

SAINT JEROME

ON THE PERPETUAL VIRGINITY  
OF THE BLESSED MARY

*De Perpetua Virginitate B. Mariae*

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SABBATISMUS

Saint Jerome (347–420)

De Perpetua Virginitate B. Mariae · On the Perpetual Virginity of the  
Blessed Mary

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[ON THE VIRGINITY OF THE BLESSED MARY  
(C)]*NOTICE CONCERNING THE FOLLOWING BOOK.*

Helvidius, having poorly understood several testimonies of the sacred Scripture, and having insufficiently considered the authorities of two ancient Fathers, namely Tertullian and Victorinus of Pettau, had composed a book in which he strove to prove that the Virgin Mary—after she had given birth to Jesus the Son of God by no human work, but by the Holy Spirit—had then, from her husband Joseph, in the common manner of other men, generated several sons, who are called the "Brothers of the Lord" (\*Fratres Domini\*) in the Gospel. To smear this madness with some pretense of reason, he added a new error: for he babbled that virginity is in no way superior to marriage, and by bringing forward arguments, or rather lies, he attempted to prove it. He was, as it seems, a common man from the populace, a rustic, and barely imbued even with the first elements of letters; he was of such an obscure name that, although he resided in Rome at the same time as Jerome, he was never known by face to him, who remained ignorant of whether he was white or black, as they say. Gennadius adds that he was a disciple of Auxentius—the most impious of the Arians who had invaded the see of Milan—and an imitator of Symmachus, that pagan senator who had defended idolatry in his writings. But that testimony of Gennadius troubles me for more than one reason, and I

think it suffers from a very serious transposition. For why, in responding, would Jerome pass over Auxentius, the master of Helvidius? And why Symmachus, unless with the intention of doing harm, and by what reason of impiety had Helvidius imitated him—he who published a book neither polished in speech nor in reason, but rather teeming with solecisms? Again, if he emulates impiety, in what way does Gennadius say that he wrote "out of zeal for religion"? These things certainly do not harmonize with right reason so that they can be equally referred to Helvidius.

Requested by the brothers, Jerome finally responded to his booklet, although he had long delayed doing so, lest by responding, that man should become worthy of being defeated. Therefore, about to join battle, he attacks each of the heretic's propositions extracted in order, having properly explained the passages of Scripture—and especially that one of Matthew 1:18, which the adversary most greatly abused—in such a sense that he most clearly proves that Mary the Mother of God (\*Deipara\*) persisted as a perpetual virgin, and that, having given birth to the Savior, she never knew a man, which is the faith of the Catholic Church. For this reason, he gave the title to the book: \*On the Perpetual Virginity of Blessed Mary\*; which again is called by Gennadius in the Corbie codex, "an excellent and pleasing booklet, in which it is shown that the most Blessed Mary, mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, as she was a virgin before birth, so she remained a virgin after birth." Regarding the authority of the

Ancients, it is enough for him to say of Tertullian that he was not a man of the Church; but he flatly denies that Victorinus of Pettau was of the same opinion as the adversary: then he says he could summon an infinite series of writers and oppose them. Finally, he discourses much on the praise of virginity, the excellence of which, after having most luminously set forth the testimony of Paul to the Corinthians, he extols also from the inconveniences of marriage, which he places before the eyes. Concerning which matter, when he wrote to Pammachius ten years later in Epistle 48, num. 17: "While Damasus of holy memory was still living," he says, "we wrote the book against Helvidius on the perpetual virginity of Blessed Mary, in which it was necessary for us, in preaching the blessedness of virginity, to say much about the troubles of marriage." Did that excellent man, learned in the Scriptures, and a virgin Doctor of the virgin Church, find anything to reproach in that discourse?

From this testimony it is also easily gathered at what time the book was composed. Namely, at the end of the year 384, according to the faith of the ancient martyrologies, Damasus died: Jerome stayed in Rome with Damasus not before the end of the year 382, as has been proved by the chronological arguments in Epistles 19 and 20. Moreover, this other testimony from Epistle 22 proves that the first year of the two-year period that intervenes, namely 383, must be assigned to it: "How great are the troubles of marriage, and with how many anxieties they are bound, I think

has been briefly expressed in that book which we published against Helvidius on the perpetual virginity of Blessed Mary." For that Epistle pertains, as we have shown in its place, to the earlier part of the year 384; and therefore this book against Helvidius, which he praises and indicates was already in the hands of the common people, must be ascribed to the preceding 383.

ONE BOOK BY SAINT EUSEBIUS JEROME,  
PRIEST OF STRIDON, ON THE PERPETUAL  
VIRGINITY OF BLESSED MARY, AGAINST  
HELVIDIUS.

1. Recently requested by the brothers to respond to the booklet of a certain Helvidius, I delayed doing so: not because it would have been difficult to convince a rustic man, and one barely imbued even with the first elements of letters, regarding the assertion of truth; but lest he, by being responded to, should become worthy of being defeated. To this was added that a turbulent man, and alone in the whole world both layman and priest to himself (who, as that one says, thinks loquacity is eloquence, and considers speaking ill of all a sign of a good conscience), having received material for disputing, would begin to blaspheme more, and as if from a sublime place would carry his sentence into the whole world: and because he could not with truth, he would tear me apart with insults. But because all these so just causes of my silence have ceased for a more just end, on account of the scandal of the brothers who were moved by his madness, the

axe must now be applied to the roots of the unfruitful tree of the Gospel (Matt. 3:10), and with the barrenness of its leaves it must be handed over to the flames, so that he who never learned to speak may at last learn to be silent.

2. Therefore, the Holy Spirit must be invoked by me, so that he may defend the virginity of Blessed Mary by his own sense through my mouth. The Lord Jesus must be invoked, so that he may protect the guest-chamber of the sacred womb, of which he was an inhabitant for ten months, from all suspicion of intercourse. God the Father himself is also to be entreated, that he may show the mother of his Son to have been a virgin after birth, who was a mother before she was wedded. We do not desire the field of rhetorical eloquence, nor do we seek out the snares of the Dialecticians, nor the thickets (\*spineta\*) of Aristotle: the very words of the Scriptures are to be placed: let him be reconvicted by the very testimonies which he used against us, so that he may understand that he was able to read the things that were written, but was not able to know the things that have been strengthened by piety.

3. Helvidius.—His first proposition was: "Matthew speaks: 'Now the generation of Christ was in this wise: When Mary his mother was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found having in her womb of the Holy Spirit. And Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to expose her, was minded to put her away privately. But while he thought on these things, behold, the Angel of the Lord

appeared to him in sleep, saying: Joseph, son of David, fear not to take Mary thy wife. For that which is born in her is of the Holy Spirit' (Matt. 1:18 seqq.). Behold," he says, "you have her \*espoused\*, not \*commended\*, as you say; and certainly espoused for no other reason than that she was eventually to be married. For the Evangelist would not have said of those who were not to come together: 'Before they came together': because no one says of one who is not going to dine, 'before he dined.' Then she is called \*wife\* and joined by the Angel. Let us now hear what the Scripture pronounces: 'Then Joseph, rising up from sleep, did as the Angel of the Lord had commanded him: and he took his wife, and knew her not till she had brought forth her son' (Matt. 1:24, 25)."

4. Jerome. What the preposition \*before\* (\*ante\*) shows. Why Mary conceived while a virgin espoused.---Let us run through the details, and pursuing the impiety by the same tracks by which it entered, let us show that he has said things that fight against each other. He confesses her \*espoused\*: and immediately he wants her to be a \*wife\* whom he has confessed as a \*betrothed\*. Again, her whom he names as a wife, he says was espoused for no other reason than that she was eventually to be married. And lest we think this too little: "You have her \*espoused\*," he says, "and not \*commended\*, that is, not yet a wife, not yet joined by the marital bond. But in that which he says, 'For the Evangelist would not have said of those who were not to come

together: \*Before they came together\*: because no one says of one who is not going to dine, before he dined,' I know not whether to grieve or to laugh." Shall I argue for his ignorance, or accuse him of rashness? As if, if someone should say: "Before I dined in the port, I sailed to Africa," the sentence could not stand unless he were to dine in the port at some time. Or if we should wish to say: "The apostle Paul, before he went to Spain, was cast into chains at Rome." Or certainly this: "Helvidius, before he performed penance, was prevented by death": must he therefore go to Spain immediately or a little after the chains; or must Helvidius perform penance after death; when the Scripture says: "But in hell who shall confess to thee?" (Psalm 6:6). And should it not rather be understood that the preposition \*before\* (\*ante\*), although it often indicates a consequence, yet sometimes shows only those things which were previously being thought? Whence it is not even necessary that the things thought of should be done, since something else intervened for the very reason that the things which were thought of should not be done. Therefore, when the Evangelist says: \*before they came together\*, he shows the nearest time of the marriage, and that the matter was already at such a point that she who had previously been a betrothed began to be a wife. As if he had said: "Before they mingled kisses and embraces; before they performed the act of marriage, she was found having in her womb." Moreover, she was found by no other than by Joseph, who detected

the swelling womb of his betrothed with almost marital license and curious eyes. Yet it does not follow, as we have taught by the previous examples, that he came together with Mary after the birth, since the desire for coming together was removed by the conception of the womb. But as to what is said in sleep to Joseph: "Fear not to take Mary thy wife." And again: "And Joseph, rising up from sleep, did as the Angel of the Lord commanded, and took his wife," it ought to move no one, as if from the fact that she is called \*wife\*, she had ceased to be \*betrothed\*: since we know it to be the custom of the divine Scripture to call betrothed women \*wives\*. Just as is approved in the following testimonies of Deuteronomy: "If anyone," it says, "shall find a damsel betrothed to a man in the field, and doing violence lie with her, let him die the death, because he hath humbled his neighbor's wife" (Deut. 22:25). And in another place: "But if there be a young damsel betrothed to a man, and a man find her in the city, and lie with her, ye shall bring forth them both to the gates of that city, and they shall be stoned with stones, and they shall die. The young damsel, because she cried not out, being in the city: and the man, because he hath humbled his neighbor's wife: and ye shall root out the evil from yourselves" (Ibid. 23, 24). And also elsewhere: "And what man is there that hath betrothed a wife, and hath not taken her? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man take her" (Deut. 20:7). Moreover, if a scruple is moved in anyone,

why she conceived as a betrothed, and not rather without a betrothed, or (as Scripture calls him) a husband, as a virgin, let him know that there was a triple reason. First, that through the genealogy of Joseph, of whom Mary was a kinswoman, the origin of Mary also might be shown. Second, lest according to the law of Moses she should be stoned by the people as an adulteress. Third, that fleeing to Egypt she might have the solace of a guardian rather than of a husband. For who at that time would have believed a Virgin that she had conceived from the Holy Spirit; that the angel Gabriel had come, and delivered the mandate of God; and would they not rather, as an adulteress, according to the example of Susanna, have condemned her by the sentence of all, when today, the whole world now believing, the Jews argue—Isaiah saying: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive in her womb, and shall bear a son" (Isai. 7:14)—that in Hebrew *\*young woman\** is written, not *\*virgin\**, that is, *\*AALMA\**, not *\*BETHULA\**? Against whom we shall discourse more competently in another place. Finally, except for Joseph, and Elizabeth, and Mary herself, and very few indeed, if we can estimate any who may have heard from these, all esteemed Jesus the son of Joseph: so much so, that even the Evangelists, expressing the opinion of the common people, which is the true law of history, called him the father of the Savior, as there: "And he came in the spirit into the Temple" (no doubt Simeon) "and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law"

(Luke 2:27). And elsewhere: "And his father and mother were wondering at those things which were said of him" (Ibid. 33). And again: "And his parents went every year to Jerusalem at the solemn day of the Passover" (Ibid. 41). And then: "And when the days were fulfilled, as they returned, the child Jesus remained in Jerusalem, and his parents knew it not" (Ibid. 43). Also Mary herself, who had responded to Gabriel, saying: "How shall this be, because I know not a man," listen to what she speaks of Joseph: "Son, why hast thou done so to us? Behold, thy father and I, sorrowing, were seeking thee" (Ibid. 48). This is not here the voice of the Jews, as many argue, nor of those mocking. The Evangelists call Joseph father: Mary confesses him father. Not that (as I have indicated above) Joseph was truly the father of the Savior; but that for preserving the reputation of Mary, he was esteemed by all as the father, who before he was warned by the Angel: "Joseph, son of David, fear not to take Mary thy wife; for that which is born in her is of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 1:20), was thinking of putting her away privately. So much did he trust that he who had been conceived was not his own. But enough has already been disputed, rather with the zeal for teaching than for responding, why Joseph was called the father of the Lord, and why Mary was called wife: in which also this is briefly contained, why certain ones are said to be his brothers.

5. Helvidius.—But because we reserve a place for this little question, and our discourse hastens to the rest: now it must be discussed how the

Scripture says: "And Joseph, rising up from sleep, did as the Angel of the Lord had commanded him, and took his wife, and knew her not until she brought forth her son, and he called his name Jesus" (Matt. 1:24, 25). In which first the adversary sweats with superfluous labor, that the word \*knowing\* is to be referred to intercourse rather than to knowledge: as if anyone had denied this, and any prudent man could ever have suspected those ineptitudes which he refutes. Then he wants to teach that the adverb \*until\* (\*donec\*), or \*even to\* (\*usque\*), signifies a certain time: which being completed, that happens which was not happening until that time which was prescribed, as in the present: "And he knew her not until she brought forth her son." It appears, he says, that she was known after the birth, the knowledge of whom only the generation of the son was delaying. And to approve this, he heaps up very many examples from the Scriptures, brandishing his sword in the dark after the manner of the Andabatae, and shaking the sound of his tongue only to pierce the members of his own body.

6. Jerome.—To which we briefly respond, that both the word \*knew\* and \*until\* are understood in two ways in the holy Scriptures. And concerning that indeed which is written, \*he knew\*, he himself has discussed that it is to be referred to intercourse: no one doubting that it is often referred to knowledge, as there: "The child Jesus remained in Jerusalem, and his parents knew it not." Now it is to be shown that, just as

there he followed the custom of the Scripture, so also in \*until\*, he may be broken by the authority of the same Scripture, which often signifies a certain time (as he discussed) in its assumption, but often an infinite time, as is that which God speaks to certain ones in the Prophet: "I am, I am, and until you grow old, I am" (Isai. 46:4; Jerem. 7). Will God cease to be after they have grown old? And the Savior in the Gospel to the Apostles: "Behold, I," he says, "am with you all days until the consummation of the world" (Matt. 28:20). Therefore, after the consummation of the world, will the Lord depart from his disciples, and then, when they are to judge the twelve tribes of Israel upon twelve thrones (Matt. 19:28), will they be defrauded of the Lord's company? Paul the apostle also, writing to the Corinthians: "Christ the firstfruits," he says: "then those who are Christ's, who have believed in his coming: then the end, when he shall have delivered the kingdom to God and the Father, when he shall have destroyed all principality and all power and virtue. For he must reign until he hath put all enemies under his feet, for he hath subjected all things under his feet" (1 Cor. 15:23, 25, 27). Let it be, let it be said of the man, we do not deny it, of him who suffered the cross, who is afterwards commanded to sit at the right hand. What does this mean that he says: "For he must reign until he hath put all enemies under his feet"? Will the Lord reign only so long until enemies begin to be under his feet; and after they have been under his feet, will he cease to reign: when indeed he will then rather begin to

reign, when enemies have begun to be under his feet? David also in the fourth psalm of degrees: "As the eyes of the handmaid are on the hands of her mistress, so are our eyes to the Lord our God, until he have mercy on us" (Psalm 122:2). Will the Prophet, therefore, have his eyes to the Lord only so long as he may obtain mercy, and after mercy is obtained, will he twist his eyes to the earth? Who says in another place: "My eyes have failed for thy salvation, and for the word of thy justice" (Psalm 118:123). I could heap up innumerable examples upon this, and hide all the impudence of the provoker with a cloud of testimonies; but I will yet subjoin a few, that the reader himself may find things similar to these for himself.

7. The divine word speaks in Genesis: "And they delivered to Jacob the strange gods which were in their hands, and the earrings which were in their ears. And Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree, which is in Shechem, and lost them until this present day" (Gen. 35:4 seq.). Likewise at the end of Deuteronomy: "And Moses the servant of the Lord died in the land of Moab by the word of the Lord, and they buried him in Geth, near the house of Peor, and no one knows his sepulcher until this day" (Deut. 34:5, 6, according to LXX). Certainly "this present day" must be esteemed of that time in which the history itself was composed, whether you wish to say Moses was the author of the Pentateuch, or Ezra the restorer of the same work, I do not refuse. Now this is asked, whether that which was said, "until this day," is referred to that age in which the books

were published or written. Let him show, therefore, after that day, so many years having now passed even to us with volumes completed, that either the idols which had been hidden under the terebinth were found, or the tomb of Moses was investigated, because he stubbornly asserts that after \*until\* (\*donec\*) and \*even to\* (\*usque\*), that begins to be which was not so long as \*even to\* was being fulfilled and \*until\*. Rather, let him notice the idiom of the holy Scripture, and understand with us that in which he was hesitating, that those things about which there could be doubt if they had not been written are signaled, but the rest are left to our intelligence. For if even in a recent time, while those who had seen Moses were living, his sepulcher could be unknown, much more so as so many centuries pass by. According to which also that is understood concerning Joseph, that the Evangelist indicated that about which a scandal could be moved, that she was not known by her husband until the birth, so that we might much more understand that she was not known after the birth, from whom he then abstained when he could still fluctuate concerning the vision.

8. In sum, I require this: why did Joseph abstain even to the day of birth? He will certainly respond, because he had heard the Angel saying: "For that which is born in her is of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 1:20). To which we infer: and certainly he had heard, "Joseph, son of David, fear not to take Mary thy wife" (Ibid. 20). He had been forbidden to leave her, lest he should think his wife an

adulteress. Was he also separated from the company of his spouse, when certainly he had been admonished rather lest he should be separated? And did a just man, he says, hearing of the son of God in the womb, dare to think of intercourse with his wife? Beautifully. He, therefore, who trusted a dream so much that he did not dare to touch his wife: did he—after he had known by the voice of the shepherds that the Angel of the Lord had come from heaven, and had said to them: "Fear not; behold, I evangelize to you a great joy, which shall be to all the people, because there is born to you today a Savior, who is Christ the Lord in the city of David" (Luke 2:10 seq.); and that with him the praises of the heavenly host had sung: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will"; who had seen the just Simeon among the embraces of the little child preaching: "Now lettest thou thy servant depart, Lord, according to thy word in peace: because my eyes have seen thy salvation" (Ibid. 29); who had seen Anna the prophetess, the Magi, the star, Herod, the Angels; who, I say, had known such great miracles—dare to touch the temple of God, the seat of the Holy Spirit, the mother of his Lord? And certainly "Mary kept all these words, conferring them in her heart" (Ibid. 51). And lest you should impudently deny that Joseph was ignorant of these things: "And his father and mother," says Luke, "were wondering at those things which were said of him." Although you contend with wondrous impudence that these things have been falsified in the Greek codices,

which not only almost all the Commentators of Greece have left in their volumes, but some also of the Latins have assumed just as they are held in the Greek. Nor is it necessary now to treat of the variety of copies, since the whole instrument of both the old and the new Scripture has been translated from thence into the Latin speech, and the wave of the fountain must be believed to flow much purer than the stream.

7. Helvidius.—"These things," you say, "are trifles to me, and superfluous arguments, and a discussion more curious than true. Could not Scripture have said: And he took his wife, and was not further bold to touch her (Gen. 38:26), as it said of Tamar and Judah? Or did Matthew lack words by which he could express that which he wished to be understood? He knew her not, he says, until she brought forth a son (Matt. 1:25). After the birth, therefore, he knew her, whose knowledge he had deferred until the birth."

8. Jerome.—If you are so contentious, even now you shall be overcome by your own mind. I do not want you to interpose any time between the birth and cohabitation. I do not want you to say: Whatsoever woman has conceived and brought forth a male child shall be unclean seven days, according to the days of her separation and her purging she shall be unclean; and on the eighth day she shall circumcise the flesh of his foreskin, and thirty-three days she shall sit in pure blood, and shall not touch any holy thing, and the rest (Lev. 12:2, 3). Let Joseph invade her immediately; let him immediately hear through

Jeremiah: They were made to me as horses mad after females, every one neighed after the wife of his neighbor (Jer. 5:8). Otherwise, how shall it be able to stand, He knew her not, until she brought forth a son, if he waits after the time of purging; if for forty days again a lust delayed for so long a time is deferred? Let the woman in childbirth be polluted with blood; let the midwives receive the wailing little one; let the husband hold the weary wife. Thus let the marriage begin, lest the Evangelist be found a liar. But far be it that this should be judged of the mother of the Savior and of a just man. No midwife was there; no officiousness of women intervened. She herself wrapped the infant in swaddling clothes, she herself was both mother and midwife. And she laid him, he says, in a manger, because there was no room for her in the inn (Luke 2:7). This sentence both convicts the ravings of the apocrypha, while Mary herself wrapped the infant in swaddling clothes; and does not allow the pleasure of Helvidius to be fulfilled, while there was no room for marriage in the inn.

9. Helvidius.—But because we have already responded sufficiently and abundantly to that which he had proposed, Before they came together, and He knew her not, until she brought forth a son, we must come to the third question, so that according to the order of his discussion, the order of our response may also proceed. For he wishes that Mary also procreated other sons; and from that which is written: But Joseph went up into the city of David, that he might be en-

rolled with Mary his wife, being great with child. And it came to pass while they were there, the days were fulfilled that she should bring forth, and she brought forth her firstborn son (Luke 2:4 et seqq.): he strives to prove that firstborn cannot be said, except of him who also has brothers; just as he is called only-begotten who is the only son to his parents.

10. Jerome.—But we define it thus: Every only-begotten is a firstborn; not every firstborn is an only-begotten. He is the firstborn, not only after whom there are others, but before whom there is none. Every thing, says the Lord to Aaron, that opens the womb, from all flesh which is offered to the Lord, from man even unto beast, shall be yours: only the firstborn of men they shall redeem for prices, and the firstborn of unclean beasts (Exod. 34:19, 20, and Num. 18:15). The word of God defined what the firstborn is: Every thing, it says, that opens the womb. Otherwise, if he is not firstborn except him only whom brothers follow, the firstborn are not due to the priests for as long as others have also been procreated; lest perhaps, a birth not following afterwards, he be only-begotten and not firstborn. His redemption, it says, shall be from one month, the estimation of five shekels. A shekel, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, is twenty oboli. Only the firstborn of calves, and the firstborn of sheep, and the firstborn of goats you shall not redeem, because they are holy (Num. 18:16, 17). The word of God compels me to vow to God everything that opens the womb, if it be of clean animals; if of unclean,

to redeem it, giving the price to the priest. I am able to respond and say: Why do you bind me in the point of one month? Why do you call him firstborn, whom I do not know whether brothers follow? Wait until a second is born. I owe nothing to the priest, unless he also shall have been procreated through whom he who was born before begins to be the firstborn. Will not the very letters speak to me and refute me of folly, that he is said to be the firstborn who opens the womb, not he who also has brothers?

Finally, I ask concerning John, whom it is established is only-begotten, whether he was also the firstborn? Whether he himself, according to the Law, was subject to that whole law? It cannot be doubted. Certainly of the Savior the Scripture speaks thus: When the days of their purging were fulfilled, according to the Law of Moses, they led him into Jerusalem, that they might offer him to the Lord; as it is written in the Law of the Lord: That every male opening the womb shall be called holy to the Lord; and that they might give victims according to that which is said in the Law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons (Luke 2:22 et seq.). If this law pertains only to firstborn, and followers make a firstborn, he who was ignorant of followers ought not to have been held by the law of the firstborn. But because even he whom other brothers do not follow is held by the law of the firstborn, it is gathered that he is called firstborn who opens the womb and before whom there is none, not he whom a brother born after succeeds. Moses writes in Exo-

dus: And it came to pass about midnight, and the Lord struck every firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the captive woman who is at the lake, and every firstborn of the beast (Exod. 12:29). Answer me: those who were then killed by the exterminator, were they firstborn or also only-begotten? If those only are called firstborn who have brothers, therefore the only-begotten were liberated from slaughter. But if they were slain as only-begotten, it was done against the sentence, and among the firstborn the only-begotten also died. Either you will liberate the only-begotten from punishment, and you will be ridiculous; or if you will confess that they were killed, we shall obtain even against your will that only-begotten are called firstborn.

11. Helvidius's final proposition.—The final proposition was (although he wished to show this very thing in the firstborn) that the brothers of the Lord are named in the Gospels, as there: Behold, his mother and his brothers were standing without, seeking to speak with him (Luke 8:20). And elsewhere: After these things he went down to Capernaum, he and his mother, and his brothers (John 2:12). And there: His brothers therefore said to him: Pass from hence, and go into Judea, that your disciples also may see your works which you do. For no one doing anything in secret seeks himself to be in public. If you do these things, manifest yourself to the world (John 7:3, 4). John adding from above: For neither did his brothers then believe in him (Ibid. 5). Likewise

Mark and Matthew: And he taught them in their synagogue in their own country, so that they were astonished, and said: From whence has this man all this wisdom and virtues? Is not this the son of the carpenter? Is not his mother called Mary, and his brothers James and Joseph, and Simon and Jude, and his sisters are they not all with us? (Mark 6:3; Matt. 13:54-56)? Luke also in the Acts of the Apostles reports thus: All these were persevering with one mind in prayer with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers (Acts 1:14). And also Paul the Apostle in the same truth of history agrees with a like voice: But I went up according to revelation, and I saw no one, except Peter and James the brother of the Lord (Gal. 1:18, 19). And again in another place: Have we not power to eat and to drink? Have we not power to lead about wives, even as the rest of the Apostles, and the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas? (1 Cor. 9:4, 5)? And lest perhaps anyone should not admit the testimony of the Jews, who also published the names of his brothers, asserting that they were deceived by a similar error in the brothers as they "fell in judging the father," he shrewdly took precaution and says: "These same names are named by the Evangelists in another place, and they are the same brothers of the Lord, the sons of Mary." Matthew speaks: And many women were there (doubtless before the cross of the Lord) looking on from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him. Among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and

the mother of the sons of Zebedee (Matt. 27:55, 56). Likewise Mark: And there were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joseph, and Salome (Mark 15:40); and there after a little: And many others who had come up with him to Jerusalem. Also Luke: And they were Mary Magdalene and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and the rest with them (Luke 24:10).

12. Jerome.—These things we have therefore repeated, lest he should complain and cry out that those things which make for him have been subtracted by us, and his opinion convulsed, not by the testimonies of the Scriptures, but by a slippery discussion. "Behold," he says, "James and Joseph the sons of Mary, the same whom the Jews called brothers. Behold Mary the mother of James the less and of Joseph. But of James the less, to distinguish him from the greater, who was the son of Zebedee, as also in another place Mark puts: But Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and of Joseph, saw where he was laid; and the sabbath being past, they bought spices, and came to the monument. And indeed he says: How wretched and impious it will be to think this of Mary, that while other women had care of the burial of Jesus, we should say his mother was absent; or should feign some other Mary, I know not whom; especially since the Gospel of John testifies that she was present there, when the Lord commended her, already a widow, as a mother to John from the cross. Or do the Evange-

lists both are deceived and deceive, so as to call them the mother of Mary, whom the Jews said were brothers of Jesus?"

13. O blind madness, and mind insane to its own destruction! You say that his mother was present at the cross of the Lord, you say she was commended to the disciple John on account of her widowhood and solitude; as if, according to you, she did not have four sons, and innumerable daughters, in whose company she might enjoy herself? You also name her a widow, which the Scripture does not say. And while you propose all the examples of the Evangelists, the words of John alone do not please you. You say in passing that she was present at the cross of the Lord, lest you should seem to have passed it over by design; and yet you are silent as to what women were with her. I would pardon one who did not know, unless I saw one who was silent by design. Hear, therefore, what John says: But there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene (John 19:25). To no one is it a doubt that there were two Apostles called by the name of James: James the son of Zebedee, and James the son of Alphaeus. This James, I know not what "lesser" James, whom the Scripture commemorates as the son of Mary, yet not the mother of the Lord, do you wish him to be an Apostle or not? If he is an Apostle, he will be the son of Alphaeus; and he will believe in Jesus; and he will not be of those brothers of whom it is written: For neither did his brothers then believe in him. If he is not an Apostle, but

some third James I know not who, how is he to be thought the brother of the Lord, and how will he be called "lesser" to distinguish him from the greater, since "greater" and "lesser" are accustomed to provide a distance not between three, but between two; and the brother of the Lord is an Apostle, Paul saying: Then after three years I came to Jerusalem to see Peter, and I remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none other of the Apostles, except James the brother of the Lord (Gal. 1:18, 19)? And in the same Epistle: And having known the grace which was given to me, Peter and James and John, who seemed to be pillars (Gal. 2:9). But lest you should think this James the son of Zebedee, read the Acts of the Apostles. He had already been killed by Herod. The conclusion remains, that this Mary who is written as the mother of James the less, was the wife of Alphaeus, and the sister of Mary the mother of the Lord, which Mary John the Evangelist surnames "of Cleophas," whether imposing the name on her from her father, or from the clan of her family, or from whatever other cause. But if from this she seems to you to be different and another, because in one place she is called Mary the mother of James the less, and here Mary of Cleophas: learn the custom of Scripture, that the same man is called by different names. Raguel the father-in-law of Moses is also called Jethro. Gideon, with no causes of a changed name previously set forth, is suddenly read as Jerubbaal. Uzziah the king of Judah is in turn called Azariah. Mount Tabor is called Itabyrium. Again, the Phoenicians sur-

name Hermon Sirion, and the Amorite surnames him Senir. The same region of the sky is called by three names, Negeb, Teman, Darom, read Ezekiel. Peter is also called Simon and Cephas. Jude the zealot is called Thaddaeus in another Gospel: and many other things which pertain to the example of these the reader himself will be able to gather for himself from all the Scriptures.

14. Now that which we are attempting to show is in what manner the brothers of the Lord are called the sons of his maternal aunt, Mary, who, not believing before, afterwards believed. Although it could happen that, one believing immediately, others were for a long time incredulous; and that this was the mother of James and Joseph, that is, Mary of Cleophas the wife of Alphaeus, and this one was called Mary the mother of James the less. Who if she were the mother of the Lord, he would rather have called her his mother, as in all places, and not by saying she was the mother of others, would have wished her to be understood as the mother of another. But in this part I do not pull a contentious rope; let Mary of Cleophas be one, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph another, provided it be established that the same Mary the mother of James and Joseph is not the mother of the Lord. And from whence, you say, were they called brothers of the Lord, who were not brothers? Now you shall be taught that in the divine Scriptures they are called brothers in four ways: by nature, by race, by kinship, by affection. By nature: Esau, Jacob, the twelve Patriarchs, Andrew

and Peter, James and John. By race, by which all Jews are called brothers among themselves, as in Deuteronomy: If however you buy your brother, who is a Hebrew, or she who is a Hebrewess, he shall serve you six years: and in the seventh year you shall dismiss him free from you (Deut. 15:12). And in the same: By appointing you shall appoint over you a prince, whom the Lord your God shall choose, him who is from your brothers. For you shall not be able to appoint over you a foreign man, because he is not your brother (Deut. 17:15). And again: Lest seeing the calf of your brother, or his sheep wandering through the way, you neglect them: by returning you shall return them to your brother. But if your brother does not approach you, nor do you know him, you shall gather them within your house: and they shall be with you until your brother seeks them, and you shall restore them to him (Deut. 22:1, 2). And the Apostle Paul: I wished, he says, that I myself were anathema from Christ for my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites (Rom. 9:3, 4). Furthermore, those are called brothers by kinship who are of one family, that is, of one fatherland, which the Latins interpret as paternitates; when from one root a great multitude of the race is spread abroad, as in Genesis. But Abraham said to Lot: Let there not be a strife between me and you, and between my shepherds and your shepherds, because we are men who are brothers. And there: And Lot chose for himself the region of the Jordan, and Lot removed from the East, and they departed each one from his

brother (Gen. 13:8, 11). And certainly Lot is not the brother of Abraham, but the son of his brother Haran. For Terah begat Abraham and Nahor and Haran; and Haran begat Lot. And again: But Abraham was seventy-five years old when he went out from Haran. And Abraham took Sarah his wife, and Lot the son of his brother (Gen. 12:4, 5). But if you still doubt that the son of a brother is called a brother, take an example. But when Abraham had heard that Lot his brother was led captive, he numbered his servants three hundred and eighteen (Gen. 14:14). And when he had described the slaughter by a nocturnal assault, he added: And he brought back all the cavalry of Sodom, and he recalled Lot his brother (Ibid. 16). These were sufficient to prove those things which we have said. But lest you should cavil in anything, and should wind yourself out like a slippery snake, you must be bound by the bonds of testimonies, lest complaining you should hiss and say that you were overcome more by tortuous arguments than by the truth of the Scriptures. Jacob, the son of Isaac and Rebecca, when he had proceeded to Mesopotamia fearing the snares of his brother, approached and rolled away the stone from the mouth of the well, and watered the sheep of Laban the brother of his mother (Gen. 28 and 29). And Jacob kissed Rachel, and crying out with his voice, he wept, and indicated to Rachel that he is the brother of her father, and that he is the son of Rebecca (Gen. 29:11, 12). Behold also here by the same law as above, the son of a sister is called a brother. But Laban said to Jacob: Because you are

my brother, you shall not serve me for nothing (Gen. 29:15). Tell me what is your reward. Twenty years having therefore been completed, when his father-in-law being ignorant, accompanied by wives and children he returned to his fatherland, Laban followed him on Mount Gilead. And when he had not found the idols which Rachel was hiding, having searched in the baggage, Jacob responded and said to Laban: What is my fault, and what is my crime, that you have persecuted me? and why have you searched all my vessels? What have you found of all your things? Put it here in the sight of your brothers and my brothers: and they shall judge between us two (Gen. 31:36, 37). Answer: who are these brothers of Jacob and Laban, who then were present? Esau certainly the brother of Jacob was absent, and Laban the son of Bethuel had no brothers, except his sister Rebecca.

15. There are innumerable things of this sort inserted in the divine books. But lest I make it long, I shall return to the last part of the division, that is, that those are also called brothers by affection, which is split into two, into the spiritual and into the common. Into the spiritual, because all Christians are called brothers, as there: Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell in one (Ps. 132:1). And in another psalm the Savior says: I will tell your name to my brothers (Ps. 21:23). And elsewhere: Go tell my brothers (John 20:17). Furthermore into the common, because all born from one father, we are joined among ourselves by a like brotherhood. Say, he

says, to those who hate you: You are our brothers (Isa. 66:5 according to the LXX). And the Apostle to the Corinthians: If anyone who is named a brother is a fornicator, or covetous, or a server of idols, or a slanderer, or a drunkard, or a robber, with such a one not even to take food (1 Cor. 5:11), and other things like to these.

I ask now, according to which manner do you understand the brothers of the Lord to be called in the Gospel? According to nature? But the Scripture does not say so, calling them neither the sons of Mary, nor of Joseph. According to race? But it is absurd that a few of the Jews should be called brothers, when all who were there, being Jews by this law, could have been called brothers. According to the affection of human right and spirit? But if so, who were more brothers than the Apostles, whom he taught within, whom he called mothers and brothers? Or if all because they are men are brothers, it was foolish to be announced as a proper thing: Behold your brothers seeking you; when generally all men by this right are brothers. It remains, therefore, that according to the former exposition you understand them to have been called brothers by kinship, not by affection; not by the privilege of race, not by nature. In the way that Lot was called the brother of Abraham, in the way that Jacob was called the brother of Laban, in the way also that the daughters of Zelophehad receive an inheritance among their brothers, in the way also that Abraham himself had Sarah his sister as his wife. For he says: Truly she is my sister by my father, but

not by my mother (Gen. 20:12), that is, she is the daughter of a brother, not of a sister. Otherwise, what sort of thing is it that Abraham, a just man, took the daughter of his own father as a spouse, when in the first men, on account of the holiness of ears, the Scripture does not name that very thing, preferring it to be understood than to be brought forth; and God afterwards sanctions by law and threatens: He who shall take his sister by his father, or by his mother, and shall see her nakedness, and she shall see his nakedness, it is a disgrace: and they shall be exterminated before the children of their race. He has uncovered the nakedness of his sister, he shall receive his sin (Lev. 20:17).

16. Most ignorant of men, you had not read these things, and the whole sea of the Scriptures being forsaken, you have brought your madness to the injury of the Virgin, after the example of him whom fables report, when he was unknown to the crowd and could think of no good deed by which he might become noble, to have set fire to the temple of Diana; and no one betraying the sacrilege, he is reported to have come forward into the midst himself, crying out that he had set the fire. When the princes of Ephesus asked for what cause he had wished to do this, he responded: That because I could not be known for good, I might become known to all for evil. And this indeed Greek history narrates. You truly have set fire to the temple of the Lord's body, you have contaminated the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit, from which you wish a team of four brothers

and a heap of sisters to have proceeded. Finally, with a voice joined to the Jews, you say: Is not this the son of the carpenter? Is not his mother called Mary, and his brothers James, and Joses, and Simon, and Jude, and are not all his sisters with us? (Matt. 13:55, and Mark 6:3). All is not said except of a crowd. Who, I pray you, knew you before this blasphemy? Who reckoned you worth a farthing? You have obtained what you wished: you have become noble in crime. I myself who write against you, though I dwell in the same City with you, know not whether you be white, as they say, or black. I pass over the faults of speech with which your whole book teems. I am silent as to the ridiculous beginning. O times! O manners! I do not seek eloquence; which you, not having it yourself, required in brother Craterius. I do not, I say, demand the brightness of the tongue, I seek the purity of the soul. For among Christians it is a great solecism and fault to either narrate or do anything shameful. I come to the end, and I conclude you with a horned interrogation, and I will act with you as if I had done nothing above: that the brothers of the Lord were called so in the same manner as Joseph was called father. I, she says, and your father, sorrowing were seeking you (Luke 2:48). This mother speaks, not the Jews. And the Evangelist himself reporting: And his father and mother were wondering over these things which were said of him (Ibid. 33), and things like to these, which we have already enumerated, in which they are called parents. And lest perhaps you should plead about the variety

of copies, because you have most foolishly persuaded yourself that the Greek codices have been falsified, I come to the Gospel of John, in which it is most plainly written: Philip found Nathanael, and said to him: Him of whom Moses wrote in the Law, and the Prophets, we have found, Jesus the son of Joseph from Nazareth (John 1:45). Certainly this is contained in your codex. Answer me: how is Jesus the son of Joseph, whom it is established was procreated of the Holy Spirit? Was Joseph truly his father? Although you are dull, you will not dare to say so. Or was he so thought? In the same way let the brothers be esteemed as the father was esteemed.

17. But since the discourse has already sailed out from the rocks and rugged places, the sails must be spread, and we must rush into his epilogues, in which, having seemed a smatterer to himself, he calls Tertullian into testimony, and proposes the words of Victorinus, bishop of Pettau. And of Tertullian indeed I say nothing more than that he was not a man of the Church. But of Victorinus I assert this, which also of the Evangelists: that he called them brothers of the Lord, not sons of Mary. But brothers in that sense which we have expounded above: by proximity, not by nature. Truly we wear away trifles, and the fountain of truth being omitted, we follow the rivulets of opinions. Am I not able to move for you the whole series of ancient writers: Ignatius, Polycarp, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr, and many other apostolic and eloquent men, who against Ebion, and Theodotus of Byzantium, and Valentinus,

holding these same things, wrote volumes full of wisdom? Which if you had read at any time, you would be wiser. But I think it better to respond briefly to each point, than by lingering longer to extend the volume.

18. I now make an attack on that in which you, by comparing virginity and marriage, wished to be eloquent. We laughed at the proverb in you: We have seen a camel dancing. You say: "Are virgins better than Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who had marriages? Are not little ones daily fashioned by the hands of God in wombs, that we ought deservedly to blush that Mary married after childbirth? Because if this seems shameful to them, it remains that they should not believe even that God was born through the genitals of a virgin. For it is more shameful, according to them, that God was begotten through the private parts of a virgin, than that a virgin married her own husband after childbirth." Join if it please you also other insults of nature: the womb swelling for nine months, the loathings, the birth, the blood, the swaddling clothes. Let the infant be described to you, wrapped in the usual covering of membranes. Let the hard mangers be brought in, the wailing of the little one, the circumcision of the eighth day, the time of purging, so that he may be proved unclean. We do not blush, we are not silent. By how much more humble are those things which he suffered for me, by so much more do I owe to him. And when you have repeated all things, you will bring forth nothing more insult-

ing than the cross: which we profess and believe, and in which we triumph over enemies.

19. But as we do not deny these things which are written, so we refuse those things which are not written. We believe that God was born of a Virgin, because we read it. We do not believe that Mary married after childbirth, because we do not read it. Nor do we say this for the purpose of condemning marriage, for virginity itself is the fruit of marriage: but because it is not permitted to us to judge anything rashly concerning holy men. For we are able by this judgment of possibility to contend that Joseph also had several wives, because Abraham had several, Jacob had several; and that from these wives were the brothers of the Lord, which many feign with a temerity not so much pious as audacious. You say Mary did not remain a virgin: I claim more for myself, that Joseph himself also was a virgin through Mary, so that from a virginal marriage a virgin son might be born. For if fornication does not fall upon a holy man, and it is not written that he had another wife; and of Mary, whom he was thought to have had, he was rather the guardian than the husband: it remains that he remained a virgin with Mary, who deserved to be called the father of the Lord.

20. And because I am about to say some things concerning the comparison of virginity and marriage, I beseech those who shall read that they do not think I have detracted from marriage in the praise of virgins, and made some distance between the saints of the Old Testament and the

New, that is, between those who had marriages and these who have departed entirely from the embrace of women; but according to the condition of the times, some were then subject to one sentence, and we to another, upon whom the ends of the ages have run down. As long as that law remained: Increase and multiply, and fill the earth (Gen. 1:28); and: Cursed is the sterile woman who does not bring forth seed in Israel (Isa. last chapter according to LXX), all married and were given in marriage, and leaving parents, became one flesh. But when that voice thundered: The time is shortened: it remains that even those who have wives be as if they had them not; adhering to the Lord, we are made one spirit with him (1 Cor. 7:29). And why? Because he who is without a wife thinks on those things which are of God, how he may please God. But he who is with a wife is solicitous for the things which are of this world, how he may please his wife. And the woman and the virgin is divided: she who is not married thinks on the things which are of God, that she may be holy in body and spirit. For she who is married thinks on the things which are of the world, how she may please her husband (Ibid. 32-34). Why do you bark? why do you resist? The vessel of election speaks these things: The woman and the virgin, he says, is divided. See of how great happiness she is, who has even lost the name of her sex. A virgin is now not called a woman. She who is not married thinks on the things which are of the Lord, that she may be holy in body and spirit. The definition of a virgin

is to be holy in body and spirit; because it profits nothing to have a virgin flesh, if one has married in mind. But she who is married thinks on the things which are of the world, how she may please her husband. Do you think it is the same thing to be at leisure for prayer days and nights, to be at leisure for fasts; and at the arrival of the husband to polish the face, to mince the gait, to feign blandishments? The former does this that she may appear more foul, and may cloud the good of nature by injury. The latter is painted at the mirror, and in insult to the Artificer endeavors to be more beautiful than she was born. Thence infants prattle, the household makes a noise, children hang from kisses and from the mouth, expenses are calculated, outlays are prepared. On this side the girded hand of cooks rubs the meats, on that side the crowd of weavers murmurs; meanwhile it is announced that the husband has come with his companions. She, after the manner of a swallow, surveys all the inner rooms, whether the couch be stiff, whether they have swept the floors, whether the cups be adorned, whether the dinner be prepared. Answer, I pray, where among these things is the thought of God? And these are happy houses? But where drums sound, the pipe cries out, the lyre prattles, the cymbal clatters, what fear of God is there? The parasite glories in insults; victims exposed to lusts enter, and naked by the thinness of their garments are forced upon immodest eyes. At these things the unhappy wife either is glad and perishes, or is offended and the husband is incited to quarrels. Hence discord, the

seed-plot of divorce. Or if some house is found in which these things do not happen, which is a rare bird; yet does not the very management of the house, the education of children, the necessities of the husband, the correction of the little servants, call away from the thought of God? The female things of Sarah, says the Scripture, had failed (Gen. 18:11); after which it is said to Abraham: In all things whatsoever Sarah says to you, hear her voice (Gen. 21:12). She who is not in the anxieties and pain of childbirth, she who, the offices of the menstrual blood failing, has ceased to be a woman, is made free from the curse of God; nor is her turning to her husband, but on the contrary the husband is subjected to her, and it is commanded to him by the voice of the Lord: In all things whatsoever Sarah says to you, hear her voice; and thus they begin to be at leisure for prayer. Because as long as in marriage the debt is paid, the instance of praying is passed over.

21. We do not deny that widows, we do not deny that married women, are found to be holy women; but those who have ceased to be wives, who in the very necessity of marriage imitate the chastity of virgins. This is what the Apostle briefly, with Christ speaking in him, testified: The unmarried woman thinks on the things of God, how she may please God: but she who is married thinks on the things of the world, how she may please her husband (1 Cor. 7:34); leaving to us over this a field of understanding. Nor yet does he impose necessity or a snare on anyone, but he persuades that which is honest, wishing all to be

just as himself. And although he does not have a precept of the Lord concerning virginity: because it is beyond men; and in a certain way it was the part of an impudent man to compel against nature, and in another way to say, I wish you to be what Angels are: whence also a virgin is of greater reward, while she despises that which if she shall have done, she does not sin; nevertheless in the things connected he adds: But I give counsel, as having obtained mercy from the Lord, that I may be faithful. I think therefore that this is good on account of the present necessity; because it is good for a man so to be. What is that necessity? Woe to those who are with child and to those who give suck in that day (Matt. 24:19, and Mark 13:17). Therefore the forest grows up, that afterwards it may be cut down. Therefore the field is sown, that it may be reaped. Now the world is full, the earth does not contain us. Daily wars cut us down, diseases take us away, shipwrecks swallow us up, and nevertheless we litigate concerning boundaries? From this number are those who follow the Lamb (Rev. 14), who have not defiled their garments, for they remained virgins. Observe what defiled signifies. I do not dare to expound it, lest Helvidius should cavil. But as to what you say, that some are shop-keeping virgins; I say more to you, that there are among these even adulteresses, and, that you may wonder more, that clerics are innkeepers, and monks are immodest. But who does not immediately understand that neither a shop-keeping woman can be a virgin, nor an adulterous man a monk,

nor a cleric an innkeeper? Is it the fault of virginity if a pretender of virginity is in crime? I certainly, that passing over other persons I may come to the Virgin: she who exercises the arts of a huckster, I know not whether in body, but what I do know, she does not remain a virgin in spirit.

22. We have used rhetoric, and in the manner of declaimers, we have played a little. You, Helvidius, have compelled us, who now with the Gospel flashing, wish virgins and married women to be of the same glory. And because I judge that you have been overcome by the truth, and have turned to the detraction of my life and to maledictions (for even silly women are accustomed to do this, who wish ill to their victorious masters in corners), I say this beforehand, that your reproaches will be a glory to me, when you tear me with the same mouth with which you detracted from Mary, and the servant of the Lord and his mother experience a canine eloquence alike.