

## THIRD PART, QUESTION 25

### Of the Adoration of Christ (In Six Articles)

We have now to consider things pertaining to Christ in reference to us; and first, the adoration of Christ, by which we adore Him; secondly, we must consider how He is our Mediator with God.

Under the first head there are six points of inquiry:

- (1) Whether Christ's Godhead and humanity are to be adored with one and the same adoration?
- (2) Whether His flesh is to be adored with the adoration of "latria"?
- (3) Whether the adoration of "latria" is to be given to the image of Christ?
- (4) Whether "latria" is to be given to the Cross of Christ?
- (5) Whether to His Mother?
- (6) Concerning the adoration of the relics of Saints.

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#### Whether Christ's humanity and Godhead are to be adored with the same adoration?

IIIa q. 25 a. 1

**Objection 1.** It would seem that Christ's humanity and Godhead are not to be adored with the same adoration. For Christ's Godhead is to be adored, as being common to Father and Son; wherefore it is written (Jn. 5:23): "That all may honor the Son, as they honor the Father." But Christ's humanity is not common to Him and the Father. Therefore Christ's humanity and Godhead are not to be adored with the same adoration.

**Objection 2.** Further, honor is properly "the reward of virtue," as the Philosopher says (Ethic. iv, 3). But virtue merits its reward by action. Since, therefore, in Christ the action of the Divine Nature is distinct from that of the human nature, as stated above (q. 19, a. 1), it seems that Christ's humanity is to be adored with a different adoration from that which is given to His Godhead.

**Objection 3.** Further, if the soul of Christ were not united to the Word, it would have been worthy of veneration on account of the excellence of its wisdom and grace. But by being united to the Word it lost nothing of its worthiness. Therefore His human nature should receive a certain veneration proper thereto, besides the veneration which is given to His Godhead.

**On the contrary,** We read in the chapters of the Fifth Council\*: "If anyone say that Christ is adored in two natures, so as to introduce two distinct adorations, and does not adore God the Word made flesh with the one and the same adoration as His flesh, as the Church has handed down from the beginning; let such a one be anathema."

**I answer that,** We may consider two things in a person to whom honor is given: the person himself, and the cause of his being honored. Now properly speaking honor is given to a subsistent thing in its entirety: for we do not speak of honoring a man's hand, but the man himself. And if at any time it happen that we speak of honoring a man's

hand or foot, it is not by reason of these members being honored of themselves: but by reason of the whole being honored in them. In this way a man may be honored even in something external; for instance in his vesture, his image, or his messenger.

The cause of honor is that by reason of which the person honored has a certain excellence. For honor is reverence given to something on account of its excellence, as stated in the IIa IIae, q. 103, a. 1. If therefore in one man there are several causes of honor, for instance, rank, knowledge, and virtue, the honor given to him will be one in respect of the person honored, but several in respect of the causes of honor: for it is the man that is honored, both on account of knowledge and by reason of his virtue.

Since, therefore, in Christ there is but one Person of the Divine and human natures, and one hypostasis, and one suppositum, He is given one adoration and one honor on the part of the Person adored: but on the part of the cause for which He is honored, we can say that there are several adorations, for instance that He receives one honor on account of His uncreated knowledge, and another on account of His created knowledge.

But if it be said that there are several persons or hypostases in Christ, it would follow that there would be, absolutely speaking, several adorations. And this is what is condemned in the Councils. For it is written in the chapters of Cyril†: "If anyone dare to say that the man assumed should be adored besides the Divine Word, as though these were distinct persons; and does not rather honor the Emmanuel with one single adoration, inasmuch as the Word was made flesh; let him be anathema."

**Reply to Objection 1.** In the Trinity there are three Who are honored, but only one cause of honor. In the mystery of the Incarnation it is the reverse: and therefore

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\* Second Council of Constantinople, coll. viii, can. 9 † Council of Ephesus, Part I, ch. 26

only one honor is given to the Trinity and only one to Christ, but in a different way.

**Reply to Objection 2.** Operation is not the object but the motive of honor. And therefore there being two operations in Christ proves, not two adorations, but two causes of adoration.

**Reply to Objection 3.** If the soul of Christ were not united to the Word of God, it would be the principal thing

in that Man. Wherefore honor would be due to it principally, since man is that which is principal in him\*. But since Christ's soul is united to a Person of greater dignity, to that Person is honor principally due to Whom Christ's soul is united. Nor is the dignity of Christ's soul hereby diminished, but rather increased, as stated above (q. 2, a. 2, ad 2).

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### Whether Christ's humanity should be adored with the adoration of "latria"?

IIIa q. 25 a. 2

**Objection 1.** It would seem that Christ's soul should not be adored with the adoration of "latria." For on the words of Ps. 98:5, "Adore His foot-stool for it is holy," a gloss says: "The flesh assumed by the Word of God is rightly adored by us: for no one partakes spiritually of His flesh unless he first adore it; but not indeed with the adoration called 'latria,' which is due to the Creator alone." Now the flesh is part of the humanity. Therefore Christ's humanity is not to be adored with the adoration of "latria."

**Objection 2.** Further, the worship of "latria" is not to be given to any creature: since for this reason were the Gentiles reprov'd, that they "worshiped and served the creature," as it is written (Rom. 1:25). But Christ's humanity is a creature. Therefore it should not be adored with the adoration of "latria."

**Objection 3.** Further, the adoration of "latria" is due to God in recognition of His supreme dominion, according to Dt. 6:13: "Thou shalt adore [Vulg.: 'fear'; cf. Mat. 4:10] the Lord thy God, and shalt serve Him only." But Christ as man is less than the Father. Therefore His humanity is not to be adored with the adoration of "latria."

**On the contrary,** Damascene says (De Fide Orth. iv, 3): "On account of the incarnation of the Divine Word, we adore the flesh of Christ not for its own sake, but because the Word of God is united thereto in person." And on Ps. 98:5, "Adore His foot-stool," a gloss says: "He who adores the body of Christ, regards not the earth, but rather Him whose foot-stool it is, in Whose honor he adores the foot-stool." But the incarnate Word is adored with the adoration of "latria." Therefore also His body or His humanity.

**I answer that,** As stated above (a. 1) adoration is due to the subsisting hypostasis: yet the reason for honoring may be something non-subsistent, on account of which the person, in whom it is, is honored. And so the adoration of Christ's humanity may be understood in two ways.

First, so that the humanity is the thing adored: and thus to adore the flesh of Christ is nothing else than to adore the incarnate Word of God: just as to adore a King's robe is nothing else than to adore a robed King. And in this sense the adoration of Christ's humanity is the adoration of "latria." Secondly, the adoration of Christ's humanity may be taken as given by reason of its being perfected with every gift of grace. And so in this sense the adoration of Christ's humanity is the adoration not of "latria" but of "dulia." So that one and the same Person of Christ is adored with "latria" on account of His Divinity, and with "dulia" on account of His perfect humanity.

Nor is this unfitting. For the honor of "latria" is due to God the Father Himself on account of His Godhead; and the honor of "dulia" on account of the dominion by which He rules over creatures. Wherefore on Ps. 7:1, "O Lord my God, in Thee have I hoped," a gloss says: "Lord of all by power, to Whom 'dulia' is due: God of all by creation, to Whom 'latria' is due."

**Reply to Objection 1.** That gloss is not to be understood as though the flesh of Christ were adored separately from its Godhead: for this could happen only, if there were one hypostasis of God, and another of man. But since, as Damascene says (De Fide Orth. iv, 3): "If by a subtle distinction you divide what is seen from what is understood, it cannot be adored because it is a creature"—that is, with adoration of "latria." And then thus understood as distinct from the Word of God, it should be adored with the adoration of "dulia"; not any kind of "dulia," such as is given to other creatures, but with a certain higher adoration, which is called "hyperdulia."

Hence appear the answers to the second and third objections. Because the adoration of "latria" is not given to Christ's humanity in respect of itself; but in respect of the Godhead to which it is united, by reason of which Christ is not less than the Father.

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\* Cf. Ethic. ix, 8

**Objection 1.** It would seem that Christ’s image should not be adored with the adoration of “latria.” For it is written (Ex. 20:4): “Thou shalt not make to thyself a graven thing, nor the likeness of anything.” But no adoration should be given against the commandment of God. Therefore Christ’s image should not be adored with the adoration of “latria.”

**Objection 2.** Further, we should have nothing in common with the works of the Gentiles, as the Apostle says (Eph. 5:11). But the Gentiles are reproached principally for that “they changed the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of the image of a corruptible man,” as is written (Rom. 1:23). Therefore Christ’s image is not to be adored with the adoration of “latria.”

**Objection 3.** Further, to Christ the adoration of “latria” is due by reason of His Godhead, not of His humanity. But the adoration of “latria” is not due to the image of His Godhead, which is imprinted on the rational soul. Much less, therefore, is it due to the material image which represents the humanity of Christ Himself.

**Objection 4.** Further, it seems that nothing should be done in the Divine worship that is not instituted by God; wherefore the Apostle (1 Cor. 11:23) when about to lay down the doctrine of the sacrifice of the Church, says: “I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you.” But Scripture does not lay down anything concerning the adoration of images. Therefore Christ’s image is not to be adored with the adoration of “latria.”

**On the contrary,** Damascene (De Fide Orth. iv, 16) quotes Basil as saying: “The honor given to an image reaches to the prototype,” i.e. the exemplar. But the exemplar itself—namely, Christ—is to be adored with the adoration of “latria”; therefore also His image.

**I answer that,** As the Philosopher says (De Memor. et Remin. i), there is a twofold movement of the mind towards an image: one indeed towards the image itself as a certain thing; another, towards the image in so far as it is the image of something else. And between these movements there is this difference; that the former, by which one is moved towards an image as a certain thing, is different from the movement towards the thing: whereas the latter movement, which is towards the image as an image, is one and the same as that which is towards the thing. Thus therefore we must say that no reverence is shown to Christ’s image, as a thing—for instance, carved or painted wood: because reverence is not due save to a rational creature. It follow therefore that reverence should be shown to it, in so far only as it is an image. Consequently the same reverence should be shown to Christ’s image as to Christ Himself. Since, therefore, Christ is adored with the adoration of “latria,” it follows that His image should be adored with the adoration of “latria.”

**Reply to Objection 1.** This commandment does not forbid the making of any graven thing or likeness, but the making thereof for the purpose of adoration, wherefore it is added: “Thou shalt not adore them nor serve them.” And because, as stated above, the movement towards the image is the same as the movement towards the thing, adoration thereof is forbidden in the same way as adoration of the thing whose image it is. Wherefore in the passage quoted we are to understand the prohibition to adore those images which the Gentiles made for the purpose of venerating their own gods, i.e. the demons, and so it is premised: “Thou shalt not have strange gods before Me.” But no corporeal image could be raised to the true God Himself, since He is incorporeal; because, as Damascene observes (De Fide Orth. iv, 16): “It is the highest absurdity and impiety to fashion a figure of what is Divine.” But because in the New Testament God was made man, He can be adored in His corporeal image.

**Reply to Objection 2.** The Apostle forbids us to have anything in common with the “unfruitful works” of the Gentiles, but not with their useful works. Now the adoration of images must be numbered among the unfruitful works in two respects. First, because some of the Gentiles used to adore the images themselves, as things, believing that there was something Divine therein, on account of the answers which the demons used to give in them, and on account of other such like wonderful effects. Secondly on account of the things of which they were images; for they set up images to certain creatures, to whom in these images they gave the veneration of “latria.” Whereas we give the adoration of “latria” to the image of Christ, Who is true God, not for the sake of the image, but for the sake of the thing whose image it is, as stated above.

**Reply to Objection 3.** Reverence is due to the rational creature for its own sake. Consequently, if the adoration of “latria” were shown to the rational creature in which this image is, there might be an occasion of error—namely, lest the movement of adoration might stop short at the man, as a thing, and not be carried on to God, Whose image he is. This cannot happen in the case of a graven or painted image in insensible material.

**Reply to Objection 4.** The Apostles, led by the inward instinct of the Holy Ghost, handed down to the churches certain instructions which they did not put in writing, but which have been ordained, in accordance with the observance of the Church as practiced by the faithful as time went on. Wherefore the Apostle says (2 Thess. 2:14): “Stand fast; and hold the traditions which you have learned, whether by word”—that is by word of mouth—“or by our epistle”—that is by word put into writing. Among these traditions is the worship of Christ’s image. Wherefore it is said that Blessed Luke painted the image

**Objection 1.** It would seem that Christ's cross should not be worshiped with the adoration of "latria." For no dutiful son honors that which dishonors his father, as the scourge with which he was scourged, or the gibbet on which he was hanged; rather does he abhor it. Now Christ underwent the most shameful death on the cross; according to Wis. 2:20: "Let us condemn Him to a most shameful death." Therefore we should not venerate the cross but rather we should abhor it.

**Objection 2.** Further, Christ's humanity is worshiped with the adoration of "latria," inasmuch as it is united to the Son of God in Person. But this cannot be said of the cross. Therefore Christ's cross should not be worshiped with the adoration of "latria."

**Objection 3.** Further, as Christ's cross was the instrument of His passion and death, so were also many other things, for instance, the nails, the crown, the lance; yet to these we do not show the worship of "latria." It seems, therefore, that Christ's cross should not be worshiped with the adoration of "latria."

**On the contrary,** We show the worship of "latria" to that in which we place our hope of salvation. But we place our hope in Christ's cross, for the Church sings:

"Dear Cross, best hope o'er all beside,  
That cheers the solemn passion-tide:  
Give to the just increase of grace,  
Give to each contrite sinner peace."

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Therefore Christ's cross should be worshiped with the adoration of "latria."

**I answer that,** As stated above (a. 3), honor or reverence is due to a rational creature only; while to an insensible creature, no honor or reverence is due save by reason of a rational nature. And this in two ways. First, inasmuch as it represents a rational nature: secondly, inasmuch as it is united to it in any way whatsoever. In the first way men are wont to venerate the king's image; in the second way, his robe. And both are venerated by men with the same veneration as they show to the king.

If, therefore, we speak of the cross itself on which Christ was crucified, it is to be venerated by us in both ways—namely, in one way in so far as it represents to us the figure of Christ extended thereon; in the other way,

from its contact with the limbs of Christ, and from its being saturated with His blood. Wherefore in each way it is worshiped with the same adoration as Christ, viz. the adoration of "latria." And for this reason also we speak to the cross and pray to it, as to the Crucified Himself. But if we speak of the effigy of Christ's cross in any other material whatever—for instance, in stone or wood, silver or gold—thus we venerate the cross merely as Christ's image, which we worship with the adoration of "latria," as stated above (a. 3).

**Reply to Objection 1.** If in Christ's cross we consider the point of view and intention of those who did not believe in Him, it will appear as His shame: but if we consider its effect, which is our salvation, it will appear as endowed with Divine power, by which it triumphed over the enemy, according to Col. 2:14,15: "He hath taken the same out of the way, fastening it to the cross, and despoiling the principalities and powers, He hath exposed them confidently, in open show, triumphing over them in Himself." Wherefore the Apostle says (1 Cor. 1:18): "The Word of the cross to them indeed that perish is foolishness; but to them that are saved—that is, to us—it is the power of God."

**Reply to Objection 2.** Although Christ's cross was not united to the Word of God in Person, yet it was united to Him in some other way, viz. by representation and contact. And for this sole reason reverence is shown to it.

**Reply to Objection 3.** By reason of the contact of Christ's limbs we worship not only the cross, but all that belongs to Christ. Wherefore Damascene says (De Fide Orth. iv, 11): "The precious wood, as having been sanctified by the contact of His holy body and blood, should be meetly worshiped; as also His nails, His lance, and His sacred dwelling-places, such as the manger, the cave and so forth." Yet these very things do not represent Christ's image as the cross does, which is called "the Sign of the Son of Man" that "will appear in heaven," as it is written (Mat. 24:30). Wherefore the angel said to the women (Mk. 16:6): "You seek Jesus of Nazareth, Who was crucified": he said not "pierced," but "crucified." For this reason we worship the image of Christ's cross in any material, but not the image of the nails or of any such thing.

\* Hymn Vexilla Regis: translation of Father Aylward, O.P.

**Objection 1.** It would seem that the Mother of God is to be worshiped with the adoration of “latria.” For it seems that the same honor is due to the king’s mother as to the king: whence it is written (3 Kings 2:19) that “a throne was set for the king’s mother, and she sat on His right hand.” Moreover, Augustine\* says: “It is right that the throne of God, the resting-place of the Lord of Heaven, the abode of Christ, should be there where He is Himself.” But Christ is worshiped with the adoration of “latria.” Therefore His Mother also should be.

**Objection 2.** Further, Damascene says (De Fide Orth. iv, 16): “The honor of the Mother reflects on the Son.” But the Son is worshiped with the adoration of “latria.” Therefore the Mother also.

**Objection 3.** Further, Christ’s Mother is more akin to Him than the cross. But the cross is worshiped with the adoration of “latria.” Therefore also His Mother is to be worshiped with the same adoration.

**On the contrary,** The Mother of God is a mere creature. Therefore the worship of “latria” is not due to her.

**I answer that,** Since “latria” is due to God alone, it is not due to a creature so far as we venerate a creature for its own sake. For though insensible creatures are not capable of being venerated for their own sake, yet the ra-

tional creature is capable of being venerated for its own sake. Consequently the worship of “latria” is not due to any mere rational creature for its own sake. Since, therefore, the Blessed Virgin is a mere rational creature, the worship of “latria” is not due to her, but only that of “dulia”: but in a higher degree than to other creatures, inasmuch as she is the Mother of God. For this reason we say that not any kind of “dulia” is due to her, but “hyperdulia.”

**Reply to Objection 1.** The honor due to the king’s mother is not equal to the honor which is due to the king: but is somewhat like it, by reason of a certain excellence on her part. This is what is meant by the authorities quoted.

**Reply to Objection 2.** The honor given to the Mother reflects on her Son, because the Mother is to be honored for her Son’s sake. But not in the same way as honor given to an image reflects on its exemplar: because the image itself, considered as a thing, is not to be venerated in any way at all.

**Reply to Objection 3.** The cross, considered in itself, is not an object of veneration, as stated above (Aa. 4,5). But the Blessed Virgin is in herself an object of veneration. Hence there is no comparison.

**Objection 1.** It would seem that the relics of the saints are not to be worshiped at all. For we should avoid doing what may be the occasion of error. But to worship the relics of the dead seems to savor of the error of the Gentiles, who gave honor to dead men. Therefore the relics of the saints are not to be honored.

**Objection 2.** Further, it seems absurd to venerate what is insensible. But the relics of the saints are insensible. Therefore it is absurd to venerate them.

**Objection 3.** Further, a dead body is not of the same species as a living body: consequently it does not seem to be identical with it. Therefore, after a saint’s death, it seems that his body should not be worshiped.

**On the contrary,** It is written (De Eccles. Dogm. xl): “We believe that the bodies of the saints, above all the relics of the blessed martyrs, as being the members of Christ, should be worshiped in all sincerity”: and further on: “If anyone holds a contrary opinion, he is not accounted a Christian, but a follower of Eunomius and Vigilantius.”

**I answer that,** As Augustine says (De Civ. Dei i, 13): “If a father’s coat or ring, or anything else of that kind, is so much more cherished by his children, as love for

one’s parents is greater, in no way are the bodies themselves to be despised, which are much more intimately and closely united to us than any garment; for they belong to man’s very nature.” It is clear from this that he who has a certain affection for anyone, venerates whatever of his is left after his death, not only his body and the parts thereof, but even external things, such as his clothes, and such like. Now it is manifest that we should show honor to the saints of God, as being members of Christ, the children and friends of God, and our intercessors. Wherefore in memory of them we ought to honor any relics of theirs in a fitting manner: principally their bodies, which were temples, and organs of the Holy Ghost dwelling and operating in them, and are destined to be likened to the body of Christ by the glory of the Resurrection. Hence God Himself fittingly honors such relics by working miracles at their presence.

**Reply to Objection 1.** This was the argument of Vigilantius, whose words are quoted by Jerome in the book he wrote against him (ch. ii) as follows: “We see something like a pagan rite introduced under pretext of religion; they worship with kisses I know not what tiny heap of dust in a mean vase surrounded with precious linen.” To him

\* Sermon on the Assumption, work of an anonymous author

Jerome replies (Ep. ad Ripar. cix): “We do not adore, I will not say the relics of the martyrs, but either the sun or the moon or even the angels”—that is to say, with the worship of “latria.” “But we honor the martyrs’ relics, so that thereby we give honor to Him Whose martyrs<sup>†</sup> they are: we honor the servants, that the honor shown to them may reflect on their Master.” Consequently, by honoring the martyrs’ relics we do not fall into the error of the Gentiles, who gave the worship of “latria” to dead men.

**Reply to Objection 2.** We worship that insensible body, not for its own sake, but for the sake of the soul, which was once united thereto, and now enjoys God; and for God’s sake, whose ministers the saints were.

**Reply to Objection 3.** The dead body of a saint is not identical with that which the saint had during life, on account of the difference of form, viz. the soul: but it is the same by identity of matter, which is destined to be reunited to its form.

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<sup>†</sup> The original meaning of the word ‘martyr,’ i.e. the Greek *martyr* is ‘a witness’