

VI. Mary as a „perpetual virgin”.

1. Teaching of the Catholic Church.

The official acts of the Fifth Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 553 referred to Mary as ἀειπαρθενος (*aeiparthenos*) which in Greek means an „ever-virgin”. The teaching of her perpetual virginity has been confirmed on subsequent councils and has become a dogma of the Catholic Church.

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 (Cf. DS 291; 294; 427; 442; 503; 571; 1880). In fact, Christ's birth “did not diminish his mother's virginal integrity but sanctified it” (*Lumen gentium*, 57). And so the liturgy of the Church celebrates Mary as *Aeiparthenos*, the “Ever-virgin” (Cf. *Lumen gentium*, 52).
Catechism of the Catholic Church, §499

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, *Sermones*. 186, 1: PL 38, 999): with her whole being she is “the handmaid of the Lord” (Luke 1:38).
Catechism of the Catholic Church, §510

In order to maintain this dogma, the Catholic Church interprets all the New Testament fragments mentioning the siblings of Jesus as speaking of His relatives.

Against this doctrine the objection is sometimes raised that the Bible mentions brothers and sisters of Jesus (Cf. Mark 3:31-35; 6:3; 1 Corinthians 9:5; Galatians 1:19). 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” (Matthew 13:55; 28:1; cf. Matthew 27:56). They are close relations of Jesus, according to an Old Testament expression (Cf. Genesis 13:8; 14:16; 29:15; etc.).
Catechism of the Catholic Church, §500

For the Catholic Church Mary's virginity is “*the sign of her faith* ‘unadulterated by any doubt’ and of her undivided gift of herself to God's will”.

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 (*Lumen gentium* 63; cf. *1 Corinthians* 7:34-35). It is her faith that enables her to become the mother of the Savior: “Mary is more blessed because she embraces faith in Christ than because she conceives the flesh of Christ” (St. Augustine, *De sancta virginitate*, 3: PL 40, 398).
Catechism of the Catholic Church, §506

Mary's virginity forms an important part of her being perceived as “the symbol and the most perfect realization of the Church”.

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” (*Lumen gentium*, 64; cf. 63).
Catechism of the Catholic Church, §507

2. Mary's virginity in the scripture.

The scripture teaches that Mary was a virgin before conceiving Jesus. Her virgin conception was important for several reasons.

2.1. The prophecy of Isaiah 7:14.

Firstly, it was necessary for the prophecy of Isaiah to be fulfilled.

14 Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.
Isaiah 7:14 NASB

Isaiah prophesied that God would give a sign and “a virgin will be with child and bear a son”. The Hebrew word *almah* (אִלְמָה) means both a young woman and a virgin and thanks to Matthew we know that Isaiah used it in the second meaning. Conception by a young woman would not be a special sign from the Lord in any case.

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. **19** And Joseph her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to send her away secretly. **20** But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. **21** She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” **22** Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet:**23** “Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which translated means, “God with us.”
Matthew 1:18-23 NASB

2.2. Jesus as the firstborn.

Secondly, only through Mary’s virgin birth could the Old Testament teachings about primogeniture find their fulfilment in Christ. Although the status of the firstborn in the case of Christ refers primarily to the privileges associated with primogeniture (and those, according to the biblical meaning of this term were not always given to the first offspring)¹ it also includes the order of birth.

7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.
Luke 2:7 NASB

22 And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord **23** (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every *firstborn* male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”), **24** and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, “A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”
Luke 2:22-24 NASB

The firstborn son was given the position of preeminence and to him belonged the largest inheritance (Deuteronomy 21:15-17). Additionally, since the last Egyptian plague in which God killed all that was firstborn in Egypt (Exodus 4:23, 11:4-7, 12:29), all that was firstborn in Israel was consecrated to Him (Exodus 13:2, 13:12-15, 22:29-30). This consecration involved being fully devoted to God in serving Him and it became the allotment of the Levites whom God took instead of the firstborn children in Israel (Numbers 3:12-13, 3:41-45, 8:14-18) since the whole of Israel committed apostasy against the

¹ Equally important as the literal meaning is the secondary meaning of being the firstborn which refers to the pre-eminence, rulership and supremacy – and in this sense the term “firstborn” could be used to refer to a son who was not born first (cf. Psalm 89:27). The birthright of the firstborn did not always remain with the firstborn son and would at times be imparted on a further descendant. For example Esau ceded his birthright to Jacob for a portion of food (Genesis 25:29-34). Reuben lost his firstborn status through his immoral conduct towards his father (Genesis 35:22, 49:4; 1 Chronicles 5:1-2) and it was given to Joseph, etc.

Lord in the golden calf incident and only the tribe of Levi remained faithful to Moses (Exodus 32; Deuteronomy 33:8-11).

Both the preeminence and rulership (Daniel 7:13-14; Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:9-11) and full devotion to serving God (John 4:34, 5:30, 6:38, 17:4) have been united in the person of Christ. In Christ the kingship (Psalm 2:6, 45:6; Revelation 19:16, etc.) and priesthood have been uniquely combined (Psalm 110; Zechariah 6:13). As the King-Messiah Christ is the ultimate fulfilment of all the Old Testament types and prophecies about the firstborn (Psalm 89:27; Hebrews 1:6; cf. Romans 8:29) and it was only appropriate that He should also be the Firstborn Son of Mary.²

2.3. Jesus had to be born without a human father in order to be free from the sin nature.

Directly connected to the virgin conception is also the fact that Jesus had to be born without a human father in order to be free from the sin nature, since from Adam it is passed on through the male line (chapter IV, points 2.1 and 2.2; Romans 5:12, 5:17, 5:19; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22). Although theoretically the conception by the Holy Spirit and without a human father does not necessitate a virgin conception, it does practically. If Jesus had been born from the Holy Spirit after Mary began to have relations with Joseph and other children had been born, there would have been no end to human speculations and allegations.

20 But when he had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.
Matthew 1:20 NASB

34 Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” **35** The angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. **36** And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. **37** For nothing will be impossible with God.”
Luke 1:34-37 NASB

Mary’s virginity before the conception of Jesus was thus important and it is confirmed by the testimony of the scripture. Her virginity after Jesus has been born, however, was irrelevant from a theological point of view and the Bible not only nowhere teaches that Mary remained a virgin, but in many places says the exact opposite.

3. Mary’s perpetual virginity – the testimony of the scripture and the interpretations of the Catholic Church.

3.1. Matthew 1:18.

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.
Matthew 1:18 NASB

Already at the beginning of the gospel of Matthew we encounter the first testimony showing that the teaching of Mary’s perpetual virginity contradicts the teaching of the scripture. Matthew writes that “before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit”. The expression “came together” is a translation of the Greek word *συνέρχομαι* (*synerchomai*) – “to come together” which according to the BDAG lexicon (Danker et al., 2000) means:

1. to come together with others as a group, assemble, gather (e.g., Mark 3:20, etc.).

2 Christ is also the Firstborn among the resurrected – He was first resurrected (Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5).

2. to come/go with one or more persons, travel together with someone (e.g., John 11:33; Luke 23:55, etc.).
3. to unite in an intimate relationship, come together in a sexual context (e.g., 1 Corinthians 7:5). In πρὶν ἢ συνελθεῖν αὐτοῦς in Matthew 1:18 domestic and marital relations are combined.

The first two meanings are unrelated to the context of Matthew 1:18 where we have neither a gathering nor a travel undertaken by a group of people. The third meaning refers to uniting in an intimate relationship and according to the lexicon in this verse the word *synerchomai* refers both to the spouses coming to live together and their marital relations. The Catholic translation in the New Jerusalem Bible (similarly as the Catholic translations in other languages – cf. the Polish Biblia Tysiąclecia) ignores the intimate aspect of Mary and Joseph coming together and renders „but before they came to live together”.

Catholic translations often render this verse in such a way as to make it possible to uphold the doctrine of Mary’s perpetual virginity and these translations are wrong. The word *synerchomai*, according to its usage in ancient Greek, contains in itself the notion of intimate relations between the spouses (the matter of such relations is always described euphemistically in the scripture) and the context makes it clear that it is in this sense that the word was used in Matthew 1:18.

Matthew says that “before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit” which means that Mary and Joseph did have marital relations, but this occurred after Jesus was born and so the conception took place through a miracle (he continues the thought in the following verses, again emphasising that Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit – Matthew 1:19-20).

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: when His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit.
Matthew 1:18 NASB

3.2. Matthew 1:24-25.

24 And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took *Mary* as his wife, **25** but kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Jesus.
Matthew 1:24-25 NASB

The Greek text at the beginning of verse 25 says: καὶ οὐκ ἐγίνωσκεν αὐτὴν ἕως οὗ ἔτεκεν υἱόν (*kai ouk eginōsken autēn heōs hou eteken huion*) which translated literally means “and he did not know her until she bore a son”. “To know” is a biblical euphemism meaning “to have an intercourse”, used also in the Old Testament (cf. Genesis 4:1, 4:17, 4:25, etc.). Thus the verse says that Joseph did not begin to have marital relations with Mary until she gave birth to her Son.

The key expression here is *heōs hou* which means “till”, “until”, “as far as”, “to”, “up to”. The meaning of this phrase is clear – it denotes the end of a period of time and it is in this meaning that Matthew uses *heōs* also in other places in his gospel (e.g., Matthew 5:26, 10:23, 16:28, 24:34, etc.). If thus Matthew writes that Joseph “kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son”, then this means that he did not approach Mary to have relations with her until she gave birth to a Son – and that he did afterwards. The purpose of this expression is to denote a time limit of a certain activity or state.

Otherwise Matthew could have written that Joseph kept her a virgin without setting any time limit, that they never had relations, etc. If Joseph was never to have marital relations with Mary and if she was to remain a virgin perpetually, then using the expression “until” in this sentence is pointless and misleading. Joseph did not have relations with Mary until the birth of Jesus in order for Isaiah’s prophecy to be fulfilled (Isaiah 7:14, see point 2.1 above), but after His birth they began normal marital cohabitation from which other children were born (see 3.4 below).

In the Catholic church attempting to conform the Word of God to a given doctrine – instead of following exactly the opposite procedure – goes beyond an erroneous interpretation of a particular verse, however, and often even leads to purposefully giving a false translation. The Catholic translation New Jerusalem Bible renders the beginning of verse 25 in the following way: “he had no intercourse with her when she gave birth to a son” and the word “when” is also used by the Knox Bible. The meaning of the Greek *heōs hou* is “till”, “until”, “as far as”, “to”, “up to” and not “when” which is a clear perversion of the text³. We are here dealing with a basic Greek word whose meaning is clear and not with a complicated lexical or grammatical problem. The usage of the word “when” makes the whole expression nonsensical. Another Catholic Translation – the New American Bible – says: “He had no relations with her at any time before she bore a son” which is another attempt to obscure the clear meaning of the verse – that the birth of Jesus is the end of the period when they did not have relations. Such twisting of the clear meaning of the words of the scripture by the Catholic Church is a grave error (cf. chapter V, point 3, analysis of paragraph 37 of the *Munificentissimus Deus* encyclical).

15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.
2 Timothy 2:15 NASB

1 Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart, **2** but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.
2 Corinthians 4:1-2 NASB

17 For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God.
2 Corinthians 2:17 NASB

32 “Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it.”
Deuteronomy 12:32 NASB

5 Every word of God is tested;
He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.
6 Do not add to His words
Or He will reprove you, and you will be proved a liar.
Proverbs 30:5-6 NASB

6 Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.
1 Corinthians 4:6 NASB

18 I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book;**19** and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.
Revelation 22:18-19 NASB

3.3. Luke 2:7 – Jesus as the firstborn Son.

3 According to BDAG, Greek *heōs* can be used to denote contemporaneousness and mean “as long as, while”, but to take this expression in this way in Matthew 1:25 leads to a nonsensical translation – that Joseph did not have an intercourse with Mary when (in the sense of “during”, “while”) she bore a son. The usage of Greek tenses in this verse (i.e., the word “bore” is in the aorist – the completed past tense – and not the imperfect which would signify the duration of an activity) also makes this rendering impossible.

As discussed in point 2.1, Jesus was the firstborn Son of Mary.

7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.
Luke 2:7 NASB

22 And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord 23 (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every *firstborn* male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord”), 24 and to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the Law of the Lord, “A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”
Luke 2:22-24 NASB

3.3.1. The meaning of the Greek word πρωτότοκος – *prōtotokos*.

The context makes it clear that the word “firstborn” – Greek πρωτότοκος – *prōtotokos* – is used in the literal meaning in these verses and describes Jesus as the first child of Mary.

The word *prōtotokos* is used of Christ six times in the New Testament. Four times it refers to His position in relation to others – in Luke 2:7 as the first child of Mary, in Romans 8:29 as the firstborn “among many brethren” (“brethren” here means all believers predestined to be conformed to His image), in Colossians 1:18 and Revelation 1:5 as the first among the resurrected.

The word “firstborn” is used in its metaphorical meaning – as referring to the preeminence and the highest position – and without the reference to its literal meaning in Colossians 1:15 and Hebrews 1:6. In Colossians 1:15 Christ is described as “the firstborn of all creation” – not, however, because He is a creature Himself and was created as the first, since as God He has always existed (John 1:1). Paul calls Christ “the firstborn of all creation” because “by Him all things were created” (verse 16) and He holds a position of preeminence over all creation – “He is before all things” (verse 17).

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.
Colossians 1:15-17 NASB

At the same time, Christ became a man for us, which made it possible to reconcile sinful creatures with the perfectly holy God. And so as the Creator and the One who lowered Himself for us and as the God-man reconciled man with God (and through it the rest of the creation, cf. Romans 8:19-22), our Lord can be described as “the firstborn of all creation”, with Paul using the word *prōtotokos* as meaning the highest position and authority.

In Hebrews 1:6 Christ is also described as the “firstborn” and in this verse too this title refers to Christ’s position as the Lord of the whole creation (verses 2 and 3), possessing the highest rank and being incomparably superior to angels (verses 4-13).

In Colossians 1:15 and Hebrews 1:6 the context clearly indicates that the word “firstborn” is used in its metaphorical meaning and does not refer to primacy among others who follow (for example in resurrection – Colossians 1:18 and Revelation 1:15). The context of Luke 2:7 and 2:23 precludes such usage of the word *prōtotokos* as it is evident that Luke refers to the order of birth in both verses. An attempt to impose the metaphorical meaning of this word in Luke 2:7 requires ignoring both the context and the fact that Jesus is called the “firstborn” Son of Mary – not a “firstborn of all creation” (Colossians 1:15) or the Son of God who as the Lord and Creator of all things is above all creation as the “firstborn” (Hebrews 1:6).

3.3.2. Luke could have used the word μονογενής (*monogenēs*) – “the only one” to describe Jesus, as he uses this word in other places in his gospel.

If Luke wanted to say that Jesus was Mary's only Son – as the Catholic Church interprets – then it is difficult to explain the usage of the word “firstborn”, the meaning of which implies that other children must have been born after Him. The Catholic interpretation becomes impossible to defend when we take into account that when referring to the only child Luke uses in his gospel the word with exactly this meaning – μονογενής (*monogenēs*) – “one and only”, “the only one”.

12 Now as He approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out, the only (μονογενής – *monogenēs*) son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her.
Luke 7:12 NASB

41 And there came a man named Jairus, and he was an official of the synagogue; and he fell at Jesus' feet, and *began* to implore Him to come to his house; **42** for he had an only daughter (θυγάτηρ μονογενής – *thygatēr monogenēs* – “the only daughter”), about twelve years old, and she was dying. But as He went, the crowds were pressing against Him.
Luke 8:41-42 NASB

38 And a man from the crowd shouted, saying, “Teacher, I beg You to look at my son, for he is my only *boy* (μονογενής – *monogenēs*),
Luke 9:38 NASB

To use this word to describe Jesus would make the matter clear and not leave room for any speculation, but Luke did not do so.

John refers to Jesus as the only Son (μονογενής – *monogenēs*) of God the Father – because He is the one and only (John 1:18, 3:16, 3:18; 1 John 4:9).

14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.
John 1:14 NASB

Jesus was the only Son of God, but He was the firstborn Son of Mary who bore other children after Him (see point 3.4 below).

In Luke we also have a description of a birth of an only child. Luke relates the miraculous birth of John the Baptist foretold to Zechariah by the angel Gabriel (cf. Luke 1:7, 1:13, 1:18) in the following way:

57 Now the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she gave birth to a son.
Luke 1:57 NASB

John the Baptist was the only son of Zacharias and Elizabeth and Luke writes that Elizabeth “gave birth to a son”. He does not use the description “firstborn” since it would be misleading by indicating that other descendants came after him.

Catholic theologians also use the argument given by Jerome from Stridon that the word “firstborn” could have been used also to describe a son after whom there were no further descendants, as otherwise the son who was to be given over to God as the firstborn (Exodus 13:2, 34:20; Numbers 3:12) could only be referred to as such if at least one other child was born after him and the scripture doesn't give such a condition.⁴ This is true and in the context of sanctifying a son to God according to His command, as in the verses listed above (Exodus 13:2, 34:20; Numbers 3:12) such a usage of the word “firstborn” was possible. This argument, however, can only apply in the context where this precept of the Law is present and this is not the case in Luke 2:7 which has nothing to do with it.

4 Jerome presents this argument in his work “Against Helvidius: The Perpetual Virginity of the Blessed Virgin Mary”.

3.4. Siblings of Jesus.

The siblings of Jesus are mentioned in numerous places in the New Testament. According to the interpretation of the Catholic Church in all these passages it is not the literal brothers and sisters of Christ who are mentioned, but rather some other relatives.

Against this doctrine the objection is sometimes raised that the Bible mentions brothers and sisters of Jesus (Cf. Mark 3:31-35; 6:3; 1 Corinthians 9:5; Galatians 1:19). 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” (Matthew 13:55; 28:1; cf. Matthew 27:56). They are close relations of Jesus, according to an Old Testament expression (Cf. Genesis 13:8; 14:16; 29:15; etc.).
Catechism of the Catholic Church, §500

Below is a list of verses mentioning Jesus’ siblings which are then analysed in the subpoints which follow.

46 While He was still speaking to the crowds, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him. **47** Someone said to Him, “Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You.” **48** But Jesus answered the one who was telling Him and said, “Who is My mother and who are My brothers?” **49** And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, “Behold My mother and My brothers! **50** For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother.”
Matthew 12:46-50 NASB

The footnote for Matthew 12:46 in the Catholic Jerusalem Bible says:

In Hebrew and Aramaic (and many other languages), “brothers” is the word used for cousins or even more distant relations of the same generation.

Similarly, the footnote for this verse in the Polish Catholic Translation – Biblia Tysiąclecia – says:

Not blood brothers, but paternal or maternal cousins. Hebrew and Aramaic have no separate words to designate closer relatives (cf. Mark 3:31).

31 Then His mother and His brothers *arrived, and standing outside they sent *word* to Him and called Him. **32** A crowd was sitting around Him, and they *said to Him, “Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You.” **33** Answering them, He *said, “Who are My mother and My brothers?” **34** Looking about at those who were sitting around Him, He *said, “Behold My mother and My brothers! **35** For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother.”
Mark 3:31-35 NASB

19 And His mother and brothers came to Him, and they were unable to get to Him because of the crowd. **20** And it was reported to Him, “Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, wishing to see You.” **21** But He answered and said to them, “My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it.”
Luke 8:19-21 NASB

54 He came to His hometown and *began* teaching them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, “Where *did* this man *get* this wisdom and *these* miraculous powers? **55** Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? **56** And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then *did* this man *get* all these things?” **57** And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his *own* household.”
Matthew 13:54-57 NASB

2 When the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue; and the many listeners were astonished, saying, "Where did this man *get* these things, and what is *this* wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands? **3** Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?" And they took offense at Him. **4** Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his *own* relatives and in his *own* household."
Mark 6:2-4 NASB

12 After this He went down to Capernaum, He and His mother and *His* brothers and His disciples; and they stayed there a few days.
John 2:12 NASB

5 For not even His brothers were believing in Him.
John 7:5 NASB

10 But when His brothers had gone up to the feast, then He Himself also went up, not publicly, but as if, in secret.
John 7:10 NASB

14 These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with *the* women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.
Acts 1:14 NASB

5 Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?
1 Corinthians 9:5 NASB

The New Jerusalem Bible gives a correct translation of this verse, as by using the words ἀδελφὴν γυναῖκα – *adelphēn gynaiika* - "sister woman/wife", Paul is referring to a believing wife:

5 And every right to be accompanied by a Christian wife, like the other apostles, like the brothers of the Lord, and like Cephas?
1 Corinthians 9:5 New Jerusalem Bible

Some other Catholic translations, however, render this verse in such a way as to create an impression that a believing woman is meant who is not a wife:

5 Have we not power to carry about a woman, a sister, as well as the rest of the apostles, and the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?
1 Corinthians 9:5 Douay-Rheims Bible

5 nay, have we not the right to travel about with a woman who is a sister, as the other apostles do, as the Lord's brethren do, and Cephas?
1 Corinthians 9:5 Knox Bible

The footnote in the Polish Catholic Translation (Biblia Tysiąclecia) which renders this phrase "a woman-sister" says:

"woman-sister" – certainly women who were taking care of the material needs of Apostles' every day life; cf. Luke 8:2.

We have here another example of a false interpretation by the Catholic Church which stems from attempting to defend another unbiblical ordinance – the compulsory celibacy imposed on clergy.

Firstly, the reference to Luke 8:2, although seemingly supporting this interpretation, has in reality got nothing to do with the matter discussed by Paul, since he is only speaking of one woman taken by the apostle and not a group of women who were following the apostles together, as it is the case in the quoted Luke verse.

Secondly, it is practically impossible that in a society as depraved and immoral as was the case with the pagans at that time the apostles would take the risk of conducting themselves in a manner that could easily be wrongly interpreted and taken as a permission to live with a woman who was not one's wife. In the case of Christians, circumspection in such matters was all the more important given that they were treated with suspicion and often falsely accused by those among whom they lived – to become a reason for offence was unacceptable.

Finally, this wrong interpretation contradicts the argument that Paul presents 1 Corinthians 9:4-14, according to which apostles had the right to be sustained by the church and this right extended to their wives and children. The Catholic interpretation ignores the context and leads to a paradox, since according to it the church would have to sustain the person whose task it was to – according to the footnote – “take care of the material needs of Apostles’ every day life”. We would thus have a situation where apostles had the right to expect material sustenance for a person who was to provide this sustenance (!). By giving the reference to Luke 8:2 the Catholic Church contradicts its own argument since the women following Christ and the apostles not only were not a material burden, but supported them financially themselves.

1 Soon afterwards, He *began* going around from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God. The twelve were with Him, **2** and *also* some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, **3** and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means.
Luke 8:1-3 NASB

19 But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother.⁵
Galatians 1:19 NASB

Jude, mentioned in Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3, was almost certainly also a brother of our Lord (he was a blood brother of James mentioned in the same verses – technically both were half-brothers of Jesus through Mary) and is an author of the inspired New Testament letter:

1 Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James,
To those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ:⁶
Jude 1:1 NASB

The above verses directly testify to Jesus having siblings, but there are New Testament passages which confirm this fact indirectly, such as Luke 2:41-46:

41 Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover.**42** And when He became twelve, they went up *there* according to the custom of the Feast; **43** and as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But His parents were unaware of it,**44** but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day's journey; and they *began* looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances. **45** When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for

5 James, the Lord's brother, is also mentioned in other places in the New Testament – Acts 12:17, 15:13, 21:18; 1 Corinthians 15:7; Galatians 2:9, 2:12.

6 There are several reasons why Jude describes himself as the “brother of James” and not a “brother of the Lord”: his family relationship was secondary to the spiritual relationship; the designation “brother of the Lord” had already belonged to James (Galatians 1:19); Jude could have also refrained from using this title through humility. Since this name was quite common, however – for example in the New Testament two apostles had it (Matthew 10:3-4; Mark 3:18-19; Luke 6:16; John 14:22) and Jude Barsabbas (Acts 15:22; the same Greek name Ἰούδας – *Ioudas* – can be translated as “Jude” or “Judas”) - it was important for Jude to be somehow distinguished from them. We should also remember that all New Testament authors were either apostles, directly associated with the apostles or brothers of the One who sent the apostles. If Jude had not been a brother of Jesus, he would be an exception (R.D. Luginbill, personal communication, January 31, 2013).

Him. **46** Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions.
Luke 2:41-46 NASB

It is highly improbable that Mary and Joseph would have gone a day's journey before realising that Jesus was not with them unless they were occupied with other children. Coming back from some sort of festival or any other destination – even together with other members of the family – would we not immediately realise that our only child is missing? Failure to realise about Jesus missing was far more likely if the number of children was higher and we know that Jesus had at least six siblings – four brothers and at least two sisters (Tasker, 1976).

The situation described in Luke 2:41-46 is also ironically inconsistent with the false and baseless teaching of the Catholic Church according to which Mary is the mother of the whole humanity and an archetype of the Church as the mother. If Mary really only had Jesus with her back then, then this makes things all the worse, since then the one who is (wrongly) perceived by the Catholic church as the perfect mother, would on the way back from Jerusalem have misplaced her only son (!).

3.4.1. Analysis of the context.

Before the words used in the passages quoted above are analysed linguistically, we should study the context of the verses where Jesus' brothers and sisters are mentioned.

3.4.1.1. The meaning of the words in a given context.

46 While He was still speaking to the crowds, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him. **47** Someone said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You." **48** But Jesus answered the one who was telling Him and said, "Who is My mother and who are My brothers?" **49** And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, "Behold My mother and My brothers! **50** For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother."
Matthew 12:46-50 NASB

54 He came to His hometown and *began* teaching them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where *did* this man *get* this wisdom and *these* miraculous powers? **55** Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? **56** And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then *did* this man *get* all these things?" **57** And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his *own* household."
Matthew 13:54-57 NASB

Firstly, if both in Matthew 12:46 and 47 and Matthew 13:55 the word "mother" is used in its literal meaning, then we cannot begin in the middle of the sentence to interpret other words – which refer to brothers and in Matthew 13:56 also to sisters – metaphorically.

The context is clear – in both quoted passages Mary is Jesus' mother, in Matthew 13:55 Joseph is the carpenter. Thus His brothers and the sisters are the literal brothers and sisters (to be precise, half-brothers and half-sisters as children of Joseph and Mary – Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit). According to the Catholic interpretation Mary is the mother (literal interpretation), Joseph is the carpenter (literal interpretation), but the brothers are – according to the footnote in the Catholic Jerusalem Bible – "cousins or even more distant relatives of the same generation" (switch from a literal interpretation to one referring to a more distant meaning). We are here dealing with baseless interpretive gymnastics in which the meaning of words flowing directly from the context is changed in order to defend a pre-imposed doctrine. The context clearly speaks of Jesus direct family relationships – mother, father, brothers and sisters.

The fact that the word "brother" has a broader range of meaning and can for example be used by a Jew addressing his kinsmen (Acts 3:17) or refer to a fellow believer in Christ (Acts 1:15-16; Romans 1:13, etc.), does not mean that we can ignore the context and arbitrarily transfer a given meaning to any

other text where the word is used. It is obvious that the fact that Paul uses the word “brethren” in Romans 1:13 to refer to fellow believers – and so his brothers in faith – does not allow us to apply this meaning of the word “brethren” in any other context. This is what the Catholic church is doing in their distorted interpretation of Matthew 12:46-47 and 13:55-56, ignoring the obvious meaning of the text and breaking a fundamental principle of biblical interpretation.

3.4.1.2. Matthew 12:46-50 – distinguishing between blood relationships and spiritual relationships.

46 While He was still speaking to the crowds, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him. **47** Someone said to Him, “Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You.” **48** But Jesus answered the one who was telling Him and said, “Who is My mother and who are My brothers?” **49** And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, “Behold My mother and My brothers! **50** For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother.” Matthew 12:46-50 NASB (also Mark 3:31-35 and Luke 8:19-21)

The purpose of Jesus’ reply in Matthew 12:48 is to distinguish between blood relationships and spiritual relationships. This clearly indicates that in verse 47 it is His literal mother and brothers who are spoken of since the contrast is meant to show which relationships are the most important and that those who fulfil God’s will are closer to Jesus than even his blood brothers. The whole point of this passage is lost in the Catholic interpretation of it according to which Jesus’ brothers are some more distant relatives. It would yield the following sense:

46 While He was still speaking to the crowds, behold, His mother and brothers – cousins or even more distant relatives of the same generation – were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him. **47** Someone said to Him, “Behold, Your mother and Your brothers – cousins or even more distant relatives of the same generation – are standing outside seeking to speak to You.” **48** But Jesus answered the one who was telling Him and said, “Who is My mother and who are My brothers – cousins or even more distant relatives of the same generation?” **49** And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, “Behold My mother and My brothers – cousins or even more distant relatives of the same generation! **50** For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother – a cousin or even a more distant relative of the same generation – and sister – a cousin or even a more distant relative of the same generation – and mother.” Matthew 12:46-50 NASB

The context makes it clear that Jesus used the words “mother” and “brothers” referring to the closest blood relations, otherwise His response loses its meaning.

3.4.1.3. Matthew 13:55 – the insult of the Nazarenes is aimed at Jesus’ closest family

54 He came to His hometown and *began* teaching them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, “Where *did* this man *get* this wisdom and *these* miraculous powers? **55** Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? **56** And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then *did* this man *get* all these things?” **57** And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his *own* household.” Matthew 13:54-57 NASB

Firstly, as it has been discussed above, the Catholic church interprets the words referring to Joseph and Mary at the beginning of verse 55 literally, and then suddenly in the middle of this sentence changes the interpretive method and takes the brothers and sisters as more distant relatives. This change is unjustified and goes against the context.

Secondly, the insult of the Nazarenes was aimed at Jesus’ closest, biological family since it is the humble status of the family He came from that was an offence and a stumbling block for them to

believe in Him. By referring to Christ's nuclear family which they knew and which in their eyes was not exceptional in any way – quite contrary – they were rejecting His special status and would not accept Him as the Messiah.

Also in this case interpreting “brothers” as some distant relatives is against the point of the insult against our Lord's family. The argument of those who did not believe in Jesus and considered Him an ordinary man is based on Him having a normal, human, biological family which they knew and the status and origin of which were not extraordinary in any way. To take “brothers” as distant relatives outside of the closest biological family deprives this argument of its force.

54 He came to His hometown and *began* teaching them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, “Where *did* this man *get* this wisdom and *these* miraculous powers? **55** Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers - cousins or even more distant relatives of the same generation – James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? **56** And His sisters - cousins or even more distant relatives of the same generation – are they not all with us? Where then *did* this man *get* all these things?” **57** And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his *own* household.”
Matthew 13:54-57 NASB

It is absurd to consider that the Nazarenes were degrading Jesus by first referring to His father (they thought that Joseph was Jesus' biological father), then to His mother – to then suddenly start speaking of some more distant relatives. There is also no reason for children coming from a different family to share the insult which was clearly directed at the closest family of Christ.⁷

The literal meaning of the words “brothers” and “sisters” is further supported by the fact that they are spoken by the Nazarenes, people coming from the same region as Jesus and belonging to the same local community. Otherwise, if the Nazarenes did not have Christ's blood brothers and sisters in mind, then instead of referring to some distant relatives in order to prove that Jesus was an ordinary man, they could have equally usedis an expression “is He not one of us”? Since, however, they refer to brothers and sisters of Christ – as opposed to themselves – then it means that their words are aimed at the closest, biological family of Jesus (R.D. Luginbill, personal communication, August 7, 2017).

Finally it is not only against the context to defend an interpretation according to which “brothers” mean cousins, but in this fragment we also have sisters and to take them as cousins or some distant relatives further strains the argument.

3.4.1.4. Matthew 13:57 – “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his *own* household”.

Jesus words from verse 57 (also Mark 6:4; Luke 4:24; cf. John 4:44) also confirm that it is His blood brothers and sisters who are mentioned in this passage. Jesus refers to His rejection by the Nazarenes (“A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his *own* household”) and by the members of His own family – as even His brothers did not believe in Him (“A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his *own* household”).

5 For not even His brothers were believing in Him.
John 7:5 NASB

3.4.2. Linguistic analysis of the word “brothers”.

7 What would be the point of demeaning some distant relatives - “Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His paternal cousin James, maternal cousins Joseph and Simon and some other distant relative – Judas?”

According to the Catholic church (Catechism of the Catholic Church, §500), the word “brothers” in the verses quoted above does not refer to blood brothers, but rather to “close relations of Jesus, according to an Old Testament expression (Cf. Genesis 13:8; 14:16; 29:15; etc.)”.

The reasoning of the Catholic Church and its assumptions are clearly presented in the fragment of the Catholic text “Brethren of the Lord” (n.d.), the purpose of which is to defend the dogma of Mary’s perpetual virginity. This text has been officially approved by the Catholic Church authority.

Because neither Hebrew nor Aramaic (the language spoken by Christ and his disciples) had a special word meaning “cousin”, speakers of those languages could use either the word for “brother” or a circumlocution, such as “the son of my uncle”. But circumlocutions are clumsy, so the Jews often used “brother”.

The writers of the New Testament were brought up using the Aramaic equivalent of “brothers” to mean both cousins and sons of the same father—plus other relatives and even non-relatives. When they wrote in Greek, they did the same thing the translators of the Septuagint did. (The Septuagint was the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible; it was translated by Hellenistic Jews a century or two before Christ’s birth and was the version of the Bible from which most of the Old Testament quotations found in the New Testament are taken.)

In the Septuagint the Hebrew word that includes both brothers and cousins was translated as adelphos, which in Greek usually has the narrow meaning that the English “brother” has. Unlike Hebrew or Aramaic, Greek has a separate word for cousin, anepsios, but the translators of the Septuagint used adelphos, even for true cousins.

You might say they transliterated instead of translated, importing the Jewish idiom into the Greek Bible. They took an exact equivalent of the Hebrew word for “brother” and did not use adelphos in one place (for sons of the same parents), and anepsios in another (for cousins). This same usage was employed by the writers of the New Testament and passed into English translations of the Bible. To determine what “brethren” or “brother” or “sister” means in any one verse, we have to look at the context. When we do that, we see that insuperable problems arise if we assume that Mary had children other than Jesus. “Brethren of the Lord” (n.d.)

The reasoning of the Catholic church can be summarised in the following points:

1. Jesus and His disciples spoke Aramaic.
2. Neither in the Aramaic nor in the Hebrew is there a word meaning “cousin”, so to designate a cousin the word “brother” was used, since “circumlocutions are clumsy”.
3. The writers of the New Testament were brought up using the Aramaic equivalent of “brothers” to mean both cousins and sons of the same father—plus other relatives and even non-relatives.
4. When writing their books, the New Testament authors followed the Septuagint, translating the Hebrew word meaning both brothers and cousins as *adelphos* – brother.
5. In order to determine what “brethren” or “brother” or “sister” means in any given verse, we have to look at the context.

Let’s analyse this argumentation.

3.4.2.1. The language spoken by Jesus and His disciples.

Because neither Hebrew nor Aramaic (the language spoken by Christ and his disciples) had a special word meaning “cousin”, speakers of those languages could use either the word for

“brother” or a circumlocution, such as “the son of my uncle”. But circumlocutions are clumsy, so the Jews often used “brother”.
“Brethren of the Lord” (n.d.)

Jesus and His disciples did speak Aramaic, but the picture which this statement paints is incomplete and because of that – misleading. At the time of Christ Aramaic, Hebrew, Greek and Latin were used in the land of Israel.

Aramaic has been in usage since the Babylonian captivity and the Jews predominantly spoke this language. The majority of documents and inscriptions which come from that time is in Aramaic. Probably a significant portion of the Jews – if not the majority – also knew Greek and at least some also knew Hebrew. Latin was the language of Roman officials.

Hebrew was the language of the Old Testament scriptures. It was used predominantly in the context of religion and liturgy and functioned mainly as a written language. It was probably no longer in common usage as a spoken language in everyday communication, but it was known at least by those who studied the scripture.

Greek was the international language of trade and as the lingua franca of that time it was also used by the Jews. The hellenisation of Israel had begun already before the invasion of Alexander the Great in the fourth century B.C. and after this invasion the influence of Greek culture intensified. Additionally, Greek was used by Jews coming back from diaspora (e.g., from cities such as Alexandria) and those who were educated and came from higher social classes. Numerous fragments of the New Testament give a strong basis to believe that a significant part of the Jews must have spoken Greek.

It is probable that Pilate addressed both Jesus and other Jews in Greek (Matthew 27:11-26; Mark 15:1-15; Luke 23:1-7, 13-25; John 18:28-40). His first language as a Roman official was Latin, but the Jews to whom he spoke in the above verses did not know Latin. Pilate almost certainly didn't know the Hebrew and it is unlikely that he knew Aramaic (Fitzmyer, 1992). No gospel also mentions an interpreter in his conversation with Jesus or dialogue with the Jewish crowd which indicates that both Jesus and the other Jews gathered then understood Greek.

Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus testifies to the fact that the Jews communicated in Greek even among themselves (John 3:1-21). Jesus told Nicodemus that in order to see the Kingdom of God he must be born again (John 3:3). The Greek word *ἀνωθεν* (*anōthen*) however, refers primarily not to the time, meaning “again, anew”, but rather to the space – “from above” – and it is in this sense that John uses *anōthen* in his gospel (John 3:31, 19:11, 19:23).

This is also the sense in which Jesus used this word, since the birth that allows one to see the Kingdom of heaven is from God (John 1:13; cf. 1 John 2:29, 3:9, 4:7, 5:1) and takes place through the Holy Spirit (John 3:5-6) – and so has its source “above”. This birth is not about coming to the world again, as Nicodemus wrongly understood by taking *anōthen* as meaning “again”.

4 Nicodemus *said to Him, “How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?”
John 3:4 NASB

Confusion, however, was only possible if the conversation took place in Greek, since both Hebrew and Aramaic have separate words for “from above” and “again”.⁸

In his publication Fitzmyer (1992) lists also other incidents indicating the knowledge of Greek by Jesus.

8 Jesus used an ambiguous expression purposefully. It challenged Nicodemus and gave Jesus an opportunity to explain what a birth “from above” is. Jesus did not correct Nicodemus when he interpreted *anōthen* as meaning “again” and until today this meaning is in use in Christianity. We know, however, that we are born “again” from God through the Holy Spirit.

1. Healing of the centurion's son (Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:2-10; John 4:46-53). Both Matthew and Luke describe him as ἑκατοντάρχης (*hekatontarchēs*) which indicates that he was a Roman centurion. The fact that he was not a Jew is confirmed by Jesus' words from Luke 7:9.

9 Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled at him, and turned and said to the crowd that was following Him, "I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith."
Luke 7:9 NASB

As a Roman centurion who was not a Jew, he would have almost certainly spoken with Jesus in Greek. Although we know from Luke's gospel that he communicated with Jesus through Jewish elders (Luke 7:3), he then sends his friends (Luke 7:6) who probably spoke Greek.

2. Meeting the Syro-Phoenician woman in Mark 7:25-30. Although she probably knew one of the semitic languages – either Phoenician or Aramaic – Mark identifies her as Ἑλληνίς (*Hellēnis*) "a Greek" (Mark 7:26) which suggests that Jesus spoke to her in Greek.
3. After Jesus said that He would come back to the One who sent Him (John 7:33-34), the Jews ask themselves "Where does this man intend to go that we will not find Him? He is not intending to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks, and teach the Greeks, is He (John 7:35)?" Jesus could only teach the Greeks in Greek and the words of the Jews assumed this possibility.

Important also is the fact that Jesus came from Galilee which is described as the "Galilee of the Gentiles" in Matthew 4:15 and which was known for its bilingual character (Guthrie, 1990). There were many Greek towns in that district, including those belonging to the Decapolis (a group of ten hellenistic cities lying to the east and southeast of the Sea of Galilee). Growing up in such a region Jesus probably knew Greek which, due to His profession as an artisan/producer (Mark 6:3), He would have needed to trade with Greeks. The same applies to His disciples, of whom four were fishermen.

In summary, we can thus conclude that Judea, Samaria and Galilee were multilingual areas (similarly as Switzerland or Belgium today). Available evidence shows that a significant portion of the Jews knew both Aramaic and Greek. At least a part of them also knew Hebrew and for some it would have been their third language. All indicates that Jesus belonged to this group (the scroll of Isaiah which He read in Luke 4:17-19 was almost certainly in Hebrew).

The statement that Jesus and the apostles spoke Aramaic doesn't thus tell the whole truth. Apart from Aramaic at least some of them – as the rest of the Jews – also knew Greek and Hebrew. Hence we cannot assume, as the Catholic Church is doing, that the words in Matthew 12:46-50 and 13:54-57 were originally spoken in Aramaic. They could have been spoken in Greek. The truth is that we just don't know and we cannot build doctrines on speculation. We should also remember that the words about Jesus' siblings were said several times – by different people and at different times – which also makes it more probable that they could have been spoken in different languages.

Summary and response to the Catholic argument:

1. Judea, Samaria and Galilee were multilingual areas where Aramaic, Greek, Hebrew and Latin were all used.
2. Available evidence shows that a significant portion of the Jews knew both Aramaic and Greek. At least a part of them also knew Hebrew and for some it would have been their third language. It was almost certainly the case with Jesus, but some of His disciples were probably at least bilingual.
3. We don't know in what language the words in Matthew 12:46-50 and 13:54-57 were originally spoken and we cannot build doctrines based on speculation.

3.4.2.2. The language of the gospels.

Speculations as to which language particular words may have been spoken in are not only unverifiable and so cannot help us in a correct interpretation of the text, but they ignore the key point in this matter – that the gospels were written in Greek and this is how they were inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Greek text of the gospels gives us the teaching that God wanted us to receive and should be interpreted for what it says.⁹

Quite to the contrary – speculations of the Catholic church undermine the authority of the Word of God and ultimately deprive it of its meaning. Catholic theologians follow reasoning according to which the Greek text says one thing, but since in their opinion its words were originally spoken in Aramaic – which is an unverifiable speculation – then it means something else and this meaning must be established based on the conjectured Aramaic original. This reasoning ultimately invalidates the inspired Greek text and makes it a mere basis for speculations the purpose of which is to ignore the clear meaning of the scripture in order to defend a false doctrine.

The statement that the authors of the New Testament “did the same thing the translators of the Septuagint did” and “did not use adelphos in one place (for sons of the same parents), and anepsios in another (for cousins)”, but used only one translation – *adelphos* – “brother” – is not only another baseless speculation, but it is founded on a false premise.

Analysis of the Catholic argumentation shows how low is the regard for the Word of God in the Catholic church. The Catholic church treats the Word as if it was a plastic material with which they can do whatever they like and they don’t even hold back from depriving the inspired text of the gospel of its authority, if they only see it as necessary to defend their doctrines. First the clear meaning of the Greek text has been invalidated and twisted by speculation that its words were originally uttered in Aramaic and so the word “brother” cannot mean a brother, and then another baseless conclusion has been presented as a fact – that the authors of the New Testament followed the Septuagint and used the word “brother” to designate both brothers and cousins.

Firstly, it should at this point again be emphasised that the text of the gospels is the text inspired by the Holy Spirit. Although we do have in the New Testament some Old Testament quotations based on the Septuagint (and we can usually indicate where a New Testament author used the Septuagint), the statement that the authors of the gospels „did the same thing the translators of the Septuagint did” is a far reaching conclusion lacking any basis. There is a fundamental difference between citing a particular text in some places and following its usage of words, its way of translating the Old Testament, etc. The baseless Catholic conclusion is dangerous in that it can degrade the inspired text of the gospel to the level of the Septuagint which is only a(n uninspired) translation of the Old Testament and not the original text inspired by the Holy Spirit¹⁰.

Secondly, the premise on which this speculation is based is false. The Septuagint translates the Hebrew word “brother” אָח – (*ach*) with the Greek word for „brother” – ἀδελφός (*adelphos*), but the Hebrew expression for cousin in Numbers 36:11 – “the sons of their uncles” – was translated not with the word “brothers”, but, correctly, with the word „cousins” – ἀνεψιοὶ (*anepsioi*). We have here a substantive error which has been officially approved by the authority of the Catholic Church.

9 There are a few places in the New Testament where the Holy Spirit guided the author of the gospel to give us some words or phrases both in Greek and in Hebrew or Aramaic (e.g., John 19:13). In all other places we should base our interpretations on the inspired Greek text.

10 An author of the book of the New Testament was inspired by the Holy Spirit. If he used the Septuagint when citing the Old Testament, then we can be certain that he did it with God’s approval and the text he wrote is inerrant. In the New Testament we even have a few quotations from extra biblical authors (cf. Titus 1:12-13) which neither makes the entire work from which the citation comes inspired, nor does it change the inspired character of the scripture where the citation was used. There is, however, a key difference between using – with the guidance of the Holy Spirit – a fragment of a particular book, and stating that the authors of the scripture followed the paradigm of an uninspired translation when writing their books.

Moreover, the New Testament authors did distinguish between brothers and relatives or cousins and did not follow the Septuagint. Luke uses in his gospel both the word “brothers” (ἀδελφοὶ – *adelphoi* – Luke 8:19-21) and “relative/kinsmen/kinswoman” (συγγενὴς – *syngenis* – Luke 1:36) and Paul distinguishes between “brother/brothers” (ἀδελφοὶ – *adelphoi* – 1 Corinthians 9:5; ἀδελφός – *adelphos* – Galatians 1:19) and a “cousin” (ἀνεψιὸς – *anepsios* – Colossians 4:10; see point 3.4.2.4 below). The Greek convention – and the entire New Testament was written in Greek – does not allow for the words “brothers” and “sisters” to mean “cousins”. When the Greek says “brother” it means either means a literal brother or a close associate/friend, but never does the word mean a cousin, for which a separate word is used – ἀνεψιὸς (*anepsios*).

Summary and response to the Catholic argument:

1. The Greek text of the gospels should be interpreted for what it says. Speculations as to which language particular words may have been spoken in are not only unverifiable and so cannot help us in a correct interpretation of the text, but they ignore the key point in this matter – that the gospels were written in Greek and this is how they were inspired by the Holy Spirit. The speculations of the Catholic church in fact undermine the authority of the Word of God and ultimately deprive it of its meaning.
2. The statement that “in the Septuagint the Hebrew word that includes both brothers and cousins was translated as adelphos” (“Brethren of the Lord”, n.d.) is false. This is shown by the Septuagint translation of Numbers 36:11 where the Hebrew expression meaning cousin - “the son of uncle” – was translated with the Greek word “cousin” – ἀνεψιὸς (*anepsios*).
3. The conclusion that the authors of the New Testament “did the same thing the translators of the Septuagint did” and “did not use adelphos in one place (for sons of the same parents), and anepsios in another (for cousins)”, but used only one translation – *adelphos* – “brother” – is also wrong. The New Testament authors made distinctions between brothers, relatives and cousins.
4. Baseless and erroneous speculations of the Catholic Church might degrade the inspired text of the scripture to the level of an uninspired translation which Septuagint is.

3.4.2.3. The words “cousin” and “brother” in the Hebrew, Aramaic and the Old Testament.

Because neither Hebrew nor Aramaic (the language spoken by Christ and his disciples) had a special word meaning “cousin”, speakers of those languages could use either the word for “brother” or a circumlocution, such as “the son of my uncle”. But circumlocutions are clumsy, so the Jews often used “brother”.

The writers of the New Testament were brought up using the Aramaic equivalent of “brothers” to mean both cousins and sons of the same father—plus other relatives and even non-relatives. When they wrote in Greek, they did the same thing the translators of the Septuagint did. (The Septuagint was the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible; it was translated by Hellenistic Jews a century or two before Christ’s birth and was the version of the Bible from which most of the Old Testament quotations found in the New Testament are taken.) “Brethren of the Lord” (n.d.)

They are close relations of Jesus, according to an Old Testament expression (Cf. Genesis 13:8; 14:16; 29:15; etc.).
Catechism of the Catholic Church, §500

Firstly, as it has been emphasised in the previous point, the New Testament was written in Greek and this is how it was inspired by the Holy Spirit. This fact nullifies the above argument which is based on an unverifiable conjecture that the words from Matthew 12:46-50 and 13:54-57 were originally spoken in Aramaic. Even however, if we should ignore this problem, this argument is still false.

A cousin is a child of an aunt or uncle and this is how the cousins are designated in the Old Testament:

11 Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah and Noah, the daughters of Zelophehad married their uncles' sons.
Numbers 36:11 NASB

In the Old Hebrew there thus existed a designation for a cousin – “the son of an uncle” (the same also in the modern Hebrew) and, as evident, it was in use. According to both the Hebrew BDB (Brown, Driver & Briggs, 1952) and HALOT (Koehler & Baumgartner, 2000) lexicons, the Hebrew word “brother” – אָח (ach) can mean a relative (although in Greek the word “brother” is not even used for relatives), but it is never used with the technical meaning of “cousin”. Thus the statement that “circumlocutions are clumsy, so the Jews often used ‘brother’” is another false conclusion.

The verses listed in the Catechism – Genesis 13:8, 14:16, 29:15 – also fail to provide any solid support for the argument of the Catholic Church. It is for example impossible to determine whether in Genesis 13:8 – as in many other similar verses – by calling Lot “brother” Abraham refers to their blood kinship, to their close relationship and mutual faithfulness which was very frequent in the Old Testament (cf. 1 Kings 20:32-33, etc.) or to their common faith (just as we today do in Christianity, calling fellow believers “brothers”). He is certainly not using the word “brother” with the meaning of “cousin” since Lot was his nephew (Genesis 12:5). The same applies to the situations where this designation was used between Jacob and Laban (e.g., Genesis 29:15).

Finally we must keep the most fundamental fact in mind which is easily overlooked when one follows the convoluted Catholic argumentation – that in both the Hebrew and Aramaic the word “brother” still means...a brother (Genesis 4:2, 27:6, 44:20, etc.). The Catholic church first speculates that the words from the gospel were spoken in Aramaic which cannot be proven and then they assume that since the word “brother” was spoken in Aramaic, then it must have been used in a meaning different than a blood brother – as if in Aramaic the word “brother” could not mean a literal brother. To this another false conclusion is added that in the Hebrew the word “brother” was used to designate a cousin.

Thus the statement that “the writers of the New Testament were brought up using the Aramaic equivalent of ‘brothers’ to mean both cousins and sons of the same father—plus other relatives and even non-relatives” is firstly at least partially incorrect and secondly, it is only another speculation which is irrelevant in light of the fact that the gospels were written in Greek. Thirdly, although the word “brother” could have been used in Hebrew or Aramaic to designate a more distant relative, we have no evidence that it was ever used in the technical meaning of “cousin” – the Catholic Church again presents a baseless conjecture as a fact. Finally, the possibility of using the word “brother” in Hebrew and Aramaic for a more distant relative doesn’t change the fact that it still retains its basic meaning of a literal, blood brother. The Catholic church in every instance assumes that since the word “brother” was originally spoken in Aramaic (which we don’t know – see points 3.4.2.1 and 3.4.2.2 above), then it couldn’t have just meant a literal brother. The Catholic church makes every possible effort in order to distort the clear meaning of the words of the scripture and in this effort they make further errors and draw further false conclusions.

Finally, we should remember that although in Hebrew and Aramaic the word “brother” can be used to designate a more distant relative, this is not the case in Greek in which the gospels were written.

Summary and response to the Catholic argument:

1. In the ancient Hebrew a cousin was described as “the son of an uncle”.
2. The statement:
“Because neither Hebrew nor Aramaic (the language spoken by Christ and his disciples) had a special word meaning “cousin”, speakers of those languages could use either the word for

“brother” or a circumlocution, such as “the son of my uncle”. But circumlocutions are clumsy, so the Jews often used “brother”

is false. As the example of Numbers 36:11 shows, the expression “son of an uncle” was in use and according to both the BDB and HALOT Hebrew lexicons the Hebrew word for “brother” – אָח (ach), although it could also mean a more distant relative, it was not used in the technical meaning of “cousin”.

3. At least in some Old Testament verses listed in the Catechism which are meant to provide support for the Catholic argumentation, it is impossible to determine with certainty in what sense was the word “brother” used. Even, however, in those places where it is used to designate a relative, there is not a single case where it would be used with the meaning “cousin”.
4. When analysing the Catholic argumentation it is important to remember that in both Hebrew and Aramaic the word “brother” still simply means a literal, blood brother. The entire argumentation of the Catholic church is based not only on the speculation that the words of the gospel were spoken in Aramaic, but also on a baseless assumption that since Aramaic was used, then the word “brother” must have been used in a meaning different than literal.

3.4.2.4. The words “cousin” and “brother” in the Greek and in the New Testament.

The writers of the New Testament were brought up using the Aramaic equivalent of “brothers” to mean both cousins and sons of the same father—plus other relatives and even non-relatives. When they wrote in Greek, they did the same thing the translators of the Septuagint did. (The Septuagint was the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible; it was translated by Hellenistic Jews a century or two before Christ’s birth and was the version of the Bible from which most of the Old Testament quotations found in the New Testament are taken.)

In the Septuagint the Hebrew word that includes both brothers and cousins was translated as adelphos, which in Greek usually has the narrow meaning that the English “brother” has. Unlike Hebrew or Aramaic, Greek has a separate word for cousin, anepsios, but the translators of the Septuagint used adelphos, even for true cousins.

You might say they transliterated instead of translated, importing the Jewish idiom into the Greek Bible. They took an exact equivalent of the Hebrew word for “brother” and did not use adelphos in one place (for sons of the same parents), and anepsios in another (for cousins). This same usage was employed by the writers of the New Testament and passed into English translations of the Bible. To determine what “brethren” or “brother” or “sister” means in any one verse, we have to look at the context.

“Brethren of the Lord” (n.d.)

In the New Testament there is a clear distinction between a brother and a relative or a cousin and this fact shows the error of the above Catholic argumentation. In Luke 1:36 Elizabeth is described as a “relative/kinswoman” – Greek συγγενίς (*syngenis*).¹¹

36 And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month.

Luke 1:36 NASB

Luke didn’t use the word “sister” to describe Elizabeth who was a relative of Mary. If thus Luke writes about the brothers of Jesus, he means his literal blood brothers, not his relatives. Otherwise, he would have used the designation “relative”, as in the verse above.

19 And His mother and brothers came to Him, and they were unable to get to Him because of the crowd. **20** And it was reported to Him, “Your mother and Your brothers are standing

¹¹ The designation συγγενής (*syngenēs*)/συγγενίς (*syngenis*) – relative/kinsman/kinswoman – is used eleven times in the New Testament.

outside, wishing to see You.” **21** But He answered and said to them, “My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it.”
Luke 8:19-21 NASB

Similarly Paul makes a distinction between a brother and a cousin. In 1 Corinthians 9:5 he uses the designation “the brothers of the Lord” and in Galatians 1:19 “the brother of the Lord” to refer to Jesus’ brothers:

5 Do we not have a right to take along a believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord (ἀδελφοὶ τοῦ κυρίου – *adelphoi tou kyriou*) and Cephas?
1 Corinthians 9:5 NASB

19 But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord’s brother (τὸν ἀδελφὸν τοῦ κυρίου – *ton adelphon tou kyriou*).
Galatians 1:19 NASB

However, in Colossians 4:10 he describes Mark as the cousin of Barnabas:

10 Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and *also* Barnabas’s cousin (ἀνεψιὸς – *anepsios*) Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him);
Colossians 4:10 NASB

Thus the argument that Paul had cousins in mind when using the expression “the brother/brothers of the Lord” in 1 Corinthians 9:5 and Galatians 1:19 is unsustainable. If he had cousins in mind, he would have used the Greek word for cousin, as in Colossians 4:10.

When the Greek word “brother” – ἀδελφός (*adelphos*) is used in the gospels towards a particular person mentioned by name, it always means a literal brother and there are no exceptions from this. This is how we know that Simon Peter was the brother of Andrew (Matthew 4:18), that John was the brother of James (Matthew 4:21), that Herod had a brother Philip (Matthew 14:3), that Lazarus was the brother of Mary and Martha (John 11:2) – and that Jesus had four brothers – James, Joseph, Simon and Jude (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3). In the gospels there are also many other verses where the word brother can only mean brother as a sibling (Matthew 20:24, 22:25, etc.). Also in the Greek literature a case is unknown that a brother mentioned by name was not a literal brother but some more distant relative. It is also quite logical that if a given person is designated as a “brother” and their name is given, then the word “brother” should be taken literally, since giving the name shows that a particular person is to be indicated and this goes against using „brother” in the sense of some distant relative whose relationship with a given person is indeterminate.

The statement, however, that “to determine what ‘brethren’ or ‘brother’ or ‘sister’ means in any one verse, we have to look at the context” is true. And it is the analysis of the context which shows that the Catholic interpretation is wrong (see point 3.4.1).

3.4.2.5. The identity of James and Joseph in Matthew 13:55 and 27:56.

The Catholic church identifies the brothers of Jesus from Matthew 13:55 – James and Joseph – with the James and Joseph in Matthew 27:56.

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” (Matthew 13:55; 28:1; cf. Matthew 27:56).
Catechism of the Catholic Church, §500

55 Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?

Matthew 13:55 NASB

56 Among them was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

Matthew 27:56 NASB

Catholic scholars not only take the James from Matthew 13:55 and 27:56 as the same person, but also identify him with the apostle James, the son of Alphaeus (Mark 3:18).

James “the brother of the Lord” is therefore one with James the son of Alphaeus, and consequently with James the Less, the identity of these two being generally conceded. Again, on comparing John 19:25, with Matthew 27:56, and Mark 15:40 (cf. Mark 15:47; 16:1), we find that Mary of Cleophas, or more correctly Clopas (Κλωπάς), the sister of Mary the Mother of Christ, is the same as Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joseph, or Joses. As married women are not distinguished by the addition of their father's name, Mary of Clopas must be the wife of Clopas, and not his daughter, as has been maintained. Moreover, the names of her sons and the order in which they are given, no doubt the order of seniority, warrant us in identifying these sons with James and Joseph, or Joses, the “brethren” of the Lord. The existence among the early followers of Christ of two sets of brothers having the same names in the order of age, is not likely, and cannot be assumed without proof. Once this identity is conceded, the conclusion cannot well be avoided that Clopas and Alphaeus are one person, even if the two names are quite distinct. It is, however, highly probable, and commonly admitted, that Clopas and Alphaeus are merely different transcriptions of the same Aramaic word Halphai. James and Joseph the “brethren” of the Lord are thus the sons of Alphaeus. Bechtel, 1907, *The Brethren of the Lord*, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*

The above argumentation is another example of the Catholic church presenting speculations as facts. These speculations are wrong this time also.

We should begin by stating that the fragments of the scripture which speak of Jesus’ brothers and sisters speak of His siblings and not some other, more distant relatives – as it has been shown above. If Matthew 13:55 refers to Jesus’ father (the Nazarenes probably considered Joseph as Jesus’ biological father), then to His mother and then to His brothers, where James and Joseph are mentioned, then it is clear that they are listed as members of the same, biological family – and so as the sons of Joseph and Mary. Thus since Matthew 27:56 speaks of James and Joseph as sons of a different Mary, then we should accept the clear testimony of the scripture – that they are sons of a different Mary. As it is the case with almost every single argument of the Catholic church, here also we encounter an effort to conform the Word of God to a particular doctrine, despite its obvious meaning. We must consequently bear in mind that although the Catholic argumentation presented in this point ignores the testimony of the scripture which has been discussed above (point 3.4 ff.), in no way does it invalidate it.

The argument of the Catholic church is based on the coincidence of names of two sets of brothers mentioned in the scripture. It is, however, much weaker than could initially appear. Firstly, as the testimony of the New Testament indicates, some names must have been quite common among the Jews. We have three Marys under the cross – Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene and Mary of Clopas (Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40; John 19:25). Among only twelve apostles we have two by the names of Simon – Simon Peter and Simon the Zealot (Matthew 10:2, 10:4; Mark 3:16, 3:18; Luke 6:14-15; Acts 1:13) and two by the names of Judas – Judas also named Thaddaeus and Judas Iscariot (Matthew 10:3-4; Mark 3:18-19; Luke 6:16; John 14:22). Using the same or similar names, also among the Romans, was a much more frequent phenomenon in times of Jesus than it is today.

Secondly, Luke 1:61 shows that giving the same names was even expected among relatives:

57 Now the time had come for Elizabeth to give birth, and she gave birth to a son. **58** Her neighbors and her relatives heard that the Lord had displayed His great mercy toward her; and they were rejoicing with her.

59 And it happened that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to call him Zacharias, after his father. **60** But his mother answered and said, “No

indeed; but he shall be called John.” **61** And they said to her, “There is no one among your relatives who is called by that name.”
Luke 1:57-61 NASB

Finally, we should remember that many persons we know from the gospels had two names. Comparison of lists of the apostles in different portions of the scripture makes this clear, as these lists can only be reconciled if we accept this principle (Matthew 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16; Acts 1:13).

The above facts show that the coincidence of names does not allow to identify James and Joseph from Matthew 13:55 with James and Joseph from Matthew 27:56. Such an identification would in any case contradict the scripture for reasons given in the previous points.¹²

The scripture does not allow us to confirm whether Alphaeus and Clopas are the same person and whether these are two different transcriptions of the same Aramaic name.¹³ The Catholic church again presents an unverifiable conjecture as a fact. Inasmuch as this is a possibility, it is however certain that James, the son of Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13) could be a brother of Christ, even in the sense of a relative, as the Catholic church proposes.

From John 7:5 we know that brothers of Jesus did not believe in Him. If thus we take James from Matthew 13:55 to be the James the son of Alphaeus who was an apostle, then we arrive at a paradox that a brother of Jesus was an apostle who was an unbeliever. This error in Bechtel’s reasoning remains regardless of whether we take the word “brother” as meaning a blood brother, cousin or some other more distant relative, as whichever meaning we take, we will have to apply to both Matthew 13:55 and John 7:5. We know that the only unbelieving disciple was Judas Iscariot. The interpretation of the Catholic Church is thus erroneous.

3.4.3. Psalm 69.

Another proof that Jesus had brothers and sisters comes from Psalm 69. Psalm 69 is a Messianic psalm – it prophetically foreshadows the fate of Jesus Christ as the Messiah.¹⁴ Jesus applies the fragment of this psalm to Himself in John 15:25:

25 But *they have done this* to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, ‘They hated Me without a cause.’
John 15:25 NASB

4 Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head;
Those who would destroy me are powerful, being wrongfully my enemies;
What I did not steal, I then have to restore.
Psalm 69:4a NASB

John does the same in his gospel:

12 Let’s also notice that according to Bechtel “the existence among the early followers of Christ of two sets of brothers having the same names in the order of age, is not likely, and cannot be assumed without proof”, but the existence of two sisters by an identical name of “Mary” does not pose a problem for him.

13 Similarly, contrary to what Bechtel wrote, we are unable to confirm based on Matthew 27:56, Mark 15:40 and John 19:25 that Mary of Clopas was a sister of Mary the mother of Jesus, or not. The Greek in John 19:25 does not allow to establish with certainty that the name “Mary” should be linked both with the words “His mother’s sister” and the designation “the one of Clopas”.

14 This does not mean that every verse of this Psalm applies to Jesus, but many of its parts find their fulfilment in the life of Christ.

16 and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business." **17** His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house will consume me."

John 2:16-17 NASB

9 For zeal for Your house has consumed me,
And the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me.
Psalm 69:9 NASB

And so does Paul in Romans:

3 For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me."
Romans 15:3 NASB

David's prophetic words from verse 22 also found fulfilment in the life of Christ:

21 They also gave me gall for my food
And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.
Psalm 69:21 NASB

34 they gave Him wine to drink mixed with gall; and after tasting *it*, He was unwilling to drink.
Matthew 27:34 NASB (also Mark 15:23 and Luke 23:36)

28 After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, to fulfill the Scripture, *said, "I am thirsty." **29** A jar full of sour wine was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine upon *a branch of hyssop* and brought it up to His mouth. **30** Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.
John 19:28-30 NASB

48 Immediately one of them ran, and taking a sponge, he filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink.
Matthew 27:48 NASB (also Mark 15:36)

Psalm 69:6-9 says:

6 May those who wait for You not be ashamed through me, O Lord [a]God of hosts;
May those who seek You not be dishonored through me, O God of Israel,
7 Because for Your sake I have borne reproach;
Dishonor has covered my face.
8 I have become estranged from my brothers
And an alien to my mother's sons.
9 For zeal for Your house has consumed me,
And the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me.
Psalm 69:6-9 NASB

The words from verse 9 also found their fulfilment in the life of Christ, because His brothers did not believe in Him and did not understand His mission and ministry:

5 For not even His brothers were believing in Him.
John 7:5 NASB

21 When His own people heard *of this*, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, "He has lost His senses."
Mark 3:21 NASB

Psalm 69:8 makes clear, however, that blood brothers are meant – the sons of His mother – and not cousins or some other more distant relatives.

8 I have become estranged from my brothers
And an alien to my mother's sons.
Psalm 69:8 NASB

Jesus became estranged from His brothers – the sons of His mother, Mary.

3.4.4. General conclusions.

Firstly, the brothers of Jesus are mentioned numerous times in the New Testament (Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21; Matthew 13:54-57; Mark 6:2-4; John 2:12, 7:5, 7:10; Acts 1:14; 1 Corinthians 9:5; Galatians 1:19). The strained Catholic church interpretation, wrong for the reasons given above, prompts another question – why would cousins or some other more distant relatives be mentioned so frequently and mentioned together with Mary? And why are they following Him, also with His mother? According to the Catholic interpretation we have a horde of cousins or some other relatives constantly remaining close to Jesus and His mother and following Him (!).

Secondly, accepting the Catholic church interpretation would mean that the word “brothers”, which is used on numerous times in the New Testament to refer to the family of Christ, was not used in its basic meaning – referring to literal, blood brothers – a single time. If the Greek words ἀδελφός (*adelphos*)– “brother” and – ἀδελφή (*adelphē*) – “sister” were used in any other context and if not for the attempt to defend a false doctrine of Mary’s perpetual virginity, their literal and basic meaning would have never been brought into question.

If, however, we assume that Jesus did have brothers – and the above analysis shows the veracity of this assumption – then we can ask the question – in what other way were the New Testament authors to say that other than in the way they did? Let’s put ourselves in their position. They used the words “brother” and “sister” referring to the brother and sisters of Jesus and now this literal meaning of these words, clearly stemming from the context, is rejected and changed by those who accepted a false doctrine which prevents them from accepting this meaning. It is evident that the Catholic church interprets all the verses speaking of Jesus’ siblings in such a way as to be able to defend their dogma of Mary’s perpetual virginity.

4. Other arguments of the Catholic church which refer to the scripture.

The attempt to defend the dogma of perpetual virginity led the Catholic church to look for passages in the scripture which could justify it. There are no such passages, however, and Catholic theologians are trying to find support for this false teaching in places which not only have got nothing to do with perpetual virginity, but even with Mary herself (cf. Chapter III, points 2.1.2, 2.1.3, 2.1.4; chapter V, point 3, analysis of paragraphs 26, 27 and 29). We have here another case where the Catholic church first established a teaching which has got nothing to do with the scripture – and did so for entirely unbiblical reasons (see point 6 below) – and now attempts to conform the Word of God to fit to this teaching.

4.1. Mary’s alleged “vow of virginity”.

Gregory of Nyssa (fourth century A.D.) somehow found a vow of virginity made by Mary in Luke 1:34. This invention has been accepted by many early fathers of the church and is used still today used by Catholics to defend the dogma of perpetual virginity.

28 And coming in, he said to her, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord *is* with you.” **29** But she was very perplexed at *this* statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. **30** The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. **31** And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him

Jesus. **32** He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David;**33** and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.” **34** Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?”
Luke 1:28-34 NASB

Beyond an attempt to bend the words of the scripture to a preconceived teaching it is impossible to explain how in Mary’s question - “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” – one could find a vow of virginity. Mary uses the expression “I do not know a man” (Greek *ἀνδρα οὐ γινώσκω* – *andra ou ginōskō*) which is a biblical euphemism meaning intercourse (the same expression is used in Matthew 1:24-25 and in the Old Testament – Genesis 4:1, 4:18, 4:25, etc.; cf. Point 3.2 above). It is only in this sense that Mary “did not know a man”, since she had already known her husband Joseph which Luke 1:27 says:

26 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, **27** to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary.
Luke 1:26-27 NASB

Mary’s question shows that she has correctly understood angel’s promise of conceiving a Son as soon to be fulfilled and did not know how it would happen since she has not relations with Joseph yet. To take this question as a vow of perpetual virginity is absurd. Such a “vow” would also stand in direct contradiction to Mary being betrothed to Joseph and soon to be married to him.

4.2. John 19:26-27.

26 When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He *said to His mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” **27** Then He *said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” From that hour the disciple took her into his own *household*.
John 19:26-27 NASB

When defending the dogma of Mary’s perpetual virginity Catholics often use the argument that if Jesus had brothers, then before His death He would have entrusted His mothers to one of them and not to John.

Matthew 12:46-50 (also Mark 3:31-35 and Luke 8:19-21) clearly says, however, that Jesus put spiritual relationships even above blood relationships and closest to Him were those who believed in the Word of God and were fulfilling God’s will – and not His biological family.

46 While He was still speaking to the crowds, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him. **47** Someone said to Him, “Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You.” **48** But Jesus answered the one who was telling Him and said, “Who is My mother and who are My brothers?” **49** And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, “Behold My mother and My brothers! **50** For whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother.”
Matthew 12:46-50 NASB

Whereas from John 7:5 we know that Jesus’ brothers did not believe in Him (cf. point 3.4.3 above; Psalm 69:8).

5 For not even His brothers were believing in Him.
John 7:5 NASB

It is thus understandable why Jesus, for whom faithfulness to God’s will was more important than family relationships, entrusted His mother to a believing apostle and not to His unbelieving brothers of whom the gospels even make no mention of being with Jesus was He was crucified – contrary to John who remained with Him. Since He has made this choice, then it means it was the best for Mary’s spiritual well-being. Svendsen (2001) makes a good observation that it might have been necessary for

Jesus to declare His will that He wanted Mary to be entrusted to John and not to the care of His brothers, as otherwise the latter would have happened and she would be among His unbelieving siblings.¹⁵

We also know of the other apostles that they were scattered (Matthew 26:31, 26:56) and so John who remained faithful to Jesus and showed his love by remaining with Him even by the cross – which in itself was courageous and risky – was the best candidate to take Jesus’ mother into his care.

It is also possible that the mother of John – Salome – was the sister of Mary which is indicated by the comparison of Mark 15:40 and Matthew 27:56.

40 There were also *some* women looking on from a distance, among whom *were* Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses, and Salome.
Mark 15:40 NASB

56 Among them was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.
Matthew 27:56 NASB

We know that James and John were the sons of Zebedee:

35 James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, *came up to Jesus, saying, “Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You.”
Mark 10:35 NASB

This would mean that John was a cousin of Jesus. Thus apart from the spiritual motive in Jesus’ decision, there would have also been a close kinship.

It is also worth noting that Jesus first told Mary to look to John and not John to look to Mary. It is another example showing that she had no special status among believers (Slick, 2008).¹⁶

4.3. Ezekiel 44:1-2.

In their defence of Mary’s perpetual virginity Catholics also quote Augustin’s interpretation of Ezekiel 44:1-2 to which Thomas Aquinas refers in his *Summa Theologica* (part 3, question 28, point 6)

On the contrary, It is written (Ezekiel 44:2): “This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall pass through it; because the Lord the God of Israel hath entered in by it.” Expounding these words, Augustine says in a sermon (De Annunt. Dom. iii): “What means this closed gate in the House of the Lord, except that Mary is to be ever inviolate? What does it mean that ‘no man shall pass through it,’ save that Joseph shall not know her? And what is this – ‘The Lord alone enters in and goeth out by it’ – except that the Holy Ghost shall impregnate her, and that the Lord of angels shall be born of her? And what means this---‘it shall be shut for evermore’---but that Mary is a virgin before His Birth, a virgin in His Birth, and a virgin after His Birth?”

We have here another example of seeking Marian allegories in fragments of the scripture which have nothing to do with Mary – and doing so against the context and principles of biblical exegesis. The

15 We know that both James and Jude later believed and became authors of New Testament books. The scripture doesn’t tell, however, when it happened.

16 Similarly in Acts 1:14 Mary, who is in this verse mentioned for the last time in the scripture, was in prayer with other believers – she was not over them, neither did she occupy any special position (Slick, 2008).

14 These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with *the* women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.
Acts 1:14 NASB

scripture nowhere teaches us that the temple in Jerusalem is a type or allegory of Mary¹⁷ and seeing a gate of the temple as Mary's reproductive organs is simply absurd (which would lead us to other absurdities). In chapters 40-46 Ezekiel describes the millennial temple and its rituals¹⁸. The east gate of this temple will be closed due to God's majesty who will have entered through it (Ezekiel 43:1-5; cf. Exodus 19:21-22). Ezekiel 44:1-2 and the context of this passage has got nothing to do with Mary.

4.4. The argument of virginity as a higher calling.

In the defence of their dogma the Catholic church quotes the teaching of the scripture about virginity, which they consider as far more virtuous and honourable than married life and in which thus Mary must have lived. This defence contains a paradox, however, since the main purpose of virginity – devoting one's life to God at the cost of marriage and family – could not have been realised in Mary's case anyway.

It is true that virginity allows to fully devote one's life to God and reduce the amount of worldly concerns, which is what both Jesus (Matthew 19:12) and Paul taught (1 Corinthians 7:7-8, 7:26, 7:28, 7:32-34, 7:38-40). The virginity about which both Jesus and Paul spoke, however, obviously implies a solitary, unmarried life, since it is the freedom from marriage and so from the need to please the spouse and take care of children that allows to dedicate to God the time that would have otherwise been taken by the family.

It is obvious, however, that such a life was not God's will for Mary. She was betrothed to Joseph (Matthew 1:18; Luke 1:27)¹⁹ and her role was to become the mother of Christ in His human nature. Mary was thus both a wife and a mother and so in her case the main purpose of virginity – dedicating the entire life to God at the cost of marriage and family – could not have been fulfilled.

Keeping ceremonial virginity which makes no difference in the context of serving God is not only devoid of any value in God's eyes (similarly as keeping celibacy which does not translate into greater commitment to the Kingdom of God), but contradicts God's command towards marriage – to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:28, 9:1, 9:7; 1 Corinthians 7:3-5, etc.).

Defending the dogma of Mary's perpetual virginity based on the teaching of the scripture on virginity on the one hand thus leads to a paradox since the Catholic church vehemently defends virginity the main purpose of which – devoting oneself fully to God at the cost of marriage and family – could not have been fulfilled in any case. On the other hand, this defence directly contradicts one of the main purposes of marriage as ordained by God – to form a family and have children.

5. Extra-biblical arguments of the Catholic church.

5.1. Pseudoepigrapha.²⁰

17 The same point has already been discussed in chapter V, point 3, paragraph 29, where the expression “the Lord's footstool” – signifying the Lord's temple in Jerusalem, His earthly abode – is erroneously and baselessly taken as referring to Mary. Similarly, the scripture doesn't teach us that Mary's type can be seen in the ark of the covenant – chapter V, point 3, paragraph 26.

18 The Millennium is a one thousand year period of Christ's rule on the earth which will begin after His second coming (Revelation 20:1-10) and end before the eternal state commences (Revelation 21-22).

19 We should bear in mind that the betrothal in the Jewish culture of that time was much more formal and binding than engagement is today.

20 Pseudoepigrapha (Greek ψευδής – *pseudés* – false and ἐπιγραφή – *epigraphé* – “name”, “inscription” – and so a “false name”, “false inscription”, “false title”) - a literary work ascribed to a certain person, usually well known and of established authority, but written by someone else; a forgery.

As it is sadly the case also in the case of other teachings (cf. chapter V, point 3, analysis of paragraphs 21 and 22), so here also the Catholic church bases their argumentation on uninspired works of which we know that they are outright forgeries.

Frequently quoted in the defence of Mary's perpetual virginity is the "Protoevangelium of James" - a pseudoepigraphal work probably dating the second half of the second century. According to this fabrication - whose author falsely claimed to be James - Joseph had children from his previous marriage who were later called "brothers of the Lord". This forgery also contains a graphic description of the inspection of Mary's virginity performed by Salome after Christ's birth. This description is worth reading in order to become familiar with the inventions and lies which later came to serve as foundations of Catholic teachings.

19. And I saw a woman coming down from the hill-country, and she said to me: O man, whither are you going? And I said: I am seeking an Hebrew midwife. And she answered and said to me: Are you of Israel? And I said to her: Yes. And she said: And who is it that is bringing forth in the cave? And I said: A woman betrothed to me. And she said to me: Is she not your wife? And I said to her: It is Mary that was reared in the temple of the Lord, and I obtained her by lot as my wife. And yet she is not my wife, but has conceived of the Holy Spirit.²¹

And the midwife said to him: Is this true? And Joseph said to her: Come and see.²² And the midwife went away with him. And they stood in the place of the cave, and behold a luminous cloud overshadowed the cave. And the midwife said: My soul has been magnified this day, because my eyes have seen strange things - because salvation has been brought forth to Israel. And immediately the cloud disappeared out of the cave, and a great light shone in the cave, so that the eyes could not bear it. And in a little that light gradually decreased, until the infant appeared, and went and took the breast from His mother Mary. And the midwife cried out, and said: This is a great day to me, because I have seen this strange sight. And the midwife went forth out of the cave, and Salome met her. And she said to her: Salome, Salome, I have a strange sight to relate to you: a virgin has brought forth - a thing which her nature admits not of. Then said Salome: As the Lord my God lives, unless I thrust in my finger, and search the parts, I will not believe that a virgin has brought forth.²³

20. And the midwife went in, and said to Mary: Show yourself; for no small controversy has arisen about you. And Salome put in her finger, and cried out, and said: Woe is me for mine iniquity and mine unbelief, because I have tempted the living God; and, behold, my hand is dropping off as if burned with fire. And she bent her knees before the Lord, saying: O God of my fathers, remember that I am the seed of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob; do not make a show of me to the sons of Israel, but restore me to the poor; for You know, O Lord, that in Your name I have performed my services, and that I have received my reward at Your hand. And, behold, an angel of the Lord stood by her, saying to her: Salome, Salome, the Lord has heard you. Put your hand to the infant, and carry it, and you will have safety and joy. And Salome went and carried it, saying: I will worship Him, because a great King has been born to Israel. And, behold, Salome was immediately cured, and she went forth out of the cave justified. And behold a voice saying: Salome, Salome, tell not the strange things you have seen, until the child has come into Jerusalem.

Protoevangelium of James, chapters 19 and 20 (Walker, 1886)

The Protoevangelium of James bears all the marks of a work created for a specific purpose - to provide proof for the teaching of Mary's perpetual virginity. In order to achieve this purpose the author not only falsely claimed to be James, but poured other inventions on the paper, frequently styling his text based on the words of the scripture. Guthrie (1990, p.839) points that "in most of the acknowledged Christian pseudepigrapha, a sufficient motive is found in the desire to propagate views

21 It is worth noting how the author of this fiction, in order to absolutely deny the fact that Mary and Joseph had children, puts words into Joseph's mouth which also reject their marriage.

22 Words probably taken from John 1:39, 1:46.

23 The author makes this response by Salome reminiscent to the famous words of Thomas from John 20:25

which would not otherwise be acceptable. Thus the device was used widely among heretical sects.” This is exactly what we are dealing with in this case.

The Catholic church thus ignores the clear testimony of the scripture about Jesus’ siblings and resorts to most strained interpretations in order to salvage their doctrine, but puts their trust in forgeries such as the one quoted above.²⁴ Although Protoevangelium of James is not a part of the Catholic canon, it is frequently mentioned in Catholic argumentation for Mary’s perpetual virginity and this includes articles officially approved by Catholic authority (e.g., <https://www.catholic.com/tract/mary-ever-virgin>).

5.2. Tradition.

As in the case of all other Marian doctrines (and their other teachings) the Catholic church also quotes the testimony of the so called “tradition” and the arguments presented above also qualify as such. This equates to putting the opinions of the church fathers and uninspired works not only on a par with the Word of God, but de facto above it, since the Word of God teaches that Jesus had brothers and the Catholic church defends their opposite view quoting the works of the fathers or pseudoepigrapha.

We encounter here a typical Catholic argumentation according to which the strength of the argument is proven by the multiplicity of opinions and their antiquity, as if these were a warrant of veracity (cf. especially chapter V). As an advocate of Mary’s perpetual virginity the Catholic church often quotes Augustine.

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, *Sermones*. 186, 1: PL 38, 999): with her whole being she is “the handmaid of the Lord” (Luke 1:38). Catechism of the Catholic Church, §510

Augustine’s statement that Mary was “always a virgin” is only an opinion lacking any biblical foundation. Such an opinion provides no evidence for the dogma of perpetual virginity and should not be presented as such, as it is done in the Catechism.

There is no testimony equal to the testimony of the scripture. The church fathers were fallible human beings, as all of us, and their works are uninspired. Frequently evident is their lack of understanding of the Word of God and their attempts to conform it to a preconceived teaching, as it is the case in the embarrassing interpretation of Augustine – accepted by Jerome and the Catholic church – who in the gate of the temple in Ezekiel 44:1-2 reads an allegory of Mary (see point 4.3 above).

There are arguments in the Catechism the logic of which makes them totally worthless (cf. chapter V and the arguments of pope Pius XII for the alleged assumption of Mary into heaven).

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 (Cf. DS 291; 294; 427; 442; 503; 571; 1880). In fact, Christ’s birth “did not diminish his mother’s virginal integrity but sanctified it” (*Lumen gentium*, 57). And so the liturgy of the Church celebrates Mary as *Aeiparthenos*, the “Ever-virgin” (Cf. *Lumen gentium*, 52). Catechism of the Catholic Church, §499

The statement that “the deepening of faith in the virginal motherhood led the Church to confess Mary’s real and perpetual virginity” means that deepening of the faith in the virginal motherhood, which is in accordance with the teaching of the scripture (Matthew 1:18; Luke 1:27) somehow led the Catholic church “to confess Mary’s real and perpetual virginity”, which is never mentioned in the scripture and to which the scripture not only gives no basis, but teaches the exact opposite. Virginal

24 Catholics quote also other pseudoepigrapha when defending Mary’s perpetual virginity, such as the gospels of Peter or Thomas, according to which Jesus’ brothers are Joseph’s children from the previous marriage.

motherhood has got nothing to do with perpetual virginity and the argument of the Catholic church is obviously wrong from a logical point of view – there is no basis for the conclusion drawn (unless we take “the deepening of faith in the virginal motherhood” as the basis for the dogma of perpetual virginity).

Deprived of any value in the context of defending perpetual virginity are the words that “Christ's birth ‘did not diminish his mother's virginal integrity but sanctified it’” (*Lumen gentium*, 57). In what way the birth of Christ “sanctified” Mary’s virginal integrity is impossible to tell.

Finally the statement that “the liturgy of the Church celebrates Mary as *Aeiparthenos*, the ‘Ever-virgin’” (Cf. *Lumen gentium*, 52) is another example of a tautological argument in which the Catholic church attempts to prove that a dogma is true since this is what the liturgy says – although we still don’t know what this liturgy is based on (the same logical error is frequently repeated by pope Pius XII in his encyclical *Munificentissimus Deus* – see chapter V). De facto the statement means that “Mary is a perpetual virgin since the Catholic church celebrates her as a perpetual virgin”.

6. The root causes of the teaching of Mary’s perpetual virginity.

As the above analysis shows, the scripture clearly teaches that Jesus had siblings – half-brothers and half-sisters, the children of Joseph and Mary. The Catholic church, however, rejects the testimony of the scripture and invents various interpretations to defend their dogma. As it is also the case with other doctrines, they use extra-biblical arguments and quote fictional accounts which are also forgeries, such as the Protoevangelium of James, which are supposed to strengthen the argument of the so called “tradition”. It is worth investigating the reasons for this vehement defence of this dogma by the Catholic church.

6.1. Pagan origins of the cult of Mary.

The cult of Mary emerged in the first centuries of Christianity and gathered momentum quickly. An elevation of her status can be seen in the writings of many fathers as well as numerous extra-biblical sources (cf. point 5 above, entire chapter V). Ultimately, this led in many cases to giving Mary worship that is only due to God, which can be observed in the Catholic church today as well. Since the scripture gives no basis to this cult, the key role in its emergence and expansion was played by other factors.

In the first centuries after Christ the entire world, except a small group of Christians and Jews (of whom the majority unfortunately rejected Christ), was pagan. In many pagan cults, as in the classical Greek literature, virginity was a frequent attribute of goddesses and other heroines and special women, such as Athena or Artemis (cf. Acts 18:23-41). The name of the temple dedicated to Athena – Parthenon – means “the temple of the virgin-goddess” (the Greek word παρθένης – *parthenos* means “virgin” and from it comes παρθενών – *parthenōn*). Those who claimed to be Christians, but in reality did not follow the teaching of the Word of God, did not want their goddess/heroine/special woman to be inferior to her pagan counterparts. It is remarkable that in the last decade of the sixth century the Parthenon was converted into a temple dedicated to the “Virgin Mary”. Those not building their faith on the truth thus first adopted perpetual virginity for Mary, so that she would not be inferior to the pagan goddess, and then took over her pagan temple.²⁵ We thus have an important pagan element here and we should bear in mind that many of the fathers come from regions where the Greek culture was dominant (R.D. Luginbill, personal communication, August 7, 2017).

6.2. The cult of virginity.

Worshiping Mary in contradiction to the teaching of the scripture, combined with the pagan influence of the Greek culture – which directly contributed to this worship – led to many fathers being urged to make Mary a perpetual virgin. The cult of Mary ever virgin thus expanded fast, and together with it virginity itself began to be glorified.

²⁵ Acting in this way has got nothing to do with true Christianity.

6.2.1. Without her perpetual virginity, Mary's glory would be deficient in the eyes of the Catholic church.

The necessity to make Mary a perpetual virgin and the vehement defence of this false dogma show what paradoxical status virginity has achieved. In the eyes of the Catholic church to be a mother of Christ in His human nature, the Saviour of the world, is an insufficient privilege and in order to make the glory of Mary full, she must also be a perpetual virgin.

The fact that God chose Mary for His Son to be born of her and the fact that she participated in the incarnation of God is a great privilege and a proof that Mary was exceptionally faithful to God in her life (cf. Luke 1:38). It was God's will for her to be the mother of Christ and, as the wife of Joseph, also of other children – and not for her to be a perpetual virgin which would also go against a normal married life. God has thus assigned an important role to Mary which she has fulfilled and this role is in itself a unique distinction. Attempts to further elevate her status and making her a perpetual virgin in the image of Greek goddesses stem from the desire to worship her to which the scripture gives no basis and against which it warns. In this case these attempts also lead to a paradox that just being a mother of Christ is an insufficient privilege and so Mary must be proclaimed as a perpetual virgin.

6.2.2. An erroneous perception of virginity and marital relations.

The defence of the dogma of Mary's perpetual virginity also exposes other problems in the reasoning of the Catholic church. It reflects the former perception of marital intercourse as an awkward necessity and bodily unchastity which survived in the Catholic church in some form until today – de facto, even if not de jure.

Although the position of the Catholic church is not as radical as that of many early fathers, we should remember that it is these fathers – frequently seeing even legitimate sexuality within a marriage as abhorrent and exalting a totally unbiblical ascetic way of life – were a key influence in establishing the dogma of Mary's perpetual virginity. On the other hand, as the teaching of the Catechism shows, virginity is glorified in Catholicism in a way that contradicts the Word of God and ascribed to it is a meaning for which the scripture provides no basis.

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 (*Lumen gentium* 63; cf. *1 Corinthians* 7:34-35). It is her faith that enables her to become the mother of the Savior: “Mary is more blessed because she embraces faith in Christ than because she conceives the flesh of Christ” (St. Augustine, *De sancta virginitate*, 3: PL 40, 398).
Catechism of the Catholic Church, §506

The statement that “Mary is a virgin because her virginity is *the sign of her faith* ‘unadulterated by any doubt’” is a serious error. The scripture gives no basis to perceive virginity as a “sign of faith unadulterated by doubt”²⁶ – quite contrary. Abraham is called the father of those who believe (Romans 4:16) and we find numerous references to his faith in the scripture (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:3, 4:20-22; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23; Hebrews 11:17-19). Moses played a key part in God's plan of salvation through his trust and faithfulness to Him and so did David. All these men were married. Identifying faith or its maturity with virginity is not only deprived of any biblical foundation, but creates a distorted image of faithfulness to God. It is also worth noting that in Hebrews 11 where the best examples of faith are mentioned and where we have a list of those who distinguished themselves with exceptional trust to the Lord, Mary is not mentioned.

26 We should also remember that except Jesus Christ no one's faith has ever been “unadulterated by any doubt”. We have here another example of ascribing perfection to Mary, although the scripture gives no basis for it. Mary was a sinful human being (chapter IV) and demonstrated her imperfect understanding of God's plan on numerous occasions (see chapter V, point 3, analysis of paragraphs 38 and 39).

With regard “her undivided gift of herself to God's will”, as it has been discussed above, in her case this meant being a mother and a wife. It was not God’s will for her to commit her life to Him as a solitary virgin.

Virginity is for the Catholic church a symbol of keeping “in its entirety and purity the faith” pledged to the Spouse, although it is a clear teaching of the scripture that carnal relations within marriage in no way deprives one of purity or breaks the faith towards our Lord.

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” (*Lumen gentium*, 64; cf. 63).
Catechism of the Catholic Church, §507²⁷

It is a serious error on the part of the Catholic church to perceive virginity as an outward expression of devotion to God and of spiritual purity since both are achievable within a marriage (to the degree that they are achievable for sinful human beings). Relations within a marriage – quite in accordance with the scripture – neither makes it impossible to fulfil God’s will, nor does it make a man impure.²⁸ Quite the contrary – life in solitude is not a path for everyone and should only be chosen by those who can endure on it (1 Corinthians 7:2-5, 7:9).

Perpetual virginity was thus a necessary attribute of Mary in the eyes of those whose perception of sexuality within a marriage was distorted and contrary to the scripture – as it was the case with many of the early fathers.

6.3. The influence of the false teaching of Mary’s perpetual virginity and the current necessity to defend this teaching by the Catholic church.

This unscriptural apotheosis of virginity at the cost of legitimate marital relations contributed to many erroneous developments, such as ascetic movements, male and female orders – which are themselves unbiblical inventions – or the mandatory celibacy for clergy (cf. Matthew 8:14-15; 1 Timothy 3:1-2; Titus 1:5-7).

Presently the Catholic church must maintain the erroneous teaching of Mary’s perpetual virginity and defend it in all possible ways since it has been proclaimed a dogma of the Catholic faith. And this is what the Catholic Church is doing, attempting to conform the words of the scripture to this false teaching and using interpretations which break all the principles of biblical exegesis. To admit an error would mean breaching the inerrancy of the Catholic church which it baselessly ascribes to itself.

No verse in the scripture says that Mary was a perpetual virgin. Many verses teach that she was not.

7. Summary.

27 Nowhere in the scripture is Mary presented as a figure of the Church. The symbolism of the Church as a mother bearing sons through baptism also has nothing to do with the scripture. The Catholic church as a “virgin” is a metaphor which those attempting to defend Mary’s perpetual virginity should avoid. It is a distortion to the point of absurd to call “virgin” an institution which has to its account the crusades, the inquisition, political conspiracies and collusions, forgeries, sexual abuse committed by many priests throughout the centuries – and covered by many others, and all its false teachings and practices stemming from unfaithfulness to God and His Word.

28 Married were Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Solomon, apostles, etc.

1. The scripture teaches that Mary was a virgin before conceiving Jesus. Her virgin conception was important for several reasons – in order to fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14, for Jesus to be the firstborn Son and for Him to be free from the sin nature.
2. Mary's virginity after Jesus' birth was irrelevant from a theological point of view and the Bible not only nowhere teaches that Mary remained a virgin, but in many places says the exact opposite (Matthew 1:18, 1:24-25; Luke 2:7; Ewangelia Mateusza 12:46-50, 13:54-57, etc.).
3. According to the interpretation of the Catholic Church in all the passages mentioning the siblings of Jesus it is not the literal brothers and sisters in Christ who are mentioned, but rather cousins or some other relatives. This interpretation is erroneous and results from an attempt to conform the testimony of the scripture to the false dogma of perpetual virginity. The Catholic church argumentation to defend this interpretation contains numerous errors.
4. The attempt to defend the dogma of perpetual virginity led the Catholic church to look for passages in the scripture which could justify it. There are no such passages, however, and Catholic theologians are trying to find support for this false teaching in places which not only have got nothing to do with perpetual virginity, but even with Mary herself (e.g. Luke 1:34; Ezekiel 44:1-2). We have here another case where the Catholic church first established a teaching which has got nothing to do with the scripture – and did so for entirely unbiblical reasons – and now attempts to conform the Word of God to fit to this teaching.
5. In the defence of their dogma the Catholic church quotes the teaching of the scripture about virginity, which they consider as far more virtuous and honourable than married life and in which thus Mary must have lived. This defence contains a paradox, however, since the main purpose of virginity – devoting one's life to God at the cost of marriage and family – could not have been realised in Mary's case anyway. The teaching of the Catholic church also directly contradicts one of the main purposes of marriage as ordained by God – to form a family and have children.
6. In their argumentation the Catholic church also quotes uninspired works of which we know that they are outright forgeries. Frequently quoted in the defence of Mary's perpetual virginity is the "Protoevangelium of James" – a pseudoepigraphal work probably dating the second half of the second century. According to this fabrication – whose author falsely claimed to be James – Joseph had children from his previous marriage who were later called "brothers of the Lord". This forgery also contains a graphic description of the inspection of Mary's virginity performed by Salome after Christ's birth. The Protoevangelium of James bears all the marks of a work created for a specific purpose – to provide proof for the teaching of Mary's perpetual virginity.
7. As in the case of all other Marian doctrines the Catholic church also quotes the testimony of the so called "tradition" and the arguments presented above also qualify as such. This equates to putting the opinions of the church fathers and uninspired works not only on a par with the Word of God, but de facto above it, since the Word of God teaches that Jesus had brothers and the Catholic church defends their opposite view quoting the works of the fathers or pseudoepigrapha. The Church also presents in their Catechism arguments the logic of which makes them totally worthless (baseless conclusions, tautology, etc.).
8. The origin of the teaching of the perpetual virginity is the cult of Mary and her worship which directly contradicts the scripture. The roots of this cult are pagan – virginity was an attribute of goddesses and heroines in the Greek culture (e.g., Athene and Artemis). Those not building their faith on the truth did not want their goddess to be inferior to the pagan goddesses. It is remarkable that in the last decade of the sixth century the Parthenon was converted into a temple dedicated to the "Virgin Mary".
9. The cult of Mary ever virgin thus expanded fast, and together with it virginity itself began to be glorified. It also reflects the perception of marital intercourse as an awkward necessity and bodily unchastity which was held by many early fathers.

10. It is a serious error on the part of the Catholic church to perceive virginity as an outward expression of devotion to God and of spiritual purity since both are achievable within a marriage (to the degree that they are achievable for sinful human beings).
11. Relations within a marriage – quite in accordance with the scripture – neither make it impossible to fulfil God’s will, nor do they make a man impure. Quite the contrary – life in solitude is not a path for everyone and should only be chosen by those who can endure on it.
12. This unscriptural apotheosis of virginity at the cost of legitimate marital relations contributed to many erroneous developments, such as ascetic movements, male and female orders – which are themselves unbiblical inventions – or the mandatory celibacy for the clergy.
13. Presently the Catholic church must maintain the erroneous teaching of Mary’s perpetual virginity and defend it in all possible ways since it has been proclaimed a dogma of the Catholic faith. And this is what the Catholic Church is doing, attempting to conform the words of the scripture to this false teaching and using interpretations which break all the principles of biblical exegesis. To admit an error would mean breaching the inerrancy of the Catholic church which it baselessly ascribes to itself.
14. No verse in the scripture says that Mary was a perpetual virgin. Many verses teach that she was not.

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See also:

- <https://answersingenesis.org/bible-characters/is-the-perpetual-virginity-of-mary-a-biblical-view/>
- <https://carm.org/did-mary-have-other-children>
- <https://carm.org/marys-virginity-and-matt-125>

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