

QUESTION 6

The Ordering of the Assumption

Next we have to consider the ordering of the assumption. And on this topic there are six questions: (1) Did the Son of God assume the flesh by the mediation of the soul? (2) Did He assume the soul by the mediation of the spirit, i.e., the mind? (3) Was the soul of Christ assumed by the Word before the flesh? (4) Was the flesh assumed by the Word before being united to the soul? (5) Was the whole human nature assumed by the mediation of the parts? (6) Was the whole human nature assumed by the mediation of grace?

Article 1

Did the Son of God assume the flesh by the mediation of the soul?

It seems that the Son of God did not assume the flesh by the mediation of the soul (*non assumpsit carnem mediante anima*):

Objection 1: The manner in which the Son of God is united to His human nature and its parts is more perfect than the manner in which He exists in all creatures. But He exists immediately in creatures by His essence, presence, and power (cf. *ST* 1, q. 8). Therefore, *a fortiori*, the Son of God is united to His flesh immediately* and without the mediation of His soul.

Objection 2: The soul and the body are united to the Word of God in a oneness of *hypostasis* or person. But the body belongs immediately to the person or *hypostasis* of a man, just as the soul does. What's more, the body seems to be closer to the man's *hypostasis* than is the soul, which is the form, since the principle of individuation, which is implied in the name '*hypostasis*', seems to be the matter. Therefore, the Son of God did not assume the flesh by the mediation of the soul.

Objection 3: If the mediator is removed, the things that are conjoined by means of that mediator are separated from one another; for instance, if the surface were removed, then the color that is in the body by means of that surface would be gone. But when the soul [of Christ] was separated off by death, the union of the Word to the flesh still remained. (This will become clear below (q. 50, a. 2).) Therefore, the Word is not joined to the flesh by the mediation of the soul.

But contrary to this: In *Epistola ad Volusianum* Augustine says, "The magnitude of God's power adapted to itself a rational soul and through it a human body and the whole man altogether, in order to change it into something better."

I respond: 'Medium' or 'middle' (*medium*) is said in relation to a beginning and an end (*dicitur respectu principii et finis*). Hence, just as 'beginning' and 'end' imply an ordering, so, too, does 'medium'. Now there are two sorts of orderings or orders: (a) one is the order of *time*, and (b) the other is the order of *nature*.

Now in the mystery of the Incarnation there is nothing that is called a medium or mediator with respect to the order of *time*, since, as will be shown below (aa. 3-4), the Word of God united a complete human nature to Himself all at once.

On the other hand, there are two ways in which an order of *nature* can be seen among things: (a) according to levels of *dignity* (*secundum gradum dignitatis*), in the way that we say that angels are in the middle between men and God; and (b) with respect to types of *causality* (*secundum rationem causalitatis*), in the way that we say that a middle or mediating cause exists between a first cause and a last effect. And this second sort of order or ordering in some sense follows upon the first. For as Dionysius explains in *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, chap. 13, God acts through substances that are closer [to Him] on those that are more remote [from Him].

Therefore, if we focus on the levels of *dignity*, then the soul lies in the middle between God and the flesh. On the other hand, in the order of *causality*, the soul itself is in some sense a cause of the flesh that

is to be united to the Son of God. For the flesh would not be assumable if it were not for the ordering which (a) it has toward the rational soul and because of which (b) it has the status of being *human* flesh. For it was explained above (q. 4, a. 1) that human nature is assumable before all other natures.

Reply to objection 1: There are two orderings that can be thought of between a creature and God.

One of these orderings has to do with the fact that creatures are caused by God and depend on Him as the principle of their *esse*. And on this score, because of the infinitude of His power, God reaches out to each thing *immediately* by causing and conserving it. And this involves God's existing *immediately* in all things by His essence, power, and presence (cf. *ST* 1, q. 8).

The second ordering has to do with the fact that things are led back to God as their end. And on this score there is something in the middle between the creature and God, because, as Dionysius explains in *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, lower creatures are led back to God through higher creatures. And it is this sort of order that is involved in the assumption of the human nature by the Word of God, who is the terminus of the assumption. And this is why He is united to the flesh through the soul.

Reply to objection 2: If the *hypostasis* of the Word of God were constituted simply by a human nature, then it would follow that the body is closer to it, since the body is the matter, which is the principle of individuation—in the same way that the soul, which is the specific form, would be more closely related to the human nature.

However, since the *hypostasis* is prior to and higher than the human nature, the higher that something is within the human nature, the closer it is related to the *hypostasis*. And so the soul is closer to the Word of God than the body is.

Reply to objection 3: Nothing prevents a thing from being a cause of a second thing with respect to aptitude and congruity and yet such that if it is removed, that second thing is not destroyed. For even if something's coming-to-exist depends on another, still, once it exists with its caused *esse*, it is no longer dependent on that other thing. For instance, if a friendship between two individuals were caused by the mediation of someone else, the friendship would still remain if that other individual departed; and if a woman is taken in matrimony because of her beauty, which is fitting in a woman for conjugal union, then even if the beauty fades, the conjugal union still endures. And, similarly, the union of the Word of God to the flesh remains even when the soul is separated.

Article 2

Did the Son of God assume the soul by the mediation of the spirit?

It seems that the Son of God did not assume the soul by the mediation of the spirit:

Objection 1: It is not the case that the same thing falls in the middle between itself and something else. But as was established in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 77, a. 1, ad 1), the spirit, i.e., the mind, is not different in essence from the soul itself. Therefore, the Son of God did not assume the soul by the mediation of the spirit, i.e., the mind.

Objection 2: That by the mediation of which the assumption was effected seems itself to be more assumable. But the spirit, i.e., mind, is not more assumable than the soul; this is clear from the fact that, as was explained above (q. 4, a. 1), angelic spirits are not assumable. Therefore, it seems that the Son of God did not assume the soul by the mediation of the spirit.

Objection 3: What is posterior is assumed from the beginning by the mediation of what is prior. But 'soul' names the *essence* itself, which is naturally prior to that *power* of the soul which is the mind. Therefore, it seems that the Son of God did not assume the soul by the mediation of the spirit or mind.

But contrary to this: In *De Agone Christiano* Augustine says, "Invisible and incommutable truth received the soul through the spirit and the body through the soul."

I respond: As has been explained (a. 1), the Son of God is said to have assumed the flesh by the mediation of the soul, both because of the order of dignity and also because of the fittingness of the assumption. Now each of these points is found if we compare the intellect, which is being called the ‘spirit’, to the other parts of the soul.

For the soul is assumable because of fittingness only through the fact that it has a capacity for God (*est capax Dei*), to whose image it is made, and this is because of the mind, which is here being called the ‘spirit’—this in accord with Ephesians 4:23 (“Be renewed in the spirit of your mind”).

Similarly, among the other parts of the soul, the intellect is higher and more dignified and more similar to God. This is why in *De Fide Orthodoxa* 3 Damascene says, “The Word of God was united to the flesh by the mediation of the intellect; for the intellect is the purest part of the soul, and God Himself is an intellect.”

Reply to objection 1: Even if the intellect does not differ from the soul in essence, it is nonetheless distinct from the other parts of the soul because of the nature of its power. And on this score the character of a mediator belongs to it.

Reply to objection 2: The angelic spirit lacks fittingness for an assumption not because it falls short in dignity, but because its fall is irreparable. But the same cannot be said of the human spirit, as is clear from what was said in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 64, a. 2),.

Reply to objection 3: When the intellect is posited as a mediator between the soul and the Word of God, ‘soul’ is being taken not for the *essence* of the soul, which is common to all the powers, but for the *lower powers* that are common to every soul.

Article 3

Was the soul of Christ assumed by the Word before the flesh?

It seems that the soul of Christ was assumed by the Word before the flesh:

Objection 1: As has been explained (a. 1), the Son of God assumed the flesh by the mediation of the soul. But what is prior reaches what is in the middle first, before it reaches what is at the end. Therefore, the Son of God assumed the soul before the body.

Objection 2: The soul of Christ is more dignified than the angels—this according to Psalm 96:7 (“Adore Him, all you His angels”). But as was established in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 46, a. 3), angels were created at the beginning. Therefore, so was the soul of Christ. But the soul of Christ was not created before it was assumed; for in *De Fide Orthodoxa* 3 Damascene says, “Neither the soul of Christ nor the body of Christ ever had a proper *hypostasis* except for the *hypostasis* of the Word.” Therefore, it seems that the soul was assumed before the flesh, which was conceived in the virginal womb.

Objection 3: John 1:14 says, “We have seen Him, full of grace and of truth,” and afterwards this follows, “And of His fullness we have all received” (1:16)—that is, “... all the faithful at every time,” as Chrysostom explains. But this would not be the case unless Christ had the fullness of grace and of truth before all the saints who have existed from the beginning of the world, since a cause cannot be posterior to what it causes. Therefore, since the fullness of grace and of truth was in the soul of Christ because of its union with the Word—this according to what is said in the same place (“We have seen His glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and of truth” (1:14))—it seems to follow that the soul of Christ had been assumed by the Word of God at the beginning of the world.

But contrary to this: In *De Fide Orthodoxa* 4 Damascene says, “... not, as some falsely claim, that before the incarnation which is from the virgin, the intellect was united to the Word of God and was called the Christ from that time.”

I respond: Origen claimed that all souls had been created at the beginning, and he also claimed that the created soul of Christ was among them.

But this is wrong if it is being claimed that Christ's soul was created then but not immediately united to the Word, since it would follow that the soul in question at some time had its own proper subsistence in the absence of the Word. And so, when this soul was assumed by the Word, either the union was not effected with respect to subsistence or else the soul's preexistent subsistence was corrupted.

Again, this position is likewise wrong if it is being claimed that the soul in question was united to the Word from the beginning and was afterwards incarnated in the womb of the virgin. For in that case His soul would seem not to be of the same nature as our souls, which are created at the same time as they are infused into our bodies. Hence, in *Epistola ad Iulianum* Pope Leo says, "The flesh was not of a nature different from ours, and the soul was not at the beginning infused into anything different from the rest of men."

Reply to objection 1: As was explained above (a. 1), the soul of Christ is said to mediate in the union of the flesh to the Word in accord with the order of *nature*. But it does not, because of this, have to be the case that it mediated in the order of *time*.

Reply to objection 2: As Pope Leo explains in the same letter, the soul of Christ "excels not by a difference in genus but in the sublimity of its power." For it belongs to the same genus as our souls do, but it excels even the angels "in the fulness of grace and of truth" (John 1:14).

However, the mode of the Incarnation corresponds to the soul in the propriety of its own genus; and since it is the form of the body, the soul is created at the same time that it is infused into the body and united with it. This is something that does not fit in with the angels, since they are substances altogether free of bodies.

Reply to objection 3: All men receive from the fullness of Christ according to sort of faith that they have in Him; for Romans 3:22 says, "... the justice of God through faith in Jesus Christ in all and upon all who believe in Him." But just as we believe in Him as the one who has been incarnated, so the ancients believed in Him as the one who was going to be born, since, as 2 Corinthians 4:13 says, "We believe, having the same spirit." And, as Romans 4:5 explains, the faith which one has in Christ has the power to justify in accord with the purpose of God's grace: "To him who does not do works, but believes in Him who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited to him as justice in accord with the plan of God's grace." Hence, since this plan of God's is eternal, nothing prevents certain individuals from being justified before His soul was full of grace and of truth.

Article 4

Was the flesh of Christ first assumed by the Word before being united to the soul?

It seems that the flesh of Christ was first assumed by the Word before being united to the soul:

Objection 1: In *De Fide ad Petrum* Augustine says, "Hold firmly, and do not in any way doubt, that the flesh of Christ was not conceived without the divinity in the womb of the virgin before it was assumed by the Word." But it seems that the flesh of Christ was conceived before it was united to the rational soul, since in the course of generation a material disposition exists prior to the completing form. Therefore, the flesh of Christ was assumed before being united to the soul.

Objection 2: Just as the soul is a part of human nature, so is the body. But as is clear from the passage from Pope Leo quoted above (a. 3), in Christ the human soul did not have a principle of its *esse* different from the principle of its *esse* in other men. Therefore, neither, it seems, did the body of Christ have a principle of being (*principium essendi*) different from its principle of being in us. But in us the flesh is conceived before the rational soul arrives. Therefore, it was also like that in Christ. And so the flesh was assumed by the Word before being united to the soul.

Objection 3: In the *Liber de Causis* it says, "A first cause has more influence on what is caused

than a secondary cause does, and it is more united to what is caused than a secondary cause is.” But the soul of Christ is related to the Word in the way that a secondary cause is related to a primary cause. Therefore, the Word was united to the flesh before the soul was.

But contrary to this: In *De Fide Orthodoxa* Damascene says, “As soon as it was the flesh of the Word of God, it was flesh that was animated, rational, and intellectual.” Therefore, it is not the case that the union of the Word with the flesh preceded His union with the soul.

I respond: Human flesh is assumable by the Word in keeping with its being ordered toward the rational soul, which is its proper form. But it does not have this ordering before the rational soul comes to it, since as soon as a given matter becomes proper for a given form, it receives that form. Hence, the substantial form is introduced at the very same instant that the alteration is terminated. And from this it follows that it is not fitting for the flesh to be assumed before it is *human* flesh, which happens when the rational soul arrives. Therefore, just as the soul was not assumed prior to the flesh, since it is contrary to the nature of the soul to exist before it is united to the body, so it was not fitting for the flesh to be assumed prior to the soul, since it was not human flesh before it had a rational soul.

Reply to objection 1: The flesh is classified as human because of the soul. And so before the coming of the soul it is not *human* flesh, though there can be a disposition toward human flesh. However, in the case of the conception of Christ, the Holy Spirit, who is an agent of infinite power, simultaneously disposed the matter and brought it to completion.

Reply to objection 2: The form gives the species in actuality, whereas the matter, taken just in its own right, is in potentiality with respect to the species. And so it would be contrary to the character of a form to exist before the nature of the species, which is brought to completion by the form’s union with the matter, whereas it is not contrary to the nature of the matter to exist before the nature of the species.

And so the dissimilarity that exists between our origin and Christ’s origin, insofar as our flesh is conceived before it is animated [by a rational soul], whereas the flesh of Christ is not, has to do with what occurs before the completion of the nature, since we are conceived by the semen of a male human being, whereas Christ is not.

By contrast, it is a difference that had to do with the origin of the *soul* that would result in a difference between the natures.

Reply to objection 3: The Word of God is understood to be united to the flesh prior to the soul in the *common* manner in which He exists in *all* creatures through His essence, power, and presence—‘prior to’, I mean, not in *time*, but in *nature*. For the flesh is understood as a certain *entity*, something that it has from the Word, prior to its being *animated*, something the it has from the soul.

On the other hand, in our way of understanding (*secundum intellectum*), the flesh has to be united by a *personal union* to the soul prior to the Word, since from its union to the soul the flesh has the character of being unitable to the Word in a *person*—especially since persons are found only in a rational nature.

Article 5

Did the Son of God assume the whole human nature by the mediation of its parts?

It seems that the Son of God assumed the whole human nature by the mediation of its parts:

Objection 1: In *De Agone Christiano* Augustine says, “The invisible and incommutable Truth assumed the soul through the spirit, the body through the soul, and in this way assumed the whole human being.” But the spirit, the soul, and the body are parts of the whole human being. Therefore, He assumed the whole human being by the mediation of its parts.

Objection 2: The reason why the Son of God assumed the flesh by the mediation of the soul is that the soul is more similar to God than the body is. But since the parts of the human nature are more simple,

they seem to be more similar than the whole to Him who is the most simple of all. Therefore, He assumed the whole by the mediation of the parts.

Objection 3: The whole results from the union of the parts. But the union is understood as the terminus of the assumption, whereas the parts are presupposed for the assumption. Therefore, He assumed the whole through the parts.

But contrary to this: In *De Fide Orthodoxa* 3 Damascene says, “In our Lord Jesus Christ we see not the parts of the parts, but instead those things that are proximately composed, i.e., the divine nature and the human nature (*id est, deitatem et humanitatem*).” But the human nature is a certain whole that is composed of the soul and the body as its parts. Therefore, the Son of God assumed the parts by the mediation of the whole.

I respond: When something is said to be a mediator in the assumption that belongs to the Incarnation, it is not an ordering of *time* that is being designated, since the assumption of the whole and of all the parts is effected simultaneously. For it has been shown (aa. 3-4) that the soul and body are simultaneously united to one another in order to constitute the human nature in the Word.

By contrast, here it is the ordering of *nature* that is being designated. Hence, what is *posterior in nature* is assumed through that which is *prior in nature*. But there are two ways in which something is prior in nature: (a) on the part of the *agent* and (b) on the part of the *matter*. For these two causes exist before the thing exists.

Now on the part of the *agent* what is first absolutely speaking (*simpliciter*) is that which falls first in the agent’s intention, whereas what is first in a certain respect (*secundum quid*) is that from which the agent’s operation begins, and this because the intention is prior to the operation.

On the other hand, on the part of the *matter* what is prior is what exists beforehand in the transmutation of the matter.

Now in the case of the Incarnation one must pay special attention to the ordering that is on the part of the agent. For as Augustine says in *Epistola ad Volusianum*, “In such matters the whole explanation for the deed is the power of the one who does it.” Now it is clear that according to the intention of the agent (*secundum intentionem facientis*) what is complete is prior to what is incomplete and, as a result, the whole is prior to the parts. And so one should reply that the Word of God assumed the parts of the human nature by the mediation of the whole. For just as He assumed the body because of the ordering it has to the rational soul, so He assumed the body and the soul because of the ordering they have to the human nature.

Reply to objection 1: The only thing that one is given to understand by these words is that by assuming the parts of the human nature, the Word assumed the whole human nature. And so the assumption of the parts is prior in the path of operations as we understand them, but not prior in time. By contrast, the assumption of the nature [as a whole] is prior in the path of intention—and this, as has been explained, is to be prior absolutely speaking.

Reply to objection 2: God is simple in such a way that He is also the most perfect being. And so the whole is more similar to God than the parts are, insofar as it is more perfect.

Reply to objection 3: It is a *personal union* in which the assumption is terminated and not a *union of nature*, which is what results from the conjunction of the parts.

Article 6

Did the Son of God assume the human nature by the mediation of grace?

It seems that the Son of God assumed the human nature by the mediation of grace:

Objection 1: Through grace we are united to God. But the human nature in Christ was united [to God] most of all. Therefore, that union was effected through grace.

Objection 2: Just as the body is alive through the soul, which is its perfection or completion, so the soul is alive through grace. But the human nature is rendered fit for the assumption through the soul. Therefore, the soul is likewise rendered fit for the assumption through grace. Therefore, the Son of God assumed the soul by the mediation of grace.

Objection 3: In *De Trinitate* 15 Augustine explains that the Incarnate Word is like our own word in speech. But our own word is united to the voice by the mediation of the spirit. Therefore, the Word of God is united to the flesh by the mediation of the Holy Spirit and so by the mediation of grace, which is attributed to the Holy Spirit—this according to 1 Corinthians 12:4 (“There are differences among graces, but the same Spirit”).

But contrary to this: As was established in the Second Part (*ST* 1-2, q. 110, a. 2), grace is a certain accident of the soul. But as is clear from what was said above (q. 2, a. 6), the union of the Word to the human nature was effected with respect to *subsistence* and not with respect to an *accident*. Therefore, it is not the case that the human nature was assumed by the mediation of grace.

I respond: In Christ one posits both the *grace of union* and *habitual grace*. Therefore, grace cannot be understood as a mediator of the assumption of the human nature, regardless of whether we are talking about the grace of union or habitual grace.

For the grace of union is itself the personal *esse* that is given gratuitously by God to the human nature in the person of the Word, and this is *the terminus* of the assumption, whereas habitual grace, which involves the special sanctity of *this* man, is a certain effect that *follows upon* the union—this according to John 1:14 (“We have seen His glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and of truth”). By this we are given to understand that it is by the very fact that this man is the only-begotten of the Father, something that He has through the union, that He has the fullness of grace and of truth.

On the other hand, if the grace itself is being understood here as the will of God making something, or doing something, gratuitously, then in this sense the union is effected through grace not as a mediator, but as an efficient cause.

Reply to objection 1: Our union with God is through an operation insofar as we have cognition of Him and love Him. And so this sort of union is through habitual grace, insofar as a perfect operation proceeds from the habit. By contrast, the union of the human nature to the Word of God has to do with personal *esse*, which does not depend on any habit but instead depends without mediation on the nature itself.

Reply to objection 2: The soul is the *substantial* perfection of the body, whereas grace is an *accidental* perfection of the soul. And so grace cannot order the soul toward a *personal* union, in the way that the soul orders the body.

Reply to objection 3: Our own word is united to our voice by the mediation of the spirit—though not as by a *formal* mediator, but instead as by a *moving* or *efficient* mediator. For the spirit by which the vocal sound is formed proceeds from the word that is conceived interiorly. Similarly, as will become clear below (q. 32, a. 1), the Holy Spirit, who forms the body of Christ, proceeds from the eternal Word. However, it does not follow from this that the grace of the Holy Spirit is a formal mediator in the union under discussion here.