

## QUESTION 47

### The Efficient Cause of Christ's Passion

Next we have to consider the efficient cause of Christ's passion. And on this topic there are six questions: (1) Was Christ killed by others or by Himself? (2) What was His motive for handing Himself over to His passion? (3) Did the Father hand Him over to suffer? (4) Was it fitting for Him to suffer at the hands of gentiles? (5) Did His killers know who He was (*eum cognoverint*)? (6) What about the sin of those who killed Christ?

#### Article 1

#### Was Christ killed by others or by Himself?

It seems that Christ was killed not by others, but by Himself (*Christus non fuerit ab alio occisus, sed a seipso*):

**Objection 1:** In John 10:18 He Himself says, "No one takes my life from me, but I myself lay it down." But the one who is said to kill someone is he who takes his life. Therefore, Christ was killed not by others, but by Himself.

**Objection 2:** Those who are killed by others die little by little as their nature is weakened. And this is especially clear in the case of those who are crucified; for as Augustine says in *De Trinitate* 4, "Those hung from a tree were tormented by a slow death." However, this did not happen in the case of Christ, since, as Matthew 27:50 says, "Crying out in a loud voice, He gave up His spirit." Therefore, Christ was killed by Himself and not by others.

**Objection 3:** Those who are killed by others die violently and so not voluntarily, since the violent is opposed to the voluntary. But in *De Trinitate* 4 Augustine says, "Christ's spirit left His flesh not unwillingly, but because He willed it, when He willed it, and in the manner in which He willed it." Therefore, Christ was killed by Himself and not by others.

**But contrary to this:** Luke 18:33 says, "... and after they have scourged Him, they will put Him to death."

**I respond:** There are two ways in which a thing can be a cause of some effect:

In one way, by *directly contributing* to that effect (*directe ad illud agendo*). And this is the way in which Christ's persecutors killed Him, since they inflicted a sufficient cause of death on Him with the intention of killing Him and having the effect follow, since His death followed from that cause.

In the second way, an individual is said to be the cause of something *indirectly*, viz., because *he does not prevent it when he is able to prevent it*—in the way that an individual is said to drench another because he does not close the window that the heavy rain passes through.

And it is in this latter way that Christ Himself was a cause of His own passion and death. For He was able to prevent His passion and death—first of all, by holding His adversaries in check, with the result that they either would not want to kill Him or would not be able to kill Him. Second, because His spirit had the power of preserving the nature of His flesh from being subjected to any sort of inflicted wound. Indeed, as Augustine points out in *De Trinitate* 4, Christ's soul had this power because it was conjoined to the Word of God in a oneness of person,

Therefore, because Christ's soul did not drive inflicted harm away from His own body, but instead willed that His corporeal nature should succumb to that harm, He is said to have laid down His life or to have died voluntarily (*suam animam posuisse vel voluntarie mortuus esse*).

**Reply to objection 1:** When it is said, "No one takes my life from me (*nemo tollit animam meam a me*)", what is understood is this: "without me willing it (*me invito*).” For what is properly said to be 'taken' (*tolli*) is what an individual takes away (*aufert*) from someone who is unwilling and who is

unable to resist.

**Reply to objection 2:** In order for Christ to show that it was not the passion inflicted by violence that was taking away His life, He preserved His bodily nature in its strength, so as to cry out with a loud voice even when He was in His last moments. This is counted along with the other miracles that belong to His death. Hence, Mark 15:39 says, “Now when the centurion who was standing opposite Him saw that He had expired while crying out in this manner, he said, ‘Indeed, this man was the Son of God.’”

It was likewise remarkable in the case of Christ’s death that He died more quickly than the others afflicted with the same punishment. Hence, John 19:32 reports that “they broke the legs” of those who were with Him, in order that they might die quickly, “but when they came to Jesus, they found Him dead, and so they did not break His legs.” Likewise, Mark 15:44 says, “Pilate was surprised that He had already died.” For just as by His will His bodily nature kept its vigor to the end, so, too, when He willed it, He suddenly succumbed to the inflicted harm.

**Reply to objection 3:** Christ suffered violence in order to die and yet, at the same time, He died voluntarily. For the violence was inflicted on His body, and yet it prevailed over His body to the extent that He wanted it to.

## Article 2

### Did Christ die out of obedience?

It seems that Christ did not die out of obedience (*Christus non fuerit ex obedientia mortuus*):

**Objection 1:** Obedience has to do with a command. But we do not read that Christ was commanded to suffer. Therefore, He did not suffer out of obedience.

**Objection 2:** An individual is said to do out of obedience what he does out of the necessity imposed by a command (*quod facit ex necessitate praecepti*). But Christ suffered voluntarily and not out of necessity. Therefore, He did not suffer out of obedience.

**Objection 3:** Charity (*caritas*) is a more excellent virtue than obedience. But we read that Christ suffered out of charity—this according to Ephesians 5:2 (“Walk in love (*in dilectione*), just as Christ has loved us (*dilexit nos*) and handed Himself over for us”). Therefore, Christ’s passion should be attributed to charity (*caritas*) rather than to obedience.

**But contrary to this:** Philippians 2:8 says, “He became obedient to the Father to the point of death.”

**I respond:** It was extremely fitting for Christ to suffer out of obedience:

First of all, because this was appropriate for human justification in order that, as Romans 5:19 puts it, “just as many became sinners because of the disobedience of one man, so many became justified (*iusti*) through the obedience of one man.”

Second, it was appropriate for the reconciliation of God with men—this according to Romans 5:10 (“We were reconciled with God through the death of His Son”). This was because the very death of Christ was a certain sacrifice that was the most acceptable of all to God—this according to Ephesians 5:2 (“He delivered Himself up for us, an offering and sacrifice to God with a fragrant odor”). But obedience is preferred over every sacrifice—this according to 1 Kings 15:22 (“Obedience is better than sacrifices”). And for this reason it was fitting for the sacrifice of the passion and death of Christ to proceed from obedience.

Third, it was appropriate for His victory, by which He triumphed over death and the author of death. For a soldier cannot conquer without being obedient to his general. And so the man Christ

obtained victory by being obedient to God—this according to Proverbs 21:28 (“An obedient man speaks of victories”).

**Reply to objection 1:** Christ received from the Father the command to suffer; for John 10:18 says, “I have the power to lay down my life and I have the power to take it up again, and this command I have received from my Father,” viz., to lay down His life and to take it up again. As Chrysostom points out, “this does not mean that beforehand He waited to hear the command and that He had to learn about it, but instead He indicated that the process was a voluntary one and thus destroyed the suspicion that there was contrariety [on His part]” with respect to the Father (*et contrarietatis ad patrem suspicionem destruxit*).

Yet because the Old Law was consummated in the death of Christ—this according to the fact that as He was dying He said, “It is consummated” (John 19:30)—one can gather that by suffering He fulfilled all the precepts of the Old Law (cf. *ST* 1-2, qq. 100, 101 and 104). He fulfilled the *moral precepts*, which are founded upon the precepts of charity, insofar as He suffered both (a) out of love for the Father—this according to John 14:31 (“... that the world might know that I love the Father and that I do as the Father has commanded me; arise, let us go from here,” i.e., to the place of the passion)—and (b) out of love for neighbor—this according to Galatians 2:20 (“He loved me and handed Himself over for me”). On the other hand, He fulfilled the *ceremonial precepts*, which are ordered mainly toward sacrifices and oblations, by His own passion insofar as all the ancient sacrifices were a prefigurement of that true sacrifice that Christ offered by dying for us. Hence, Colossians 2:16-17 says, “Let no one judge you in matters of food or drink or in regard to a feast day or a new moon, which are shadows of things to come, but the body is Christ’s,” because Christ is compared to them as a body to its shadow. Finally, Christ fulfilled the *judicial precepts* of the Law, which are mainly ordered toward making satisfaction to those who suffer harms, by His suffering, since, as Psalm 68:5 says, “He paid for what He did not steal,” allowing Himself to be affixed to a tree for the apple which the man had stolen from a tree in opposition to God’s command.

**Reply to objection 2:** Even if obedience implies a necessity with respect to what is commanded, it nonetheless implies voluntariness (*volutatem*) with respect to the fulfillment of the command. And such was Christ’s obedience. For the very passion and death, considered in their own right (*secundum se*), were repugnant to His natural will, and yet Christ willed to fulfill God’s will in this matter—this according to Psalm 39:9 (“I want to do your will, my God”). Hence, in Matthew 26:42 He said, “If this cup cannot pass from me unless I drink it, Your will be done.”

**Reply to objection 3:** Christ suffered out of charity (*ex caritate*) for the same reason that He suffered out of obedience; for He fulfilled even the precepts of charity only out of obedience, and He was obedient out of His love (*ex dilectione*) for the Father who was commanding Him.

### Article 3

#### Did the God the Father hand Christ over to suffering?

It seems that God the Father did not hand Christ over to suffering (*Deus pater non tradiderit Christum passioni*):

**Objection 1:** It seems to be wicked and cruel for someone who is innocent to be handed over to suffering and death. But as Deuteronomy 32:4 says, “God is faithful and lacking in wickedness.” Therefore, He did not hand over the innocent Christ to suffering and death.

**Objection 2:** It seems that no one is handed over to death both by Himself and by another. But Christ handed Himself over for our sake—this according to Isaiah 53:12 (“He handed over His own

life”). Therefore, it does not seem that God the Father handed Him over.

**Objection 3:** Judas is reproached for handing Christ over to the Jews—this according to John 6:71-72 (“One of you is a devil—He said this because of Judas, who was going to hand Him over”). Similarly, the Jews are likewise reproached for handing Him over to Pilate—this according to what Pilate himself says in John 18:35 (“Your own people and your chief priests have handed you over to me”). Again, as John 19:16 has it, it was Pilate who handed Him over to be crucified, and as 2 Corinthians 6:14 says, “Justice has nothing in common with wickedness.” Therefore, it seems that God the Father did not hand Christ over to suffering.

**But contrary to this:** Romans 8:32 says, “God did not spare His own Son, but handed Him over for all of us.”

**I respond:** As has been explained (a. 2), Christ suffered voluntarily out of obedience to the Father. Hence, there are three ways in which God the Father handed Christ over to suffering:

In one way, insofar as by His eternal will He preordained the suffering of Christ for the liberation of the human race—this according to Isaiah 53:6 (“The Lord has laid on him the wickedness of us all,” and according to Isaiah 53:10 (“The Lord willed to bruise him in infirmity”).

In the second way, insofar as He inspired Him to want to suffer for our sake, by infusing charity into Him. Hence, in the same place (Isaiah 53:7) it says, “He was offered up because He willed it.”

In the third way, by not protecting Him from suffering, but by instead exposing Him to those who were persecuting Him. Hence, as we read in Matthew 27:46, while hanging on the cross Christ said, “My God, why have you forsaken me?” As Augustine explains, this was because [the Father] had exposed Him to His persecutors.

**Reply to objection 1:** It is indeed wicked and cruel to hand an innocent man over to suffering and death against his will. But this is not how God the Father handed Christ over; instead, He did it by inspiring in Him the will to suffer for our sake. In this is shown both (a) the severity of God (*Dei severitas*), who did not want to forgive sin without punishment (*sine poena*)—something that the Apostle signified when he said, “He did not spare His own Son”—and also (b) the goodness of God, in that because man could not make sufficient satisfaction through any punishment (*per aliquam poenam*) he might suffer, God gave him someone to make satisfaction—something that the Apostle signified when he said, “He handed Him over for all of us.” And in Romans 3:25 he says, “... whom”—viz., Christ—“God put forward through faith as a propitiator in His blood (*quem per fidem propitiatorem proposuit Deus in sanguine ipsius*).”

**Reply to objection 2:** Insofar as He is God, Christ handed Himself over to death by the very same act of will and the very same action by which the Father likewise handed Him over. On the other hand, insofar as He is a man, Christ handed Himself over as inspired by the Father. Hence, no contrariety is involved in the Father’s handing Christ over and Christ’s handing Himself over.

**Reply to objection 3:** The same action is judged in diverse ways in regard to good and evil insofar as it proceeds from diverse roots. For the Father handed Christ over, and Christ handed Himself over, out of charity, and that is why they are praised. By contrast, Judas handed Him over out of greed, the Jews handed Him over out of envy, and Pilate handed Him over out of the worldly fear by which he feared Caesar—and that is why they are all reproached.

#### Article 4

##### Was it fitting for Christ to suffer at the hands of gentiles?

It seems that it was not fitting for Christ to suffer at the hands of gentiles (*non fuerit conveniens Christum pati a gentilibus*):

**Objection 1:** Since men were to be liberated from sin through Christ's death, it would seem fitting for the fewest possible men to commit sin in His death. Now among those who sinned in His death were the Jews, in whose person Matthew 21:38 says, "Here is the heir; come, let us kill him." Therefore, it seems that it would have been fitting for the gentiles not to be implicated in the sin of killing Christ.

**Objection 2:** The reality should correspond to the prefigurement. But it was Jews, and not gentiles, who offered the prefigurative sacrifices of the Old Law. Therefore, the passion of the Christ, which was the true sacrifice, should not have been fulfilled at the hands of gentiles, either.

**Objection 3:** John 5:18 says, "The Jews were seeking to kill Christ, not only because He was breaking the Sabbath, but also because He called God His Father, making Himself equal to God." But these seem to be contrary only to the Law of the Jews; hence, in John 19:7 they themselves say, "According to the Law He should die, since He has made Himself the Son of God." Therefore, it seems to have been fitting for Christ to suffer at the hands of the Jews and not at the hands of the gentiles. In addition, what the Jews said, viz., "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death" (John 18:31), was false, since, as is clear from Leviticus 20, there were many sins punished by death under the Law.

**But contrary to this:** In Matthew 20:19 our Lord Himself says, "... and they will hand Him over to the gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified."

**I respond:** The effect of Christ's passion was prefigured in its very mode. For, first of all, Christ's passion had the effect of salvation among the Jews, very many of whom were baptized in the wake of Christ's death (*quorum plurimi in morte Christi baptizati sunt*), as is clear from Acts 2 and 4. But, second, because of the preaching of the Jews, the effect of Christ's passion passed to the gentiles. And this is why it was fitting for Christ to begin suffering at the hands of Jews and, afterwards, once the Jews handed Him over, for His suffering to be brought to completion at the hands of gentiles.

**Reply to objection 1:** Christ, in order to show the abundance of the charity out of which He was suffering, requested forgiveness for His persecutors once He had been placed upon the cross. And in order that the fruits of this petition might extend to both Jews and gentiles, Christ wished to suffer at the hands of both groups.

**Reply to objection 2:** Christ's passion was the offering of a sacrifice insofar as, out of charity, He endured death by His own will. By contrast, insofar as He was made to suffer at the hands of His persecutors, it was not a sacrifice but the most grievous sin of all.

**Reply to objection 3:** Augustine claims that when the Jews said, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death," they meant that "they were not permitted to put anyone to death because of the holiness of the feast day, which they had already begun to celebrate."

Alternatively, Chrysostom claims that they wanted to kill Him not as a transgressor of the Law, but as a public enemy, since He had made Himself king—something that it was not up to them to judge.

An alternative reply is that they were not permitted to crucify anyone, which is what they wanted, but were permitted only to stone them, which is what they did in the case of Stephen.

A better reply is that the power of executing anyone had been taken away from them by the Romans, to whom they were subject.

## Article 5

### Did Christ's persecutors know who He was?

It seems that Christ's persecutors knew who He was (*persecutores Christi eum cognoverunt*):

**Objection 1:** Matthew 21:38 says, "The vine-dressers (*agricolae*), seeing the son, said among themselves, 'Here is the heir; come, let us kill him'." Jerome comments here: "Our Lord most clearly proves by these words that the leaders of the Jews crucified the Son of God not out of ignorance, but out of envy. For they understood Him to be the one to whom the Father says through the prophet, 'Ask of me and I will give you the nations as your inheritance' (Psalm 2:8)." Therefore, it seems that they knew Him to be the Christ, or the Son of God.

**Objection 2:** In John 15:24 our Lord said, "... but now they have seen and have hated both me and my Father." But what is seen is known clearly. Therefore, the Jews, knowing that He was the Christ, inflicted suffering on Him out of hatred.

**Objection 3:** In a sermon from the Council of Ephesus it says, "Just as he who destroys the imperial message is bound to die as someone who despises the emperor's word, so the Jew who crucified Him whom he had seen, will pay the penalty as someone who presumed to lay his hands on God the Word Himself." But this would not be the case if they did not know Him to be the Son of God, since their ignorance would excuse them. Therefore, it seems that the Jews who crucified Christ knew Him to be the Son of God.

**But contrary to this** is what is said in 1 Corinthians 2:8, "If they had known, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory." And in speaking to the Jews in Acts 3:17, Peter says, "I know that you acted out of ignorance, just as your leaders did." And our Lord, hanging on the cross, said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

**I respond:** Among the Jews, some individuals were more prominent and some were less prominent.

According to *De Quaestionibus Novi et Veteris Testamenti*, the more prominent ones, who were called their leaders, recognized, just as the demons recognized, that He was the Christ promised in the Law; for they saw in Him all the signs that the prophets had claimed would occur. However, they were ignorant of the mystery of the divine nature, and that is why the Apostle claimed that if they had known, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory. However, notice that their ignorance did not excuse them from sin (*non eos excusabat a crimine*), since their ignorance was in a some sense affected. For they saw the evident signs of His divine nature, but out of their hatred for, and envy of, Christ they perverted those signs and refused to believe His words when He confessed Himself to be the Son of God. Hence, in John 15:22 He Himself said, "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin." And afterwards he adds, "If I had not done among them works such as no one else has done, they would have no sin" (John 15:24). And so what is said in Job 21:14 can be taken to apply to their person: "They said to God, 'Depart from us, we do not want knowledge of Your ways.'"

By contrast, the less prominent individuals, i.e., the common people, who did not know the mysteries of the Scriptures, did not fully understand that He was either the Christ or the Son of God, even though some of them believed in Him. Yet most of them did not believe (*tamen multitudo non credidit*). And even if, as John 7:31-41 reports, they sometimes wondered whether He was the Christ because of the multitude of His signs and the efficacy of His teaching, they were nonetheless later deceived by their leaders into not believing that He was either the Son of God or the Christ. This is why Peter said to them, "I know that you acted out of ignorance, just as your leaders did," viz., since they had been led astray by

their leaders.

**Reply to objection 1:** These words are spoken in the person of the vine-dressers (*ex persona colonorum*), by whom are signified the leaders of the people, who recognized Him to be the heir insofar as they knew Him to be the Christ promised in the Law.

However, it seems to count against this reply that those words of the Psalm, viz., “Ask of me and I will give you the nations as your inheritance,” are spoken to the same one to whom it is said, “You are my son, this day I have begotten you.” Therefore, if they recognized Him as the one to whom it is said, “Ask of me and I will give you the nations as your inheritance,” it follows that they recognized Him as the Son of God. In the place cited above, Chrysostom likewise claims that they knew Him to be the Son of God. Again, in commenting on Luke 23:34 (“... for they know not what they do”), Bede likewise says, “Note that He was not praying for those who preferred to crucify, rather than to believe in (*confiteri*), an individual whom they understood to be the Son of God.”

But to this one could respond that they knew Him to be a son of God not through His [divine] nature, but through the excellence of His singular grace.

Still, we can reply that they are still being said to have known the true Son of God, since they had evident signs of this reality—and yet, because of hatred and envy, they did not want to assent to these signs so as to acknowledge Him to be the Son of God.

**Reply to objection 2:** The words quoted are preceded by: “If I had not done among them works such as no one else has done, they would have no sin.” And afterwards it is added: “But now they have seen and have hated both me and my Father.” This shows that when they saw Christ’s marvelous works, their hatred kept them from recognizing Him to be the Son of God.

**Reply to objection 3:** Affected ignorance seems to aggravate one’s sin rather than to excuse it. For it shows that a man is so strongly inclined to sin that he wants to incur ignorance in order not to avoid sinning. And so the Jews sinned not only as crucifiers of the man Christ, but also as crucifiers of God.

## Article 6

### Was the sin of those who crucified Christ the most grievous of all sins?

It seems that the sin of those who crucified Christ was not the most grievous of all sins (*peccatum crucifigentium Christum non fuerit gravissimum*):

**Objection 1:** A sin is not the most grievous of all sins if there is an excuse for it. But our Lord Himself excused the sin of those who crucified Him, saying, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Therefore, their sin was not the most grievous of all sins.

**Objection 2:** In John 19:11 our Lord says to Pilate, “The one who handed me over to you has the greater sin.” But Pilate himself had Christ crucified by his underlings. Therefore, the sin of the traitor Judas seems to have been greater than the sin of those who crucified Christ.

**Objection 3:** According to the Philosopher in *Ethics* 5, “No one suffers injustice willingly,” and, as he says in the same place, “Where no one suffers an injustice, no one commits an injustice.” Therefore, no one commits an injustice against someone who is willing. But as was established above (a. 1, a. 2 ad 2, and q. 46, a. 6), Christ suffered voluntarily. Therefore, Christ’s crucifiers did not commit an injustice. And so it is not the case that their sin was the most grievous of all sins.

**But contrary to this:** In *Super Matthaëum*, commenting on Matthew 23:32 (“Fill up the measure of your fathers ...”), Chrysostom says, “As far as the truth is concerned, they *exceeded* the measure of their fathers. For these men killed, they crucified, God.”

**I respond:** As has been explained (a. 5), the leaders of the Jews knew who Christ was, and if there was any ignorance in them, it was affected ignorance, which was not able to excuse them. And so their sin was the most grievous of all, both because of the genus of the sin and because of the malice with which they willed it (*tum ex generi peccati, tum ex malitia voluntatis*).

On the other hand, the less prominent Jews sinned very grievously with respect to the genus of the sin, but their sin was in some way diminished because of their ignorance. Hence, in commenting on Luke 23:34 (“... they know not what they do”), Bede says, “He is asking on behalf of those who did not know what they did and who had zeal for God, though not with respect to knowledge.”

Much more excusable was the sin of the gentiles by whose hands Christ was crucified and who did not have knowledge of the Law.

**Reply to objection 1:** As has been explained, this act of making an excuse on the part of our Lord applied not to the leaders of the Jews, but to the less prominent individuals among the people.

**Reply to objection 2:** Judas handed Christ over not to Pilate but to the chief priests, who handed him over to Pilate—this according to John 18:35 (“Your own people and your chief priests have handed you over to me”). Yet their sin was greater than that of Pilate, who killed Christ out of his fear of Caesar, and also greater than the sin of the soldiers, who crucified him at the command of the procurator and not out of greed, as with Judas, or out of envy and hatred, as with the high priests.

**Reply to objection 3:** Christ did, to be sure, will His own passion, just as God likewise willed it, but He did not will the wicked action of the Jews. And that is why those who killed Christ are not excused from injustice.

And yet he who kills a man does injury not only to the man but also to God and to the republic—just like one who kills himself, as the Philosopher explains in *Ethics* 5. Hence, as we read in 2 Kings 1:6ff., David condemned to death the one who “had not feared to raise his hand to kill the anointed one of the Lord (*christum Domini*),” even though [Saul] had asked him to do it.