

QUESTION 52

Christ's Descent into Hell

Next we have to consider Christ's descent into hell (*de descensu Christi ad inferos*). And on this topic there are eight questions: (1) Was it fitting for Christ to descend into hell? (2) Which region of hell did He descend into (*in quem infernum descenderit*)? (3) Was the whole Christ in hell? (4) Did He stay there for some length of time (*utrum aliquam moram ibi contraxerit*)? (5) Did He liberate the saintly ancestors (*sanctos patres*) from hell? (6) Did He liberate the damned from hell? (7) Did He liberate children who had died in original sin? (8) Did He liberate human beings from purgatory?

Article 1

Was it fitting for Christ to descend into hell?

It seems that it was not fitting for Christ to descend into hell (*non fuerit conveniens Christum ad infernum descendere*):

Objection 1: In *Epistola ad Evodium* Augustine says, "And I have been unable to find any place in the Scriptures where hell itself (*ipsos inferos*) is called something good (*in bono appellatos*).” But Christ's soul did not descend into anything bad, since not even the souls of the just descend into something bad. Therefore, it seems that it was not fitting for Christ to descend into hell.

Objection 2: Descending into hell cannot be fitting for Christ with respect to His divine nature, which is altogether without movement (*est omnino immobilis*); instead, it is fitting for Him only with respect to His assumed nature. But whatever Christ did or underwent in His assumed nature is ordered toward human salvation, and it does not seem to have been necessary for human salvation that Christ should descend into hell. For as was explained above (q. 49, aa. 1 and 3), through His passion, which He endured in *this* world, He had [already] liberated us from sin and punishment. Therefore, it was not fitting for Christ to descend into hell.

Objection 3: As was established above (q. 51), through Christ's death His soul was separated from His body, which had been placed in the sepulcher. But it does not seem that He descended into hell with respect to His soul alone, since the soul, given that it is incorporeal, does not seem to be able to move from place to place (*non videtur quod localiter possit moveri*); for as is proved in *Physics* 6, this belongs to bodies, and descent involves a corporeal movement. Therefore, it was not fitting for Christ to descend into hell.

But contrary to this: In the creed it says, "He descended into hell." And in Ephesians 4:9 the Apostle says, "Now this, 'He ascended', what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower regions of the earth?" A Gloss adds: "that is, into hell (*ad inferos*)."

I respond: It was fitting for Christ to descend into hell:

First of all, He had come to bear our punishment in order to free us from punishment—this according to Isaiah 53:4 ("Surely, he has borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows"). But by sin man had incurred not only the death of the body, but also the descent into hell. And so just as it was fitting for Him to die in order to liberate us from death, so it was fitting for Him to descend into hell in order to liberate us from our descent into hell. Hence, Hosea 13:14 says, "O death, I will be your death; O hell, I will be your bite."

Second, because it was fitting that since the devil was conquered by His passion, Christ would take away those whom the devil had conquered and who were being held in hell—this according to Zachariah 9:11 ("You have also, because of the blood of your covenant, set free from the pit those of your people who had been conquered"). And Colossians 2:15 says, "Despoiling the principalities and powers, He has exposed them confidently."

Third, in order that just as He showed His power on earth by living and dying, so, too, He would show His power in hell by visiting it and lighting it up; hence, Psalm 23:7 and 9 says, “Lift up your gates, you princes” —Gloss: “that is, you princes of hell, give up the power by which until now you have been detaining men in hell.” And so, as Philippians 2:10 says, “At the name of Jesus every knee should bend,” not only “of those in heaven,” but also “of those in hell.”

Reply to objection 1: The name ‘hell’ (*infernus*) stands for an evil of punishment (*malum poenae*), but not for an evil of sin or fault (*malum culpae*). Hence, it was fitting for Christ to descend into hell, not in the sense that He Himself deserved punishment, but in order that He might liberate those who were liable to punishment.

Reply to objection 2: Christ’s passion was a sort of universal cause of human salvation, both of the living and of the dead. Now a universal cause is applied to singular effects through something specific. Hence, just as the power of Christ’s passion is applied to the living through the sacraments that configure us to Christ’s passion, so, too, it was applied to the dead through Christ’s descent into hell. It is because of this that Zachariah 9:11 explicitly says, “He led those who had been conquered out of the pit in the blood of His covenant,” i.e., through the power of His passion.

Reply to objection 3: Christ’s soul descended into hell not by the same kind of movement by which bodies move, but by the kind of movement by which angels move, as this was explained in the First Part (*ST* 1 q. 53, a. 1).

Article 2

Did Christ descend even into the hell of the damned?

It seems that Christ descended even into the hell of the damned (*Christus descenderit etiam ad infernum damnatorum*):

Objection 1: From the mouth of divine wisdom, Ecclesiasticus 24:45 says, “I will penetrate all the lower regions of the earth.” But the hell of the damned is counted among the lower regions of the earth—this according to Psalm 62:10 (“They will go into the lower regions of the earth”). Therefore, Christ, who is the Wisdom of God, descended all the way to the hell of the damned as well.

Objection 2: In Acts 2:24 Peter says, “God has raised Christ up, having loosed the sorrows of hell, because it was not possible that He should be held fast by it.” But there were no sorrows in the hell of the ancestors or, again, in the hell of children, who are not punished by the pain of the senses (*poena sensus*) for any actual sins, but are instead punished only by the pain of loss (*poena damni*) because of original sin. Therefore, Christ descended into the hell of the damned—or into purgatory as well—where men are punished by the pain of the senses for their actual sins.

Objection 3: 1 Peter 3:19-20 says, “Coming in spirit, He preached to those who were in prison and who had at one time been disbelieving”—which, as Athanasius explains in *Epistola ad Epictetum*, has to do with Christ’s descent into hell. For, he says, “Christ’s body was in the sepulcher when He went to preach to those spirits who were in prison, as Peter says.” But it is clear that the disbelievers were in the hell of the damned. Therefore, Christ descended into the hell of the damned.

Objection 4: As Augustine says in *Epistola ad Evodium*, “If Sacred Scripture had said that the dead Christ came into the bosom of Abraham, without naming hell or its sorrows, I wonder whether anyone would dare to assert that He had descended into hell. But since evident testimonies mention hell and its sorrows, there is no reason for believing that the savior went there except to save them from the same sorrows.” But the place of sorrows is the hell of the damned. Therefore, Christ descended into the hell of the damned.

Objection 5: As Augustine puts it in a certain sermon on Christ's passion, by descending into hell "Christ let loose all the just who were bound by original sin." But among them is Job, who says of himself in Job 17:16, "All that I have shall go down into the very depths of hell (*in profundissima inferni*)."

Therefore, Christ likewise descended into the very depths of hell. **But contrary to this:** Concerning the hell of the damned Job 10:21 says, "... before I go, and return no more, to a land that is dark and covered with the mist of death." But as 2 Corinthians 6:14 explains, there is no "fellowship of light with darkness." Therefore Christ, who is the light, did not descend into the hell of the damned.

I respond: There are two ways for a thing to be said to be somewhere:

In one way, *through its effect*. And in this sense Christ descended into each region of hell (*in quemlibet infernum descendit*), though in different ways. For instance, in the case of the hell of the damned, His descending into hell had the effect of putting the individuals to shame for their malice and lack of faith (*habuit hunc effectum quod, descendens ad inferos, eos de sua incredulitate et malitia confutavit*). On the other hand, in the case of those who were being detained in purgatory, He gave them the hope of attaining glory. Again, in the case of the saintly ancestors (*sancti patres*), who were being detained in hell because of original sin alone, he infused into them the light of eternal glory.

In the second way, a thing is said to be somewhere *through its essence*. And in this sense Christ's soul descended only to the place in hell in which the righteous were being detained, with the result that those whom He visited interiorly through grace, He also visited in place with His soul.

So while He was visiting one region of hell, He spread His effect in some way to every region of hell—just as, while suffering in one location on earth, He liberated the whole world by His passion.

Reply to objection 1: Christ, who is the Wisdom of God, "penetrated all the lower regions of the earth" (Ecclesiasticus 24:45)—not locally, i.e., not by surrounding all things with His soul, but instead by extending the effect of His power in some way to everyone. Still, He did this in such a way as to bring light only to the righteous; for what follows [in the same verse] is this: "I will enlighten all who hope in the Lord."

Reply to objection 2: There are two sorts of sorrow.

One has to do with the *suffering of a punishment* that men undergo for their *actual* sins—this according to Psalm 17:6 ("The sorrows of hell have surrounded me").

The second sort of sorrow has to do with the *delay of hoped-for glory*—this according to Proverbs 13:12 ("Hope that is deferred afflicts the soul"). The saintly ancestors suffered this latter sort of sorrow in hell. To signify this, Augustine, in a sermon on the passion, says that "they prayed to Christ with tearful supplication."

Now by descending into hell Christ relieved both sorts of sorrow, though in different ways. For He relieved the pains or sorrows of punishment by keeping them away, in the way that a physician is said to relieve an illness with medicine. By contrast, the sorrows caused by the delay of glory He dissolved directly (*actualiter*) by bestowing glory [on the individuals].

Reply to objection 3: What Peter says here is referred by some to Christ's descent into hell, where they explain the passage as follows: "To those who were in prison," i.e., in hell, "and who at one time had been disbelieving, Christ preached, coming in spirit," i.e., with His soul. Hence, in *De Fide Orthodoxa* Damascene says, "Just as He preached the gospel to those who lived on earth, so, too, He preached it to those who were in hell"—not, to be sure, in order to convert disbelievers to the Faith, but "in order to put their unbelief to shame." For the preaching itself cannot be understood to be anything other than the manifestation of His divinity, which was made manifest to those in hell by His descending in power into hell.

However, in *Epistola ad Evodium*, Augustine gives a better explanation, viz., that the passage refers not to Christ's descent into hell, but to an operation of His divine nature which He had exercised from the

beginning of the world—so that the meaning is that “to those who were in prison,” i.e., living in the mortal body, which is a sort of prison of the soul, “coming in the spirit” of His divine nature, “He preached” through interior inspirations and also through exterior admonitions from the mouths of the righteous. “He preached to those,” I repeat, “who were at one time disbelieving,” viz., disbelieving what Noah was preaching, “when they were hoping for God’s patience,” through which the punishment of the flood might be deferred. This is why [Peter] adds, “... in the days of Noah, when the ark was being built.”

Reply to objection 4: There are two ways in which bosom of Abraham can be thought of:

In one way, in accord with *the repose from sensible punishment that exists there*. And on this score, the name ‘hell’ does not belong to it, and there are no sorrows there.

In the second way, it can thought of as involving *a privation of the hoped for glory*. And on this score, the bosom of Abraham has the character of hell and sorrow.

And so what is now called the bosom of Abraham is the repose that belongs to the blessed in heaven (*requies beatorum*). And it is not called ‘hell’, nor are sorrows said to exist in the bosom of Abraham.

Reply to objection 5: As Gregory says in commenting on the same passage, “He is calling the higher regions themselves of hell ‘the deepest hell’. For if in relation to the height of the heavens this gloomy atmosphere is hell, then relative to the height of this same atmosphere, the earth lying beneath it can be thought of as hell and as the abyss (*profundum*). But as regards the depth of this same earth, those regions of hell that are higher than the other regions of hell (*superiora sunt aliis receptaculis inferni*) may in this sense be signified by the name ‘the deepest hell’.”

Article 3

Was the whole Christ in hell?

It seems that the whole Christ was not in hell (*Christus non fuit totus in inferno*):

Objection 1: Christ’s body is a part of Him. But Christ’s body was not in hell. Therefore, it is not the case that the whole Christ was in hell.

Objection 2: Nothing whose parts are separated from one another can be called a whole. But as has been explained (q. 30, aa. 3-4), [Christ’s] body and soul, which are the parts of His human nature, were separated from one another after His death. But He descended into hell while He was dead. Therefore, He could not have been in hell as a whole.

Objection 3: If a thing is said to be in a place as a whole, then nothing of it exists outside of that place. But something of Christ existed outside of hell, since His body was in the sepulcher and His divine nature was everywhere. Therefore, Christ was not in hell as a whole.

But contrary to this: In *De Symbolo* Augustine says, “The Son is wholly with the Father, wholly in heaven, wholly on earth, wholly in the virgin’s womb, wholly on the cross, wholly in hell, wholly in the paradise to which He brought the thief.”

I respond: As is clear from what was said in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 31, a. 2, ad 4), the masculine gender [i.e., ‘he’] refers to the *person* or *hypostasis*, whereas the neuter gender [i.e., ‘it’] belongs to the *nature*. Now as was explained above (q. 50, aa. 2-3), even though the soul was separated from the body in Christ’s death, nonetheless, neither of them was separated from the person of the Son of God. And so in the case of the triduum of Christ’s death, one should claim that (a) the whole Christ was in the sepulcher, since the whole person was there because of the body that was united to Him, and, similarly, (b) the whole Christ was in hell, since the whole person of Christ was there by reason of the soul that was united to Him, and, in addition, (c) that the whole Christ was at that time everywhere by reason of His

divine nature.

Reply to objection 1: The body which was at that time in the sepulcher was not a part of the uncreated person but a part of the assumed nature. And so the fact that Christ's body was not in hell does not rule out the whole Christ's being there. Instead, it shows that what was *not* there was the whole that pertains to the human nature (*totum quod pertinet ad humanam naturam*).

Reply to objection 2: It is the totality of the human nature that is built up from the united soul and body, not the totality of the divine person. And so even when the union of the soul and body is dissolved by death, the whole Christ remains, even though the human nature does not remain as a totality (*in sua totalitate*).

Reply to objection 3: The person of Christ exists as a whole in each place, but not totally in each place, since He is not circumscribed by any place. But neither is it the case that all places taken together can comprehend His immensity. Just the opposite, by His immensity He comprehends all things.

Now it is true (*habet locum*) in the case of those things that are corporeally and circumscriptively in a place that if the whole is somewhere, then nothing of it exists outside that place. But this is not true in the case of God. Hence, in *De Symbolo* Augustine says, "It is not with respect to diverse times or places that we say that the whole Christ is everywhere, as if He were at one time whole in one place and at another time whole in another place. Instead, we say that the whole Christ is everywhere in the sense that He is always everywhere as a whole."

Article 4

Did Christ stay in hell for any length of time?

It seems that Christ did not stay in hell for any length of time (*Christus nullam moram contraxit in inferno*):

Objection 1: Christ descended into hell in order to free men from it. But this was accomplished immediately upon His descent itself; for as Ecclesiasticus 11:23 says, "It is easy in the eyes of God to make a poor man rich all of a sudden." Therefore, it seems that Christ did not stay in hell for any length of time.

Objection 2: In a sermon on the passion Augustine says, "Without any delay, at the command of our Lord and savior, 'all the iron bars were broken' (Isaiah 45:2)." Hence, in the person of the angels who were accompanying Christ, Psalm 23:7 says, "Lift up your gates, you princes!" But Christ descended there in order to break the gates of hell. Therefore, Christ did not stay in hell for any length of time.

Objection 3: Luke 23:43 reports that while hanging on the cross, our Lord said to the thief, "This day you shall be with me in paradise"—from which it is clear that Christ was in paradise on that same day. But He was not there with His body, which had been placed in the sepulcher. Therefore, He was there with His soul, which had descended into hell. And so it seems that He did not stay in hell for any length of time.

But contrary to this: In Acts 2:24 Peter says, "... God raised Him up, with the sorrows of hell having been dissolved, because it was not possible for Him to be held by hell." Therefore, it seems that He remained in hell until the hour of the resurrection.

I respond: Just as Christ, in order to take our punishments upon Himself, wanted His body to be placed in the sepulcher, so, too, He wanted His soul to descend into hell. But His body remained in the sepulcher for a full day and two nighttimes in order to confirm the reality of His death. Hence, one should believe that His soul likewise stayed in hell for that same length of time (*tantundem*), in order that

His soul might leave hell at the same time that His body left the sepulcher.

Reply to objection 1: By descending into hell, Christ liberated the saintly individuals who existed there—not, to be sure, by immediately leading them out of the place of hell, but by immediately illuminating them with the light of glory in hell itself. And yet it was fitting for His soul to remain in hell for as long as His body remained in the sepulcher.

Reply to objection 2: What are called the ‘iron bars of hell’ signify obstacles that were preventing the saintly ancestors from leaving hell because of our first parent’s debt of sin. Christ broke those gates immediately upon descending into hell by the power of His passion and death. And yet, for the reasons explained above, He wanted to remain in hell for a certain length of time.

Reply to objection 3: These words of our Lord should be thought of having to do not with a corporeal and terrestrial paradise, but with a spiritual paradise in which all those who are thoroughly enjoying the divine glory are said to exist. Hence, the thief descended into hell with Christ in order to be with Christ. For it was said to him, “... you will be with me in paradise,” but because of his reward he *was* in paradise, since he was in that place enjoying Christ’s divinity, as were the other saintly individuals.

Article 5

Did Christ, by descending into hell, liberate the saintly ancestors from hell?

It seems that by descending into hell Christ did not liberate the saintly ancestors from hell (*Christus, descendens ad inferos, sanctos patres inde non liberaverit*):

Objection 1: In *Epistola ad Evodium* Augustine says, “I have not yet discovered what Christ, descending into hell, conferred on those righteous individuals who were in the bosom of Abraham, and I never see Him departing from them as regards the beatific presence of His divinity.” But He would have conferred much on them if He had been liberating them from hell. Therefore, it does not seem that Christ liberated the saintly ancestors from hell.

Objection 2: No one is detained in hell except because of sin. But as long as the saintly ancestors were still living [in this world], they had been justified from sin by their faith in the Christ. Therefore, they did not need to be liberated from hell when Christ descended into hell.

Objection 3: If the cause is removed, then the effect is removed. But as was explained above (q. 49, a. 1), the cause of [Christ’s] descending into hell was sin, which had been removed by Christ’s passion. Therefore, it is not the case that through Christ’s descent into hell the saintly ancestors were led out of hell.

But contrary to this: In a sermon on the passion Augustine explains that when Christ descended into hell, “He broke the gate and iron bars of hell” and released all those righteous individuals who were being held there, bound up by original sin.

I respond: As was explained above (a. 4, ad 2), when Christ descended into hell, He acted in the power of His passion. As was explained above (q. 49, aa. 1 and 3), through Christ’s passion the human race was liberated not only from sin, but also from the debt of punishment. Now there are two ways in which men had been bound by the debt of punishment:

In one way, because of the *actual* sin that each individual had committed in his own person.

In the other way, as Romans 5:12ff. explains, because of the *sin of the whole of human nature* that came down from the first parent to all human beings by their origin (*in omnes originaliter devenit*). As is clear from what is said in Genesis 2 and 3, the punishment for this sin is (a) corporeal death and (b) exclusion from the life of glory. For after the sin God banished the man from paradise—the man whom,

before the sin, God had threatened with death if he were to sin.

And so when Christ descended into hell, He absolved the saintly individuals of the debt by which they had been excluded from the life of glory and thus could not see God through His essence—which, as was explained in the Second Part (*ST* 1-2, q. 3, a. 8), is what perfect human beatitude consists in. Now the saintly ancestors were being detained in hell because entry into the life of glory was not open to them—and this because of the sin of the first parent. And so when Christ descended into hell, He liberated the saintly ancestors from hell. And this is what Zachariah 9:11 is talking about: “By the blood of Your covenant You led forth the prisoners from the pit in which there was no water.” Again, Colossians 2:15 says, “Despoiling the principalities and powers”—Gloss: ‘that is, [the principalities and powers] of hell, by releasing Isaac and Jacob and the rest of the righteous’—“He led them out”—Gloss: ‘that is, He led them far from this kingdom of darkness into heaven’.

Reply to objection 1: Augustine is speaking here against certain individuals who thought that the righteous individuals of old had, before the coming of Christ, been subject in hell to the sorrows of punishments. Hence, a little before the quoted passage, he began by saying, “Some add that this benefit was also bestowed on the saints of old, that upon the Lord’s coming into hell they were freed from their sufferings. But I do not see how Abraham, into whose bosom that pious poor man was received (Luke 16:22), should be understood to have been in such sufferings.” And so, when he later adds that he has not yet discovered what Christ’s descent into hell conferred on the holy ones of old, this should be understood as having to do with their being freed from the sorrows of punishment.

However, Christ *did* confer on them the attainment of glory and, as a result, he freed them from the sorrow that they were suffering because that glory was being delayed. Yet they derived great joy from their hope for glory—this according to John 8:56 (“Abraham, your father, rejoiced that he was to see my day”). And this is why [Augustine] adds, “I never see Him departing from them as regards the beatific presence of His divinity”—that is, even before Christ’s coming they were happy *in hope*, even though they were not yet completely happy *in reality*.

Reply to objection 2: While the saintly ancestors were still living [in this life], they had been freed through their faith in the Christ from every sin, both original and actual, and from the debt of punishment for their actual sins, but not from the debt of punishment for original sin. And because of this they were excluded from glory as long as the price of human salvation had not yet been paid—in the same way that even now Christ’s faithful ones are freed through baptism from the debt of actual sins and from the debt of original sin as regards the exclusion from glory, but nonetheless still remain bound by the debt of original sin as regards the necessity of bodily death. For they are renewed in their spirit, but not yet in their flesh—this according to Romans 8:10 (“The body, it is true, is dead by reason of sin, but the spirit lives because of justification”).

Reply to objection 3: Immediately upon Christ’s death, His soul descended into hell, and He showed the fruit of His passion to the saintly individuals who were being detained in hell—even though they did not exit from that place as long as Christ remained in hell, since Christ’s presence itself involved the fullness of glory (*pertinebat ad cumulum gloriae*).

Article 6

Did Christ liberate any of the damned from hell?

It seems that Christ liberated some of the damned from hell (*Christus aliquos damnatos ab inferno liberavit*):

Objection 1: Isaiah 24:22 says, “They will be gathered together in a gathering of one bundle in the

pit, and they will be shut up there in prison, and after many days they shall be visited.” But he is speaking here of the damned, “who had adored the army of heaven” (Jerome, *In Isaiam*). Therefore, it seems that even the damned were visited when Christ descended into hell. This seems to involve their being liberated.

Objection 2: Zachariah 9:11 says, “By the blood of Your covenant You led forth the prisoners from the pit in which there was no water.” A Gloss comments: “You have freed those who, having been conquered, were being held in prisons, where there was no mercy to refresh them which that rich man was seeking (Luke 16:22-24).” But only the damned are enclosed in prisons without mercy. Therefore, Christ liberated some of the damned.

Objection 3: Christ’s power was not less in hell than in this world, since in both cases He operated through the power of His divine nature. But in this world He liberated some individuals from every state. Therefore, in hell He likewise liberated even some who were in the state of the damned.

But contrary to this: Hosea 13:14 says, “O death, I will be your death; O hell, I will be your bite.” A Gloss comments, “By leading out the elect, but by leaving the reprobate in the same place.” But only the reprobate (*reprobi*) are in the hell of the damned. Therefore, no one was liberated from the hell of the damned by Christ’s descent into hell.

I respond: As was explained above (a. 4, ad 2 and a. 5), when Christ descended into hell, He operated by the power of His passion. And so His descent into hell conferred the fruit of liberation only on those who were conjoined to Christ’s passion by faith informed by charity, through which sins are taken away. By contrast, those who were in the hell of the damned either (a) had no faith at all in Christ’s passion, such as unbelievers, or (b) if they had faith, did not have any conformity to the charity of the suffering Christ. Hence, they had not been cleansed of their sins. And because of this, Christ’s descent did not confer on them liberation from the debt of the punishment of hell.

Reply to objection 1: When Christ descended into hell, anyone who was in any part of hell was in some way visited. However, some were visited to their consolation and liberation, whereas others, viz., the damned, were visited to their shame and confusion. Hence, in the same place it is added, “The moon will blush and the sun will be put to shame, etc.” (Isaiah 24:23).

This can also refer to the visitation by which they will be visited on the day of judgment, not in order that they might be liberated, but in order that they might be condemned more fully—this according to Zephaniah (“I will visit men who are fastened down in their own scum”).

Reply to objection 2: When the Gloss says, “Where there was no mercy to refresh them,” this should be understood as having to do with the refreshment of complete liberation. For the saintly ancestors could not have been liberated from their prisons before Christ came.

Reply to objection 3: It was not because of Christ’s lack of power that it was not the case that some were liberated from every state in hell, in the way that some are liberated from every state among men in this world. Instead, it was because of the very different situation of the two groups. For as long as men are living in this world, they can be converted to faith and charity; for in this life men are not confirmed either in good or in evil, as they are after they leave this life.

Article 7

Were children who died in original sin liberated by Christ’s descent?

It seems that children who had died in original sin were liberated by Christ’s descent (*pueri qui cum originali peccato decesserant, fuerint per descensum Christi liberati*):

Objection 1: These children were being detained in hell only for original sin, just like the saintly

ancestors. But as was explained above (a. 1), the saintly ancestors were liberated from hell by Christ. Therefore, similarly, the children were also liberated from hell by Christ.

Objection 2: In Romans 5:15 the Apostle says, “If by the offense of the one the many died, much more has the grace of God and the gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded unto the many.” But it was because of the sin of the first parent that children who died with original sin are detained in hell. Therefore, *a fortiori*, they were liberated from hell through the grace of Christ.

Objection 3: Just as baptism operates in the power of Christ’s passion, so, as is clear from what has been said (a. 4, ad 2 and aa. 5-6), Christ’s descent into hell did as well. But children are liberated from original sin and from hell through baptism. Therefore, they were similarly liberated by Christ’s descent into hell.

But contrary to this: In Romans 3:25 the Apostle says, “God proposed Christ as a propitiator through faith in His blood.” But children who had died with only original sin were in no way participants in faith. Therefore, they did not receive the fruits of Christ’s propitiation in the sense of being liberated from hell by Him.

I respond: As was explained above (a. 6), Christ’s descent into hell had an effect only on those who were conjoined through faith and love (*per fidem et dilectionem*) to Christ’s passion, in the power of which Christ’s descent into hell brought liberation. However, children who had died with original sin were in no way conjoined to Christ’s passion through faith and love—for they could not have had their own faith (*propriam fidem*), since they did not have the use of free choice; nor could they have been cleansed of original sin by the faith of their parents or by any sacrament of faith. And that is why Christ’s descent into hell did not liberate children of this sort from hell.

What’s more, the holy ancestors were liberated because they were admitted into the glory of seeing God, which no one can arrive at except through grace—this according to Romans 6:23 (“The grace of God is eternal life”). Therefore, since children who had died with original sin did not have grace, they were not liberated from hell.

Reply to objection 1: Even though the saintly ancestors were still bound by the debt of original sin insofar as this has to do with human nature, nonetheless, they had been liberated through faith in the Christ from all stain of sin, and so they were capable of receiving the liberation that Christ conferred when he descended into hell. But as is clear from what has been explained above, this cannot be said of the children.

Reply to objection 2: When the Apostle says, “... the grace of God ... abounded unto the many,” ‘the many’ should not be taken *comparatively*, with the meaning that numerically more individuals have been saved by the grace of Christ than damned by the sin of Adam; instead, it should be taken *absolutely*, as if to say that the grace of the one Christ has abounded unto many, just as the sin of the one Adam has reached many. But just as Adam’s sin reaches only those who have descended from him according to the flesh through the nature of semen, so Christ’s grace reaches those only who have become His members by spiritual regeneration—which does not apply to children who have died in original sin.

Reply to objection 3: Baptism is applied to men in this life, in which a man can be changed from sin into grace. But Christ’s descent into hell was exhibited to souls after this life, where they are not capable of the change just mentioned. And that is why children are liberated from original sin and from hell by baptism, but not by Christ’s descent into hell.

Article 8

Did Christ by His descent into hell liberate souls from purgatory?

It seems that Christ by His descent into hell liberated souls from purgatory (*Christus suo descensu ad inferos liberaverit animas a purgatorio*):

Objection 1: In *Epistola ad Evodium* Augustine says, “Because evident testimonies mention both hell and its sorrows, there is no reason why our Savior is believed to have gone there except to save men from those same sorrows. But I still ask whether it was all whom he found in these sorrows, or just some of them, whom He judged worthy of that benefit. Yet I do not doubt that Christ went into hell and granted this favor to individuals who found themselves in their sorrows.” But as was explained above, He did not confer the benefit of liberation on the damned. But, besides the damned, there are no individuals who find themselves in sorrowful punishments except those who are in purgatory. Therefore, Christ liberated souls from purgatory.

Objection 2: The very presence of Christ did not have a lesser effect than His sacraments do. But souls are liberated from purgatory by Christ’s sacraments, and especially by the sacrament of the Eucharist, as will be explained below (*Supplement*, q. 71, a. 9). Therefore, *a fortiori*, souls were liberated from purgatory by the presence of Christ when He descended into hell.

Objection 3: As Augustine points out in *De Poenitentia*, whomever Christ cured in this life, He cured completely. And in John 7:23 our Lord says, “[Are you indignant with me] because I made a whole man well on the sabbath?” But Christ liberated those who were in purgatory from the debt of the pain of loss, by which they were being excluded from glory. Therefore, He likewise liberated them from the debt of the punishment of purgatory.

But contrary to this: In *Moralia* 13 Gregory says, “While our creator and redeemer, penetrating the confines of hell, brought out from there the souls of the elect, He does not allow us to go to the place from which He has already liberated others by descending.” But He does allow us to go to purgatory. Therefore, when He descended into hell, He did not liberate souls from purgatory.

I respond: As has often been said, Christ’s descent into hell was liberating in virtue of His passion. But His passion had a power that was everlasting and not temporal or transitory—this according to Hebrews 10:14 (“By one offering He has perfected forever those who are sanctified”). And so it is clear that Christ’s passion did not have a greater efficacy at the time of His descent (*non habuit tunc maiorem efficaciam*) that it has now. And so individuals who were like those who are now being detained in purgatory were not liberated from purgatory through Christ’s descent into hell. However, if there were some in hell who were like those who are even now being liberated from purgatory by the power of Christ’s passion, then there is nothing to prevent them from having been liberated from purgatory by Christ’s descent into hell.

Reply to objection 1: From this passage of Augustine’s one can conclude not that all the individuals who were in purgatory were liberated from purgatory, but that this benefit was conferred on some of them, viz., those who had already been sufficiently cleansed, or, again, those who, while they were still living in this world, had, through their faith and love and through their devotion to the death of Christ, merited to be liberated from the temporal punishment of purgatory when Christ descended.

Reply to objection 2: Christ’s power operates in the sacraments in the manner of a sort of healing and expiation. Hence, the sacrament of the Eucharist liberates men from purgatory insofar as it is a sacrifice that makes satisfaction for sin.

By contrast, Christ’s descent into hell did not itself make satisfaction (*non fuit satisfactorius*), even though it was operating in the power of the passion, which, as was established above (q. 48, a. 2), did make satisfaction. Instead, the descent into hell made satisfaction in general (*erat satisfactoria in*

generali), so that its power had to be applied to each individual through something that applied to him specifically. And this is why it did not have to be the case that everyone was freed from purgatory by Christ's descent into hell.

Reply to objection 3: The defects from which Christ completely (*simul*) liberated men in this world were *personal* and belonged *properly* to each individual. On the other hand, the exclusion from God's glory was a sort of *general* defect pertaining to the whole of human nature. And that is why there was nothing to prevent those who were in purgatory from being liberated from the exclusion from glory without being liberated from the debt of purgatorial punishment, which had to do with their personal or proper defects—just as, conversely, in the way explained above (a. 7, ad 1 and q. 49, a. 5, ad 1), the saintly ancestors had been liberated from their proper or personal defects before Christ's arrival [in hell], but not from the common defect, [viz., the exclusion from glory].