

QUESTION 14

The Bodily Weaknesses that Christ Took On in His Human Nature

Next we have to consider the weaknesses (*defectus*) that Christ took on in His human nature: first, the bodily weaknesses (question 14), and, second, the weaknesses belonging to His soul (question 15).

On the first topic there are four questions: (1) Was it fitting for the Son of God to take on bodily weaknesses in His human nature? (2) Did He take on the necessity of being subject to these weaknesses? (3) Did Christ contract these weaknesses? (4) Did Christ take on all the weaknesses of the sort in question?

Article 1

Was it fitting for the Son of God to assume a human nature with bodily weaknesses?

It seems that it was not fitting for the Son of God to assume a human nature with bodily weaknesses (*filius Dei non debuit assumere naturam humanam cum corporis defectibus*):

Objection 1: Just as the soul was united to the Word of God in a person, so, too, was the body. But as was explained above (q. 7, a. 9), Christ's soul had every manner of perfection, both with respect to grace and with respect to knowledge. Therefore, His body should likewise have been perfect in every way, having no weakness within it.

Objection 2: Christ's soul saw the Word of God by the vision with which the blessed in heaven see it, and so Christ's soul was beatified. But the body is glorified because of the soul's beatitude; for in *Epistola ad Dioscurum* Augustine says, "God made the soul with so strong a nature that from the fullness of its blessedness there pours over into the lower nature, i.e., into the body, not, to be sure, the beatitude that is proper to something that enjoys and understands, but instead the fullness of health, i.e., the vigor of incorruptibility." Therefore, Christ's body was incorruptible and devoid of any weakness.

Objection 3: Punishment follows upon sin. But there was no sin in Christ—this according to 1 Peter 2:22 ("... who committed no sin"). Therefore, neither should there have been in Him any bodily weaknesses, which are punishments.

Objection 4: No one who is wise takes upon himself what impedes him from his proper end. But the end of the Incarnation seems to be impeded in many ways by bodily weaknesses of the sort in question:

First, men were prevented from knowing Him because of infirmities of the sort in question—this according to Isaiah 53:2-3 ("[There was no sightliness] that we should have been taken with Him. Despised and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with infirmity, and His look was, as it were, hidden and despised, whereupon we esteemed Him not").

Second, because the desire of the holy patriarchs does not seem to be fulfilled; for in their person Isaiah 51:9 says, "Arise, arise, put on your strength, you arm of the Lord."

Third, because it seemed more fitting for the devil to be defeated, and for human weakness to be healed, by strength rather than by weakness.

Therefore, it seems not to have been fitting for the Son of God to assume a human nature with bodily infirmities or weaknesses.

But contrary to this: Hebrews 2:18 says, "For in that in which He Himself suffered and was tempted, He is able to help those who are likewise tempted." But He came in order to help us; hence, David said [in Psalm 102:1], "I have lifted up my eyes to the mountains, from there shall help come to me." Therefore, it was fitting for the Son of God to assume flesh that was subject to human infirmities, so that He would be able to suffer and be tempted, and so to bring us assistance.

I respond: It was fitting for the body assumed by the Son of God to be subject to infirmities and weaknesses, and this for three reasons:

First, because the Son of God, once His flesh was assumed, came into the world to make satisfaction for the sin of the human race. But an individual makes satisfaction for the sin of another when he takes upon himself the punishment due for the other's sin. And bodily weaknesses of the sort in question, viz., death, hunger, thirst, and others of this sort, are the punishment for the sin that was introduced into the world by Adam—this according to Romans 5:12 (“Through one man sin entered into the world and, because of sin, death”). Hence, it was fitting, given the end of the Incarnation, for [the Son of God] to suffer punishments of this sort in our flesh and in our stead—this according to Isaiah 53:4 (“Truly, he has borne our infirmities”).

Second, in order to build up belief in the Incarnation. For since human nature was not known to men otherwise than as subject to bodily weaknesses of the sort in question, if the Son of God had assumed a human nature without these weaknesses, then he would not have seemed to be a true human being or to have real human flesh, but instead would have seemed to have imaginary flesh, as the Manicheans claimed. And so, as Philippians 2:7 says, “He emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, having been made in the likeness of men, and presented as a man.” Hence, as John 20:26 reports, Thomas was called back to faith by seeing His wounds.

Third, because of the example of patience that He gives us by courageously tolerating human liabilities and weaknesses (*passiones et defectus humanos fortiter tolerando*). Hence, Hebrews 12:3 says, “He endured opposition from sinners against Himself, in order that you might not grow weary, falling short in courage.”

Reply to objection 1: Making satisfaction for the sin of another has as its *matter*, to be sure, the punishments that the individual undergoes for the sin of the other, but it has as its *principle* the habit of the soul by which one is inclined to will to make satisfaction for the other and because of which the act of making satisfaction has efficacy. For as will be explained below (*Supplement*, q. 14, a. 2), the act of making satisfaction would not be efficacious if it did not proceed from charity. And so it was necessary for Christ's soul to be perfect with respect to the habits of knowledge and of the virtues, in order that it might have the ability to make satisfaction, and it was necessary for its body to be subject to infirmities, in order that it not be lacking in the matter for making satisfaction.

Reply to objection 2: In accord with the natural relation that obtains between the soul and the body, glory redounds to the body from the glory of the soul. However, in Christ this natural relation was subject to the will of the divine nature itself, and this will brought it about that the beatitude remained in the soul and did not flow into the body, but that instead the flesh suffered what befits a passible nature—this according to what Damascene says, viz., that “it was by the consent of the divine will (*beneplacito divinae voluntatis*) that the flesh was permitted to suffer and to do what was proper to it.”

Reply to objection 3: Punishment always follows upon sin, whether actual sin or original sin. Sometimes it is the sin of the one who is being punished, whereas sometimes it is the sin of another, for whom the one who suffers the punishments is making satisfaction. And so it happened in the case of Christ—this according to Isaiah 53:5 (“He was wounded for our iniquities, bruised for our sins”).

Reply to objection 4: The infirmity assumed by Christ did not impede the end of the Incarnation but instead promoted it to the highest degree. And even though His divinity was hidden by infirmities of the sort in question, His humanity, which is the Way to arrive at the divinity, was nonetheless made manifest—this according to Romans 5:1-2 (“We have access to God through Jesus Christ”). Again, the ancient patriarchs desired in Christ not bodily strength but instead the spiritual strength through which He both defeated the devil and healed human infirmity.

Article 2

Was Christ subject to bodily weaknesses by necessity?

It seems that Christ was not subject to bodily weaknesses by necessity (*Christus non ex necessitate his defectibus subiacerit*):

Objection 1: Isaiah 53:7 says, “He was offered because He willed it (*oblatus est quia ipse voluit*),” and it is talking about the offering of the Passion. But what is willed is opposed to the necessary (*sed voluntas opponitur necessitati*). Therefore, Christ was not subject to bodily weaknesses by necessity.

Objection 2: In *De Fide Orthodoxa* 3 Damascene says, “Nothing is considered coerced in the case of Christ, but everything is voluntary.” But what is voluntary is not necessary. Therefore, weaknesses of the sort in question did not exist by necessity in Christ.

Objection 3: Necessity is imposed by something more powerful. But no creature is more powerful than Christ’s soul, to which it pertains to conserve its own body. Therefore, weaknesses or infirmities of the sort in question did not exist in Christ by necessity.

But contrary to this: In Romans 8:3 the Apostle says, “God sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.” But the condition of sinful flesh is such that it carries the necessity of dying and of bearing other such liabilities. Therefore, the necessity of bearing these weaknesses existed in Christ’s flesh.

I respond: There are two sorts of necessity:

One is the *necessity of coercion* (*necessitas coactionis*), which is effected by an *extrinsic agent*. And this sort of necessity is contrary both to *nature* and to the *will*, both of which are *interior principles*.

The other sort of necessity is *natural necessity*, which follows from natural principles, viz., *form*, in the way that it is necessary for fire to give off heat, or *matter*, in the way that it is necessary for a body that is composed of contraries to be decomposed. Therefore, in accord with the necessity that follows upon the *matter*, Christ’s body was subject to the necessity of death and to the necessity of other weaknesses of this sort. For, as has been said, “it was by the consent of the divine will that Christ’s flesh was permitted to do and to suffer what was proper to it,” and, as has been explained, this necessity is caused by the principles of human flesh.

On the other hand, if we are talking about the *necessity of coercion* insofar as it conflicts with a *bodily nature*, then, once again, Christ’s body, in accord with the condition of its own nature, was subject to the necessity of the piercing nail and the striking whip. However, insofar as this sort of necessity conflicts with *the will*, it is clear that in the case of Christ there was no necessity of weaknesses of this sort, either with respect to the divine will or with respect to Christ’s human will absolutely speaking, i.e., insofar as the will is following deliberative reason. Instead, such necessity existed only with respect to the *natural* movement of Christ’s will, since it naturally shrank back from death and bodily harm.

Reply to objection 1: Christ is said to have been “offered because He willed it” both by His divine will and by His deliberate human will, even though, as Damascene explains, death was contrary to the natural movement of His human will.

Reply to objection 2: The reply to the second objection is clear from what has been said.

Reply to objection 3: Nothing was more powerful than Christ’s soul absolutely speaking, and yet nothing prevents it from being the case that something was more powerful with respect to *this* effect, e.g., the nail with respect to piercing. And I say this insofar as Christ’s soul is being thought of with respect to its own nature and its own power.

Article 3

Did Christ contract His bodily weaknesses?

It seems that Christ contracted His bodily weaknesses (*Christus defectus corporales contraxit*):

Objection 1: We are said to ‘contract’ something that we obtain along with our nature at its origin (*contrahere dicimur quod simul cum natura ex origine trahimus*). But along with His human nature Christ obtained bodily weaknesses and infirmities through the nature’s origin from His mother, whose own flesh was subject to weaknesses of the sort in question. Therefore, it seems that He contracted those weaknesses.

Objection 2: What is caused by the principles of a nature is obtained along with the nature and so is ‘contracted’. But punishments of the sort in question are caused by the principles of human nature. Therefore, Christ contracted them.

Objection 3: As Hebrews 2:17 points out, Christ is like other men because of weaknesses of the sort in question. But other human beings have contracted their weaknesses of this sort. Therefore, it seems that Christ likewise contracted such weaknesses.

But contrary to this: Weaknesses of the sort in question are contracted because of sin—this according to Romans 5:12 (“Through one man sin entered into this world and, because of sin, death”). But in Christ there was no place for sin. Therefore, Christ did not contract weaknesses of the sort in question.

I respond: In the verb ‘contract’ one understands an ordering of effect to cause, so that what is said to be contracted is obtained by necessity along with its cause. Now sin is the cause of death and of the weaknesses in human nature, since, as Romans 5:12 explains, “It was because of sin that death entered into the world.” And so the ones who are properly said to contract the weaknesses in question are those who incur those weaknesses because of a debt of sin. But Christ did not have the weaknesses because of a debt of sin, since, as Augustine explains in commenting on John 3:31 (“He who came from above is over all”), “Christ came from above, i.e., from the height that human nature had before the sin of the first man.” For He received human nature without sin in the purity in which it existed in the state of innocence. And, in a similar way, He was able to assume a human nature without any weaknesses.

So, then, it is clear that Christ did not ‘contract’ those weaknesses in the sense of receiving them as a debt for sin, but instead He received them by His own act of will.

Reply to objection 1: The flesh of the virgin was conceived in original sin and so contracted those weaknesses. But the flesh of Christ from the virgin assumed a nature without sin (see q. 27 below). Similarly, as has been explained, Christ was able to assume a nature without punishment, but He willed to receive the punishment in order to accomplish the work of our redemption. And so He had weaknesses of the sort in question because He assumed them voluntarily and not because He contracted them.

Reply to objection 2: There are two causes of death and of the other weaknesses in human nature: One is the *remote cause*, which is taken from the material principles of the human body, given that it is composed of contraries. However, this cause was impeded by original justice.

And so the *proximate cause* of death and of the other weaknesses is sin, through which original justice was removed. And, because of this, since Christ was without sin, He is said to have assumed these weaknesses voluntarily and not to have contracted them.

Reply to objection 3: In the case of the weaknesses in question, Christ is like other men with respect to the *quality* of the weaknesses, but not with respect to their *cause*. And so He did not *contract* these weaknesses in the way that the others did.

Article 4

Did Christ have to take on all the bodily weaknesses of men?

It seems that Christ had to take on all the bodily weaknesses of men (*Christus omnes defectus corporales hominum assumere debuit*):

Objection 1: Damascene says, “What cannot be assumed cannot be healed.” But Christ came to heal our weaknesses. Therefore, He had to take on all our weaknesses.

Objection 2: In order for Christ to make satisfaction for us, He had to have perfected habits in His soul and weaknesses in His body. But on the part of His soul He took on the fullness of every grace. Therefore, on the part of His body He had to take on all the weaknesses.

Objection 3: Death occupies first place among the bodily weaknesses. But Christ took on death. Therefore, *a fortiori*, He had to take on all the other weaknesses.

But contrary to this: Contraries cannot be brought about at the same time in the same thing. But certain infirmities are contrary to one another, because they are caused by contrary principles. Therefore, it was impossible for Christ to take on all human infirmities.

I respond: As has been explained (a. 1), Christ took on human weaknesses in order to make satisfaction for the sin that belonged to human nature, and for this He was required to have the fullness of knowledge and grace (*perfectionem scientiae et gratiae*) in His soul. Therefore, Christ had to take on those weaknesses which (a) follow from the common sin of the whole nature and yet which (b) are not incompatible with the fullness of knowledge and grace.

So, then, it was not appropriate for Him to take on *all* human weaknesses or infirmities:

For there are some weaknesses that conflict with the fullness of knowledge and grace, e.g., ignorance, a proneness toward evil, and difficulty with respect to the good.

Again, there are weaknesses that are not general consequences for the whole of human nature because of the sin of the first parent, but are instead caused in some human beings by certain particular causes, e.g., leprosy, epilepsy, and other things of this sort. These weaknesses are sometimes caused by human fault, e.g., by disordered eating, whereas sometimes they are caused by defects in the power that forms the bodies (*ex defectu virtutis formativae*).

Neither of these [first two] sorts of weaknesses are fitting for Christ, since His flesh was conceived by the Holy Spirit, who has infinite wisdom and power and is unable to err or to fall short. And Christ Himself did nothing disordered in directing His own life.

On the other hand, there are weaknesses of a third sort that are found in all human beings in general because of the sin of the first parent, e.g., death, hunger, thirst, and other things of this sort. And Christ took on all these weaknesses. Damascene calls them “natural and intractable liabilities (*naturales et indetractibiles passiones*)”—*natural*, because they affect all of human nature in general; *intractable*, because they do not involve any deficiency in knowledge or grace.

Reply to objection 1: All the particular weaknesses of men are caused by our body’s corruptibility and passibility, along with the addition of certain particular causes. And so when Christ healed our body’s passibility and corruptibility by taking them on, He healed all the other defects as a consequence.

Reply to objection 2: The fullness of all grace and knowledge were fitting for the soul of Christ in their own right (*secundum se*), given that the soul had been assumed by the Word of God. And so Christ took on the fullness of wisdom and grace absolutely speaking. By contrast, He took on our weaknesses by way of a dispensation, in order that He might make satisfaction for our sin, and not because they belonged to Him in their own right. And so it was not necessary for Him to take on all the weaknesses; instead, it was necessary for Him to take on only those weaknesses that sufficed for making satisfaction for the sin of all of human nature.

Reply to objection 3: Death came to all men because of the sin of the first parent, whereas certain other weaknesses did not, even though they are lesser weaknesses than death is. Therefore, the arguments in the two cases are not similar.