

An Exposition of the Gospel of St. Matthew

Chapters 1-19

Fr. John Macevilly D.D.



Stabat Mater Press

Originally:
An Exposition of the Gospels

By Archbishop John MacEvilly, D.D.

Authored in the year of Our Lord, 1898

Editing has been made for the purpose to correct typological, grammatical, or spelling errors in the originally work. Any apparent remaining errors in the work have remained by reason of maintaining the intent of the author.

Publisher's Note

While the underlying text remains in the public domain, this specific edition, including its formatting, layout, and editorial refinements, constitutes a unique presentation of the material.

The publisher asserts no new copyright claim over the specific public domain content contained herein. However, the design, typesetting, formatting, and any newly added editorial materials are the intellectual property of Stabat Mater Press and are protected under applicable copyright and publishing laws. Unauthorized reproduction of this edition's unique formatting and layout may constitute a violation of intellectual property rights. No portion of this book may be reproduced in any form without written permission from the publisher or author, except as permitted by U.S. copyright law.

Copyright © 2025 by Stabat Mater Press

All rights reserved.

Edited by Austin L. Lambert

Covert Art by Stabat Mater Press

All images, including the on the cover, are in the public domain and free for use. Any exceptions will be specifically noted.

Contents

Introduction	1
Preface	8
Prologue	14
1. Chapter I	17
The Genealogy of Our Lord	
2. Chapter II	49
Herod and the Magi	
3. Chapter III	84
John the Baptist	
4. Chapter IV	117
The Temptation of Our Lord	
5. Chapter V	151
The Sermon on the Mount	
6. Chapter VI	206
7. Chapter VII	261
8. Chapter VIII	289
A Two-Fold Miracle	
9. Chapter IX	316
Our Lord Cures Man With Palsy	

10. Chapter X	343
Our Lord Sends out His Workmen into the Harvest	
11. Chapter XI	384
John the Baptist in Prison	
12. Chapter XII	416
Violation of the Sabbath	
13. Chapter XIII	453
The Sermon on the Mount	
14. Chapter XIV	488
Herod Hears of Our Lord's Miracles; The Death of John the Baptist	
15. Chapter XV	509
Our Lord Charged by Pharisees	
16. Chapter XVI	533
A Two-Fold Miracle	
17. Chapter XVII	560
The Transfiguration	
18. Chapter XVIII	590
Our Lord Rebukes the Ambitious Aspirations of the Apostles	
19. Chapter XIX	624
Our Lord Performs Several Miracles	

Introduction

A CONSIDERABLE period has now elapsed since I first ventured on laying before the public a Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul, and those commonly called Catholic. I resolved at the time to continue these Scriptural subjects with a similar Commentary on the Four Gospels, and the Acts of the Apostles. Circumstances, however, soon changed; and from the retirement of college life, so well suited for such studies, I found myself unexpectedly charged with varied and multiplied duties of the gravest nature, which it would be criminal to overlook or neglect. I was, in consequence, reluctantly forced to give over, for a time, the almost constant and uninterrupted application which the publication of a Scriptural Commentary would almost exclusively demand. I was determined, however, not to lose sight of my original design of publishing a Commentary on the Gospels; any spare time I had on hands from episcopal or missionary duties, I devoted to this study particularly. The reading over voluminous Commentaries involved no small amount of labour, to me by no means distasteful, as well as the sacrifice of other important studies. The following Commentary on St. Matthew and St. Mark is partly the result. The notes which I made on St. Luke, St. John, and the Acts, are not yet arranged for publication. I trust to be able, in a short time, to publish them in a supplemental volume. It is right to inform, at least some of my readers, that the Commentary on St. Matthew almost fully

embraces the two other synoptical Gospels, as they are called, of Mark and Luke. The reader of the Commentary on St. Matthew will be able to perceive that most of the Gospel of St. Luke is included in the Commentary on Matthew and Mark. From St. Matthew's Gospel, St. Luke differs but very little, save as regards the two first chapters in the Gospel of the latter (having reference chiefly to the facts and circumstances connected with the birth and infancy of the Baptist, the birth and infancy of our Blessed Lord), and some few parables not contained in the Gospel of St. Matthew. A large portion of St. John, particularly in what regards our Lord's Passion, has been commented on, by anticipation, in St. Matthew.

The great favour with which the Commentary on the Epistles has been received, as it has already reached a third edition, after having been a considerable time out of print, for want of time to superintend its re-publication, emboldens me to hope, that the Commentary on the Gospels will be received with at least equal favour by the public. It is hoped it may serve to promote the objects for which the Commentary on the Epistles was designed, viz., to furnish the intelligent laity and reading portion of the Catholic community with a thoroughly Catholic exposition, in their own language, of one of the most important portions of the SS. Scriptures—to supply the ecclesiastical student with a compendious treatise from which to draw materials, at a future day, for instructing others, which is by no means the least important of the exalted duties of the sacred ministry—and lastly, to serve as a practical reply to the clumsy calumnies so often refuted, of those who charge the Catholic Church with interdicting, for her own purposes, the reading of the SS. Scriptures, even when such reading is hedged round with the proper safeguards. We cannot meet this stupid charge with a clearer refutation than by adducing the authoritative words of the successor of St. Peter on this subject.—“*Illi enim sunt*

fontes uberrimi qui cuique patere debent ad hauriendam et morum et doctrinæ sanctitatem, depulsis erroribus qui his corruptis temporibus late disseminantur.” “For they (viz., the SS. Scriptures), are the most abundant sources, that ought to be left open to every one, to draw from them purity of morals and doctrine, to eradicate the errors which are widely disseminated in these corrupt times.” (See letter of Pius VI. to Martini, prefixed to Martini’s Bible.)

But does not this charge, with which our ears are every day assailed, come with good grace from men who, themselves enjoying singular advantages, have never produced anything in elucidation of the SS. Scriptures, unless it be an occasional indecent article or empty placard, abusive of every attempt on the part of Catholics to supply an acknowledged want? It is not for me to say why the sons of the Irish Establishment are so barren of Scriptural knowledge. But while the fact cannot be gainsaid, that a word of abuse of those who differ from us in religion is never uttered, or permitted to be uttered, from Catholic altar or pulpit in this country, those men who accuse the Catholic Church of withholding the Bible from the people, in many instances, “fulfil the law,” by the unmeaning abuse of Catholic doctrine and practices, blaspheming what they understand not, and charitably substitute the grossest misrepresentation, which costs them but little study, for that ecclesiastical and Scriptural knowledge which some of them are too ignorant of, and many too indolent, to acquire. On this subject I may be permitted to quote the words of an exceedingly learned and voluminous commentator on SS. Scripture—“I believe no Church in the world has done less for the critical study of the Bible than the Irish Establishment. After a diligent search through all the biographical indexes within my reach (see E. G. Horne’s *Introduc.*, last edition, wherein the index is very complete), I cannot find the name of one Irishman, trained and serving in the Anglo-Irish Church, who has

published a comment on even one chapter of the Bible. I do not speak of such men as Bramhall, Bedell, Jeremy Taylor, Jebb,* Mant, Whately, and Trench, educated abroad, and imported here because their services were needed, and Irishmen could not be found to take their places. I speak of the sons of the Irish Establishment, of those brought up under her care, and I say that few, perhaps not even one, of them can be named among biblical interpreters. It is evident that the curse of barrenness has blighted the whole life of the Irish Establishment, from its first planting down to the present hour, when the just sentence is at length heard, ‘Cut it down, therefore, why cumbereth it the ground.’” (Very Rev. D. MacCarthy, D.D., Vice-President and Professor of SS. Scripture, College, Maynooth, 1868.)

In addition to the foregoing reasons, the character of the age on which we have fallen considerably influenced me in publishing a Commentary on the Gospels at the present time. Was it ever more necessary at any period in the history of Christianity than it is at the present day, to place before the world, in as clear a light as possible, an exposition, in accordance with the unerring teachings of the Catholic Church, of the fundamental principles of faith and morals, with which the Son of God came down to enlighten a world which He found sitting in darkness, and in the shadow of death? Does the condition, into which many parts of the world are at this moment relapsing promise to be an improvement on that state of Paganism, in which He found it when He came to proclaim glory to God and peace to men? Has not His spouse and representative, the Catholic Church, with whom He deposited the fulness of truth, and to whom He bequeathed the plenitude of His authority, as fierce a struggle before her, enemies as embittered to encounter, as she had when she was forced to seek shelter for a time in the bowels of the earth, and the Flavian Amphitheatre re-echoed to the savage yells of “Christianos

ad leones.” Are the principles of atheism, materialism, total negation of all future sanction, dimly shadowed forth even in the very fables of Paganism, less deadly or noxious in their consequences, both as regards here and hereafter, than the principles of polytheism she succeeded in utterly extirpating? As regards public authority, was the all-absorbing power of the Pagan rulers more crushing than the iron despotism men would now fain establish, in the most powerful kingdoms, under the specious name of liberty? Liberty—that name, like religion itself, so often injuriously invoked, which can never be found dissociated from the holy influences of God’s Spirit, for, “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there (and there only) is liberty” (2 Cor. 3:17).

Do we not every day see efforts persistently made, and unjustly enforced, even at the certain risk of anarchy, to render to Cæsar not only what belongs to Cæsar, but also to concentrate in him all rights, human and Divine; to constitute him the sole guardian, depositary, and dispenser of what belongs to God; and this, in defiance of all the principles of true liberty, despite solemn treaties, and in violation of all guaranteed rights of conscience? Does not this all-absorbing power of the State, resting solely on brute force, by an unholy league which embraces both hemispheres, unjustly invade and trample under foot the sacred rights of parents, and force them to bring up their children, who were destined to fill up one day those seats vacated by the fallen angels, in schools where the sacred name of God is utterly banished, and their tender minds indoctrinated in the soul-destroying principles of materialism?

What is this but a persistent attempt at the revival of Paganism, making might, or the law of the strongest, the sole standard of right, and the substitution of brute force for the abiding blessings of moral influences? What is it but a rapid approach to that sad state of spiritual decay, of which our Redeemer Himself forewarns us, “Think you,

when the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:8).

As the Son of God came down from heaven not only to be our Redeemer, but our teacher; not only to ransom us with the effusion of His precious blood, but to enlighten us with these saving truths, the knowledge of which, joined to firm and unhesitating faith, He has made an indispensable condition of salvation, it must be over a subject of the deepest spiritual interest to place these truths in as clear a light as possible. Whether the following Commentary may serve to advance this and the other ends referred to, must be left to others to decide.

The Text is from the edition published by Duffy (A.D. 1857) with the sanction and approval of the Archbishops and Bishops of Ireland, and lately published by Gill and Son, with the sanction and approval of his Eminence, the Cardinal Archbishop of Dublin.

The plan is in every respect similar to that adopted in the Exposition of the Epistles (see Preface to), with the exception of the paraphrase. In the Epistles, which might be regarded as so many closely-reasoned doctrinal dissertations on Christian faith and morals, dealing but little with matters of fact, a paraphrase would be well suited to connect the several sentences, and supply the link, sometimes apparently wanting, in the reasoning of the inspired writers. Whereas, in the Gospels, which are, in general, but a narrative of the actions of our Blessed Lord, as well as of His discourses, recorded in a discursive and disconnected form, a paraphrase would seem to be out of place. It is hoped, however, that the reader will find its absence compensated for by a more ample exposition of the meaning of the several words and phrases in the Commentary, and by the tracing of the consecutive course of reasoning in the discourses of our Divine Redeemer, and the connexion of the narrative of the Evangelists, whenever practicable.

It is right to inform the readers of the commentators I have followed, and the authorities whose opinions are found reflected in the following work. These are—Jansenius Gandavensis, Maldonatus, Calmet, A. Lapide, Mauduit, Natalis Alexander, Patrizzi (*Dissertations, &c.*), Barradius, Lucas Burgensis, Jansenius Iprensis, Sylveria, Martini, Kenrick, &c.; and in Mark, in addition to the foregoing, Patrizzi's Commentary on Mark. On doctrinal points—St. Thomas, Bellarmine, Perrone, Primate Dixon, Professor Murray. Among the Fathers—St. Jerome, St. Augustine, and St. Chrysostom, &c. These several authorities I refrain from quoting on each particular point, save occasionally, as by doing so I would be only breaking up the continuity of the work, and rendering it less attractive to the general reader. But I have taken care to advance no opinion or interpretation, the substance of which is not found in one or more of the learned authorities referred to in the preceding catalogue.

I am far from imagining this work to be, in every respect, what it ought to be. For its many defects and shortcomings I must trust to the kind indulgence of the reader.

I have only to say, in conclusion, that it has been my anxious desire to give faithful expression on every point to the teaching and doctrines of the Holy Roman Catholic Church—the infallible depositary of God's revealed truth. She alone is the Apostolic See—the heir of the plenitude of ecclesiastical power, and of the indefectible faith of Peter, whom faith tells us to be the infallible teacher of the universal Church—lambs and sheep, pastors and people—Divinely appointed to teach and confirm his brethren.

— Fr. JOHN MACEVILLY, D.D.

GALWAY, April 6, 1876.

Preface

ST. MATTHEW, the Evangelist, it is generally supposed, was a Galilean by birth. He followed the profession of publican or tax-gatherer. As a class, the publicans were held in great horror by the Jews, who regarded them as public sinners, on account of their exactions, rapacity, and heartless oppression of the poor. Everywhere in the Gospels, they are referred to by our Divine Redeemer as placed outside the pale of salvation. (See Commentary, p. 167.) St. Matthew held his office or toll-booth at Capharnaum, on the brink of the Lake of Genesareth. His special department was, very probably, the collection of the customs levied on persons and merchandise, that crossed the Lake of Genesareth. It was while he was actually engaged in the duties of his calling, "sitting in the custom-house" (9:9), our Lord, who came to save sinners, called on him to follow Him. St. Matthew at once obeyed the heavenly call. Leaving all, he attached himself inseparably to the service of his Divine Master. Before, however, taking leave of his friends, and all he held most dear in this world, probably during the interval allowed him to put his worldly affairs in order, he gave our Lord and His disciples a banquet, at his house, to which his former associates flocked in great numbers (9:10). From this, the Pharisees took occasion to indulge in their usual carping malignity, in regard to the actions of our Divine Redeemer. But He, on hearing of it, reduces them to silence, and assigns several reasons in justification of His con-

duct. St. Matthew, also, bore the name of Levi (Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27). Mark calls him "Levi, the son of Alpheus." Whence, some modern critics hold that Matthew and Levi were two different persons. But, the common opinion is, that he had both names—a thing by no means uncommon among the Jews. Thus, we have, Simon Peter, John Mark, Paul called Saul, &c. The identity of circumstances recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, both as to time, place, occupation, &c., places the identity of Matthew and Levi beyond all reasonable doubt. It is utterly improbable, and hardly tenable, that two publicans would be called by our Lord, in the same words, at the same time and place, one of whom would become an Apostle, and the other utterly unheard of afterwards.

It is given as a proof of the great humility of the Evangelist, that while Mark and Luke, out of consideration for his feelings, call him "Levi," a name less known in connexion with his former odious course of life; and while they mention him as the host of our Divine Redeemer, he himself speaks of himself as Matthew, the publican, and omits all reference to himself as the privileged host of our Divine Lord.

We have no further allusion to St. Matthew in the Gospel. From tradition, we learn that he preached for some years after our Lord's Ascension, in Judea and the neighbouring countries (Eusebius, St. Epiphanius), that after the dispersion of the Apostles, he went to preach the Gospel, some say, to Persia (St. Paulinus); others, to Parthia (St. Ambrose); others, to Ethiopia (Ruffinus and Socrates). As regards his end, whether he died a natural death, or received the crown of martyrdom, on those points, nothing can be determined for certain.

HIS GOSPEL.—There never has been any diversity of opinion regarding the authenticity of this Gospel, among writers, ancient or modern, all of whom ascribe it to St. Matthew, if, perhaps, we except Faustus, the Manichean refuted by St. Augustine (*Lib. contra*

Faustum). It has also been universally agreed upon, as we learn from Eusebius (Lib. iii., Hist. c. 24), that it was written in Judea, at the earnest request of the converted Jews of Palestine, and at the instance of the other Apostles, before their dispersion, in order that an enduring record of what St. Matthew preached might be preserved, and to supply his personal absence before he went to preach elsewhere. Upon this point, the greatest unanimity prevails among ancient and modern writers. Nor are intrinsic arguments, in proof of this, wanting, derived from the Gospel itself. Everywhere, it abounds with allusions to Jewish customs and usages general and particular, laws, localities, &c., with which the Jews were thoroughly acquainted; also with Hebrew, or rather Syro-Chaldaic words and phrases left unexplained, because well known to his readers; whereas, these same laws, usages, phrases, localities, are explained by the other Evangelists, whose Gospels were intended for a different class of readers, for whom such explanations were necessary.

We have, moreover, frequent prophetic quotations, without the prophet being named, "*Sicut dictum est per Prophetam*," the prophet quoted being, in each instance, well known to those for whom the Gospel was intended.

LANGUAGE OF.—There is hardly any other historical fact, regarding which such unanimity of opinion prevails among the earliest ecclesiastical writers, as that St. Matthew wrote his Gospel originally in Hebrew, or rather Syro-Chaldaic, the vernacular of Judea at the time. During the period of seventy years' captivity at Babylon, the use of the ancient Hebrew had ceased; and after their return, the Jews brought back with them the Chaldaic or Aramaic language. With this they mixed up some Hebrew words. The language commonly in use since their return from captivity till the utter destruction of the Jews, was this language, chiefly composed of the Chaldaic, and partly of

the Hebrew; hence, termed Syro-Chaldaic. That this was the language in which St. Matthew wrote his Gospel, is attested by Papias, whose veracity in reference to this fact, as well as his sources of knowledge, are unquestionable (Iræneus, *Hœeres.* III, 21); Iræneus (Euseb. *Hist. Eccles.* V, verse 8). Pantenus, who, St. Jerome informs us, brought back from Judea, where he went to preach the Gospel, the Hebrew copy of the Gospel of St. Matthew, left there by St. Bartholomew, Apostle (de *Viris Ill.* 36); Origen (apud Euseb. *H. E.* vi. 25); St. Epiphanius (*Her.* xxix. 9); St. Jerome, &c., &c.

Having written his Gospel for the use of the converted Jews of Palestine, can it be supposed St. Matthew would employ any other than the language most dear to them, to which they were wedded by so many ties of nationality? (See Acts 22:2).

Would the Ebionites and Nazareans have attempted to assert that their own Apocryphal Hebrew Gospel was the primitive text of St. Matthew, if the persuasion did not prevail generally at the time, that St. Matthew wrote in Hebrew? The first objection against this opinion, on the ground that certain Syro-Chaldaic words are explained, proves nothing, as these words probably were explained by the Greek interpreter. Moreover, the author himself might have explained certain remarkable compound words in a simpler form. If the argument proved anything, it would equally militate against the Hebrew origin of the Books of Genesis 31:18; Exodus 12:2; 1 Kings 17:42, &c., where a similar explanation of certain remarkable words is given.

2ndly. It is objected that the quotations are from the Septuagint of the Old Testament. But most of the quotations are only according to the sense of the passages quoted, and this approaches nearer the original Hebrew than the Septuagint.

3rdly. The phraseology in Mark, who confessedly wrote in Greek, is almost identical in many places with St. Matthew.

But, all that would follow from this is, that it was the Greek translator of Matthew that employed certain forms of expression, which were afterwards adopted by Mark.

Although St. Matthew originally wrote in Syro-Chaldaic, it is quite certain, that his Gospel appeared in Greek, at a very early period, and was in common use in the second century. Some maintain that this early Greek copy was an original, emanating from St. Matthew himself, and written by him for the use of the Hellenistic Jews, and the Gentiles aggregated to the Church. Others maintain it was but a translation, made under the direction of St. Matthew himself; but by whom made is uncertain. Some say, by St. Paul; others, by St. Luke; others, by St. James, first Bishop of Jerusalem, for the use chiefly of the Hellenistic Jews, subject to his spiritual jurisdiction. But, whether the Greek copy in question, was an original emanating from St. Matthew, or a translation by whomsoever made, under his direction, it was regarded by the Church as inspired and canonical. In course of time, it came into general use throughout the Church. The Fathers, without exception, quoted from it, without any doubt or misgiving whatever, regarding its canonical authority. Owing to the corruptions made in the Hebrew copies by the Ebionite and Nazarean heretics, the Hebrew version ceased to be of any authority whatever. It was according to the Greek that St. Jerome corrected the Vulgate, by the command of Pope Damasus.

What became of the original Hebrew copy of St. Matthew, cannot be known for certain. By some it is held that it perished, with other Jewish records, in the destruction of Jerusalem.

TIME OF.—It is generally admitted that the Gospel of St. Matthew was written first of all the Books of the New Testament. The precise time cannot be ascertained. It is certain some interval elapsed between it and our Lord's death and resurrection. For, St. Matthew

refers to the idle tale regarding our Lord's body having boon stolen by His disciples, as existing up to the time he wrote (28:15); and he speaks of the potter's field purchased with the blood-money flung back by the wretched Judas, being called "Haceldama," up to the time of his writing his Gospel (27:8). Some refer the date of it to the year 41, eight years after our Lord's Ascension. Others, to a later period. It is universally admitted to have been written before any other Book of the New Testament. Hence, justly entitled to the place it occupies, first in our Bibles.

The chief scope and aim which St. Matthew proposes to himself, clearly is to prove that Jesus Christ was the true Messiah promised to the Jews—the Son of David, predicted by the prophets, On this account it is, he quotes more largely from the, Scriptures of the Old Testament in proof of this, than any other of the Evangelists.

Prologue

THE English word, Gospel, is of Saxon origin, derived from the Saxon words, God spell, which signify Good news. Its corresponding word in the Greek, *ευαγγελιον*, in Latin, *Evangelium*, bears the same signification. The word, *ευαγγελιον*, is employed by classical authors to denote sometimes the reward conferred on the bearer of good news; sometimes, the sacrifice offered in thanksgiving for good tidings. In SS. Scripture, it is employed sometimes to denote the entire doctrine of Christ, “*prædicate Evangelium omni creature*” (Mark 16:15), “*qui non obediunt Evangelio, pœnas dabunt, &c.*” (2 Thess. 1:9); sometimes, the preaching of this doctrine, “*Cujus laus est in Evangelio*” (2 Cor. 8:18). Here, it denotes good news, or tidings, the most joyful ever communicated to the human race, embracing the entire economy of Redemption through Christ. By a metonymy, the word signifies the history of that good news. As sanctioned by Ecclesiastical usage, it may be described to be “the history of the coming of Christ on earth, of His Life, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension into Heaven, which history the Catholic Church declares to have been written under the inspiration of God’s Spirit.” The declaration of the Church is the Seal that authenticates the inspired character of this history. Without it St. Augustine would not have received the Gospel. “*Ego Evangelio non crederem nisi me Ecclesiæ Catholicæ commoveret*

auctoritas.” (Lib. Contra. Epist. Manichi quam vocant fundamenti, Tom. viii., c. 5.)

This Gospel is “Holy” in its object and Author, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is holiness itself; in its subject—The life and actions of our Lord; in its end—the sanctification of the world.

It is said to be “according to Matthew,” as recorded by St. Matthew. It by no means implies that a different subject is treated of by all the Evangelists, but only that, while the history of our Lord’s life and actions is given substantially the same by all, the following is the form in which it is recorded by St. Matthew.

It seems nearly certain, and is almost universally admitted, that the titles prefixed in our Bibles to the Gospel, “THE HOLY GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST ACCORDING TO MATTHEW,” or “MARK,” &c., were not written by the Evangelists themselves. For, there is a great difference between the titles given in some versions and editions and those given in others. In some, they are rather short; in others, very long. Their perfect identity of expression in all the Gospels, with the exception of the Evangelist’s name, in each case, would go far to prove the same, as the Evangelists rarely employ identical expressions. Moreover, St. Mark commences his Gospel with the words, “The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God,” which clearly shows he prefixed no other heading, such as is found in our Bibles. It was not customary with Hebrew writers to give a leading title, save in the text itself. No doubt, from the very beginning the Gospel of each Evangelist was authenticated by the Church as the work distinctly bearing the name of each. Hence, amongst the charges brought by Tertullian against Marcion (Lib. 4, Contra Marcion), he accuses him of using a Gospel which did not bear the author’s name.

Chapter I

THE GENEALOGY OF OUR LORD

ANALYSIS

In this chapter the Evangelist gives the pedigree of our Blessed Lord, which he divides into three series, comprising fourteen generations each. The first series commencing with Abraham and ending with David (vv. 1–6), is composed partly of his patriarchal ancestors, but chiefly of those who exercised the office of Judges among the Jewish people. The second commencing with David, who is repeated as the head of this series, and ending with the Babylonish captivity (7–11), embraces our Redeemer's kingly ancestors. The third commencing with the deportation of the people to Babylon, after which all independent kingly authority ceased among the Jews, and ending with our Lord, embraces mostly His ducal ancestors. We have next the history of our Lord's miraculous conception—the Virgin's pregnancy—the perplexity which it occasioned Joseph, from whom the mysterious operation of the Holy Ghost was hitherto kept secret (18–19)—the consoling assurances of the angel sent to dispel his doubts and calm his apprehensions (20–21)—the Prophecy of Isaias relating to this wonderful conception by a virgin (22–23)—the unhesitating obedience of Joseph (24–25).

COMMENTARY

1. "The book." This word in its general acceptation, with the Hebrews, means a writing of any kind. Here, it signifies a narrative or catalogue "of the generation" that, is to say, of the genealogy or ancestors "of Jesus Christ." In this sense it holds the place of Preface or Title to this first chapter. The Hebrew word, *Sepher*, corresponding to the Greek, *Βιβλίος*, denotes any writing or narrative. As Moses speaking of the first Adam says (Genesis 5:1), "This is the book of the generation of Adam," so St. Matthew here employs the same form of language in reference to Christ to convey that He is the second Adam, "the Father of the world to come" (Isaias 9:6); the principle of a second birth more happy and of a more exalted character than that which was derived from the first, who was a type of Christ (Rom. 5:14; 1 Cor. 15) Maldonatus is of opinion that the words form the title of the entire Gospel. According to him "generation" refers not only to the descent, but also to the entire life and actions of Christ as recorded in this Gospel. His opinion is improbable; the words mean, the record or roll of the pedigree of our Lord.

"Of Jesus Christ." "Jesus," derived from a Hebrew word signifying "to save" (see v. 21), is the proper name of the Man-God, and denotes his Person and Divinity. "Christ," derived from a Greek word signifying "to anoint" denotes his office as Prophet, Priest, and King, all of whom were anointed with oil on entering on the peculiar and sacred functions of their office. Our Lord was anointed in virtue of the Hypostatic union, which was a spiritual and essential unction, whereby He was set apart as Prophet, Priest, and King. This was the oil of gladness wherewith He was anointed (Heb. 1:9). In thus referring to the name and office of the Son of God, St. Matthew wishes to arrest the attention of the Jews by conveying to them that he is about

giving the history of their long-expected Messiah, which means the Anointed.

“The Son,” that is, the descendant. The Hebrews designated by the name of “son” every one descended from another, no matter how remotely, in a direct line.

“Of David, the son of Abraham.” Those two are mentioned because to them were made the promise in a special way that Christ would be born of them; of Abraham, as head of the race; of David, as head of the family. David is placed first for brevity sake, otherwise the construction should run thus: “The son of Abraham, who was the father of David, from whom Christ was descended” (St. Jerome). Others assign as a reason for this construction that the promises made to David regarding Christ were more recent, and of a more special character, being made, not alone to the Jewish race, but to the family of David. Hence, the Jewish people, including the very babes and sucklings, everywhere style the Messiah as “the son of David” (Matt. 21:15; John 7:42, &c.), pointing to his royal dignity as heir to the throne of David on which He was to sit for ever, “and the Lord God shall give Him the throne of David, His father, and He shall reign in the house of Jacob for ever, and of His kingdom there shall be no end” (Luke 1:32). Hence the Prophets everywhere speak of our Lord, as Son of David. In truth, the Son of David, was one of the characteristic names of our Lord. (Isa. 9:7; Jer. 23:5; Ezek. 34:23; Amos 9:11). The promise first made to David on this head is recorded (2 Kings 7:12, &c.), confirmed (Psa. 88:13), and renewed to Solomon (3 Kings 9:5). St. Matthew wishes to convey that all these promises were fulfilled in Christ.

“The son of Abraham” may either refer to David, who was the descendant of Abraham, or to Christ, who was the son of David and of Abraham. In this latter construction the conjunction, and, is un-

derstood. To Abraham and David both were made promises regarding Him. The former construction is preferred by many, inasmuch as it followed, as a matter of course, in the minds of all the Jews, that being the son of David, He should also be a son of Abraham.

From the birth of Abraham to that of Christ there elapsed an interval of about 2004 years; and from the death of David to Christ, a period of 1013 years.

St. Matthew studiously traces the genealogy of Christ to Abraham through a successive series of forty-two, with the view of convincing the Jews that He was their true Messiah, whom they should, therefore, honour and worship. In St. Luke, whose Gospel was written for the use of the Gentiles, our Lord's pedigree is traced up to Adam, the father of the whole human race. The Gospel of St. Matthew being written for the Jews, the genealogy commences with Abraham, whom the Jews called their father.

2. "Abraham begot Isaac." Writing for the Jews, St. Matthew commences the genealogy of Christ with Abraham, in whom they gloried as their father, the founder of their race, to whom they were wont to trace up their genealogies. He was, moreover, the first, after Adam, to whom a promise was made that Christ was to be of his seed. St. Luke's Gospel being written for the use of the Gentiles, the pedigree of our Lord is traced up to Adam, the father of the entire human race, "Isaac" alone mentioned out of all the other sons of Abraham, as it was of him Christ was born. But in Isaac shall thy seed be called (Gen. 21:12; Rom. 9:7).

"Judas and his brethren." The brethren of Judas are mentioned, while no similar mention is made of the brethren of Isaac and Jacob; because the Jewish people, whom St. Matthew addresses, were descended from the twelve sons of Jacob, the eleven others as well as Judah, their descendants constituting one and the same people,

of whom Christ was born. These were the twelve pillars of the Jewish people and of the kingdom of Christ.

3. "Of Thamar." It is remarked by commentators that all the women mentioned in the genealogy of our Lord were, with the exception of His Immaculate Mother, publicly subject to reproach. One of them being guilty of adultery—Bethsabee; another of incest—Thamar; another, a harlot—Rahab; and the fourth a Gentile—Ruth. Rahab, too, was a Gentile, a native of Jericho. The reason commonly assigned for this is, that being united to their husbands out of the ordinary way, and owing to an unusual combination of circumstances, these women presented a very expressive type of the sinful Gentiles, who were aggregated to the people and Church of God through a new vocation, after the Jews had been rejected. Other reasons are assigned, viz., that our Lord, having come to save sinners, deigned to have among His ancestors some who were very expressive types of those whom He came to save (St. Jerome). Again, the Evangelist wished to humble the pride of the Jews, by reminding them of the gross sins of their Patriarchs in whom they were wont to glory so much (St. Chrysostom). The first reason seems the more probable. Jacob's incestuous connexion with Thamar is recorded (Gen. 38). "Phares and Zara," being twin brothers, are both mentioned, as presenting in the circumstances of their birth an expressive type of the Jews and Gentiles, the mystery of whose vocation is referred to by the Apostle (Rom. 11:25). The same figure was expressed in the birth of Jacob and Esau; but as this latter did not belong to the people of God, having sold his birthright, and thus a type of the reprobate, all mention of him here was, therefore, omitted by the Evangelist.

4. "Aminadab." Lyranus referring to a Jewish tradition, states that this Aminadab was the leader of the tribe of Juda on the egress of the Hebrews from Egypt; the first also to lead the way and to enter into

the Red Sea, which miraculously opened a passage for the Israelites. To him the words refer (Cant. 6:1)—“My soul troubled me for the chariots of Aminadab.” He was succeeded by his son Naasson, in the desert.

5. “Rahab.” Being one time a harlot, afterwards became converted (Heb. 11:31). She was a native of Jericho. In consequence of her humanity in concealing the Hebrew explorers, she was saved with her whole house and kindred, and associated with the people of God (Josue 6:25).

“Ruth,” a native of Moab. Our blessed Lord, who came to save all, Jews and Gentiles, deigned, in order to inspire all with confidence in His mercy, and with hopes of forgiveness, to count among His ancestors Gentiles as well as Jews; and it is with this view the Holy Ghost moves the Evangelist to record this fact.

“Booz begot Obed.” Some commentators are of opinion that some generations are omitted here, that the Booz referred to here was not the immediate father of Obed, because between Salmon and Jesse inclusively, only four generations existed, and between them a period of 366 years elapsed, too long a period for four generations to extend over. However, this argument proves nothing, the age of man, for several reasons, being then far greater than at any future period. (Natalis Alexander, Calmet, &c.)

“Jesse.” Reference is made to him in the prophecy of Isaias, which regards our Redeemer, “egredietur virga de radice Jesse” (Isa. 11:1). He was also called, Isai. He was not held in any great consideration among the Jews. Hence, Saul scornfully calls David “the son of Isai” (1 Kings 20:27).

6. “David the King”—the first king among the ancestors of Christ. To him was made the promise of a perpetual kingdom. Our Lord’s

Royal dignity is here indicated, as He was heir to “the throne of David his father” (Luke 1:32).

“That had been (the wife) of Urias.” This recalls the memory of David’s sin, and at the same time conveys that God, far from having, in consequence, rescinded His promises to David, had, on the contrary, fulfilled them in her seed, who was his accomplice in guilt. “That had been of Urias” conveys that, having ceased to be Urias’s wife, she was married to David at the time of Solomon’s birth, who was, therefore, the issue of lawful wedlock.

8. “And Joram begot Ozias.” From the history, or rather from all the catalogues of the kings of Juda in succession (1 Par. 3:11, &c.), it is quite certain that three kings who reigned in immediate succession are here passed over by the Evangelist. For, Joram begot Ochozias; Ochozias begot Joas; Joas begot Amasias; who begot Ozias referred to here, also called Azarias. So that Ozias, or Azarias, was not immediately the son, but rather the great grandson of Joram, said to be begotten of him in accordance with the Jewish custom of designating by the name of son even the remote offspring of a man in a direct line, just as Christ is said to be “the son of David and of Abraham.” Why these three generations were passed over is variously accounted for. It surely could not be on account of their great wickedness. Two of them, Joas and Amasias, were reputed good kings; and Solomon and Manasses, who are mentioned in the genealogy, were worse than even Ochozias. The reason generally assigned by commentators following St. Jerome is, that the Evangelist, having in view, for some mysterious reason of his own, to divide the genealogy of our Lord into three classes, consisting of fourteen generations each (v. 17), passed over these three rather than others, on account of the malediction pronounced by God, through the mouth of the prophet Elias, on the house of Achab (3 Kings 21:21; 4 Kings 9:8), viz., that He would utterly destroy his posterity.

Hence, as Joram had married Athalia, the daughter of Achab, his descendants to the fourth generation were expunged by the Evangelist from the catalogue of the ancestors of Christ. Very likely, these names were expunged from the public records St. Matthew had before him. The reason of this omission was, no doubt, understood by those to whom St. Matthew wrote; nor would such omission interfere with the truth of the history. They were not naturally, but civilly, destroyed by such exclusion; just as the tribe of Dan, on account of its wickedness and forbidden commerce with the idolatrous Gentiles, is excluded from the catalogue of the saints numbered out of the tribes of Israel (Apoc. 7:5–8). No more of those lineally descended from Achab are excluded by the Evangelist, as the malediction of God on the children for their parents' crimes does not usually, according to the measure of the Law, extend beyond the fourth generation (Exod. 20:5). Athalia, the mother of Ochozias, is called the daughter of Amri, king of Israel (4 Kings 8:26), although only his grand-daughter, in accordance with the Jewish usage already referred to. From other parts of Scripture it is clear that Joram was married to Achab's daughter (4 Kings 8:18). It was on account of Ochozias being descended from Achab that Jehu slew him (4 Kings 9:27, &c.), in obedience to the Divine command on the subject (4 Kings 9:7). The omission of these three generations does not much affect the design of the Evangelist, which was to show that Christ was descended from David. He would be equally the son of David whether these generations were expressed or omitted.

11. "Josias begot Jechonias and his brethren." This verse presents some difficulties—1st, because of the four sons of Josias mentioned (1 Par. 3:15; 4 Kings 23:30, 31), viz., Johanan, the first-born; the second, Joakim; the third, Sedecias; the fourth, Sellum," there is none called Jechonias; and Jechonias, the father of Salathiel, had no brethren; he had but one brother, Sedecias. There would also seem to be wanting,

as the text stands, some one generation of the thrice fourteen (v. 17), in either the second or third of the series. The question is, in case there be an omission of one generation, to which series, second, or third, is the omission to be referred.

Various solutions have been given by commentators to these difficulties. It is held by many commentators that the "Jechonias" mentioned in the text is the same as Joakim, the second son of Josias, who was appointed king after Joachaz, by Pharaoh Nechao, king of Egypt. (4 Kings 23:34; St. Ambrose, in Lucam; St. Jerome, in Matth.; Irenæus Lib. Hor. iii., &c.) After Josias was slain at Mageddo (4 Kings 24), his son Sellum, reckoned as his fourth son, although Sedecias was younger, mounted the throne immediately under the name of Joachaz, as appears from Jeremiah (22:11), where, writing at the time that Joachim, the successor of Joachaz, was reigning, the Prophet says—"Thus saith the Lord to Sellum, son of Josias, king of Juda, who reigneth instead of his father ... in the place to which I have removed him, there shall he die," &c. Sellum, who went by the name of Joachaz, also, died in Egypt, whither Pharaoh Nechao transported him. (4 Kings 24)

Sellum is placed last, or "the fourth" among the sons of Josias (1 Par. 3:15), on account of the short duration of his reign, which lasted only three months. He was succeeded by Joachim, who reigned eleven years. Joachim was succeeded, though not immediately, by his brother Sedecias, who is reckoned as the "third" son of Josias, although, in point of years, the youngest. That he was younger than Sellum is clear from this, viz., that Sellum was twenty-three years when he began to reign (4 Kings 23:31); and after an interval of more than eleven years, during which the reign of Joachim lasted, Sedecias, on mounting the throne, was only twenty-one years (24:18). That Sellum or Joachaz was also younger than Joachim is also clear, as the latter was twenty-five

years after the deposition of Joachaz, who was only twenty-three years and three months before (23:31). Hence, Joachaz is not to be confounded with Johanan, the first-born of Josias, who, it is generally supposed, either died before his father, or from some cause or other never ascended the throne. The advocates of the exposition now given, say that this Joachim is the Jechonias here referred to by St. Matthew, "Jechonias and his brethren." These expositions supply the omission of one generation, which, it is generally admitted, occurs here, thus; "And Jechonias begot Jechonias, and Jechonias begot Salathiel." So that the Jechonias who is said to have begotten Salathiel in the text (v. 12), is not the son, but the grandson of Josias.

There is, however, no evidence in Scripture that Joakim, the second son of Josias ever bore the name of Jechonias. Hence, Maldonatus rejecting the former solution, hazards a conjecture of his own. Setting out with the general admission, that there has been some error, or rather omission in this passage, arising from the transcription of copyists, he says the omission should be supplied in a manner most in accordance with the truthful catalogue of the ancestors of our Lord given in the Old Testament; and, consequently, he supplies it in this way: "Josias begot Joakim and his brethren, and Joakim begot Joachin, also called Jechonias" (1 Par. 3:16; Jer. 24:1); and Jechonias begot Salathiel (v. 12).

Others adopt different other hypotheses. Patrizzi adopts the opinion of Harduin, who maintains that by the Jechonias first referred to, "Jechonias and his brethren" is meant Johanan, the first-born of Josias, who is supposed by almost all other expositors never to have ascended the throne. It is hard to say which of the suppositions is the more probable solution of the difficulty. As regards the first solution already given, it might be conjectured that as Joachin, the son of Joachim, was called Jechonias, so might Joachim himself have borne the same name

which might be common to both. This, however, is merely conjectural (see v. 17).

There is also much diversity of opinion in explaining in which of the series, second or third, one generation of the thrice fourteen (v. 17) is wanting. Those who hold that it is wanting in the second series, maintain that Jechonias mentioned in v. 12 as father of Salathiel, commences the third series. Hence, the second commencing with Solomon and ending with Josias inclusively, contains only thirteen generations. Those who say it is wanting in the third series, maintain that Jechonias, father of Salathiel, belongs to the second series; and they prefer this arrangement, because, according to their ideas, St. Matthew, in dividing our Redeemer's lineage into thrice fourteen generations, had in view to note the threefold condition of the Jewish people under judges, who chiefly constituted the first series; under kings, who constituted the second; and dukes, who constituted the third. Hence, Jechonias and his brethren, kings of Juda, should be ranked in the second series. But, it may be said in reply, that the three sons of Josias who reigned, were only the mere creatures of the kings of Egypt and Babylon, who made and unmade them at pleasure; and hence they could hardly be said to reign at all. Moreover, all who belong to any one of the three series, need not be necessarily of the same denomination. In the first series, were found men who were not judges, Abraham, Isaac, &c.

Others maintain, that even taking the text as it stands, without supposing any error whatever on the part of copyists, still fourteen generations (the word "generation" meaning the persons, or ancestors of Christ, of whom a catalogue is now given) may be reckoned. Of these expositors some, among whom is Harduin, say that David, who closes the first series, is to be twice repeated, as is indicated in v. 17. For, he is made as much the head of the second series, although closing

the first, as Abraham is of the first; while, as regards the close of the second series, what is repeated is not Jechonias, but “the Babylonish captivity.” Hence Jechonias should be reckoned in the third series. Others say, with St. Augustine (*de cons. Evangel.*) that Jechonias, and not David, should be repeated twice, as ending the second, and commencing the third series, which closes with our Lord.

“In the transmigration of Babylon.” “In” means, about, or, on the eve of, because Josias was dead some years before the Jewish people were carried away captive to Babylon; “transmigration” means carried away captive. There was a threefold transmigration (*Jer.* 52:28–30; *4 Kings* 25); the first, under Joachim, the son of Josias, in the beginning of Nabuchodonosor’s reign; the second, under Joachin, son of Joachim, in the eighteenth year of Nabuchodonosor’s reign; the third, under Sodecias, in the twenty-third year of Nabuchodonosor. This last deportation, which included almost the whole people, was effected by Nabuzardan, the general of Nabuchodonosor.

Patrizzi (*De Genere Christ.* *Dissert.* ix.) maintains that the words, “in the transmigration of Babylon,” are not to be connected with the word “begot,” since Josias was dead before the transmigration or deportation of the Jews to Babylon, which occurred in the reign of his sons; but that there is an ellipsis in the passage, the word *τους* (“those who were”) being omitted. Hence, the words mean, “Josias begot Jechonias and his brethren (those who were), in the transmigration of Babylon.” The captivity is by no means to be confounded with the transmigration. For, St. Matthew says, “after the transmigration,” which, surely, cannot mean the term of seventy years’ captivity (*Jer.* 25:11; *Dan.* 9:2), since it was during the captivity, and not after it, “Jechonias begot Salathiel,” when the triple deportation of the people to Babylon had been completed. “The transmigration,” or carrying away, which embraces the triple “transmigration,” is referred to as a

remarkable epoch in Jewish history to close the second series with. Under the sons of Josias, the carrying away began and was completed. Not so the period of captivity embracing seventy years, during which some of those belonging to the third series were born.

12. "After the transmigration of Babylon" was completed, and during the seventy years' captivity, or of their detention at Babylon.

"Jechonias begot Salathiel." This, most likely, happened after the death of Nabuchodonosor, when his son, Evilmerodach, ascending the throne, brought forth Jechonias from prison and bestowed on him kingly honours (4 Kings 25:27; Jer. 52:31). Had he a son at the time of his captivity, Nabuchodonosor would have appointed this son, rather than his uncle, Sedecias, to succeed him on the throne. It was, therefore, during the captivity he begot Salathiel. The curse of sterility pronounced by God against Jechonias (Jer. 22:30) had only reference to the exclusion of his children from "the throne of David" (Jer. 22:30). For, reference is made in v. 28 to his seed, who "would be cast on a land they knew not." While after his captivity his uncle, Sedecias, reigned in his stead, none of his sons, Salathiel and Asir (1 Par. 3:17) ever saw the land of Juda. Under Zorobabel, his grandson, the Jews returned to their country.

The promise regarding our Lord sitting on the throne of David had reference only to His spiritual kingdom, of which there was to be no end.

"Salathiel begot Zorobabel." In 1 Par. (3:19) it is said, "Of Phadaia were born Zorobabel and Semei." It is most probable that the Zorobabel spoken of by St. Matthew is a different person altogether from him of whom there is mention in Paralipomenon. For, the list of the posterity of both is quite different in St. Matthew and Paralipomenon. St. Matthew describes Abiud as the son of Zorobabel; in Paralipomenon, there is no mention whatever of him. Hence, there

is no contradiction between St. Matthew and Paralipomenon; since in the catalogue furnished by the writer in this latter book there is no mention whatsoever made of the sons of Zorobabel, Abiud or Reza, spoken of in the catalogue of St. Matthew here and Luke (c. 3:27).

16. "Who is called," which, by a Hebrew idiom, signifies, who is in reality "Christ," that is, the Anointed, or the Messiah. As an exposition of the interpretations and hypotheses advanced for the purpose of explaining the apparent discrepancies between the genealogies of our Lord given here by St. Matthew and by Luke (c. 3:23–38), might render inconveniently diffusive the commentary on this chapter, already sufficiently protracted on other points, we shall content ourselves here with merely noting the chief interpretations on this subject, reserving a fuller exposition for the commentary on Luke, c. 3. It may not be amiss here to observe, that whatever may be the difficulties to be found in any of the leading opinions at this remote period of time (and they are very great, whichever hypothesis we adopt), a strong extrinsic proof of the genuineness of both genealogies is found in the fact, that the genealogies of Matthew and Luke have never been objected to by the Jews of their day, whether believers or unbelievers, who had every opportunity of knowing the state of the case, and many of whom would gladly charge the Evangelists with inaccuracy or inconsistency, if such really existed. And this proof is the more convincing, if it be borne in mind, that the Jews were always remarkable for paying the greatest attention to genealogies, particularly where there was question of direct descent from the most illustrious of their ancestors; and moreover, that they would naturally watch with jealous care, that no mistake should occur, and no false allegation be allowed to pass unchallenged, in the case of the ancestors of the Messiah especially, and of His descent from David, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham, to whom the promises regarding Him were made. Notwithstanding this strong

extrinsic argument, there have not been wanting at all periods of the Church, from Celsus, in the second century, to Strauss in our own day, enemies of the Christian name, to urge the inaccuracy or inconsistency of the two genealogies, as an objection to the veracity or inspiration of the New Testament. If it were not a matter perfectly certain at the time, that by tracing the genealogy of Joseph, St. Matthew at the same time gave the genealogy of the Blessed Virgin, the Jews, for whom he wrote, and who had before them the genealogical tables, since lost, which would clearly show Joseph and Mary to be of the same tribe and closely united in the same family, would certainly have urged as an objection that he promised to give the genealogy of Jesus Christ, from Abraham and David, and only gave that of Joseph, whom, in the very passage, he declares not to be the father of Jesus Christ. This would clearly show Joseph and Mary to be of the same tribe and family, and that by giving the genealogy of Joseph, the Evangelist gave that of Mary also, the only earthly parent of Jesus Christ. The Evangelist's reason for giving the genealogy of Joseph, rather than that of Mary, is found in the fact, that it was not usual among the Jews to trace genealogies through the female line (St. Jerome). Even in the case of Judith, it is given through the male line (Judith 8:1), and St. Matthew writing for the Jews would naturally conform to their custom. Moreover, among the Jews, the genealogy of the mother was not considered the true one, but only that of the father. Now, St. Joseph passed externally for the father of Jesus Christ; and if Joseph was not shown to be of the house of David, the unbelieving Jews (for St. Matthew wrote for the Jewish people, believers and unbelievers) would regard the account of our Saviour's miraculous conception, as a mere fabrication, and would maintain that Christ was not descended from David, and, therefore, had no claims to be considered the promised Messiah. Now, the above probable hypothesis, which explains the reticence of the Jews, utterly

unaccountable, save in the supposition, that by giving the pedigree of Joseph, St. Matthew gave that of Mary also, receives confirmation from the fact that the Blessed Virgin would appear to have no brothers. For, neither in tradition nor in SS. Scripture do we find mention of any such near connexions of our Lord, as we should naturally expect if they existed, the more so, as we have reference made to the immediate female relative of the Blessed Virgin (John 19:25). This again leads us to believe that the Blessed Virgin was an heiress; for, contrary to what was customary in the case of women, she went to Bethlehem with St. Joseph to be registered (Luke 2:5). She must, therefore, have an inheritance, and should, consequently, in accordance with the Jewish law, (Num. 36:8) marry a kinsman, in order that the inheritance should not pass out of the tribe or family. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin must, therefore, be of the same family; and by giving the genealogy of St. Joseph, St. Matthew gives that of the Blessed Virgin also.

The difficulty, however, still remains, regarding the two genealogies, between which there are but few points of agreement. One traces our Lord's descent downwards from Abraham; the other, upwards to Adam. The number of generations in St. Luke is 77; in St. Matthew, 42. They are even far greater in the former than in the latter from the point of contact in David. The one mentions Jacob, as the father of Joseph; the other Heli, &c., &c. Both would seem to give the genealogy of Joseph; but as this could not by any means regard natural descent; hence, various interpretations are advanced to reconcile their apparent discrepancy. There are two leading interpretations, considered the most probable. According to the first, St. Matthew gives the natural genealogy of St. Joseph; St. Luke, that of the Blessed Virgin. In this interpretation, when St. Luke speaks of Joseph as the son of Heli (τοῦ Ἠελί), he means the son-in-law, married to the Blessed Virgin, the daughter of Heli, who must, therefore, be identified with Joachim,

whom tradition represents as the father of the Blessed Virgin. This would easily account for the difference of numbers of generations in both. This interpretation, however, has against it, its novelty; it was unknown until the fifteenth century, and whatever may be said in regard to a few of the Fathers cited in favour of it (Irenæus, Origen, Tertullian, and Athanasius), it cannot be questioned that the weight of authority is in favour of the leading interpretation to be referred to, in the second place. It moreover traces our Lord's pedigree to Nathan, and not to Solomon, to whose family the promises were made (2 Kings 7:12–16). Again, the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph being most probably nearly related by the father's side (since the Evangelist could not attain his object with the Jews in giving any other than the paternal genealogy), they would surely coincide before reaching the third or fourth generation, and it is hard to conceive how so wide a divergence as that given in the gospels could exist between them. Again, the grammatical construction in St. Luke's Gospel would be fatal to this interpretation, and the insertion of a parenthesis, besides being arbitrary and dangerous in principle, when there is question of interpreting the Word of God, would not much mend matters. Finally, the Virgin's name is not at all introduced by St. Luke, who professes to give the genealogy of our Lord through St. Joseph.

In the second interpretation, it is maintained that in both Matthew and Luke we have the genealogy of St. Joseph—as, indeed, the words of the text itself expressly state—in the former, his natural; in the latter, his legal genealogy. This legal relationship arose under the Levirate law, resulting from a peculiar enactment of the law of Moses (Deut. 25:5) “When brethren dwell together, and one of them dieth without children ... his brother shall take her and raise up seed to his brother: and the first son he shall have of her, he shall call by his name, that his name be not abolished out of Israel.” The application of

this law to the case of Joseph is founded on the authority of Julius Africanus, who lived in the third century, and says he had it from the relations of our Lord himself. His statement is this: Estha, the mother of Heli and Jacob, was married successively to Mathan and Melchi; of the former, she begat Jacob; of the latter, Heli. Jacob and Heli were, therefore, uterine brothers, having the same mother, but not the same father (Eusebius Hist. Eccles. Lib. 7). Now, Heli having died childless, Jacob married his widow, and had for issue, Joseph, who was the natural son of Jacob, but the legal son of Heli. As Mathan and Melchi, to whom Estha was successively married, need not be at all related, it is no wonder that the two genealogies branch off very divergently without meeting again save in Zorobabel and Salathiel, till they reach David, through Solomon on the one side, and Nathan on the other. This interpretation is commonly adopted by the Fathers. As both genealogies, the natural and legal, were regarded of the greatest importance among the Jews, it is no wonder the Evangelists give both. The interpretation of Africanus, however, as it stands, unless there be some error in transcription by copyists, does not well accord with the text of St. Luke, in which Heli is given, not as son of Melchi, who is two generations in advance, but of Mathat. But be the difficulties in removing the discrepancies in both genealogies what they may, at this remote period, the Jews, who had the best means of knowing accurately the date of the case, saw none; otherwise, they would have at once objected, which is a clear proof that no such discrepancy really existed.

17. If we begin by counting Abraham, and end with Christ, we have but 41 generations; hence, apparently, a name must be repeated or supplied to make up the three fourteens, or 42. By putting David at the end of the first series and beginning of the second, we shall have: Abraham, 1—David, 14; David, 1—Josias, 14; Jechonias, 1—Christ,

14. The repetition of David's name is suggested by the Evangelist himself: "From Abraham to David ... From David to the transmigration," &c., making David the head of the second fourteen, and therefore to be counted as much as Abraham is of the first. There were in reality more than three fourteens, but for some mysterious reason of his own, St. Matthew, who omitted some generations (see v. 8), wishes to divide the entire into three fourteens, according to the catalogue of names expressed by himself. Many Catholic and Protestant writers, and among the rest Harduin, who is a great authority in chronological matters, adopt this mode of computation. If we suppose a generation omitted, then a different division is made: Abraham, 1—David 14; Solomon, 1—Joachim, 14; Jechonias, 1—Christ, 14.

18. "Now, the generation of Christ was this." After having shown that our Lord was of the seed of David, the Evangelist, to prevent any misconception regarding the manner of His birth, to which the mention of Joseph, as husband of Mary, and the seed born of her might give rise, now proceeds to show that His birth took place in a way quite different from that of all other children. The Greek word for "generation," *ἡ γενεσις*, means "the birth," hence the words mean, "the birth of Christ took place in the following now and unheard of manner."

"Espoused," is generally understood by the Fathers to mean, married, delivered over to him as wife to a husband, and not merely engaged. He is called her "husband" (vv. 16–19), and she his "wife" (v. 20). The Greek word bears the signification of being married (Luke 2:5). It is, moreover, observed that if the Blessed Virgin was merely engaged to Joseph, and exhibited signs of pregnancy while living apart in her father's house, the Almighty would have hardly sufficiently consulted, humanly speaking, for her character or life which, in these circumstances, would be forfeited to the law, and this is commonly

assigned as one of the chief reasons why the Blessed Virgin was engaged in marriage at all. Patrizzi, however (Lib. iii., Disser. xv. de Som. Joseph), maintains, that at the time of his dream (v. 20) Joseph was not married, but only betrothed to the Blessed Virgin. His reasons are:—

1. If married, Joseph would surely have accompanied her on her visit to St. Elizabeth immediately after conceiving the Son of God (Luke 1:39), and have known the mystery of her miraculous conception so loudly proclaimed by Elizabeth (Luke 1:43).

2. He interprets “took unto him,” he now took as his wife her to whom he was before only espoused. For, “doing as the Angel commanded” (v. 24) would, according to him, imply some course of action different from merely passively allowing her to remain in his house.

3. The Greek word *μνηστευθεισης* signifies espousals, as contradistinguished from *ελαβε*, married, as appears from Deut. 20:7. St. Jerome also says of Joseph, “*Omnia futuræ uxoris noverat*” (Comment. in hunc locum). St. Chrysostom (in Matt. Hom. iv. 82) would seem to be of the same opinion.

According to Jewish usage (Philo de specialibus legibus, p. 788), those espoused were regarded as man and wife; hence, Joseph is called “the husband of Mary,” and this St. Jerome tells us (in Matt. c. 1) is in accordance with Scriptural usage, and hence, whosoever violated another’s spouse was regarded as an adulterer (Deut. 22:24) and punished as such.

As for consulting for the honour of the Virgin by means of marriage, it would not be regarded as a dishonour for a woman to have conceived of her espoused before marriage. Intercourse between them, although forbidden, was not regarded as entailing dishonour. (Selden *Uxor. Heb.*) Espousals were dissolved by a bill of divorce like marriage (Deut. 24:13; Patrizzi loco citato).

“Before they came together,” a modest expression for conjugal intercourse. “Before,” until, by no means implies carnal intercourse, afterwards; for, as St. Jerome clearly demonstrates from several Scriptural examples against the heretic Helvidius and others, such words as, before, until, &c., convey what happened or took place before an event, but by no means signifies what happened afterwards. That point is left undetermined. Thus, “Sit on my right until” I make Thy enemies Thy footstool (Psa. 109) by no means conveys that He ceased to sit at His father’s right hand afterwards. “The raven did not return to the Ark till the waters were dried up upon the earth” (Gen. 8:7). This does not imply that it returned afterwards.

“She was found with child” quite unexpectedly by Joseph, who, with all a husband’s care, observed the condition of his blessed spouse. Probably he observed it when she was advanced three months in her pregnancy, after her return from visiting Elizabeth.

“Of the Holy Ghost.” These words are not to be connected with “was found,” as if Joseph knew the meaning or cause of her pregnancy, the contrary appears from the Angel dissipating his fears (v. 20); but with the words, “with child,” as if to say of her pregnancy, the Spirit of God, the source of all grace and holiness, was the author who brought this about by His power and operation, not as the father of Jesus Christ, but as supplying the place of father. Although the conception of Christ was an act of the entire Trinity, still, being an act of sovereign goodness, grace, love and fecundity, it is, by appropriation, ascribed to the Holy Ghost, as the effects of power are attributed to God the Father, and acts of wisdom to God the Son.

To the several reasons commonly assigned why our Lord had chosen to be born of a married woman, St. Ignatius, martyr, adds another, viz., *ut partus ejus celaretur a Diabolo*, that the devil would be baffled, while thinking Him to be born in the ordinary way. Upon this

idea, St. Bernard (Hom. 2, N. 3) on the words, “missus est,” enlarges considerably, and shows that while God might have accomplished the work of redemption in whatever way He thought proper, still, in order to show how far He exceeded the demon in wisdom, He wished that the same instrumentality and course of action should be employed in man’s redemption that had so successfully accomplished his fall. In the one case, the devil tempted the woman, and through her triumphed over the man; in the other, the woman would deceive the serpent in miraculously bringing forth a son, the mystery of which was concealed from the devil, so that her son, Christ Jesus, would triumph over him publicly, and destroy his empire.

19. The Virgin’s conception is evidenced by the testimony of Joseph, to whom it caused such perplexity, and of the Angel by whom this perplexity was removed. Both are here adduced as unexceptionable witnesses of this miraculous occurrence.

“A just man.” If he were “a just man,” and therefore observant of the law in all things, should he not expose her, as prescribed (Num. 5:12)? And, moreover, are not those who are conscious of another’s sin commanded to bear witness against him (Lev. 5:1)? The jealous husband who suspects his wife’s fidelity, is allowed in Num. 5:12 to bring her before the priest, but not bound to do so. And as regards Leviticus, it is only when interpellated by the judge, one is bound to expose another’s sin of which he is conscious.

Apart, however, from these answers, the observation does not apply at all here, inasmuch as the word “just” does not refer here to the mere virtue of justice generally regarded as one of the four cardinal virtues; but, it means the aggregate of all virtues including goodness, benevolence, meekness, &c., with which holy Joseph was eminently endowed; and it was because he was thus charitable, meek, and considerate, that he did not wish to expose her publicly, to make a public example of

scorn of her, as the Greek word (δειγματισαι) clearly means, but he wished "to put her away privately," probably by giving her privately a bill of divorce, which he was not bound to give publicly, nor explain the causes of giving it. Others think he meditated leaving her and going into some distant country. It is quite clear that Joseph, whose virtue was tried in an extraordinary way on this occasion, strongly suspected the Virgin, the signs of whose pregnancy were beyond doubt, and with whom he had not cohabited, to be guilty of adultery. Yet still, knowing her great virtue, he was inspired by Jesus Christ himself, whom she bore in her sacred womb, with the prudence of adopting the wise course of parting with her. He would thus consult for himself, and avoid the imputation of sanctioning crime by living with a suspected adulteress, and of carrying patience to the excessively foolish extent of permitting the supposed offspring of sin to be attributed to him. He purposed doing so "privately" to consult for her character.

20. "Thought" had been anxiously revolving these things within himself during his waking hours, without coming to any determinate resolution. From this appears the prudence of Joseph, who acted neither rashly nor without reflection; and his meekness and secrecy, by not divulging his suspicions to any one, not even to the Virgin herself.

"Behold" arrests attention, the matter being a subject of admiration.

"The Angel of the Lord," generally supposed to be Gabriel, the same who announced the mystery of the Incarnation.

"In sleep." Whenever the Almighty deigns to manifest His will through dreams, He allows no doubt to exist regarding the reality and divine origin of His communications, as in the case of Abimelech, Pharaoh, Nabuchodonosor. Whenever clear, certain proofs of divine communication do not exist, then the observance of dreams, which come either from natural causes or the demon, is strictly prohibited

(Deut. 18:10). God made known His will to Joseph on this occasion. Indeed, by disclosing to him the private thoughts which God alone, the searcher of hearts, could know, He sufficiently indicated the divine character of the communication.

“Joseph.” The Angel addresses him in a kind, consoling manner, because his suspicion, so far as he was concerned, seemed well founded.

“Son of David,” reminds Joseph of the promises regarding the birth of the Messiah, from the family of David; and thus prepares him for the revelation regarding the conception of our Lord, which he was about to disclose.

“Fear not,” as if you were fostering an adulteress.

“To take unto thee,” to retain in your house and live with her whom thou hast already repudiated in thy mind, and banish all thoughts of either dismissing or leaving her.

“Mary thy wife,” who has been faithful to thee and perfectly sinless.

“Conceived.” The Greek word, *γεννηθὲν*, means “born,” to denote that our Lord was perfectly formed, that all His members and faculties were matured from the first moment of His conception in His mother’s womb.

“Is of the Holy Ghost,” that is, brought about by no human intervention, but by the power and operation of the Holy Ghost; while the word “conceived” shows that the Blessed Virgin had, according to the order of nature, performed the part of mother in conceiving our Lord, the words, “is of the Holy Ghost,” show that, by a stupendous miracle, in the order of nature, the Holy Ghost had, by His divine operation, supplied the place occupied by a father in the natural order, without, at the same time, being the father of our Lord, since the human nature of Christ received none of the substance of the Holy Ghost, so as to establish, as in the natural order, the relation of paternity.

21. "Bring forth a son." Having assured Joseph of the supernatural conception of her offspring, the Angel now tells him what that offspring is. "Shall bring forth," as a true mother. From this is refuted the error of Valentinus and others who asserted that our Lord brought a body with Him from heaven, and did not take flesh in the Virgin's womb.

"A son," and not a daughter. He does not say, as was said to Zachary, "she shall bring forth a son to thee," because it was not for Joseph, but for the entire world, our Lord was brought forth, "parvulus natus est NOBIS," &c. (Isa. 9:6).

"And thou shalt call his name Jesus." Joseph is reminded in these words, of the care he is to bestow on the infant, of whom, although not the father, he is still constituted the natural guardian and foster-father, and also on the mother, on whom, far from sending her away, he should bestow all possible care and attention.

"Jesus." This is the proper name of the Son of God, brought down from heaven by the Angel, and bestowed on Him at circumcision. It signifies Saviour, the same as the Hebrew word Jesuah, with a slight change of termination, which is derived, according to some, from the Hebrew verb Jasah, to save, or according to others, from the word Jehosuah, of which it is a contraction—compounded of Jehovah, Lord, and suah, salvation, contracted Jesuah, the Lord Saviour. This is the etymological reason of the word assigned by the Angel himself, "for He shall save His people from their sins." The corresponding Hebrew word is sometimes written Jehosuah, and sometimes, particularly in books written since the Babylonish captivity (as in Esdras 2:2; Nehemias 7:7), in a contracted or shorter form, Jesuah, and this latter is the form preserved in the inscription of our Saviour's cross in the Church of the Holy Cross, Rome. In every instance the Septuagint interpreters render Jehosuah, Jesus; and so do Philo and Josephus.

In the Vulgate it is always rendered Josue, by St. Jerome. In the Old Testament, we sometimes find the same persons called Jehosuah and Jesuah, which proves both terms to be identical. Thus, for instance, the High Priest, the son of Josedec, called Jehoscuah (Aggeus 1:1; Zach. 3:8), is called Jesuah (1 Esdras 5:2; 2 Esdras, or Nehemias 12:26). It was by no means unusual with the Jews to contract and shorten words, as in the case of Jehosuah into Jesuah. In the New Testament, we find the word Jesus—the proper name of the Incarnate Son of God—applied to Josue, the son of Nun (Acts 11:4, 5; Heb. 4:8). He was a distinguished type of Him who was pre-eminently entitled to the appellation of “Saviour,” not of one people alone, but of all peoples, from every tribe of the earth, embracing Jew and Gentile.

22. “Now, all this was done.” Some interpreters, among whom are St. Chrysostom, Irenæus, &c., say those words were spoken by the Angel, and form a continuation of his discourse to Joseph (vv. 20, 21). All this mysterious silence on the part of the Virgin, which caused you such perplexity, or rather, this mysterious pregnancy itself on the part of your virgin spouse, Mary, without human intervention, the cause of this perplexity, took place, &c. The generality of commentators, however, say they are the words of St. Matthew, explaining the foregoing words, and adducing the testimony of the Prophet as an additional argument corroborative of the testimony of the Angel. For, with the Jews, whom St. Matthew addressed, the fulfilment of this remarkable, well-known prophecy of Isaias would carry great weight. Patrizzi (*De Evang. Lib. iii., Dissert. xv.*) advocates the former opinion, chiefly on the grounds—1st, that if “all this” were the words of St. Matthew, they would embrace the message of the Angel to Joseph, which certainly did not take place, in order that the prophecy might be fulfilled. 2ndly. That if these were not the Angel’s words, he would not have sufficiently instructed Joseph as to the divine and supernatural origin

of the child of the Virgin's womb, while the words of the Prophet would have effectually done this. 3rd. The Gospel narrative of what Joseph did (v. 24) would seem to convey that he did it at the close of the Angel's address, and that, therefore, the words of this verse and of v. 23 were comprised in it.

"That the word might be fulfilled." The particle "that," when there is question of the fulfilment of a prophecy, does not precisely express the cause, as if to say, the cause of the event taking place was in order that the prophecy might be fulfilled, since the event to take place was prior, in the mind of God, to the issuing of the prophecy. For, the prophecy was made, because the event it regarded was to take place. It means the consequence, so that, the consequence of all this was the verification of the prophecy. However, while generally denoting the consequence, it might be said here, in some sense, to indicate the cause also. For, among the causes of the conception of Christ by a virgin, was the verification of the promises made by God to the Fathers, which promises were contained in the SS. Scriptures. It may be said to refer to a cause, and to a consequence, at the same time. For, He who issued the prophecy, because He determined on bringing about the event, accomplished the event, because He predicted it, in order to vindicate His veracity, a prophecy, being a kind of promise which a man of veracity fulfils, because He made it.

23. "Behold" arrests attention when a matter of great importance is in question. "A virgin shall be with child," &c. This celebrated prophecy is found in Isa. 7:14. It was uttered on the occasion of the second expedition of Rasin, king of Syria, and of Phacee, king of Israel, to destroy the kingdom of Juda, over which Achaz then reigned, and of the whole race of David (Isa. 7:6). Achaz with his people were seized with the greatest consternation, owing to the combination of these hostile forces against him. The Prophet was commanded by God to