

## PROLOGUE TO PART 3

Since our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, in order—as attested to by the angel—to “save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21), showed us within Himself the Way of Truth through which we could arrive at the beatitude of immortal life upon rising again, it is necessary for the completion of the work of all of theology that after having considered the ultimate end of human life and the virtues and vices (Part 2), we should follow up with a consideration of the Savior of everyone Himself and of the benefits He has bestowed on the human race (Part 3).

On this score we have to consider, first, the Savior Himself (questions 1-59); second, His sacraments, by which we attain to salvation (questions 60-90 [+ *Supplement*, qq. 1-68]); and, third, the end of immortal life, which we arrive at by rising again through Him [*Supplement*, qq. 69-end].

As for the first, there are two things to consider: the first is the very mystery of the Incarnation, insofar as God became man for our salvation (questions 1-26); the second has to do with those things that were done and suffered by our Savior Himself, i.e., by God incarnate (questions 27-59).

### QUESTION 1

#### The Fittingness of the Incarnation

On the first point there are three things to consider: first, the fittingness of the Incarnation (question 1); second, the mode of union that belongs to the Incarnate Word (questions 2-16); and, third, the things that follow upon this union (questions 17-26).

On the first topic there are six questions: (1) Was it fitting for God to be incarnated? (2) Was the Incarnation necessary for the restoration of the human race? (3) If there had been no sin, would God have been incarnated? (4) Was God incarnated mainly to remove Original Sin more than to remove actual sin? (5) Would it have been fitting for God to be incarnated at the beginning of the world? (6) Should God’s incarnation have been deferred until the end of the world?

#### Article 1

##### Was it fitting for God to be incarnated?

It seems that it was not fitting for God to be incarnated:

**Objection 1:** Since God is the very essence of goodness from eternity, it is best for Him to be as He was from eternity. But God existed from eternity without any flesh. Therefore, it was most fitting for Him not to be united to flesh. Therefore, it was not fitting for God to be incarnated.

**Objection 2:** It is not fitting for things that are infinitely distant from one another to be joined together, just as it would be an unfitting conjunction if someone were to paint an image in which “the neck of a horse was joined to a human head” [Horace]. But God and flesh are infinitely distant from one another, since God is as simple as can be, whereas flesh, especially human flesh, is composite. Therefore, it was unfitting for God to be united to human flesh.

**Objection 3:** A body is as distant from the highest spirit as malice is from the highest good. But it would be altogether unfitting for God, who is the highest goodness, to take on malice (*malitiam assumeret*). Therefore, it is not fitting for the highest uncreated spirit to take on a body (*corpus assumeret*).

**Objection 4:** It is unfitting for one who exceeds great things to be contained in the smallest thing, and it is unfitting for one who takes care of great things to transfer himself to small things. But the whole universe is not sufficient to contain God, who takes care of the whole world. Therefore, as Volusianus writes to Augustine, it seems unfitting “that He, in comparison with whom the universe is thought of as

something small, should be hidden within the little body of a crying infant, and that this ruler should be absent for so long from His throne, and that the care of the whole world should be transferred to one little body.”

**But contrary to this:** It seems to be most fitting for the invisible things of God to be made known through visible things. For this is why the whole world was made, as is clear from the Apostle in Romans 1:20: “The invisible things of God are seen and understood through the things that have been made.” But as Damascene says at the beginning of *De Fide Orthodoxa* 3, through the mystery of the Incarnation “God’s goodness and wisdom and justice and power or strength are shown all together: His *goodness*, since He did not despise the weakness of His own handiwork; His *justice*, since He did not make some other kind of being conquer the tyrant, nor did He forcibly snatch man from death; His *wisdom*, since He found the most suitable solution for a most difficult problem; His infinite *power* or *strength*, since there is nothing greater than for God to become man.” Therefore, it was fitting for God to be incarnated.

**I respond:** What is fitting for each thing is what belongs to it by reason of its proper nature, in the way that what is fitting for a man is to reason discursively, since this belongs to him insofar as he is rational by his nature.

Now as is clear from Dionysius in *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 1, the very nature of God is goodness (*ipsa natura Dei est bonitas*). Hence, whatever involves the nature of the good (*quidquid pertinet ad rationem boni*) is fitting for God. But as is clear from Dionysius in *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 4, the nature of the good involves communicating itself to others. Hence, it belongs to the nature of the *highest good* to communicate itself in the highest manner to a creature. But as Augustine puts it in *De Trinitate* 13, this is brought about by “uniting to Himself a created nature in such a way that one person comes to be from these three: the Word, a soul, and flesh.” Hence, it is clear that it was fitting for God to be incarnated.

**Reply to objection 1:** The mystery of the Incarnation was fulfilled not by God’s being changed in some way from the state He existed in from eternity, but by His uniting Himself to a creature in a new way—or, rather, by His uniting a creature to Himself. And so just as the creature, since it had not previously existed, was brought into being, so, fittingly, since it had not been previously united to God, it was afterwards united to Him.

**Reply to objection 2:** Being united to God in the unity of a person was not fitting for human flesh given the condition of its nature, because this lay beyond its dignity. However, it was fitting for God, given the infinite excellence of His goodness, to unite this flesh to Himself for the sake of human salvation.

**Reply to objection 3:** Any other condition by which a creature differs from its creator has been instituted by God’s wisdom and is ordered toward God’s goodness. For it is because of His own goodness that God, though He is uncreated, unchangeable, and incorporeal, has produced changeable and corporeal creatures. And, similarly, the evil of punishment (*malum poenae*) was introduced by God’s justice for the sake of His glory.

By contrast, the *evil of sin* (*malum culpae*) is committed by a withdrawal from the art of God’s wisdom and from the order of God’s goodness.

And so it was able to be fitting for Him to take on (*assumere*) a nature that is created, changeable, corporeal, and subject to punishment, but it was not fitting for Him to take on (*assumere*) the evil of sin.

**Reply to objection 4:** As Augustine replies in *Epistola ad Volusianum*, “Christian doctrine does not hold that God was joined to human flesh in such a way that He either deserted or lost the occupation of governing the universe, or in such a way that He transferred this occupation by contracting it to the little body in question. This is the sentiment of men who are capable of thinking of nothing except bodies. God is great not in mass, but in power. Hence, the greatness of His power feels no difficulties in narrow surroundings. And given that the transitory word of a man is heard simultaneously by many and wholly by each, it is not incredible that the abiding Word of God should be simultaneously everywhere as

a whole.” Hence, nothing unfitting follows from God’s being incarnated.

## Article 2

### Was the Word of God’s being incarnated necessary for the restoration of the human race?

It seems that the Word of God’s being incarnated was not necessary for the restoration of the human race (*non fuerit necessarium ad reparationem humani generis verbum Dei incarnari*):

**Objection 1:** As was established in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 27, a. 20), since the Word of God is perfect God, He did not gain any power at all from the flesh He assumed. Therefore, if the incarnate Word of God restored [human] nature, then He could have restored it without assuming flesh.

**Objection 2:** The only thing that seemed to be required for the restoration of human nature, which had fallen through sin, was that man should make satisfaction for sin. For God should not require of man more than man is capable of, and since He Himself is more inclined to forgive than to punish, then just as He imputes the sinful act to man, so, too, it seems that He may impute to him a contrary act for erasing the sin. Therefore, the Word of God’s being incarnated was not necessary for the restoration of human nature.

**Objection 3:** Man’s salvation mainly involves revering God; hence, Malachi 1:6 says, “If I am a master, then where is the fear of me? If I am a father, where is my honor?” But men have more reverence for God by the very fact that they think of Him as elevated above all things and beyond the understanding of men; hence, Psalm 112:4 says, “High above all nations is the Lord, and His glory is above the heavens.” And later it adds, “Who is like the Lord our God?”—which pertains to reverence. Therefore, it seems that it is not fitting for human salvation that God should become similar to us by assuming flesh.

**But contrary to this:** That which is necessary for human salvation is that by which the human race is liberated from perdition. But the mystery of God’s incarnation is of that sort—this according to John 3:16 (“God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in Him should not perish, but should have eternal life”). Therefore, God’s being incarnated was necessary for human salvation.

**I respond:** There are two senses in which something is said to be necessary for a given end:

In one sense, it is *something without which the end cannot be had*, in the sense that food is necessary for the preservation of human life.

In the second sense, it is *something through which the end is attained in a better and more fitting way*, in the way that a horse is necessary for a trip.

In the *first* way, God’s being incarnated was *not* necessary for the restoration of the human race. For there are many other ways in which God by His omnipotent power could have restored human nature.

However, in the *second* sense it *was* necessary for God to be incarnated in order to restore human nature. Hence, in *De Trinitate* 13 Augustine says, “We will show that God, whose power all things are equally subject to, was not lacking another possible way, but that there was not another more fitting way to cure our misery.”

And this can be thought of with respect to *man’s progress in the good*:

First, with respect to *faith*, which is made more certain by the fact that one believes God Himself as He speaks. Hence, in *De Civitate Dei* 11 Augustine says, “In order that man might walk more confidently toward the truth, Truth Itself, the Son of God, by assuming a man (*assumpto homine*), established faith and gave it a foundation.”

Second, with respect to *hope*, which is especially raised up thereby. Hence, in *De Trinitate* 13 Augustine says, “There was nothing so necessary to raise up our hope as for us to be shown how much

God loves us. But what clearer indication of this very thing is there than that the Son of God should deign to enter into fellowship with us?"

Third, with respect to *charity*, which is thereby excited most of all. Hence, in *De Catechizandis Rudibus* Augustine says, "What greater reason is there for the coming of the Lord than that God is showing His love among us?" And afterwards he adds, "If an individual has been slow to love, at least let him not be slow to love *in return*."

Fourth, with respect to *correct action*, in which He gave us Himself as an example. Hence, in a sermon on the birth of our Lord Augustine says, "It was not a man who could be seen who was to be followed, but rather it was God who could not be seen who was to be followed. Therefore, God became man in order that man might be shown both someone who was seen by man and someone whom man would follow."

Fifth, with respect to *a full participation in the divine nature (quantum ad plenam participationem divinitatis)*, which is truly man's beatitude and the goal of human life. And this is given to us through the humanity of Christ. For in a homily on the birth of our Lord Augustine says, "God become man so that man might become God."

Similarly, [the Incarnation] was likewise useful *for the removal of evil*:

First, through it *man is instructed not to prefer the devil to himself and not to venerate him who is the author of sin*. Hence, in *De Trinitate* 13 Augustine says, "Once human nature was able to be joined to God in such a way as to become one person, those proud and malignant spirits did not dare to prefer themselves to man by reason of the fact that they do not have flesh."

Second, through it *we are instructed as to how great the dignity of human nature is, so that we do not corrupt it by sinning*. Hence, in *De Vera Religione* Augustine says, "God has shown us how exalted a place among creatures human nature occupies in the fact that He has appeared to man in a true man." And in a sermon on the nativity Pope Leo says, "Acknowledge, O Christian, your own dignity and, having become a sharer in the divine nature, do not return to your former wretchedness by a morally degenerate way of life."

Third, because, as *De Trinitate* 13 puts it, *in order to curb man's presumptuousness*, "God's grace, with no preceding merits, is commended to us in the man Christ."

Fourth, because, as Augustine says in the same place, "*Man's pride*, which is the greatest obstacle to his adhering to God, *can be counteracted and healed by this great humility* on the part of God."

Fifth, *in order to liberate man from servitude*. As Augustine explains in *De Trinitate* 13, "This had to be done in such a way that the devil is conquered by the righteousness of the man Jesus Christ," which happened when Christ made satisfaction for us. But a mere man could not have made satisfaction for the whole human race, whereas God was not obligated to make satisfaction. Hence, Jesus Christ had to be both God and man. Hence, in his sermon on the nativity Pope Leo says, "Weakness is taken up by power, and humility by majesty, in order that one and the same mediator between God and men might die in one and rise in the other—and this is what was fitting for our remedy. For if He were not true God, He would not have brought a remedy; and if He were not true man, He would not have set an example."

Moreover, there are many other advantages which were gained and which are beyond the comprehension of human understanding.

**Reply to objection 1:** This argument goes through with respect to the *first* sense of the necessary, without which one cannot arrive at the end.

**Reply to objection 2:** There are two ways in which satisfaction can be said to be sufficient:

In one way, the satisfaction is *perfectly* sufficient by being *condign (satisfactio condigna)* because of its adequacy to compensate for the sin that has been committed. And on this score the satisfaction made by a mere man could not have been sufficient, since the *whole* of human nature was corrupted by sin, and neither the good of one person nor the good of many persons could have compensated for the loss in a way that was equivalent to the whole of the nature. Again, the sin committed against God had a

sort of infinite character because of the infinity of God's majesty; for an offense is greater to the extent that the one who is offended is greater. Hence, for the satisfaction to be condign, the action of the one who was making satisfaction had to have infinite efficacy in the sense of belonging to both God and man (*ut puta Dei et hominis existens*)

In the second way, the satisfaction is called sufficient *in an imperfect sense*, viz., in the sense of *being accepted* by one who is content with it even though it is not condign. And in this sense the satisfaction made by a mere man is sufficient. And since everything imperfect presupposes something perfect by which it is sustained, it follows that every act of satisfaction that belongs to a mere man has its efficacy from the satisfaction made by Christ.

**Reply to objection 3:** In assuming flesh, God does not diminish His own majesty and, as a result, the nature of reverence toward Him is not diminished. This reverence increases through an increase of one's cognition of Him. And by the fact that He willed to be close to us by assuming flesh, He has increased our attraction toward coming to know Him.

### Article 3

#### If man had not sinned, would God still have been incarnated?

It seems that if man had not sinned, God would still have been incarnated:

**Objection 1:** As long as the cause remains, the effect remains. But as Augustine says in *De Trinitate* 13, in addition to the forgiveness of sin, "there are many other things that have to be thought about in the Christ's incarnation"—and these have been already been explained (a. 2). Therefore, even if man had not sinned, God would have been incarnated.

**Objection 2:** It is part of the omnipotence of God's power that He perfects His works and manifests Himself by an infinite effect. But no mere creature can be called an infinite effect, since it is finite by its essence. Instead, it is only in the work of the Incarnation that an infinite effect of God's power seems mainly to be manifested—and this through the fact that things that are infinitely distant from one another are joined together, insofar as it is brought about that a man is God. In this work the universe seems especially to be perfected by the fact that the last creature, viz., man, is joined together with the first principle, viz., God. Therefore, even if man had not sinned, God would have been incarnated.

**Objection 3:** Human nature was not made more capable of grace through sin. But after sin it is capable of the grace of union (*capax est gratiae unionis*), which is the greatest grace. Therefore, if man had not sinned, human nature would have been capable of this grace. Nor would God have withheld from human nature a good of which it was capable. Therefore, if man had not sinned, God would have been incarnated.

**Objection 4:** God's predestination is eternal. But Romans 1:4 says of Christ that "the Son of God was predestined in power." Therefore, even before the sin it was necessary for the Son of God to be incarnated, in order that God's predestination might be fulfilled.

**Objection 5:** The mystery of the Incarnation was revealed to the first man, as is clear from the fact that [in Genesis 2:23] he said, "This is now bone of my bones ..."—which, as is clear from Ephesians 5:32, the Apostle claims to be "the great mystery in Christ and the Church." But as Augustine proves in *Super Genesim ad Litteram*, the man could not have had foreknowledge of his own fall, for the same reason that the angel could not have had foreknowledge of his own fall, either. Therefore, even if man had not sinned, God would have been incarnated.

**But contrary to this:** In *De Verbis Domini*, while expounding Luke 19:10 ("The Son of Man came to seek out and to save that which had been lost"), Augustine says, "If man had not sinned, the Son of

Man would not have come.” And a Gloss on 1 Timothy 1:15 (“Christ came into this world in order to save sinners”) says, “There was no reason for Christ the Lord to come except to save sinners. Take away the sick people, take away the wounds, and there is no reason for the medicine.”

**I respond:** There have been different opinions on this matter. Some claim that even if man had not sinned, the Son of God would have been incarnated. But others assert the contrary, and their assertion seems more worthy of assent.

For things that proceed from God’s will alone, over and beyond anything that is owed to a creature, can be made known to us only insofar as they are handed down in Sacred Scripture, through which God’s will is made known to us. Hence, since throughout Sacred Scripture the explanation of the Incarnation involves the sin of the first man, it is more fitting to say that the work of the Incarnation is ordered by God toward the healing of sin, so that if the sin had not existed, the Incarnation would not have existed.

Still, God’s power is not limited to this; for God could have been incarnated even if the sin had not existed.

**Reply to objection 1:** All the other reasons that were assigned involve the healing of sin. For instance, if man had not sinned, he would have been permeated with the light of divine wisdom and perfected by God with the rectitude of moral uprightness, in order that he might have cognition of all that is necessary. However, since man, having deserted God, fell to the level of corporeal things, it was fitting for God, having assumed flesh, likewise to show him the saving remedy through corporeal things. Hence, in commenting on John 1:14 (“The Word became flesh ...”), Augustine says, “Flesh had blinded you, flesh heals you; for Christ came in such a way that, of the flesh, He blotted out the vices that belonged to the flesh.”

**Reply to objection 2:** God’s infinite power is shown in the very production of things *ex nihilo*. Again, it suffices for the perfection of the universe that the creature is ordered in a natural mode toward God as its end. On the other hand, it exceeds the limits of the perfection of nature that a creature should be united to God in a person.

**Reply to objection 3:** There are two sorts of capacity that can be considered in human nature:

One sort is in keeping with the order of *natural potency*. This sort is always fulfilled by God, who gives to each thing in a way that accords with its natural capacity.

By contrast, the second sort of capacity is in keeping with the order of *God’s power*, which every creature obeys at God’s pleasure (*ad nutum*). And it is this sort of capacity that is relevant here. Now it is not the case that God fulfills every capacity of this sort that belongs to a nature; otherwise, God would be able to do in a creature only what He in fact does—which is false, as was established in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 25, a. 5 and q. 105, a. 6).

Now nothing prevents human nature from having been made for something greater after sin, since God permits evils in order to elicit something better from them. Hence, Romans 5:20 says, “Where sin abounded, grace abounded even more.” Hence, the blessing of the Paschal candle says, “O happy fault that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer.”

**Reply to objection 4:** Predestination presupposes foreknowledge of future things. And so just as God predestines that the salvation of a given man should be fulfilled through the prayers of others, so, too, He predestined the work of the Incarnation as a remedy for human sin.

**Reply to objection 5:** Nothing prevents an effect from being revealed to someone to whom the reason for the effect is not revealed. Therefore, the mystery of the Incarnation could have been revealed to the first man without his having knowledge of the reason for it. For it is not the case that everyone who has cognition of an effect has cognition of its cause as well.

#### Article 4

### Was God incarnated more principally as a remedy for actual sin than as a remedy for Original Sin?

It seems that God was incarnated more principally as a remedy for actual sin than as a remedy for Original Sin:

**Objection 1:** A sin is more serious to the extent that it is more opposed to human salvation, for the sake of which God was incarnated. But actual sin is more serious than Original Sin, since, as Augustine explains in *Contra Julianum*, a minimal punishment is due for Original Sin. Therefore, Christ's incarnation is ordered more principally toward erasing actual sins.

**Objection 2:** As was established in the Second Part (*ST* 1-2, q. 87, a. 5), only the pain of loss (*poena damni*), and not the pain of sense (*poena sensus*), is due for Original Sin. But in order to make satisfaction for sins, Christ came to suffer the pain of sense on the cross, and not the pain of loss, since He experienced no loss of the vision of God or of the enjoyment of God. Therefore, He came principally to erase actual sin more than Original Sin.

**Objection 3:** In *De Compunctione* 2 Chrysostom says, "This is the attitude of the faithful servant: to count the benefits of his Lord, which have been bestowed on everyone in general, as if they have been bestowed on himself alone. For instance, in Galatians 2:20, as if speaking of himself alone, Paul writes, 'Christ loved me and delivered Himself up for me.'" But one's own sins are actual sins, since Original Sin is a common sin. Therefore, we have to have this attitude: thinking that He came principally because of actual sins.

**But contrary to this:** John 1:29 says, "Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who takes away the sin of the world."

**I respond:** It is certain that Christ came into this world not only to erase that sin which had been handed down from the origin (*originaliter*) to later individuals, but also to erase all the sins that were afterwards added. Not that all sins are in fact erased (which is because of a defect on the part of men who do not adhere to Christ—this according to John 3:19 ("The light came into the world, and men loved darkness more than the light"))—but that He delivered what was sufficient for a total erasure. Hence, Romans 5:15-16 says, "Not like the offense is the gift ... For judgment was from one offense unto condemnation, but grace is from many offenses unto justification."

Now Christ came more principally for the erasure of a given sin to the extent that the sin in question is greater. But there are two senses in which something is said to be greater:

In one sense, *intensively*, in the way that a greater whiteness is more intense. And in this sense actual sin is greater than Original Sin, since, as was explained in the Second Part (*ST* 1-2, q. 82, a. 1), it has more of the nature of the voluntary.

In the second sense, something is said to be greater *extensively*, in the way that a whiteness that exists in a bigger surface is said to be greater. And in this sense Original Sin, through which the whole human race is infected, is greater than actual sin, which is proper to the individual person. And on this score, Christ came to remove Original Sin, insofar as, according to *Ethics* 1, the good of the race is more divine than the good of an individual.

**Reply to objection 1:** This argument goes through with respect to the *intensive* magnitude of a sin.

**Reply to objection 2:** The pain of sense is not owed to Original Sin in the retribution to come, and yet the hardships (*poenalitates*) that we suffer in this life in a way perceivable to the senses, e.g., hunger, thirst, death, and others of this sort, proceed from Original Sin. And so in order to make full satisfaction for Original Sin, Christ wanted to suffer sensory pain, in order that He might bring death and other such things to completion within Himself.

**Reply to objection 3:** As Chrysostom adds in the same place, "The Apostle spoke these words not

because he wished to diminish the gifts of Christ that were very ample and diffused throughout the earth, but in order to point to himself alone as a provocation for all of them. For what does it matter that He gives these gifts to others, when they are given to you as completely and perfectly as if none of them had been given to anyone else?"

Therefore, from the fact that an individual should think of Christ's benefits as having been bestowed on himself, it does not follow that he should think that they have not been bestowed on others. And so this does not rule out that He came more principally to abolish the sin that belongs to the whole nature than to abolish the sin of one person. But that general sin has been remedied so perfectly in each individual that it is as if it had been remedied in him alone. What's more, because of the union of charity, each individual should ascribe to himself the whole which has been bestowed on everyone.

### Article 5

#### Would it have been more fitting for God to be incarnated from the beginning of the human race?

It seems that it would have been more fitting for God to be incarnated from the beginning of the human race (*a principio humani generis*):

**Objection 1:** The work of the Incarnation proceeds from the immensity of God's charity—this according to Ephesians 2:4-5 ("God, who is rich in mercy, because of the excess of His love by which He loved us when we were dead in our sins, revived us in Christ"). But charity does not put off helping a friend who is suffering from need—this according to Proverbs 3:28 ("Do not say to your friend, 'Go and come back again, and I will help you tomorrow', when you can help him right now"). Therefore, God should not have deferred the work of the Incarnation, but should have assisted the human race by His incarnation from the beginning.

**Objection 2:** 1 Timothy 1:15 says, "Christ came into this world to save sinners." But more individuals would have been saved if God had been incarnated at the beginning of the human race, since many, ignorant of God, perished in their sin in different ages. Therefore, it would have been more fitting for God to be incarnated from the beginning of the human race.

**Objection 3:** The work of grace is no less orderly than the work of nature. But as Boethius says at the beginning of the *Consolatio*, "Nature takes its beginning from things that are perfect." Therefore the work of grace should have been perfect from the beginning. But the perfection of grace is seen in the work of the Incarnation—this according to John 1:14 ("The Word was made flesh," and later it is added, "... full of grace and of truth"). Therefore, Christ should have been incarnated from the beginning of the human race.

**But contrary to this:** Galatians 4:4 says, "But in the fullness of time God sent His own Son, made from a woman," where a Gloss explains, "The fullness of time is what had been predefined by God the Father as the time when He would send His Son." But God has defined everything by His wisdom. Therefore, God was incarnated at the most fitting time. And so it was not fitting for God to be incarnated from the beginning of the human race.

**I respond:** Since the work of the Incarnation is ordered principally toward restoring human nature by destroying sin, it is clear that it was not fitting for God to have been incarnated from the very beginning of the human race, *before* sin. For medicine is given only to those who are already sick. Hence, in Matthew 9:12-13 our Lord Himself says, "A physician is needed not for those who are well, but for those who are sick (*male habentibus*); for I have come to call sinners and not the upright."

But it likewise would not have been fitting for God to be incarnated *immediately after the sin*.

First, *because of the condition of human sin, which had proceeded from pride*. Hence, man had to

be liberated in such a way that, having been made humble, he would recognize that he needs a liberator. Hence, a Gloss on Galatians 3:19 (“... being ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator”) says, “With great planning it came to be that, after the fall of man, the Son of God was not going to be sent immediately. For God left first man with his freedom of will under the natural law, in order that he might come to know his natural strength. And when he fell short, he received the Law. When the Law had been given, the disease became stronger because of habitual sin—sin that belonged not to the Law, but to his nature—so that, with the illness now understood, he would cry out for a physician and seek the assistance of grace.”

Second, *because of the ordering that belongs to movement toward the good*, according to which one proceeds from the imperfect toward the perfect. Hence, in 1 Corinthians 15:46-47 the Apostle says, “It is not the spiritual that is first, but the animal and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, an earthly man; the second man is from heaven, a heavenly man.”

Third, *because of the dignity of the incarnate Word Himself*. Hence, a Gloss on Galatians 4:4 (“When the fullness of time had arrived ...”) says, “To the extent that a greater judge was coming, a longer series of heralds had to precede Him.”

Fourth, *lest the fervor of faith should cool down because of the great length of time*. For near the end of the world “the charity of many will grow cold” (Matthew 24:12), and Luke 18:8 says, “When the Son of Man comes, do you think that He will find faith on earth?”

**Reply to objection 1:** Charity does not defer helping a friend, but only as long as the appropriateness of the action and the condition of the persons are taken into account. For instance, if a physician gave the medicine to a sick individual at the beginning of the illness, it might do less good or even harm him instead of helping him. And so, too, the Lord did not immediately apply the remedy of the Incarnation to the human race, lest the human race should disdain that remedy out of pride, given that it had not come to recognize its own illness beforehand

**Reply to objection 2:** In *De Sex Quaestionibus Paganorum*, q. 2 Augustine replies to this objection as follows: “Christ wanted to appear among men, and to have His doctrine preached to them, when and where He knew there would be individuals who were going to believe in Him. For in the times and places in question He knew that there would be men like those—not all of them, but yet many—who lived in His bodily presence and who did not want to believe in Him or in His preaching, even though the dead were raised.”

However, in *De Perseverantia*, the selfsame Augustine rejects this reply, saying, “Can we claim that the inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon refused to believe when such powers were exercised among them, or that they would not have believed if such powers had been exercised, when our Lord himself attests (Matthew 11:21-22) that they would have done penance with great humility if those signs of divine power had been worked among them?”

And he adds by way of response: “Hence, as the Apostle says, ‘So it depends not upon man’s will or exertion, but upon the mercy of God’ (Romans 9:16), who assists those whom He wills to, those whom He foresees would believe because of the miracles if they were worked among them, whereas others He does not assist, those of whom He has secretly, but justly, made a different judgment in His predestination. So let us believe without a doubt that His mercy is with those who are liberated and that His truth is with those who are punished.”

**Reply to objection 3:** Among *diverse things*, what is perfect is prior to what is imperfect, in both time and nature, since what is perfect has to lead the other things to perfection. However, within *one and the same thing*, the imperfect is prior to the perfect in time, even if it is posterior in nature. So, then, the eternal perfection of God is prior to the imperfection of human nature in duration, but the consummated perfection [of human nature] in its union with God is posterior to its imperfection.

## Article 6

### Should the work of the Incarnation have been deferred until the end of the world?

It seems that the work of the Incarnation should have been deferred until the end of the world:

**Objection 1:** Psalm 91:11 says, “My old age in plentiful mercy,” i.e., “in the last days,” as a Gloss puts it. But the time of the Incarnation is especially a time of mercy—this according to Psalm 101:14 (“For it is time to have mercy on it”). Therefore, the Incarnation should have been deferred until the end of the world.

**Objection 2:** As was explained above (a. 5, ad 3), in one and the same thing, the perfect is posterior in time to the imperfect. Therefore, what is most perfect of all should be what is last in time. But the highest perfection of human nature is in its union to the Word, because, as the Apostle puts it in Colossians 1:19, “in Christ it has pleased [the Father] that the fulness of divinity should dwell.” Therefore, the Incarnation should have been deferred until the end of the world.

**Objection 3:** It is not fitting for what can be done through one thing to be done through two things. But the one coming of Christ that will occur at the end of the world could have been sufficient for the salvation of human nature. Therefore, it was not necessary for Him to come through the Incarnation before then. And so the Incarnation should have been deferred until the end of the world.

**But contrary to this:** Habakkuk 3:2 says, “In the midst of the years You shall make it known.” Therefore, the mystery of the Incarnation, through which it was made known to the world, should not have been deferred until the end of the world.

**I respond:** Just as it was not fitting for God to be incarnated at the beginning of the world, so it was not fitting for the Incarnation to be deferred until the end of the world.

This is apparent, first, *from the union of the divine nature and the human nature*. For as was explained above (a. 5, ad 3), there is a sense in which the perfect precedes the imperfect in time, since in that which goes from being imperfect to being perfect the imperfect temporally precedes the perfect, whereas in that which is an efficient cause of perfection, the perfect temporally precedes the imperfect. Now in the work of the Incarnation the two of these come together. For in the Incarnation itself human nature is led to the highest perfection, and so it was not fitting for the Incarnation to have been effected at the beginning of the human race. On the other hand, the Incarnate Word Himself is the efficient cause of human perfection—this according to John 1:16 (“Of His fullness we have all received”), and so the work of the Incarnation should not have been deferred until the end of the world. Rather, it is the perfection of glory, to which human nature is to be ultimately led by the Incarnate Word, that will occur at the end of the world.

It is apparent, second, *from the effect of human salvation*. For as it says in *De Quaestionibus Novi et Veteris Testamenti*, “It is in the power of the Giver to have pity when, or as much as, He wills. Hence, He came when He knew that it was fitting to help and when His benefits would be welcomed. For when by the languor of the human race the cognition of God began to grow dim among men and their morals were changing, He deigned to choose Abraham, in whom the form of morals and of the knowledge of God would be renewed. And, later on, He gave the Law to Moses in writing. And because the gentiles despised the Law and would not subject themselves to it, and because those who received the Law did not keep it, the Lord, moved by mercy, sent His own Son, who, having granted to everyone the remission of their sins, offered them to God the Father as justified.” Now if this remedy had been deferred until the end of the world, knowledge of God and reverence for Him and uprightness in morals would have been totally erased from the earth.

It is apparent, third, that *it would not have been fitting for the manifestation of the divine power*, which has saved men in many ways, not only through faith in something future, but also through faith in

something present and in something past.

**Reply to objection 1:** The Gloss in question is expounding on the mercy that leads all the way to glory.

However, if it were referring to the mercy shown to the human race through Christ's Incarnation, then one would have to note that, as Augustine explains in *Retractationes*, the time of the Incarnation can be compared with the youth of the human race, "because of the vigor and fervor of its faith, which operates through love," but also to its old age, i.e., the sixth age, "because of the number of the times, since Christ came in the sixth age ... and even though youth and old age cannot be found simultaneously in a body, they can exist simultaneously in the soul, the one because of the soul's alacrity and the other because of its gravity." And so somewhere in *83 Quaestiones* Augustine claimed that "it was not becoming that the Master, by the imitation of whom the human race was to be formed to the highest virtue, should come from heaven, except in the time of youth." In other places, however, he claimed that Christ came in the sixth age of the human race, i.e., in its old age.

**Reply to objection 2:** As has been explained, the work of the Incarnation has to be thought of not only as the terminus of a movement from the imperfect to the perfect, but also as the principle of perfection in human nature.

**Reply to objection 3:** As Chrysostom says in commenting on John 3:17 ("God did not send His Son in the world to judge the world"), "There are two advents of the Christ: the first, in order to remit sins, and the second, in order to judge. For if He had not done this, all would have perished at once; for all have sinned, and all stand in need of God's glory." Hence, it is clear that He should not have deferred the advent of mercy until the end of the world.