THE FATHERHOOD OF ST. JOSEPH

BY

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TRANSLATED BY

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TO ST. JOSEPH

Protector of your God, good Joseph
Guiding His steps across the worn shop floor,
Teaching His little hands to hold the saw,
Opening at His beseeching glance the door.

Performer of the little tasks that grace
The life of men in little, lovely ways,
Starting the Son of God on His great road
With gentle, peaceful, happy childhood days.

From Calvary His anguished eyes could look
Upon a world which had not understood;
And yet He could remember—Joseph there,
Joseph, long dead, Joseph had been so good.
Preface

The following theological discussions about St. Joseph, the chaste spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary and virginal father of our Savior, the God-man, are substantially identical with a series of discourses given by the author at Innsbruck University. Yielding to repeated requests I now give them to the public with a few changes of minor importance. It is hoped that the work, originally intended for theologians and therefore couched in somewhat technical theological language, may yet be of interest to other educated men and women interested in theological questions.

May the book contribute toward a greater devotion to the great patriarch whose rank in the kingdom of God yields only to that of the God-man Himself and His blessed virginal Mother.

The Author
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Introduction

I. Historical Notes on the Devotion to St. Joseph

The veneration of St. Joseph, the virginal spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in its essence and foundation is as old as the Church itself. For the august position and dignity of the holy patriarch is, as we shall see, unmistakably founded on Holy Scripture, i.e., the Gospels. Yet, like many other doctrines and institutions of the Church, it passed through a process of development that sometimes was peculiar indeed, yet on the whole really wonderful. Joseph Seitz in his valuable work on “The Veneration of St. Joseph in Its Historical Development” (1908) has shown this in detail. It is to be regretted that he does not go further than the Council of Trent; a continuation promised by him does not seem to have been published. Another historical account, shorter, but in its way excellent, was given us by the well-known historian Otto Pfülf, S.J.¹ He traces the development from the origin of the Church to the end of the nineteenth century. Both

¹ In two articles in Stimmen aus Maria-Laach, Vol. XXXVIII (1890).
of these accounts are most serviceable to one who wishes to study the historical development in detail. Although the aim of the following discussions is not historical but dogmatic, it may be both interesting and helpful for our purpose if we point out and emphasize, under the guidance of these two authors, some highlights of that development.

In the first three or four centuries of the Church we find few traces of a pronounced veneration of St. Joseph, a fact which is called strange and is made much of by the opponents of this devotion. But in this religious veneration as in every other, it is well to make a distinction between private veneration where an individual, in his heart alone perhaps, recognizes and full of wonder beholds the exalted position of St. Joseph in the kingdom of God and his great holiness, and external and public veneration which finds expression in common public devotions, feast days, altars, and churches erected in honor of St. Joseph.

The former, the private or rather interior veneration, has certainly existed ever since the origin of the Church; it was bound to arise as soon as believing and thoughtful Christians applied themselves to pious and attentive reading of the Gospels, especially the chapters on the childhood and youth of our Savior, and they came to know the august personality of St. Joseph; the latter, the common or public veneration, could by exterior circumstances be arrested, and this is what actually happened. In the first centuries of Christianity it was of prime importance that the Redeemer, the God-man, should be recognized and believed in as a divine person, no easy task for a human society intellectually and
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morally depraved and therefore unwilling and almost unable to accept the sublime Christian mysteries, especially the virginal birth of the divine Savior by Mary the Mother of God. Hence it could scarcely be helped that St. Joseph, who was not the natural father of the Redeemer, yet could easily be taken, and frequently was taken, to be the natural father, had to remain in the background in order that the honor of the Godman and of his Virgin Mother could remain intact.

One other circumstance may have had a share in preventing a public veneration of St. Joseph to develop during the earliest Christian times. It was the time of the first expansion of Christianity and of the cruel persecution of Christians. In such times it was natural that every other human greatness and nobility, even if supernatural, had to yield precedence to the marvelous heroism and the constancy unto death of the apostles and the other martyrs. Such examples were more striking, and would attract the attention and arouse the compassion of the faithful much more than the greatness and holiness, noble in his silent self-sacrifice, but less conspicuous, of the spouse, or husband, of the mother of God. Later on, when the Christian religion had gained a firm footing and had permeated the very lives of men, the veneration of St. Joseph, too, began to develop and spread especially in the Oriental Church. Here already in the third century we find not a few evidences of it, and in the ninth century it seems to have reached a high state of development nearly everywhere. That this development was practically restricted to the Orient, is evidently explained by the history of the times.
For over the Western countries the storm of the migration of peoples had broken and had left them a huge heap of ruins. Here the urgent need was to civilize and Christianize the barbarous hordes that had invaded central and southern Europe, and to save from utter extinction and to revitalize the Roman inhabitants, vanquished as they were, and humbled or almost exterminated. It is not to be wondered at that out of this period, so turbulent, fermenting and all but relapsing into barbarism, few if any documents are available that could bear witness to any public devotion to St. Joseph. There was no printing press, and the stormy times were not favorable to the development or the recording of religious devotions. The same is true of other devotions and institutions which were certainly existing. Lack of documents from this period is, therefore, not sufficient in our case to allow a conclusion that such a devotion did not exist. Least of all can the fact that the veneration of St. Joseph, both in theory and in practice, required a considerable time to assert itself, develop and spread, warrant any misgivings, if we consider and appraise it from the dogmatical standpoint. It shares its fate not only with other devotions but with other and quite essential institutions and even definite dogmas of the Catholic Church. I mention only the primacy of the Roman Pontiff, the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, both of which emerged only by and by into the full and general consciousness of the Church and the theoretical and practical acceptation by all its members, and it was not till the nineteenth century that they were solemnly declared by the Church
as revealed truths. However, when the task mentioned above had been in the main accomplished and the Christian religion, after the devastations by the barbarian invaders, was reviving and blossoming again, the veneration of St. Joseph, too, became alive, and with the twelfth century began to strike deeper and stronger roots in Christian life and produced abundant flowers and fruits. This was especially owing to two of the greatest men of the century, the Venerable Abbot Rupert of Deutz (d. 1135) and St. Bernard (d. 1155) who never tired of proclaiming the greatness and sanctity of the holy patriarch and promoting his veneration.

And ever since then this devotion developed more and more and spread farther and farther with every succeeding century. Chief credit for this is due to a number of outstanding men and women, theologians and saints, such as Pierre d’Ailly, Gerson (chancellor of the university of Paris), St. Bernardine of Siena (1444), Bernardine of Feltre (1494), Bernardine de Busto (1500), Thomas Cajetan (de Vio), St. Theresa of Avila, St. Francis de Sales, St. Vincent de Paul, St. Alphonsus Liguori, and others. The various religious orders, as Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites, Jesuits, and Redemptorists, vied with one another in the veneration of the holy patriarch and endeavored to bring about its acceptance everywhere. The veneration of St. Joseph spread from diocese to diocese and began to flourish even in missionary districts in foreign countries. Royal courts, such as the Bourbons in Paris and the Hapsburgs in Vienna and Brussels, gave it sincere
and active support and so had no little share in its growth.²

This is not the place to trace its development further; only one phase of it deserves to be pointed out here, in order to prepare the way for a better understanding of the dogmatic discussion that is to follow, namely, the wonderful advance this devotion has made since the pontificate of Pius IX. Pius IX was himself fervently devoted to St. Joseph and, when raised to the papal throne in 1847, at once set out to promote this veneration in the whole Church. On September 10 of the same year he extended to the whole Church the feast of the Patronage of St. Joseph which before that time had been kept only in a number of individual dioceses. His predecessors Pius VIII and Gregory XVI had already endowed with indulgences the pious meditation of the seven sorrows and joys of St. Joseph; Pius IX increased those indulgences considerably soon after the beginning of his pontificate (February 1, 1847). On June 11, 1855, he enriched with great spiritual favors the daily devotion to St. Joseph during the month of March, and on April 27, 1865, he issued a decree that had for its aim, or effect, to make the month of March, as it were, the counterpart of the month of May, inasmuch as the month of March was to be dedicated to St. Joseph as the month of May is especially dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. With this Pope's approval and encouragement the confraternity of the Cord of St. Joseph was established in Verona, March 19, 1860, and was soon after that raised by him to the rank of an archconfraternity and enriched with many indulgences, its salutary in-

² Cf. Plülf, loc. cit.
fluence being widespread among both clergy and people. Other measures, more important and far reaching, will be mentioned later.

The example of this great Pope was followed by members of the episcopate, encouraged and sometimes, we may surmise, directly instigated by him. Thus, not to mention individual princes of the Church, several provincial synods (e.g., those of Vienna in Austria [1858], Prague in Bohemia [1860], Kalocsa in Hungary [1862], Baltimore [1866], New Granada in Colombia [1868], Bordeaux in France [1868]) enacted decrees in which they called the faithful to a fervent veneration of St. Joseph, sometimes giving to understand that after the Mother of God, St. Joseph deserved the first place in their devotion. An especially clear expression of the sentiments of the Catholic episcopate of that time in regard to the veneration of St. Joseph was the postulations addressed by them to the Apostolic See or to the Vatican Council, in which they asked for an increased liturgical cultus of the saint. The first petition had been sent to the Congregation of Rites in 1869; it bore the signatures of many, especially Italian, bishops, priests, and laymen, but was not acted on, probably because the Vatican Council was soon to convene. Three other petitions were offered by members of the Vatican Council itself. These resembled each other and in substantial agreement asked the Council that it would solemnly declare St. Joseph the first patron and protector, after the Blessed Virgin, of the whole Church, and would accord to him, next to the Mother of God, the highest liturgical veneration. The first petition was signed by 153 fathers of the Council,
the second by the 43 religious superiors general present at the Council, the third by 118 fathers of the Council. That there were not more signers need not cause surprise nor does it reflect on the contents of these petitions; for scarcely had the canvassing for signatures begun when the critical situation in Europe and the outbreak of the Franco-German war caused the suspension of the Council. Thus no more signatures could be collected and the petitions could not be acted upon. They were not without result, however. And this brings us back to Pius IX.

This Pope himself gave an answer to these petitions and met their wishes to a great extent, in fact in all essential parts. In his name and by his orders, on December 8, 1870, a decree of the Congregation of Rites was publicly read during the divine services in the three papal basilicas, of the Vatican, the Lateran, and Mary Major, in which decree, with special reference to the petitions addressed to the Council, the chaste spouse of the Blessed Virgin, in consideration of his exalted position in the Holy Family, was solemnly declared the patron of the whole Catholic Church, and his feast was raised to the rank of a double of the first class. Not content with this solemn act, Pius IX in the next year (July 7, 1871) addressed an apostolic letter to the whole Catholic world in which he repeated the proclamation of the patronage of St. Joseph over the whole Catholic church that had been published in the Roman basilicas, and still further extended the liturgical cult of the holy patriarch. He prescribed that the Creed should be said in the Mass on the feasts of St. Joseph, that in the prayer A cunctis immediately after the name of the Blessed
Virgin Mary the words "with Blessed Joseph" should be inserted, and that in the divine office likewise the \textit{suffragium} in honor of St. Joseph should be said following that of the Blessed Virgin. With these enactments Pius IX crowned his work of advancing the veneration of St. Joseph.

The succeeding popes followed in his footsteps. Leo XIII, the great teacher in St. Peter's chair, on August 15, 1889, addressed a splendid encyclical to the Catholic world, to instruct the faithful with apostolic authority on the eminent dignity, power, and holiness of St. Joseph who, as he indicated, in these respects occupies the first place after the Mother of God in the kingdom of God. So he hoped to bring it about that the veneration of the saint and trust in his power to help them would strike ever deeper roots in the hearts of the faithful. He also recommends the dedication, in a special manner, of the month of March to St. Joseph and calls upon all the bishops of the world to second him, the supreme teacher and pastor of the Church, in his endeavors to advance the veneration of our great and lovable saint. Leo XIII took another step: in two apostolic briefs he recommended most warmly the association of the Holy Family that had been in existence for some time, and invited all Catholic families of the whole world to join it and to dedicate themselves to the Holy Family of Nazareth. In the first of them (June 14, 1892) he calls St. Joseph the acknowledged head of the Holy Family and the illustrious saint who represented paternal authority for Jesus in this world. In the second (June 20, 1892) he repeated that invitation and enriched that association with many indulgences and
privileges, recommending and enjoining on the members prayers in which St. Joseph is invoked as the holy protector of Jesus and Mary.

Leo's saintly successor, Pius X, who in baptism had been given the name of Joseph, would not fail in doing his part to further this devotion. By decree of the Congregation of Rites of March 18, 1909, he approved the Litany of St. Joseph proposed to him by many bishops and religious superiors, had it inserted in the liturgical books, and recommended it for public and private use. The pontificate of Benedict XV brought another distinction to the liturgical cult of the holy patriarch. By his orders the Congregation of Rites issued a decree (April 9, 1919) by which the Masses of St. Joseph were given a new and special preface. Under Pius XI by a decree of the Congregation of Rites (August 9, 1922) in the rite of extreme unction and in the liturgical prayers for the dying the invocation of St. Joseph was added to that of the Blessed Mother of God, and a special prayer to St. Joseph is to be said in behalf of the dying person. Utterances of the same Pope on diverse occasions bear witness that in regard to devotion to St. Joseph his sentiments are fully in agreement with those of his predecessors.

This outline suffices to show us what position the teaching office of the Church has taken in regard to veneration of St. Joseph as it expressed itself with steadily increasing clearness, especially since the beginning of the pontificate of Pius IX. This being the attitude of the ecclesiastical authorities, it was natural that the Christian people turned to this devotion with increasing enthusiasm. Especially since the twelfth cen-
tury, and particularly since the Council of Trent and again since the Vatican Council, the veneration of St. Joseph, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, has become part and parcel of the Christian life, ever growing extensively and intensively, with the result that today the faithful place St. Joseph, on account of his intimate connection with the divine Redeemer and the Mother of God, next to her, his virginal spouse, and assign precedence to him over all the other saints, even the holy angels, the apostles, and St. John the Baptist. Thus has come true what the pious and learned Dominican, Isidore Isolani with prophetic vision foretold, “that in view of the great things that God had done in St. Joseph, the holy Catholic Church would one day approve and promote the public and solemn veneration of St. Joseph; that there would be great rejoicing in the Church militant when once his sublime holiness and dignity would be generally recognized; that the Holy Ghost would not fail to enkindle in the hearts of the faithful such a veneration of the saint that also the ecclesiastical authorities would give public and solemn expression to it by founding monasteries, churches, and altars in honor of St. Joseph.”

II. The Meaning of Religious Veneration

From our short introductory remarks the dogmatic question arises: How is the special and distinctive veneration which the Catholic Church has been paying to St. Joseph, especially since the tenth century, more so since the Council of Trent, and above all since the Vatican Council, supported by the sources of revelation,

*Isidore Isolani, O.P., Summa de donis S. Josephi (1514).*
and what are its deeper dogmatic foundations? The present treatise is an endeavor to answer these questions. In its course all more important questions of dogmatic relevance regarding St. Joseph will have to be dealt with. What is meant by "religious veneration"? In what does it consist? If by veneration in general is meant respect for, and submission to, another's greatness, then religious veneration or religious cult means, in the first place, nothing less than the homage, or the expression of our respect for and submission to the highest object, to the first principle and ultimate end of all religion, that is, to God in His infinite greatness, majesty, and holiness. In the second place it means a proportionate homage or expression of respect for and submission to those persons who are intimately and, in the present order, supernaturally connected with God, the ultimate object of all worship, and thus in a special way have a share of His dignity and holiness.

This definition makes it clear that the dignity and holiness of the persons to whom religious worship is paid must be not only the motive but also the norm or measure of religious worship. It evidences, furthermore, the essential difference and fathomless distance between the worship due to God and addressed to Him alone, called by theologians *latria*, and that worship or veneration which we show to those creatures whom God has exalted and honored, the angels and saints: the worship of *dulia*. By the same principle we give to the Mother of God a worship or veneration, called *hyper-dulia* which, on the one hand, by its very nature, is immeasurably below the worship of *latria* and, on the other hand, surpasses the veneration given to the other
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saints as much as her own dignity and holiness excels that of all the angels and saints. In order, therefore, to determine and measure the scope and extent to which we should go in our veneration of St. Joseph we shall have to determine and consider not only his personal supernatural holiness, but also his relation to the work of Redemption and his position in the supernatural kingdom of God, and his high dignity resulting therefrom. Now, this position of the holy patriarch in the kingdom of God is determined in its distinctive character first by his intimate relations to the divine Redeemer and His immaculate Mother and to the Church, which embodies both the effects and the continuation of the work of Redemption; and secondly, by the wonderful privileges resulting from these relations. These relations and these privileges have been made known to us, directly or indirectly, by divine revelation, and therefore furnish the dogmatic foundation for the specific veneration due to this great saint. From them, as they will be treated in detail in this book, the special claims of our saint to our special veneration will follow as a logical necessity. As a preliminary bird’s-eye view of the present treatise, we give them here in their systematic sequence:

1. The existence of a true marriage between Mary and Joseph.
2. Qualities peculiar to this marriage; its purpose, task, its fruit.
3. The fatherhood of St. Joseph in regard to the child Jesus.
4. Detailed explanation, negatively and positively, of the nature of this fatherhood.
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5. The fatherhood of St. Joseph in the writings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church from the eighth century to the present time.

6. Privileges of St. Joseph resulting from his marriage and fatherhood, especially his incorporation into the so-called hypostatic order with the humanity of Jesus and Mary.

7. His personal dignity and holiness.


9. The veneration due St. Joseph and paid to him by the Church: protodulia.

III. THEOLOGICAL LITERATURE ON ST. JOSEPH

The theological literature on St. Joseph is, of course, not so extensive and abundant as that on his holy spouse, the Blessed Virgin Mary. Christian antiquity has left us no detailed discussion, much less a systematic treatment, about St. Joseph. In some of the Fathers and ecclesiastical writers we meet with occasional remarks and comments on this saint, very stimulating by their theological acumen and depth. The genius of St. Augustine especially sensed and understood the position of St. Joseph and his connection with Jesus and Mary as few other theologians have done, before or after him. However, valuable contributions to the study of our subject are found in the work of a number of other Fathers, e.g., Ephraem, Chrysostom, Jerome. We shall have occasion to quote and discuss them in the course of the following chapters.

Likewise the great medieval theologians failed to produce any detailed systematic presentation of the teaching of theology on St. Joseph, although particular
questions sometimes found more detailed treatment. Toward the end of the Middle Ages a few theologians wrote comprehensive works on St. Joseph, e.g., Pierre d’ Ailly who wrote *A Treatise on the Honors of St. Joseph*. Isidore Isolani, who was mentioned above, left a rather large work *On the Gifts of St. Joseph*, rather oratorical and not very systematic but rich in content (new edition, Rome, 1887). A famous scholar well known for his devotion to St. Joseph, John Gerson, the chancellor of the University of Paris, preached a sermon at the Council of Constance in 1414 on the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, in which he purposely incorporated a large amount of theological matter concerning St. Joseph. He also published a book of popular meditations in French on St. Joseph and a lengthy epic poem in his honor entitled *Josephina*. Theologically, however, these two books hardly add anything new to the famous sermon just referred to.

After the Council of Trent the theology of St. Joseph unquestionably has made decided progress in several respects. First to be mentioned here is Suarez, who gives a thorough and systematic treatise on our saint from both the positive and the speculative side. Scheeben says of this treatise: “The best account of what can be ascertained theologically with more or less certainty concerning the dignity, position, and qualities of St. Joseph, is found in Suarez whose guidance the better class of ascetical (and theological) writers have followed in modern times.”

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5 *Dogmatik*, III, no. 1586.
Theophile Raymand deserves attention, who in his famous *Diptycha Mariana* ably treats also some queries regarding St. Joseph, boldly and decidedly rejecting all exaggerations and groundless fancies though occasionally going too far in his usual caustic criticism. Another contemporary of Suarez, P. Morales, wrote an extensive work: *Chapter I of Matthew on Christ, the Blessed Virgin, and her True Spouse*. Like the work of Isolani it contains valuable material in a diffuse, but more systematic and critical treatment (new edition, 1868). Famous are two sermons of Bossuet on St. Joseph that attracted great attention at the time, and even from the theological point of view still deserve it. One more theologian of pre-Vatican time, Sedlmayer, may be mentioned who in his *Theologia Mariana* has a Quaestio in 17 articles on St. Joseph, a clear and solid treatment.

After the Vatican Council a considerable number of monographs, not only ascetical but also theological, have appeared treating more or less thoroughly St. Joseph’s position in the kingdom of God and his supernatural dignity and holiness. Textbooks of dogmatic theology also, periodicals, and Scripture commentaries, now usually give more attention to our saint than formerly. Some of the monographs were intended to furnish a theological foundation for the postulations which, as we said above, were presented to the Vatican Council or to the Apostolic See.⁶

⁶ Cf. especially the following: Mariani, *La Primauté de S. Joseph* (1897) and *De cultu S. Joseph amplificando* (1908); Joseph Bover, *De cultu S. Joseph amplificando* (1926); J. Picirelli, *S. Giuseppe nell’ ordine presente de la divina providenza* (1897).
Marriage between Mary and Joseph

To account for the entire supernatural dignity and holiness of St. Joseph, we have to consider in the first place his marital union with Mary the Immaculate Virgin and Mother of God. And above all we have to prove from the sources of revelation the following fundamental truth: Between Mary and Joseph there existed a true marriage in the proper sense of the word: therefore St. Joseph was truly the husband of the virginal Mother of God.

1. The truth is unmistakably contained in the Gospels. It follows, with psychological necessity as a conclusion from the fact vouched for by the Evangelists, that Joseph and Mary lived together in one household, a fact that was well known to all their relatives and acquaintances. For in the minds of the Jews at that time the requirements of marital propriety and marital chastity were such that mature persons of different sex not of one family could not dwell together under one roof living a common life, unless they were married and therefore were husband and wife. Now that Mary and Joseph from a certain date had been living together was a matter of common knowledge. Joseph had taken
Mary “to him,” into his home, and was henceforth faithfully attending to his duties as husband, and Mary doing the same as wife. Together they went to Bethlehem to be enrolled; together they went to Jerusalem on legal feast days, fled to Egypt when persecuted by Herod, and, after their return, lived together at Nazareth. From all this we have to conclude that Mary and Joseph were bound to each other by a legal marriage: they were in truth husband and wife. Otherwise by living together in the midst of their people they would have risked severest censure, public contempt, persecution, and punishment. But not a trace of this is found in the Gospel account. Jesus was by everybody considered the legitimate son of Mary and Joseph, even by the Pharisees and scribes who yet pried into every detail of the life of Jesus and would ruthlessly have pounced upon our Lord and his holy parents if the least dark spot could have been detected in the relation between Mary and Joseph. Thus the union of Mary and Joseph was universally recognized as a true and genuine marriage.

Moreover, the same truth is asserted by the Evangelists in explicit terms: Joseph is called the “husband” (man) of Mary, and Mary the “wife” of Joseph. Thus Matt. 1:16: “And Jacob begot Joseph, the husband of Mary and of her was born Jesus, who is called Christ”; 1:19: “Joseph her husband, being a just man”; 1:20: “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”; 1:24: “he took unto him his wife.” Luke 2:5: “to register, together with Mary his espoused wife.” No other name or description is ever
used in Holy Scripture to designate the relation be-
tween Mary and Joseph. Gratuitous and quite unten-
able is the objection raised already by heretics of the
first and second centuries, namely, that the Evangelists
accommodated themselves to the opinion and parlance
of the contemporary Jews who believed and therefore
said that Mary and Joseph were husband and wife al-
though they were not, and therefore Jesus was the
legitimate son of Joseph the carpenter. For as the
Fathers already frequently contended, the words and
assertions of inspired Holy Writ have to be taken in
their literal sense so long as this does not lead to absurd
or impious conclusions, which, in our case, is quite out
of question, i.e., the assumption of a true and real mar-
riage in no way involves anything that would appear
incongruous or impious, but, as we shall consider later
on, the incarnation of the Son of God in Mary the
Virgin is very well compatible with a union of Mary
and Joseph by a virginal marriage. Moreover, the ob-
jection of the heretics that the expressions “husband”
and “wife” are merely accommodations to the way of
speaking of the Jews at that time, has been well count-
ered in another way already by St. Augustine:

When the Evangelist was recording his own or another
man’s words, we might possibly imagine that he was free
to speak according to the opinion current among men; but
when an angel was addressing some other person, could he
have spoken, against his own and the other’s better knowl-
dge, according to the “opinion of other men” and not
rather according to objective truth, when he said to him:
“Do not be afraid to take to thee Mary thy wife”? 1

FATHERHOOD OF ST. JOSEPH

One more objection against our argument from the use of the words “husband” and “wife” might be brought from the fact that twice Mary is called “the espoused wife” of Joseph; for from this it might seem that Mary was and remained only affianced to Joseph without in reality ever becoming his wife. Yet this objection, too, can be met with an answer no less effective and to the point: it is true that the Jews, at least at the time of Christ, made a distinction, as we do now, between espousal and marriage, but the Jewish distinction was made on a ground quite different from the Christian one. According to the Jewish view with betrothal (erusin) the entire essence of marriage was already given, while complete partnership as a married couple (missuín) was effected only with the induction of the bride into the house of the bridegroom. For this reason infidelity of a betrothed was regarded as formal adultery and was punished as such. This is evident from Deut. 22:22, 29, where such a case of infidelity is called adultery and is punished as such. The same is clearly indicated in the fact that among the Jews this so-called betrothal could be dissolved only like a full or consummated marriage, i.e., by a bill of divorce. Scheebeen, therefore, rightly remarks that such a “betrothal” among the Jews would be styled more correctly “marriage.” ¹ From this it follows that the words of Matt. 1:18, “antequam convenirent” (“before they came together”) are to be explained, as “before she was taken to his home,” and not “before they consummated the marriage.”

¹ Matt. 1:18; Luke 2:5.
² Dogmatik, III, no. 1582.
MARY AND JOSEPH: MARRIAGE

These two arguments from the Gospels can be given added strength by a third: St. Joseph is repeatedly in the Gospels called the father of Christ, and Mary and Joseph are called the parents of Christ, e.g., Luke 2:33: “And His father and mother were marveling at the things spoken concerning Him.” Luke 2:48: “Son, why hast Thou done so to us? Behold, Thy father and I have been seeking Thee sorrowing”; 2:27: “And when His parents brought in the child Jesus”; 2:41: “And His parents were wont to go every year to Jerusalem”; 2:43: “The boy Jesus remained in Jerusalem, and His parents did not know it.” Distinctly and without qualification Joseph is here called the father of Jesus just as Mary is called His mother, and both together the parents of the child Jesus: Joseph, therefore, was father in a true, not merely putative, sense. When Scripture says, “Jesus . . . being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph,” it excludes only natural generation by Joseph, but does not preclude another, true, fatherhood. Now the only ground for calling Joseph in a true sense the father of Jesus can be found in the fact that he was in truth the husband of Mary, the Mother of God. Any other explanation, if closely examined, will be found unsatisfactory. Thus again we are face to face with the existence of a true marriage between Mary and Joseph.

How it is precisely that this marital union between Mary and Joseph involved a true and higher fatherhood of Joseph in regard to the child Jesus will be explained later when we treat of this fatherhood more fully. Just now this short remark will suffice: in the present order of things according to God’s ordination

the blessing with children should be conditioned on the existence of a true marriage, and therefore also the child Jesus, the God-man, should appear and be the fruit of a marriage, but a virginal marriage.

With this we may conclude our argumentation from the inspired word of God and pass over to the witness of tradition.

2. Tradition, too, if carefully examined, will furnish us with a full endorsement of the Catholic teaching. In early Christian times the existence of a true marriage between Mary and Joseph was flatly denied and fiercely attacked by Julian, the Pelagian, who based his argumentation on the false premise that sexual union was an essential element of marriage. St. Augustine refuted him effectively in his book *Adversus Julianum Pelagianum*. Apart from this work, however, and generally speaking, we do not find a clear and uniform teaching of the Fathers and ecclesiastical writers as against Julian and others who opposed a true marriage between Mary and Joseph. Especially is this true of writers before Ambrose. These are frequently ambiguous, to say the least, in their treatment of the relation between Mary and Joseph, and it cannot be denied that some of them appear as opponents of a true marriage between Mary and Joseph, if we take their expressions literally. This will not surprise us when we find that a clear concept of what is the essence of marriage was still lacking. To those writers, as to the prevailing opinion of the time, marriage appeared somehow inseparable from its, present or future, consummation, and therefore they could not form a clear idea of a virginal marriage, i.e., a marriage contracted but never to be consummated. They
all rejected emphatically the existence of any sexual intercourse between Joseph and Mary, whether before or after the conception and birth of Christ, but failed to give a clear decision as to the meaning of those scriptural terms denoting a true marriage. They call St. Joseph the bridegroom of the Blessed Virgin, and think they can take expressions like “husband” and “wife” rather as merely external denominations, not denoting in our case a real marriage, but designed rather to make it appear such, and thus to conceal and protect the mystery of that holy union. Such or similar language we find in some of the early writers, including some of the more important Fathers, e.g., Tertullian, Origen, Basil, Chrysostom, Epiphanius, Ephraem, Cyril of Jerusalem, Hilary, Peter Chrysologus, Gregory the Great. Yet for all that we are hardly justified in saying that these Fathers and ecclesiastical writers were convinced and uncompromising opponents of a true marriage between Mary and Joseph. Lacking the clear idea of a virginal marriage, or a matrimonium ratum non consummatum, they either did not really treat this question at all, or they failed to see the point at issue. With great probability, if not certainty, we can, therefore, assign as the chief reason of their ambiguous, if not captious, way of speaking the fact that they aimed in the first place to exclude any marital intercourse between Mary and Joseph, and that they did not sufficiently understand or consider the essential difference between simple betrothal in the Christian sense, and betrothal in the Jewish law, which was practically a giving in marriage and therefore a true marriage.

A change begins to appear with Ambrose, although
even after his time there were writers who used the same confused language as those before. St. Ambrose, as we know, before his conversion had held high position in the Roman government and therefore, we may be sure, had a thorough acquaintance with Roman law. This may have led him to investigate fully and precisely such a question, whether or not there existed a true marriage between Mary and Joseph. He became convinced that such a marriage, valid according to principles of law, existed, and he defended it in classic language that was afterward adopted in part by canon law. Let us look at a few passages.

In his commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke 5 he poses the question why, according to the wise plan of God, our Lord should be born of a virgin betrothed to a man; his answer shows unmistakably that he considered the union between Mary and Joseph a true marriage:

Divine mysteries are indeed hidden, and according to the saying of the prophets it is not easy for any man to know the plan of God. Nevertheless from the other deeds and precepts of our Lord and Savior we are able to understand that this was also more in keeping with the divine plan, that she should be chosen to give birth to the Lord who was betrothed to a man. But why did she not become pregnant before her espousal? Perhaps lest it be said that she had conceived in adultery. And the Scripture clearly demonstrates that she would be both espoused and a virgin: a virgin, that it might be clear that she was free from intercourse with man; espoused, lest she be seared by the infamy of violated virginity, to which desecration the fact of the pregnant womb would seem to point.

5 Bk. II, no. 1.
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Later on (no. 3) St. Ambrose gives another reason why our Savior was to be conceived and born of an espoused virgin, and this again shows clearly that according to St. Ambrose the Blessed Virgin was united with Joseph by marriage in the proper sense of the word: "A reason of no little weight is found in this, that the virginity of Mary should be kept from the knowledge of the prince of this world, for when he should see her espoused he could not become suspicious of the child born of her (i.e., would not recognize in the child the savior of the world who according to the prophecy of Isaia was to be the son of a virgin; for, as Ambrose and some other Fathers thought, he should be kept in ignorance of this for a while). That it was planned to mislead the prince of this world, the words of our Lord Himself indicate." Yet more clearly St. Ambrose speaks in two other passages. In the same book (no. 5) he says distinctly: "Let it not disturb you that Holy Scripture calls Mary wife; for it is not the deprivation of virginity but the legally performed marriage contract that establishes the married state; in fine, no one can dismiss a wife whom he has not taken to wife; therefore he who intended to dismiss her acknowledges thereby that he had taken her to wife." In a similar vein and, if possible, more clearly he says elsewhere: "Nor let it disturb you where he says that Joseph took his wife and went into Egypt, for one espoused to a man has the name wife. For when the marriage is entered upon it gets the name of marriage. It is not the defloration of virginity that constitutes the marriage, but it is the marriage contract. Finally, as soon as the maid is joined by a legal act to the man, the mar-
riage begins to exist, not when she is known by him in (sexual) cohabitation.”

St. Augustine, the great pupil and spiritual son of St. Ambrose, took up, developed, and perfected the teaching of his master. Two reasons led him to a closer investigation of the marriage between Mary and Joseph. The first was the observation that already in his time there were quite a number of married people so far advanced in grace or perfection that with mutual consent for the sake of Christ they practiced continence and thus followed the example of Mary and Joseph. So the question arose whether such a way of life was still embodying the essential characteristics of a marriage and thus could still claim the name of marriage in the proper sense. St. Augustine tells us about this in one of his sermons (sermo 51) and then answers the question as follows:

It is not true that for the reason that Joseph had not carnally known the mother of the Lord, he was not father, as if it were passion that made a woman one’s wife and not rather conjugal love. Pay well attention to this, dear brethren. Some time in the future the Apostle of Christ was going to declare in the Church: “It remains that those who have wives be as if they had none.” We know many among the brethren who, advanced in grace, in the name of Christ and with mutual consent abstain indeed from carnal indulgence, but do not at all withhold from each other their conjugal love. The more the former is restrained the more the latter increases in them. Are those who lead such a life perhaps not wedded because they do

*De inst. virgin., chap. 6, no. 41.
*I Cor. 7:29.*
not demand from each other the carnal debt? Yet she is subject to her husband, as is becoming, and this the more so, the more chaste she is; and he, on the other hand, loves his wife truly and, as is written, in honor and holiness as coheir of grace, just as Christ has loved the Church. Therefore since the union is there and the marriage is there, and the marriage does not cease to exist when that is not done which could also be done of course, unlawfully, with one not wedded: one might wish that all could live that way. But many cannot. Therefore let no one put asunder those who can lead that life, nor for that reason refuse the name husband and wife to those who are bound together, though not in the flesh, yet in their hearts.

We have here St. Augustine clearly asserting the existence of true marriages that are not consummated, and particularly of the virginal marriage between Joseph and Mary.

Another occasion to take up this question was furnished to Augustine by the Pelagian and Manichaean heresies with their errors concerning concupiscence, marriage, and virginity. These had to be refuted and the Christian position set forth and defended. This was bound to lead to a discussion of the virginal marriage of Mary and Joseph. Augustine’s genius took it up with his usual masterly acumen. His chief argument for a virginal, but true, marriage between Mary and Joseph is based on Matt. 1:20, where Mary is explicitly called the wife of Joseph. He thus endorses the argumentation from the various designations of Mary as the wife

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8 Col. 3:18.
9 I Thess. 4:4.
11 Eph. 5:25.
of Joseph adopted and was given us in detail already. But let us hear his own words:

If married people freely and with mutual consent have chosen to refrain from indulging carnal desires, the marriage bond between them is not loosened thereby: far from it. On the contrary, it will be all the stronger, the firmer that agreement is, an agreement to be kept with even greater love and concord, not in the union of bodies but in the harmony of two hearts beating in unison. Hence there was no falsehood in what the angel said to Joseph: "Do not be afraid to take to thee Mary thy wife, for what is begotten in her is of the Holy Spirit." She is called wife ever since she had pledged her troth to him, although he had not known her carnally, nor was ever to do so; nor had the name "wife" lost its meaning or become a falsehood because there never had been, and never would be, any carnal intercourse. For this virgin was to her husband a source of joy all the more holy and wonderful, because she became a mother without man's intervention, differing from him as regards the offspring, but altogether like him in mutual fidelity. On account of this faithful union both of them could claim to be called the parents of Christ, not only Mary as His mother but also Joseph as His father, just as he was called the husband of Mary, though he was the one as well as the other not in the flesh, but in the spirit. Yet both of them, he Christ's father in the spirit, she, His mother, also in the flesh, were parents of His humility, not of His majesty; of His infirmity, not of his divinity. . . . But as she had become mother without man's intervention, they certainly could not together be called Christ's parents, even of him in the form of a slave, unless they had been, though without carnal intercourse, husband and wife. Therefore also, when the genealogy of Jesus had to be traced, the line of descent had to lead down rather to
Joseph, lest the male sex, the stronger one, be treated with disrespect; and at the same time truth did not suffer, for both Joseph and Mary were of the seed of David from which it was prophesied that Christ was to come.\(^\text{12}\)

To this argumentation from Scripture, St. Augustine adds in summary form a theological reason developed by him more fully elsewhere: “So all the three blessings of marriage are found in these parents of Christ: offspring, fidelity, sacrament, i.e., indissolubility. The offspring we recognize in the Lord Jesus Himself; their fidelity, because there was no adultery; the sacrament, because there was no divorce” (cf. chapter 6 \textit{infra}).

As St. Augustine himself tells us, this argumentation of his from Matt. 1:20 was attacked by the Pelagian Julian. Let us hear his rebuttal of one of Julian’s objections:

You say that he looked in the eyes of men like the husband, and you want us to understand that Holy Scripture when it called him the husband of Mary spoke thus according to what men thought of him, not what he really was. Well, let us admit that the Evangelist might have spoken thus “according to the opinion of men, provided he was giving his own words or the words of some other third person”:—but how could the angel when conversing with Joseph alone, contrary to his own better knowledge and contrary to the better knowledge of him whom he was addressing, have spoken “according to the opinion of men,” and not in accordance with actual facts, when he said to him: “Do not be afraid to take to thee Mary thy wife”? Furthermore, why had the genealogical series to be traced down to Joseph but for the truth that the male sex has precedence? This I have pointed out already in the

\(^{12}\textit{De nupt. et concup.}, Bk. I, chap. 2.$
book to which yours was to be the answer. But you were afraid even to touch this point. When, however, the Evangelist Luke (3:23) says of our Lord that He was “supposed to be the son of Joseph,” he does so because Jesus was thought by the people to be the natural son of Joseph. It was to remove this false belief, and not to deny that Mary was the true wife of Joseph, thereby contradicting the angel’s testimony.  

Thus in St. Augustine, the greatest doctor of the Church, we have found a staunch supporter of the belief that Joseph and Mary were married in the proper sense of the word. Yet in spite of all this, in spite of his great authority, the attitude of the theological writers of the following centuries up to the rise of Scholasticism remained obscure or vacillating. The reasons for this were in the main the same as those that had caused a similar attitude in the earlier Fathers and ecclesiastical writers. This seems to have been owing principally to their insufficient acquaintance with Jewish and Roman law on matrimony. So we see even such distinguished men as Venerable Bede, Rhabanus Maurus, and others approaching more or less closely to the teaching of Ambrose and Augustine, even appealing to their authority, yet always falling short of arriving at a clear solution of the question. Not until Scholasticism had risen and made its influence felt did the teaching of Ambrose and Augustine make any real headway and, in spite of occasional objections, finally meet with universal acceptance. SUFFICE IT TO QUOTE A FEW REPRESENTATIVE WRITERS OF THE PERIOD. OUR FIRST WITNESS DESERVING RECOGNITION IS Rupert of Deutz, the Benedictine abbot.

18 Contra Julianum, Bk. V, no. 47 (PL, 44, 810).
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(d. 1135). This theologian, whose importance ought to be better appreciated even now, following Augustine's lead acclaims St. Joseph as the true husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary and as father of the Lord:

"Jacob begot Joseph, the husband of Mary, and of her was born Jesus who is called Christ." By calling Joseph the husband of Mary he gives him a great, and a true, name, because if he is the husband of Mary, he is also the father of the Lord. . . . But not only did the Evangelist call Joseph the husband of Mary, but even before him an angel had done the same when he called Mary the wife of Joseph: "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take unto thee thy wife." O true and holy marriage; a marriage heavenly, not of this earth. For how, and in what were they united in marriage? In this, that both had one mind and the same mutual fidelity. Carnal corruption alone was absent. The Apostle, therefore, could truthfully say: "The first man was of the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven, heavenly"; 14 not as if Jesus Christ who was born of Mary had in the flesh come down from heaven and, as some heretics would have it, merely passed through Mary as through a conduit, but because the union of Mary and Joseph, like their whole life, was heavenly and the Holy Ghost engendering in them—for their conversation was in heaven—their conjugal love toward each other, and Himself reigning supreme in their hearts had entrusted this wife to this husband, and while forming a human body in the womb of the Virgin had filled the heart of this man with fatherly love for the child that was born. 15

Also Hugh of St. Victor (d. 1141) takes a decided stand in favor of a true marriage between Mary and

14 I Cor. 15:47.
15 In Matth., Bk. I, no. 568 (PL, 168, 1319).
Joseph. He also endeavors to explain speculatively by the scholastic method how it was possible for Mary to contract a valid marriage in spite of her resolve, or vow, of perpetual virginity. We shall later on deal briefly with the question of this compatibility. At present let us hear how emphatically he maintains his thesis:

She was, then, spouse and wife; she was also truly virgin and had not abandoned her resolve to remain a virgin. We declare, therefore, that she was an espoused virgin; we declare that she was a wife, though a virgin; we declare that later on also as mother and virgin she ever kept inviolate her vow of virginity, and that the unfading glory of chastity forever reigned side by side with the purity of the wife and the honor of motherhood. Behold now and gaze upon that virgin, our little maid so chaste, in her unique purity, her exquisite beauty, her spotlessness without a peer. . . . In whatever way it was done (how Mary found a vow of perpetual chastity compatible with the married state), we must never call in doubt that the Blessed Virgin Mary for definite and well-founded reasons, after having vowed perpetual virginity entered the holy state of matrimony without changing her resolution to remain a virgin, so that she truthfully could claim the name of wife, and yet keep the vow of virginal integrity to the end.  

And yet at the very time when Rupert of Deutz and Hugh of St. Victor so staunchly upheld the existence of a true marriage between Mary and Joseph a dissenting voice was heard again. It was no less famous an opponent than the great canonist Gratian, the author of *Decretum Gratiani*, which forms part of the old code of canon law. According to him not only the mutual consent in contracting the marriage but also its con-

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18 *De B.M. Virg.*, chap. 1 (*PL*, 176, 867).
summation is an essential requisite of a valid marriage. But although his opinion was accepted by a number of other canonists, the trend of theological science had already turned in the opposite direction so decidedly that Gratian’s view became untenable. Not only teachers of dogmatics, as Peter Lombard, rose against him, but also others, even canonists, as Roland Bandinelli, the future pope Alexander III (d. 1181), who as pope decided some marriage questions in a sense opposite to Gratian’s view, and in agreement with Hugh of St. Victor and Peter Lombard. In the course of time this opposition to Gratian grew so strong that with the beginning of the thirteenth century the controversy concerning the marriage of Joseph and Mary was virtually settled and the teaching of the “master of the sentences,” Peter Lombard, was generally accepted. All the great theologians of the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries, St. Albert, St. Thomas, St. Bonaventure, Scotus, etc., held it and considered it binding, and thus it has been ever since. One lone exception in modern times was Joseph Freisen, who in his History of Canon Law on Marriage came out in favor of a view similar to Gratian’s, but his opinion received little attention by theologians and was generally rejected.

Concluding this argumentation from tradition, let us hear what Benedict XIV says of the theological character of the doctrine that the marriage of Mary and Joseph was a valid marriage in the proper sense of the word: 17

Whatever we may think of those theologians (before the Council of Trent) who for some reason of their own

17 De festis B.V.M., chap. 1, no. 2.
held that no true marriage was contracted by Mary and Joseph, now, however, such a denial could not escape the censure of temerity. For Cardinal Capisucchi writes: “Such an opinion would have to be considered rash, to say the least, since the whole School with its leaders, the Master of the Sentences and the Angelic Doctor, stands unanimous for the affirmative, and the Fathers themselves, if rightly understood, say the same thing.” 18 “To say the least” are his words, for Suarez considers it heretical to deny the real marriage between Mary and Joseph. And this censure is strenuously defended by Theophile Raynaud. 19

When, according to Benedict XIV, Suarez calls the denial of this marriage heretical, while other theologians would call it merely a rash (temeraria) statement, the two censures, as it seems to us, differ in appearance only, not in reality. For if one considers as of faith only those doctrines that are patently contained in the sources of revelation, i.e., in Scripture and tradition, and, in addition, have been formally defined by the Church as a matter of faith, then the existence of a real marriage between Mary and Joseph is not a dogma. But if we consider as belonging to the deposit of faith also those doctrines that are patently contained in the sources of revelation and, while not formally defined, are yet universally taught and believed in the Church, the existence of this marriage is doubtlessly a part of the Catholic faith; and this is what Suarez seems to have had in mind, since he made reference to no dogmatic definition. It would even be more correct to call this doctrine simply a matter of faith because not only those

18 Controv., 14, sect. 9.
doctrines are sufficiently proposed to us as matters to be believed which have been solemnly defined as dogmas, but also those which are clearly contained in Holy Writ and tradition and are currently taught by the living voice of the Church. The fact that for some time no universal agreement on this point was achieved makes no difference. It is sufficient that now for centuries such an agreement has existed and that this agreement was morally, not mathematically, universal. Also Leo XIII in his encyclical on St. Joseph speaks of this marriage as of a fact that cannot be called in doubt but is vouched for by Holy Scripture and therefore revealed, and to this fact, as to their source, he traces other great privileges of St. Joseph, his exalted dignity and his appointment as patron of the Holy Church.
Joseph's Virginal Marriage

In the preceding pages we have considered that the union of the Mother of God and St. Joseph was a true marriage in the proper sense of the word. Our argumentation had, of course, to be drawn in the main from the sources of revelation, Scripture, and tradition. In the course of this discussion, especially when the Fathers and theologians were drawn upon, we met occasionally references or allusions to peculiar and destructive qualities of this marriage, and in particular that special quality that invests this marriage with a special hallowed dignity and supernatural splendor: its virginal character. This we have now to examine more closely; and its appropriateness, its nobility, and other connected questions will have to be discussed. We cannot ignore these questions, for this marriage is the foundation of the supernatural holiness and dignity of St. Joseph, and this dignity and holiness in turn are the motive, and determine the norm and extent, of the veneration we have to pay to St. Joseph.

1. The present chapter will especially endeavor to prove that the marriage of Mary, the Mother of God,
with St. Joseph was a *matrimonium ratum non consummatum*: it was a virginal marriage.


In the Gospel of the annunciation (Luke, chap. 1) the words of prime importance for our purpose are the words of the Blessed Virgin (v. 34): “How shall this happen, since I do not know man.” This is Mary’s answer to the most sublime and marvelous message that heaven ever sent to any denizen of this earth. By these words the Virgin most prudent as well as most humble, by no means tried to evade the task almighty God was setting for her. But she cannot see or understand how the angel’s words could be accomplished in her; somehow she has a feeling of bewilderment and uneasiness which makes her ask this anxious question. But why this uneasiness? She herself tells us: “Since I do not know man.” Up to now she has jealously guarded her virginity; it is evident that she is determined to preserve it forever. But this cannot be accounted for unless she were convinced that the Lord God had bestowed his approval and blessing upon her resolution. Were it otherwise these words, “How shall this happen, since I do not know man?” would have no meaning. Her question “How” would be out of place, if she, though a virgin up to now, yet was willing to comply with those conditions that in the natural order result in motherhood. We must conclude, therefore, that she was unalterably resolved to remain a virgin forever, and that she was convinced that almighty God had approved and blessed her resolution. And the theologians since Augustine and Thomas are justified in finding in
those words of the Blessed Virgin an indication that she had consecrated her virginity to God by a vow. St. Augustine says:

Already before Christ was conceived He had chosen a virgin consecrated to God to become His mother. This is indicated by her answer to the angel who had brought her the message: “How shall this happen, since I do not know man.” She would not speak thus if she had not vowed herself to God as a virgin. However, because such vow was not yet countenanced by Jewish custom, she was espoused to a holy man, who would not rob her of that which was consecrated to God, but would rather protect her against the attacks from others. Indeed, even if she had said merely: “How shall this happen,” without adding, “because I do not know man,” even in that case she would certainly not have asked how she could bear her promised son, if she had married with the intention of consummating the marriage. Moreover, God might have chosen; again, it might have been that God commanded her to remain a virgin so that the Son of God might assume from her the form of a servant in a becoming and wonderful way. But as she was to be the exemplar of holy virgins of the future and people should not be led to think that only she had to be a virgin who was privileged to become a mother without the intervention of man; therefore she consecrated her virginity to God before she knew how she was going to conceive; in order that in a mortal body on this earth the heavenly life might be imitated because of a vow, not because of a command; because it was a choice of love, not something accepted under duress. When, therefore, Christ willed to be born of a virgin, who had resolved on remaining a virgin forever before she knew who was to be born of her, His purpose was rather to commend holy virginity, than to command it. And thus He wished that even in that
woman of whom He assumed His human nature, virginity should be her own free choice.¹

Clearly St. Augustine thus emphasizes the freedom of the Blessed Virgin in vowing her virginity: not commanded, not forced, but voluntarily had she chosen it.

Like St. Augustine, also St. Thomas maintains that Mary had taken the vow of virginity; he, however, thinks the vow was only conditional at first, but finally absolute:

I answer that, as was said previously, the works of perfection deserve more praise when they are performed in fulfillment of a vow. Virginity was to be a distinctive feature of paramount importance in the Blessed Virgin as it is clear from the reasons given (in previous articles). . . . Nevertheless, because under the Old Law both women and men were bound by the duty of begetting children, since the true worship of God was to be propagated by way of propagation of the race, until Christ was born of that people, it is believed that the Mother of God had not taken the vow of virginity absolutely, before she was espoused to Joseph; but though she desired to do so, she subordinated her wish to God’s pleasure. Afterward, however, having taken a husband, as the custom of the time required, she, together with him, took the vow of virginity.²

St. Bonaventure is of the same opinion:

For three reasons it behooved the Blessed Virgin to have made the vow of virginity. The first is, that she might be a worthy dwelling of the Son of God. For, since “wisdom ³

¹ De virg., chap. 4.
² Summa theol., IIIa, q.28, a.4.
³ Cf. Wisd. 7:25 f.
is the brightness of eternal light, and the unspotted mirror of God's majesty, into which nothing defiled can come,” it was becoming for Him to be conceived by a virgin undefiled not only in fact but even in her mind and steadfast will, and the perfect purity of the will is secured by the vow of chastity. The second reason is that she was to be an exemplar for women of unblemished virginity. For as God gave Christ as a model to men, so he gave Christ’s mother to women; and since this very thing, the vow of virginity, deserves most to be commended and imitated, she should live her life under that vow. The third reason is that it was to be her privilege that in her should be embodied all that is noble, all that is holy. It is unthinkable that any other women should surpass her in any way. On the contrary, he who had made her adorned her also with the privilege of all nobility, so that, as He loved her above all others, she might be also holier and more lovable than all the others. For this reason, even apart from her divine motherhood, she deserves our honor and love above all other saints; and certainly the Holy Ghost, whose inspiration prompted others to take this vow, would not fail to do the same to her.¹

Suarez writes:

Those words do not indicate any doubt on her part, but they clearly indicate not only that the Blessed Virgin was resolved “not to know man” but that she felt herself so strongly bound and barred in this respect that she could never do it lawfully. For though she had not known man heretofore and was resolved not to do so even hereafter, this fact could hardly be a sufficient reason to put that anxious question, How shall this happen, if she was still at liberty to do as she pleased in this matter. She could have been given the answer that she was free to know man and

¹ In IV, d. 30, a. 1, q. 2.
conceive a son. Therefore those words, "I do not know man," must mean: "I am not allowed to know man; it is no longer a matter of my own choice." From these words thus understood also St. Augustine concludes that Mary had taken a vow.\(^5\)

By this argumentation Suarez clearly shows that it must have been a vow that restrained Mary from marital intercourse; accepted by God, for she had no command in this respect and therefore no other obligation.

2. So far we have considered the virginal marriage of Mary and Joseph chiefly as far as Mary was concerned; but by our discussion the virginal character of that marriage also on the part of St. Joseph was established, at least indirectly. Let us, however examine this side of the question a little more closely. When Mary spoke those words: "How shall this happen, since I do not know man?" she was already espoused to St. Joseph, as the Gospel calls her a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph. Now, the Virgin most pure and most prudent would never have consented to this betrothall unless by a revelation from above, or by her intimate acquaintance with the character of St. Joseph, or by a mutual agreement with him, she had become absolutely convinced that her consecrated virginity would not be imperiled by her marriage, but would be all the more safe and secure. We are thus forced to conclude that St. Joseph, too, was and remained a virgin, and in short, that the marriage of Joseph and Mary was a virginal marriage.

Scotus pertinently says:

\(^5\) D. 6, s.2, a. 5.
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From the angel’s charge to St. Joseph, “Do not be afraid to take to thee Mary thy wife,”⁶ we conclude without a shade of doubt that also Mary before her betrothal was given a similar instruction, whether through the angel or immediately by God Himself: “Do not be afraid to take Joseph, a just man, as thy husband; for behold, the Holy Ghost will give him to thee as a guardian and witness of thy virginity. He also, on his part, will live continently, and in many ways be at thy service to protect thy virginity.”⁷

Furthermore, how foreign to St. Joseph’s mind must have been any intention of consummating his marriage before Mary’s virginal conception, may be inferred from his painful embarrassment when he was made aware that his betrothed was with child, whatever explanation we may prefer of the cause of his anxiety!

Even more clearly we have the virginal character of this marriage revealed in Matt. 1:25: “And he did not know her till she had brought forth her first-born son.” We have here the positive statement of Holy Scripture that St. Joseph did not “know” the Blessed Virgin, i.e., had no carnal intercourse with her before the birth of her first-born, our Lord Jesus Christ.

But a number of heretics of the early Christian times as well as in later days abused this very text in an endeavor to prove just the opposite. From the clause, “till she had brought forth her first-born son,” they argued: Consequently, according to the Evangelist, Joseph did know her at least afterward: for the negative “did not know” is limited to the time before the birth of her first-born; and, in addition, the term “first-born” is

⁷In IV Sent., dist. 30, q.2.
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certainly an indication that there were other children of Joseph and Mary after Jesus.

Both objections, however, are found to have little or no weight and have been successfully refuted since the times of the Fathers, especially by St. Jerome. As regards the first objection, the purpose of the Evangelist must not be lost sight of: his main endeavor without doubt was to bring out impressively the supernatural character of Christ’s conception and birth by Mary the Virgin; for this reason he was especially bound to speak of what happened, or did not happen, up to the birth of Christ; it was not in the same degree important for his purpose to refer to the relation between Mary and Joseph after the virginal birth of the divine Child. Then the explanation of the word “till” by our objectors can be shown to be wrong. For to say that Joseph “did not know her till she had brought forth her first-born son,” in no way asserts that he did so afterward. With the particle “till,” Holy Scripture in a number of places merely intends to say what up to the specified time has happened or not happened; in no way does it commit itself as to the time that followed. To show the scriptural usage of this word “till,” we will quote some examples used already by St. Jerome in his answer to Helvidius:

Isa. 46:4 [Jerome quotes according to the LXX]: (The Lord says): “I am, I am, and till you grow old, I am.” Shall He perhaps cease to be, when they have grown old? In the Gospel our Savior says to His apostles: “Behold, I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world.” 8 Will He perhaps leave His disciples after the end

8 Matt. 28:20.
of the world? . . . Again it is written: "Christ must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet." ⁹ Shall He cease to reign when they are lain under His feet? Rather He will reign more completely thenceforth. ¹⁰

Any mind that is fair and clean and, above all, sensitive for high moral and religious values, would take it as a matter of course that St. Joseph, whom Holy Scripture so emphatically calls a just man (in the sense of a perfect man), would never profane and desecrate with sensual lust that sanctuary, the womb of the holy virgin hallowed forever by the God-man. This line of reasoning was already used by the Fathers in meeting the attacks of Helvidius, e.g., St. Ambrose. ¹¹ And St. Jerome:

Why, I ask, did St. Joseph contain himself until the birth of the child? Helvidius will answer: "Because he had heard the angel say: 'What is begotten in her is of the Holy Spirit.'" Very well! This man, then, who so firmly believed in a dream that in consequence thereof he did not dare to touch his wife: this man, I say, afterward—when he had learned from the lips of the shepherds that an angel of the Lord had come from heaven and told them: "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which shall be to all the people, for there has been born to you today in the town of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord": ¹² and that with this angel a multitude of the heavenly host then intoned the song of praise: Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth among men of good will, this Joseph, who had seen Simeon embrace the child

⁹ I Cor. 15:25.
¹⁰ No. 6 (PL, 23, 189).
¹¹ De inst. virg., chap. 6.
and proclaim praise: "Now dost Thou dismiss Thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word, in peace, because my eyes have seen Thy salvation"; who had seen Anna the prophetess, the Magi, the star, Herod, the angels; who, in short, had heard and seen such wonderful things, this man would have the effrontery, I ask, to violate a temple of God, a dwelling place of the Holy Ghost, the Mother of his Lord? 13

In a similar vein the author of the opus imperfectum: "How could he dare to do such a thing after he had learned that she had become the temple of the only-begotten Son of God? What a man so religious as he would not do before, how could he have done it afterward? 14

And St. Gregory the Great says: "Joseph could not dare to know Mary after he had learned the mystery of our redemption to have commenced in her womb." 15

The same arguments we meet again in the theologians. Gerson gives as St. Joseph's reason for his continence before the birth of Jesus, "his reverence for such a great mystery," and adds: "Hence we are given clearly to understand that he did not know her also after the birth of Christ, because the same reason was all the more urgent afterward." And Cajetan remarks pointedly: "Unless our mind has become imbecile we cannot but see that, after learning and seeing so many wonderful things, Mary and Joseph could never even think of intercourse."

The other objection, based on the term "first-born,"

13 Adv. Helv., no. 8 (PL, 23, 190).
14 PG, 56, 635.
15 Mor., Bk. VIII, no. 89 (PL, 75, 856).
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will prove of no more weight, provided only, as it ought to be, that the common usage of the word at that time, especially in the language of the Bible, be taken in account. To this usage St. Jerome already appeals when he counters the heretic Helvidius thus: “First-born is not only he after whom others were born, but also he before whom no other one was born.” 16 It appears quite possible that the Evangelist meant to stress this very point in order to preclude any suspicion that Mary might have been a widow before her espousal to Joseph, and thus to dispose of any possible doubt about Mary’s perpetual virginity. Moreover, St. Jerome calls attention to the Law, according to which every first-born was consecrated to the Lord and had to be redeemed, and then he says: “The word of God defines what is first-born, as all that opens the womb. Otherwise if only he were a first-born who is followed by brothers, then the priests also could not claim the first fruits so long as other fruits were not yet produced. . . . Shall not the very letters of Scripture get tongues to charge me with ignorance, and say that a first-born is he who opens the womb, not he who also has brothers”? This objection is dealt with in a similar way later by Catholic theologians and exegetes as Albert the Great, Thomas, Suarez, Maldonatus, and by moderns as Knabenbauer, Schanzch. To quote only St. Thomas: 17

It is the custom of the Scriptures to call first-born not only him who is followed by brothers but also him who is born first otherwise, if only he were a first-born who is followed by brothers, also the first fruits would not be

16 Adv. Helv., no. 10.
17 Summa theol., IIIa, q.28, a.3.
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due according to the law as long as other fruit were not produced. But this is not so, for according to the law the first fruit had to be redeemed within a month.¹⁸

When some opponents tried to cast a slur on the chastity of St. Joseph by pointing to his close daily contact with Mary and the familiarity which must have been the result, such an insinuation was already resented and ably refuted by the Fathers and early theologians. They one and all emphasize the ever perfect modesty of conduct of the Blessed Virgin, her matchless purity, her beauty whose bodily attractions were so eclipsed by the radiance of her beautiful soul that it was more apt to rouse in the beholder a love and desire for these virtues rather than a desire to endanger or impair or destroy them. Already St. Ambrose insists: "She was so full of grace that she not only preserved her own virginity but also conveyed the same distinction to others with whom she visited." ¹⁹ So also Thomas, Bonaventure, Gerson, Suarez. Gerson says:

Joseph was a just man, and the fomes of sin was in him either checked or extinguished, as it had to be, lest the beauty of Mary and daily familiarity with her become a scandal and his ruin. In consequence, by his life and daily contact with her he was not roused to passion but rather inspired with a love of chastity, and this was due not only to the check upon the fomes (of concupiscence) in himself and to the virtue and merit of Mary, but also to her refined and always self-disciplined behavior.²⁰

3. Objections such as those we have just discussed

¹⁸ Num. 18:16.
¹⁹ De inst. virg., chap. 7, no. 50 (PL, 16, 319).
²⁰ Sermo de Nativ. B.V.M., 3.
take no account of St. Joseph’s high rank, even in the supernatural order, nor of all the gifts of grace showered upon him to equip him for it. But once this exalted dignity is admitted and duly appreciated, we shall be ready to agree with the opinion now all but generally admitted, that St. Joseph not only lived with Mary in virginal marriage, but also preserved his virginity throughout his life.

Already in Christian antiquity this opinion had distinguished supporters. St. Jerome voices it quite emphatically addressing Helvidius:

You say that Mary did not always remain a virgin. But I claim even more than that, namely, that Joseph also remained a virgin through Mary, so that a virginal son was born in a virginal marriage. For if fornication can have no place in so holy a man, and if Scripture knows nothing of a second marriage of Joseph and he was much more of a protector and guardian to her than a husband, it stands to reason that he who by right is called the father of our Lord remained a virgin with Mary.\[^{21}\]

That St. Augustine shared this opinion can be gathered from his remark against Julian: “Even after he [Joseph] had learned that the holy virgin was by God blessed with a child, he did not seek another wife, since in any case he would not even have sought her for wife had he not felt obliged to do so by the law.” \[^{22}\]

Peter Damian:

Do you not know that the Son of God valued integrity of the body so highly that he wished to become man not through a marriage however honorable, but by an invio-

\[^{22}\] Bk. V, no. 48.
late virgin? And lest it appear to be sufficient if his mother was a virgin, the belief of the Church is that also he was a virgin who was thought to be His father.\textsuperscript{23}

In medieval times this opinion seems to have been generally held. Since the twelfth century the term “virgin” appears again and again in connection with St. Joseph, in a sense, it is true, not identical with but similar to the sense in which it is applied to the Blessed Virgin: e.g., Peter Comestor (d. 1179) says: “With the Virgin he remained a virgin.”\textsuperscript{24} And Peter of Riga (d. 1180): “That man complied with the divine injunctions, rejoicing that he belonged to a virgin, and remaining a virgin with the holy Virgin.”

Thenceforth we find this doctrine (of the perpetual virginity of St. Joseph) adopted by the great theologians, such as St. Albert and St. Thomas.

St. Albert holds that Joseph, like Mary, had made a vow of virginity and chastity. To show how becoming and necessary this was, he stresses the close connection Joseph had with those most holy persons, Jesus and Mary:

He had the resolve of perpetual chastity. Otherwise it would have been reckless temerity for himself if defiled, to touch the body of the Redeemer or that perfect mirror of purity, the body of his most holy mother, as Isaias says (52:11): “Be ye clean, you that carry the vessels of the Lord.” Oza\textsuperscript{25} putting forth his hand to the ark of God and taking hold of it was struck dead because he was defiled through his wife; and yet the ark was only dimly fore-

\textsuperscript{23} On Celibacy of Priests, chap. 3 (\textit{PL}, 145, 384).
\textsuperscript{24} Hist. schol., Bk. I, chap. 3.
\textsuperscript{25} II Kings 7:6.
shadowing this holiness of Mary. How could Joseph have dared to busy himself about Jesus and Mary with the stain of unchastity on his soul? In Exodus 29:10–15 the sons of Israel were warned to wash their garments and not to come near their wives, before the Lord would appear to them amid fire and smoke.

How much stronger reasons for vowing perpetual chastity must we believe those to have who even only with their hands shall touch the very flower of chastity? Finally, for what reason could divine Wisdom have chosen one defiled to act as witness and protector to the Mother of God? 26

St. Thomas: “We believe that as the mother of Jesus was a virgin, so was St. Joseph, because Jesus commended her, a virgin, to a virgin, not only at the end of His life (to St. John) but also at the beginning (to St. Joseph).” 27

St. Bernardine of Siena: “Though under obligation to take a wife (to marry), he kept to his desire and resolution to remain a virgin.” 28

Gerson:

As it behooved Mary to be resplendent with all purity, so it was meet that she should always have a husband distinguished for his purity, who with her, ever Virgin, would remain a virgin. Even as both were equally distinguished by their royal lineage, Mary vowed virginity; and Joseph, as the theologians tell us, did likewise. This vow is no obstacle to a true marriage . . . and in this marriage also we have offspring, fidelity, indissolubility. 29

27 On Matt. 12:47.
28 Sermon on St. Joseph.
29 Sermo de Nativ. B.V.M., 3.
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Toletus:

If the Virgin was entrusted to John on account of his virginity, it was no less proper that the Virgin was given in marriage to a man who was a virgin; rather would it seem to be even more befitting. For to John she was given for a mother, and this title precludes all suspicion of anything unseemly. But to Joseph she was given as a spouse, a title which could suggest that there were marital relations, especially since the Blessed Virgin was in her youth at the time of her marriage, but not at the time of the Passion. So to put her chastity above suspicion, the Virgin had to be given to a virgin. This point must be held.\(^{30}\)

Salmeron:

Christ the Lord wished to be nourished and raised only amid virginal purity; yea, Joseph was not only virgin, but God had extinguished in him all the fire of concupiscence, so that he might in all decency and holiness be about the fairest maid, the Blessed Virgin, and day and night live with her quite familiarly.\(^{31}\)

To quote at least one of the outstanding theologians of modern times, Scheeben:

That Joseph, like Mary, was always a virgin both before and after their wedding, has not been established dogmatically and cannot be established that way. But it can be fairly presumed in view, on the one hand, of the high vocation of Joseph and of its analogy with that of the virginal disciple who on account of this very quality was admitted to a similar relation of familiarity with Jesus and Mary; and on the other hand, because the marriage of Joseph and Mary demands also on his part a vow of virgin-

\(^{30}\) *In Luc.*, chap. 1.

\(^{31}\) Vol. III, tract. 19.
ity, a vow which in turn indicates that his whole life was ruled by the ideal of virginal purity. 32

This remark of Scheeben’s, that the perpetual virginity of St. Joseph is neither proved nor provable dogmatically, can mean only that we have no scriptural testimony bearing directly and explicitly on this point and that there is for it no general tradition reaching back to antiquity; not, however, that it cannot be logically deduced from data furnished by Scripture and tradition. Indeed, he himself avers that certain facts, vouched for by Scripture, e.g., the marriage between Joseph and Mary, establish a safe presumption for this virginity.

As a conclusion it may be worth while to bring together and state in detail the so-called rationes convenientiae or epigentiae which the Fathers and later theologians adduce more or less explicitly in favor of the virginity of St. Joseph. These reasons, together with what has by now become the all but universal consensus of theologians, will establish a sufficiently safe ground on which to rest our case. At the same time they bear out the presumption which Scheeben demands.

The following considerations, then, if unprejudiced and close attention is given to the matter, will show how unlikely it is, even how unthinkable and impossible, that St. Joseph should have lacked this prerogative of perpetual virginity.

This holy patriarch had been chosen and destined by divine Providence to spend many years of his earthly pilgrimage in the closest and most intimate companion—

32 Dogmatik, III, 489.
ship with those most august and holy persons, Jesus, and Mary. He was in truth the husband of the Virgin Mother of God, and therefore in a true sense father of the God-man, Jesus, and the head of the Holy Family and, consequently, its official representative and protector. To be able to meet this sublime task Joseph was, without any doubt, endowed by God with all the required helps of grace. But the Mother of God was the Virgin most pure, the Queen of virgins, the virgin par excellence: without the least impairment of her virginity she conceived and brought forth the divine Child Jesus; she has kept free from even the least shadow of a stain her virginity which she had consecrated to God of her own free will. Moreover, she was the Virgin most prudent, who would never have pledged her troth to St. Joseph had she not known beforehand, whether by natural or supernatural ways, that her holy spouse, too, had always been and, in addition, was determined ever to remain a virgin.

And the child Jesus, the God-man, who was to redeem mankind came into this temporal world in order also to restore to virginity its rightful, honored place. He openly showed His special love for virginal souls, He would assume His human nature, and be conceived and born, of an inviolate Virgin. For His apostles He chose such men as would leave everything for His sake and, at least after their vocation, live a life of continency. His best beloved disciple was to be St. John, who was and always remained a virgin; who was allowed to rest his head on his Master’s breast when the latter at the Last Supper instituted the sacrament of His love; and to whose care and custody, from the tree of
the cross, before giving up His spirit to the Father, Jesus was to entrust His own mother; the Virgin most pure to the virginal beloved disciple.

When due consideration is given to all these strikingly significant facts—the high value placed upon virginity by Jesus and Mary, the eminent dignity of St. Joseph because of his most intimate association with our Savior, the God-man who Himself was a virgin, and with the Virgin Mother of God—must it then not appear most unlikely, an utter anomaly, if in spite of all this, St. Joseph did not also share in this prerogative of perpetual virginity? Thus it came to pass that this belief in St. Joseph’s perpetual virginity has worked its way finally to its general acceptance by Catholic theology and by the joyful willing faith of the Catholic people.
Objections to the Virginal Marriage of Mary and Joseph

In our previous chapter we endeavored to prove the existence of a true marriage between Mary and Joseph and in a general way to explain its nature. We also gave what evidence there is for the perpetual virginity of St. Joseph. There remain, however, two difficulties that must be solved or cleared up before a full understanding of this holy union is possible. To give this solution is the aim of the present chapter.

I. Against the Catholic teaching it was urged in Christian antiquity by the heretic Helvidius with his followers, and later on to our own times by Protestants and rationalists, that in diverse places of the New Testament a number of apostles or disciples of Christ are designated as "brethren of the Lord." There must, then, have been other children from a previous marriage of St. Joseph; at any rate the perpetual virginity of St. Joseph is questionable. This objection has found its match already in the expert scholarship, and trenchant sarcasm, of St. Jerome who confuted it in his work against Helvidius. It was also taken up and dealt with in detail by later theologians. Among the more recent

It is a fact, well recognized and not to be denied, that in the language of Scripture not only full brothers and sisters, i.e., actual children of the same parents, may go by the name of brothers and sisters. Thus in the Old Testament Abraham and Lot are called brothers though they were only uncle and nephew; the same with Laban and Jacob; so also kinsmen of King Ochozias called themselves brothers of the King though not at all brothers in the strict sense of the term.¹

It is, therefore, a patent fallacy if from the one fact that in the New Testament some apostles or disciples of the Lord are called brothers of Jesus the conclusion is drawn that they have the same parent or parents with our Lord, and that thus either the virginal character of the marriage of Mary and Joseph or at least the perpetual virginity of St. Joseph is called in question. But it is not only a fallacy but downright error, because from other passages of the New Testament it is evident that those “brethren of the Lord” are not his brothers in the natural sense of the word but other near relatives, i.e., cousins. When Jesus was preaching at Nazareth the people of the town called the following men “his brethren” according to Matthew 13:55: James, Joseph, Simon, Jude; according to Mark 6:3, with a change in the sequence: James, Joseph, Jude, Simon.

But in the history of our Lord's passion, in both Matthew (27:56) and Mark (15:40) we find a James and a Joseph to be the sons of a Mary who (according to John 19:25) was a sister of Mary the mother of Jesus, both of whom must evidently be identical with the James and Joseph enumerated above among the "brothers of Jesus"; for if this Mary under the cross is to be identified by the names of her sons, these latter must already have been named or known before. Furthermore, in the lists of apostles (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13) the same James is surnamed (son) of Alpheus (= Cleophas; cf. John 19:25 with Mark 10:40) just as he is called by Mark (in the passage just referred to) James the Less, to distinguish him from James the Greater, the son of Zebedee. Lastly St. Jude in his epistle (chap. 1) styles himself the "brother of James." Thus a careful comparison of the pertinent data of Scripture reveals these "brothers of Jesus" to be actually the sons of Alpheus Cleophas and the Mary mentioned above. If they are nevertheless called "brothers of Jesus," they are such only in the wider sense of near relatives: they are cousins of Jesus.

The other supposition, that they were sons of Joseph from a previous marriage, has no shred of support in Holy Scripture. On the contrary, it is disproved by those very texts we have examined; it is in contradiction with the biblical narrative of our Savior's early life; no trace of it is found there of any "brothers of Jesus," not even in those passages where events are narrated in which the presence and participation of any real brothers of Jesus would have been simply unavoidable. St. Jerome remarks on this question:
Some writers conjecture the “brethren of the Lord” to be the sons of Joseph from another wife, following in this hallucination of apocryphal writers, and put forth a fictitious woman Melcha or Escha. We, however, as we wrote in our treatise against Helvidius, understand the brethren of the Lord to be not the sons of Joseph, but cousins-german of the Savior, sons of Mary the aunt of our Lord, of whom it is said that she was the mother of James the Less and Joseph and Jude who, as we read elsewhere in the Gospel, were called brethren of the Lord. That cousins sometimes were called brothers the whole Scripture bears witness.²

Still more conflicting with Holy Scripture, not only with the account of the annunciation but also with the scene of the crucifixion (John 19:25–27) is the assumption that the “brothers of Jesus” were natural sons of Mary the mother of God: “Now there were standing by the cross of Jesus His mother and His mother’s sister, Mary of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus, therefore, saw His mother and the disciple standing by, whom He loved, He said to His mother, ‘Woman, behold thy son.’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold thy mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.” But how could Jesus have assigned His mother away from her own children and entrusted her to a disciple, a beloved one, it is true, yet no blood relation at all; entrusted her to him as if to her only son (as the original text suggests) to be protected and taken care of by him—with total disregard of her own children?

² In Matth. 12:40, 50.
Several of the Fathers noted the significance of all this. St. Hilary:

Some utterly depraved men have the hardihood to assert in support of their own opinion that it has been handed down that our Lord had several brothers. But if these had been Mary’s sons . . . she would, at the time of the Passion, never been assigned as mother to John the Apostle, as the Lord said both to His mother, “Woman, behold thy son,” and to John, “Behold thy mother”; for He thus left behind in His disciple His own filial love to comfort her who was now left alone in the world.\(^3\)

St. Ambrose:

And our Lord Himself while hanging on the cross made it clear [that his mother was always a virgin] when He said to His mother, “Woman, behold thy Son”; then to His disciple, “Behold thy mother.” And both the mother and the disciple bear witness, for from that hour the disciple took her into his home. To be sure, if she had ever carnally known her husband she would never have left him, nor would he, a just man, ever have permitted her to leave him. And how could our Lord have caused this separation as He did since according to His own words no one may dismiss his wife except on account of immorality.\(^4\) (St. Ambrose here seems to suppose that St. Joseph was still living at the time of the crucifixion: an opinion generally, and justly, abandoned in later times.)

St. Peter Chrysologus: “If the Blessed Mary had had other sons, Christ on the cross in the hour of His death would not give His mother to a disciple, would

\(^3\) In Matth., chap. 1.

\(^4\) In Luc., Bk. II, no. 4.
not entrust her to one not a member of the family.”

It is, therefore, beyond all question. The “brothers of Jesus” mentioned in the New Testament were neither the sons of the marriage of Mary and Joseph, nor the offspring of a previous marriage of St. Joseph. St. Jerome refuting this objection, as he did with others, in a masterly though, it cannot be denied, bitterly sarcastic way, already pointed out that it had its origin in some phantastic stories of apocryphal writers.

II. The second difficulty that has to be cleared away if we wish to achieve a correct understanding of this marriage between Mary and Joseph is inherent in the matter itself: Is such a thing as a virginal marriage at all possible? Is a “virginal marriage” not rather a contradiction in terms? To answer this question as clearly and concisely as possible, we shall endeavor to prove the following proposition: A virginal marriage involved no contradiction in itself; on the contrary, the married state and perpetual virginity, even if the latter is consecrated by a vow, can well coexist in the same persons (husband and wife).

A few remarks on the nature of marriage and on the vow of virginity will clear the way for our argument.

a) What is marriage? What is its essential element? Marriage has its foundation both in the natural law and in the positive divine law. It may be defined as the permanent, moral, and juridical, union of man and woman, based on a contract, for the purpose, in the first place, of generation and education of offspring; in the second place for the purpose of mutual help

*Sermo 48.*
and of a rational control of the sexual instinct. The first and primary end of marriage, therefore, is the procreation and education of offspring, and through this the preservation and increase of the race, as our first parents were told by God: "Increase and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it." 6 But since man and woman, being sexually different, have also different requirements, even man depends on woman, the stronger on the weaker. If woman looks to man for protection, so man to woman for wifely care and attention. Therefore mutual help and assistance is the second end of marriage: "Let us make him a help like himself." After the fall of man a third end was to be served by marriage: by its very nature marriage became a *remedium concupiscientiae*, i.e., it was to serve as rational control of the sexual instinct, which had become disordered concupiscence through the first sin. The Apostle refers to this when he says: "For fear of fornication, let each man have his own wife," etc.7

Our definition of marriage, though couched in different words, is substantially the same as that given in the Roman Catechism, the classic definition since the time of Peter Lombard: Marriage is the conjugal union of man and woman, contracted between two qualified persons which obliges them to live together throughout life.

The following observations and distinctions will help to show more clearly some implications of our thesis.

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7 1 Cor. 7:2.
1. The threefold end of marriage given in our definition is the *finis operis*, the end objectively inherent in the marriage itself, toward which it tends by its very nature, even though, on account of some obstacle, not all three can be achieved in all cases. Well to be distinguished from this threefold natural end is the *finis operantis*, the immediate goal which the persons marrying have in mind, their subjective motive. The latter in the mind of the persons may be identical with the threefold end intrinsic to every marriage, or it may be a different one, e.g., the desire to improve one’s economic condition, or to please one’s parents or superiors, provided only that it is compatible with the primary end. Needless to say that any one of the three objective ends would be sufficient as a lawful motive. Thus the need of protection or help, or the desire for a lawful way of exercising the sexual function would be sufficient as a motive for contracting a valid marriage. Nor is it necessary that the primary end, the procreation of children, be consciously intended, only provided again that nothing be positively done or intended that runs counter to this primary end.

2. A clear distinction is also to be made between the act of marrying and the married state, i.e., the permanent union of man and wife. The former is a transitory juridical act, a contract, by which permanent rights are granted and permanent duties accepted. These rights and duties form the marriage bond, the essential element of marriage. What these rights and duties are the Apostle tells us: “Let the husband render to the wife her due, and likewise the wife to the husband. The wife has not authority over her body, but the
husband; the husband likewise has not authority over his body, but the wife”; i.e., the parties give to each other the right over their bodies for those acts which are required for generation, and by which they become the adequate principle of generation. St. Thomas states our distinction clearly and tersely: Matrimony is not the consent (the contract) itself but the union effected by that contract of the two persons directed to one purpose.

3. The consummation of the marriage, that is, the actual use of the right to marital intercourse, does not belong to the essence of marriage. It rather presupposes the existence of marriage in order to be itself lawful, and it gives to marriage only that kind of perfection which it reaches by achieving its main purpose. Thus again St. Thomas.

4. The right to marital intercourse is not such that it may be exercised at will at any time and under any circumstances. Its use may sometimes be impeded or estopped not only by physical causes but also on moral grounds, without prejudice to the marriage bond.

5. Nor is actual fertility an essential element of marriage. For a true and valid marriage can exist between sterile or elderly persons who, though capable of intercourse, are not capable of begetting children.

6. Certain duties—a) to live in common, b) when using the marriage right, not to obstruct by positive action the primary end of marriage, c) when blessed with children, to give them a proper education—are

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8 Ibid., 7:3 f.
9 Summa theol., Suppl., q.45, a.1, ad 2.
10 Summa theol., IIIa, q.29, a.2.
not themselves part of the essence of marriage, but are necessary consequences of every marriage, or of every fertile marriage.

7. The foregoing observations justify our assertion that the essence of marriage consists solely in the permanent moral-juridical bond which through mutual rights and duties unites husband and wife into one, legitimate, adequate principle of generation. This is also the view of St. Thomas and with him of theologians generally. They explicitly distinguish the transitory act through which the marriage is contracted, and the moral-juridical permanent bond through which husband and wife are united formally: the former is the effective cause of marriage, the latter the formal constitutive element.\textsuperscript{11}

8. Lastly, marriage is essentially a spiritual bond, since it consists of rights and duties which are spiritual things although they may concern also things material.

b) Having considered the essence of marriage, we must briefly give our attention to the vow of virginity. What, in general, is a vow? It is a promise made to God by which a man obliges himself to do something pleasing to Him. The vow of virginity, therefore, is the deliberate promise made to God, and for the love of Him, to abstain from all and every sexual pleasure whether lawful, as in the married state, or unlawful. While the observance of conjugal fidelity is a matter of justice, the vow, being an act of worship, belongs to the virtue of religion, and its violation is an act of sacrilege.

Now the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph were truly united in a valid marriage. On the other hand, the per-

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Ibid.}, Suppl., q.44, a.1; q.45, a.1; q.52, a.2.
petual virginity secured by a vow not only of the Blessed Virgin but also of St. Joseph is a fact that cannot be seriously doubted. The question therefore arises, how such a vow can be reconciled with a valid marriage contract, perpetual virginity with a lasting marriage bond. It may seem that they simply cannot coexist in the same persons, especially so if, in addition, perpetual virginity was mutually made a condition when the contract was entered upon. For by their marriage husband and wife have the right, and under certain conditions, the strict duty, to sexual intercourse; on the other hand, by their vow recognized in the marriage contract that right and duty seems to be annulled.

To overcome this difficulty we have first to recall the distinction we have made between the threefold end intrinsic to every valid marriage and the subjective motive of the contracting parties. That threefold objective end need not be also the subjective and formal motive of the parties concerned; e.g., if their one impelling motive in marrying were that of securing mutual help and assistance, or the desire of receiving the sacramental grace, without any intention, however, positively to obstruct the primary end, their marriage would without doubt be both valid and licit.

Furthermore, we have to distinguish the right and the use of the right: the right can exist without ever being used. A man may have the right to take up his residence in a certain house without ever doing so. The same is true in our case: the right to sexual intercourse may exist without ever being exercised. A couple after being married may decide by mutual agreement—the
agreement, be it understood, to be binding by virtue of fidelity only—never to consummate the marriage. But if they can do so after marriage without thereby destroying its essential character, then they can also make the same agreement when contracting marriage without endangering the validity of their contract. In both cases they would retain the right to sexual intercourse, but by their mutual agreement they would assume the obligation—the obligation of fidelity to one’s promises, not an obligation of formal justice—to refrain from making use of their right.

Similar to this, if not the same, is the condition of a husband and wife who either after or before their marriage with mutual consent have taken the vow of virginity. By their marriage all the essential marital rights come vested in them; these rights are not annulled or abrogated but only suspended by an obligation of the vow not to consummate the marriage, that is, not to exercise their vested right, this obligation being founded on a vow and therefore on the virtue of religion and not of justice in the formal sense. Therefore, if this couple in contravention to their vow of virginity were to have sexual relations with each other it would not be a sin against justice nor would it be fornication, but a sin against the virtue of religion, a sacrilege. But if either of the two persons would do the same with a third person, it would be not only a sacrilege, but also adultery and a sin against justice.

We have said that an agreement involving an obligation of fidelity not to consummate the marriage, or a mutual vow of virginity resulting in an obligation of the virtue of religion, is not incompatible with the ju-
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ridical right, acquired by the marriage, to marital intercourse. For there is here no conflict of right with right both connoting justice, but only a suspension of an existing right through an additional obligation arising from another cause. Some theologians, it is true, would go further and maintain that an agreement not to use the right of marriage would not abrogate the right itself, even if the agreement were intended to bind in strict justice. Other authorities, however, stoutly oppose this view. A few short remarks may be allowed and must be sufficient on this special question.

We would say that the continued existence of the right to marital intercourse and an obligation in justice added to it by a compact to refrain from it, are contradictory and cannot coexist in the same persons: they exclude each other, just as "yes" and "no" exclude each other as an answer to the same question. It is hard to see how the opponents of this view can invoke, in support of their opinion, as they do, the distinction between a right and the use of that right; for the right to marital intercourse is not a right of ownership of (or right of property over) the body of another, but the right to use it. The right of property and the right to use it may well be separated by a contract (binding in justice); but how can the right to use be contractually separated from what itself is a mere right to use? Note the difference between the right of ownership (e.g., over a house or farm and the right to hunt on grounds owned by another). The marriage right is evidently a mere right to use, not a right of possession or property; for otherwise it would not be a violation of justice if a man were to defraud his wife by mutilation of a mem-
ber. How, then, can, by an agreement, an obligation binding in justice arise not to use this "right to use" without destroying the right itself? It seems to us that this difficulty is insoluble. Fortunately we do not need to solve it in order to vindicate the virginal marriage of Mary and Joseph: our own explanation given in this chapter is fully sufficient as the champions of the last mentioned opinions will have to admit.
In the divine plan the special purpose of this marriage was to furnish the conditions under which the Incarnation should take place.

Up to now we have considered three aspects of the marriage between Mary and Joseph: 1. that it was a true and valid marriage; 2. that it was a marriage ratified but not consummated; 3. that, though a true and valid marriage, it was not incompatible with the state and vow of virginity. There remain three other things in connection with this marriage that call for special consideration: 1. the reason for this marriage, or the providential task this marriage had to perform; 2. how the three bona which the theologians since St. Augustine ascribe to every valid marriage are actually, and indeed most perfectly, verified in this marriage; 3. the wonderfully exalted position to which St. Joseph was raised by this conjugal union with the Mother of God. These three considerations have an important bearing on the aim we have set for this book.

In the present chapter we ask: What is the sublime

\(^1\) This chapter is practically a commentary on *Summa theol.*, IIIa, q. 29, a. 1.
mission or the reasons of this marriage? When we speak here of reasons we do not mean external reasons, or causes, that may have contributed to bring about this marriage, such as a desire on the part of the parents of the Blessed Virgin or the advice of the priests in the temple, to whose tutelage according to an ancient tradition Mary had been entrusted; for concerning these things only conjectures, no positive statements, are possible. Nor would the high repute in which the married state was held among the Jews when blessed with offspring, have had a decisive influence on Mary and Joseph. For theirs was to be a virginal marriage. Notwithstanding the high value placed on marriage, there are several instances in the Old Testament showing that continence and virginity were considered something pleasing to God. Thus married people, before they had to approach the divine Majesty in the performance of religious rites, e.g., priests officiating in the temple, were bound by the law to abstain from marital intercourse. After all, it seems plausible enough that Mary and Joseph must have been acting upon a revelation or inspiration from on high when they entered upon this marriage that was to have such an intimate relation to the incarnation of the Son of God. We should, therefore, endeavor above all to discover and understand what role this marriage had in the plan of divine Providence.

Scripture furnishes scarcely any clues. But the Fathers and later the great Scholastics of the Middle Ages directed their search to this very question, the close connection of this marriage with the Incarnation, to find and determine its reasons. Among the Fathers those
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deserving special mention are Ignatius, Origen, Eusebius the Church historian, Hilary, Epiphanius, Ambrose, Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine. St. Thomas, collecting and systematizing most of the findings of the Fathers, shows that in a threefold respect it was most fitting that the Son of God was conceived and born of an espoused virgin; that He, therefore, entered this temporal world as in a true and real marriage. St. Thomas also discussed with remarkable lucidity other cognate questions that are helpful to a study of the mystery of the Incarnation; e.g., why the Son of God should be conceived and born of a woman of this race of Adam; by one who was and remained a virgin before, in, and after the conception and birth of Christ, by one of the line of David, etc. Since those questions are beyond the scope of our discussions, we limit ourselves to the one point that concerns us here: the fitness, or even moral necessity, that the Son of God was born of an espoused virgin, or that He appeared on earth as the supernatural fruit of the virginal marriage between Mary and Joseph. We state the reasons as given by St. Thomas,\(^2\) and add some explanations as far as they are deemed necessary or helpful.

"It was fitting that Christ should be born of an espoused virgin; first, for His own sake; secondly, for His mother’s sake; thirdly, for our sake.

"I. For the sake of Christ Himself. We can adduce four reasons: the first is that He should not be rejected by unbelievers as an illegitimate child. Wherefore Ambrose says: ‘What blame could be put on the Jews and Herod if they seemed to persecute one born of adul-

\(^2\) Ibid.
tery?’” To understand the full import of this first reason given by St. Thomas it is sufficient to call to mind how little prepared the Jewish and pagan contemporaries of Christ were to accept with a sincere and humble faith a mystery so singular and wonderful as the virgin birth of the Savior. They would certainly have considered Him illegitimate and would have heaped ignominy and obloquy on Him. The wisdom of divine Providence, therefore, chose to cover up the mystery by this marriage as by a veil until the time when, through the miracles of Jesus and especially His resurrection and ascension, Jews and pagans were prepared to open their minds also to the message of the Savior's mysterious and wonderful entrance into this visible world. Already Eusebius stressed this point when he said: “The proper time for revealing this mystery could not have come until Christ had risen from the dead and had ascended into heaven; until the fame of Him as the Word of God had spread over the world, the nations were being called and the divine prophecies were being fulfilled so that the event gave visible proof of their truthfulness.”

“The second reason was that his genealogy could be traced in the customary way, i.e., by the male ancestors. Therefore Ambrose says: “He who came into the world had to be enrolled according to the custom of the world. But for this a male person is required; for it is the man who represents (the dignity of) the family in the Senate and other courts of record. We see the same in the usage of the Scriptures where stress is al-

*Questions on the Gospels, I, 6.*
ways laid on the descent of the male persons." 4 The significant point here is that, especially among the Jews, the genealogy is always traced through the male line. Now, if Mary had not been married to a man, the descent of Jesus from David could not have been established; it would have remained in doubt, and even under a cloud. But since the promised Redeemer could not allow a shadow to fall on His birth, and according to the prophecies He was to be "the son of David," Mary, the mother of Jesus, had to be united in marriage with a man of the house of David.

"The third reason was the safeguarding of the newborn child lest the devil should fiercely try to harm or hamper Him. Hence Ignatius says that Mary was espoused to a man in order that the manner of the birth of Christ could be kept a secret from the devil." The force of this third reason has been questioned or denied by some theologians, e.g., Scotus, Maldonatus, Natalis Alexander. However, it had its supporters in a number of the Fathers and other early writers, e.g., Origen, Basil, Jerome, Chrysostom, Ambrose, Bernard, and for this reason deserves at least respectful attention. That it is not devoid of all probability if rightly understood and not overstressed, the following considerations may show.

It was in the plans of God's providence that the incarnate Son of God pass through all the stages of childhood and youth until, grown to full manhood, He should bring the sacrifice of His life on the altar of the cross. Also His Messianic mission and His divine son-

4 In Luc., chap. 3.
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ship should become known and recognized first in the intimate circle of His friends and chosen disciples and only then, and gradually, by the general public. The prince of darkness, too, should only gradually and not too early become aware of it to keep him from attacking too fiercely the little flock of the nascent Church. True, God in His power could have kept him in check by force. But divine Providence, disposing all things not only mightily but also gently, preferred to keep the secret of the wonderful conception and birth of the Savior from the enemy for a while. The means to this end may well have been the marriage of the Blessed Virgin with St. Joseph which, as we have said, was like a veil to hide the mystery from unwelcome eyes. That the devil, strictly speaking, was physically able to become aware of it, is not denied; but he is not omniscient, and God’s wisdom could certainly arrange conditions and circumstances so that the virginal conception and birth remained unknown to the enemy without interference with his natural powers. If thus understood, the third reason given by St. Thomas cannot be dismissed offhand as altogether negligible.

“The fourth reason was that Jesus might be nourished by Joseph, who is therefore called His father, as His foster father.” This reason is plain. The divine Child who in His mortal life would share with us all the infirmities and needs of our human nature, to be like to us also in this regard, needed someone who would feed, guard and, if needed, defend Him: duties which in the nature of the thing belong to the head and father of the family. Hence it was fitting, even morally necessary, that Mary should be espoused to a man who by this
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marriage became her child’s father, not indeed in the physical sense, but true father nevertheless, in a higher and nobler way, as we shall see later on. And how faithfully and constantly St. Joseph discharged those duties we know from the Gospels: it was he who gave to the Child the name Jesus as he had been commissioned by the angel; he presented Him to God in the temple according to the Law; he saved Him from the clutches of cruel King Herod by taking Him to Egypt; with Mary, after visiting the temple, he went on the sorrowful search for the Child apparently lost; it was he whose wishes and directions governed the household at Nazareth, and the divine Child was subject to him as well as to the holy Mother, as Holy Scripture clearly indicates.

II. The second group of reasons, three in number, tell us why this marriage was in the interest of Mary the Virgin Mother. “First, that she should be saved from the punishment provided by law for adultery, or an illegitimate pregnancy; i.e., lest she should be stoned as an adulteress,” as Jerome says. This reason, too, is clear: the Blessed Virgin would have been suspected by the Jews of sexual delinquency and, as she had no means of defense that could avail against them, she would have been stoned to death whether her alleged delinquency was with a married or an unmarried man: “If virginity is not found in the accused damsel, they shall cast her out of her father’s house, and the men of the city shall stone her to death, and she shall die: because she hath done a wicked thing in Israel, to commit fornication in her father’s house.”

5 Deut. 22:20 f.
Secondly, that she might be preserved from infamy; whence Ambrose says: “She was espoused lest she be branded with the stigma of violated virginity, since her pregnant womb would be considered a sign of moral corruption.” With the shining immaculate purity and holiness of the divine Child, that of His mother is necessarily connected. Therefore to keep her holiness above all suspicion, the marriage with St. Joseph was provided for. Any taint attaching to the conception and birth of Christ would be utterly irreconcilable with the holiness or providence of God. It would have rendered the hearts of men loath to go along with God’s plan of redemption, might have frustrated it. Moreover the singular love of God for the immaculate Virgin could not permit that her absolute freedom from every sin, that of unchastity above all, could be questioned in any manner whatever. This is what St. Ambrose means when he says: “The Lord would rather have some people entertain doubts about His origin than about the purity of His mother. For He knew how sensitive was the modesty of the Virgin and how delicate a thing the reputation of a pure woman, and He did not think that the belief in His origin should be built up at the cost of disgrace to His mother.”

Thirdly, that she might have the services of St. Joseph, as Jerome says. What we said above about the Child applies in a similar fashion to the mother. She, too, was not free from the infirmities nor above the needs of our human nature. Hardships and sorrow were also her portion on earth. Long before the tragedy of Calvary she had begun to be the mother of sorrows

*In Luc.*, chap. 1.
because she was the true mother of the Man of sorrows. She, too, needed a bread-winner, a guardian and defender, and no better one could be found than a husband with the heart and loving solicitude of St. Joseph.

III. St. Thomas gives a number of reasons why this marriage was most fitting for our sake, inasmuch as the virginal marriage of Mary and Joseph brought some great advantages to our faith and Christian morals. He writes as follows:

"First, that Christ was born of a virgin is now proved by Joseph as a witness. Therefore Ambrose says: "The more trustworthy witness for her purity is the husband who would certainly resent the wrong and could avenge the disgrace if he had not become aware of the mystery." In behalf of our belief in the virginal conception and birth of our Savior we could not wish for a more competent and trustworthy witness than St. Joseph. And we owe this to his virginal marriage with Mary. As St. Ambrose remarks, St. Joseph as husband would certainly have felt keenly any disgrace caused by the infidelity of his wedded wife. Moreover, how far he himself was from any thought of consummating his marriage is clearly shown by his worry, if not dismay, when he became aware that his spouse so pure was with child. Relief came to his soul only when in a prophetic dream an angel from heaven appeared and told him to take heart: "Do not be afraid, Joseph, to take to thee Mary thy wife, for that which is begotten in her is of the Holy Spirit." Thus St. Joseph's own testimony is corroborated by a messenger sent by God Himself. The value of this testimony of St. Joseph is

\[ \text{Matt. 1:20.} \]
aptly illustrated by St. Bernard comparing it with the 
faith of the apostle Thomas, at first weak and hesi-
tating, but all the bolder and stronger afterward: “As 
Thomas first doubting and feeling his way became 
afterward the courageous and steadfast witness to the 
resurrection of our Lord, so Joseph, having married 
the Blessed Virgin and thus, living in close association 
with her, enabled to assure himself of her holy life 
while she was under his care, because the most reliable, 
the star witness, for Mary’s purity. . . . For, as I am 
a weak man, I myself in regard to the Resurrection 
would sooner have believed Thomas who first was 
doubting and hesitating, then I would have believed 
Cephas who heard and believed at once; and so like-
wise, regarding the continence of the mother I would 
believe her husband who was guarding and watching 
her, more than the Virgin herself when in her defense 
he calls her own guiltless conscience to witness.” 8 
But here we have already touched upon the next 
reason of St. Thomas.

“Secondly, thereby the words of the Virgin Mother 
become the more credible when she asserts her own 
virginity. Wherefore Ambrose says (loc. cit.): ‘More 
credence will be given the words of Mary and there is 
no motive left for a lie. For an unmarried pregnant 
woman might probably try to exculpate herself by a 
lie. But a married woman has no such reason to tell a 
lie; for her motherhood is a reward and the crown of 
glory of her marriage.’” St. Thomas adds: “These 
two reasons serve to strengthen our faith.” Indeed they 
do. For St. Joseph bearing witness to Mary’s virginity

* Hom. 2 super “Missus est.”
confirms for us her own assertion contained in her question: "How shall this happen, since I do not know man?" However, also her assertion in her own behalf, even if taken alone, is quite dependable and unimpeachable. For had she remained single and yet become pregnant, people might have felt justified in suspecting that she was lying to hide her guilt. But now that she was married, there surely was no need for a lie of excuse. For there is no disgrace for a married woman in becoming a mother; rather is it a blessing, and an honor and joy for the parents. No one tells a lie unless he has a reason for doing so.

"A third reason is that those virgins who through lack of caution bring disgrace upon themselves should have no excuse. As Ambrose says: 'It was not becoming that maidens with a shady reputation should be able to give as an excuse that the mother of the Lord seemed to be of evil fame.'" This reason may well be taken as a hint how carefully a virgin soul should avoid everything that might tarnish her reputation for purity, since, to protect the good name of the Blessed Mother, divine Providence arranged for her this holy union with St. Joseph so that from the very outset no suspicion could ever arise against her.

"Fourth reason: Because this marriage signifies the whole Church which, though a virgin, yet is espoused to one man, Christ, as Augustine says." Here St. Thomas shows us this marriage as a type of the Church, which is a virgin, yet as the spouse of Christ is bearing Him children and ever more children. In fact every Christian marriage typifies this union of the Church

*De s. virgin., chap. 12.*
with Christ, but less perfectly than this one, because Mary alone became a mother yet always remaining a virgin.

"Fifth reason. There may be even a fifth reason for the Mother of the Lord to be both espoused and a virgin at the same time; because thus in her person both virginity and matrimony are honored, to confound those who would disparage the one or the other of them." In fact, by this virginal marriage not only virginity but also the married state, and with it the family, are honored and hallowed. Henceforth the sacred union of Mary and Joseph, the holy family of Nazareth, has become the ideal prototype of the Christian family. We find here father, mother, and Child inseparably linked together by the sacred ties of conjugal, parental, and filial love. What a tower of strength this holy marriage and ideal family has been against the heretics of old and, under God's providence, will be against the insidious attacks of the modern propagandists of free love—often meaning thereby crude animal instinct! These would bring about the disintegration of both marriage and family and thus sap the very foundation of human society, a threat that must be evident not only to the believing Christian but to every thinking man who has any moral sense left. The popes of our times in their encyclicals and decrees have again and again called attention to this danger, and have encouraged and recommended as an effective means of defense against it, the devotion to the holy family.

We have now surveyed and studied somewhat in detail the reasons given by St. Thomas and the Fathers to show how appropriate and desirable was this vir-
ginal marriage of Mary and Joseph. In the light of these reasons, that marriage is seen in its intimate connection with the incarnation of the Son of God and His Messianic mission. Its great purpose was to furnish the conditions in which the eternal Son of God could become a member, or rather the head, of the human race in a manner honorable and befitting His dignity. But it was not only to serve the Incarnation itself but also its main purpose, the Redemption, and the application of the fruits of Redemption, since it helps to strengthen and nourish our faith, encourages and stimulates a truly Christian way of life, and especially stands forth as the most beautiful and noblest model of the Christian marriage and family. For all this we owe to St. Joseph, the chaste spouse of the Blessed Virgin, a debt of gratitude second only to what we owe to Christ the Son of God Himself and to His immaculate Mother. And from all this we already can divine in some way the great dignity, the grandeur of St. Joseph. But of this we shall say more later on.
The Bona Matrimonii

In the two preceding chapters we asked and answered two questions, both of them indispensable for a correct understanding of this marriage of Mary the immaculate Virgin, and Joseph her chaste spouse. In chapter 4 we saw that the virginity of Mary and Joseph was no barrier to a true and valid marriage between them. In the last chapter we examined more closely the reasons or purpose peculiar to this marriage and, as I venture to hope, have become convinced that this holy union was arranged by God’s wise providence precisely with a view to the Incarnation and to the role this marriage had to play in its proper execution. This may seem to be sufficient as an explanation of this marriage and sufficient evidence to show that St. Joseph was in the full and proper sense of the word the true husband of the Virgin Mother of God. He thus appears already in the halo of his exalted supernatural dignity deserving a veneration on our part such as no other creature does or can claim except only the august Queen of heaven. Nevertheless to complete the picture and to deepen our understanding of the subject, we shall add one other consideration to what we have said already.
This consideration will also serve as an introduction to the following chapters, in which we shall give a more thorough explanation and discussion of the fatherhood of St. Joseph. This unique privilege, the fatherhood of St. Joseph in respect to the child Jesus, forms, as it were, the central point of our theme.

In the present chapter what will claim our attention is especially a statement of St. Augustine found in several of his writings. It concerns marriage in general, but particularly the marriage of Mary and Joseph. Thus he writes:

Every bonum nuptiorum is fulfilled in the marriage of Christ’s parents: offspring, fidelity, and sacrament. There was an offspring, as we know, the Lord Jesus Himself; fidelity, because there was no adultery; sacrament, because in fallen man this would not be without that result of sin, gross carnal concupiscence; and He who was to be without sin, wished to be conceived without this concupiscence, to be conceived not in the sinful flesh, but in the likeness of sinful flesh; to show also by the same token that all flesh begotten through intercourse is sinful flesh whereas the only one not thus begotten was not sinful flesh.¹

This dictum of St. Augustine concerning the three bona matrimoniæ has become a theological axiom. We find it in St. Thomas² and then in many other theologians. With some verbal changes even the Council of Florence has made it its own. “The first bonum matrimoniæ is offspring, to be begotten and educated for the service of God; the second, fidelity which each party

¹ De nupt. et concup., Bk. I, chap. 11, no. 13.
² Summa theol., IIIa, q.29, a.2; In IV, d.30, q.2, a.2.
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has to observe toward the other; the third, the indissolubility of the marriage." 3

What is the meaning of this statement, and how is it verified in the virginal marriage of Mary and Joseph?

1. The blessing that is here called sacrament is not to be understood as sacramental grace; the marriage of Mary and Joseph was not a sacrament of the New Testament, for the New Testament did not yet then exist. St. Augustine by a figure of speech (metonymy) here calls sacrament what in the New Testament is an effect, a principal one, of the sacrament of matrimony, namely, its indissolubility. Now it is evident that this indissolubility, this indestructible bond, is realized to perfection in the marriage of Mary and Joseph. In fact, by a special dispensation of divine Providence this marriage had to serve an important purpose in connection with the incarnation of the Son of God, and the two parties were the holiest of men: Joseph, emphatically called by Scripture "a just man," and Mary, "full of grace" and "blessed among women." It could not be, therefore, that they should ever give even a fleeting thought to severing that bond, once they were assured that it had been decreed and wrought by God Himself. The doubt that, with God's permission, embarrassed St. Joseph for a moment was speedily relieved by the angel, and served only to make that bond doubly secure. It also helped to confirm our belief both in the virginal character of this marriage and the virgin birth of the Savior, just as the doubts of the unbelieving Thomas were, according to God's

3 Decr. pro Armenis (Denz., no. 702).
plan, bound to strengthen the faith of the other apostles and of the faithful ever since.

2. The second bonum, fidelity, is nothing else than mutual, conjugal fidelity and the self-forgetting devoted love for each other never waning until death. This, too, in a perfect degree was present in this holy marriage. We cannot hope fully to conceive and encompass in our thoughts how true, deep, strong, self-sacrificing was that sublime and chaste love of these two holy persons who belonged to each other so entirely and exclusively in order that God’s great design might be accomplished. Nothing could impair this love, for it was strong as death. And thus sustained by this love until death (the death of St. Joseph) parted them, they faced together, with serene courage and fortitude, hardships and sorrows that in God’s wise providence were to be their share: the toilsome journey to Bethlehem, the hardheartedness of its people, the flight into Egypt and bitterness of exile, etc. But above all, conjugal fidelity in the case of Mary and Joseph is evidenced most clearly by the fact that they kept unstained in its spotlessness that virginal purity which they had pledged to each other. Knowing their sublime vocation to which God had called them, they could not think of ever acting otherwise. The marriage of Mary and Joseph can, therefore, claim the two blessings of indissolubility and fidelity so perfect as no other marriage ever could.

3. But is the third bonum, offspring, also verified as a blessing of this marriage? Can the child Jesus, the God-man, be regarded as the fruit of this marriage?
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For an answer to this not exactly easy question, let us again consult St. Augustine, who will show at least the right approach to its solution. He has repeatedly pointed out that sensual pleasure, naturally connected with sexual function and liable to get out of the control of reason, can in no way be considered essential to marriage, even less so than intercourse itself. The more completely carnal concupiscence is excluded and the more the bond of spiritual love predominates, the more closely marriage approaches that higher state of life, virginity, and so much more perfect and noble it is itself; and if it were possible to obtain its primary end without such carnal union, it would be the most perfect, the ideal marriage. Now this ideal is realized in the marriage of Mary and Joseph. But let us give one or two passages of St. Augustine to have his own words:

Therefore, if our fathers took wives and had intercourse with them for no other reason but to beget children, it would have been a great joy to them if they could have had children without that carnal act; for in order to obtain children they were not by wantonness driven to it but were induced to it by a sense of duty. Was Joseph, then, not father because without carnal concupiscence he obtained a son? God forbid that Christian chastity should think this if not even Jewish did so.¹

In another passage of the same sermon Augustine says:

If Joseph had been excluded from the genealogy of our Lord, he might well have remonstrated: “Why do you leave me out? Why is this genealogical line up and down not traced through me?” Perhaps they will tell him, “Because you did not beget him through the carnal act.”

¹ *Sermo 51.*
he will answer: “But did she become his mother through a carnal act?” What the Holy Spirit wrought He wrought for both of them. “Joseph was a just man,” Holy Writ says. Therefore both husband and wife were just. And the Holy Spirit resting in the justice of both of them, gave the Son to both of them; but in that sex which had to bring forth the Son He worked so that the Son was also born to the husband. Therefore the angel said to both of them that they should give the name to the child, so that the parental authority of both should find recognition.\(^5\)

Similar passages are found elsewhere in St. Augustine’s works.

From the passages quoted one thing at least is clear: In St. Augustine’s view, the divine child Jesus is a fruit of the marriage of Mary and Joseph, not of course in the natural sense; but what in this respect that marriage was lacking, has been supplied in a supernatural manner by the operation of the Holy Spirit. And to receive this supernatural operation of the Holy Spirit both Mary and Joseph, wife and husband, had put themselves into the proper disposition by their holiness.

Let us now hear what St. Thomas says on this subject:

Offspring is called a *bonum matrimonii* not only so far as it is begotten through the marriage, but also as it is conceived and reared in the marriage. And in this manner was that offspring (the Lord Jesus) a fruit of this marriage, not in the first manner. However, one born of adultery, or an adopted child, who is reared during the marriage, is not a *bonum matrimonii* because marriage is not by its nature ordained toward the rearing of such children; whereas the marriage of Mary and Joseph was spe-

cially ordained to the end that in it this offspring should be received and reared.\(^6\)

These words of St. Thomas clearly indicate that Jesus is the offspring of this marriage. Billot, who follows St. Thomas closely in his treatment of this subject, concludes his explanation with the pertinent remark:

Thus this marriage has no peer among all other marriages. For marriage in its first institution foreshadowed, as it were, the future mystery of the incarnate Word of God; marriages in the New Testament imitate it as an image does its exemplar, but the marriage of Christ’s parents actually received the incarnate Word itself when it came down from heaven, nourished it faithfully, and introduced it to the world becomingly.\(^7\)

Lastly let us hear Suarez whose competent treatment of the theology on St. Joseph was highly commended, as we have seen, by Scheeben:

Through his marriage with the Blessed Virgin, Joseph became in a certain sense master of her body since, as St. Paul says, the wife has not authority over her body, but the husband. Thus it came about that the fruit of the virginal body, in a certain sense, belonged to Joseph. As the old Roman law has it: “What grows or is built on the land of another accrues to the ownership of him whose land it is.” Thus if miraculously a spring should rise in someone’s garden, it would belong to him who owns the garden. When, therefore, the virgin land conceived of the blessing of the Lord, the fruit of the blessing belonged to Joseph whose land it was, it had been prefigured in the blessings of the patriarch Joseph.\(^8\) Furthermore, by the marriage

\(^6\) *In IV*, d. 30, q. 2, a. 2 ad 4.
\(^7\) *De Sacr.*, II, thesis 35.
\(^8\) Deut. 33:13–16.
bond the two, man and wife, become one, as it were; for, while through the carnal union they become one flesh, through the marriage bond itself they become one heart and one soul. Hence it is that they own in common what they have, and consequently that which belongs to one, belongs also to the other.⁹

If we now sum up and combine these three explanations, which are practically identical anyway, and add a few remarks to make our presentation complete, we shall be enabled to form a fairly adequate idea of how the divine child Jesus was actually the true, though miraculous, fruit of the marriage of Mary and Joseph.

As we saw in our last chapter, the virginal marriage of Mary and Joseph had been ordained by God in view of the Incarnation, so that it could take place under suitable conditions. For this purpose it had to be a real marriage. An apparent marriage, a pseudo-marriage, could never do; like a lie, it would have been absolutely unworthy of God and therefore impossible. The eternal Son of God, then, had to be conceived by an espoused virgin; He had to be born into her marriage. This was all the more necessary because

God from the beginning, when He created the first man and woman, had conditioned the blessing with offspring upon marriage, and had sanctified marriage as the fountainhead henceforth of all future human life; so that He would not depart from this moral norm, set by himself, even when a virginal conception was to take place in which a man's physical cooperation was absolutely out of the question.¹⁰

⁹ Dogmatik, III, 489.
Let us turn our attention for a moment to this supernatural phenomenon, the virginal conception. In the natural order for the origin of a new human life three factors are required. The primary factor is the first cause of all being, God. He cooperates here, not only as He always does in preserving all beings in their existence and cooperating with all the activity of His creatures, but in this case of the production of a new human life He acts as the Creator of the new spiritual soul. Almighty God alone can call into existence a spiritual soul and infuse it into the organized fetus prepared by the one organic principle, the parents. Man and woman, therefore, are the secondary factor through their sexual union in which the female germ cell is fertilized by the male cell, thus becoming a human fetus which through the soul created and infused by God becomes a living human being. Thus in the natural order human life is propagated, new human beings come into existence, the natural activity of the parents being merely preparatory or dispositive to the creative action of God.

In the case of which we are speaking, the miraculous conception of the divine Child by the Virgin Mary, evidently the secondary, human, factor could not function in the usual natural manner; it was, however, not dispensed with altogether. The female factor in due time produced the female germ cell; but instead of having it fecundated in the natural way by the action of man, she with a supernatural act of perfect obedience had it ready for the divine operation of the Holy Ghost, through which it was fertilized, quickened by a human soul, and at once hypostatically united with the Second
Person of the Blessed Trinity. She did this when, upon the invitation of the Holy Ghost Himself, and illumined and supported by his grace, with humble and complete submission to God’s will she uttered those tremendous words that were to renew the world and to begin a new, supernatural order: “Be it done to me according to thy word.”

But in all this, was there any cooperation of the part of the other created factor, St. Joseph; anything that he contributed so that his virgin spouse could become the Mother of God? Most certainly. His contribution was his own purity, his virginal union with the Virgin most pure, that union resplendent in its supernatural holiness, by which he jointly with his spouse was to make it possible that the eternal Son of God could be conceived and be born by a virgin and thus come into this world in a manner that was not unworthy of His own ineffable purity and holiness. Furthermore, Joseph did as the heavenly messenger had commanded him, and took to him his wife, the virgin so wonderfully blessed by God, and henceforth spent himself in guarding and serving her and the blessed fruit of her womb. This cooperation of St. Joseph was merely dispositive in character, yet in value it was not only equal but immeasurably superior to a mere natural act of fertilization, and it was the only kind of cooperation fitting enough when the mystery of the Incarnation was to be accomplished. Finally, the two arguments quoted above from Suarez are to be borne in mind. First: according to the words of St. Paul and a principle of law generally accepted, the husband has a right over the wife’s body in respect to the sexual functions by
which new human life originates; therefore lawful offspring belongs not only to the wife but also to the husband, even though there had been no physical cooperation on his part. Secondly: they are one flesh through the conjugal act, but it is through the marriage bond itself that they become one heart and one soul; for this reason what is conceived and born of the wife is born not only to the wife but also to her husband: it is a fruit of the marriage. Consequently also Jesus was born to the virginal marriage of Joseph and Mary. He can and must be called the fruit of this marriage.

A virgin conceives of the Holy Ghost, but a virgin espoused to Joseph: to him, therefore, into the marriage which she had contracted with him, she bears the Son by whom the Lord God had hallowed her womb. If every child though begotten in the ordinary way, by a natural physiological process, yet remains in the final instance a gift from heaven, cannot He who bestows this “blessing” bestow it by way of exception on a marriage without requiring the physical cooperation of the couple thus favored? In either case, both husband and wife rejoice in the blessing that God has bestowed on them. . . . This truth, Heaven’s incontestable right to cause an Israelite to become a father without his generative power functioning, yet with all the consequences resulting from parental relationship,—a truth the importance of which is best revealed in the birth of the Messiah—had long before been made familiar to the Israelitic mind, and that purposely and in a striking manner. It was the levirate marriage that had to serve also this purpose, and precisely on account of this purpose it was to play such an important role in the continuation of the Israelitic families and even within the genealogy of the Messiah Himself. It is true the union of
Mary and Joseph was not a levirate marriage; but it was especially on account of the same reasons that prompted this marriage, that the idea of the levirate was implanted so deeply in the consciousness of Israel. The same God of their covenant who has it in his power to give a son to a deceased Israelite who could in no way cooperate, gives a son to a Virgin’s “husband” who is still living yet also never touched his virginal spouse. An Israelite might ask then: Should the child which heaven granted the wife of Joseph within his lifetime be less truly a son of Joseph than if she had been left a widow without children, and then were to bear him a son through a levirate marriage after his death? In neither case did Joseph beget the son; yet in both cases it is the sovereign power of God that bestows the blessing of fatherhood on the Israelite in a manner beyond natural powers. . . . The essential thing in either case is God’s sovereign freedom of action. It was only logical, therefore, that the angel told Joseph he should use the right involved in fatherhood: to give the Child the name, that name so expressive of the child’s mysterious vocation.\footnote{Ibid., p. 122, and Unity of the Gospels, p. 244.}

We shall conclude with a passage from Scheeben, who fully agrees with us in explaining the fruit of the virginal marriage, and therefore the fatherhood, of St. Joseph. His words, in more scholastic language than Grimm’s, are as follows:

It is evident that the close connection existing between Mary’s marriage with Joseph and her virginal motherhood is to be thought of not as something merely extrinsic or accidental but as an intrinsic and organic relationship, with the result that this marriage not only excels all others in dignity and holiness, but, precisely as marriage, has a per-
fection all its own, especially as regards the two most important "blessings" of a marriage: offspring, and "sacrament." In regard to the first, this marriage has this in common with all other marriages, that it was destined by God as its author, and therefore destined intrinsically and essentially, to make possible the begetting of offspring. But unlike any other virginal marriage, it was privileged, without detriment to its virginity, to share with a consummated marriage the blessing of fruitfulness, because in it the spouses were actually blessed with an offspring to be reared by them; and although this offspring was not begotten by them through carnal intercourse, it could nevertheless belong, in the intention of its divine progenitor, to both human parents as their own through their spiritual union, no less so than if it had been the fruit of a carnal union. Furthermore, this marriage surpassed all non-virginal marriages in this, that its fruit was one especially and absolutely holy, and that, when both parents in order to obtain this fruit surrendered themselves jointly as virginal spouses to the will of God, their cooperation was of an order much superior to that involved in the carnal union for the natural begetting of offspring.

Indissolubility is a characteristic that sets the marriage bond apart from and high above any other bond uniting one human being with another. This blessing consists in the fact that by the will of God one person is so linked with and attached to another that with this it forms an indissoluble whole, and that each of them in and through this other person as through an organ that belongs to God, is taken possession of by God Himself for a service to be rendered by it in conjunction with the other. This bond is more nearly perfect the holier the service of God for the performance of which the two persons are united (and the more perfect the ownership of God over them is, in virtue of which and for the purpose of which one person
takes to itself the other) and the more perfectly they are an organ belonging to God and, as a result, can mutually draw each other still closer to God by their union. But in both respects the union of Mary and Joseph surpasses all comparison, not only all natural pre-Christian and non-Christian, but also all Christian marriages in the same manner as its purpose, that Christ should be born and reared in it, surpasses the purpose of other marriages, the pro-creation and rearing of mere human beings destined to become members of Christ (and in the same manner as Mary is in a higher sense an organ of God and member of Christ than other men who become such organs and members through baptism).\textsuperscript{12}

The explanations given in this chapter may suffice to show how the child Jesus is the fruit of the virginal marriage of Mary and Joseph. They were intended also, as we have said, to pave the way for an explanation of the fatherhood of St. Joseph in respect to the child Jesus, which is the central theme of this book. But since this fatherhood of St. Joseph is based entirely on his virginal marriage with the Blessed Virgin Mary, the existence of this marriage had first to be demonstrated before we could proceed to explain and prove St. Joseph’s claim to the glorious title: “father of Jesus.”

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Dogmatik}, III, nos. 1579-81.
For a full understanding of the discussion we are now entering upon, it is important to keep in mind the conclusions we have reached so far, because they are presupposed as a basis of the following chapters. We have seen so far and become convinced, I think, that Mary and Joseph were united in a true and valid marriage without any impairment of their virginity, which both had vowed to God; further, that this virginal and holy marriage was designed by the all-wise providence of God entirely with a view to the incarnation of His eternal Son, so that this could take place in a dignified and worthy manner; which purpose this marriage served perfectly. Finally, in our last chapter we have shown how the three *bono* which, since St. Augustine, theologians generally have held as distinctive properties of marriage (offspring, fidelity, indissolubility) have been realized in an eminent, and of course supernatural, manner: even the blessing of offspring was there, since the child Jesus, who is God and man, was the fruit of this marriage. Thus we have prepared the ground for the following discussion of the fatherhood of St. Joseph in respect to the divine child Jesus. The first question
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now is: What really is this fatherhood of St. Joseph or what kind of fatherhood is it?

1. St. Joseph is commonly called the foster father of Jesus, a name certainly appropriate in a way and well deserved. For there can be no doubt but that he faithfully did his utmost to supply all the wants of Jesus; he provided Him with food and raiment and shelter. As far as it was in his power, he shielded Him from bodily harm and discomfort. He rescued Him from the plots of the ruthless Herod. He instructed Him in the trade he himself plied, and so on. We cannot imagine any kind of service which he would not render Him, if needed and possible, with fatherly love and solicitude. But this fatherly care which he bestowed on the child Jesus is not sufficient to account for the juridical relationship existing between Jesus and Joseph, nor does it explain how the Child was truly the fruit of the virginal marriage of Mary and Joseph; it does not constitute the essential element of this fatherhood: it is only a result or function thereof.

2. Some theologians would call St. Joseph the adoptive father of the divine Child. But this designation is not only insufficient and inadequate but positively inappropriate because based on a misapprehension of the term. For adoption on the part of a father, or a mother if she herself can act legally, means to take or receive as one’s own child a minor who otherwise is a stranger to the adopting person, i.e., not belonging to the family by birth. But, as we have seen, the child Jesus was not at all a stranger to St. Joseph: as the supernatural offspring of the marriage of Mary and Joseph, He already belonged to the family. Besides,
ordinary common sense sees how incongruous is the idea of adoption of a high-born person by one of low estate, and all the more so, of adoption of a divine person by a human person.

In support of the opinion here rejected, it will not do to appeal to the authority of Suarez and of St. Augustine quoted by him, for such an appeal betrays a misunderstanding of their words. Suarez writes as follows:

Augustine adds another reason for this name ("father") in these words: "Nor is the fact that he had not begotten Him a reason for denying to St. Joseph the right to be called the father of Christ; for he could well be father also of one whom he had not begotten by his wife but adopted from elsewhere." For by adoption even one who is a total stranger becomes a son, and he who adopts him is called, and in his way becomes, a father. And Joseph, when without his intervention his wife bore him a son through the power of the Holy Ghost, accepted Him as his own beloved son given to him by God, and in a manner adopted Him, so that Jesus in a manner became his son, and this by a way more noble and perfect than elsewhere. Unless we prefer to say that Christ chose Joseph for His father and, as it were, made Himself his son.¹

Evidently neither St. Augustine nor Suarez here speaks of adoption in the proper sense of the word; they consider the divine Child in no way a stranger to Joseph, but they do say here by implication what they say elsewhere in plain words: that He was given by God to both Mary and Joseph as the fruit of their virginal marriage.

¹ Vol. XIX, d.8, s.1, no. 4.
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3. By some more modern writers St. Joseph was styled the legal father of Jesus. But also this name, common among the Jews, with its specific meaning in Old Testament usage, fails utterly to do justice to the peculiar relation of St. Joseph in respect to the child Jesus. Among the Jews a man already deceased without children was designated the legal father in respect to children whom a surviving brother begot for him by his widow. But in our case, as between Joseph and Jesus, there is clearly no such relationship: Mary was not a widow when Jesus was born; she had no other husband even after the death of St. Joseph; so here everything is lacking that is required for legal fatherhood. There is, however, some kind of analogy between St. Joseph and a legal father: as to a legal father by his surviving brother a son is begotten of the former’s widow, so to Joseph through the supernatural operation of the Holy Ghost the child Jesus was conceived and born by his virginal spouse. Grimm who makes much of this analogy and skillfully uses it in his harmonization of the history of revelation, nevertheless admits that it does not constitute St. Joseph the legal father of Christ. 2

4. Finally we have the well-known passage in Holy Scripture where St. Luke (3:23) speaks of “Jesus, being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph.” Hence St. Joseph is frequently called the putative father of Jesus. But this designation is not a name given to Joseph by the sacred writer, who intends merely to say that the contemporary Jews thought that Joseph was the father of Jesus, but erroneously, inasmuch as they be-

2 Unity of the Gospels, p. 244.
believed he was the natural father. Therefore the use of this expression to define the fatherhood so distinctly ascribed to St. Joseph elsewhere in Holy Scripture, is unwarranted if not absurd and is contrary to what Scripture means, as we shall show from its texts later on.

After all this, the question is still open, in what sense Holy Scripture calls St. Joseph the father of Jesus, or, in what the fatherhood of Joseph really consists.

5. Let us see now whether Scripture itself does not furnish us at least some clues for solving the problem. Here at once our attention is arrested by the striking fact that in the New Testament St. Joseph is simply called "the father of Jesus" without any qualification, and this not only by the Jews who erroneously thought him to be the natural father of Jesus, but also by the inspired writers and, what is still more significant, by Mary herself, the Mother of God, the Virgin most prudent, the Seat of wisdom, who certainly was fully aware of all that was implied in the relation between Joseph and herself, and between Joseph and the blessed fruit of her womb. The Evangelist calls Joseph the father, and Mary and Joseph the parents of Jesus: "And His father and Mother were marveling at the things spoken concerning Him" (Luke 2:33). "And His parents were wont to go every year to Jerusalem at the feast of the Passover" (ibid., 2:41). And the Mother of God herself said to the Child when she had found Him again in the temple: "Son, why hast Thou done so to us? Behold, Thy father and I have been seeking Thee sorrowing" (ibid., 2:49). Thus both the inspired writer and the Virgin most prudent call Joseph simply "father of Jesus." Therefore Joseph must be,
as far as such a thing is possible, in a higher, yet true and proper, sense the father of Jesus. As Suarez says: "Names which are deliberately given to a thing usually reveal its nature or the qualities on which they are based. Therefore, when the eternal Father would share His own name with this man He indicated clearly enough to what high dignity He had raised him when with the name He entrusted to him also the office and, to a great extent, the responsibility of a father." ³

We can conclude, therefore, that God in His wise providence had destined Joseph to become father to Jesus in all respects as far as possible, with the sole exception, that is, of natural generation. But how could Joseph be invested with this fatherhood? The only possible explanation that is left, but a sufficient one, must be found in this: that the divine Child was given by God to both Mary and Joseph as the fruit of their virginal marriage. In the unqualified designation of St. Joseph as the father, and of both Mary and Joseph together as the parents of Jesus, it seems to us, we have an unmistakable confirmation of what we have endeavored to show in our last chapter: that the child Jesus was truly the fruit of their virginal marriage. St. Joseph, therefore, is the father of Jesus in virtue of his virginal marriage with the Virgin most pure: in this marriage Jesus was conceived and born, was given by God as the fruit of this marriage, and this not to Mary alone but to Joseph also, both of them cooperating, under God, dispositively to the production of this fruit, this cooperation, however, belonging to the supernatural order, viz., through their virginity

³ Vol. XIX, d. 8, a. 1, no. 3.
which they had consecrated to God; through their virginal marriage in which they mutually entrusted their virginity to each other for preservation; through their unconditional surrender to God’s holy will. And as thus the Blessed Virgin, full of grace, is seen to be in very truth the mother of the incarnate Word, so St. Joseph appears in an analogous, not identical, manner as His father.

In the light of this explanation we are afforded a deeper insight into other passages of Holy Scripture dealing with the relation between Mary and Joseph, or between her and the blessed fruit of her womb, especially the passage in Matt. 1:20 ff. When St. Joseph was sorely tried by the discovery that his spouse was with child, unaware, as he was, that the Son of God had become incarnate in her virginal womb, 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.”

By these words St. Joseph was given to understand that the Virgin Mother of God had not ceased to be his wife in consequence of the wonderful thing that had come to pass, but that she with her divine Child was rather given anew and entrusted definitely to him as husband and father. This is why the angel said: “She shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus.” According to these words of the angel the marital union of Mary and Joseph is inseparably

*Matt. 1:20 f.*
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connected with the fatherhood of Joseph in respect to the child Jesus. Previously the angel Gabriel had said to Mary: “Do not be afraid, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God. And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and shalt bring forth a Son; and thou shalt call His name Jesus.” Thus the command given to Joseph is the same as the one given to Mary: to give the name to the Child. But as this is the right and duty of the parents, of the father as well as of the mother, we see that God Himself through His angel made it known that Joseph was and remained father of the Child, which with its mother now was definitely entrusted to Joseph’s fatherly care. And with this fatherhood, of course, all corresponding rights and duties were conferred. This does not mean, however, that Joseph first became the father of Jesus only through this revelation and the command transmitted to him by the angel; but the fatherhood that was his already by virtue of the miraculous conception of his virginal spouse was now revealed to him and solemnly confirmed. As you see, this interpretation of the fatherhood brings the several pertinent passages of Scripture into harmonious accord.

But let us add one more proof. The genealogy of Christ given to us in the Gospels also is entirely in favor of a true fatherhood of St. Joseph. The purpose of this genealogical list, especially in Matthew, was to show that Christ came on earth as the son and heir of David as the prophesies of the Old Testaments had promised. The line is traced down to “Joseph, the husband of Mary, and of her was born Jesus who is

called Christ.” But for this proof to be conclusive it was necessary that Joseph as the true husband of the Virgin Mother should have, in virtue of his true fatherhood, also all the rights of a father over the Son of Mary, just as the latter in virtue of true sonship also had a son’s full rights in respect to Joseph as his father. This, too, is well brought out by Grimm:

In order that the son of Mary, although being the son of a virgin, should yet have a rightful claim of sonship on Mary’s husband, so that, consequently, he as the scion of David could succeed as a matter of course to all the legal titles and inheritance claims which Joseph possessed as a descendant of David, the manner in which the Incarnation should take place had been part of the divine plan from the beginning and we find in the Gospel account precisely for this reason the Virgin espoused to Joseph “of the house of David.” The Messiah is the son and heir of David; as such he has the strict right to the throne of his father and the sovereignty over Israel; as such he will set up the throne of David, rule as King in Israel and subdue his enemies. This is a truth which the reading of the prophets had deeply embedded in the religious mind of Israel, and its fulfillment is ushered in with appearance of the Angel. We can estimate the importance of the fact that Gabriel with his message was sent to an “espoused” virgin, when we state it thus: Mary shall not become mother through the operation of the Holy Ghost overshadowing her, without also through the miraculous birth of her son, making her “husband” the father of her child. To perceive the strict logic of this real connection we must bear in mind the juridical concepts that under the Mosaic law governed the relation of espoused persons and of married persons. According to those concepts there is no difference between
bride and married woman as far as their respective relation to bridegroom and husband is concerned.\textsuperscript{6}

We have seen that our interpretation of the fatherhood of St. Joseph by basing it on his virginal marriage with the Mother of God harmonizes perfectly the Scripture texts that deal with it; and now these texts in turn appear to furnish a solid argument in favor of our interpretation, or at least a strong confirmation of the other proofs we have outlined in this chapter.

6. We conclude with a few remarks on a question connected with our subject but more formal in character: What name will best fit this fatherhood of St. Joseph as we have proved and interpreted it? In the first part of this chapter we have met several explanations and, according to them, various names suggested for this fatherhood; but as they proved unsatisfactory, the question of a name is still open.

Hitherto even theologians who in the main concur in our interpretation have failed to agree on a name. Because this fatherhood is quite unique and miraculous it is indeed not easy to find a suitable name. Cornelius a Lapide\textsuperscript{7} suggested \textit{pater matrimonialis}, i.e., wedded father, because he is father of the child Jesus on the juridical ground of his marriage with the Mother of Jesus. But this appellation, too, appears not quite satisfactory because every father who actually begot children in lawful wedlock is a “wedded” father. Now St. Joseph was indeed the lawful husband of the Virgin Mother; and the child Jesus was the \textit{proles} or fruit of

\textsuperscript{6} \textit{History of the Childhood of Jesus}, I, 122 f.

\textsuperscript{7} On Matt. 1:16.
their holy union, but he was not begotten by Joseph; therefore the distinctive mark of St. Joseph’s fatherhood is not indicated, not even hinted at, in the name “wedded father.” The term “wedded and virginal father” would indeed answer the purpose of an accurate description of this fatherhood, but it is too ponderous an expression to meet with general acceptance. There remains the simple name: Pater virgo, or pater virgineus, i.e., “virginal father.” Against this name P. Hormaeche, S.J., has made objection on the ground that St. Joseph was not father merely by being a virgin. But it seems to us that this objection has no weight; it could be raised also against calling Mary “Virgin Mother.” Besides, St. Joseph was and is father of Jesus because he was united in virginal marriage with the Mother of God, and this marriage had its reason of existence in the purpose it had to serve and actually did serve: the incarnation of the Son of God; and because the child Jesus was, in the sense explained, the proles, the fruit of this marriage. Moreover, the name “virginal father” contains implicitly or virtually also the idea “wedded” father; for without his virginal marriage with the Mother of God there was no possibility for him to become in any true sense the father of Jesus, and as we have shown in our last chapter, this marriage was the necessary prerequisite predisposition, the causa dispositiva, for the incarnation of the Son of God in the virginal womb of Mary the Mother of God. Indeed, we employ also the name “Virgin Mother” to designate the Mother of God without mentioning her marriage. Why in the case of St. Joseph

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8 In the Spanish periodical Estudios Ecclesiasticos, 1927.
the name "virginal father" would be inadmissible we cannot see. Of all the names suggested, this one seems to us to be the most appropriate.

Our interpretation of the fatherhood of St. Joseph, however, may to some have the appearance of being too near putting St. Joseph on a par with the Mother of God herself and thus creating a new difficulty. We shall later on revert to this objection. For the present let this short statement suffice: the body of the divine Child was formed solely from the purest flesh and blood of His mother, prerogative of hers in which St. Joseph had no share whatever, so that from this one fact their essential inequality is already evident.
We have explained the fatherhood of St. Joseph in respect to the child Jesus to mean that he was father on the ground of his virginal union with Mary the immaculate Virgin; for, as this marriage existed solely for the role it had to play in connection with the incarnation of the eternal Son of God, the divine Child was by Mary conceived in this marriage and was born into it, and was given by the first cause of all life not only to Mary but also to Joseph; thus both Mary and Joseph by their virginal marriage, by their chaste spiritual love toward each other, by their love of God and their wholehearted surrender to His holy will, cooperated as dispositive causes toward the incarnation of the Son of God in the womb of Mary; and as the Blessed Virgin is thus the mother of the incarnate Word, so we see also Joseph to be, in an analogous sense, the father of Jesus. In our last chapter we saw, moreover, that this interpretation has a solid foundation in Scripture and alone explains the pertinent Scripture passages harmoniously. In the present chapter we shall consider the attitude of the Fathers of the Church in regard to the question.
A modern theologian, C. Mariani, who explains the fatherhood of St. Joseph in the main as we do and who published a valuable study on this subject,\(^1\) gives quotations from several Fathers, e.g., Ephraem, Jerome, Augustine, and then remarks: "This is what in the second, third, fourth, and fifth centuries the Fathers and doctors of the Church thought of the fatherhood of St. Joseph. But after that time, toward the end of the fifth century and during the following two centuries apocryphal and legendary stories represented St. Joseph as an old man, as a widower, as foster father, or adoptive or putative father. We must, therefore, go back to venerable antiquity."

Unfortunately, at closer scrutiny, the matter appears not so favorable to our thesis, as he would have it. At any rate there can be no thought of a unanimous teaching of the Fathers on this question, neither during those four centuries nor later. Moreover, two of his quotations from Ephraem appear hardly conclusive. In fact, on the question of St. Joseph's fatherhood, just as on the question of his true marriage with Mary, most of the Fathers did not succeed in working out a clear theory. The reason for this is to be found partly in the great influence which the apocryphal writings still had at that period, partly in the fact that the Fathers were compelled especially to defend the perpetual virginity of Mary against the heretics who misused the name "father" applied to Joseph to bolster up their attacks. Clearer ideas, however, were achieved by a few of the Fathers, especially by the great Augustine whose writings on this subject as on others marked an epoch and

\(^1\) *De cultu S. Joseph amplificando.*
really laid the foundation of a theology of St. Joseph. However, though he penetrated to the very heart of the question, his ideas did not receive the attention they deserved. Only very slowly their influence began to be felt, but after the Council of Trent an increasing number of theologians accepted them, especially after Suarez had adopted the chief points and with some valuable additions stated them in a form clear to understand. Other theologians elaborated the doctrine further, and the pronouncements of Pius IX and Leo XIII helped, at least indirectly, to make it more widely known and accepted.

1. Let us now hear the great teacher, St. Augustine, of whom we have already quoted several remarks on the threefold bonum matrimonii, remarks which have a bearing also on our present question. From the words of the Evangelist 2 and of Mary, in which both Mary and Joseph are called the parents of Jesus, he argues as follows:

“His father and mother were marveling at the things spoken concerning him.” Therefore when the Evangelist tells us that Christ was born, without intercourse with Joseph but of Mary the Virgin, why is it that he calls Joseph His father, unless we are right when we hold, that Joseph was the husband of Mary through the marriage union alone without any carnal intercourse, and that he therefore was more intimately the father of Jesus by the fact that Jesus was born of his spouse, than if he had adopted Him from elsewhere. Therefore it is clear that he used the expression, “being, as was supposed, the son of

Joseph,” only on account of those who believed Him be-
gotten by Joseph as other men are by their father.³

Here we have the unmistakable assertion of St. August
ine that Christ is rightfully called the son of 
Joseph, or Joseph the father of Christ, because Christ 
was conceived and born of Mary, the virgin espoused 
to Joseph although she had not conceived by him but 
by the Holy Ghost. In other words, Augustine de-
clares that St. Joseph is the father of Christ by right of 
marrage, and he ranks his fatherhood far above father-
hood by adoption.

Elsewhere St. Augustine speaks as follows:

But when the King of all nations was born, there the 
dignity of the virgin state had its beginning in the mother 
of the Lord, for to her it was given to have a son without 
losing her virginity. Now where there was a marriage, and 
a virginal one at that, between Mary and Joseph, could not 
the chaste fruit of her womb also belong, in a chaste man-
er, to her husband? For just as she was wife, yet chaste, so 
he was husband just as chaste. And as she was mother with-
out losing her chastity, so was he father without losing his. 
One, therefore, who says that Joseph should not be called 
father because he did not beget a son, sees in the procrea-
tion of children merely carnal lust, not the mutual love of 
two souls. What another man would accomplish by carnal 
action, Joseph has accomplished in a nobler manner 
through spiritual love.⁴

This means that with Joseph it was a chaste, spiritual 
love, instead of carnal desire, that was acting and be-

³ De consensu Evang., Bk. II, no. 3 (PL, 23, 1072).
⁴ Sermo 51, no. 26 (PL, 38, 348).
FATHERHOOD OF ST. JOSEPH

came fruitful in the fruit of this virginal marriage, the
divine child Jesus. St. Augustine illustrates this idea by
two examples, as he continues:

For also those who adopt children beget in a more chaste
manner through love those whom they cannot beget in
the flesh. Consider, brethren, the rights of adoption, how
a man becomes the son of one who did not physically beget
him: here the will of the one adopting is more potent than
the nature of one begetting. Therefore Joseph must have
been father, and father in the highest degree.  

How does St. Augustine understand the last sentence?
What he means is this: As in an adoption an act of the
will and love takes the place of procreation with its
accompanying sensual desire, so with St. Joseph it was
his will or his pure and chaste love that replaced carnal
intercourse, and therefore he was father and, indeed,
father in a higher sense, even in the highest degree.

For a second example to illustrate his point, St.
Augustine refers to the patriarchs of the Old Testa-
ment:

Also by women who are not their wedded wives men
beget children, and these are called natural children. But
children by their wives are preferred above them although
as far as procreation is concerned there is no difference.
Why, then, are the latter preferred above others, unless
it is because the love of the wife by whom these children
are begotten is a chaster love? What matters here is not
the carnal act which is the same in both women. To what,
therefore, does the wife owe her superiority if not to her
sentiment of fidelity, her wisely affection, her more sin-
cere and chaste love? Now if a man could have children

by his wife without intercourse, should he not all the more gladly accept them from her, the more chaste she is and the more beloved by him? *

St. Augustine here undoubtedly holds that in the virginal marriage of Mary and Joseph the place of the carnal act with its sensual love was taken over by their higher, spiritual, and holy love, and that it is owing to this love that the miraculous fruit of that marriage, belonged to both of them, to Joseph as His father, and to Mary His mother.

This thought so engrossed St. Augustine's mind that he takes it up once more in the same sermon (no. 30):

As Mary, mother without carnal concupiscence, so Joseph, father without carnal intercourse. Let the genealogical line, ascending or descending, be traced through him, and let us not leave him out under the pretext that there was no carnal concupiscence. His greater purity rather speaks for his paternity, or else the Blessed Virgin herself might reprove us. For she herself would not put her own name before that of her husband, but said: "Thy father and I have been seeking Thee sorrowing." Evil-minded cavillers, therefore, should beware of doing what the chaste wife would not do. Let us, therefore, include Joseph in counting the generations because, as he in chastity was husband, so was he father in chastity. But let us even give preference to the man over the woman, according to the order of nature as well as of the law of God. For if we strike out his name and put hers in its stead, he will say, and justly, too: "Why do you cut me off? Why is the line, up and down, not traced through me?" Can we say to him: "Because you have not begotten through carnal intercourse"? He would retort: "But has she given birth

* Ibid.
after carnal intercourse?" What the Holy Ghost has wrought, He wrought for both of them. "He was a just man," Scripture says. Therefore he was a just man, she a just woman. The Holy Ghost, being well pleased with the justice of both, gave the Son to both of them. But in that sex which had to give birth to the Son he brought it about so that the Son was also born to the husband. Therefore the angel tells both of them that they should give the name to the child, and so their parental authority is made evident. Mary is told: "Behold, thou shalt conceive a Son and thou shalt call His name Jesus." And Joseph also is told: "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." And then Scripture also says: "And she brought forth her Son." There we have the confirmation of his fatherhood, not in the flesh, of course, but in love. So is he, therefore, father, as he really is. It betokens great caution and prudence on the part of the Evangelists that they include Joseph in the genealogy whether, as in Matthew, descending from Abraham to Christ, or, as in Luke, ascending from Christ through Abraham to God. The former counts downward, the latter upward, but both of them through Joseph. Why? Because he was father. Why father? Because he was father the more firmly, the more chastely he was father. It is true, people thought that he was the father of our Lord Jesus Christ in a different way, namely, like other fathers who beget children in the flesh, and not get them in the spirit through paternal love. For St. Luke says also: "Who was supposed to be the father of Jesus." Why was he supposed to be? Because their way of thinking and of forming opinions leads men to believe things must be as they usually are. Therefore our Lord is not of the seed of Joseph, although some people thought
so; nevertheless to the devoted love of Joseph a Son was born by Mary the Virgin; the Son who was also the Son of God. \textit{(ibid.)}

Let us sum up the exposition of the great doctor in a few sentences. To St. Augustine Joseph was truly the father of Jesus in virtue of his virginal marriage with the mother of God; the child Jesus was born into this marriage; He was the wonderful, supernatural fruit of it and therefore belonged to both virginal spouses, Joseph and Mary; as she is mother, so he is father. Each of them had a part in giving human life to the divine Child, but it was not by natural, physical act of intercourse: in its place there was with them a conjugal love entirely chaste and pure, combined with perfect justice and holiness; to this hallowed virginal union was given a wonderful, supernatural, all-holy fruit, the divine child Jesus. It was, therefore, on the ground of their sublime union, distinguished by perfect justice and holiness, that they were so wonderfully blessed by God: Mary and Joseph cooperated, as \textit{causae dispositivae}, not in a natural way as other parents do, but in a manner much superior, spiritual and supernatural. It seems to me that in these passages St. Augustine with his eloquence and deep insight fully corroborates the explanation of the fatherhood given by us in the last two chapters.

2. As we have said already, none of the other Fathers has so thoroughly treated of the fatherhood of St. Joseph as St. Augustine has. We have, however, statements from a few others upholding substantially the same doctrine. I have already mentioned St. Ephraem. We have at least one statement of his that
unquestionably speaks in favor of our explanation of St. Joseph's fatherhood:

The Gospel calls Mary mother (and not foster mother); but it also calls Joseph father (and not foster father), although he had no part in that generation. Not the name made Joseph what he was; but what he was gave him that name. For the exchange of marriage pledges between the Virgin and Joseph caused the name to be given to him, viz., father, although he did not procreate. Of palm trees the male plants fertilize the female plants by overshadowing them without physical contact and without imparting something of their substance to them. Also some fig trees bear no fruit unless they are overshadowed by male branches. Now, as the latter (in our Syrian language) are called "fathers" though not themselves generating, so St. Joseph was called father although he is Mary's husband not on account of any marital intercourse. A great mystery.⁷

According to Ephraem, therefore, St. Joseph is called the father of Jesus; this is not an empty name but there is a reason for it in the very nature of the thing; it has a solid foundation in the marriage pledges exchanged between Mary and Joseph, the offspring (proles) of which was the child Jesus. We have here the same idea as in St. Augustine, only no mention is made of the cooperation of Mary and Joseph.

3. Another valuable witness we have in the author of the Questions and Answers to Orthodox Christians (formerly ascribed to St. Justin; but of the fifth century), who writes:

As Joseph was called the son of Eli although not begotten by him, but because of the requirement of the divine

⁷ II, 277 (Vatic. ed.).
law that to this Eli a son should be given by his wife, so
God also willed that to Joseph a son should be given by his
wife although not physically begotten by him. . . . For
whatever is born of a wife without adultery is necessarily
the son of both husband and wife, in whatever manner it
may have pleased God to give a son to the husband,
whether by natural generation or without it.⁸

This author, too, maintains that Joseph by right of his
marriage is truly the father of Jesus.

4. St. Chrysostom, in a passage bearing on this sub-
ject, makes the angel address Joseph thus:

“She shall bring forth a son and thou shalt call his name
Jesus.” For do not thou, because he is of the Holy Ghost,
imagine that thou art an alien to the ministry of this dis-
ensation. Since, although in the birth thou hast no part,
but the Virgin remained untouched, nevertheless what
pertains to a father, but does not injure the honor of vir-
ginity, that do I give thee: to set a name on that which is
born: for “thou shalt call his name.” For though the off-
spring be not thine, yet shalt thou exhibit a father’s care
toward him. Therefore, even from the giving of the name,
do I connect thee with Him that is born. But lest one
should from this suspect him to be the father, hear now
carefully he phrases the following: “She shall bring forth
a son,” he says; he does not say: “bring forth to thee,” but
simply “bring forth,” putting it indefinitely: since not to
him did she bring forth but to the whole world.⁹

We quote this only because St. Chrysostom has the
angel assign to Joseph paternal authority with all the
rights pertaining thereto. Fatherhood in our sense is

⁸ Q. 133 (PL, 6, 1386).
⁹ On Matt. 1:21; hom. 4, no. 7 (PG, 57, 47).
not asserted, since according to Chrysostom the child was not "born to St. Joseph."

5. Our final witness is St. Jerome. His testimony, in the line of thought of St. Augustine, requires and deserves a more careful evaluation:

You say that Mary did not remain a virgin. But I maintain even more: that St. Joseph, too, was a virgin, because of his union with Mary, so that the virgin Son might be born of a virginal marriage. If no suspicion of fornication can fall on the holy man, and there is no record of his having had another wife; if his relation to Mary whose husband he was held to be, was more that of a protector of her virginity than of a husband: then it follows that he who was privileged to be called the father of our Lord, remained a virgin with Mary.¹⁰

A few remarks on this passage are called for. 1. Why does St. Jerome say: "Joseph, too, was a virgin because of his union with Mary"? After all that we have said so far about the virginal marriage of Mary and Joseph, the answer can be no other but this: The eternal Son of God could be conceived and born only of a virgin, but a virgin living in a virginal marriage. We have discussed this in all its aspects in chapter 5, following closely the teaching of St. Thomas. Divine Providence, disposing all things wisely, especially whatever had in any way to serve the execution of the divine plan of the Incarnation and Redemption, willed that Mary should be living in a virginal marriage and that Joseph would be thus intimately united with her in virginal marriage to guard and protect her virginity and, in general, to minister to her and her divine Child. In short, Joseph had to remain a virgin because of that

¹⁰ De perp. virg. B.M. (PL, 23, 203).
union with Mary, because Mary was destined to be the
virginal mother of the divine Redeemer. 2. This is
corroborated by the words immediately following:
"that the virginal son might be born of a virginal mar-
riage." For, as we have seen before, this virginal mar-
riage had been arranged solely with a view to the
incarnation of the Son of God. And it was the only
way in which the Incarnation could be accomplished
as God had decreed it, since, according to the general
law of God, human life should be propagated only in
marriage. 3. The Son of God was to enter the human
world as the proles, the fruit, of this marriage, as St.
Jerome says so clearly and pointedly: of this virginal
marriage the virginal Son should be born. But if Jesus
was the fruit of this marriage, then Joseph was truly
His father, for the fruit of the marriage belongs not
only to the wife but also to the husband. And there-
fore, as Mary was truly the mother of the divine Child,
so was Joseph truly His father. In fact, both of them
have, as dispositive causes, cooperated in the incarna-
tion of the Son of God by their justice and holiness,
but especially by their virginal marriage and by their
mutual love, a chaste conjugal love. St. Augustine
emphasizes this repeatedly and with great clearness as
we have seen. In St. Jerome’s words the same is at least
implied, and he could quite logically conclude: "It
follows that he who was privileged to be called the
father of our Lord, remained a virgin with Mary."

The testimony of St. Jerome, so short yet so preg-
nant with meaning, is of great value for us. It shows
that he fully agrees with St. Augustine about the essen-
tial point of our question, and that we have another
corroboration of our thesis and our explanations.
St. Augustine was not alone, even in Christian antiquity, in his interpretation of the fatherhood of St. Joseph in regard to the child Jesus, as we have seen in previous chapters. His ideas, in the main, are found again in Ephraem; in Chrysostom, who at least asserts for St. Joseph full parental authority and responsibility; also in the brief, but clear and precise sentences of Pseudo-Justin; and finally in Jerome, who in equally precise and pregnant words echoes the ideas of St. Augustine, though whether in this he is influenced by him or not would be hard to decide. That the first centuries did not furnish more witnesses may be regrettable, but finds its explanation in the circumstances of the times. The fatherhood of St. Joseph as we understand it and, in fact, the whole theology of St. Joseph is not a pivotal truth of Christianity, such as the Trinity, the Incarnation, or the Redemption, which above all others had to be safeguarded against the great heresies of that time. Moreover, since a number of writers of the period could not clearly recognize the existence of a true marriage between Joseph and Mary, they could not do so in regard to Joseph's fatherhood, because the
latter is bound up with the former as its necessary consequence. Those witnesses, however, whom we have quoted, though few in number, have notable weight and cannot be made light of. The greatest of them, St. Jerome and St. Augustine, especially the latter with his profound and lucid discussion of our question, were bound in the course of time to have a decisive influence on theological thought. At first this influence was slow to make itself felt because the invasion of the barbarians with the resulting devastation of the civilized world all but paralyzed scholarly work, while the influence of apocryphal writings was still strong enough to hinder a sound theological development. When these obstacles had been overcome, St. Augustine’s influence began to assert itself; from the eighth century onward we meet with an ever-increasing number of writers who maintain the fatherhood of St. Joseph in the sense of St. Augustine. We cannot describe this development in detail. We content ourselves with a short survey and point out its highlights by quotations from some of its witnesses.

1. In the eighth century we have the testimony of Venerable Bede, who not only follows St. Augustine’s opinion but takes over its verbal expression. Commenting on Luke 2:33, “And His father and mother were marveling . . .,” he says:

Joseph can be called father of Jesus in the same manner as he can, and rightly so, be considered the husband of Mary, without there being carnal intercourse but by the mere fact of being joined in marriage; and this surely with a closer relationship than if Jesus had been adopted by him from another. For Joseph could not be denied the
name of father for the reason that he had not begotten him, since he would be by right also the father of one whom he had not gotten from his wife but adopted from another.  

2. In the ninth century it is Paschasius Radbertus who upholds the fatherhood of St. Joseph in the sense and even in the words of St. Augustine:

Because Jesus was born of his wife, Joseph is called the father of Jesus on account of a much closer relationship than if Jesus had been adopted from another. And therefore when the Evangelist says “Jesus being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph,” he evidently says so only on account of those who thought Him begotten of Joseph as other men are born.

3. In the twelfth century we have Rupert of Deutz seconding St. Augustine. He recognizes and extols St. Joseph not only as the husband of Mary, but also as the father of the child Jesus and this precisely on account of that marriage:

“Jacob begot Joseph, the husband of Mary, and of her was born Jesus who is called Christ.” By calling Joseph the husband of Mary he gives him a great, and a true name, because if he is the husband of Mary he is also the father of the Lord. Or does the law not declare that she who is espoused is thereby already wife? . . . Therefore Joseph is Mary’s husband, and she his wife, and hence this Evangelist could correctly call Joseph the husband of Mary, but also the other Evangelist did not lie when he called him the father of Him who was born of her, Christ, when he said: “And His father and mother were marveling at the things spoken concerning Him.”

1 In Matth. (PL, 92, 345).
2 In Matth., Bk. I, chap. 1 (PL, 120, 79).
THE THEOLOGIANS

Not only the Evangelist called Joseph the husband of Mary, but even before him an angel had—what amounts to the same thing—called Mary the wife of Joseph, saying: “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take unto thee thy wife.” Oh, true and holy marriage, heavenly and not of this earth. For how and by what bond were they united? No doubt, in this, that there was in them one mind and the same mutual fidelity: carnal corruption only was absent. Most truly therefore the Apostle said: “The first man was of the earth, earthy, the second man is from heaven, heavenly,” not as if Jesus Christ who was born of Mary, had from heaven the flesh and, as some heretics would have it, had passed through Mary as through a conduit, but because the union of Mary and Joseph like their whole life, and the Holy Spirit engendered in them, whose conversation was in heaven, their conjugal love toward each other and Himself reigning in their hearts, had entrusted this wife to this husband and, while forming a human body in the womb of the Virgin had filled the heart of this man with fatherly love for the Child that was born.

We can see that these ideas are quite Augustinian.

4. With Rupert of Deutz we have already passed the threshold of Scholasticism. In this period let our first witness be Peter Lombard, the Magister Sententiarum, whose Sentences during the next centuries became the textbook used by the theologians in their lectures and the basis of many commentaries. He writes:

The marriage of Joseph and Mary was perfect in holiness, perfect also in regard to the threefold benefit of the marriage: fidelity, offspring, sacrament. For, as Augustine says, every bonum matrimonii is fully realized in the

4 I Cor. 15:47.
6 De nuptiis, Bk. I, chap. 11, no. 13.
parents of Jesus: fidelity, offspring, sacrament. There was an offspring, as we know, the Lord Jesus Himself; fidelity, because there was no adultery; sacrament, because there was no divorce. Only marital intercourse was absent, because in fallen man that would not be without that result of sin, gross carnal concupiscence, with which He did not wish to be conceived who was to be without sin. Thus, although no conjugal intercourse took place, they were a married couple in spirit, not in the flesh, as truly as they were parents. It is true St. Ambrose states that a marriage becomes perfect through carnal intercourse: "In every marriage a spiritual union is understood, which however is confirmed and made perfect through bodily union."

But it must be understood that the use of the marriage does not make it more perfect in regard to its validity and holiness, but only in regard to its signification, because it represents more perfectly the union of Christ and the Church.

Note especially the words, "Though no intercourse took place, they were truly married, though in a spiritual not carnal manner, as truly as they were parents." No distinction is made between Joseph and Mary: as in truth they were husband and wife "mente, non carne," because Jesus was the proles, the offspring, of that marriage.

5. This doctrine concerning the threefold bonum matrimonii and concerning the child Jesus as the offspring of the marriage of Joseph and Mary was retained also by St. Thomas. We can, therefore, safely claim him as adherent to St. Augustine's interpretation, although he does not speak of "parents" and the

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7 Gratian, Decr., chap. 27, q.2.
8 Sent., Bk. IV, d. 30.
"fatherhood" of St. Joseph as explicitly as the Master of the Sentences. But he seems also to have admitted on the part of Mary and Joseph a dispositive cooperation toward bringing about the human existence of the child Jesus. This would best explain a passage in his Commentary on the Sentences,\(^9\) especially his answer to the fourth objection there raised.

Objection 4. A marriage is called perfect because it has the _bonum praxis_. But the offspring reared in that marriage (of Mary and Joseph) was not the effect of that marriage, just as an adopted child is not called a _bonum matrimonii_. Therefore that marriage was not perfect.

Reply. An offspring is called a _bonum matrimonii_ not only inasmuch as it is begotten through the marriage, but also as it is conceived and reared in the marriage. And in this manner was that offspring (the Lord Jesus) a fruit of this marriage, not in the first manner. However, one born in adultery or an adopted child who is reared in the marriage is not a _bonum matrimonii_, because marriage is not by its nature ordained toward the hearing of such children, whereas the marriage of Mary and Joseph was specially ordained to the end that in it this offspring should be conceived and reared.

Since we are dealing here with a principle or axiom proposed by St. Augustine, we probably have to understand this text of St. Thomas in the following sense. The entrance of the God-man into human existence was necessarily and indispensably conditioned on the virginal marriage of Joseph and Mary. Only in this way, God had decreed, should Jesus be conceived and born, in a supernatural and miraculous manner, of Mary

\(^9\) _In IV_, d. 30, q. 2, a. 2.
united in virginal marriage with Joseph. Thus Joseph and Mary cooperated, not through natural generation, but through their virginal marriage and their various acts of virtue connected therewith, toward the realization of the human existence of the child Jesus. Their cooperation was preparatory, or dispositive, in making themselves ready for their appointed task, because according to God's plan the virginal marriage was the condition and preparation to the virginal conception and birth of the God-man. But a married couple to whom under these circumstances and in this way a child is given by God are parents of this child though it is not begotten naturally. Therefore, as Mary is the mother of Jesus, so Joseph is, not in the same but in an analogous manner, His father.

The other great scholastic theologians (such as Alexander of Hales, Albert the Great, Bonaventure, Duns Scotus, Aegidius Romanus, Henry of Ghent) seem not to have treated of this question, or at best paid no special attention to it.

6. Yet one more theologian of the time before the Council of Trent, has to be mentioned, one who was filled with a fervent devotion to our saint, and spared no effort to make the world recognize the high dignity and holiness of St. Joseph and his sublime position in the kingdom of God, and also to promote his veneration in the Church. It is Gerson, the famous chancellor of the University of Paris. At the Council of Constance he preached before the assembled fathers of the Council a great sermon on the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin and used this occasion also to show forth the great excellencies and privileges of St. Joseph.
Several of his other writings serve the same purpose, e.g., an office of St. Joseph, the lessons of which are dogmatic in tenor; a didactic poem in Latin hexameters treating of the life of St. Joseph according to the Gospels, but also with passages dogmatic in content; and his Considerations on St. Joseph in French, likewise from the dogmatic point of view. We quote only a passage from his sermon at the Council of Constance, treating of the fatherhood of St. Joseph.

Joseph was the bodily father of Jesus in the opinion of men; he was father by his care as breadwinner; he was father, thirdly, through generation; true, he did not himself beget Him, but Mary his wife did so by the operation of the Holy Ghost, who, in a sense, took the place of Joseph, not through physical but through mysterious spiritual generation. Joseph, therefore, can be called, not indeed the natural father of Jesus, but the legal father to whom the Holy Ghost had given generative powers more efficacious than the natural. Jesus was born on the land or property of Joseph, on the earth of which Isaias says: “Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the just: let the earth be opened and bud forth a Savior.” ¹⁰ And in psalm 84:12 we read: “Truth is sprung out of the earth.” Does there not, then, belong to Joseph, beyond all other men, a sort of legal right in the blessed formation of the child Jesus, who was born in and of that flesh over which Joseph had been given dominion by matrimonial right? . . . This formation in thee, O Mary, of the child Jesus was through the Holy Ghost, but with the implicit consent of thy husband Joseph. For he wished that the will of the Lord be done in everything since he was a just man. . . . We may exclaim here: O, the alto-

¹⁰ Isa. 45:8.
gether wonderful grandeur that is thine, O Joseph! O, the peerless dignity: the mother of God, the queen of heaven, the mistress of the world deigned to call thee her lord. I do not know which is here more admirable: the humility of Mary or the sublimity of Joseph, although both are surpassed beyond comparison by the child Jesus, who is blessed forever more. Yet of Him it is written that He was subject to them: subject to a carpenter, He who created the dawn and the sun; subject to a woman plying the loom, He to whom must bend the knees of those in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. I wish I had words enough to explain a mystery so deep and hidden from the world, this wonderful and venerable trinity, Jesus, Joseph, and Mary. To wish is in my power, but I do not find the strength to do, and I fail in my effort. Therefore, since grace as well as glory do not do away with nature but elevate and perfect it, let us in pious devotion consider the following: by merely the natural bond that unites the family, the son Jesus is beholden to His mother, the mother to her husband, and both Son and mother to the most faithful and watchful and ever untiring guardian and provider Joseph who was the head of Mary and therefore had a degree of authority over Mary just as Mary by right of natural motherhood had over her Son Jesus. How great, then, must we think Joseph to be now in his heavenly glory who had been so distinguished and great in this vale of tears on earth? Surely if Jesus did not lie when he said: "Where I am, there also shall My servant be," it seems that the one should have a place nearest to Him in heaven who after Mary was closest to Him, most obsequious and faithful in his service to Him on earth.

7. After the Council of Trent, with the revival of the sacred sciences, and especially scholastic theology,

more attention was paid to St. Joseph. A number of theologians made him the object of their investigations at least in connection with Mariology, and discussed also the question of his fatherhood. In this, as in other questions, Suarez pointed the way; he went back to St. Augustine and in the main followed his lead, and probably caused many other theologians to do the same. Among those who accepted the Augustinian interpretation of the fatherhood of St. Joseph, are Cornelius a Lapide, Tirinus, Silveyra, Theophile Raynaud, Francis Sylvius, Estius, Cardinal Gotti, St. Francis de Sales, Billot, Mariani, Bover, Schindler, Egger, Lercher, Gummersbach, Knabenbauer. It would take too long to give excerpts from them all. We shall quote a few of them and add some remarks on their teaching.

Suarez we have already heard in the sixth chapter. Cornelius a Lapide and Tirinus follow him closely, using almost the same words.

8. *Cornelius a Lapide:*

Observe the expression, “Joseph the husband of Mary.” From this we conclude that Joseph had all the rights of a real husband with regard to the Blessed Virgin, and consequently is rightly and truly the father of Christ. And this for the following reasons. 1. Christ was the fruit of the marriage of Joseph and Mary, for, being born in their marriage, He may be ascribed to both as respectively to His father, and to His mother. For through this marriage Joseph had become in a sense the owner of the body of the Blessed Virgin; and therefore also the fruit of that body, viz. Christ, belonged to him just as ore deposits which are found on a land belong to the owner of the land, as the jurist says, “what has its origin in my field is mine.” 2. A man and his wife are made one by marriage and, as it
were, one legal person. Therefore they have everything in common, and so also the legitimate offspring of that marriage . . . Christ, who was the Son of the Virgin Mother of God, was also son of Joseph who as her husband was her partner in all her blessings. . . . Joseph was therefore more truly the father of Christ than one who merely adopts a son is father of that son. . . . Hence it follows that Joseph has a father’s authority over Him, and therefore the utmost affection and solicitude of a father for Him. And Christ in return cherished, loved, and honored Joseph as His father and was obedient to him.\(^\text{12}\)

9. \textit{Tirinus:}

Jesus is in fact the proper and lawful son of St. Joseph, although it was not owing to natural generation but to the supernatural power of the Holy Ghost, that Jesus was born to the husband by his lawful wife. For since the husband is the head of his wife and master over her body, he is this also over whatever is in whatever manner the fruit of that body. . . . Therefore Joseph had all the rights of a true master and father in regard to Jesus as man, and is thus called the father of Jesus also by the Blessed Virgin.\(^\text{13}\)

10. \textit{Estius:}

How was Christ a \textit{bonum} of this marriage, and how was Joseph the father of Christ? Some writers answered here-tofore simply, that this could be truthfully asserted in as-much as Christ was conceived and born in that marriage without any violation of its sanctity. This reason is good as far as it goes, but it would be more adequate to say: Christ is called with full right a \textit{bonum} of this marriage because the generation of the offspring that took place in that

\(^{12}\text{In Matth. 1:16.}\)

\(^{13}\text{Ibid.}\)
marriage was not only a matter of the mother, but also, by the law governing marriage, concerned St. Joseph since he was the husband of the virginal Mother of God. By this right Joseph is truthfully called the father of Christ as the Evangelist bears witness: "And His father and mother were marveling," and the Blessed Virgin herself speaking to her son: "Behold, Thy father and I have been seeking Thee sorrowing."  

11. Gotti, O.P.:  

Christ as the true son of Mary belonged also to Joseph, her spouse, on a special title, being the fruit of their marriage, not indeed born of it, but in it, namely in and of that virginal body to which he alone had a right by the law of marriage. And he must be called the father of the son of his wife in a much stricter sense than a stepfather whose son is of another marriage, because Joseph is called the father of Christ who is in the same, though not of the same marriage.  

All these theologians refer to Augustine as their authority, and rightfully so, as we have seen. But they omit something that Augustine stated clearly and emphatically. True fatherhood and true motherhood require that the father and mother as free agents cooperate dispositively in the procreating of the child. In Augustine, as we have seen, we find a very plausible explanation for this freely given dispositive cooperation of Mary and Joseph; but not in these theologians. We have discussed it above in our discourse on the threefold bonum matrimonii and again explained it ac-

14 *In IV*, 2, d. 30, no. 11.  
cording to St. Augustine in the last chapter. It is of decisive importance, and no true fatherhood and motherhood can be without it.

Some theologians use comparisons to illustrate the thesis that Joseph is the father of Jesus because the latter as the fruit of the virginal womb of his wife by the law of marriage belongs also to him. Thus Suarez, Francis de Sales, Kleutgeu, etc. Let us hear the last one. In a dogmatic sermon he explains the fatherhood of St. Joseph in the sense of Suarez and illustrates it with the following comparison.

But what is of greater importance: because Joseph was the true husband of Mary, therefore the Son of Mary, though not conceived of him but of the Holy Ghost, can be claimed by Joseph as his own, as no other human being can claim Him. Let us consider this more closely. The holy Fathers use various comparisons with which to illustrate the prerogatives of the Blessed Virgin, and among them they frequently compare her with Paradise, which God had created for our first parents, not only because Mary was like a garden planted by God and rich in flowers and fruits of grace and holiness, but also because in her arose the tree of life, Christ. God from the beginning placed man in Paradise that he dress and keep it, as Scripture says, but after man’s obedience had stood its test, Paradise was to be given to him and his posterity forever. Now, supposing that man had stood the test, would God, when giving over Paradise to him, have withheld from him the tree of life because forsooth it had been made to grow by the power of God alone without the cooperation of man? You would not think so.

Now Joseph also passed through a time of hard trial which may be compared with the time in which Adam’s
obedience was tested. Well, then, Joseph had all through his time of trial with pious awe and reverence guarded that paradise entrusted to him, that is, the Blessed Virgin, so that she, assured for all the future of his virtue, could say to the angel: "How can I be a mother since I know not man?" Would now God, when giving Mary to Joseph forever, wish that the blessed fruit of her womb should not be his (literally; should remain alien to him)? Ah no; what the Gospel teaches is quite different. What did the angel say when he appeared to Joseph in a dream? "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." 16 In these words was revealed to our saint, the mystery into which the angels desire to look, the mystery of the incarnation of God, and of the virginal motherhood of Mary, and at the same time the will of God that Mary, now raised through this mystery above all mere creatures, should not cease to be his wife but would be given to him as such by God Himself forever. But was nothing revealed to him about his own relationship to the child in her womb? The angel continues: "She shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins." It is the father's and mother's privilege to give the name to the child, therefore the angel had already said to Mary: "Thou shalt call his name Jesus." 17 Thus by giving to Joseph the same command God revealed His will that Joseph should take the place of father to the Child, which thus was handed over to him with the mother.

Thus far Kleutgeu. However, to this and to similar comparisons applies what we have said about the proofs or explanations of other theologians: true fatherhood

and motherhood presuppose or demand a dispositive cooperation freely given by father and mother. This must therefore be the case also in Mary and Joseph. But there is no hint of such cooperation in these comparisons, however apt they may seem to be. We call attention again to this defect in order to point out once more how ingenious, penetrating, and comprehensive is the explanation of St. Augustine. No theologian has so far been able to improve on it.

It is gratifying to find that since the Vatican Council a few theologians who follow Suarez and Augustine in explaining the fatherhood of St. Joseph have explicitly pointed out this element so much stressed by St. Augustine, that as Mary, so Joseph as well, actively cooperated to bring about the realization of the human existence of the redeemer (thus, e.g., Mariani, Scheeben, Bellouvet, Knabenbauer, Gummersbach).

*Scheeben* writes:

As for the *bonum proli*, this marriage was not less than any other, intended by God who made it, intrinsically and essentially for the purpose of making the receiving of an offspring possible. But over every other virginal marriage it has this privilege, that without any detriment to its virginity, it shares with a consummated marriage the blessing of fruitfulness. For in it a fruit had really to be given to the married couple and to be entrusted to their care. And although the fruit was not produced through the carnal use of the marriage by husband and wife, it still had to belong to both according to the decree of the divine Father, by virtue of the spiritual unity of husband and wife, just as the natural fruit of another marriage belongs to husband and wife. In addition, this marriage possesses still another privilege above every non-virginal marriage: the fruit of
it is entirely holy; and husband and wife by their joint
virginal surrender to God have cooperated in a higher
manner to obtain this fruit than is the case through carnal
relations with regard to a natural fruit.\(^\text{18}\)

Knabenbauer, beginning with a quotation from a
Lapide, writes as follows:

"Christ was born in the marriage of Joseph and Mary.
By this marriage Joseph became, as it were, the owner of
the body of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Therefore also the
fruit of her womb belongs to him. For the fruit that is born
of a lawful marriage belongs to both spouse as the crop
that under supernatural influence grows on my otherwise
sterile field, belongs to me; therefore, by the law of mar-
riage, Christ is the son of Joseph. Moreover, by marriage
husband and wife become one, one civil person, as it were;
therefore the lawful offspring belongs to them in com-
mon." Thus far a Lapide. But that God can, and some-
times would give a son to a man who did not beget him,
we see exemplified in the levirate marriages. Thus August-
tine and Paschasius are right when they conclude from the
existence of a true marriage between Mary and Joseph
that Christ could and would have to be called a son of
David because of Joseph, even if there had been no blood
relationship between Mary and Joseph. Finally an argu-
ment of Bellouvet (who quotes Bartholomaeus de los Rios)
deserves a place here, namely, that Joseph is called father
of Jesus because he truly contributed something toward
the realization of the human origin of Christ. For accord-
ing to the divine plan, Jesus was to be born of one who was
both virgin and wife; and hence it is that Joseph's virginal
continency became, as a moral cause, the foundation on
which his fatherhood in regard to Jesus is based.\(^\text{19}\)

\(^{18}\) *Dogmatik*, I, no. 1580.

\(^{19}\) Knabenbauer, *In Matth. 1:16*. 
A few additional remarks. It is indeed greatly desirable that Catholic theology follow up the lines of thought of St. Augustine and thus further advance our knowledge of the dogmatic truth concerning St. Joseph. Then his exalted position, second only to his holy spouse, in the kingdom of God will be still more clearly recognized. It may seem strange that in regard to St. Joseph theological science shows no such development and continuous progress as it did in regard to other subjects, e.g., Mariology. This may perhaps be due, partly at least, to the plans of Divine Providence, which this great and lovable saint had to serve, as we have already shown or at least hinted.

How it was that the person of the holy patriarch was originally hidden, as it were, in obscurity, and that his wonderful greatness became recognized and acknowledged only late and gradually, is well told by Billot:

Since it is not in accord with the divine plans to have the virginal birth brought to public notice from the beginning with signs and miracles, the virgin mother had to be espoused to a man so as no doubts could be cast on the legitimacy of our Lord's birth. Mary, the mother of Jesus, must needs be married to Joseph, the man specially chosen through whom and under whom Christ was to be introduced into the world in an unobtrusive and honorable manner, and thus make it possible to avoid a premature announcement of the arrival of the Messiah in Israel which would have been detrimental to the execution of the divine plan. Others, St. John and the apostles, were destined to be the voices to make Christ known to the world later on; Joseph was to be rather a veil to screen Him from sight. But since Christ had to remain hidden only for a while, Joseph was taken from this world before the precursor ar-
rived to proclaim the advent of the Messiah, and thus men could by and by get used to thinking of Christ without associating him with a human father.

The ministry of Joseph was required for the introduction of the Son of God into the world and to make possible the hidden life of Christ in all decency and respectability. But without the hidden life the mystery of the Incarnation would have lost its peculiar characteristic: the name Emmanuel would not have so full a meaning as it now has. . . . And because Joseph was, as it were, a shadow to hide Christ, he himself had to remain even more in the shade, not only in his lifetime but even after his death, and he did not become the object of public veneration till much later. For it was necessary that the dogma of the virginity of the Mother of God take firm root in the minds of men, and that all become fully accustomed to the thought that only Mary is the physical parent of the Savior.\(^\text{20}\)

In the next chapter we shall give a more systematic summary of our previous chapters, add a few explanations, and thus conclude our explanation of St. Joseph’s fatherhood considered in itself.

\(^{20}\) *De verbo incarn.*, 7th ed., pp. 422 ff.
Recapitulation

The virginal marriage of Mary and Joseph is ordered entirely toward the Incarnation; the latter is the entire reason for the existence of the former. Therefore the God-man, Jesus, is the fruit of that marriage, and as Mary is mother, so Joseph is father; for the fruit of that marriage belongs to both of them according to the law governing marriage relations: the wife has not authority over her body, but the husband. St. Joseph was not the physical father, but in very truth he cooperated to the Incarnation through his virginal marriage with Mary. In natural generation father and mother cooperate by marital intercourse only dispositively, but the soul is created by God. Now, in the place of this natural dispositive cooperation there exists in our case the spiritual union between Joseph and Mary, their virginal marriage, their chastity and holiness: thus only could they cooperate toward the Incarnation. Therefore to Joseph must be ascribed a spiritual or a moral generation in regard to the child Jesus; generation is the origin of a living being out of the substance of a living being, into the likeness of its nature.

Solution of two difficulties.
RECAPITULATION

a) How could St. Joseph cooperate since he knew nothing of such a task?

b) Jesus has only one father, the heavenly Father.

In order to understand better what we have to say, the reader should keep clearly before his mind the explanations of the fatherhood of St. Joseph previously given. We shall, therefore, here give a clear, if short, summary of them, add complementary explanation here and there, and then, drawing conclusions, point out some special aspects of the fatherhood of St. Joseph.

In the first place we should always keep in mind that according to the divine plan the virginal marriage of Mary and Joseph was ordered entirely toward the incarnation of the Son of God and had in this its only reason for existence; its only purpose was to serve the appropriate execution of the Incarnation. The Son of God, as we have seen, had to be conceived by an espoused virgin and had to be born into a virginal marriage. This was all the more required because God had from the beginning, at the creation of the first man and wife, attached the “blessing of children” to marriage, and ordained that this, and this only, should be the lawful fountainhead of all further human life; so much so, that He would not make an exception from this law even when His only-begotten Son was to become man in the womb of a virgin where any physical action of a man was absolutely excluded. St. Joseph was therefore not the natural father of Jesus, nor could he be. But this being so, how could Joseph still become and be, in a true sense, father of Jesus, this being the name given him in the clearest and most definite terms not
only by the Evangelists, but by Mary herself, by the angel, and subsequently by the greatest doctors of the Church and the most distinguished theologians? Following the teaching of St. Augustine, St. Jerome, St. Thomas, Suarez, and others, we have explained it as follows:

In the natural order a human being comes into existence only by the cooperation of three factors: the primary factor is God, the first cause of all being. He acts here not only as He does everywhere by conserving all that exists in being, and cooperating with every created activity, but here He creates a spiritual soul. Only God can create this and infuse it into the organism prepared by the parents. Husband and wife, therefore, though they are the adequate organic principle, are only secondary factors through the marital act in which the female germ cell is impregnated by the male. But this action is only dispositive, i.e., preparatory to the creative act of God by which the soul is created and united with the fetus prepared by the parents, and a new individual human life comes into being.

Now in our case, which is the supernatural conception of Jesus, the God-man, we also have the secondary factors, husband and wife, who had a dispositive function to perform, not, however, in the same way as it would have been in the case of a natural conception. In our case, the female factor, the purest Virgin, had gradually formed within her, in the natural spontaneous course of development, the germ cell that was to be fecundated not by man, but in a supernatural manner. When the angel brought her the message from heaven, she, with supernatural resignation, placed her-
self at the disposal of the Holy Spirit to have the fruit of her womb supernaturally quickened, and hypostatically united with the eternal Son of God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. She did this under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit Himself, and enlightened and supported by divine grace, by an act of humble and complete submission to the holy will of God. She did it with a word that was to renew the world and introduce a new supernatural order: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word." ¹ But already previous to this she had cooperated dispositively toward this when under divine inspiration she joined St. Joseph in that virginal marriage, which she hallowed by practicing all those holy virtues that this state of life called for and by which it was ennobled with a holiness never equaled.

But how did St. Joseph cooperate dispositively to that supernatural conception of the eternal Son of God? He could not cooperate by any physical activity, not even by a natural spontaneous activity as the Mother of God partly did, nor did he give anything of his substance. But he could and did cooperate through his own virginity, and through his virginal marriage with Mary, which the divine wisdom had foreseen and foreordained. For thus he has, on his part, made it possible that the Son of God could be conceived and born of an espoused virgin, and thus also in accordance with the law established from the beginning, enter into this world as a man in a proper and irreproachable manner. And for this function St. Joseph had prepared himself by the outstanding holiness of his life—Holy Scripture

¹ Luke 1:38.
FATHERHOOD OF ST. JOSEPH

calls him emphatically “a just man”—and once married to the virgin, loved her with the chastest love of a virginal husband, guarded with tenderest care her virginity which through their virginal marriage had become, as it were, also his own treasure, and did so not only after her supernatural conception, but already before it. For these reasons he, too, had a share in the blessed fruit of that marriage and of that virginity, for to both of these, marriage and virginity, i.e., to both elements combined, is to be ascribed the supernatural conception of Jesus by His mother, as the prayer of the Church shows: “O God, who through the fruitful virginity of Blessed Mary didst bestow on mankind the rewards of eternal salvation: grant, we beseech thee, that we may experience her intercession for us, through whom we were made worthy to receive the author of life, Jesus Christ Thy Son our Lord.”

Furthermore, St. Thomas says of the Virgin most pure: “Through the grace given to her she merited such a degree of purity and holiness that she could fittingly be the Mother of God.” 2 These words we can apply to St. Joseph not in quite the same sense, yet in a true sense: “Through the grace given to him he merited that degree of purity and holiness that he could fittingly be the virginal spouse of the Blessed Virgin and the father of Christ.”

In our case, therefore, according to the divine plan, the effective disposition for the production of the new, not merely human but divine-human, life of Jesus, consisted not in a marital intercourse but in what we have described above, the dispositively preparatory activity

2 Summa theol., IIIa, q.2, a.11 ad 3.
of St. Joseph as well as of the Blessed Virgin: "To the holy love of Joseph a Son was born of the Virgin Mary who also is the Son of God." Thus to him also, not only to the Virgin Mother, the child Jesus was given by God. This dispositive activity of Joseph and Mary is of primary importance; only through it could they, as secondary or subordinate causes, it is true, but by free and personal activity cooperate toward the incarnation of the Son of God. As Mary is really the mother of Jesus, so is Joseph in a true sense His father. Mary, to be sure, conceived and bore Jesus even physically, though not through marital intercourse but because the Holy Spirit had overshadowed her. But it was the will of God that both Mary and Joseph by their dispositive activity should make possible and, as it were, invite or attract that operation of the Holy Spirit, and consequently to their virginal marriage the child Jesus was given as its fruit; not only to Mary, but also to Joseph.

Nor could it be otherwise, because of the virginal marriage. For since, according to the well-known words of the Apostle and the generally accepted juridical views, the body of the wife belongs to the husband with a view to the procuring of a new life, the lawful fruit of the womb belongs not only to the wife but also to the husband, even if he did not cooperate physically in the conception; for, as other husbands and wives become one flesh by the consummation of the marriage, so Joseph and Mary, by the marital bond itself and by their mutual chaste marital love become one heart and one spirit, and thus one cooperating.

\footnote{St. Augustine, \textit{Sermo} 51, no. 16 (\textit{PL}, 44, 421).}
principle in the production of the human life of the Son of God. One could, after all, as it seems, say that St. Joseph cooperated at the supernatural fecundation of the virginal womb of the Blessed Virgin, not through physical generation of course, but through a wonderful, supernatural, purely spiritual one; since even the natural generation of a human being is only secondary and dispositive on the part of the parents; for of the elements included in the commonly accepted definition of generation, all but the one just mentioned, are present: *productio viventis a vivente conjuncto in similitudinem naturae*. We can, then, again conclude: As Mary is truly the mother of the God-man, so is Joseph His father, in a true, although only analogous sense.

After these explanations it is no longer difficult to derive a formal proof of the fatherhood of St. Joseph from the fact that the virginal marriage of Mary and Joseph was essentially directed toward the Incarnation of the Son of God; or, what practically means the same thing, that the child Jesus is the *proles*, the offspring, the fruit of this marriage. We can sum up our whole argumentation in a more syllogistic form as follows:

According to St. Augustine, St. Thomas, and other great theologians, the virginal marriage between Joseph and Mary was ordained by God toward the incarnation of the eternal Son of God in such a manner that the child Jesus would be the *proles*, or the offspring, of this marriage. It is generally agreed that the fruit of a marriage can be only a child who is a result of that marriage and to whose origin or existence both husband and wife have cooperated in their respective manta-

*In 1*, s. 4, d. 30, q. 2, a. 2 ad 4; *Summa theol.*, IIIa, q. 29, a. 2.
ner. For as St. Thomas well says, a child conceived in adultery, or a child unrelated to that marriage and adopted later, is obviously, as all agree, not a proles of that marriage. But since the child Jesus is the proles, the offspring of the virginal marriage between Joseph and Mary, therefore Joseph and Mary have, both of them, cooperated dispositively to bring about the human existence of Jesus, not Mary alone, but also Joseph: for what is done unilaterally by one spouse cannot be ascribed to the marriage as such. Now St. Joseph did not cooperate as a physical cause; therefore it was a moral dispositive cooperation on his part. In what this dispositive cooperation consisted has been explained in the last chapter: Mary and Joseph cooperated by contracting their virginal marriage, by their mutual chaste marital love, by their holiness culminating in their total obedient surrender to God, and by doing so, they supplied the condition, or better, the disposition, with which by God's all-wise, merciful decree the incarnation of His Son in the purest womb of Mary was irrevocably bound up, just as in the natural order the production of a new human life is bound up with marital intercourse. Thus the child Jesus, as proles of that virginal marriage, was truly the child of husband and wife, of Joseph and Mary, and as Mary was the mother, so was Joseph in a true sense, even if only analogous, His father.

Scheeben's argumentation comes to the same conclusion. He points out that the most essential constitutional element of fatherhood and motherhood consists in the fact that the parents are given a child through God in connection with their marriage: for to Joseph
and Mary in and through their marriage and as a fruit of it, the child Jesus was given by God, and received by them. Such a gift of God, given in connection with the marriage, is an essential characteristic, or constitutional element, of fatherhood and motherhood in general, and especially so in the case of the fatherhood and motherhood of the parents of the God-man Jesus. Scheeben, following St. Thomas, well emphasizes this:

Generally, even in ordinary marriages, their relationship to the fruit is better and more ideally expressed when it is called *susceptio prolis per Deum* rather than joint procreation for that expression marks the child as the fruit of the divine blessing from which the soul originates, and the productive function of the parents as subservient to the divine cooperation. From this point of view and for this reason the child in ordinary marriage is first given and appropriated by God to the mother, and through the mother to the father, and this not only on account of the physical influence of the father upon the production of the child, but at the same time also by virtue of the father’s corporeal proprietorship of the mother, or also in virtue of the unity of both. From this general point of view it is easier to maintain that the marriage of Mary and Joseph is a perfect marriage. On the other hand, its peculiar form is an instructive example helpful toward an ideal view of marriage in general. From it, finally, there follows a deeper understanding of the fatherhood of St. Joseph, which is certainly more than a merely apparent fatherhood in the form of a guardianship or adoption, because it is based upon the perfection of the marriage of Joseph with the bodily mother of the child.\(^6\)

\(^{5}\) Cf. Gen. 4:1.

\(^{6}\) Mariology, I, 129.
RECAPITULATION

But how to a man without physical generative function on his part a child can be given by God, is aptly illustrated by Grimm by calling attention to the Old Testament institution of the levirate, i.e., a marriage that according to the Mosaic law a man had to contract with the widow of his deceased brother who had died without issue, in order to raise children for his deceased brother. Grimm says:

This truth, Heaven's inviolable right to cause an Israelite to become a father without his generative power functioning, yet with all the consequences resulting from parental relationship—a truth the importance of which is best revealed in the birth of the Messiah—it had long before been made familiar to the Israelite mind, and that purposely and in a striking manner. It was the levirate marriage that had to serve also this very purpose, and just on account of this purpose it was to play such an important role in the continuation of the Israeliic families and even within the genealogy of the Messiah Himself. It is true that the union of Mary and Joseph was not a levirate marriage. But especially for the same reasons which prompted this marriage, the idea of the levirate had been implanted too deeply in the consciousness of Israel. The same God of their convenant who has it in his power to give a son to a deceased Israelite who could in no way cooperate, gives a son to a Virgin's "husband" who is still living yet also never touched his virginal spouse. An Israelite might well ask: Should the child which heaven granted the wife of Joseph within his lifetime be less truly a son of Joseph than if she had been left, widow without children, and then were to bear him a son through a levirate marriage after his death? In neither case did Joseph beget the son; yet in both cases it is the

7 Deut. 25:5-10.
sovereign power of God that bestows the blessing of fatherhood on the Israelite in a manner beyond natural powers. Israel knows of this freedom of God; therefore the Messiah stands there before His people as the real son and heir of Joseph, whether he was begotten by His father or had become His child in some extraordinary way. Even if this way is not a levirate marriage, if the Lord has another means to do it, what does it matter? The essential thing in either case is God’s sovereign freedom of action. It was logical, therefore, that the angel told Joseph he should make use of a right involved in fatherhood: to give the Child the name, that name so expressive of the Child’s mysterious vocation.¹

Against the explanation we have given of the fatherhood of St. Joseph, and especially against our assertion that he, as well as the Blessed Virgin, cooperated as personal and freely acting cause toward the incarnation of the eternal Son of God, the objection perhaps will be made that this appears impossible in the case of St. Joseph because, before the angel announced to him that the Blessed Virgin was with child and that this Child was the Son of God, St. Joseph had no knowledge that the Incarnation decreed by God from eternity was now imminent. How could he cooperate in it as a personal and free, even if only dispositive, cause, especially in contracting marriage with the Blessed Virgin, so long as he did not know that this virginal marriage was entirely ordained toward the incarnation of the Son of God and had in this its ratio essendi; it seems that of necessity St. Joseph had to be informed about this if he had to cooperate as a personal and free

¹ Grimm, *Die Einheit der Evangelien*, p. 244.
cause. This question is, no doubt, justified and needs an answer. I reply as follows: In the first place, the ordination of the virginal marriage between Joseph and Mary toward the Incarnation was the work of God, not of men. To accomplish His great design He made use of the Virgin most pure and virginal Joseph: by special graces He illumined their mind and moved their will to enter upon that holy virginal marriage. Notwithstanding this, their contract was a free and personal action and, even if they were not aware that according to the intention of God their union had to be subservient to the incarnation of the Son of God, yet by totally surrendering themselves always to the providence and guidance of God they had the intention of serving God also in their marriage and of cooperating in everything that God would command or wish. Such a general surrender to the holy will of God, however, contained implicitly the willingness to be, as far as was possible for them, at God’s beck and call in everything, therefore also in their marriage, and thus also in regard to the incarnation of the Son of God that was to take place in and through their marriage.

Moreover later on, but at the proper time, both holy spouses were informed of the great and wonderful purpose of their virginal marriage, whereupon they promptly offered themselves at once for this holy and sublime ministry; the Blessed Virgin at the annunciation before the Incarnation itself through her grand answer: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done to me according to thy word”; and St. Joseph soon after the Incarnation, also by an angel who appeared to him in a dream dispelled his anxiety and invited him
to give himself also in the future entirely to the service of Mary and her divine Child; and Joseph, too, at once entered upon this holy ministry. This prompt and wholehearted willingness of both of them is an evident indication that when they entered their virginal marriage, they already intended, at least implicitly, to be of service by means of their marriage to the incarnation of the Son of God. Thus they, not only Mary but also Joseph, were also freely acting, personal, though only dispositive and ministerial, causes of the Incarnation, as it took place in concreto. We may recall here the words of Gerson quoted in the last chapter: "This formation in thee, Mary, of the child Jesus was through the Holy Ghost, but with the implicit consent of thy husband Joseph. For he wished that the will of the Lord be done in everything, since he was a just man."

That St. Joseph was not informed earlier of the Incarnation as the Fathers and many theologians point out, was according to the all-wise plan of God, and was to strengthen our faith in the virginal conception and birth of our Savior. For St. Joseph’s apprehension and anxiety that took hold of him at the sight of the blessed condition of his holy spouse, gives clear evidence that he had no physical part in it; and on the other hand, by the explanation of the angel the virginal conception wrought by the Holy Ghost is put beyond all doubt for any believing Christian.

Still another objection that might be raised against our explanation of the fatherhood of St. Joseph may be mentioned here. Our Lord often speaks of His “Father who is in heaven,” and thus seems to exclude another father of His; also in theological books we can read that
Christ has only one Father, in heaven. Does this not disprove our explanation? The answer is easy: God the Father, the First Person of the Blessed Trinity, is the only Father of Christ, so far as He—as to His divine nature—is begotten by God the Father from all eternity. But, as to His human nature, He is not the natural Son of God, has not God as Father, because He does not proceed from God the Father in similitudinem naturae divinae. The fatherhood of St. Joseph, therefore, is not on the level of the fatherhood of the First Person of the Blessed Trinity; it does not refer to Christ’s divine, but to His human nature; it is only a feeble reflection of the eternal fatherhood of God the Father, although it is far above all natural human fatherhood.
Prerogatives of St. Joseph

St. Joseph’s virginal marriage with Mary the immaculate Virgin and Mother of God, and, resulting from it, his fatherhood in respect to the divine child Jesus, furnish, if we may call it so, the chief supernatural characteristic or essence of St. Joseph. But as usually various qualities or prerogatives are connected with or stem from an essence, so it is with this, as it were, supernatural essence of St. Joseph. From it a number of prerogatives arise for him. We have to consider at least the most important of these if we wish to appreciate as fully as possible the entire supernatural grandeur and dignity of St. Joseph.

1. Because St. Joseph was in truth the virginal spouse of Mary, the immaculate Virgin and Mother of God, and, as we have explained before, according to the law of marriage and, by a kind of spiritual or moral generation the father of Jesus, he had therefore all the rights and duties of husband and father in his relation to Mary and Jesus. But given these rights and duties, it is also implied that he is the head of the family: for the father is everywhere considered the bearer and propagator of the family and name; he is the one figuring in
genealogical tables; he governs the family and assigns their tasks to its members, takes care of the common welfare, provides for their bodily needs and for the physical and mental training of the children; he is their protector and representative before the outside world. All these are functions of the head of a family, and therefore the father of a family is everywhere considered the head of the family. Now Holy Scripture bears witness to these duties of St. Joseph as well as to the great and indefatigable efforts he made to comply with them amid the greatest difficulties. A few relevant passages from Holy Scripture bear this out.

a) When the Saint became aware of the blessed condition of his spouse and his heart filled with painful anxiety, an angel appeared to him in a dream, composed his fears, and entrusted Mary and the blessed fruit of her womb to his care and protection: "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.'" ¹

The task incumbent on him as father and head of the family that was coming into existence, was thus solemnly confirmed for him by these words of the angel, and he forthwith began to perform it with

¹ Matt. 1:20-23.
wholehearted devotion and never flagging fidelity. "So Joseph, arising from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had 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." 2

He took to him the Blessed Virgin, was her protector, provider for all her needs, especially the faithful guardian and witness of her virginity, which was entrusted to him as his own treasure, at their marriage by their virginal union. He did not know her till she had brought forth her first-born Son, and much less so afterward: after both had vowed virginity and especially after the birth of Jesus there could be no thought for him of profaning by sensual desire and carnal lust that virginal womb sanctified by the conception and birth of the eternal Son of God. The most holy Virgin could not but appear to him as a wonderful sanctuary, closed by a mysterious door, which only one could open, God Himself, the sovereign Lord, as the holy Fathers explain the well-known passage of Ezechiel. 3

He then escorted her to Bethlehem, protecting her and waiting on her during the journey, and under great difficulties managed to find for her a shelter where she brought forth the Son of God made man. And when Jesus was born and was to be circumcised, Joseph called His name Jesus as was commanded by the angel, thus using for the first time his right as father and head of the family. So again as father and head of the family he acted at the presentation of the child Jesus in the temple, which according to Jewish law was the duty

3 Ezech. 44:19.
of the father as the head of the family.\textsuperscript{4} Whatever else Scripture records of St. Joseph, everywhere we find him faithfully complying with his rights and duties as husband and father, always solicitous, reliable head of the family. Yet one or other trait of this picture calls for special attention. For still awaiting him were harder tasks that would give him an opportunity to show that his faithfulness and ever watchful solicitude could stand splendidly every test.

b) The divine Child, the future Redeemer, had scarcely entered into this visible world when the powers of darkness rose up against Him, and accomplices among wicked men to destroy Him. In vain. For divine Providence brought to naught their dark schemes, but it used also on its part a man always obedient and ready for every sacrifice, St. Joseph. The Evangelist tell us: “When they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph, saying, ‘Arise, and take the Child and His mother, and flee into Egypt, and remain there until I tell thee. For Herod will seek the Child to destroy Him.’ ”\textsuperscript{5} And St. Joseph without the least hesitation complies with the divine command and undertakes the toilsome, the perilous, journey. “So he arose, and took the child and His mother by night, and withdrew into Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod; that there might be fulfilled what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet saying, ‘out of Egypt I called My Son.’ ”\textsuperscript{6}

\textsuperscript{4} Luke 2:22 f.
\textsuperscript{5} Matt. 2:13.
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 2:14 f.
c) And when the danger that threatened the life of the Child from Herod had been removed by the death of this ruthless tyrant, an angel of the Lord appeared again to Joseph in Egypt and bade him to return to his home in Israel and with Jesus and His mother settle in Galilee, in the town of Nazareth. Finally his anxious fatherly solicitude appeared when the child Jesus at the age of twelve years accompanied His parents to Jerusalem at the feast of the Passover, and was lost to them, and they searched for Him for three days full of sorrow, as His mother herself attested: “And His mother said to Him, ‘Son, why hast Thou done so to us? Behold, Thy father and I have been seeking Thee sorrowing.’”

Holy Scripture gives us a clear detailed picture of the fatherly solicitude never faltering amid all the trials of St. Joseph, but it also no less clearly bears witness to the position of authority that was his as the head of the family. This position is evidenced by the fact that the divine commands to give to the Child the name of Jesus, was directed to St. Joseph, and so also the command to rescue the Child from the snares of Herod, and this in such a way that also the mother was entrusted to him. There are several unmistakable indications that also the Blessed Mother recognized this position of St. Joseph as head of the family. She expressed it in words when she couched her sorrowful complaint over the three days’ loss of her Child in these words: “Son, why has Thou done so to us? Behold, Thy father and I have been seeking Thee sorrowing.”

7 Ibid., 2:19 ff.
mentions here Joseph as the head of the family, in the first place, before herself, like the Evangelist Luke who usually does so: "And His father and mother were marveling at the things spoken concerning Him." 9 By her very acts she shows that she respects his position when readily and without demur she submits to his guidance and protection, as we can see from the account of the incidents related in the Gospels and referred to above. And the divine child Jesus Himself acknowledged, together with the maternal authority of His Virgin Mother, also the paternal authority of St. Joseph, as the Evangelist again bears witness: "And He was subject to them." 10

d) Yet this authority of St. Joseph as husband of the Mother of God, as father of the divine child Jesus, as head of the holy family, must not be misunderstood. Suarez commenting on the words of the Evangelist, "and He was subject to them," has his pertinent remark:

This sentence signifies that Jesus actually did, rather than what He was obliged to do. For, in truth, on account of the dignity of His person, He was in the proper sense subject to no man. But to indicate the high position of St. Joseph, it was sufficient that Christ, considered only and specifically in His human nature and origin, was by right to be subject to him and that, though exempt from it by His divine nature, He wished to be actually subject to him and to render respect and obedience to him as to His father and superior. 11

9 Ibid., 2:33.
10 Ibid., 2:51.
11 De mysteriis vitae Christi.
FATHERHOOD OF ST. JOSEPH

This subjection and obedience was not, therefore, a strict duty for Him, not even for His human will, but, considering His actual human condition, a matter of fitness, a concruitas or observantia. In this sense also the Fathers understand the words, “and He was subject to them,” e.g., St. Augustine: who says: “The Evangelist does not say, ‘He was subject to the mother,’ but, ‘He was subject to them . . . by that condescension by which He also had become a Son of man.’” 12

e) The Church also, both in her teaching and in her practice, has recognized St. Joseph as the head of the holy family. Thus Leo XIII says in his encyclical Quamquam pluris (Aug. 15, 1889): “From this two-fold dignity (of husband and father) arise at once the duties imposed by nature on fathers, so that Joseph should be both the lawful and natural guardian, procurator and defender of that divine home over which he presided. And these duties and functions he performed to the full as long as he lived.”

In the same encyclical the Pontiff points out that the incarnate Word of God paid honor and obedience to Joseph as His father: “St. Joseph is distinguished above all others by that august dignity which consists in this, that according to the divine plan he was the protector of the Son of God, the father of Jesus in the opinion of man. The natural consequence of which was that the Word of God humbly submitted Himself to Joseph, obeyed his commands, and paid him all the respect that children owe to their father.”

What we have said of St. Joseph as being the head of

12 Sermo 51, no. 19 (PL, 38, 343).
the holy family is also confirmed by the Church in the
litany in honor of St. Joseph, approved for the whole
Church by Pius X, in which the invocation almae fa-
miliae præses is equivalent to sacrae familiae caput i.e.,
"head of the holy family"; further, in the motu proprio
of Benedict XV (July 25, 1920), in which we read of
St. Joseph: "he was the august head of the holy family
of Nazareth"; finally in the Preface prescribed in 1919
for the whole Church for the feast of St. Joseph, in
which the holy patriarch is called a faithful and pru-
dent servant set over the family of God. When we con-
sider all this, it will scarcely appear an exaggeration if
we say that this authority of St. Joseph as head of the
holy family is a matter enshrined in the faith of the
Church.

Consequently, in virtue of his virginal marriage with
Mary the Virgin and Mother of God, and in virtue of
his fatherhood in respect to Jesus the God-man, St.
Joseph was also the head of the holy family.

II. As head of the family, thus endowed with the
authority this position conferred on him, St. Joseph is
seen to have a special relation all his own to God the
Father.

a) He was thereby in a special way, and incom-
parably more than any other creature, a representative
and reflected image of the heavenly Father. A few
words must suffice to explain this point here.

Father of Jesus in the proper and fullest meaning of
the word is the heavenly Father, the First Person of the
Trinity. He is His natural Father since He has from
eternity begotten and is forever begetting Him as to
His divine nature. But He is also at least by appropria-
tion in contrast to the other divine Persons the primary juridical Father of Jesus even when the latter is considered in His human nature, for, as the Apostle says "From Him all fatherhood in heaven and earth is named." 13 The spiritual and juridic fatherhood of St. Joseph appears thus as a participation of the divine fatherhood. From the express injunction of the heavenly Father, St. Joseph performs the duties and enjoys the rights of father of Jesus. Again and again messengers come to him with instructions and directions from the heavenly Father. Thus St. Joseph is seen to be the temporal, visible representative of the eternal Father, under whose guidance and protection he exercises his rights and duties as father. Surely also Jesus and Mary regarded him as such a representative and therefore would render the most prompt and willing obedience to his wishes and commands. Thus the paternal authority of St. Joseph is a reflection, a faint yet wonderful reflected image, of the infinite authority of the heavenly Father.

b) There is another feature in the fatherhood of St. Joseph by which it is specially ennobled and appears again as a reflection of the eternal heavenly fatherhood. God the Father has begotten His eternal Son through the infinitely perfect act of knowing His own self, by which act He produced within Himself a living and consubstantial image of Himself, the eternal Word. Now, nothing can be farther removed from any physical impurity or corruption than the spiritual operation of the intellect. But also the fatherhood of St. Joseph is entirely unaffected by any physical taint: it

13 Eph. 3:15.
PREROGATIVES OF ST. JOSEPH

is grounded on something spiritual, the virginal marriage with the Blessed Virgin, and resulted from a kind of spiritual generation, as we have explained before. Thus again the fatherhood of St. Joseph is a reflection of the fatherhood of the heavenly Father.

c) For one more reason the fatherhood of St. Joseph reflects, as far as it is possible for a creature, the fatherhood of the heavenly Father: the heavenly Father loves His eternal consubstantial Son with an infinite love because He is the infinitely perfect image of Himself, and He therefore calls Him, His beloved Son in whom He is well pleased. But since He willed that St. Joseph be His representative on earth, the human father of His well-beloved Son, it is inconceivable that He should not also instill in his heart a corresponding fatherly love, just as the immaculate Virgin whom He made the mother of His only-begotten and well-beloved Son, was endowed by Him, no doubt, with a mother's love so tender and great as to surpass our comprehension. St. Joseph had therefore such a love of the child Jesus as if he had been His natural father, only in an incomparable higher and more perfect degree than the best natural father would have for his only son. And the holy doctors can scarcely find words eloquent enough to extol this love of St. Joseph. Thus Bernardine of Siena exclaims in one of his sermons: "St. Joseph had the most ardent love for Christ. . . What delight for him to hear the still lisping infant call him father. . . . With an overwhelming love he felt attracted to the sweet Son given to him by the Holy Ghost through his virginal spouse, . . . and the

14 Matt. 3:17.
piercing pain at the loss of the child Jesus shows it was the sorrow of a tenderly loving father.” 15

In a similar vein also Isidore Isolani (note 92) speaks in glowing terms of the fatherly love of St. Joseph. After showing by several arguments that St. Joseph must have had an immense love for the divine Child entrusted to him, he says that Joseph from the moment when Jesus was born must undoubtedly have put on a new man, i.e., that from a pure and holy man he became incomparably more pure and holy, and then continues:

How often did he lovingly carry the Child in his arms! And when the Child began to lisp and to show outwardly that He understood, how often would Joseph say: “What do You want, my Son? Oh, immortal God tell me, order, command! You wish that they consider me Your father, but I only desire, and glory in it, to be Your servant. Who would not love You, You so exceedingly beautiful, so wise and strong and powerful and so loving? For you are truly God, the wisdom of the Father, the splendor of His glory, the salvation of mankind. I adore You, my Son, I love You, I wish to be loved by You. Accept my service which I would fain give You and Your holy mother. Where I, weak and moral man, would fail, be You my help. O sweet consolation, o fountain of love, my soul is melting by the sweetness of Your love.” To such words of intense love the Child’s sweet voice would answer, His face lighting up with joy. There is, then, no reason to doubt that Joseph must have loved the Child with an undescrivable love. Ask one who loves the Lord Jesus Christ, ask one who is longing for Him. He will answer: All this is clearer than day-

15 Sermo 1 de S. Joseph.
light; and to see it no proofs are needed, only the heart of a lover.\textsuperscript{16}

Bossuet, in one of his panegyrics on St. Joseph, has a significant and suggestive passage on this love of St. Joseph. He writes:

Joseph shares with Mary her cares, vigils, and anxieties which the bringing up of the divine Child may entail, and for Jesus he has that natural affection, those tender sentiments only a father’s heart is capable of. But, one may ask, whence has he that fatherly heart if nature has not given it to him? Are those natural affections available to us to be picked up at will? Can art imitate what only nature can write into the heart? If, then, Joseph is not a natural father, how can he have a father’s heart? We recognize that here the hand of God must be at work. It is owing to the power of the Almighty that Joseph has a father’s heart, and, when nature does not give him one, God makes one for him with His own hand. For Holy Scripture says of God that He directs and turns the hearts of men whithersoever He will.

. . . It is this almighty hand that gave to Joseph the heart of a father and to Jesus the heart of a son. So Jesus obeys, and Joseph is not afraid to give Him orders. And whence comes this boldness for him to give commands to his Creator? From this fact: The true (i.e., natural) Father of Jesus Christ, God who has begotten Him from all eternity, after choosing St. Joseph to serve His only-begotten Son as father in time, sent into the heart of Joseph a ray or spark of that infinite love which He Himself has for His Son. This is what changed the heart of Joseph, what gave him a father’s love, and such a love that the just Joseph, now finding within him a father’s heart formed by God, at the same time feels that God wills him also to make use

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{De donis S. Joseph}, II, chap. 15.
of his authority as father, and thus feels free to give com-
mands to Him whom he recognizes as his Lord.\(^\text{17}\)

In conclusion we listen to the eloquent words of a
distinguished spiritual writer of the last century, Fa-
ther W. Faber, who vies with a Bernardine of Siena
and Isidore Isolani in extolling the all but boundless
fatherly love of St. Joseph to the divine child Jesus.
He writes:

From his deep calm soul Joseph had poured out a very
ocean of love, humblest love, loving shrinking from being
like the Father’s love, yet also daring to be like it, as Mary’s
had been like the conjoined loves of Father and Spirit, as
she was Mother and Spouse conjoined. No angel might
love Jesus as Joseph loved Him. No temporal love but
Mary’s could be more like an eternal love than the love of
Joseph for the Child, because of its likeness to the love of
the Everlasting Father. \ldots\ Joseph’s love of Jesus was, of
course, requited by the Child Jesus with a corresponding
filial love, a love such as might be parcelled out among all
the fathers upon earth and make them all more happy than
they could well believe.\(^\text{18}\)

And to this love between Jesus and Joseph is joined
the mutual love of Jesus and Mary on the one hand,
and that between Mary and Joseph on the other, and
this triply interwoven love constitutes, in the words of
Father Faber, the unity of that holy family on earth,
which may aptly be called the earthly trinity because
it is a wonderful image of the heavenly Trinity. For as
the three divine Persons are really distinct as persons
while identical and one in nature, so were the three

\(^{17}\) _Œuvres_, VII, 176.

\(^{18}\) _Bethlehem_, p. 136.
persons of the holy family really distinct, of course, as persons, and, though not identical in nature, they were yet so intimately connected and made one by their wonderful mutual love for each other.

d) There is yet a third prerogative, resulting from Joseph's virginal marriage with the Mother of God and from his fatherhood in respect to Jesus: St. Joseph belongs to the hypostatic order or can be seen inserted into it. But this point will require a more detailed explanation in another chapter.
As we said in the last chapter, we proceed to the detailed explanation of a doctrine first proposed by Suarez, which, as we shall see, will also help to a clearer understanding of the part St. Joseph played in the work of our salvation. As it is best to keep Suarez’ exposition before our mind, we first quote his own words.

I do not think it at all improbable that the task, or the office, of St. Joseph, inasmuch as it belongs in some respect to a higher order, can be called more perfect than the office of the apostles. For, as I understand it, certain offices in the kingdom of God belong to the order of sanctifying grace, and in this order, as I understand it, the apostles ranked highest, and needed more extraordinary graces and gifts of wisdom than others did. But there are offices that belong to the order of the hypostatic union which is in its kind more perfect, as I have said when speaking of the dignity of the Mother of God. Now, in this order, though in the lowest place, I find the office of St. Joseph, and thus it excels all offices precisely because it belongs to a higher order. Therefore St. Thomas was careful to state that the apostles ranked higher than others because their office belonged to the New Testament. But the office of St. Joseph does not belong to the New Testament nor, strictly speak-
ing, to the Old, but to the author of both of them, to the cornerstone who has made both one.\footnote{De \textit{myster.} \textit{Chri.}, d.8, s.1, no. 10.}

I. Suarez, then, says that in his opinion St. Joseph, on account of his office, i.e., the task assigned to him by God, belongs to the hypostatic order, in contradistinction to the apostles, who through their ministry, i.e., the office conferred on them by Christ, belong to the ordinary order of grace, of sanctifying grace. The latter order comprises sanctifying grace which is destined for all men, together with all that directly subserves the acquisition, preservation, and increase of that grace. The hypostatic order, or the order of the union of the Son of God with an individual human nature in one person, comprises immediately this individual human nature in its union with the eternal Son of God, together with all other gifts and privileges and relations which naturally and immediately result from this union for that human nature, and it comprises, in addition to this, also all that directly and affectively served the accomplishment of that union. Therefore, as the ministry or office of the apostles belongs to the order of sanctifying grace, because it is destined for and serves the production of sanctifying grace in men, so belongs to the order of the hypostatic union the ministry or office or the task of the Mother of God, because she in humble submission served the realization of God’s eternal decree of salvation, i.e., the incarnation of the Son of God. Now thus also the ministry of St. Joseph would belong to the order of the hypostatic union if he, too, in resemblance to the Mother of God,
by the task assigned to him by God effectively served the same incarnation of the Son of God. To show that St. Joseph had this task and that he performed it well, is the purpose of the following discussion. After all we have said, it will not be too difficult to show this and to prove our thesis convincingly. If Suarez himself speaks somewhat hesitatingly, that is because of his modesty. But since his time the present question has been cleared up considerably by theological discussion. Now to our argumentation:

1. As we have seen in our previous discussions, St. Joseph was in truth the virginal spouse of Mary the immaculate Virgin and Mother of God. He was also the father of the Child who was God and man, not indeed natural father by physical procreation, but as virginal father according to principles of the marriage law and through what we may call a kind of spiritual generation. In consequence he had all the rights and duties and characteristic attributes of a true father, the natural procreation excepted. Finally he was in truth the head of the holy family, no less than any father is head of a family according to divine and human law. Therefore he stood in the closest and most immediate relations with Jesus and Mary. Holy Scripture bears clear witness to these truths, especially the last one, that Joseph was the head of the holy family. It is just this that we have treated in detail in the last chapter. Now I wish only to stress the fact that this truth is clearly also contained in the general implicit faith of the Church. Proof for this is furnished by various pronouncements and liturgical legislation of Roman Pontiffs, (e.g., Leo XIII, Pius X, Benedict XV), some of
ORDER OF HYPOSTATIC UNION

which we quoted already in the previous chapter. Leo XIII declared:

From this twofold dignity of St. Joseph (as husband and father) result for him the duties which nature prescribes for the father of a family, so that Joseph was the legitimate and natural guardian, provider, and protector of the divine home over which he presided. These duties and obligations he actually fulfilled while his moral life lasted. Every day he would watch unremittingly with loving care over his wife and her divine Son. By his daily work he would procure for them what they needed for their life and comfort. He warded off the danger that threatened their lives from the jealousy of the king, fleeing with them to a safe refuge. In all the hardships of travel and the bitterness of the exile he was the always ready companion, helper and comforter to the Blessed Virgin and Jesus.²

A short but emphatic pronouncement and the liturgical legislation of Benedict XV were quoted already in the last chapter.

In 1909 Pius X approved for the whole Church a litany of St. Joseph in which the holy patriarch is invoked as the “Head of the Holy Family.” Benedict XV in a Motu proprio, Bonum sane (July 25, 1920), declared that St. Joseph was “the head of the holy family.” On April 19, 1919, the same pope had approved a special Preface for the Masses in honor of St. Joseph, which says that Joseph “as a faithful and prudent servant, was set over God’s family.” Thus the popes of our time in authentic documents.

These relations of St. Joseph as true spouse of the virginal Mother of God, as true though not natural

² Encyclical Quamquam pluries (August 15, 1889).
father of Jesus, as head of the holy family, show him in closest immediate connection with the other members of the holy family, the last one, as head of the family, giving him even a certain precedence before Mary, and even before Jesus. But since these, the God-man Jesus and His virginal mother, certainly belong to the hypostatic order, we have the same to say of Joseph because of his most intimate union with them, and because as head of the holy family he has a certain preference over them. This is all the more so because the virginal marriage between Joseph and Mary was arranged by God entirely and only in view of the Incarnation and had in this its only reason for existence. Therefore that virginal marriage and the whole holy family belongs to the order of the hypostatic union, and thus also St. Joseph, as an essential part of that virginal marriage and as head of the holy family, evidently belongs to that order.

2. In still another way we can show this proposition true and certain. As the apostles by their apostolic labors had a part in applying the fruits of Redemption to men, spreading the faith and giving a share to men of the treasures of grace which the Redeemer had earned for them, and generating in their hearts the supernatural life of grace, so did St. Joseph have an effective part in bringing about the incarnation of the Son of God, planned and decreed by God from all eternity. We have previously explained how St. Joseph contributed to it: according to God's eternal plan the Incarnation had to come to pass within a virginal marriage. This was so first because, after the creation of
the first man and woman, human life should be propagated only in and through marriage; secondly, and this especially, because the most suitable, if not the only way, to carry out this plan of the Incarnation in a manner appropriate and worthy of it was in a virginal marriage. Then in the fullness of time, and doubtlessly under divine inspiration, Mary and Joseph joined in a virginal marriage, and this marriage was chosen by God that in it His eternal Son should be made flesh and become man. Mary and Joseph, Therefore, By responding to God's inspiration and contracting that virginal marriage, Mary and Joseph, not only Mary but also Joseph, cooperated freely and effectively to bring about the incarnation of the Son of God that had been planned by God from all eternity. Their virginal marriage paved the way for His entrance into this world. They did this by their virginal marriage both on account of their marriage and of their virginity, both of which in their case were inseparably connected. And this virginal marriage, therefore their marriage as well as their virginity, took the place of the carnal use of the marriage, on which elsewhere the origin of new human life depends. It is in this sense that the words of St. Augustine must be understood when he says of the fatherhood of St. Joseph:

What the Holy Ghost has wrought, He wrought for both of them. . . . Being well pleased with the sanctity of both, He gave the Son to both of them. But in that sex which had to give birth to the Son, He brought it about so that the Son was also born to the father. Therefore the angel tells both of them to give the name to the Child.
Here the parental authority is made evident. . . . Joseph is therefore father. Why? Because he is father the more firmly, the more chastely he was father.\(^\text{3}\)

Since it was through his virginity that Joseph cooperated dispositively to bring about the Incarnation and since in this cooperation his fatherhood in regard to Jesus is founded, he is the more truly the father of Jesus the more virginal and chaste he was.

After all this, it seems to me, we can safely draw the conclusion: Because St. Joseph not only stood in the closest and most intimate relations to the holiest persons, Jesus and Mary, but also because his virginal marriage, i.e., his marital fidelity and virginity, cooperated dispositively in the Incarnation, he clearly belongs to the order of the hypostatic union. Moreover he belongs to it because to him as husband and as head of the holy family was entrusted the protection of his virginal spouse when the power of the Most High had overshadowed her, as well as of the child Jesus even after His birth, and because he accomplished this task under the most difficult conditions with the most faithful and devoted love of a husband and father, and thus effectively protected and preserved the greatest treasure this earth ever held: the human life of the Son of God and Redeemer of mankind.

3. We have heard Augustine and seen that the doctrine here set forth is well in accord with his views, and the same is to be said of the other Fathers and doctors. Let us hear some of them in reference to this subject. The words spoken by the angel who appeared to Joseph in his dream to remove his doubts about the

\(^3\text{Sermon 51, no. 30 (PL, 38, 351).}\)
Blessed Virgin are interpreted by St. Chrysostom thus: “Do not believe that, because what is born of her is of the Holy Spirit, you therefore are excluded from the ministry of that dispensation, i.e., of the Incarnation.” ⁴ Evidently St. Chrysostom considers that St. Joseph belongs to the order of dispensation, i.e., the hypostatic order.

Similar thoughts we find in St. Bernard’s sermons:

Remember that great patriarch who was once sold into Egypt. To him it was given to understand the secret meaning of dreams. But to Joseph it was granted to become acquainted with, and even have a part in, heavenly mysteries. . . . There is no doubt that Joseph to whom the Mother of the Savior was espoused was a good and faithful man, a faithful and a prudent servant whom the Lord had chosen to be a helpmate to this mother, a provider for His daily needs, and as the only one on earth to cooperate faithfully in carrying out the great design. . . . The Lord found like another David, a man according to His own heart to whom He could safely entrust the most hidden secret of His heart, to whom as to another David “the uncertain and hidden things of His wisdom,” ⁵ whom He allowed to know that mystery which no one of the princes of this world knew. And what many kings and prophets wished to see but did not see, and wished to hear but did not hear: to Joseph it was given not only to see and hear, but to hear Him in his arms, to lead Him by the hand, to embrace, kiss, feed, and protect Him. ⁶

Among the representatives of Neo-Scholasticism we have already heard Suarez, who more than others de-

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⁴ In Matth., 4, no. 6 (PG, 57, 46).
⁵ Ps. 50:8.
⁶ Super “Missus est,” hom. 2, no. 16 (PL, 183, 69).
serves credit for his masterly treatise on St. Joseph in
dogmatic theology. Another theologian of about the
same period, especially famous as a Scripture scholar,
Cornelius a Lapide, teaches the same as Suarez, al-
though he does not use the same phraseology, on St.
Joseph’s belonging to the hypostatic order:

Christ belonged in the proper sense to the family of St.
Joseph, for He belonged to the family of His mother, and
His mother belonged to the family of Joseph, her husband.
There was on earth, then, an exceedingly distinguished,
heavenly divine family, in which the father was Joseph
who presided and ruled, the mother was the Blessed Vir-
gin, and the Son was Christ. In this family were therefore
the highest and noblest persons in the world: the first,
Christ, as God and man; the second, the virginal Mother
who was of all most closely related to Christ; the third,
Joseph, as matrimonial father of Christ.\textsuperscript{7}

Of modern theologians we shall quote only two,
who like Cornelius a Lapide bear the same witness,
though not using the theological terminology of Suarez,
because they treat the subject in a popular way or only
in passing. The first is Kleutgen, who says in one of
his sermons:

Great as were the vocation and merit of the prophets
who foretold Christ, of the precursor who prepared the
way for Him, of the apostles who founded His Church:
should we not regard as great and sublime the office and
merit of the one who waited on, nourished, and guarded
Him? Is not the person of Christ of inestimably higher
value than the Church He founded? And shall we not ap-
preciate much more highly the services by which His life

\textsuperscript{7} \textit{In Matth. 1:16}. 
was preserved than those by which His name was made known to the world? It is true, all the services that St. Joseph could do for Him, could be done for Him only in His humanity; but were they therefore not done for Him? Who was it that in this human nature lived and worked, who in it and through it was man? It was He who in His divine nature lives and operates with the Father and the Holy Ghost, who is the only-begotten Son, the eternal Word. As it is true that Mary, in whose womb only the humanity of Christ was formed, has given birth to God the Son, so it is true that Joseph has fed and protected God the Son. Precisely this is the great mystery of divine condescension: He who by the power of His divinity nourishes and keeps in existence all creation, willed in the weakness of His humanity to be protected by men. Even more. How did the Son of God become our Redeemer, if not by taking on a human nature, and in it suffered and died? And it is precisely for this that all generations shall call Mary blessed as the mother of the Redeemer because from her the Son of God received His human nature. Now that same human life which Mary gave to the Son of God, as any mother gives it to her child, Joseph has preserved as a father preserves the life of his son. Joseph nourishes that body that was sacrificed for the salvation of all of us; that blood that was given as ransom for us all; that body that became the food of our souls, that blood that was to be for us the drink of eternal life. The Egyptian Joseph stored wheat during the several fertile years to distribute it to the people during the sterile years. But Joseph, the husband of Mary, not only kept in safety the living bread that had come from heaven, but also kept it alive and nourished it so that all peoples could be nourished by it unto eternal life.8

8 *Sermons*, I, 298.
Kleutgen does not indeed speak here explicitly of any cooperation of St. Joseph when the human life of the Son of God was to come first in existence, but rather of his preserving this life. But also this latter activity, especially when we consider that he was part of that family and the head of it, furnishes, as it seems clear, a sufficiently solid foundation for his inclusion in the hypostatic order.

As a second witness we quote Billot:

Joseph was closer to Christ than others, both because of his official task to carry out all the duties of a father, only generation excepted, in regard to Christ, and because he was head of that marital union which was ordained directly by God for the purpose of receiving and rearing Christ.⁹

Finally it can be said that this doctrine is steadily gaining more and more ground and can be called theologically certain.

II. To understand fully what it means that St. Joseph belongs to the order of the hypostatic union, as well as our arguments to prove it, we need to show briefly that besides Mary and Joseph no other creature, neither angel nor man, not even St. John the Baptist, nor the apostles, by the task imposed on them by God or by their office, belonged to the order of the hypostatic union.

a) The proof for this additional assertion is not difficult. First a general argument, to show that all those tasks and offices mentioned above and all other conceivable ones are excluded from the hypostatic order. All these various tasks or offices imply or in-

⁹ De verbo incarn., VII, 423.
dicate no influence whatever upon the hypostatic union. They rather presuppose it as already existing; therefore they do not belong to it. All these offices could have been instituted even if the eternal Son of God had assumed a human nature, not by being conceived and born of a Virgin, but in some other way, e.g., if He had come into this world as an adult man. These offices have no internal relations to the Incarnation. Those charged with them are thereby not brought into such close and immediate connection with the Son of God made man, and therefore not with the Incarnation as it actually took place, and they therefore cannot belong in any way to the order of the hypostatic union.

b) Let us consider also each of these offices separately. 1. It might seem that the archangel Gabriel, who announced to Mary her selection as mother of God, effectively contributed to the execution of the Incarnation and therefore belonged to the order of the hypostatic union. But this mission of the angel was first of all a transitory service on which the Incarnation did not depend in any way. It did not establish any interior permanent relation of the angel to the mystery of the Incarnation as we find it in Mary and Joseph. It was the office of a messenger, of an intermediary, as it were, between God and the Blessed Virgin, who himself was and remained entirely outside of the mystery of the Incarnation; an office that established no special or essential relation between Jesus, Mary, and Joseph on one side and the angel on the other.

We have to say the same in regard to the prophets
who under the inspiration of God foretold the Incarnation. Their prophecies presupposed the coming Incarnation as a wonderful event to be carried out in the future with God as its principal cause and a Virgin and her virginal spouse as ministerial causes. But the prophets were by their prophecies brought into no real interior relation to the mystery; and much less did they themselves exert any influence on the Incarnation.

2. A difficulty, however, seems to be caused by St. John the Baptist, of whom our Lord Himself said: "Among those born of women there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist." 10 He should therefore also belong to the hypostatic order. But this difficulty is no more than apparent. The office or task of St. John the Baptist had nothing whatever to do with bringing about the Incarnation, but evidently presupposes it. His task was to make the Incarnation known to men and make them believe in it, and therefore belonged to the ordinary order of grace, which was itself a result of the Incarnation. Moreover, those words cannot be taken in that quite universal meaning which they seem to have. For among those born of women are also Christ the Lord Himself and His holy mother. Should they perhaps be considered inferior to John the Baptist? This of course is not to be thought of. They are an exception, and so nothing prevents our belief that St. Joseph is also excepted.

But what is really the meaning of these peculiar words? To answer this question we must, according to general rules of interpretation, consult parallel pas-

10 Matt. 11:16.
sages of Scripture and the context. Now St. Luke in a parallel passage says: "Among those that are born of women, there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist." And another rule of interpretation tells us that among parallel passages that one gives the sense more faithfully and exactly which gives it in more definite and concrete words. The answer therefore is this: Christ the Lord does not compare St. John with all men but only with the prophets, and says therefore that no prophet is greater than John the Baptist. The context also furnishes us the same explanation, for in both Evangelists the words quoted above are followed by this sentence: "Yet he that is lesser in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." With these words our Lord meant that the least office in the New Testament is greater and higher than the highest office of the Old Testament, to which St. John the Baptist still belonged. There is here no comparison whatever of St. Joseph with St. John the Baptist, and the fact that St. John was the greatest prophet of the Old Testament has no value to prove that he belonged to the order of the hypostatic union.

The Exalted Dignity of St. Joseph

In the former chapters we explained and proved that St. Joseph was the husband of the virginal Mother of God; that in a true and proper sense he was also the father of the child Jesus, the God-man; that consequently he was the head of the holy family and acted as such; that by reason of these facts and privileges he belonged to the order of the hypostatic union. We have thus laid the foundation and at the same time set the norms or standards of measure to guide us in forming a true estimate of St. Joseph’s exalted position in the kingdom of God, of his supernatural grandeur and dignity. Let us, then, briefly consider this foundation and these norms, and, in addition, a few other aspects, hitherto not mentioned, and it will not be difficult for us to form a fair and correct judgment in this question.

1. St. Joseph was and will remain forever the virginal spouse of the immaculate Virgin and Mother of God, “the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ” (Matt. 1:16). This holy marriage is the first foundation and the first norm of his supernatural elevation and dignity. By marriage husband and wife enter upon the most intimate union with each
other that is imaginable among men. They become not only one flesh or one principle of a new human life, but one heart and one soul, and one moral, though not physical, person. Marriage generally implies that the spouses share with each other not only their material possessions but also their spiritual and moral goods, as far as this is possible, therefore also equality in social position or rank. But since the Blessed Virgin on account of her divine motherhood surpassed all created persons in dignity and excellence, and since St. Joseph was in truth her virginal spouse, he by his virginal marriage with her was of necessity raised to her inestimable great dignity and excellence as far as this was possible. This is shown by Leo XIII in his encyclical on St. Joseph (Quamquam pluries):

That St. Joseph is in a special way the patron of the Church and that the latter can expect great things from his protection and help, has its cause and special reason in the fact that he was the husband of Mary and the father, as was believed, of Christ. Hence stem all his dignity, grace, holiness, and glory. Certainly the dignity of the Mother of God is so high that nothing greater can be created. But since Joseph was united with the Blessed Virgin by the marital bond, he beyond any doubt approached closer than any other ever did to that pre-eminent dignity by which the Blessed Virgin far surpasses any other creature. For matrimony is the closest association or union which by its nature demands the mutual sharing of what the spouses have. Therefore when God destined Joseph as husband for Mary He willed him surely to be not merely her companion in life, the witness of her virginity, the protector of her virtue, but also through the very bond of marriage a participant of her exalted dignity.
The following additional remarks may help to a fuller understanding of the argument contained in the preceding words of Leo XIII. The virginal marriage between Joseph and Mary according to the plan of God had only one purpose: to be subservient to the incarnation of the Son of God, as we have said more than once. Under the inspiration of the all-wise God, Mary and Joseph were in a virginal marriage so that as one moral principle, Joseph only morally, Mary also physically, they could and should dispositively cooperate in that grand and wonderful work of God. But if they, closely united as they were, together cooperated in that great task, there St. Joseph could not but have shared in some way that marvelous elevation of Mary, that dignity beyond measure which was her due as the Mother of God. The opposite would have sounded like a discordant note in this wonderfully harmonious work of God, the Incarnation. There can simply be no thought whatever of a kind of morganatic marriage between Mary and Joseph. When therefore Leo XIII in the above quoted passage says that St. Joseph had a share in the high dignity of Mary, it is because it is demanded by the very nature of the thing. Furthermore, that St. Joseph was called by a special divine decree to become the virginal spouse of the Virgin Mary, is an incontestable truth demanded by the very purpose which this marriage had to serve, and is clearly set forth in ecclesiastical documents. We have quoted above the words of Leo XIII: “God had destined St. Joseph as husband for Mary.” His great predecessor Pius IX, who was a chief promoter of the veneration of St. Joseph, said the same in clear and
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explicit words. The apostolic letter of July 7, 1871, in which he finally regulated the liturgical veneration of St. Joseph as the patron of the universal Church begins with the following words:

The illustrious patriarch St. Joseph, whom almighty God had chosen above all His other saints to become here on earth the purest and true husband of the immaculate Virgin Mary and . . . father of His only-begotten Son, and whom He also abundantly endowed with quite extraordinary graces to enable him to carry out his duties most faithfully; him who is crowned in heaven with glory and honor, the Catholic Church now honors with the most solemn liturgical rites and venerates with deepest devotion.¹

In the same letter the Pope decreed that St. Joseph should be mentioned with other saints in various places in the liturgy, and the prayer of the feast of the Patronage (now the Solemnity) of St. Joseph should be added in certain cases; this prayer clearly states that St. Joseph was chosen and appointed the husband of the Blessed Virgin: “O God, who in Thine unspeakable providence wast pleased to choose blessed Joseph for the spouse of Thy most holy mother: grant, we beseech Thee, that we may be worthy to have him for our intercessor in heaven whom we venerate as our protector on earth.”

The special election of St. Joseph as husband of the Blessed Virgin is part, therefore, of the implicit faith of the Church, and thus also is the eminent dignity of St. Joseph, so that in this respect next to the mother of God he excels all created persons, men and angels.

I say "created persons" because of the human nature of Christ which in itself is not a person but, of course, surpasses Mary and Joseph in dignity because it partakes of the infinite majesty of the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity and is with the latter adored with the highest divine worship (supremo cultu latriae).

2. The second foundation and therefore also the second norm of the grandeur and dignity of St. Joseph is his fatherhood in regard to Jesus the God-man. He who keeps on trying to get a better understanding of this fatherhood, especially as interpreted by St. Augustine, must find it ever more wonderful and sublime, so that only God's infinite wisdom together with His boundless love and compassion for man could devise it and make it a reality. This fatherhood has given to Joseph all the rights, attributes, and prerogatives of a true father, not in regard to a merely human being, but in regard to Jesus who is both God and man. St. Joseph was therefore, as we have seen, as father of the child Jesus truly an image of the heavenly Father and His representative on earth. Than this no greater height can be thought of to which a male person can be raised, just as it is unthinkable that a woman could be raised above the mother of God.

Through this fatherhood St. Joseph appears to be raised even to a greater height than by his virginal marriage with the immaculate Mother of God. The pre-eminence of this fatherhood becomes so clear and almost visible when we see Mary and Jesus pay reverence and obedience to him, since as husband of Mary and father of Jesus he was also the head of the holy
family, as we have shown in detail in a previous chapter. We have here already touched the third foundation, the third norm of the high dignity of St. Joseph.

3. St. Joseph as the head of the holy family. Only a few words also on this subject. The function of the head of the holy family when rightly understood appears so sublime that in dignity it surpasses anything that among supernatural gifts or distinctions can be bestowed on men. The eternal Son of God, who is of the same nature and glory with the Father and the Holy Ghost, the Redeemer and King of all men, acknowledged, as does His holy mother, the authority of St. Joseph and is subject not only to her, but also to him. "He was subject to them," as the Holy Gospel says. It is understood, of course, He was subject only as to His human nature and human will, and, as we have said before, not from a strict obligation, but from condescension and for reasons of congruity, and only in what physical, temporal domestic interests demanded and in order to teach us men by His example how we should regard and duly respect every legitimate authority. Nor did this submission extend to matters connected with His mission as the divine Redeemer, which the divine Child Himself delicately intimated to His parents after He had been lost and found again in the temple: "Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?" 2 Finally, this dependence of the child Jesus cannot be extended to His mature manhood, which is not even demanded of ordinary men. But there is no doubt that Jesus never ceased to show to His parents filial devotion, reverence, and love, as

He doubtlessly does even now in heaven, giving consideration to their petitions and intercession more than to the other patrons or intercessors. Yet notwithstanding all these restrictions, how wonderful is the position of St. Joseph as head of the holy family! We have heard already with what awed wonderment St. Bernard speaks of it, and like him also Gerson, the chancellor of the University of Paris. And Holy Church in amazement sings to St. Joseph on his feast:

God, King of kings, and Lord of all creation,
He, at whose nod the hordes infernal tremble,
He, whom the prostrate heavens are ever serving,
Was to thee subject.

4. The fourth foundation and fourth norm of the marvelous grandeur and dignity of St. Joseph is his inclusion in the hypostatic order, of which I have spoken in the last chapter. These several foundations and norms are distinct not so much really, as formally. At any rate, they are so closely interconnected that one can be considered the result or logical conclusion from the other: his fatherhood from his virginal marriage, his headship of the holy family from his fatherhood, and from all these, his inclusion in the order of the hypostatic union. Yet a separate treatment of these several points will give a clearer understanding and deeper appreciation of St. Joseph's prerogatives.

Let us add a few other theological reasons, in a somewhat more scholastic form, based on one or the other of these four norms, or on several of them together.

5. The supernatural dignity or grandeur of a human
being is the greater the more closely he is united with the divine dignity and majesty, or the nearer his relation is to God. For owing to such a close union or near relation the divine dignity overflows, as it were, into the created person thus united, and the latter will more fully share this dignity the closer the union and the nearer the relation is. Thus the human nature of Christ possesses an absolute and infinite dignity and majesty, because by its hypostatic union with the Son of God it was taken up into unity with this divine person and made entirely its own by this divine person. The Blessed Virgin Mary, on her part, being the virginal Mother of God, is, after the human nature of Christ, of all creatures the one most intimately united with God, and therefore, after God and the human nature of Christ, possesses the next highest dignity and thus, in this regard, surpasses in a true sense infinitely, all other creatures.

Now, after the Mother of God, no other created person is in the supernatural order so closely connected with God, none has so near relations to a divine person, as St. Joseph. He is the chaste spouse of the Mother of God, the true though not the physical father of Jesus the God-man, and the head of the holy family; with Mary he belongs to the order of the hypostatic union, to which no other created person belongs. The logical conclusion therefore is: In supernatural dignity and majesty St. Joseph, next after Mary, surpasses all created persons, all angels, all saints, for only the Mother of God and he belong to the order of the hypostatic union, as we have seen already in the preceding chapter.

6. The supernatural dignity of St. Joseph is rela-
tively infinite. To see what this assertion means and how well it is founded, it is sufficient to consider briefly the fatherhood of St. Joseph. The dignity of a father is proportionate to the innate natural dignity of his son, and is measured by it; i.e., the higher the innate natural dignity of his son is, the higher will have to be the dignity of the father. Now by God’s supernatural dispensation and providence, St. Joseph was destined to be the true and proper father of Jesus, and therefore the dignity of his fatherhood will have to be measured according to the innate dignity of the God-man Jesus. But the dignity and majesty of the child Jesus, because He is the natural Son of God and true God, is simply infinite in the strict sense. Therefore also the dignity of the fatherhood of St. Joseph in regard to the child Jesus the God-man is relatively infinite, i.e., St. Joseph as true father of Jesus, the God-man, possesses a supernatural grandeur and dignity the like of which belongs to no other human person with the sole exception of the Mother of God, who by reason of her still more wonderful and closer connection with God, i.e., with the child Jesus the God-man, is in supernatural dignity and majesty still nearer to God than St. Joseph. Therefore just as the dignity of the virginal motherhood of Mary surpasses in infinite measure that of any other motherhood, so does St. Joseph’s fatherhood excel likewise every other fatherhood. To understand the force of this argument we need only recall that the theologians in a similar manner prove that a mortal sin is a relatively infinite offense committed against God. For they argue from the generally accepted principle that an offense is the graver in its kind, the
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higher the dignity of the person offended. But since the one offended by mortal sin is God Himself in His infinity, majesty, and dignity, it follows that a mortal sin, considered as an offense against God, precisely in this respect, is relatively infinite, i.e., that it surpasses in infinite measure all other offenses committed by men. Against this argumentation in the case of St. Joseph the objection might perhaps be made that the two cases are different, that St. Joseph himself did not contribute anything at all to the infinitely high dignity of the child Jesus and therefore also not to his own paternal dignity. It is certainly true that St. Joseph could contribute or add nothing to the infinite dignity of the child Jesus, but, functioning as the father that he was, he contributed his part when the Incarnation had to be accomplished, and thus he also did something toward obtaining his glorious fatherhood. Moreover, by his great merits and sanctity he had prepared himself worthily for his election to be the father of Jesus, in a manner analogous to that in which the Mother of God had prepared herself for her divine motherhood.

7. The fatherhood of St. Joseph excels in dignity even sanctifying grace and the beatific vision. To prevent any misunderstanding we have to make a few preliminary remarks. (a) The point of comparison is here solely the dignity which attaches to the fatherhood of St. Joseph on the one side and to sanctifying grace and the beatific vision on the other. There is no question here of comparing the intrinsic physical perfections of the two sides, nor of the respective greater capabilities which the two have, of giving happiness to men and angels. (b) We take the fatherhood of St.
Joseph in the sense which we have explained. In this sense it also includes sanctifying grace, although only *in exigentia et radice*, as we shall explain later, not *et formaliter*.

Now the proof. Sanctifying grace constitutes its subject (the one who has it) an adopted child of God; but the fatherhood of St. Joseph makes him the true and proper, though not bodily, father of the child Jesus; now the true and proper, although not bodily but in a sense spiritual, fatherhood in respect to the child Jesus ranks much higher than a sonship by adoption, just as among men a physical father ranks in dignity far above an adopted son. Therefore the fatherhood of St. Joseph in respect to the child Jesus is incomparably far above adoption by God. To make it still clearer we add another remark: the entire and, of course, very great value of being a son of God by adoption consists essentially in this, that through it the one who is endowed with sanctifying grace or is an adopted son of God, is given a right to participate in the beatific vision, which in itself and by its nature belongs to God alone. But to this the true father of the son of God, St. Joseph, has a better right than an adopted child. For the true fatherhood brings with it *connaturaliter* (i.e., naturally) the good things of heaven. Nor is this right in any way impaired by the fact that St. Joseph is the father of the Son of God only in respect to the human nature of Jesus. On the contrary, this fact rather emphasizes this right of St. Joseph because it is in His human nature that the Redeemer suffered and died to obtain for us a right to those heavenly goods. Since the Son of God gave Him-
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self as a son to Joseph as well as to Mary, He surely would also together with this fatherhood and motherhood impart to His parents a right to the good things He has in heaven. If ever anywhere, it is here that the words of the Apostle apply in their fullest meaning: "How can He fail to grant us also all things with Him?" 3

To prove our assertion that the fatherhood of St. Joseph ranks higher in dignity than sanctifying grace we can use here, by adapting it to our purpose, an argument by which Suarez shows that the dignity of the motherhood of the Blessed Virgin is incomparably higher than that which sanctifying grace and the glory of heaven bestow on man: As the human nature of Christ on account of the hypostatic union has a claim to the highest degree of grace and glory, so have the Blessed Virgin for being the mother of Jesus the God-man, and St. Joseph for being his father, a right to a proportionate fullness of grace and heavenly glory. Thus the virginal motherhood of Mary, and thus also the virginal fatherhood of Joseph are in a true sense the first principle and source of all the graces with which they were endowed and also of this great dignity, which resulted from these graces and that motherhood and that fatherhood contain, according to the all-wise plan of God, the ordinary sanctifying grace and the glory due to it, in a much greater measure. Therefore the motherhood of the Blessed Virgin and the fatherhood of Joseph in this respect are far superior to sanctifying grace and the glory due to it, and certainly a much greater favor was done by God to the Blessed

3 Rom. 8:32.
Virgin and to St. Joseph when He selected them to be respectively the mother and the father of the God-man, than was done to St. Peter when God selected him for a glorious place in heaven.

8. That the dignity of St. Joseph surpasses that of St. John the Baptist and of the apostles, we discussed in the previous chapter, where we showed that neither St. John the Baptist nor the apostles belonged to the hypostatic order.

After all the things we have said about St. Joseph in these pages, a suspicion may have lingered in some minds that we have set St. Joseph practically on a par with the Mother of God, which would be contrary to all that the Church believes. This objection will be attended to before the close of this book.
The Eminent Holiness of St. Joseph

HerenfoRe we have considered in detail the position or rank which St. Joseph occupies in the supernatural economy of salvation. This rank is a most distinguished one because of St. Joseph’s virginal marriage with the holy Mother of God, his fatherhood in regard to the divine child Jesus, his position as head of the holy family, and his inclusion in the order of the hypostatic union. Among all other created persons he occupies in the kingdom of God the very first rank after the blessed Mother of God. The question is now: Do we find in St. Joseph a heroic practice of virtue, a personal holiness corresponding to his sublime position? The answer is an unquestionable, yes. This is the subject of the present chapter.

I. St. Joseph’s eminent sanctity is attested by the clear words of Holy Scripture. In the Gospel we read:

“Joseph, her husband, since he was a just man.” ¹ What does this word “just” mean? Nearly all the Fathers and exegetes of later times take the expression to mean an all-round moral perfection, virtue and holiness. Thus Chrysostom: (on Matt. 1, 19) “Joseph, her husband, since he was

¹ Matt. 1:19.
a just man.” “Just” means here one endowed with every virtue . . . for justice is a general virtue (i.e., one including all others), and Holy Scripture uses the word mostly in this sense, as in Job 1:1: “The just man is truthful,” . . . and Luke 1:6: “Both were just.”

Ambrose (on Luke 3:4) says: “The just man cannot act contrary to what is prescribed by the law.”

Jerome must have had the same meaning in mind when he wrote (on Matt. 1:19): “How can Joseph be described as just, if he concealed a crime of his wife?”

The Fathers are followed in this interpretation by the later exegetes, e.g., Maldonatus: “I answer that Joseph is called a just man, because he was endowed to the full with every kind of virtue.” And Knabenbauer: “‘Just’ is he who strictly keeps to the norm of the divine law and exemplifies it in his life.”

It would be superfluous to quote other Fathers and exegetes. It suffices to say in short, that the Fathers and theologians are practically unanimous in their opinion that the term “just,” as in many other passages so also in the one with which we are here concerned, comprises all virtues, and therefore means an all-round perfection and holiness. We have therefore in Holy Scripture an unassailable witness to the perfection and holiness of St. Joseph.

II. But Holy Scripture not only theoretically testifies to the great sanctity of St. Joseph as in the text just

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2 _PG_, 57, 43.
3 _PL_, 15, 1590.
4 _PL_, 26, 24.
5 On Matt. 1:19.
6 On Matt. 1:19.
THE HOLINESS OF ST. JOSEPH

quoted, but it also pictures him to us so vividly that we almost can see him practicing in his simple unobtrusive manner the most heroic virtues. Of this, only a few illustrations.

a) It shows St. Joseph as a man of strong faith and perfect obedience. When his heart was filled with deep anxiety and misgiving over the condition of his spouse, a messenger from heaven appeared to him in a dream to relieve him of this worry. "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 of her is of the Holy Spirit.'" \(^7\)

What does St. Joseph answer? Holy Scripture does not record a single word of his, but instead lets us see his strong faith showing itself by his ready and courageous obedience. "So Joseph, arising from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him, and took unto him his wife." \(^8\) Here we are in the presence of a truly wonderful faith. If Scripture calls the faith of Abraham great because he believed God when God told him that he would get a son by sterile Sarah in her old age, then surely the faith of St. Joseph is still greater and more admirable where, upon the word of the angel sent by God and appearing to him in a dream, he in humble and simple faith with full consent accepts the coming birth of the eternal Son of God by his virginal spouse, and, upon the announcement of this wonderful mystery, at once readily and, no doubt, with a heart filled with gladness, takes to him his wife. Truly

\(^7\) Matt. 1:20.
\(^8\) Ibid., 1:24.
a wonderful faith, well deserving the praises lavished on it by the Fathers. Surely God inspired, and with many graces supported, this faith of St. Joseph. But this help did not remove all difficulties, it only gave him strength to overcome them, nor did it spare him the bitter trials the future had in store for him.

Such a trial was soon to be faced when again an angel came to St. Joseph with a message from God ordering him to flee to Egypt to save the Child from the evil designs of Herod. How difficult a task and, for the human mind, how puzzling and mysterious! This Child had been announced to him as the savior of His people and the Redeemer of the world. Could he not be easily protected against the wiles of the persecutor by a supernatural intervention of His heavenly Father? But St. Joseph would not be disconcerted by any such misgivings and difficulties, but with an unshakable faith, unflinching obedience, and dauntless fortitude, without delay he took the Child and His mother to go on the journey beset with many perils and hardships through an inhospitable desert to an unknown land. Again we have a shining example of his wonderfully strong faith in Providence, in the divinity of Christ, and in his own heavenly imposed responsibility; and at the same time again a proof of his heroic obedience ready for every and even the greatest sacrifices.⁹

At another occasion which we have mentioned already, when St. Joseph noticed that his virginal spouse was with child, and painful doubts filled his mind, other virtues of St. Joseph reveal themselves: his calm-

ness of mind and self-control. In this connection Suarez has this good comment:

When he became aware of the condition of his spouse, he showed perfect self-control and prudence, to which Chrysostom already has called attention when in one of his sermons (Hom. 4 on Matt.) he says that Christ, who while still in the womb already sanctified John through His mother, through her also conferred on Joseph grace enough to enable him to bear the heavy burden of his task with so much fortitude and insight, and thus showed himself a true philosopher.

Suarez then points out how St. Joseph's faith and obedience were tested, and he stood the test splendidly.

For both when the angel revealed to him the mystery of the Incarnation and when he ordered him to flee to Egypt, he believed and obeyed him most willingly and without delay however mysterious and incomprehensible it all may have appeared to be. . . . Again Chrysostom says (hom. 5): "Here you have seen his obedience, his faith promptly accepting the heavenly announcements, his mind fully awake and totally uncorrupted"; and again, in hom. 8, he highly praises St. Joseph's obedience, because in this matter so difficult and mysterious he does not ask questions but without saying a word obeys at once and gladly submits to all the trials. There is therefore no doubt possible that this man has attained a very high degree of sanctity.¹⁰

b) In a like manner we should treat here also of the other virtues that adorned the character of St. Joseph, such as his virginal chastity, his ardent and tender love of the divine child and of his immaculate

¹⁰ Suarez, loc. cit., disp. 8, s.2, no. 2.
spouse, and so many others. But we have already had occasion here and there to speak of them, and we shall do so again presently. Only one will be singled out as it shows his character so well and makes it so attractive and venerable. We have already alluded to it: his admirable humility and modesty. By it he managed to make himself, as it were, disappear or vanish from our eyes when Jesus and Mary are present. He seems to keep himself always in the background and comes forward only when a difficult service has to be performed or a hard sacrifice is demanded. That this should be so has its reason in the very task imposed on him by God and can be understood in the light of that task.

According to the all-wise plan of Providence, the Redeemer of the world, the God-man Jesus, should enter this world as a child, poor and weak like other children, but also in a proper and befitting manner, and therefore as the fruit of a virginal marriage. In this plan it was also decreed that Christ should not manifest Himself to the great public as the promised Redeemer until He had reached mature age. So His public life had to be preceded by His hidden life during which He would not show His divine power by miracles and other signs. But as a true man, as a true Emmanuel, i.e., God-with-us, He should pass through all the stages of human development and thus grow up into manhood, and meanwhile give to all men a wonderful example of humility and obedience and all virtues in a human family. During this time, then, the special task imposed on St. Joseph by God was this: he should by his virginal marriage with the Blessed Virgin make it possible
for the Son of God to enter into the human race in a becoming way, and then, after the miraculous conception and birth, he should become, as it were, a screen or veil hiding from the great public the miraculous event of the Incarnation until the fullness of time, while later on, when Christ had reached manhood, John the Baptist and the apostles and their successors would have the quite different, if not opposite, task to proclaim Him as the Son of God made man, and the Redeemer of man-kind, and to have Him acknowledged as such by the world. It was, furthermore, the task of St. Joseph to shield the virginity of the Mother and to safeguard the life of the Child and, while keeping the mystery of the Incarnation a secret for the time being, to become, for the benefit of men in the future, an all the more trustworthy witness to both the virginity of Mary and the incarnation of the Son of God. St. Bernard in a few words has given us a fine sketch of this wonderful task of St. Joseph: "The faithful and prudent servant whom the Lord has chosen to be a helpmate to His Mother, the provider for His daily needs, and the only trustworthy aid on earth to the great design." 11

How faithfully and bravely St. Joseph fulfilled this task that at first seemed to be a very modest one, but in reality was of the highest order, we can see in the Gospel account. Only when God calls he leaves his seclusion for a while; he makes his appearance only when it is required by the service of the divine Child and His Mother; for them he is always ready to make the greatest sacrifices; not one word of his is recorded anywhere; he disappears from the scene when the pub-

11 Hom. 2 super "Missus est," loc. cit.
Fatherhood of St. Joseph

Life of our Lord begins, and it is probable that even before that time when his task was finished he died a holy death comforted by the presence of Jesus and Mary. After all this, we might well exclaim: "Is the silent, retired life of St. Joseph, especially when his high dignity is considered, not also an admirable example of modesty and humility?" Yea, one is tempted to think that he continued even after his death in this modesty and humility for quite a long time, remaining for centuries in relative obscurity, in order that men might the more readily be willing to believe in the virginity of the Mother of God and the virginal birth of the God-man. I said, he remained in relative obscurity, inasmuch as for various reasons St. Joseph's high position only gradually and slowly received more public recognition, until finally in the last century it received the most solemn recognition in the liturgy of the Church.

On the strength of the proofs drawn from Scripture as it is with practical unanimity interpreted by the Fathers and theologians, we are fully justified in saying that the holiness of St. Joseph is altogether eminent and extraordinary.

III. One question remains yet to be answered in regard to the personal virtues and holiness of St. Joseph. It is this: Was his holiness as eminent as the position or rank which he occupies in the kingdom of God on account of the task imposed on him by God, or as eminent as is the dignity this task conferred on his person? In other words, does St. Joseph also in personal virtue and holiness surpass all the other saints, so that in this respect he ranks next to the Mother of God?
THE HOLINESS OF ST. JOSEPH

The answer will be affirmative. This is what I wish to prove in this chapter by arguments based on a number of principles generally accepted by theologians. Most of these principles have been precisely formulated by St. Thomas and are frequently used by the theologians to explain and demonstrate the sanctity of St. Joseph.

a) The first proof is based on a principle stated by St. Thomas and generally accepted by theologians. It is this: Those whom God chooses for some office, he also prepares and equips so that they are able to fill it.\(^{12}\)

St. Bernardine of Siena formulates this same principle as follows: "In regard to all special graces conferred on a rational creature by God, the general rule is that, whenever God's graciousness selects somebody for a special office or for a very high state, it also gives him all the special graces necessary for his office or that are an ornament worthy of his state." \(^{13}\)

St. Joseph had been chosen for the sublime task to be the virginal husband of the Mother of God, the true, though not bodily, father of the Son of God made man, the head of the holy family; in a word, he was, with the mother of God and next to her, taken up into the order of the hypostatic union and thus raised incomparably high above all other created persons, with the singular exception of his virginal spouse the Mother of God and, of course, the sacred humanity of Christ. Being thus chosen, he had also been equipped by God with all those graces needed by him for the performance of his task. With all these graces St. Joseph co-

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\(^{12}\) Summa theol., IIIa, q. 27, a. 4.

\(^{13}\) Sermo I de S. Joseph.
operated most faithfully as Holy Scripture clearly shows, and therefore he surpasses in holiness as well as in dignity and grace, all other saints, with the sole exception of the Mother of God. This is why St. Bernardino of Siena continues, after stating the general rule quoted above: “This was especially verified in St. Joseph, the putative father of our Lord Jesus Christ and the true husband of Mary, the queen of the world and the angels, who was chosen by the eternal Father to be the faithful provider and guardian of His greatest treasures, i.e., the Son of God and Joseph’s own spouse, an office which Joseph fulfilled most faithfully.”

There can be no question but that God wished the task committed to Joseph to be accomplished absolutely and unconditionally and that He therefore endowed Joseph with all the necessary efficacious graces, and St. Joseph corresponded most faithfully.

What we have said here agrees fully with the words of Pius IX at the beginning of his Apostolic letter *Inclytum Patriarcham* (July 9, 1879): “The illustrious patriarch St. Joseph whom God had chosen above all His other saints to become here on earth the chaste and true husband of the Immaculate Virgin Mary and . . . father of His only-begotten Son, and whom He also abundantly endowed with quite extraordinary graces to enable him to carry out his duties most faithfully: him, who is now crowned in heaven with glory and honor, the Catholic Church now honors with the most solemn liturgical rites and venerates with deepest devotion.”

b) The second proof is also based on a theological

principle formulated by St. Thomas: "The nearer a thing is to its principle, the greater its share of the effect of that principle." 15

Now Christ is surely the principle of grace, and after Mary no man or angel was ever nearer to him than St. Joseph. Therefore next to Mary he must have been enriched by Christ with grace and holiness more than any other man or angel. Further, as Christ is the principle of grace, so is Mary the mediatrix of grace, or the channel that conveys grace to us. But Joseph was also most closely united with Mary, therefore also on account of this an abundance of grace must have come to him and his sanctity must have been increased more and more.

c) Proof by a third principle, also taken from St. Thomas: "Since an efficient cause is more perfect than the subject acted upon by it, it follows that an efficient cause which perfects others must possess that perfection in a higher degree. Therefore it is precisely because Christ possesses the absolute fullness of grace that grace is communicated by Him to others." In short, an efficient cause perfecting others must have that perfection in a higher degree.

St. Thomas applies this principle only to Christ. But it holds good also elsewhere. Now St. Joseph as head and protector of the holy family has contributed his share to our redemption, somewhat like Mary though only in an analogous way, and thus has become a partial, though subordinate, cause of grace and holiness to others. Therefore he must have been, after Mary, enriched with grace and holiness more than all

15 Summa theol., Illa, q.27, a.5.
the rest of men and angels. That St. Joseph actually though indirectly contributed to our redemption cannot be called into question. For the same message that made him take to him Mary his wife, also informed him that the Son she should bring forth was to be called Jesus as the future Redeemer of the world: “Thou shalt call His name Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins.” 16 Thus he was the father not only of the God-man, but also of the Redeemer; since he freely accepted this fatherhood and willingly took upon himself all its duties and cares, he contributed, though only mediately, something to the work of the Redeemer, to our redemption, the source from which all our graces flow.

d) The fourth principle is: “The perfection of the Christian life consists in charity.” 17

The greater, therefore, a man’s love of God and of the Savior, the greater his perfection and sanctity. Who could ever love Jesus with a more intense and tender love than Mary His virginal mother and, next to her, St. Joseph. He was in truth the father of the child Jesus and as such was the reflected image and the representative of the heavenly Father. But after the heavenly Father had made Joseph such a likeness of Himself and His representative, He could not forgo, we may well say, instilling in Joseph’s heart also the most tender fatherly sentiments and feelings for his son, the God-man and our Savior. St. Joseph therefore must have loved Jesus, both as his God and Savior and as his son, with such a deep and self-sacrificing

16 Matt. 2:11.
17 Summa theol., IIa IIae, q. 184, a. 2.
love, the like of which no man or angel except Mary ever could have felt. If, then, perfection and holiness consist in the love of God and the Savior, St. Joseph must have, after Mary, surpassed all other saints in holiness.

e) The fifth principle consists in this, that God’s love for us is the real and chief cause of all grace, as Scripture and especially St. Paul frequently and clearly attest.

From this we are justified in concluding that our Savior’s love is the measure of the grace which He bestows on individual men. But Christ loved no human being, and in fact no creature, as dearly as He loved His own immaculate Mother. He loved her with the love of a most gratefully devoted son, and, in consequence, showered upon her His richest treasures of grace exceeding everything any man or angel ever received. But after His holy Mother our divine Savior gave to no one else so great a love as He gave to St. Joseph, His true, though not natural, father, the image and representative of His heavenly Father. It was the love of a son grateful to His father for all the hardships he had undergone, for all the sacrifices he had made in His behalf, and, as a consequence, the divine Savior must have bestowed upon Joseph such a plenitude of grace and holiness as upon no one else but Mary.

To the same conclusion we are led, when we consider that Mary is the mediatrix of all graces. Since Mary must have felt for St. Joseph as her husband and ever watchful protector a most tender and grateful love she could not but procure for him by her intercession the choicest graces from her Son.
Suarez speaking of the gifts of graces that St. Joseph had received from God, expresses the same thoughts:

If Christ Himself promised that anyone who in His name gives but a cup of cold water to drink shall not lose his reward, how can one think that Christ would leave unrequited so many acts of loving kindness done by St. Joseph not merely in Christ's name but to Him in person? To this must be added that quite likely also the Blessed Virgin was most eager to procure for her spouse divine help and grace even beyond the ordinary and that she actually obtained it for him through her intercession. For if it is true, and it is, that one of the most efficacious means of obtaining gifts of grace from God is devotion to the Blessed Virgin, how can one believe that Joseph, so beloved by her and so devoted to her, did not obtain through her an outstanding degree of sanctity? 18

Previous to this, Suarez had already pointed to the great love Jesus and Mary had for Joseph:

From this (i.e., the relationship existing between Jesus and Mary on the one hand, and Joseph on the other) we are able to understand how strong a bond between them of love and friendship must have arisen from Joseph's elevation to his high state and dignity. For it behooves the virtue and sanctity of the wife to love her husband and to wish for him and procure for him everything that is good for him, especially for his soul. But the Blessed Virgin was most perfect in all respects and therefore excelled also in this love. Add to this the motive of gratitude which one owes to a benefactor and which is paid in no way better than by love. St. Joseph had suffered much for the Blessed Virgin and had done so willingly from love as was proper,
indeed from deep and ardent love. Finally there must be added their similarity of character, their daily association for many years, a familiar companionship never darkened by the least cloud of discord, a companionship which could serve only to strengthen their mutual love and friendship ever more and more. These reasons apply especially to Christ and this proportionally the more so, the more perfect He and His influence on St. Joseph was than that of the Blessed Virgin.\footnote{Ibid., d. 8, s. 1, no. 6.}

Jesus and Mary, then, loving Joseph as they did, could not but procure for him a plenitude of graces that would effectively secure to him a degree of sanctity fully in keeping with his exalted state and office, i.e., a sanctity which, second only to that of the humanity of Christ and of Mary, would surpass all other created sanctity.

f) Finally, a sixth principle is contained in the well-known proverb: \textit{Verba movent, exempla trahunt}. St. Joseph living continuously in familiar holy companionship with Jesus and Mary: what wonderfully inspiring examples he had always before his eyes! How they must have spurred him on to an ever higher degree of love of God and of sanctity! St. Bernardine of Siena says in this connection: "If we poor men are often helped to greater spiritual progress by the companionship of holy men who in comparison with the Blessed Virgin are nothing, what progress must St. Joseph have made, living continuously with Jesus and Mary!" Indeed the infinite holiness of Jesus and the unmeasurable holiness of Mary must have been overflowing unto Joseph.
Suarez likewise stresses this point: "One can well understand that St. Joseph's growth in holiness was still greater after the birth of Christ; first, because the better he learned to know Jesus by his continual association and frequent conversation with Him, he must have been stirred to ever more frequent and fervent acts of love, and then, because the words and examples of Christ must have had an ever more powerful influence on him." 20

Since, as we have seen, Holy Scripture and the Church bear irrefutable witness to the holiness of St. Joseph, we can and must, from the proofs presented here, draw the conclusion that St. Joseph next to Mary far surpasses all other men and angels not only in dignity but also in perfection and holiness.

To the picture we have here drawn of the holiness and perfection of St. Joseph, one feature has yet to be added to make it complete. Catholic theology teaches that not only the saints in heaven have been confirmed in grace and therefore cannot commit sin again, but it also ascribes this privilege to some saints while they were still on earth, and this especially to the Mother of God. Some theologians assert this privilege also for St. John the Baptist and the apostles and also St. Joseph on account of their high offices which seem to require confirmation in grace for their holders; and even for a few other saints.

Only a few words regarding this question.

1. There can be no doubt about the impeccability and confirmation in grace in the case of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Everybody admits it. The theologians

20 Ibid., s. 2, no. 1.
are not agreed on the intrinsic cause of this impeccability, nor in explaining how a creature can have it.

2. As to St. Joseph, since he was the pure spouse of the Virgin Mary, the virginal father of Christ (in the sense as we explained it), and was included in the hypostatic order, no doubt whatever can exist that he had the gift of impeccability for good, at least as far as grave sins are concerned, and therefore was also confirmed in grace. His high rank as spouse of the Blessed Virgin, as father of Christ, as head of the holy family, as member of the hypostatic order, demanded this because they show him in his intimate union with our divine Redeemer, and thereby surpassing in holiness all creatures except the Blessed Mother of God. An objection that this would put St. Joseph on a par with the Blessed Virgin will be dealt with in our last chapter.
In the previous chapters we endeavored to show how important were the tasks assigned to St. Joseph in the foundation of the kingdom of God, what glorious rank he therefore occupies in that kingdom, and how lofty his dignity and how great his holiness must be. For these are the fundamental reasons and the measure of all religious veneration we owe him.

For the same purpose we have yet to consider one thing more, that St. Joseph is the patron, or protector, of the Church and was proclaimed as such by Pius IX in the decree *Quemadmodum Deus* issued on his authority by the S. Congregation of Rites and solemnly published in the chief basilicas of Rome on December 8, 1870. This decree was followed by Pius IX’s Apostolic Letter *In Clytum Patriarcham*. In this letter, after recounting and approving all that his predecessors had done to promote the veneration of St. Joseph, the Pope refers to his own efforts in this regard and especially to his proclamation of St. Joseph as Patron of the Catholic Church, stresses the importance of this patronage and gives further directions for a liturgical veneration corresponding with these privileges of St. Joseph. He writes:
THE PATRONAGE OF ST. JOSEPH

And we ourselves, having been raised to the supreme chair of Peter by God's inscrutable decree, and moved by the examples of our illustrious predecessors as well as by the special devotion we had to this holy patriarch from our early youth, have with a joyful heart already by a decree of September 10, 1847, extended the feast of his patronage as a double of the second class to the universal Church, after it had been celebrated for some time in various places by special permission of the Holy See. But in these latter times, when a savage and horrid war was declared against the Church of Christ, the devotion of the faithful to St. Joseph has made such progress that from all parts of the world countless and most fervent petitions have been sent to us, and have been repeated while the Vatican Council was in session, by every class of people and, what is most important, by many of our brethren, the cardinals and bishops of the Roman Church, all of them entreat ing us that in these sad times, in order to ward off the evils assailing us from every side, we should call upon God's mercy more efficaciously through the merits and intercession of St. Joseph by declaring him the patron of the Catholic Church. Moved by so many petitions, we prayed for light from above and then decided to satisfy these pious desires, and through a special decree of the S. Congregation of Rites published during Mass in our patriarchal basilicas of the Lateran, Vatican, and the Liberian on the feast of his immaculate spouse, December 8, 1870, we have solemnly declared the holy patriarch Joseph patron of the Catholic Church.¹

These words are followed by a number of new regulations concerning the liturgical veneration of St. Joseph, which, on the whole, assign to St. Joseph the

¹ Pius IX, Inclytum Patriarcham (July 7, 1871).
highest rank next to that of his immaculate spouse, the Mother of God.

I have said above that Pius IX "declared" St. Joseph patron of the Church, not that he constituted or appointed him patron. For this office and the corresponding high dignity of patron of the Church belongs to him of a necessity. It is the logical and natural development of the task and dignity conferred on him by God Himself. Since he was the virginal spouse of the Mother of God, and the virginal father of Jesus Christ, the God-man, the head and therefore the protector of the holy family, it follows as a natural consequence that he must also be the protector, the patron, even the father of the more numerous holy family, the Church of Christ.

Leo XIII has shown this in a beautiful and luminous passage of his encyclical Quamquam pluribus:

The reason why especially St. Joseph should be considered the patron of the Church and on the other hand why the Church can set so very great hopes on his guardianship and patronage, is the fact that he was the husband of Mary and the father, as was thought, of Jesus Christ. This is the source of all his dignity, grace and glory, and holiness. . . . From this twofold dignity there arose from him at once those duties which nature prescribes for the father of the family, so that he was the legitimate and natural guardian, provider and defender of the divine household whose head he was. These duties he actually fulfilled as long as he lived. Lovingly and zealously he watched over his spouse and her divine Child day after day. What they needed of food or clothing he always provided for them by the labor of his hands.

When their lives were in danger from the jealousy of the
King he warded it off by finding for them a safe place of refuge. In all the hardships of the journey and the bitterness of exile he was the never-failing companion, helper, and comforter of Jesus and Mary. Besides, that divine home over which St. Joseph presided with the authority of a father, sheltered within it the beginnings of the Church just arising. As the most holy Virgin is the Mother of Christ, so also she is the mother of all Christians to whom she gave birth on Mount Calvary amid the bitterest sufferings of the Redeemer; and Christ is, as it were, the first-born of the Christians who are all His brothers by adoption or redemption. This is why also St. Joseph must regard as specially commended to his care the whole multitude of Christians constituting the Church, i.e., that great family whose countless members are spread out over all lands, and over which he, as husband of Mary and father of Jesus, rules with the authority of a father. It stands to reason, therefore, and is altogether befitting that St. Joseph who once under all conditions watched over the family of Nazareth with scrupulous care, should also now shield and defend the Church of Christ under his high heavenly patronage.²

A few sentences may be added here to explain more fully or to supplement the foregoing words of Leo XIII. Analogous to the physical motherhood of the Blessed Virgin in respect to our divine Redeemer which entailed a spiritual motherhood in respect to all those redeemed by Him, the fatherhood of Joseph in respect to the child Jesus extended itself to all those who had a share in that redemption. For these have all become by redemption the adopted children of God and brothers and sisters of Christ and form now with Him one

² Encyclical *Quamquam pluries.*
mystical body, of which Christ is the head and those redeemed by Him the members, who live by their sharing of life with the head. This mystical body of Christ is the Church. But since St. Joseph is the father of Christ he cannot withhold his paternal love and care from those whom Christ by His work of redemption has made His own brothers and sisters and members of His mystical body. He will rather extend his fatherly love and care to all those who by baptism were incorporated with Christ and thus are part of His mystical body. For St. Joseph had to become the father of Christ for the sole purpose that Christ could work our redemption. This is what the words of the angel implied: “What 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.” (Matt. 1:20-21.) Thus it is now clear that St. Joseph, because he was father of Christ, hence is also father of His entire mystical body, and, by the same token, father and patron of the entire Catholic Church. It is evident from what we have said that this patronage over the Catholic Church was not established by Pius IX and then entrusted to St. Joseph, but by its very nature it belongs to St. Joseph as the father of Christ, the spouse of the Mother of God, and the head of the holy family. St. Joseph who is now in the glory of heaven with His son, the God-man, and with his immaculate spouse must have accepted with joy and satisfaction this solemn recognition of his patronage and will certainly the more readily continue his loving care for the Church of Christ the more he is recognized and venerated as her protector and patron.
THE PATRONAGE OF ST. JOSEPH

What we have said of the patronage of St. Joseph we shall find corroborated when we recall the history of the Egyptian Joseph in whom some Fathers and many theologians as well as the popes of recent times recognize a type of Joseph of Nazareth. Thus Pius IX begins his decrees of December 8, 1870, by which he declared St. Joseph patron of the Catholic Church, with these words: "As God had appointed that Joseph who was the son of the patriarch Jacob, as ruler of all the land of Egypt in order that he could save food and grain for that people, so when in the fullness of time He intended to send His Son as redeemer upon earth, He selected another Joseph whose type the former was, to be the ruler of His house and all His possessions, and the guardian of His greatest treasures." 3

These greatest treasures entrusted to Joseph during his earthly life, as the decree expressly states, were Jesus and Mary, but they are now the enlarged holy family, the Catholic Church, as is clear from the whole tenor of the decree, which concludes with the declaration of St. Joseph as patron of the whole Church.

In still more explicit words Leo XIII sets forth that the Joseph of Egypt is a type of our St. Joseph in several respects but especially a type of St. Joseph as patron of the Church. He writes in his encyclical Quamquam pluries:

You will easily understand, venerable brethren, that what we have said is confirmed by the fact that not a few Fathers, quite in agreement with the liturgy, were of the opinion that the Joseph of the Old Testament, the son of

8 Quemadmodum Deus.
the patriarch Jacob, foreshadowed the person and office of our St. Joseph and by his own illustrious position foreboded the greatness of the future guardian of the holy family. Surely, in addition to the fact that both were given the same very significant name,—Joseph, meaning "the growing one"—you know well enough that there are between them other unmistakable similarities, especially in that the former Joseph was treated with exceptional favor and benevolence by his master, and that when his master set him over his household good fortune and prosperity accrued to the house on account of Joseph. Still more important is it, that by the King's order he was given supreme power over his whole kingdom. And when calamity struck them causing crop failures and food shortages, he managed with excellent foresight to provide for the Egyptians and their neighbors so well that the King decreed he should be called the savior of the world. Thus we see the image of our St. Joseph already expressed in that older patriarch. If the older brought with him good fortune and prosperity for his master's house and was later placed in charge of the whole kingdom, so we may feel assured that the other Joseph, destined to the guardianship of all Christendom, will defend and protect the Church which in truth is the household of the Lord and the kingdom of God on earth.

We add two further short remarks.

When St. Joseph is sometimes given the title of patriarch, this word is used practically in the same sense as patron. In biblical and ecclesiastical language this title is applied, first, to the ancestors of the chosen people: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; then also to the twelve sons of Jacob as the ancestors of the twelve tribes, and sometimes to David, the founder of the Davidic dynasty. When, however, the title is used with St. Joseph, it can be done only in an analogous
sense, namely, in the sense that, since St. Joseph is the father of our Savior, his paternal rights and duties reach out also over the whole Church because the Church embraces all those who have been redeemed by Christ and thereby have become adopted children of God and adopted brothers of Christ. They are all, therefore, as Leo XIII pointed out, also the adopted children of St. Joseph. This seems to be the meaning of the title patriarch when it is applied to St. Joseph.

The patronage of St. Joseph again emphasizes his greatness in the kingdom of God. In that kingdom and therefore also in the glory of heaven he occupies the first place after Jesus and Mary and before all other holy angels and men. His throne in heaven is with, but after, the humanity of Christ and the Blessed Virgin nearest to the Most Blessed Trinity. What grandeur and glory is his now, especially when compared with his lowly, silent, retiring life of self-sacrificing service of Jesus and Mary here on earth!

A few words in conclusion. What importance for our times Holy Church attaches—and we ought to do so with her—Pope Pius XI tells us in his encyclical of March 19, 1937, on Atheistic Communism: “To hasten the advent of that ‘peace of Christ in the Kingdom of Christ’ so ardently desired by all, We place the vast campaign of the Church against world communism under the standard of St. Joseph, her mighty protector. He belonged to the working-class, and he bore the burdens of poverty for himself and the holy family, whose tender and vigilant head he was. To him was entrusted the divine Child when Herod loosed his assassins against Him.”
The Veneration Due St. Joseph

1. There remains the question to be answered, what kind of religious veneration is due St. Joseph on account of his place and office in the supernatural order or in the kingdom of God. As we said already at the outset, the sanctity and dignity of the person to be venerated is not only the motive but also the norm or measure of the veneration due him. This at once shows the essential and immeasurable difference between the veneration due and actually exhibited by the Catholic Church to God, that is the cult called latria, and the veneration due and exhibited to certain creatures specially privileged by God, that is, the angels and saints, a cult called duilia. Based on the same principle, we exhibit to the Blessed Mother of God a special kind of veneration, called hyperduilia, i.e., a veneration which by its very nature is as much below latria as a finite being is below the infinite, yet is indescribably higher, so much higher than that exhibited to other saints and angels, as the Mother of God excels all the others in dignity and holiness.

Now the question arises whether a special kind of devotion is also due St. Joseph. The answer to this
question will likewise depend on the relative position of St. Joseph in the kingdom of God, and thus depend again on his more or less close connection with the Incarnation and Redemption and therefore on his dignity and holiness. We have already described and defined this position, drawing for proofs on the following facts or principles:

a) His virginal, but true and real, marriage with Mary, the Mother of God.
b) His fatherhood in respect to Jesus the God-man, a fatherhood, though not a bodily or natural one, yet in a spiritual and moral sense, a true and real one.
c) His position as head of the holy family.
d) Consequently also his position or office as patron of the Church.
e) His inclusion in the order of the hypostatic union.
f) His eminent personal dignity and holiness.

We have treated of these relations and privileges of St. Joseph in detail and also tried to give an idea of his, for us almost inconceivable, glorious position in heaven, a rank, after Christ and His Blessed Mother, the highest in heaven.

2. Before we draw the conclusion from these privileges of St. Joseph for the kind of veneration we owe him, we wish to return to a difficulty mentioned in our last chapter. It may seem, I said there, that we have now raised St. Joseph to so high a level that he must appear to be practically the equal of the Blessed Virgin, which would seriously prejudice our whole argumentation, as the latter would thus be in contradiction to the common opinion of the theologians if not to the implied
contents of the Catholic faith. I do not deny that this difficulty is a real one that requires a solution. It would deserve a more thorough treatment, but I think a shorter and, for our purpose here, sufficiently clear answer is possible.

a) The fatherhood of St. Joseph in respect to the child Jesus, as wonderful as it is, is not on a par with the motherhood of the Blessed Virgin. The fatherhood of St. Joseph arises from a kind of spiritual or moral generation; it is a moral or juridic, not a bodily or physical fatherhood. The motherhood of the Blessed Virgin, on the other hand, is both a physical and a spiritual one. The body of the child Jesus was formed of the flesh and blood of His Blessed Mother. St. Joseph had no part in it, not a particle of his substance passed into the body of Jesus. But the Blessed Virgin not only gave of her substance to the Child but also had a part in that other spiritual or moral generation which we, with St. Augustine, St. Jerome, and others, have attributed to St. Joseph. Here we see already an essential and, for our question, decisive difference between Mary and Joseph. The part the Mother of God had in the incarnation of the Son of God was of essentially greater importance than that of St. Joseph, and she is seen much more closely united with Jesus and all the persons of the Blessed Trinity than St. Joseph and therefore raised to an essentially higher dignity in heaven.

b) Another reason helpful in clearing away our difficulty deserves at least a short notice. St. Joseph, too, had some part in our redemption, but only in a rather remote and indirect way. He had helped dis-
VENERATION DUE ST. JOSEPH

positively, as we have seen, to prepare the way for the Incarnation, which had to precede the redemption and in God's plan that was connected with it. Furthermore, he had taken the most loving care of Jesus from His birth to His manhood and thus preserved the Savior for His sacrifice on the cross, and he thus also contributed to our redemption.

But also in this respect the Blessed Virgin was again much more intimately united with our Redeemer and cooperated with Him in His redemptive work much more closely and directly. She was, in fact, the second Eve who crushed the serpent's head; whereas the second Adam was not St. Joseph but Christ, the Savior Himself. In this connection it is indeed significant that Mary was still living and with Christ, and experienced, suffered, and offered up His passion and redeeming death with Him; we know that St. Joseph was no longer among the living, since the dying Christ commended His mother to St. John.

3. From all this we can conclude with certainty that St. Joseph does not equal the Mother of God in rank and dignity but occupies the next place after her and before all the angels and saints in the kingdom of God and the glory of heaven. But since this dignity is not only the motive but must also be the measure of religious veneration, the veneration due St. Joseph is of course inferior to that due the Mother of God. Yet it ranks above that due other saints, even angels, and this not only in degree, but essentially and specifically, for the simple reason that also in dignity he surpasses the others essentially and specifically. In the veneration of other saints there can be only a gradual difference,
not an essential or specific one, because it depends on their personal sanctity, based on sanctifying grace, which in different persons is only gradually different, not essentially so. Only if for other saints besides sanctifying grace, also a dignity arising from an office they filled in this life, e.g., as priest or bishop, should be taken together with their holiness as a motive and norm, only then could there be question of a specifically different veneration. This, however, is usually not done. However this may be, it is beyond all question that the dignity of the Mother of God and of St. Joseph and consequently also the veneration which is due them surpasses essentially and specifically and all but immeasurably that of all other saints, not only because they had sanctifying grace in a much greater measure, but, as we have said, on account of their essentially and specifically higher dignity and their inclusion in the hypostatic order. Whether the veneration due the Mother of God and that due St. Joseph are specifically different, is not so clear. Although they both belong to the hypostatic order, it can hardly be denied in view of the much closer, even essentially closer, union of Mary with our Savior and the triune God, than that of St. Joseph.

The veneration or worship with which we honor God is infinitely superior to that which we give even to the Blessed Virgin and to St. Joseph; it is not only of a higher degree or kind but of a totally different order. It is properly called adoration or latria, whereas the veneration of the saints is called dulia, and the veneration of the Mother of God is quite properly called
hyperdulia (i.e., a veneration above dulia). It has become the custom to call the veneration of St. Joseph by the name protodulia (i.e., the first, or chief dulia), an expression, the best to be found, though not quite satisfactory because it might lead one to think that the veneration of St. Joseph differs only in degree, not in kind, from the veneration of other saints.

In this connection it is worth while to remark that in all religious veneration the essential thing is what takes place in the soul of the worshiper, his mental attitude toward the object of his worship, and the acts of his soul: of adoration, humble submission, gratitude, trust, love, etc. These inner acts are and must be different in the different kinds of veneration, whereas the external manifestations of them (bowing, genuflection, etc.) cannot always express those distinctions, and are often merely conventional usage.

4. Let us cast a swift glance at the development of the cult of St. Joseph especially in the last hundred years. This veneration has developed spontaneously and instinctively from the hearts of the faithful themselves, but it was always fostered and encouraged by the highest authority of the Church. Thus it bears the unmistakable marks of protodulia. Here we see a mutual influence exerted between the faithful and the authorities of the Church. The pious sense of the people of its own accord simply placed St. Joseph next to his Blessed Spouse above all the other saints in heaven, and always liked to think of him in the company of Jesus and Mary. Hence also those other petitions, for an increased liturgical veneration of St. Joseph. The au-
torities of the Church did not fail to encourage these efforts and thus on their part gave a new stimulus to the spread of the devotion to St. Joseph.

We merely quote a few papal utterances showing that the cult of St. Joseph as it has developed in our modern times possesses the marks of protodulia. Pius IX himself said that the veneration of St. Joseph as it had sprung up from the hearts of the faithful was the final impulse for him to declare St. Joseph the patron of the Universal Church. Then Leo XIII in his encyclical Quamquam pluries says: “The veneration of Joseph, which in former ages also the Roman Pontiffs endeavored to spread by degrees far and wide, and to foster in these latter days, we see everywhere increasing in unquestionable growth, particularly since our predecessor Pius IX, of happy memory, declared, in conformity with the request of many other bishops, this most holy patriarch the patron of the Universal Church.”

Benedict XV also was a zealous promoter of the veneration of St. Joseph, and was well aware of the steady growth of it among the faithful. He wrote in his motu proprio Bonum sane (June 25, 1920), on the fiftieth anniversary of the proclamation of St. Joseph as patron of the Church: “When we look back over the time elapsed since then, we behold indeed a long series of institutions demonstrating the steady growth of the veneration of this most holy patriarch among the faithful. But then, when we see the afflictions besetting the human race today, it becomes evident how necessary it is that this devotion be still more zealously
fostered and more widely propagated among the peoples of the world."

This interaction between the faithful and the authorities of the Church was probably one of the chief causes of the prodigious growth of the veneration of St. Joseph during the last hundred years. And from its manifestations we can discern that the cultus they wished to promote has the marks of true protodulia, or the highest dulia. Witness some of the results of these endeavors. First, the feast of St. Joseph (of March 19) was raised by Pius IX to the rank of a double of the first class; by Pius X, however, who was also most sincerely devoted to St. Joseph, it was reduced to a feast of the second class, because it usually occurs in Lent and because he wished to lay greater stress on the feast of the Patronage of St. Joseph; but Benedict XV reinstated it as feast of the first class. The second feast of St. Joseph, originally under the title "Patronage of St. Joseph" was finally raised to the rank of first class with octave, under the title "Solemnity of St. Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary and Patron of the Universal Church." No other saint but the Blessed Virgin is thus honored by more than one feast of the first class. And even in a third feast St. Joseph is honored together with Jesus and Mary, on the feast of the Holy Family.

Add to this the litany in honor of St. Joseph, with its beautiful invocations. Again no other saint but the Blessed Virgin is thus honored. The same is to be said of the special Preface in the Masses of St. Joseph. This Preface and the Breviary office of his feasts furnish still more proofs for our contention that veneration
due St. Joseph is unique in its kind; it is a protodulia. We have already mentioned petitions presented to the Holy See during and after the Vatican Council. They were asking for a still further increase in the liturgical worship of St. Joseph, specifically that in the Ordo Missae (in the Confiteor, in the prayers Suscipe Sancta Trinitas, and Libera nos, and in the Canon in the Communicantes) as well as in the Litany of the Saints, St. Joseph should also be mentioned by name immediately after the name of Mary the Mother of God and before the other saints. The Pope, however, did not see fit to grant these requests, chiefly on the ground that they would require a change in the most ancient and most venerable part of the liturgy which should not be made without grave reasons. From this answer it is clear that no dogmatic difficulties stand in the way. Since then we have seen changes made in the liturgical rites which our fathers would never have expected. In the course of time also these liturgical difficulties may be overcome and St. Joseph be given fullest liturgical honors, the protodulia, everywhere.

With this expression of hope we close our work. May it contribute to a better knowledge and deeper appreciation of St. Joseph and perhaps encourage shepherds of souls to make their flock better acquainted with St. Joseph, his attractive personality as well as his greatness and power, so that more and more people will go to him with loving veneration and confidence in his intercession.
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