

QUESTION 5

The Assumption of the Parts of the Human Nature

Next we have to consider the assumption of the parts of the human nature. And on this topic there are four questions: (1) Was it fitting for the Son of God to assume a real body (*verum corpus*)? (2) Was it fitting for Him to assume an earthly body, i.e., flesh and blood? (3) Did He assume a soul? (4) Was it fitting for Him to assume an intellect?

Article 1

Did the Son of God assume a real body?

It seems that the Son of God did not assume a real body (*filius Dei non assumpserit verum corpus*):

Objection 1: Philippians 2:7 says, “He was made in the likeness of men.” But what is in accord with the *truth* is not said to be in accord with a *likeness* (*quod est secundum veritatem non dicitur esse secundum similitudinem*). Therefore, the Son of God did not assume a real body.

Objection 2: The assumption of a body in no way detracted from the dignity of the divine nature. For in a sermon on the Nativity, Pope Leo says, “For neither did the glorification consume the lower nature, nor did the assumption diminish the higher nature.” But God’s dignity involves being altogether separate from a body (*ad dignitatem Dei pertinet quod sit omnino a corpore separatus*). Therefore, it seems that God was not united to a body by means of the assumption.

Objection 3: Signs should correspond to what they signify. But as is clear from Isaiah 6 (“I saw the Lord sitting ...”), the apparitions of the Old Testament, which were signs and figures of the apparition of Christ, were not by means of a real body (*non fuerunt secundum corporis veritatem*), but by means of a vision in the imagination (*secundum imaginariam visionem*). Therefore, it seems that the apparition of the Son of God in the world was likewise not by means of a real body, but only by means of a vision in the imagination (*non fuerit secundum corporis veritatem sed solum secundum imaginationem*).

But contrary to this: In 83 *Quaestiones* Augustine says, “If the body of Christ was an image belonging to the imagination, then Christ was a deceiver (*si phantasma fuit corpus Christi, fefellit Christus*). And if He was a deceiver, then He is not the Truth.” But Christ is the Truth. Therefore, His body was not an image belonging to the imagination. And so it is clear that He assumed a real body.

I respond: As is explained in *De Ecclesiasticis Dogmatibus*, the Son of God was not supposedly born (*natus non putative*), in the sense of having an imagined body, but instead He had a real body. And three arguments can be given for this.

The first is based on the notion of human nature, which involves having a real body. Therefore, granting, on the basis on what has been said (q. 4, a. 1), that it was fitting for the Son of God to assume a human nature, it follows that He assumed a real body.

A second argument can be taken from those things that were accomplished in the mystery of the Incarnation. For if His body was an image of the imagination and not a real body, then neither did He sustain a real death. Nor did He really do some of the things that the Gospels report about Him, but instead He only appeared to do them. And so it likewise follows that no real salvation followed for man, since an effect must be proportioned to its cause.

A third argument can be taken from the very dignity of the assuming person, which, since He is the Truth, did not fit in with there being any sort of fictitiousness in His work. Hence, our Lord even deigned to exclude this sort of error on His own in Luke 24 when the disciples, disturbed and terrified, thought that they were seeing a ghost and not a real body, and so He presented Himself for them to touch, saying, “Touch and see, for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.”

Reply to objection 1: The likeness in question expresses the truth about the human nature in Christ in the sense in which all who truly exist in human nature are said to be alike in species. And this is

not to be understood as a similarity in images belonging to the imagination. To make this clear, the Apostle adds that “He became obedient to death, even death on a cross”—something that could not have happened if there had been only a likeness in the imagination.

Reply to objection 2: The Son of God’s dignity is in no way diminished by His having assumed a real body. Hence, in *De Fide ad Petrum* Augustine says, “He emptied Himself, taking on the form of a servant in order to become a servant, but He did not lose the fullness of the form of God.” For the Son of God did not assume a real body in such a way as to become the form of that body—something that is incompatible with God’s simplicity and purity—since this would be to assume the body in a oneness of *nature*—which, as was explained above (q. 2, a. 1), is impossible. Instead, He assumed it in a oneness of *person*, while preserving the distinction between the natures.

Reply to objection 3: It is fitting for a figure to reflect a similarity and not the thing’s reality. For as Damascene says in *De Fide Orthodoxa* 3, “If there were a similarity with respect to everything, it would no longer be a sign, but the reality itself.” Therefore, it was fitting for the apparitions of the Old Testament to be by means of appearances only, figures as it were, whereas the Son of God’s apparition in the world was by means of a real body, in the sense of a reality that had been prefigured, i.e., signified, by those figures. Hence, in Colossians 2:17 the Apostle says, “... which are shadows of things to come, but the body is Christ’s.”

Article 2

Did Christ have a carnal, i.e., earthly, body or a celestial body?

It seems that Christ did not have a carnal, i.e., earthly body, but had a celestial body instead:

Objection 1: In 1 Corinthians 15:47 the Apostle says, “The first man was of the earth, terrestrial; the second man was from heaven, celestial.” But as is clear from Genesis 2:7, the first man, viz., Adam, was of the earth as regards his body. Therefore, likewise, the second man, viz., Christ, was of the heavens as regards His body.

Objection 2: 1 Corinthians 15:50 says, “Flesh and blood will not possess the kingdom of God.” But the kingdom of God exists principally in Christ. Therefore, in Him there is no flesh and blood, but instead a celestial body.

Objection 3: Everything that is the best must be attributed to God. But among all bodies the most noble is the celestial body. Therefore, it was fitting for Christ to assume such a body.

But contrary to this: In Luke 24:39 our Lord says, “A ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.” But flesh and bones come from the lower elements and not from the matter of a celestial body. Therefore, Christ’s body was fleshy and earthly and not a celestial body.

I respond: By the same arguments by which it was shown to be unfitting for Christ’s body to be an image belonging to the imagination (*corpus Christi non debuit esse phantasticum*), it is apparent that it was unfitting for His body to be celestial.

For, first of all, just as the truth of the human nature in Christ is not preserved if His body is an image belonging to the imagination, so, too, it is not preserved if His body is claimed to be celestial, as Valentinus claimed it to be. For as is clear from *Metaphysics* 7, since a man’s form is a natural reality, it requires the determinate matter that has to be posited in the definition of a man, viz., flesh and bones.

Second, because this position likewise detracts from the truth of those things that Christ did in His body. For since, as is proved in *De Caelo* 1, a celestial body is impassable and incorruptible, if the Son of God had assumed a celestial body, He would not truly have gotten hungry or thirsty, nor, again, would He have truly endured a passion and death.

Third, this position likewise detracts from divine truth. For since the Son of God showed Himself to

men as one who had a fleshy and earthly body, this demonstration would have been false if He had had a celestial body. And that is why in *De Ecclesiasticis Dogmatibus* it says, “The Son of God was born by taking on flesh from the virgin’s body and not by bringing it with Him from heaven.”

Reply to objection 1: There are two senses in which Christ is said to have descended from heaven:

In one sense, by reason of *the divine nature*—not in such a way that the divine nature was missing from the heavens, but because He began to exist in a new way among the lowest things, viz., in accord with His assumed nature—this according to John 3:13 (“No one has ascended into heaven except He who has descended from heaven, the Son of Man, who exists in heaven”).

In a second sense, by reason of *His body*—not because Christ’s body itself descended from heaven with respect to its substance, but because His body was formed by a heavenly power, i.e., the Holy Spirit. Hence, while explaining the passage cited in the objection, Augustine says in *Ad Orosium*, “I call Christ heavenly because He was not conceived from human seed.” And this is also the way in which Hilary explains the passage in *De Trinitate*.

Reply to objection 2: ‘Flesh’ and ‘blood’ are being understood in this passage not for the *substance* of flesh and blood, but for the *corruption* of flesh and blood, which did not exist in Christ *as a sin*. However, it did exist for a time in Christ *as a punishment*, in order that He might accomplish the work of our redemption.

Reply to objection 3: God’s greatest glory involves His propelling a lowly and earthly body to such great sublimity. Hence, in the Synod of Ephesus one reads the speech of St. Theophilus, who says, “In the same way that the best workmen are held in admiration not only when they display their skill with precious materials, but often for showing the power of their craft by taking up the poorest clay and muddy earth, so the best of all workmen, the Word of God, did not come down to us by taking on the precious matter of some heavenly body, but instead showed with mud the greatness of His skill.”

Article 3

Did the Son of God assume a soul?

It seems that the Son of God did not assume a soul:

Objection 1: In handing down the mystery of the Incarnation, John said, “The Word was made flesh,” without making any mention of a soul. But He is said to be made flesh not because He is converted into flesh, but because He assumed flesh. Therefore, He does not seem to have assumed a soul.

Objection 2: A soul is necessary to the body in order that the body might be vivified because of it. But, it seems, this was not necessary for Christ’s body, since He is the very Word of God of whom Psalm 35:10 says, “Lord, with You is the fountain of life.” Therefore, since the Word was present, it would have been superfluous for a soul to be present. But as the Philosopher says in *De Caelo* 1, “God and nature do nothing in vain.” Therefore, it seems that the Son of God did not assume a soul.

Objection 3: The common nature, viz., the human species, is constituted by the union of the soul to the body. But as Damascene says in *De Fide Orthodoxa* 3, “There was nothing in our Lord Jesus Christ to receive a common species.” Therefore, He did not assume a soul.

But contrary to this: In *De Agone Christiano* Augustine says, “Let us not listen to those who claim that a human body alone was assumed by the Word of God, and who understand the phrase ‘The Word was made flesh’ in such a way that they deny that this man had a soul or any other part of a man except flesh.”

I respond: As Augustine explains in *De Haeresibus*, it was the opinion first of Arius and later of Apollinaris that the Son of God assumed only flesh, without a soul, and they claimed that the flesh had the Word in place of a soul. From this it followed that there were not two natures in Christ, but instead

only one nature; for a human nature is made up of a soul and flesh.

However, this position cannot stand, and for three reasons:

First, because it is incompatible with the passages of Sacred Scripture in which our Lord makes mention of His own soul, viz., Matthew 26:38 (“My soul is sad unto death”) and John 10:18 (“I have the power to lay down my soul”). Now to this argument Apollinaris replies that in these passages the word ‘soul’ is being taken metaphorically, in the way that ‘soul’ is used in the Old Testament, e.g., Isaiah 1:4 (“My soul hated your new moons and your solemnities”). But as Augustine explains in *83 Quaestiones*, in the Gospel narratives the evangelists report that Jesus marveled and was angered and saddened, and that He was hungry. And these examples demonstrate that He had a real soul, in the same way that from the fact that He ate and slept and became tired it is shown that He had a real human body. Otherwise, if these things are likewise treated as metaphorical because similar things are said of God in the Old Testament, then our trust in the Gospel narratives will perish. For it is one thing for something to be announced as a prophecy in figures, and another thing for something to be written by the evangelists as a history that is properly about realities.

Second, the error in question detracts from the benefit of the Incarnation, which is the liberation of man. For as Augustine argues in *Contra Felicianum*, “If, in taking on flesh, the Son of God passed over the soul, then either (a) knowing the soul’s sinlessness, He did not believe that it needed any medicine; or (b) thinking of it as something alien from Himself, He did not bestow on it the benefit of redemption; or (c) judging it to be altogether incurable, He was unable to heal it; or (d) He rejected it as worthless and as a thing that seemed unfit for anything useful. Now two of these reasons imply a blasphemy against God. For how can He be called omnipotent if He is unable to heal what is beyond hope? Or how can He be called the God of all things, if He Himself did not make our soul? And as regards the other two reasons, in the one the cause of the soul is unknown, and in the other its merit has no place. Is anyone to be thought of as understanding the cause of the soul, if, given that the soul has been equipped to receive the law by an innate habit of reason, he tries to separate it from a sin of willful transgression? Or how can anyone know God’s generosity if he says that the soul was despised because of its sin of being ignoble? If you look at its origin, the substance of the soul is more precious, whereas if you look at its sin of transgression, then it is worse because of its intelligence. But I know Christ and His perfect wisdom, and I do not doubt that His wisdom is most holy—and because the first of these He did not despise what is better and capable of prudence, and because of the second He took on what had been badly wounded.”

Again, third, the position in question is contrary to the truth of the Incarnation. For flesh and the other parts of a man receive their species through the soul. Hence, if the soul is absent, then, as is clear from the Philosopher in *De Anima 2* and *Metaphysics 7*, they are ‘bone’ and ‘flesh’ only equivocally.

Reply to objection 1: When it is said, “The Word was made flesh” (John 1:14), ‘flesh’ stands for the whole man, as if one were to say, “The Word was made a man”—in the same way that Isaiah 40:5 says, “All flesh will see the salvation of our God.”

Now the reason why the whole man is signified by ‘flesh’ is that, as is explained in the cited passage, it was through the flesh that the Son of God appeared as visible; and this is why it is added, “And we saw His glory” (John 1:14).

Or, alternatively, as Augustine says in *83 Quaestiones*, “In all that oneness of assumption, the Word is the principal thing, whereas the flesh is the last and ultimate thing. And so in wishing to commend the love of God’s humility for us, the Evangelist named the Word and the flesh, while omitting the soul, which is lower than the Word and higher than the flesh.”

Again, it was reasonable to name the flesh, which seemed less assumable because it is more distant from the Word.

Reply to objection 2: The Word is the fountain of life as the first *efficient cause* of life. By contrast, the soul is the principle of life for a body as its *form*. Now a form is the effect of an agent. Hence, what could be concluded from the presence of the Word is instead that His body would be animated, just as from the presence of fire it can be concluded that the body to which the fire is adjoined

is hot.

Reply to objection 3: It is not unfitting—indeed, it is necessary—to say that in Christ there was a nature that is constituted by the soul coming to the body. By contrast, what Damascene is denying is that in our Lord Jesus Christ there is a *common species* in the sense of some third thing that results from the union of the divine nature and the human nature (*quasi aliquid tertium resultans ex unione divinitatis et humanitatis*).

Article 4

Did the Son of God assume a human mind, i.e., a human intellect?

It seems that the Son of God did not assume a human mind, i.e., a human intellect:

Objection 1: Where the reality is present, there is no need for its image. But as Augustine explains in *De Trinitate* 12, with respect to a man’s mind, he is made to the image of God. Therefore, since in Christ the divine Word itself was present, there was no need for there to be a human mind there.

Objection 2: A greater light blots out a lesser light. But the Word of God, which, as John 1:9 puts it, is “the light that enlightens every man who comes into this world,” is related to the mind as a greater light to a lesser light; for the mind itself is a sort of light, like a lamp lit by the first light—this according to Proverbs 20:27 (“The spirit of a man is the lamp of the Lord”). Therefore, in Christ, who is the Word of God, it was unnecessary for there to be a human mind.

Objection 3: The Word of God’s assuming a human nature is called ‘the incarnation’ (*incarnatio*). But the intellect, i.e., the human mind, is neither flesh (*caro*) nor the act of flesh (*actus carnis*), since, as is proved in *De Anima* 3, it is not the act of a body. Therefore, it seems that the Son of God did not assume a human mind.

But contrary to this: In *De Fide ad Petrum* Augustine says, “Firmly hold, and do not in any way doubt, that Christ, the Son of God, has the flesh and the rational soul of our race. Of His own flesh He says, ‘Touch and see, for a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I do’ (Luke 24:39). Again, He shows that He has a soul when He says, ‘I lay down My soul that I may take it again’ (John 10:17). And He shows that He has an intellect when he says, ‘Learn from Me, for I am meek and humble of heart’ (Matthew 11:29); and through the prophet the Lord says of Him, ‘Behold my servant shall understand’ (Isaiah 52:13).”

I respond: As Augustine reports in *De Haeresibus*, “The Apollinarians dissented from the Catholic Church concerning the soul of Christ, claiming, as did the Arians, that Christ had taken on flesh alone without a soul. But having been defeated on this question by the testimony of the Gospels, they claimed that Christ’s soul lacked a mind and that instead the Word Himself took the place of the mind in His soul.”

However, this position is defeated for the same reasons as the previous position was (a. 3).

First, it is opposed to the Gospel narrative, which, as is clear from Matthew 8:10, reports that Christ was amazed. But being amazed cannot occur without reason, since it implies a comparison of the effect to the cause, viz., as is explained at the beginning of the *Metaphysics*, when an individual sees an effect whose cause he does not know and seeks after that cause.

Second, the position in question is incompatible with the benefit of the Incarnation, viz., the justification of man from sin. For the human soul is capable neither of sin nor of justifying grace except through the mind. Hence, it was especially necessary for a human mind to be assumed. This is why, in *De Fide Orthodoxa* 3 Damascene says, “The Word of God assumed a body and an intellectual and rational soul,” and later he adds, “The whole is united to the whole, in order that He might grace all of me with salvation”—that is, make me acceptable—“for what is unassumable is incurable.”

Third, the position in question is incompatible with the truth of the Incarnation. For since the body

is proportioned to the soul in the way that matter is proportioned to its proper form, there is no real human flesh that is not perfected by a human, i.e., rational, soul, and so if Christ had had a soul without a mind, then he would have had bestial flesh rather than human flesh, since it is only through its mind that our soul differs from the soul of a beast. Hence, in 83 *Quaestiones* Augustine says that according to the erroneous position in question it would follow that the Son of God had assumed “a beast with the shape of a human body.” But, again, this is incompatible with divine truth, which does not tolerate any fictitious falsehood.

Reply to objection 1: Where the reality itself exists with its own presence, its image is not required to take its place—just as, in the location where the emperor resided, the soldiers did not venerate his image.

However, the image of the reality is required in the presence of the reality in order to be perfected by the very presence of the reality, in the way that a wax image is perfected by the impression of the seal, or in the way that the image of a man in a mirror results from his presence. Hence, for the perfecting of the human mind, the Word of God had to unite a human mind to Himself.

Reply to objection 2: A greater light blots out the lesser light of another *illuminating* body, and yet it does not blot out, but instead brings to perfection, the light of the *illuminated* body. For instance, in the presence of the sun the light of the stars is obscured, but the light that belongs to the atmosphere is brought to perfection. Now the intellect or mind of a man is like a light that is illuminated by the light of the divine Word. And so a human mind is not blotted out, but is instead brought to perfection, by the light of the divine Word.

Reply to objection 3: Even though the intellective power is not a power belonging to a body, nonetheless, the very essence of the human soul, which is the form of the body, has to be more noble in order to have the power of understanding. And so it is necessary for a better disposed body to correspond to it.