

THIRD PART, QUESTION 47
Of the Efficient Cause of Christ's Passion
(In Six Articles)

We have now to consider the efficient cause of Christ's Passion, concerning which there are six points of inquiry:

- (1) Whether Christ was slain by others, or by Himself?
- (2) From what motive did He deliver Himself up to the Passion?
- (3) Whether the Father delivered Him up to suffer?
- (4) Whether it was fitting that He should suffer at the hands of the Gentiles, or rather of the Jews?
- (5) Whether His slayers knew who He was?
- (6) Of the sin of them who slew Christ.

Whether Christ was slain by another or by Himself?

IIIa q. 47 a. 1

Objection 1. It would seem that Christ was not slain by another, but by Himself. For He says Himself (Jn. 10:18): "No man taketh My life from Me, but I lay it down of Myself." But he is said to kill another who takes away his life. Consequently, Christ was not slain by others, but by Himself.

Objection 2. Further, those slain by others sink gradually from exhausted nature, and this is strikingly apparent in the crucified: for, as Augustine says (De Trin. iv): "Those who were crucified were tormented with a lingering death." But this did not happen in Christ's case, since "crying out, with a loud voice, He yielded up the ghost" (Mat. 27:50). Therefore Christ was not slain by others, but by Himself.

Objection 3. Further, those slain by others suffer a violent death, and hence die unwillingly, because violent is opposed to voluntary. But Augustine says (De Trin. iv): "Christ's spirit did not quit the flesh unwillingly, but because He willed it, when He willed it, and as He willed it." Consequently Christ was not slain by others, but by Himself.

On the contrary, It is written (Lk. 18:33): "After they have scourged Him, they will put him to death."

I answer that, A thing may cause an effect in two ways: in the first instance by acting directly so as to produce the effect; and in this manner Christ's persecutors slew Him because they inflicted on Him what was a sufficient cause of death, and with the intention of slaying Him, and the effect followed, since death resulted from that cause. In another way someone causes an effect indirectly—that is, by not preventing it when he can do so; just as one person is said to drench another by not closing the window through which the shower is entering: and in this way Christ was the cause of His own Passion and death. For He could have prevented His Passion and death. Firstly, by holding His enemies in check, so that they would not have been eager to slay Him, or would have been powerless to do so.

Secondly, because His spirit had the power of preserving His fleshly nature from the infliction of any injury; and Christ's soul had this power, because it was united in unity of person with the Divine Word, as Augustine says (De Trin. iv). Therefore, since Christ's soul did not repel the injury inflicted on His body, but willed His corporeal nature to succumb to such injury, He is said to have laid down His life, or to have died voluntarily.

Reply to Objection 1. When we hear the words, "No man taketh away My life from Me," we must understand "against My will": for that is properly said to be "taken away" which one takes from someone who is unwilling and unable to resist.

Reply to Objection 2. In order for Christ to show that the Passion inflicted by violence did not take away His life, He preserved the strength of His bodily nature, so that at the last moment He was able to cry out with a loud voice: and hence His death should be computed among His other miracles. Accordingly it is written (Mk. 15:39): "And the centurion who stood over against Him, seeing that crying out in this manner, He had given up the ghost, said: Indeed, this man was the Son of God." It was also a subject of wonder in Christ's death that He died sooner than the others who were tormented with the same suffering. Hence John says (19:32) that "they broke the legs of the first, and of the other that was crucified with Him," that they might die more speedily; "but after they were come to Jesus, when they saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs." Mark also states (15:44) that "Pilate wondered that He should be already dead." For as of His own will His bodily nature kept its vigor to the end, so likewise, when He willed, He suddenly succumbed to the injury inflicted.

Reply to Objection 3. Christ at the same time suffered violence in order to die, and died, nevertheless, voluntarily; because violence was inflicted on His body, which, however, prevailed over His body only so far as He willed it.

Objection 1. It would seem that Christ did not die out of obedience. For obedience is referred to a command. But we do not read that Christ was commanded to suffer. Therefore He did not suffer out of obedience.

Objection 2. Further, a man is said to do from obedience what he does from necessity of precept. But Christ did not suffer necessarily, but voluntarily. Therefore He did not suffer out of obedience.

Objection 3. Further, charity is a more excellent virtue than obedience. But we read that Christ suffered out of charity, according to Eph. 5:2: “Walk in love, as Christ also has loved us, and delivered Himself up for us.” Therefore Christ’s Passion ought to be ascribed rather to charity than to obedience.

On the contrary, It is written (Phil. 2:8): “He became obedient” to the Father “unto death.”

I answer that, It was befitting that Christ should suffer out of obedience. First of all, because it was in keeping with human justification, that “as by the disobedience of one man, many were made sinners: so also by the obedience of one, many shall be made just,” as is written Rom. 5:19. Secondly, it was suitable for reconciling man with God: hence it is written (Rom. 5:10): “We are reconciled to God by the death of His Son,” in so far as Christ’s death was a most acceptable sacrifice to God, according to Eph. 5:2: “He delivered Himself for us an oblation and a sacrifice to God for an odor of sweetness.” Now obedience is preferred to all sacrifices. according to 1 Kings 15:22: “Obedience is better than sacrifices.” Therefore it was fitting that the sacrifice of Christ’s Passion and death should proceed from obedience. Thirdly, it was in keeping with His victory whereby He triumphed over death and its author; because a soldier cannot conquer unless he obey his captain. And so the Man-Christ secured the victory through being obedient to God, according to Prov. 21:28: “An obedient man shall speak of victory.”

Reply to Objection 1. Christ received a command from the Father to suffer. For it is written (Jn. 10:18): “I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it up again: (and) this commandment have I received of My Father”—namely, of laying down His life and of resuming it again. “From which,” as Chrysostom says (Hom. lix in Joan.), it is not to be understood “that at first He awaited the command, and that He had need to be told, but He showed the proceeding to be a

voluntary one, and destroyed suspicion of opposition” to the Father. Yet because the Old Law was ended by Christ’s death, according to His dying words, “It is consummated” (Jn. 19:30), it may be understood that by His suffering He fulfilled all the precepts of the Old Law. He fulfilled those of the moral order which are founded on the precepts of charity, inasmuch as He suffered both out of love of the Father, according to Jn. 14:31: “That the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father hath given Me commandment, so do I arise, let us go hence”—namely, to the place of His Passion: and out of love of His neighbor, according to Gal. 2:20: “He loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.” Christ likewise by His Passion fulfilled the ceremonial precepts of the Law, which are chiefly ordained for sacrifices and oblations, in so far as all the ancient sacrifices were figures of that true sacrifice which the dying Christ offered for us. Hence it is written (Col. 2:16,17): “Let no man judge you in meat or drink, or in respect of a festival day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the body is Christ’s,” for the reason that Christ is compared to them as a body is to a shadow. Christ also by His Passion fulfilled the judicial precepts of the Law, which are chiefly ordained for making compensation to them who have suffered wrong, since, as is written Ps. 68:5: He “paid that which” He “took not away,” suffering Himself to be fastened to a tree on account of the apple which man had plucked from the tree against God’s command.

Reply to Objection 2. Although obedience implies necessity with regard to the thing commanded, nevertheless it implies free-will with regard to the fulfilling of the precept. And, indeed, such was Christ’s obedience, for, although His Passion and death, considered in themselves, were repugnant to the natural will, yet Christ resolved to fulfill God’s will with respect to the same, according to Ps. 39:9: “That I should do Thy will: O my God, I have desired it.” Hence He said (Mat. 26:42): “If this chalice may not pass away, but I must drink it, Thy will be done.”

Reply to Objection 3. For the same reason Christ suffered out of charity and out of obedience; because He fulfilled even the precepts of charity out of obedience only; and was obedient, out of love, to the Father’s command.

Objection 1. It would seem that God the Father did not deliver up Christ to the Passion. For it is a wicked and cruel act to hand over an innocent man to torment and death. But, as it is written (Dt. 32:4): “God is faithful, and without any iniquity.” Therefore He did not hand over the innocent Christ to His Passion and death.

Objection 2. Further, it is not likely that a man be given over to death by himself and by another also. But Christ gave Himself up for us, as it is written (Is. 53:12): “He hath delivered His soul unto death.” Consequently it does not appear that God the Father delivered Him up.

Objection 3. Further, Judas is held to be guilty be-

cause he betrayed Christ to the Jews, according to Jn. 6:71: “One of you is a devil,” alluding to Judas, who was to betray Him. The Jews are likewise reviled for delivering Him up to Pilate; as we read in Jn. 18:35: “Thy own nation, and the chief priests have delivered Thee up to me.” Moreover, as is related in Jn. 19:16: Pilate “delivered Him to them to be crucified”; and according to 2 Cor. 6:14: there is no “participation of justice with injustice.” It seems, therefore, that God the Father did not deliver up Christ to His Passion.

On the contrary, It is written (Rom. 8:32): “God hath not spared His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all.”

I answer that, As observed above (a. 2), Christ suffered voluntarily out of obedience to the Father. Hence in three respects God the Father did deliver up Christ to the Passion. In the first way, because by His eternal will He preordained Christ’s Passion for the deliverance of the human race, according to the words of Isaias (53:6): “The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquities of us all”; and again (Is. 53:10): “The Lord was pleased to bruise Him in infirmity.” Secondly, inasmuch as, by the infusion of charity, He inspired Him with the will to suffer for us; hence we read in the same passage: “He was offered because it was His own will” (Is. 53:7). Thirdly, by not shielding Him from the Passion, but abandoning Him to His persecutors: thus we read (Mat. 27:46) that Christ, while hanging upon the cross, cried out: “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” because, to wit, He left Him to the power of His persecutors, as Augustine

says (Ep. cxl).

Reply to Objection 1. It is indeed a wicked and cruel act to hand over an innocent man to torment and to death against his will. Yet God the Father did not so deliver up Christ, but inspired Him with the will to suffer for us. God’s “severity” (cf. Rom. 11:22) is thereby shown, for He would not remit sin without penalty: and the Apostle indicates this when (Rom. 8:32) he says: “God spared not even His own Son.” Likewise His “goodness” (Rom. 11:22) shines forth, since by no penalty endured could man pay Him enough satisfaction: and the Apostle denotes this when he says: “He delivered Him up for us all”: and, again (Rom. 3:25): “Whom”—that is to say, Christ—God “hath proposed to be a propitiation through faith in His blood.”

Reply to Objection 2. Christ as God delivered Himself up to death by the same will and action as that by which the Father delivered Him up; but as man He gave Himself up by a will inspired of the Father. Consequently there is no contrariety in the Father delivering Him up and in Christ delivering Himself up.

Reply to Objection 3. The same act, for good or evil, is judged differently, accordingly as it proceeds from a different source. The Father delivered up Christ, and Christ surrendered Himself, from charity, and consequently we give praise to both: but Judas betrayed Christ from greed, the Jews from envy, and Pilate from worldly fear, for he stood in fear of Caesar; and these accordingly are held guilty.

Whether it was fitting for Christ to suffer at the hands of the Gentiles?

IIIa q. 47 a. 4

Objection 1. It would seem unfitting that Christ should suffer at the hands of the Gentiles. For since men were to be freed from sin by Christ’s death, it would seem fitting that very few should sin in His death. But the Jews sinned in His death, on whose behalf it is said (Mat. 21:38): “This is the heir; come, let us kill him.” It seems fitting, therefore, that the Gentiles should not be implicated in the sin of Christ’s slaying.

Objection 2. Further, the truth should respond to the figure. Now it was not the Gentiles but the Jews who offered the figurative sacrifices of the Old Law. Therefore neither ought Christ’s Passion, which was a true sacrifice, to be fulfilled at the hands of the Gentiles.

Objection 3. Further, as related Jn. 5:18, “the Jews sought to kill” Christ because “He did not only break the sabbath, but also said God was His Father, making Himself equal to God.” But these things seemed to be only against the Law of the Jews: hence they themselves said (Jn. 19:7): “According to the Law He ought to die because He made Himself the Son of God.” It seems fitting, therefore, that Christ should suffer, at the hands not of the Gentiles, but of the Jews, and that what they said was untrue: “It is not lawful for us to put any man to death,” since many sins are punishable with death ac-

ording to the Law, as is evident from Lev. 20.

On the contrary, our Lord Himself says (Mat. 20:19): “They shall deliver Him to the Gentiles to be mocked, and scourged, and crucified.”

I answer that, The effect of Christ’s Passion was foreshown by the very manner of His death. For Christ’s Passion wrought its effect of salvation first of all among the Jews, very many of whom were baptized in His death, as is evident from Acts 2:41 and Acts 4:4. Afterwards, by the preaching of Jews, Christ’s Passion passed on to the Gentiles. Consequently it was fitting that Christ should begin His sufferings at the hands of the Jews, and, after they had delivered Him up, finish His Passion at the hands of the Gentiles.

Reply to Objection 1. In order to demonstrate the fulness of His love, on account of which He suffered, Christ upon the cross prayed for His persecutors. Therefore, that the fruits of His petition might accrue to Jews and Gentiles, Christ willed to suffer from both.

Reply to Objection 2. Christ’s Passion was the offering of a sacrifice, inasmuch as He endured death of His own free-will out of charity: but in so far as He suffered from His persecutors it was not a sacrifice, but a most grievous sin.

Reply to Objection 3. As Augustine says (Tract. cxiv in Joan.): “The Jews said that ‘it is not lawful for us to put any man to death,’ because they understood that it was not lawful for them to put any man to death” owing to the sacredness of the feast-day, which they had already begun to celebrate. or, as Chrysostom observes (Hom. lxxxiii in Joan.), because they wanted Him to be slain, not as a transgressor of the Law, but as a public

enemy, since He had made Himself out to be a king, of which it was not their place to judge. Or, again, because it was not lawful for them to crucify Him (as they wanted to), but to stone Him, as they did to Stephen. Better still is it to say that the power of putting to death was taken from them by the Romans, whose subjects they were.

Whether Christ’s persecutors knew who He was?

IIIa q. 47 a. 5

Objection 1. It would seem that Christ’s persecutors did know who He was. For it is written (Mat. 21:38) that the husbandmen seeing the son said within themselves: “This is the heir; come, let us kill him.” On this Jerome remarks: “Our Lord proves most manifestly by these words that the rulers of the Jews crucified the Son of God, not from ignorance, but out of envy: for they understood that it was He to whom the Father says by the Prophet: ‘Ask of Me, and I will give Thee the Gentiles for Thy inheritance.’” It seems, therefore, that they knew Him to be Christ or the Son of God.

Objection 2. Further, our Lord says (Jn. 15:24): “But now they have both seen and hated both Me and My Father.” Now what is seen is known manifestly. Therefore the Jews, knowing Christ, inflicted the Passion on Him out of hatred.

Objection 3. Further, it is said in a sermon delivered in the Council of Ephesus (P. iii, cap. x): “Just as he who tears up the imperial message is doomed to die, as despising the prince’s word; so the Jew, who crucified Him whom he had seen, will pay the penalty for daring to lay his hands on God the Word Himself.” Now this would not be so had they not known Him to be the Son of God, because their ignorance would have excused them. Therefore it seems that the Jews in crucifying Christ knew Him to be the Son of God.

On the contrary, It is written (1 Cor. 2:8): “If they had known it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory.” And (Acts 3:17), Peter, addressing the Jews, says: “I know that you did it through ignorance, as did also your rulers.” Likewise the Lord hanging upon the cross said: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Lk. 23:34).

I answer that, Among the Jews some were elders, and others of lesser degree. Now according to the author of *De Qq. Nov. et Vet. Test.*, qu. lxvi, the elders, who were called “rulers, knew,” as did also the devils, “that He was the Christ promised in the Law: for they saw all the signs in Him which the prophets said would come to pass: but they did not know the mystery of His Godhead.” Consequently the Apostle says: “If they had known it, they would never have crucified the Lord of glory.” It must, however, be understood that their ignorance did not excuse them from crime, because it was, as it were, affected ignorance. For they saw manifest signs of His Godhead; yet they perverted them out of

hatred and envy of Christ; neither would they believe His words, whereby He avowed that He was the Son of God. Hence He Himself says of them (Jn. 15:22): “If I had not come, and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin.” And afterwards He adds (Jn. 15:24): “If I had not done among them the works that no other man hath done, they would not have sin.” And so the expression employed by Job (21:14) can be accepted on their behalf: “(Who) said to God: depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways.”

But those of lesser degree—namely, the common folk—who had not grasped the mysteries of the Scriptures, did not fully comprehend that He was the Christ or the Son of God. For although some of them believed in Him, yet the multitude did not; and if they doubted sometimes whether He was the Christ, on account of the manifold signs and force of His teaching, as is stated Jn. 7:31,41, nevertheless they were deceived afterwards by their rulers, so that they did not believe Him to be the Son of God or the Christ. Hence Peter said to them: “I know that you did it through ignorance, as did also your rulers”—namely, because they were seduced by the rulers.

Reply to Objection 1. Those words are spoken by the husbandmen of the vineyard; and these signify the rulers of the people, who knew Him to be the heir, inasmuch as they knew Him to be the Christ promised in the Law, but the words of Ps. 2:8 seem to militate against this answer: “Ask of Me, and I will give Thee the Gentiles for Thy inheritance”; which are addressed to Him of whom it is said: “Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee.” If, then, they knew Him to be the one to whom the words were addressed: “Ask of Me, and I will give Thee the Gentiles for Thy inheritance,” it follows that they knew Him to be the Son of God. Chrysostom, too, says upon the same passage that “they knew Him to be the Son of God.” Bede likewise, commenting on the words, “For they know not what they do” (Lk. 23:34), says: “It is to be observed that He does not pray for them who, understanding Him to be the Son of God, preferred to crucify Him rather than acknowledge Him.” But to this it may be replied that they knew Him to be the Son of God, not from His Nature, but from the excellence of His singular grace.

Yet we may hold that they are said to have known

also that He was verily the Son of God, in that they had evident signs thereof: yet out of hatred and envy, they refused credence to these signs, by which they might have known that He was the Son of God.

Reply to Objection 2. The words quoted are preceded by the following: “If I had not done among them the works that no other man hath done, they would not have sin”; and then follow the words: “But now they have both seen and hated both Me and My Father.” Now

all this shows that while they beheld Christ’s marvelous works, it was owing to their hatred that they did not know Him to be the Son of God.

Reply to Objection 3. Affected ignorance does not excuse from guilt, but seems, rather, to aggravate it: for it shows that a man is so strongly attached to sin that he wishes to incur ignorance lest he avoid sinning. The Jews therefore sinned, as crucifiers not only of the Man-Christ, but also as of God.

Whether the sin of those who crucified Christ was most grievous?

IIIa q. 47 a. 6

Objection 1. It would seem that the sin of Christ’s crucifiers was not the most grievous. Because the sin which has some excuse cannot be most grievous. But our Lord Himself excused the sin of His crucifiers when He said: “Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do” (Lk. 23:34). Therefore theirs was not the most grievous sin.

Objection 2. Further, our Lord said to Pilate (Jn. 19:11): “He that hath delivered Me to thee hath the greater sin.” But it was Pilate who caused Christ to be crucified by his minions. Therefore the sin of Judas the traitor seems to be greater than that of those who crucified Him.

Objection 3. Further, according to the Philosopher (Ethic. v): “No one suffers injustice willingly”; and in the same place he adds: “Where no one suffers injustice, nobody works injustice.” Consequently nobody wreaks injustice upon a willing subject. But Christ suffered willingly, as was shown above (Aa. 1,2). Therefore those who crucified Christ did Him no injustice; and hence their sin was not the most grievous.

On the contrary, Chrysostom, commenting on the words, “Fill ye up, then, the measure of your fathers” (Mat. 23:32), says: “In very truth they exceeded the measure of their fathers; for these latter slew men, but they crucified God.”

I answer that, As stated above (a. 5), the rulers of the Jews knew that He was the Christ: and if there was any ignorance in them, it was affected ignorance, which could not excuse them. Therefore their sin was the most grievous, both on account of the kind of sin, as well as from the malice of their will. The Jews also of the com-

mon order sinned most grievously as to the kind of their sin: yet in one respect their crime was lessened by reason of their ignorance. Hence Bede, commenting on Lk. 23:34, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,” says: “He prays for them who know not what they are doing, as having the zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.” But the sin of the Gentiles, by whose hands He was crucified, was much more excusable, since they had no knowledge of the Law.

Reply to Objection 1. As stated above, the excuse made by our Lord is not to be referred to the rulers among the Jews, but to the common people.

Reply to Objection 2. Judas did not deliver up Christ to Pilate, but to the chief priests who gave Him up to Pilate, according to Jn. 18:35: “Thy own nation and the chief priests have delivered Thee up to me.” But the sin of all these was greater than that of Pilate, who slew Christ from fear of Caesar; and even greater than the sin of the soldiers who crucified Him at the governor’s bidding, not out of cupidity like Judas, nor from envy and hate like the chief priests.

Reply to Objection 3. Christ, indeed willed His Passion just as the Father willed it; yet He did not will the unjust action of the Jews. Consequently Christ’s slayers are not excused of their injustice. Nevertheless, whoever slays a man not only does a wrong to the one slain, but likewise to God and to the State; just as he who kills himself, as the Philosopher says (Ethic. v). Hence it was that David condemned to death the man who “did not fear to lay hands upon the Lord’s anointed,” even though he (Saul) had requested it, as related 2 Kings 1:5-14.