

## QUESTION 34

### The Perfection of the Conceived Child

Next we have to consider the perfection of the conceived child (*de perfectione prolis conceptae*). And on this topic there are four questions: (1) Was Christ sanctified by grace in the first instant of His conception? (2) Did Christ have the use of free choice in that same instant? (3) Was Christ able to merit in that same instant? (4) Was Christ fully a comprehender in that same instant?

#### Article 1

##### Was Christ sanctified [by grace] in the first instant of His conception?

It seems that Christ was not sanctified [by grace] in the first instant of His conception (*Christus non fuerit sanctificatus in primo instanti suae conceptionis*):

**Objection 1:** 1 Corinthians 15:46 says, “What is spiritual is not first, but what is animal and then what is spiritual.” But sanctification by grace belongs to what is spiritual (*pertinet ad spiritualitatem*). Therefore, it was not immediately at the beginning of His conception that Christ received the grace of sanctification, but after a period of time.

**Objection 2:** Sanctification seems to follow after sin (*videtur esse a peccato*)—this according to 1 Corinthians 6:11 (“And this is what you were at one time”—viz., sinners—“but you have been washed, have been sanctified”). But in Christ there was never sin. Therefore, it was not fitting for Him to be sanctified by grace.

**Objection 3:** Just as all things were made through the Word of God, so all men who are sanctified are sanctified through the Incarnate Word—this according to Hebrews 2:11 (“Both He who sanctifies and they who are sanctified are all from one”). But as Augustine puts it in *De Trinitate* 1, “The Word of God, through whom all things were made, was not made.” Therefore, Christ, through whom all are sanctified, was not sanctified.

**But contrary to this:** Luke 1:35 says, “The holy one to be born of you will be called the Son of God.” And John 10:36 says, “... whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world.”

**I respond:** As was explained above (q. 7, aa. 9-10 and 12), the abundance of grace that sanctifies Christ’s soul flows from His very union with the Word—this according to John 1:14 (“We have seen His glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and of truth”). But it was shown above (q. 33, aa. 2-3) that in the first instant of its conception Christ’s body was animated [by a rational soul] and was assumed by the Word of God. Hence, it follows that in the first instant of His conception Christ had the fullness of grace sanctifying His soul and His body.

**Reply to objection 1:** The ordering that the Apostle posits here is relevant to those who arrive *progressively* at the spiritual state. However, in the mystery of the Incarnation one thinks more of the *descent* of divine fullness upon a human nature than of the progress of, as it were, a preexistent human nature toward God. And so in the man Christ there was a perfect and complete spiritual state from the beginning (*in homine Christo a principio fuit perfecta spiritualitas*).

**Reply to objection 2:** For something to be sanctified (*sanctificari*) is for it to come to be holy (*fieri sanctum*). But something comes to be such-and-such not only from a *contrary* opposite, but also from a *negative* or *privative* opposite—just as something comes to be white both from what is black and also from what is non-white.

Now we ourselves come to be holy from having been sinners, and so our sanctification comes to be from sinfulness (*et ita sanctificatio nostra est ex peccato*). But Christ as a man came to be holy because He had never had this sort of holiness of grace, and yet it is not the case that He came to be holy from

having been a *sinner*, since He had never had sin. Instead, He came to be holy from being *non-holy as a man*—not, to be sure, *privatively*, in the sense that He was at one time a man without being holy, but instead *negatively*, in the sense that when He was not [yet] a man, He did not have human holiness. And so He simultaneously came to be a *man* and a *holy man*.

It was for this reason that in Luke 1:33 the angel said, “... the holy one to be born of you ...” While explaining this passage in *Moralia* 38 Gregory says, “In order to distinguish our holiness from His, it is asserted that Jesus is going to be born holy. For even if we *come to be* holy, we are nonetheless not *born* holy, because we are constrained by the very condition of a corruptible nature. By contrast, He alone is truly born holy, because He was not conceived by the union of carnal intercourse.”

**Reply to objection 3:** The Father effects the creation of things through the Son in a way different from the way in which the whole Trinity effects the sanctification of men through the man Christ. For the Word of God shares the same power and action with the Father, and so the Father does not act through the Son as through an instrument that effects movement insofar as it itself is moved (*sicut per instrumentum quod movet motum*). By contrast, as was explained above (q. 2, aa. 6-8 and q. 18, a. 1), Christ’s human nature is indeed like an instrument of the divine nature. And that is why Christ’s human nature both sanctifies and is sanctified.

## Article 2

### Did Christ as a man have the use of free choice in the first instant of His conception?

It seems that Christ as a man did not have the use of free choice in the first instant of His conception (*Christus secundum hominem non habuerit usum liberi arbitrii in primo instanti suae conceptionis*):

**Objection 1:** An entity’s *esse* is prior to its acting or operating (*est esse rei quam agere vel operari*). But the use of free choice is a certain operation. Therefore, since, as is clear from what was said above (q. 33, a. 2), Christ’s soul began to exist in the first instant of His conception, it seems to be impossible for Him to have had the use of free choice in the first instant of His conception.

**Objection 2:** The use of free choice (*usus liberi arbitrii*) is an act of choosing (*electio*). But an act of choosing presupposes the deliberation of counsel; for in *Ethics* 3 the Philosopher says that an act of choosing is “an act of desiring what has been previously deliberated.” Therefore, it seems impossible for Christ to have had the use of free choice in the first instant of His conception.

**Objection 3:** As was established in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 83, a. 2), free choice is “a power belonging to the will and to reason (*facultas voluntatis et rationis*),” and so the use of free choice is an act that belongs to the will and to reason, i.e., to the intellect. But an act of the intellect presupposes an act of the sensory power (*presupponit actum sensus*), which cannot exist without the concurrence of organs that do not seem to have existed in the first instant of Christ’s conception. Therefore, it seems that Christ was unable to have the use of free choice in the first instant of His conception.

**But contrary to this:** In *De Trinitate* Augustine says, “As soon as the Word entered the womb, while retaining the reality of His [divine] nature, He was made flesh and a complete man (*factum est caro et perfectus homo*).” But a complete man has the use of free choice. Therefore, Christ had the use of free choice in the first instant of His conception.

**I respond:** As was explained above (a. 1), it was fitting for the human nature assumed by Christ to have a spiritual perfection which it had not made progress toward but which it possessed immediately from the beginning. Now the ultimate perfection consists not in a power or a habit, but in an action (*in*

*operatione*); hence, *De Anima 2* says that action is “a second actuality (*actus secundus*).” And so one should respond that in the first instant of His conception Christ had that action of the soul which can be had in an instant. But such is the action, belonging to the will and the intellect, that the use of free choice consists in. For the action of the will and the intellect is completed immediately and in an instant (*subito et in instanti perficitur*)—much more so than a bodily act of seeing—because neither understanding (*intelligere*), nor willing (*velle*), nor thinking (*sentire*) is a movement belonging to an incomplete act that is completed successively; instead, as *De Anima 3* explains, each of them is an already completed act. And so one should respond that in the first instant of His conception Christ had the use of free choice.

**Reply to objection 1:** *Esse* is prior *in nature* to acting, but it is not prior *in time*; instead, as soon as an agent has complete and perfect *esse*, it begins to act unless something impedes it. For instance, as soon as a fire is generated, it begins to give heat and light. Now heating is terminated not in an instant, but through a succession of times. By contrast, illuminating is completed in an instant and, as has been explained, the use of free choice is an action of this latter sort.

**Reply to objection 2:** As soon as counsel or deliberation ends, there can be an act of choosing. Now it is at the very termination of counsel that those who need the deliberation of counsel first have certitude about what is to be chosen, and so they choose immediately. From this it is clear that the deliberation of counsel is a prerequisite for choosing only in order to look into what is uncertain. But just as Christ had the fullness of justifying grace in the first instant of His conception, so He had the fullness of known truth—this according to John 1:14 (“... the fullness of grace and of truth”). Hence, having, as it were, certitude about everything, He was able to choose immediately in that instant.

**Reply to objection 3:** As was explained above (q. 11, a. 2), Christ’s intellect was, in accord with His infused knowledge, able to have an act of understanding even without turning itself toward phantasms. Hence, it was possible for there to exist in Him an action of the intellect and will without any operation on the part of the sensory power.

Still, at the first instant of His conception there could have also been an operation of the sensory power, especially with respect to the sense of touch, since, as it says in *De Generatione Animalium*, a conceived child senses by the sense of touch within his mother even before he receives a rational soul. Hence, since Christ had a rational soul in the first instant of His conception, when His body was already formed and organized, *a fortiori* He could have had an operation of the sense of touch in that same instant.

### Article 3

#### Was Christ able to merit in the first instant of His conception?

It seems that Christ was not able to merit in the first instant of His conception (*Christus in primo instanti suae conceptionis mereri non potuerit*):

**Objection 1:** Free choice is related to meriting in the same way that it is related to demeriting. But as was established in the First Part (*ST 1*, q. 63, a. 5), in the first instant of his creation, the devil was not able to sin. Therefore, neither was Christ’s soul able to merit in the first instant of its creation, which was [also] the first instant of Christ’s conception.

**Objection 2:** What a man has in the first instant of his conception seems to be natural to him, since this is something that his natural generation terminates in. But as is clear from what was said in the Second Part (*ST 1-2*, q. 109, a. 5 and q. 114, a. 2), we do not merit by means of anything natural. Therefore, it seems that the use of free choice that Christ had as a man in the first instant of His

conception was not meritorious.

**Objection 3:** What an individual merits at a given time is such that at that time he in some sense makes it his own, and so it does not seem that he can merit that same thing again; for no one merits what already belongs to him. Therefore, if Christ merited in the first instant of His conception, it follows that He did not merit anything afterwards. But this is clearly false. Therefore, it is not the case that Christ merited in the first instant of His conception.

**But contrary to this:** In commenting on Exodus 40 Augustine says, “As regards the merit belonging to His soul, Christ did not have anything in which He could have made progress.” But He would have been able to make progress in merit if He had not merited in the first instant of His conception. Therefore, Christ merited in the first instant of His conception.

**I respond:** As was explained above (a. 1), in the first instant of His conception Christ was sanctified through grace. But there are two kinds of sanctification. One is the sanctification of adults, who are sanctified in accord with their own act [of faith], whereas the other is the sanctification of children, who are sanctified in accord with the faith of their parents or of the Church and not in accord with their own act of faith. Now the first kind of sanctification is more perfect than the second kind, in the way that an act is more perfect than a habit, and in the way that what is such-and-such in its own right (*per se*) is more perfect than what is such-and-such through another (*per aliud*).

Therefore, since Christ’s sanctification was the most perfect of all—because He was sanctified in such a way as to be the sanctifier of others—it follows that He was sanctified in accord with His own movement of free choice toward God. But this sort of movement of free choice is meritorious. Therefore, it follows that Christ merited in the first instant of His conception.

**Reply to objection 1:** Free choice is not related in the same way to what is good and to what is bad; for it is related in its own right and naturally (*per se et naturaliter*) to what is good, whereas it is related to what is bad in the manner of a defect and outside of nature (*per modum defectus et praeter naturam*). As the Philosopher explains in *De Caelo* 2, “What lies outside of nature is posterior to what is in accord with nature, because what lies outside of nature is a sort of piece cut out from what is in accord with nature (*quaedam excisio ab eo quod secundum naturam*).” And so in the first instant of its creation—and as long as its nature is intact (*si tamen natura sit integra*)—a creature’s free choice can be moved toward what is good while meriting, but not toward what is bad by sinning.

**Reply to objection 2:** What a man has at the beginning of his creation according to the common course of nature is natural to a man, but there is nothing to prevent a creature at the beginning of his creation from receiving a gift of grace from God. And it is in this way that at the beginning of its creation Christ’s soul received grace by means of which it could merit. And as is clear from Augustine in *Enchiridion*, it is for this reason that, according to a certain likeness, this particular grace is called *natural* to this particular man.

**Reply to objection 3:** There is nothing to prevent the same thing from belonging to someone from diverse causes. Accordingly, the glory of immortality, which Christ merited in the first instant of His conception, was likewise such that He was able to merit it by His later actions and sufferings—not, to be sure, in the sense that more [merit] was due to Him, but in the sense that [the same merit] was due to Him from diverse causes.

#### Article 4

##### Was Christ a perfect comprehender in the first instant of His conception?

It seems that Christ was not a perfect comprehender in the first instant of His conception (*Christus non fuerit perfectus comprehensor in primo instanti suae conceptionis*):

**Objection 1:** Merit precedes the reward in the same way that sin precedes the punishment. But as has been explained (a. 3), Christ merited in the first instant of His conception. Therefore, since the status of comprehender is the principal reward, it seems that Christ was not a comprehender in the first instant of His conception.

**Objection 2:** In Luke 24:26 our Lord says, “It was necessary that the Christ should suffer and so enter into His glory.” But glory involves the state of comprehending. Therefore, Christ was not a comprehender in the first instant of His conception, when He had not yet undergone any suffering.

**Objection 3:** What is not fitting for man or angel seems to be proper to God, and so it is not fitting for Christ as a man. But to be always beatified is not fitting for either man or angel; for if they had been beatified when they were created, they would not have sinned afterwards. Therefore, Christ as a man was not beatified in the first instant of His conception.

**But contrary to this:** Psalm 64:5 says, “Blessed is he whom you have chosen and taken up”—which, according to a Gloss, refers to Christ’s human nature, which was assumed by the Word of God into a oneness of person. But His human nature was assumed by the Word of God in the first instant of its conception. Therefore, in the first instant of His conception Christ as a man was beatified. And this is what it is to be a comprehender.

**I respond:** As is clear from what was said above (a. 3), it was not fitting for Christ to receive just *habitual* grace at His conception, without its *action*. Instead, as was established above (q. 7, a. 11), He received grace “without measure” (John 3:34). But since the grace of a *wayfarer* (*gratia viatoris*) falls short of the grace of a *comprehender* (*gratia comprehensoris*), it has a lesser measure than the grace of a comprehender. Hence, it is clear that in the first instant of His conception Christ received not only a grace as great as comprehenders have, but also a grace greater than all comprehenders. And since that grace did not exist without its full action (*non fuit sine actu*), it follows that He was a comprehender in actuality, seeing God through His essence more clearly than other creatures.

**Reply to objection 1:** As was explained above (q. 19, a. 3), Christ did not merit the glory of the *soul*, in accord with which He is called a comprehender. Instead, He merited the glory of the *body*, which He arrived at through His passion.

**Reply to objection 2:** From this the reply to the second objection is clear.

**Reply to objection 3:** By the fact that Christ was both God and man, Christ had something in preference to other creatures even in His human nature, viz., that He was beatified immediately from the beginning.