

QUESTION 50

Christ's Death

Next we have to consider Christ's death. And on this topic there are six questions: (1) Was it fitting for Christ to die? (2) Was the union between Christ's divine nature and His flesh broken by His death? (3) Was the union between Christ's divine nature and His soul broken by His death? (4) Was Christ a human being during the triduum of His death? (5) Was His living body numerically identical with His dead body (*corpus eius fuerit idem numero vivum et mortuum*)? (6) Did Christ's death contribute anything to our salvation?

Article 1

Was it fitting for Christ to die?

It seems that it was not fitting for Christ to die (*non fuerit conveniens Christum mori*):

Objection 1: That which is a first principle in some genus is not disposed toward anything that is contrary to that genus; for instance, fire, which is the principle of heat, can never become cold. But the Son of God is the principle and font of every life—this according to Psalm 35:10 (“With you is the font of life”). Therefore, it seems that it was not fitting for Christ to die.

Objection 2: Death is a greater defect than sickness, since one arrives at death through sickness. But as Chrysostom argues, it was not fitting for Christ to languish with any sickness. Therefore, it was likewise not fitting for Christ to die.

Objection 3: John 10:10 says, “I have come that they might have life and have it more abundantly.” But one opposite does not lead to the other opposite. Therefore, it seems that it was not fitting for Christ to die.

But contrary to this: John 11:50 says, “‘It is expedient for one man to die for the people, so that the whole nation might not perish’”—which Caiaphas said prophetically, as the evangelist reports.

I respond: It was fitting for Christ to die:

First of all, in order to make satisfaction for the human race, which had been condemned to death because of sin—this according to Genesis 2:17 (“The day that you eat, you will die the death”). But it is a fitting way to make satisfaction for another when an individual subjects himself to the punishment which the other has merited. And so Christ willed to die in order that, by dying, He might make satisfaction for us—this according to 1 Peter 3:18 (“Christ died for our sins once for all”).

Second, in order to display the reality of His assumed nature (*veritatem naturae assumptae*). For as Eusebius explains, “If, after dwelling among men, Christ were suddenly to disappear and fly away, avoiding death, then He would be likened by everyone to a phantom.”

Third, in order that, by dying, He might free us from the fear of death. Hence, Hebrews 2:14-15 says, “He has shared [in flesh and blood], in order that through death He might destroy the one who had the power of death and might deliver those who, because of their fear of death, were subject to lifelong servitude.”

Fourth, in order that by dying corporeally “to the likeness of sin” (Romans 8:3), i.e., to punishment (*poenalitati*), He might give us an example of how to die spiritually to sin. Hence, Romans 6:10-11 says, “For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all, but the life that He lives, He lives unto God.”

Fifth, in order that by rising from the dead, He might display the power (*virtutem*) by which He conquered death and give us the hope of rising from the dead. Hence, in 1 Corinthians 15:12 the Apostle says, “If Christ is preached as having risen from the dead, how is it that some among you say that there will be no resurrection for the dead?”

Reply to objection 1: Christ is the font of life insofar as He is God, but not insofar as He is a man,

whereas His death is not insofar as He is God, but insofar as He is a man. Hence, in *Contra Felicianum*, Augustine says, “Far be it from the truth that Christ experienced death in such a way that He lost life insofar as He is life in Himself. For if that were so, the font of life would have run dry. Therefore, He experienced death by sharing in the human condition (*participatione humani affectus*), which He had taken upon Himself of His own accord, but He did not lose the power of the nature through which He gives life to all things.”

Reply to objection 2: Christ did not sustain a death that arose from a previous sickness, lest it should seem that He had died of necessity because of the weakness of His nature. Instead, He sustained a death which was inflicted on Him from the outside and to which He offered Himself of His own accord, in order that His death might be shown to be voluntary.

Reply to objection 3: One opposite does not in its own right (*de se*) lead to the other, but it sometimes does so incidentally (*per accidens*); for instance, a cold thing sometimes gives warmth incidentally. And it is in this way that by His death Christ brought us to life. For by His death He destroyed our death, in the way that an individual who endures a punishment for someone else removes the latter’s punishment.

Article 2

Was the divine nature separated from the flesh in Christ’s death?

It seems that the divine nature was separated from the flesh in Christ’s death (*in morte Christi fuerit separata divinitas a carne*):

Objection 1: In Matthew 27:46 our Lord, hanging on the cross, says, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” In expounding this passage Ambrose says, “The man cries out, about to die by separation from the divine. For given that the divine nature is immune from death, death could surely not have existed in this case without life departing, since the divine nature is life.” And so it seems that in the death of Christ, the divine nature was separated from His flesh.

Objection 2: If what lies between the endpoints is removed, they are separated. But as was established above (q. 6, a. 1), the divine nature is united to the flesh by the mediation of the soul. Therefore, it seems that since, in Christ’s death, the soul is separated from the flesh, the result is that the divine nature is separated from the flesh.

Objection 3: God’s life-giving power is greater than that of the soul. But the body could not have died without the soul being separated from it. Therefore, it seems that, *a fortiori*, it could not have died without the divine nature being separated from it.

But contrary to this: As was established above (q. 16, aa. 4-5), what belongs to the human nature can be predicated of the Son of God only by reason of the union. But as is clear from the creed of the Faith, what is fitting for Christ’s body after death, viz., to be buried, is predicated of the Son of God—this where it is said, “The Son of God was conceived and born of a virgin, suffered, died, and was buried.” Therefore, Christ’s body was not separated in death from His divine nature.

I respond: What is granted by God through grace is never revoked without sin; hence, Romans 11:29 says, “The gifts and the call of God are without repentance.” Now the grace of union, through which the divine nature is united to the flesh of Christ in a person, is much greater than the grace of adoption, by which other [human beings] are sanctified, and it is likewise more permanent by its character, since this grace is ordered toward a personal union, whereas the grace of adoption is ordered toward a sort of affective union. And yet we see that the grace of adoption is never lost without sin. Therefore, since there was no sin in Christ, it was impossible for the union of the divine nature with His

flesh to be dissolved.

And that is why, just as, before His death, Christ's flesh was united in person and *hypostasis* to the Word of God, so, too, it remained united after death—so that, namely, as Damascene explains in *De Fide Orthodoxa* 3, it was not the case after the death that the *hypostasis* of the Word of God was other than the *hypostasis* of the flesh of Christ.

Reply to objection 1: This instance of 'forsaken' should be taken to refer not to the breaking of the personal union, but to the fact that God the Father had exposed Him to the passion. Hence, in this case, forsaking is nothing other than not protecting Him from His persecutors.

An alternative reply is that, as Augustine explains in *De Gratia Novi Testamenti*, He calls Himself forsaken in relation to the prayer in which He had said, "Father, if you are able, let this chalice pass from me."

Reply to objection 2: The Word of God is said to be united to the flesh by the mediation of the soul in the sense that it is because of the soul that the flesh belongs to the human nature that the Son of God intended to assume—and not in the sense that the soul is like an intermediary that ties together the things that are united, [viz., the divine nature and the flesh].

Reply to objection 3: It is *as a formal cause (formaliter)* that the soul has the power to give life. And so when it is present and formally united [to the body], the body has to be alive.

By contrast, the divine nature has the power of giving life *as an efficient cause (effective)* and not *as a formal cause (non formaliter)*; for it is not the form of a body. And so it does not have to be the case that if the union between the divine nature and the flesh remains, the flesh is living. For God acts voluntarily and not by necessity.

Article 3

Was the divine nature separated from the soul in Christ's death?

It seems that the divine nature was separated from the soul in Christ's death (*in morte Christi fuerit separatio divinitatis ab anima*):

Objection 1: In John 10:18 our Lord says, "No one takes my life or soul (*animam*) from me, but I lay it down and take it up again." But it does not seem that the body can lay down the soul by separating itself from it, since the soul is not subject to the body's power, but instead vice versa. And so it seems fitting for Christ, insofar as He is the Son of God, to lay down His own soul. But this is to separate it from Himself. Therefore, through His death the soul is separated from the divine nature.

Objection 2: Athanasius says, "Cursed is the one who does not confess that the whole man whom the Son of God took to Himself rose again from the dead on the third day, after having been assumed again or after having been sent free." But it was not possible for the whole man to be assumed again unless at some point the whole man was separated from the Word of God. And the whole man is composed of a soul and a body. Therefore, at some point a separation was made of the divine nature from the body and from the soul.

Objection 3: The Son of God is truly called a man because of His union with a whole man. Therefore, if, after the union between the body and the soul was dissolved by death, the Word of God remained united with the soul, it would follow that it could have truly been said that the Son of God is the soul. But this is false in virtue of the fact that since the soul is the form of a body, it would follow that the Word of God was the form of a body—which is impossible. Therefore, the soul was separated from the Word of God in Christ's death.

Objection 4: The soul and the body, when separated from one another, are not one *hypostasis* but

two *hypostases*. Therefore, if the Word of God remained united to both the soul and the body of Christ, separated from one another by the death of Christ, it seems to follow that, for as long as Christ was dead, the Word of God was two *hypostases*—which is absurd. Therefore, the soul did not remain united with Word after Christ's death.

But contrary to this: In *De Fide Orthodoxa* 3 Damascene says, “Even if Christ were dead as a man and His holy soul were divided from His undefiled body, the divine nature would remain inseparable from both of them, i.e., inseparable from the soul and the body.”

I respond: As was explained above (q. 6, a. 1), the soul is united to the Word of God in a more immediate way than the body, and prior to the body. Therefore, since the Word of God was not separated in death from His body, *a fortiori*, He was not separated from His soul. Hence, just as whatever is fitting for a body that is separated from its soul is predicated of the Son of God—for instance, that He was buried—so, too, in the creed it is said of Him that He descended into hell, because His soul, separated from His body, descended into hell.

Reply to objection 1: In expounding this passage from John, Augustine asks, “Since Christ is the Word and the soul and the flesh, is He laying down the soul (*ponat animam*) from that which is the Word or from that which is the soul or, again, from that which is the flesh?” And he replies as follows: “If we claimed that the Word of God laid down His soul, it would follow that at some point the soul was separated from the Word—which is false. For death separated the body from the soul, whereas I do not say that the soul was separated from the Word. On the other hand, if we claimed that the very soul lays itself down, it follows that it is separated from itself—which is the most absurd of all.” Therefore, it remains that “the flesh itself lays down its soul and takes it up again—not by its own power, but by the power of the Word who inhabits the flesh.” For as was explained above (a. 2), the divine nature of the Word is not separated from the flesh through the death.

Reply to objection 2: Athanasius did not mean by these words that the whole is once again assumed, i.e., all His parts, as if the Word of God had laid aside the parts of His human nature by His death. Instead, he meant that the totality of the assumed nature was restored once again in the resurrection because of the resumed union of the soul and the body.

Reply to objection 3: Because of His union with a human nature, the Word of God is not called a human nature but is instead called a man, i.e., one who has a human nature. But the soul and the body are the essential parts of a human nature. Hence, it does not follow, because of the Word's union to both of them, that the Word of God is a soul or a body, but what follows instead is that He is one who has a soul or a body.

Reply to objection 4: As Damascene explains in *De Fide Orthodoxa* 3, “In Christ's death the soul was separated from the flesh, but there is not one *hypostasis* divided into two. For both the soul and the body had their existence in the same way from the beginning in the *hypostasis* of the Word, and even though they were divided in death, each of them continued to have the one *hypostasis* of the Word. Therefore the one *hypostasis* of the Word was the hypostasis of the Word, of the soul, and of the body. For neither soul nor body ever had an *hypostasis* of its own over and beyond the *hypostasis* of the Word. For there was always one hypostasis of the Word and never two.”

Article 4

Was Christ a man during the triduum of His death?

It seems that Christ was a man during the triduum of His death (*Christus in triduo mortis fuerit homo*):

Objection 1: In *De Trinitate* 1 Augustine says, “The assumption [of a human nature by the Word of God] was such that it made God a man and a man God.” But that assumption did not cease because of His death. Therefore, it seems that Christ did not because of His death cease to be a man.

Objection 2: In *Ethics* 9 the Philosopher says, “Each man is his intellect.” Hence, addressing the soul of Peter after his death, we say, “Saint Peter, pray for us.” But after His death the Son of God was not separated from His intellectual soul. Therefore, Christ was a man during the triduum.

Objection 3: Every priest is a man. But during the triduum of His death, Christ was a priest; for otherwise what is said in Psalm 109:4 (“You are a priest forever”) would not be true. Therefore, Christ was a man during the triduum.

But contrary to this: If what is higher is removed, then what is lower is removed. But *living* (*vivum*), i.e., *ensouled* (*animatum*), is [logically] higher in relation to *animal* and to *man*. For an animal is a substance that is ensouled and sentient (*substantia animata sensibilis*). But in the triduum of His death, Christ’s body was neither living nor ensouled. Therefore, He was not a man.

I respond: It is an article of the Faith that Christ truly died. Hence, it is an error contrary to the Faith to assert anything by which the reality of Christ’s death is undermined. That is why in Cyril’s synodal letter it says, “If anyone fails to confess that the Word of God suffered in the flesh, was crucified in the flesh, and tasted death in the flesh, let him be anathema.”

Now it pertains to the reality of a man’s death, or of an animal’s death, that through death the individual ceases to be a man or an animal, since the death of a man or an animal stems from the soul’s being separated [from the body], where the soul brings to completion the definition of an animal or of a man. And so to claim that Christ was a man during the triduum of His death is, simply and absolutely speaking, erroneous. However, one *can* say that during the triduum Christ was a *dead man*.

Now some have claimed that Christ was a man during the triduum, professing, to be sure, an erroneous formula, but without having the intention to err in the Faith. One example is Hugo of St. Victor, who claimed that Christ was a man during the triduum because, he said, the soul is the man. But as was shown in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 75, a. 4), this claim is false. Again, the Master of the *Sentences*, in bk. 3, dist. 22, claimed for a different reason that Christ was a man during the triduum. For he believed that the union of the soul with the flesh is not a part of the definition of a human being; instead, for an individual to be a man it is sufficient that he have a human soul and a body, whether or not they are conjoined. But this is likewise clearly false, given what was said in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 76, a. 1) and also given what was said above about the mode of the [hypostatic] union (q. 2, a. 5).

Reply to objection 1: The Word of God took up (*suscepit*) a united soul and flesh, and this is why that assumption (*susceptio*) made God a man and a man God. Now that assumption did not cease because of any separation of the Word from the soul or from the body, but the union of the flesh and the soul *did* cease.

Reply to objection 2: A man is said to be his intellect not because the intellect is the whole man, but because the intellect is the most important part of a man and that part in which the whole management of the man virtually resides. It is just as if the leader of a city were said to be the whole city because the whole management of the city resides in him.

Reply to objection 3: Being a priest belongs to a man by reason of his soul, in which the character of being ordained resides (*in qua est ordinis character*). Hence, a man does not lose his priestly ordination through death—and all the less Christ, who is the origin of the whole priesthood.

Article 5

Did numerically the same body belong to the living Christ and the dead Christ?

It seems that numerically the same body did not belong to the living Christ and the dead Christ (*non fuit idem numero corpus Christi viventis et mortui*):

Objection 1: Christ was truly dead, in just the way that other men die. But the body of any other man is not, simply speaking (*simpliciter*), the same in number when dead and when alive, because the bodies differ in an essential difference, [viz., *living*]. Therefore, neither was Christ's body, simply speaking, numerically the same when alive and when dead.

Objection 2: According to the Philosopher in *Metaphysics* 5, if given things are diverse in species, then they are diverse in number as well. But Christ's body when alive and Christ's body when dead were diverse in species, since, as is clear from *De Anima* 2 and *Metaphysics* 7, a dead man's eye or flesh is called an eye or flesh only equivocally. Therefore, Christ's body was not, simply speaking, numerically the same when alive and when dead.

Objection 3: Death is a certain sort of corruption. But if something is corrupted by a *substantial* corruption, then after it is corrupted, it no longer exists, since corruption is a change from existing to not existing (*de esse in non-esse*). Therefore, after Christ's body was dead, it did not remain numerically the same, since death is a substantial corruption.

But contrary to this: In *Epistola ad Epictetum* Athanasius says, "After that body had been circumcised, and after it had drunk and eaten and worked, and after it had been nailed to the cross, it was the impassible and incorruptible Word of God—and this is what was placed in the sepulcher." But it was the living body of Christ that had been circumcised and nailed to the cross, whereas it was the dead body of Christ that was placed in the sepulcher. Therefore, it was the same body when it was alive and when it was dead.

I respond: The phrase 'simply speaking (*simpliciter*)' can be taken in two ways:

In one way, 'simply speaking (*simpliciter*)' is the same as 'absolutely speaking (*absolute*)', in the sense that, as the Philosopher explains, "'Simply speaking' means the same as 'with nothing added'." And in this sense Christ's body when it was dead was, simply speaking, numerically the same as His body when it was alive. For something is said to be the same in number, simply speaking, because it is the same in suppositum. But Christ's body, both alive and dead, was the same in suppositum, because, as was explained above (a. 2), whether living or dead, it did not have any *hypostasis* other than the *hypostasis* of the Word of God. And it is in this sense that Athanasius is speaking in the passage cited above.

In the second way, 'simply speaking (*simpliciter*)' means the same as 'altogether (*omnino*)' or 'totally (*totaliter*)'. And in this sense Christ's body when dead was, simply speaking, not numerically the same as His body when alive. For it was not *totally* the same, since life belongs to the essence of a living body, and ['living'] is an essential, and not an accidental, predicate. Hence, it follows that a body which ceases to be alive does not remain totally the same body.

Now if someone were to claim that Christ's dead body remained totally the same, it would follow that it was not corrupted—I mean, by the corruption that belongs to death. This is the heresy of the Gaianites, as Isidore reports, and it is discussed in *Decretals* 14, q. 3. Again, in *De Fide Orthodoxa* 3 Damascene says, "The name 'corruption' signifies two things: in one way it signifies *the separation of the soul from the body*, and other things of this sort; in the second way, it signifies *a complete dissolution into the elements*. Therefore, it is impious to claim, with Julian and that Gaianites, that before the resurrection, our Lord's body was incorruptible in the first sense of corruption. For in that case Christ's body would not be consubstantial with us; nor would it have died in reality, nor would we in fact have

been saved. On the other hand, in the second sense of corruption Christ's body was uncorrupted."

Reply to objection 1: The dead body of any other man does not remain united to a permanent *hypostasis* in the way that Christ's dead body did. And so the dead body of any other man is the same body not simply speaking, but in a certain respect; for it is the same with respect to its matter, but not the same with respect to its form. By contrast, as has been explained, Christ's body remains the same, simply speaking, because of the sameness of its suppositum.

Reply to objection 2: Since a thing is called the same in number because of its suppositum, whereas it is called the same in species because of its form, it follows that whenever a suppositum subsists in *just a single* nature, it has to be the case that when the oneness in species is lost, the numerical oneness is taken away.

However, the *hypostasis* of the Word of God subsists in *two* natures. And this is why, even though in* Christ* the body does not remain the same with respect to the species of human nature, it nonetheless remains the same in number because of the suppositum of the Word of God.

Reply to objection 3: Corruption and death belong to Christ not by reason of the suppositum, given that numerical oneness accompanies the suppositum, but by reason of the human nature, in accord with which one finds in Christ's body the difference between being alive and being dead.

Article 6

Did Christ's death contribute anything to our salvation?

It seems that Christ's death contributed nothing to our salvation (*mors Christi nihil operata fuerit ad nostram salutem*):

Objection 1: Death is a certain privation, since it is the privation of life. But since a privation is not an entity, it does not have any power to act. Therefore, it could not have contributed anything to our salvation.

Objection 2: Christ's passion contributed to our salvation by the mode of meriting. But Christ's death could not have operated in this way; for in death the soul, which is the principle of meriting, is separated from the body. Therefore, Christ's death could not have contributed anything to our salvation.

Objection 3: What is corporeal is not a spiritual cause. But Christ's death was corporeal. Therefore, it could not have been a spiritual cause of our salvation.

But contrary to this: In *De Trinitate* 4 Augustine says, "The one death of our Savior"—viz., a corporeal death—"saved us from two deaths"—i.e., from the death of the soul and from the death of the body.

I respond: There are two ways in which we can talk about Christ's death: (a) in one way, insofar as it is in the process of coming-to-be (*secundum quos est in fieri*), and (b) in the second way, insofar as it has been accomplished (*secundum quod est in facto esse*).

Now death is said to be in the process of coming-to-be when an individual is tending toward death through some sort of suffering, whether natural or violent. And, in this sense, talking about Christ's death is the same as talking about His passion. And so, in this sense, Christ's death is a cause of our salvation in accord with what was said above about His passion (q. 48).

By contrast, His death as already accomplished (*in facto esse mors*) is thought of insofar as the separation of the body and the soul has already taken place. And this is the sense in which we are presently talking about Christ's death.

Now in this sense Christ's death can be a cause of our salvation not through the mode of meriting, but only through the mode of efficient causality, viz., insofar as the divine nature is not separated from

Christ's flesh even in death, and so whatever had to do with Christ's flesh, even when the soul was separated from it, was salvific for us because of the power of the divine nature united to it.

Now the effect of any cause is properly thought of in terms of its similarity to the cause. Hence, since death is a privation of one's life, the effect of Christ's death has to do with the removal of those things that are contrary to our salvation, viz., the death of the soul and the death of the body. And this is why it is said that, through Christ's death, what is destroyed in us are both (a) the death of the soul, which is due to sin—this according to Romans 4:25 (“... who was delivered up,” viz., to death, “for our sins”)—and (b) the death of the body, which consists in the soul's separating [from the body]—this according to 1 Corinthians 15:54 (“Death is swallowed up in victory”).

Reply to objection 1: Christ's death contributes to our salvation because of the power of His divine nature and not because of the character of death alone.

Reply to objection 2: Insofar as Christ's death is thought of as having been accomplished (*consideratur in facto esse*), even if it did not contribute to our salvation through the mode of meriting, nonetheless, as has been explained, it did contribute through the mode of efficient causality.

Reply to objection 3: Christ's death was, to be sure, corporeal, but that body was an instrument of the divine nature united to it and, even when dead, it operated in the power of the divine nature.