



Paragraph 2. "CONCEIVED BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY"

I. CONCEIVED BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. . .

484 The Annunciation to Mary inaugurates "the fullness of time",¹¹⁹ The time of the fulfilment of God's promises and preparations. Mary was invited to conceive him in whom the "whole fullness of deity" would dwell "bodily".¹²⁰The divine response to her question, "How can this be, since I know not man?", was given by the power of the Spirit: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you."¹²¹

485 The mission of the Holy Spirit is always conjoined and ordered to that of the Son.¹²² The Holy Spirit, "the Lord, the giver of Life", is sent to sanctify the womb of the Virgin Mary and divinely fecundate it, causing her to conceive the eternal Son of the Father in a humanity drawn from her own.

486 The Father's only Son, conceived as man in the womb of the Virgin Mary, is "Christ", that is to say, anointed by the Holy Spirit, from the beginning of his human existence, though the manifestation of this fact takes place only progressively: to the shepherds, to the magi, to John the Baptist, to the disciples.¹²³ Thus the whole life of Jesus Christ will make manifest "how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power."¹²⁴

II.... BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY

487 What the Catholic faith believes about Mary is based on what it believes about Christ, and what it teaches about Mary illumines in turn its faith in Christ.

Mary's predestination

488 "God sent forth his Son", but to prepare a body for him,¹²⁵ he wanted the free co-operation of a creature. For this, from all eternity God chose for the mother of his Son a daughter of Israel, a young Jewish woman of Nazareth in Galilee, "a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the

virgin's name was Mary":126

The Father of mercies willed that the Incarnation should be preceded by assent on the part of the predestined mother, so that just as a woman had a share in the coming of death, so also should a woman contribute to the coming of life.¹²⁷

489 Throughout the Old Covenant the mission of many holy women prepared for that of Mary. At the very beginning there was Eve; despite her disobedience, she receives the promise of a posterity that will be victorious over the evil one, as well as the promise that she will be the mother of all the living.¹²⁸ By virtue of this promise, Sarah conceives a son in spite of her old age.¹²⁹ Against all human expectation God chooses those who were considered powerless and weak to show forth his faithfulness to his promises: Hannah, the mother of Samuel; Deborah; Ruth; Judith and Esther; and many other women.¹³⁰ Mary "stands out among the poor and humble of the Lord, who confidently hope for and receive salvation from him. After a long period of waiting the times are fulfilled in her, the exalted Daughter of Sion, and the new plan of salvation is established."¹³¹

The Immaculate Conception

490 To become the mother of the Saviour, Mary "was enriched by God with gifts appropriate to such a role."¹³² The angel Gabriel at the moment of the annunciation salutes her as "full of grace".¹³³ In fact, in order for Mary to be able to give the free assent of her faith to the announcement of her vocation, it was necessary that she be wholly borne by God's grace.

491 Through the centuries the Church has become ever more aware that Mary, "full of grace" through God,¹³⁴ was redeemed from the moment of her conception. That is what the dogma of the Immaculate Conception confesses, as Pope Pius IX proclaimed in 1854:

The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Saviour of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin.¹³⁵

492 The "splendour of an entirely unique holiness" by which Mary is "enriched from the first instant of her conception" comes wholly from Christ: she is "redeemed, in a more exalted fashion, by reason of the merits of her Son".¹³⁶ The Father blessed Mary more than any other created person "in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" and chose her "in Christ before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before him in love".¹³⁷

493 The Fathers of the Eastern tradition call the Mother of God "the All-Holy" (Panagia), and celebrate her as "free from any stain of sin, as though fashioned by the Holy Spirit and formed as a new creature".¹³⁸ By the grace of God Mary

remained free of every personal sin her whole life long.
"Let it be done to me according to your word. . ."

494 At the announcement that she would give birth to "the Son of the Most High" without knowing man, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Mary responded with the obedience of faith, certain that "with God nothing will be impossible": "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be [done] to me according to your word."¹³⁹ Thus, giving her consent to God's word, Mary becomes the mother of Jesus. Espousing the divine will for salvation wholeheartedly, without a single sin to restrain her, she gave herself entirely to the person and to the work of her Son; she did so in order to serve the mystery of redemption with him and dependent on him, by God's grace:¹⁴⁰

As St. Irenaeus says, "Being obedient she became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race."¹⁴¹ Hence not a few of the early Fathers gladly assert. . .: "The knot of Eve's disobedience was untied by Mary's obedience: what the virgin Eve bound through her disbelief, Mary loosened by her faith."¹⁴² Comparing her with Eve, they call Mary "the Mother of the living" and frequently claim: "Death through Eve, life through Mary."¹⁴³

Mary's divine motherhood

495 Called in the Gospels "the mother of Jesus", Mary is acclaimed by Elizabeth, at the prompting of the Spirit and even before the birth of her son, as "the mother of my Lord".¹⁴⁴ In fact, the One whom she conceived as man by the Holy Spirit, who truly became her Son according to the flesh, was none other than the Father's eternal Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity. Hence the Church confesses that Mary is truly "Mother of God" (Theotokos).¹⁴⁵

Mary's virginity

496 From the first formulations of her faith, the Church has confessed that Jesus was conceived solely by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, affirming also the corporeal aspect of this event: Jesus was conceived "by the Holy Spirit without human seed".¹⁴⁶ The Fathers see in the virginal conception the sign that it truly was the Son of God who came in a humanity like our own. Thus St. Ignatius of Antioch at the beginning of the second century says:
You are firmly convinced about our Lord, who is truly of the race of David according to the flesh, Son of God according to the will and power of God, truly born of a virgin,. . . he was truly nailed to a tree for us in his flesh under Pontius Pilate. . . he truly suffered, as he is also truly risen.¹⁴⁷

497 The Gospel accounts understand the virginal conception of Jesus as a divine work that surpasses all human understanding and possibility:¹⁴⁸ "That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit", said the angel to Joseph about Mary his fiancée.¹⁴⁹ The Church sees here the fulfilment of the divine promise given

through the prophet Isaiah: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son."¹⁵⁰

498 People are sometimes troubled by the silence of St. Mark's Gospel and the New Testament Epistles about Jesus' virginal conception. Some might wonder if we were merely dealing with legends or theological constructs not claiming to be history. To this we must respond: Faith in the virginal conception of Jesus met with the lively opposition, mockery or incomprehension of non-believers, Jews and pagans alike;¹⁵¹ so it could hardly have been motivated by pagan mythology or by some adaptation to the ideas of the age. The meaning of this event is accessible only to faith, which understands in it the "connection of these mysteries with one another"¹⁵² in the totality of Christ's mysteries, from his Incarnation to his Passover. St. Ignatius of Antioch already bears witness to this connection: "Mary's virginity and giving birth, and even the Lord's death escaped the notice of the prince of this world: these three mysteries worthy of proclamation were accomplished in God's silence."¹⁵³

Mary - "ever-virgin"

499 The deepening of faith in the virginal motherhood led the Church to confess Mary's real and perpetual virginity even in the act of giving birth to the Son of God made man.¹⁵⁴ In fact, Christ's birth "did not diminish his mother's virginal integrity but sanctified it."¹⁵⁵ and so the liturgy of the Church celebrates Mary as *Aeiparthenos*, the "Ever-virgin".¹⁵⁶

500 Against this doctrine the objection is sometimes raised that the Bible mentions brothers and sisters of Jesus.¹⁵⁷ The Church has always understood these passages as not referring to other children of the Virgin Mary. In fact James and Joseph, "brothers of Jesus", are the sons of another Mary, a disciple of Christ, whom St. Matthew significantly calls "the other Mary".¹⁵⁸ They are close relations of Jesus, according to an Old Testament expression.¹⁵⁹

501 Jesus is Mary's only son, but her spiritual motherhood extends to all men whom indeed he came to save: "The Son whom she brought forth is he whom God placed as the first-born among many brethren, that is, the faithful in whose generation and formation she co-operates with a mother's love."¹⁶⁰

Mary's virginal motherhood in God's plan

502 The eyes of faith can discover in the context of the whole of Revelation the mysterious reasons why God in his saving plan wanted his Son to be born of a virgin. These reasons touch both on the person of Christ and his redemptive mission, and on the welcome Mary gave that mission on behalf of all men.

503 Mary's virginity manifests God's absolute initiative in the Incarnation. Jesus has only God as Father. "He was never estranged from the Father because of the human nature which he assumed. . . He is naturally Son of the Father as to his

divinity and naturally son of his mother as to his humanity, but properly Son of the Father in both natures."¹⁶¹

504 Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit in the Virgin Mary's womb because he is the New Adam, who inaugurates the new creation: "The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven."¹⁶² From his conception, Christ's humanity is filled with the Holy Spirit, for God "gives him the Spirit without measure."¹⁶³ From "his fullness" as the head of redeemed humanity "we have all received, grace upon grace."¹⁶⁴

505 By his virginal conception, Jesus, the New Adam, ushers in the new birth of children adopted in the Holy Spirit through faith. "How can this be?"¹⁶⁵ Participation in the divine life arises "not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God".¹⁶⁶ The acceptance of this life is virginal because it is entirely the Spirit's gift to man. the spousal character of the human vocation in relation to God¹⁶⁷ is fulfilled perfectly in Mary's virginal motherhood.

506 Mary is a virgin because her virginity is the sign of her faith "unadulterated by any doubt", and of her undivided gift of herself to God's will.¹⁶⁸ It is her faith that enables her to become the mother of the Saviour: "Mary is more blessed because she embraces faith in Christ than because she conceives the flesh of Christ."¹⁶⁹

507 At once virgin and mother, Mary is the symbol and the most perfect realization of the Church: "the Church indeed. . . by receiving the word of God in faith becomes herself a mother. By preaching and Baptism she brings forth sons, who are conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of God, to a new and immortal life. She herself is a virgin, who keeps in its entirety and purity the faith she pledged to her spouse."¹⁷⁰

IN BRIEF

508 From among the descendants of Eve, God chose the Virgin Mary to be the mother of his Son. "Full of grace", Mary is "the most excellent fruit of redemption" (SC 103): from the first instant of her conception, she was totally preserved from the stain of original sin and she remained pure from all personal sin throughout her life.

509 Mary is truly "Mother of God" since she is the mother of the eternal Son of God made man, who is God himself.

510 Mary "remained a virgin in conceiving her Son, a virgin in giving birth to him, a virgin in carrying him, a virgin in nursing him at her breast, always a virgin" (St. Augustine, Serm. 186, 1: PL 38, 999): with her whole being she is "the handmaid of the Lord" (⇒ Lk 1:38).

511 The Virgin Mary "co-operated through free faith and obedience in human

salvation" (LG 56). She uttered her yes "in the name of all human nature" (St. Thomas Aquinas, S Th III, 30, 1). By her obedience she became the new Eve, mother of the living.

Biblical Quote

119 ⇒ Gal 4:4.

120 ⇒ Col 2:9.

121 Lk 1:34-35 (Greek).

122 Cf. ⇒ Jn 16:14-15.

123 Cf. ⇒ Mt 1:20; ⇒ 2:1⇒ 12; ⇒ Lk 1:35; ⇒ 2:8-20; ⇒ Jn 1:3 ⇒ 1-34; ⇒ 2:11.

124 ⇒ Acts 10:38.

125 ⇒ Gal 4:4; ⇒ Heb 10:5.

126 ⇒ Lk 1:26-27.

127 LG 56; cf. LG 61.

128 Cf. ⇒ Gen 3:15, ⇒ 20.

129 Cf. ⇒ Gen 18:10-14; ⇒ 21:1-2.

130 Cf. ⇒ I Cor 1:17; ⇒ I Sam 1.

131 LG 55.

132 LG 56.

133 ⇒ Lk 1:28.

134 ⇒ Lk 1:28.

135 Pius IX, Ineffabilis Deus (1854): DS 2803.

136 LG 53, 56.

137 Cf. ⇒ Eph 1:3-4.

138 LG 56.

139 ⇒ Lk 1:28-38; cf. ⇒ Rom 1:5.

140 Cf. LG 56.

141 St. Irenaeus, Adv. haeres. 3, 22, 4: PG 7/1, 959A.

142 St. Irenaeus, Adv. haeres. 3, 22, 4: PG 7/1, 959A.

143 LC 56; St. Epiphanius, Panarion 2, 78, 18: PG 42, 728CD-729AB; St. Jerome, Ep. 22, 21: PL 22, 408.

144 ⇒ Lk 1:43; ⇒ Jn 2:1; ⇒ 19:25; cf. ⇒ Mt 13:55; et al.

145 Council of Ephesus (431): DS 251.

146 Council of the Lateran (649): DS 503; cf. DS 10-64.

147 St. Ignatius of Antioch, Ad Smyrn 1-2: Apostolic Fathers, ed. J. B. Lightfoot (London: Macmillan, 1889), 11/2, 289-293; SCh 10, 154-156; cf. ⇒ Rom 1:3; ⇒ Jn 1:13.

148 ⇒ Mt 1 18-25; ⇒ Lk 1:26-38.

149 ⇒ Mt 1:20.

150 Is 7:14 (LXX), quoted in Mt 1:23 (Greek).

151 Cf. St. Justin, Dial. 99, 7: PG 6, 708-709; Origen, Contra Celsum 1, 32, 69: PG 11, 720-721; et al.

152 Dei Filius 4: DS 3016.

153 St. Ignatius of Antioch, Ad Eph. 19, 1: AF 11/2 76-80: cf. I Cor 2:8.

154 Cf. DS 291; 294; 427; 442; 503; 571; 1880.

155 LG 57.

156 Cf. LG 52.

157 Cf. ⇒ Mk 3:31-35; ⇒ 6:3; ⇒ I Cor 9:5; ⇒ Gal 1:19.

158 ⇒ Mt 13:55; ⇒ 28:1; cf. ⇒ Mt 27:56.

159 Cf. ⇒ Gen 13:8; ⇒ 14:16; ⇒ 29:15; etc.

160 LG 63; cf. ⇒ Jn 19:26-27; ⇒ Rom 8:29; ⇒ Rev 12:17.

161 Council of Friuli (796): DS 619; cf. ⇒ Lk 2:48-49.

162 ⇒ I Cor 15:45, ⇒ 47.

163 ⇒ Jn 3:34.

164 ⇒ Jn 1:16; cf. ⇒ Col 1:18.

165 ⇒ Lk 1:34; cf. ⇒ Jn 3:9[ETML:C/].

166 ⇒ Jn 1:13.

167 Cf. ⇒ 2 Cor 11:2.

168 LG 63; cf. I Cor 7:34-35.

169 St. Augustine, De virg. 3: PL 40, 398.

170 LG 64; cf. 63.