

QUESTION 25

Adoring Christ

Next we have to consider those things that belong to Christ in relation to us: first, the adoration of Christ by which we adore Him (question 26); and second, Christ's being our mediator with God (question 27).

On the first topic there are six questions: (1) Are Christ's divine nature and His human nature to be adored with one and the same adoration? (2) Is Christ's flesh to be adored with the adoration of worship (*adoratione latriae*)? (3) Is the adoration of worship (*adoratio latriae*) to be shown to an image of Christ? (4) Is the adoration of worship (*adoratio latriae*) to be shown to the cross of Christ? (5) Is the adoration of worship (*adoratio latriae*) to be shown to the mother of Christ? (6) What about the adoration of the relics of the saints?

Article 1

Are the human nature of Christ and His divine nature to be adored with the same adoration?

It seems that the human nature of Christ and His divine nature are not to be adored with the same adoration (*non eadem adoratione adoranda sit humanitas Christi et eius divinitatis*):

Objection 1: Christ's divine nature, which is shared by the Father and the Son (*quae est communis patri et filio*), is to be adored; hence, John 5:23 says, "... that all men might honor the Son even as they honor the Father." But Christ's human nature is not shared by Him and the Father. Therefore, it is not the case that the human nature of Christ and His divine nature are to be adored by the same adoration.

Objection 2: As the Philosopher explains in *Ethics* 4, honor is, properly speaking, the reward for virtue. But virtue merits the reward through its act. Therefore, since, as was established above (q. 19, a. 1), in Christ the operation of the divine nature is distinct from the operation of the human nature (*sit alia operatio divinae et humanae naturae*), it seems that Christ's human nature is to be adored by one honor and His divine nature by a different honor (*videtur quod alio honore sit adoranda humanitas Christi et alio eius divinitas*).

Objection 3: If Christ's soul were not united to the Word, then it would have to be venerated because of the excellence of the wisdom and grace that it has. But nothing of its dignity is subtracted from it by its being united to the Word. Therefore, the human nature is to be adored by its own proper veneration, over and beyond the veneration that is shown to His divine nature.

But contrary to this: In the chapters of the Fifth Synod (Constantinople) we read, "If anyone claims that (a) Christ is adored in two natures, because of which two acts of adoration are introduced, and that (b) he does not adore God the Word made flesh along with His proper flesh by a single act of adoration, as has been handed down from the beginning of God's Church, let him be anathema."

I respond: There are two things that can be considered in someone who is being honored, viz., (a) *who it is that is being shown honor (eum cui honor exhibetur)* and (b) *the cause of the honor*.

Now, properly speaking, honor is shown to a *whole subsistent entity*; for we do not say that a man's hand is being honored, but instead we say that the man is being honored. And if it sometimes happens that someone's hand or foot is said to be honored, this is said not because parts of this sort are being honored in their own right, but because the whole is being honored in those parts. In this way a man can be honored even in something external, e.g., in his vesture, or in his image, or in his representative (*aut in nuntio*).

On the other hand, the cause of honor is *that with respect to which the one who is being honored*

has some sort of excellence. For as was explained in the Second Part (*ST* 2-2, q. 103, a. 1), honor is reverence that is shown to an individual because of his excellence. And so if in one man there is more than one cause of honor, e.g., his high office, his knowledge, and his virtue, then *as regards the one who is being honored*, that man's honor will be one with respect to *who* is being honored (*erit illius homo unus honor ex parte eius qui honoratur*), but more than one with respect to the *causes* of honor—as, for instance, in the case of a man who is being honored both because of his knowledge and because of his virtue.

Therefore, since in Christ there is just one person with a divine nature and a human nature (*in Christo una sit tantum persona divinae et humanae naturae*), and likewise just one *hypostasis* and one suppositum, the adoration of Him is one, and His honor is one, with respect to *who* is being adored, whereas, with respect to the *cause* for which He is honored, there can be said to be more than one adoration, with the result that He is honored by one honor for His uncreated wisdom and by another honor for His created wisdom.

By contrast, if more than one person or *hypostasis* were being posited in Christ, then it would follow that there is more than one adoration *absolutely speaking*. And this is what was condemned in the Synods. For instance, in the chapters of Cyril [from the Synod of Ephesus] we read, “If anyone dares to claim that (a) the assumed man has to be co-adored with the Word of God, in the sense that the one adoration is different from the other (*quasi alterum alteri*), and not instead that (b) he honors by a single adoration Emmanuel insofar as He is the Word made flesh, let him be anathema.”

Reply to objection 1: In the Trinity there are three who are honored, but one cause of honor. The converse holds in the case of the mystery of the Incarnation. And so the way in which the Trinity's honor is one is different from the way in which Christ's honor is one.

Reply to objection 2: The operation is not what is being honored, but is instead the reason for the honor. And so it is not the case that by the fact that there are two operations in Christ, it is shown that there are two sorts of adoration. Instead, what is shown is that there are two causes of adoration.

Reply to objection 3: If the soul of Christ were not united to the Word of God, it would be that which is most important in that man. And so honor would be owed to it, since a man is that which is most important in him. But since Christ's soul is in fact united to a more dignified person, honor is principally owed to the person to whom Christ's soul is united. And, as was explained above (q. 2, a. 2), the dignity of Christ's soul is not thereby diminished; instead, it is increased.

Article 2

Is Christ's human nature to be adored with the adoration of worship?

It seems that Christ's human nature is not to be adored with the adoration of worship (*humanitas Christi non sit adoranda adoratione latriae*):

Objection 1: A Gloss on Psalm 98:5 (“Adore His footstool, for it is holy”) says, “The flesh assumed by the Word of God is adored by us without impiety, since no one spiritually eats His flesh without first adoring; I do not say by an adoration that is worship (*non illa dico adoratione quae est latria*), which is owed only to the creator.” But the flesh is part of the human nature. Therefore, Christ's human nature is not to be adored with the adoration of worship (*adoratione latriae*).

Objection 2: The cult of worship (*cultus latriae*) is owed to no creature, since, as Romans 1:25 explains, the gentiles are condemned by the fact that they worshiped and served the creature. But Christ's human nature is a creature. Therefore, it is not to be adored by the adoration of worship (*adoratione*

latriae).

Objection 3: The adoration of worship is owed to God in recognition of His unsurpassed dominion—this according to Deuteronomy 6:13 (“You shall adore the Lord your God and serve Him alone”). But Christ as a man is less than the Father. Therefore, His human nature is not to be adored by the adoration of worship (*adoratione latriae*).

But contrary to this: In *De Fide Orthodoxa* 4 Damascene says, “The flesh of Christ, the incarnate Word of God, is adored not for its own sake, but because the Word of God is united to it in His *hypostasis*.” And a Gloss on Psalm 98:5 (“Adore His footstool ...”) says, “One who adores the body of Christ is thinking not of the earth, but rather of Him whose footstool it is and in whose honor he adores the footstool.” But the incarnate Word is adored with the adoration of worship (*adoratione latriae*). Therefore, so is His body, i.e., His human nature.

I respond: As was explained above (a. 1), the honor of adoration is owed to a subsistent *hypostasis*, even if the reason for the honor is something non-subsistent because of which the person to whom it belongs is being honored. Therefore, there are two ways in which the adoration of Christ’s human nature can be understood:

First, that the adoration is of [the human nature] as the thing that is adored. And to adore Christ’s flesh in this sense is nothing other than to adore the incarnated Word of God, in the way that to adore the king’s vesture is nothing other than to adore the clothed king. And on this score, the adoration of Christ’s human nature is the adoration of worship (*adoratio latriae*).

Second, it can be understood as an adoration of Christ’s human nature that is prompted by the fact that Christ’s human nature is perfected by every gift of grace. And on this score the adoration of Christ’s human nature is not the adoration of worship (*adoratio latriae*), but the adoration of honor (*adoratio duliae*) (cf. *ST* 2-2, q. 103).

The result is that one and the same person of Christ is adored with the adoration of worship because of His divine nature and with the adoration of honor because of the perfection of His human nature. Nor is this inappropriate. For God the Father Himself is owed the honor of worship (*honor latriae*) because of His divine nature and the honor of *dulia* because of the dominion by which He governs creatures. Hence, a Gloss on Psalm 7:1 (“O Lord my God, in you have I hoped”) says, “Lord of all through His power, for which He is owed *dulia*; God of all through His act of creating, for which He is owed *latria*.”

Reply to objection 1: This Gloss should not be understood to be saying that Christ’s flesh is adored separately from His divine nature, since this could happen only if the *hypostasis* of [the Word of] God were different from the *hypostasis* of the man.

However, since, as Damascene says, “If you divide by subtle concepts what *appears* to be the case from what is *understood* to be the case, then [the flesh of Christ] is not adorable as a creature,” i.e. by the adoration of worship (*adoratione latriae*). And in that case, so understood as separate from the Word of God, [this creature] is owed the adoration of honor (*adoratio duliae*)—not the *dulia* of just anyone, i.e., the *dulia* that is commonly shown to other creatures, but a certain more excellent *dulia*, which they call *hyperdulia*.

Reply to objection 2 and objection 3: Through what has just been said the reply to the second and third objections is clear. For the adoration of worship (*adoratio latriae*) is shown to Christ’s human nature not in its own right (*non ratione sui ipsius*), but by reason of the divine nature to which it is united and because of which Christ is *not* less than the Father.

Article 3

Should an image of Christ be adored with the adoration of worship?

It seems that an image of Christ should not be adored with the adoration of worship (*imago Christi non sit adoranda adoratione latriae*):

Objection 1: Exodus 22:4 says, “You shall not make for yourselves a graven image or any sort of likeness.” But no adoration should be given contrary to God’s commandment. Therefore, an image of Christ is not to be adored with the adoration of worship (*adoratione latriae*).

Objection 2: As the Apostle explains in Ephesians 5:11, we should not share in the works of the gentiles. But the gentiles are especially guilty of “exchanging the glory of the immutable God for the likeness of a corruptible man,” as Romans 1:23 puts it. Therefore, an image of Christ is not to be adored with the adoration of worship (*adoratione latriae*).

Objection 3: Christ is owed the adoration of worship (*adoratio latriae*) by reason of His divine nature and not by reason of His human nature. Therefore, a corporeal image representing the human nature of Christ is all the less owed the adoration of worship.

Objection 4: It seems that nothing is to be done in the cult of the divine except what has been instituted by God; hence, in 1 Corinthians 11:23, about to hand down his teaching on the Church’s sacrifice, the Apostle says, “I received from the Lord what I have likewise handed on to you ...” But there is no tradition found in Scripture about adoring images. Therefore, an image of Christ is not to be adored with the adoration of worship (*adoratione latriae*).

But contrary to this: Damascene cites Basil, who says, “The honor given to an image goes through to the prototype (*ad prototypum pervenit*),” i.e., to the exemplar. But the exemplar itself, viz., Christ, is to be adored with the adoration of worship (*adoratione latriae*). Therefore, so is His image.

I respond: As the Philosopher explains in *On Memory and Reminiscence*, there are two movements of the soul with respect to an image, one toward the image itself insofar as it is a certain thing, and the other toward the image insofar as it is the image of something else. And the difference between these two movements is that the first movement, by which one moves toward the image insofar as it is a certain thing (*in imaginem prout est res quaedam*), is different from the movement that is ordered toward the reality (*in rem*), whereas the second movement, which moves toward the image insofar as it is an image, is one and the same as the movement that is ordered toward the reality.

So, then, one should reply that no reverence is shown to an image of Christ insofar as it is a certain thing, e.g., a sculpted or painted piece of wood, since reverence is owed only to a rational nature. Therefore, it follows that reverence is shown to it only insofar as it is an image. And so it follows that the same reverence is to be shown to an image of Christ as to Christ Himself. Therefore, since Christ is adored with the adoration of worship (*adoratione latriae*), it follows that His image should be adored with the adoration of worship (*adoratione latriae*).

Reply to objection 1: The commandment in question does not prohibit one from making a sculpture or likeness; instead, it prohibits one from making a sculpture or likeness *in order to adore it*. Hence, it adds, “You shall not adore them or show them reverence.” And since, as has been explained, the movement toward the image is the same as the movement toward the reality, adoration [of an image] is forbidden in the same way that adoration of the reality of which it is the image is forbidden.

Hence, what should be understood to be forbidden in the passage in question is the adoration of the images that the gentiles were making for the veneration of their gods, i.e., the demons, and that is why the commandment is prefaced by: “... you shall not have strange gods before me” (Exodus 22:3).

On the other hand, since God Himself is incorporeal, no corporeal image of Him could have been

made, since, as Damascene puts it, “It is the height of foolishness and impiety to make a figure that is divine.” But because in the New Testament God has become a man, it is possible for Him to be adored in a corporeal image of Him.

Reply to objection 2: The Apostle forbids us to share in “the unfruitful works” of the gentiles, but the Apostle does not forbid us the share in their useful works.

Now there are two respects in which the adoration of images is to be counted among the unfruitful works. First, because some individuals were adoring the images themselves as certain things, believing that there was something divine (*aliquid numinis*) in them—this because of the answers that the demons used to give from within them, along with other remarkable effects. Second, because of the things of which these were the images; for the gentiles erected the images to certain creatures, which they venerated in the images with a veneration of worship (*veneratione latriae venerabantur*).

We, on the other hand, adore with the adoration of worship (*adoratione latriae*) the image of Christ, who is the true God—and we adore not because of the image itself, but, as has been explained, but because of the reality whose image it is.

Reply to objection 3: Reverence is owed to a rational creature for its own sake. And so if the adoration of worship (*adoratione latriae*) were shown to a rational creature, in whom there is an image of* God*, there could be an occasion for error, viz., that the movement of the one adoring would stop at the man insofar as he is a certain thing and not carry through to God, whose image he is. This cannot happen in the case of a sculpted or painted image in insensible material.

Reply to objection 4: The apostles, familiar with the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, handed down to the Churches certain [practices] to be preserved which they did not leave in writing but which have been ordained in the Church’s observance through the succession of the faithful over time. Hence, in 2 Thessalonians 2:15 the Apostle himself says, “Stand firm and hold on to the traditions which you have learned, whether by word”—that is, by word of mouth—“or by letter”—that is, by letter transmitted by writing. And among these traditions is the adoration of images of Christ. Hence, St. Luke himself is said to have painted an image of Christ that is kept in Rome.

Article 4

Should the cross of Christ be adored with the adoration of worship?

It seems that the cross of Christ should not be adored with the adoration of worship (*crux Christi non sit adoranda adoratione latriae*):

Objection 1: No pious child venerates what abuses his father (*contumeliam patris sui*), e.g., the whip by which he was scourged or the tree from which he was hanged; instead, he abhors it. But Christ suffered the most abusive death of all (*opprobriosissimam mortem*) on the wood of the cross—this according to Wisdom 2:20 (“Let us condemn him to the most unseemly death of all”). Therefore, we should not venerate the cross, but should instead abhor it.

Objection 2: Christ’s human nature is adored with the adoration of worship (*adoratione latriae*) insofar as it is united to the Son of God in a person. But this cannot be said of His cross. Therefore, the cross of Christ should not be adored with the adoration of worship.

Objection 3: Just as the cross of Christ was an instrument of His passion and death, so too were many other things, e.g., the nails, the crown [of thorns], and the lance. But we do not exhibit to them the cult of worship (*latriae cultum*). Therefore, it seems that the cross of Christ should not be adored with the adoration of worship (*adoratione latriae*).

But contrary to this: We exhibit the adoration of worship to that in which we place our hope for salvation. But we place our hope in the cross of Christ. For the Church sings:

Hail, O cross, our only hope (*O crux, ave, spes unica*),

At this time of the passion (*Hoc passionis tempore*)

Augment virtue for the holy (*Auge piis iustitiam*)

And to the guilty grant forgiveness (*Reisque dona veniam*).

Therefore, the cross of Christ is to be adored with the adoration of worship (*adoratione latriae*).

I respond: As was explained above (a. 3), honor or reverence is owed only to a rational creature, whereas honor or reverence is not owed to an insensible creature except by reason of a rational nature—and this in two ways. First, insofar as [the insensible creature] *represents* a rational nature; and, second, insofar as [the insensible creature] *is in some way connected* to a rational nature. In the first way, men are accustomed to venerating the king’s image; in the second way, his vesture. In both cases, men venerate [the insensible creatures] with the same veneration that the king himself is venerated with.

If, therefore, we are speaking of the very cross on which Christ was crucified, it is to be venerated by us in both ways, viz., in the one way, insofar as it represents to us the figure of Christ extended on it, and in the second way, because of its contact with the limbs of Christ and the fact that it was saturated with His blood. Hence, in both ways it is adored with the same adoration that Christ is adored with, viz., the adoration of worship (*adoratione latriae*). And for this reason we likewise address the cross and pray to it as to the one crucified Himself.

On the other hand, if we are speaking of a likeness of the cross of Christ in some other sort of material, e.g., stone or wood, silver or gold, then we venerate the cross only as an image of Christ, which, as was explained above (a. 3), we venerate with the adoration of worship (*adoratione latriae*).

Reply to objection 1: From the perspective of the opinion or understanding of non-believers, what is thought of in the cross of Christ is the abuse of Christ, but as regards its effect on our salvation, what is thought of in the cross of Christ is the divine power by which it triumphed over the enemy—this according to Colossians 2:14-15 (“... this He set aside, nailing it to the cross; and despoiling the principalities and powers, He has exposed them confidently in open show, triumphing over them in Himself”). And this is why in 1 Corinthians 1:18 the Apostle says, “The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

Reply to objection 2: Even though the cross of Christ was not united to the Word of God in a person, it was nonetheless united to Him in another manner, viz., by representation and by contact. And for this reason alone reverence is shown to it.

Reply to objection 3: As regards the notion of contact with the limbs of Christ, we adore not only the cross but also all the things that belong to Christ. Hence, in *De Fide Orthodoxa* 4 Damascene says, “The most precious wood, as sanctified by contact with His holy body and blood, should be appropriately worshiped; along with the nails, the lance, and His sacred dwelling-places.”

However, these latter things do not represent Christ in the way that the cross does. For in Matthew 24:30 the cross is called “the sign of the Son of Man,” which “will appear in the heavens.” And this is why the angel said to the women, “You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified.” He did not say, “... who was pierced by a lance,” but “... who was crucified.” And this is why we venerate the image of the cross of Christ in any sort of material, but not the image of the nails or of anything of that sort.

Article 5

Is the mother of God to be adored with the adoration of worship?

It seems that the mother of God is to be adored with the adoration of worship (*mater Dei sit adoranda adoratione latriae*):

Objection 1: The same honor should be shown to the mother of the king as to the king; hence, 3 Kings 2:19 says, “A throne was set for the king’s mother, and she sat at his right hand.” And in a sermon *De Assumptione* Augustine says, “It is right for the throne of God, the dwelling-place of the Lord of heaven, and the tabernacle of Christ to be where He is.” But Christ is adored with the adoration of worship (*adoratione latriae*). Therefore, so is His mother.

Objection 2: In *De Fide Orthodoxa* 4 Damascene says, “The honor of the mother is traced to her Son.” But the Son is adored with the adoration of worship (*adoratione latriae*). Therefore, so is His mother.

Objection 3: Christ’s mother is connected to Christ more closely than the cross is. But the cross is adored with the adoration of worship (*adoratione latriae*). Therefore, His mother should likewise be adored with the same sort of adoration.

But contrary to this: The mother of God is a pure creature. Therefore, she is not owed the adoration of worship (*adoratione latriae*).

I respond: Since worship (*latria*) is owed to God alone, it is not owed to a creature in the sense of our venerating the creature in its own right (*prout creaturam secundum se veneramus*). Now even though insensible creatures are not susceptible to being venerated in their own right, a rational creature is indeed susceptible to being venerated in its own right. And so no mere rational creature is owed the cult of worship (*cultus latriae*).

Therefore, since the Blessed Virgin is a merely rational creature, she is owed not the adoration of worship (*adoratione latriae*), but only the veneration of honor (*veneratio duliae*), and yet in a more eminent way than other creatures, insofar as she is the mother of God. And this is why it is said that she is owed *dulia* not of just any sort, but *hyperdulia*.

Reply to objection 1: The mother of the king is not owed honor that is equal to the honor that is owed to the king. Yet she is owed a somewhat similar honor by reason of a certain excellence. And this is what the cited passages mean.

Reply to objection 2: The honor of the mother is traced to the Son in the sense that the mother herself is to be honored because of her Son—but not in the way in which the honor of an image is traced to its exemplar. For the image itself, insofar as it is thought of in itself as a certain thing, is not to be venerated in any way.

Reply to objection 3: As has been explained, insofar as the cross is thought of in its own right, it is not susceptible to being honored. By contrast, the Blessed Virgin is susceptible to being venerated in her own right. And so the arguments are not parallel.

Article 6

Are the relics of the saints to be adored in any way?

It seems that the relics of the saints are not to be adored in any way at all (*sanctorum reliquiae nullo modo sint adorandae*):

Objection 1: A given thing should not be done if it can be an occasion of error. But adoring the relics of dead individuals seems to involve the error of the gentiles, who used to bestow honors on dead men. Therefore, the relics of the saints should not be honored.

Objection 2: It seems foolish to venerate insensible things. But the relics of the saints are insensible. Therefore, it is foolish to venerate them.

Objection 3: The dead body does not belong to the same species as the living body and, as a result, is not numerically the same as the living body. Therefore, it seems that after the death of a given saint, his body should not be adored.

But contrary to this: In the book *De Ecclesiasticis Dogmatibus* it says, “We believe that the bodies of the saints, and especially the relics of saintly martyrs, should be most sincerely adored as if they are parts of Christ.” And later it adds, “If anyone wishes to take a stance against this position, then he is not accounted a Christian, but a follower of Eunomius and Vigilantius.”

I respond: As Augustine says in *De Civitate Dei*, “If a father’s coat or ring, or anything else of that sort, is more dear to his children the greater their affection for their parents, there is no way that their bodies themselves are going to be despised, since we love those bodies in a much more intimate way and in a way more closely united to us than any pieces of clothing; for the bodies belong to the very nature of a human being.” From this it is clear that one who has an affection for an individual likewise venerates those things of his that are left behind after his death—not only his body or parts of his body, but also exteriors such as clothes and similar things.

Now it is clear that we ought to hold the saints of God in veneration as members of Christ, as children of God, and as our friends and intercessors. And so, in memory of them, we ought to venerate their relics of whatever kind with a fitting sort of honor—and especially their bodies, which (a) were the temple of the Holy Spirit and the organs of the Holy Spirit, who lived and operated in them, and which (b) are going to be configured to the body of Christ through the glory of the resurrection. Hence, even God Himself honors relics of this sort in a fitting way by working miracles in their presence.

Reply to objection 1: This was the argument of Vigilantius, whose words Jerome cited in the book that he wrote against him. Vigilantius says, “We see something like a gentile rite introduced under the pretext of religion; they worship with kisses I know not what tiny heap of dust in an ordinary vase covered with precious linen.” In *Epistola ad Riparium*, Jerome replies to this: “We do not *adore*”—i.e., with the adoration of worship (*adoratione latriae*)—“I do not say just the relics of the martyrs, but the sun or the moon or the angels, either. But we do *honor* the servants in such a way that the honor of the servants redounds upon our Lord.”

So, then, in honoring the relics of the saints we do not fall into the error of the gentiles, who bestowed the cult of worship (*cultus latriae*) upon dead men.

Reply to objection 2: We adore an insensible thing not for its own sake, but (a) because of the soul which is connected to the insensible thing and which now enjoys God, and (b) because of God, whose ministers [the saints] were.

Reply to objection 3: The dead body of a saint is not numerically the same as what it first was when it was alive—and this because of the diversity in the *form*, which is the [rational] soul—but it is the same by an identity of the *matter*, which is once again going to be united to its form.