

DR CADOUX ON THE VIRGIN BIRTH

In his *Life of Jesus*¹ (pp. 27-30) Dr Cadoux states that belief in the Virgin Birth is "contrary to the evidence of our *earliest* [his italics] informants". In support of this he alleges that "neither Paul, nor Peter, nor Mark (nor, incidentally, 'John') knows anything about it". This sentence betrays an ignorance of logic. The simple omission by a person to mention a certain fact is in itself no proof that he is ignorant of it. He may have good reason for not mentioning it. For the argument to be valid it has to be shown that, had he been aware of the fact, he must in the circumstances have spoken about it. This is the well-known condition which alone gives force to the argument from silence. In itself the argument from silence is purely negative and proves nothing. We may compare the popular saying that silence gives consent. Silence gives consent only when the person concerned, knowing the circumstances, would and should have spoken had he or she any objection to raise. Now the condition is not fulfilled in the case of any one of the writers mentioned. No one of them sets out to give an account of all that he knew concerning Christ. Each wrote according as the occasion and his purpose demanded. Mark says nothing of the infancy and hidden life of Christ. He begins with the preaching of the Baptist and the baptism of our Lord. He had, therefore, no occasion to mention the Virgin Birth. St Paul's epistles were all occasional. He nowhere gives a compendium of the main facts of Christ's life nor a statement of the articles of Christian belief. And the intention of St John was that his *Gospel* should be supplementary to the other three. There was no call for him to repeat what had been clearly set forth by Matthew and Luke.

Dr Cadoux's second argument is that "both of the two genealogies of Jesus (in Luke and in 'Matthew') are genealogies of *Joseph*, who—like Jesus himself—is described as a descendant of David, while nothing is said anywhere about Mary being descended from David". In the first place, the two genealogies are given precisely by the two evangelists who do expressly record the virginal conception of Jesus, a fact which makes it plain that they saw no inconsistency between the Virgin Birth and our Lord's Davidic descent being traced through Joseph. In the second place the argument loses sight of the strength of Jewish views of legal paternity. It is not merely that all Jewish genealogies are given through the male line, but that according to the notions current in Israel a man was reckoned to be the father

¹ C. J. Cadoux, *The Life of Jesus*, Penguin Books, 1948.

of a son born to his brother after his death but in his name. This is in accord with the law of the levirate Deut. xxv.5-6. This cannot provide a perfect parallel with the case of Christ for the simple reason that the latter was unique. But the case of Christ is actually stronger than that of a levirate marriage. Joseph and Mary were husband and wife, legally married and the child Jesus was born to Mary during the lifetime of her spouse. If the child of a levirate marriage could be and was reckoned to be the child of the deceased brother, with still greater right could the son of Mary supernaturally conceived, be reckoned the son of Joseph, her husband. Hence the Davidic descent of Christ did not necessarily postulate the Davidic descent of Mary, and it was not incumbent on the evangelists to speak of Mary's Davidic descent. Many authorities, however, from early times, maintain that, as a fact, Mary was of the royal house of Judah; and some see a reference to this in Rom. 1.3, where it is said of Christ that He "was of the seed of David according to the flesh".

Cadoux's third reason is as follows: "If we may judge from what is virtually our oldest manuscript evidence, the original text of the genealogy in 'Matthew' probably ended thus: 'Joseph, to whom was betrothed Mary the virgin, begot Jesus the so-called Messiah'—an apparent attempt to harmonise two irreconcilable accounts of Jesus' birth". This is a reference to the reading of the Sinaitic Syriac text in Mt. 1.16, but there is no reason to suppose that it gives the true original text against all the Greek codices and the witness of the Latin translation made from the Greek as early as the second century. Even if it were admitted for the sake of argument that we have here the true original text, even so it would not destroy the witness of Matthew to the Virgin Birth, for this Syriac text goes on to give in the rest of the chapter the same account of the Virgin Birth that is found in all the other textual witnesses. Thus the Syriac translator clearly did not intend his phrase to be in contradiction with what he also translated later in the chapter, and will have understood the word "begot" in the legal sense explained above.

E. Crawford Burkitt, a non-Catholic, who was Lecturer in Palaeography at the University of Cambridge and a scholar of international repute, has treated of this question in his book entitled *Evangelion Da Mepharreshe*, II (Cambridge University Press 1904), pp. 258-66. The following quotations give the results of his penetrating analysis. "There can in the first place be no doubt at all that Matthew wishes us to learn that Jesus Christ was conceived by Mary while yet a virgin. This is not a question of textual criticism, of the omission of a word here or there. The whole paragraph 1.18-25 is absolutely based on this assumption. Joseph finds his betrothed with child, but

on the authority of Divine revelation he learns that this has taken place not *ἐκ πορνείας* but *ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου*. Accordingly he accepts Mary as his wife, and on the birth of the child he accepts the child as his son by naming him, in obedience to the command of the Angel" (p. 259). "If the Genealogy had ended with the uncompromising statement 'and Joseph begat Jesus' it would not prove that the Evangelist believed that Joseph had been the natural father of Jesus. All that the Evangelist cares about is that Joseph accepted Jesus as his son; and further, that Joseph was justified in so doing, because of the exceptional circumstances that had been revealed to him by the Angel" (p. 261). The Sinaitic Syriac text omits in *v.25* the words "knew her not until". On this Professor Burkitt writes thus: "According to the view of the whole matter which has been explained above, the shorter text expresses the meaning of the Evangelist. He was only concerned at this point to assert that Joseph publicly accepted Mary as his lawful wife and publicly acknowledged her son as lawfully born in wedlock" (p. 261).

Finally, writing of the textual criticism of *v.16*, he says: "If what I have said above be accepted, as to the general aim and composition of the Genealogy, the intrinsic interest of the determination of the original text in this passage is considerably lessened. Whatever our decision be, the question is only a matter of literary criticism, not of historical fact" (p. 262). In other words, whatever we may decide to have been the original form of words in *v.16*, it does not teach the supposed naturalistic account of the birth of Jesus.

It may be added that the version given by Dr Cadoux "the so-called Messiah" is a curious and erroneous way of translating words that mean "who was called the Messiah".

We now come to Dr Cadoux's last argument: "Several passages in the second chapter of Luke clearly imply, in their oldest form, that Joseph was Jesus's father. In introducing the genealogy of Jesus, Luke awkwardly describes him as "being, as we supposed, son of Joseph . . ." All this means that each of these two Gospels, although in their present form they both assert (Luke a little dubiously) the Virgin Birth, reveals an older version or basis according to which Jesus was Joseph's son". How Cadoux could think that he was justified in translating "being, as we supposed, son of Joseph" it is impossible to say. The form of the verb in the Greek is impersonal—"being, as it was thought, the son of Joseph" or, as the Revised Version has it, "being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph". The people at large could not possibly have supposed anything else. And this impersonal form is found in all the Greek codices; there is no variant reading. If Cadoux had quoted Lk. *ii.34-5*, he would have put the reader in a

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better position to judge whether Luke wrote a little dubiously. In the Revised Version these verses read thus : "And Mary said unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing that I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee : wherefore also that which is to be born shall be called holy, the Son of God".

The statement that the oldest form of several passages in Lk. 11 imply that Joseph was Jesus's father is a reference to texts which mention "his parents" or call Joseph "his father", and the incautious reader might be led to imagine that such phrases had been carefully eliminated from the traditional text. This, however, is not so. These expressions are found in our current texts. Thus the Latin Vulgate in Lk. 11.33 has "his father and mother", and in 11.4 "his parents". In the general context the sense of these phrases is perfectly clear and is manifested by the passage just quoted from 11.34-5. And they merely reflect the manner of speaking in the Holy Family itself. Thus when our Lady found her Son in the temple, she said to Him : "Thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing" (Lk. 11.48). How else could she have referred to St Joseph? The awkwardness and dubiousness of which Cadoux speaks are not to be found in St Luke's *Gospel*. They must be sought elsewhere.

From a purely human point of view evidence of the Virgin Birth could be given only by our Blessed Lady and St Joseph. Supposing the *Gospel* had contained an explicit testimonial from one or both of these witnesses, it would still have been possible for the incredulous or carping critic to assert that such a text only reflected the belief of a later generation of Christians. One is reminded of the saying that people who will not listen to Moses and the prophets, would not believe if someone should rise from the dead (Lk. xvi.31).

EDMUND F. SUTCLIFFE, S.J.

*Heythrop College,
Chipping Norton, Oxon*