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978-0-521-02956-8 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 48 - The Incarnate Word,  
(3a. 1-6)

R. J. Hennessey O.P.

Excerpt

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## The Incarnate Word

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## Prologus

QUIA SALVATOR NOSTER DOMINUS JESUS CHRISTUS, teste angelo, *populum suum saluum faciens a peccatis eorum*,<sup>1</sup> viam veritatis nobis in seipso demonstravit, per quam ad beatitudinem immortalis vitæ resurgendo pervenire possimus, necesse est ut ad consummationem totius theologicæ negotii, post considerationem ultimi finis humanæ vitæ et virtutum et vitiorum, de ipso omnium Salvatore et beneficiis ejus humano generi præstitis nostra consideratio subsequatur.

Circa quam, primo, considerandum occurrit:

de ipso Salvatore;

secundo, de sacramentis ejus, quibus salutem consequimur;

tertio, de fine immortalis vitæ, ad quam per ipsum resurgendo pervenimus.

Circa primum duplex consideratio occurrit:

prima est de ipso incarnationis mysterio, secundum quod Deus pro nostra salute factus est homo;

secunda, de his quæ per ipsum Salvatorem nostrum, idest Deum incarnatum, sunt acta et passa.

Circa primum tria consideranda occurrunt:

primo, quidem, de convenientia incarnationis ipsius;

secundo, de modo unionis Verbi incarnati;

tertio, de his quæ consequuntur hanc unionem.

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<sup>1</sup>Matthew 1, 21

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## Foreword

OUR SAVIOUR, THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, as he was, according to the angel's witness, *saving his people from their sins*,<sup>1</sup> showed in his own person that path of truth which, in rising again, we can follow to the blessedness of eternal life. This means that after our study of the final goal of human life and of the virtues and vices<sup>a</sup> we must bring the entire theological discourse to completion by considering the Saviour himself and his benefits to the human race.

Such a consideration comprises three main headings:

first, the Saviour himself (1-59);

secondly, his sacraments, through which we attain salvation (60-90);<sup>b</sup>

thirdly, the goal of life without end that we attain through Christ by our resurrection.

When we treat of our Saviour we consider:

first, the mystery of the Incarnation, as this means God becoming man for our salvation (1-26);

secondly, the things that our Saviour, God incarnate, did and suffered (27-59).

About the mystery of the Incarnation itself, three topics present themselves:

first, its very rightness (1);

secondly, the manner of union between the Word and flesh (2-15);

thirdly, consequent implications (16-26).<sup>c</sup>

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<sup>a</sup>i.e. the *Secunda Pars* of the *Summa*; see also 1a. 2, Foreword.

<sup>b</sup>The *Summa* was left unfinished by St Thomas at 3a. 90, in the middle of the treatise on the sacrament of Penance; he wrote no more after the feast of St Nicholas, 1273 until his death, 7 March, 1274. The remaining topics planned in this Foreword are covered in the *Supplementum*, compiled in the 14th century, mainly from his *Scriptum super Sententias*, i.e. his commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, Book IV.

<sup>c</sup>The present Volume in this series covers Questions 1-6; Vol. 49, ed. L. Walsh, *The Grace of Christ* (Questions 7-15); Vol. 50, ed. C. E. O'Neill, *The One Mediator* (Questions 16-26).

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## SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, 3a. 1, 1

## Quaestio I. de convenientia incarnationis

Circa primum quaeruntur sex:

1. utrum conveniens fuerit Deum incarnari;
2. utrum fuerit necessarium ad reparationem humani generis;
3. utrum, si non fuisset peccatum, Deus incarnatus fuisset;
4. utrum principalius sit incarnatus ad tollendum originale peccatum quam actuale;
5. utrum conveniens fuerit Deum incarnari a principio mundi;
6. utrum ejus incarnatio differri debuerit usque in finem mundi.

*articulus 1. utrum fuerit conveniens Deum incarnari*

AD PRIMUM sic proceditur:<sup>1</sup> 1. Videtur quod non fuerit conveniens Deum incarnari. Cum enim Deus ab aeterno sit ipsa essentia bonitatis, sic optimum est ipsum esse sicut ab aeterno fuit. Sed Deus ab aeterno fuit absque omni carne. Ergo convenientissimum est ipsum non esse carni unitum. Non ergo fuit conveniens Deum incarnari.

2. Præterea, quæ sunt in infinitum distantia inconvenienter junguntur; sicut inconveniens esset junctura si quis pingeret imaginem in qua *humano capiti cervix jungeretur equina*.<sup>2</sup> Sed Deus et caro in infinitum distant, cum Deus sit simplicissimus, caro autem composita, et præcipue humana. Ergo inconveniens fuit quod Deus carni uniretur humanæ.

3. Præterea, sic distat corpus a summo spiritu sicut malitia a summa bonitate. Sed omnino esset inconveniens quod Deus, qui est summa bonitas, malitiam assumeret. Ergo non est conveniens quod summus spiritus increatus corpus assumeret.

4. Præterea, inconveniens est ut qui excedit magna, contineatur in minimo; et cui imminet cura magnorum ad parva se transferat. Sed Deum, qui totius mundi curam gerit, tota universitas capere non sufficit. Ergo videtur inconveniens quod *intra corpusculum vagientis infantiae lateat cui parum putatur universitas; et tamdiu a sedibus suis absit ille regnator, atque ad unum corpusculum totius mundi cura transferatur*, ut Volusianus scribit ad Augustinum.<sup>3</sup>

SED CONTRA, illud videtur esse convenientissimum ut per visibilia monstrantur invisibilia Dei; ad hoc enim totus mundus est factus, ut patet per

<sup>1</sup>cf III *Sent.* 1, 1, 2. CG IV, 40, 49, 53, 54, & 55. *Compend. Theol.* 200 & 201

<sup>2</sup>Horace, *De arte poetica*, 1, 2

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## FITTINGNESS OF THE INCARNATION

## Question I. the fittingness of the Incarnation

The first of these topics involves six points of inquiry:

1. whether it was right for God to become man;
2. was this necessary for the restoration of the human race?
3. would the Incarnation have occurred had man not sinned?
4. did God become incarnate to remove original sin more than to take away actual sin?
5. would it have been fitting had his incarnation taken place at the beginning of the world?
6. should it have been postponed until the end of the world?

*article I. was it fitting for God to become incarnate?*

THE FIRST POINT:<sup>1</sup> I. It does not seem right for God to have taken flesh. Since, after all, he is eternally and essentially good, the best for him is to remain as he has always been. From eternity he existed without flesh. Thus it is altogether proper that he should so remain. Hence God's incarnation was inappropriate.

2. Moreover, it is improper to join together things that are infinitely apart, e.g. it would be an odd combination for a painting to portray *the neck of a horse joined to the head of a man*.<sup>2</sup> Now God and flesh are infinitely apart; God is entirely without parts, while flesh, and especially human flesh, is composite. Their union was therefore incongruous.

3. Further, body is as far away from supreme spirit as wickedness is from supreme goodness. Since, then, it is quite incompatible for God, the supreme good, to take evil to himself, so also is it for him, supreme uncreated spirit, to take to himself a body.

4. Furthermore, whoever surpasses even great things cannot rightly be confined in the smallest; neither can one on whom the care of great issues rests involve himself with the insignificant. Now the universe itself is not enough to contain God, whose care extends over the whole world. Therefore it seems unfitting that *he whose majesty dwarfs the universe should be hidden in the small body of a puling infant, that this ruler should quit his throne for so long and transfer the governance of the whole world to a baby-body*, so Volusian wrote to Augustine.<sup>3</sup>

ON THE OTHER HAND, it is most fitting to manifest the unseen things of God through things that are seen, for this is the purpose of the whole world, as

<sup>3</sup>*Epist. cxxxv. PL 33, 513*

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## SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, 3a. I, I

illud Apostoli, *Invisibilia Dei per ea quæ facta sunt, intellecta, conspiciuntur*.<sup>4</sup> Sed, sicut Damascenus dicit, per incarnationis mysterium *monstratur simul bonitas et sapientia et justitia et potentia Dei, vel virtus: bonitas quidem, quoniam non desepit proprii plasmatis infirmitatem; justitia vero,\* quoniam non alium facit vincere tyrannum, neque vi eripit ex morte hominem; sapientia vero, quoniam invenit difficillimi pretii decentissimam solutionem; potentia vero, sive virtus, infinita, quia nihil est majus quam Deum fieri hominem*.<sup>5</sup> Ergo conveniens fuit Deum incarnari.

RESPONSIO: Dicendum quod unicuique rei conveniens est illud quod competit sibi secundum rationem propriæ naturæ; sicut homini conveniens est ratiocinari quia hoc convenit sibi in quantum est rationalis secundum suam naturam. Ipsa autem natura Dei est bonitas, ut patet per Dionysium.<sup>6</sup> Unde quidquid pertinet ad rationem boni, conveniens est Deo.

Pertinet autem ad rationem boni ut se aliis communicet, ut patet per Dionysium.<sup>7</sup> Unde ad rationem summi boni pertinet quod summo modo se creaturæ communicet. Quod quidem maxime fit per hoc quod *naturam creatam sic sibi conjungit ut una persona fiat ex tribus, Verbo, anima et carne*, sicut dicit Augustinus.<sup>8</sup> Unde manifestum est quod conveniens fuit Deum incarnari.

1. Ad primum ergo dicendum quod incarnationis mysterium non est impletum per hoc quod Deus sit aliquo modo a suo statu immutatus in quo ab æterno non fuit, sed per hoc quod novo modo creaturæ se univit, vel potius eam sibi. Est autem conveniens ut creatura, quæ secundum rationem sui mutabilis est, non semper eodem modo se habeat. Et ideo, sicut creatura, cum prius non esset, in esse producta est, convenienter, cum prius non esset unita Deo, postmodum fuit ei unita.

2. Ad secundum dicendum quod uniri Deo in unitate personæ non fuit conveniens carni humanæ secundum conditionem suæ naturæ, quia hoc erat

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\*Piana: *justitia vero quoniam, homine victo, non alio quam homine fecit vinci tyrannum*, justice because, since a man had been conquered, he made the tyrant be conquered by none other than a man

<sup>4</sup>Romans I, 20

<sup>5</sup>*De Fide Orthodoxa* III, I. PG 94, 984. St John of Damascus or Damascene (d. 749), last of the Greek Fathers; the work cited is sometimes regarded as the first systematic theology; made available to the medievals c. 1150 in the translation by Richard Burgundio of Pisa. It is a major source for St Thomas's Christology.

<sup>6</sup>*De Divinis Nominibus* I. PG 3, 593. Dionysius or Denys the Areopagite, pseudonym; the Pseudo-Dionysius is an unknown author, probably from Syria, of four theological and liturgical treatises and of a series of letters, c. 500, purporting to be the work of the Athenian convert of St Paul (*Acts* 17, 34). Giving the works a quasi-apostolic authority, this attribution was generally accepted up to the 16th

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#### FITTINGNESS OF THE INCARNATION

the Apostle teaches, *The invisible things of God are there for the mind to see in the things that he has made.*<sup>4</sup> But, as Damascene remarks, through the mystery of the Incarnation *the goodness, wisdom, justice, and power or strength of God are shown: goodness, for he did not disdain the weakness of his own handiwork; justice, because he vanquished the tyrant by none other than man and yet did not snatch man away by violence; wisdom, for he found the most apt payment for a most exacting debt; power or strength that is infinite, for what could be greater than for God to become man?*<sup>5</sup>

REPLY: Whatever is truly suited to a thing is so by reason of its distinctive nature; for example, discursive reasoning befits man who is by nature rational. But the very nature of God is goodness, as Dionysius makes clear.<sup>6</sup> Therefore whatever forms part of the meaning of the good befits God.

But goodness implies self-communication,<sup>a</sup> as Dionysius shows.<sup>7</sup> Therefore it is appropriate for the highest good to communicate itself to the creature in the highest way possible. But, as Augustine teaches, this takes place above all when *he so perfectly joins human nature to himself that one person is constituted from these three: Word, soul, flesh.*<sup>8</sup> Clearly then, it was right for God to be incarnate.

Hence: 1. The mystery of the Incarnation did not involve any sort of change in the state of God's eternal existence. Instead it took place by his uniting himself in a new fashion to a creature, or, more precisely, by a creature becoming united to him. Now for a creature to change is altogether appropriate, since mutability marks its very nature. Accordingly, just as the creature which previously did not exist was brought into existence, so too, though previously not conjoined to God, subsequently it rightly became so.

2. If we look at the natural condition of human flesh, there is no reason why it should be united to God in oneness of person; that is beyond it.

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century; see Vol. 14, ed. T. C. O'Brien, Appendix 3. A further complication was his identification with St Denis, 3rd century, Bp. of Paris.

<sup>7</sup>loc cit 4. PG 3, 693

<sup>8</sup>*De Trinitate* XIII, 17, PL 42, 1031

<sup>a</sup>'Goodness implies self-communication'. The principle expresses, first of all, the final causality of the good as attracting things towards a share in it. Secondly, it applies to the communication by an agent or efficient cause of its own good or perfection, the manner and meaning of the communication corresponds to the kind of agent in question: a natural, i.e. non-volitional agent, acts by the fixed exigency of its nature; communication by a volitional agent is free, generous, but in keeping with the goodness possessed. The argument here is that, given the revealed fact of the Incarnation, it is to be seen not as a necessary emanation, but as a communication befitting and manifesting sheerly divine goodness.

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## SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, 3a. 1, 2

supra dignitatem ipsius. Conveniens tamen fuit Deo secundum infinitam excellentiam bonitatis ejus ut sibi eam uniret pro salute humana.

3. Ad tertium dicendum quod quælibet alia conditio secundum quam quæcumque creatura differt a creatore a Dei sapientia est instituta et ad Dei bonitatem ordinata. Deus enim propter suam bonitatem, cum sit increatus, immobilis, incorporeus, produxit creaturas mobiles et corporeas; et similiter malum pœnæ a Dei justitia est introductum propter gloriam Dei. Malum vero culpæ committitur per recessum ab arte divinæ sapientiæ et ab ordine divinæ bonitatis. Et ideo conveniens esse potuit assumere naturam creatam, mutabilem, corpoream et pœnalitati subjectam; non autem fuit conveniens ei assumere malum culpæ.

4. Ad quartum dicendum quod, sicut Augustinus respondet, *non habet hoc Christiana doctrina, quod ita sit Deus infusus carni humanæ ut curam gubernandæ universitatis vel deseruerit vel amiserit vel ad illud corpusculum quasi contractam transtulerit. Hominum est iste sensus nihil nisi corpus valentium cogitare. Deus autem non mole, sed virtute magnus est, unde magnitudo virtutis ejus nullas in angusto sentit angustias. Non est ergo incredibile, ut verbum hominis transiens simul auditur a multis et a singulis totum, quod Verbum Dei permanens simul ubique sit totum.*<sup>9</sup> Unde nullum inconveniens sequitur, Deo incarnato.

*articulus 2. utrum fuerit necessarium ad reparationem humani generis Verbum Dei incarnari*

AD SECUNDUM sic proceditur:<sup>1</sup> 1. Videtur quod non fuerit necessarium ad reparationem humani generis Verbum Dei incarnari. Verbo enim Dei, cum sit Deus perfectus, ut in *Primo* habitum est,<sup>2</sup> nihil virtutis per carnem assumptam accrevit. Si ergo Verbum Dei incarnatum naturam reparavit, etiam absque carnis assumptione eam potuit reparare.

2. Præterea, ad reparationem humanæ naturæ, quæ per peccatum lapsa erat, nihil aliud requiri videbatur quam quod homo satisfaceret pro peccato.\* Non enim Deus ab homine requirere plus debet quam possit; et, cum pronior sit ad miserendum quam ad puniendum, sicut homini imputat actum peccati, ita etiam videtur quod ei imputet ad deletionem

\*Piana adds: *Sed homo, ut videtur, satisfacere potuit pro peccato.* But a man admittedly can make satisfaction for sin

<sup>9</sup>*Epist. cxxxvii 2, ad Volusianum.* PL 33, 517–519

<sup>1</sup>cf III *Sent.* 4, 3, 1 ad 3; IV, 10, 1 ad 3. *CG* IV, 54 & 55. *Compend. Theol.* I, 200 & 201. *De Rationibus Fidei* 5. In *Psal.* 45

<sup>2</sup>Ia. 27, 2 ad 2; cf Ia. 4, 1 & 2



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Yet God's boundless and surpassing goodness gives reason why it was appropriate for him so to unite himself for man's salvation.

3. Since God, who is uncreated, unchanging, incorporeal, brought changing and bodily creatures into being out of his goodness, all those characteristics whereby they differ from the creator are established by his wisdom and ordained for his goodness.<sup>b</sup> Likewise the evil of penalty<sup>c</sup> is brought in by his justice because of his grandeur. But the evil of fault is committed by a turning aside from the plan of God's wisdom and the order set by his goodness. Accordingly God could rightly take to himself a nature created, changeable, bodily, and liable to penalty, but not one subject to moral fault.<sup>d</sup>

4. As Augustine replies,<sup>e</sup> *Christian doctrine does not teach that God was so joined to human flesh as to lose or resign control over the universe as though constricted by a baby. These are notions of those incapable of thinking of anything beyond the corporeal. But God is great, not in mass, but in power, and no constraint narrows his might. If the fleeting word of a human being is heard at once by many and completely by each, should it be difficult to believe that the abiding Word of God is at once everywhere and whole?*<sup>9</sup> The Incarnation, therefore, involved nothing unlikely.

*article 2. was the incarnation of the Word of God necessary for the restoration of the human race?*

THE SECOND POINT:<sup>1</sup> 1. The incarnation of the Word of God was, it seems, not necessary for the restoration of the human race. No new power comes to the Word of God when he takes flesh, since he is fully God, as we have shown in the *Prima Pars*.<sup>2</sup> If, therefore, the incarnate Word of God is to restore nature, he could have done so without taking flesh.

2. Moreover, the only thing necessary for the restoration of human nature fallen through sin is that man should satisfy for his sin. For God ought not to require more than man is capable of. Now God is more inclined to show mercy than to punish; and thus, as the act of sin is charged to man, so too, it seems, the contrary act cancelling it should be credited to him.

<sup>b</sup>See Ia. 44, 3 & 4; 47, 1 & 2; 65, 1 & 2.

<sup>c</sup>See Ia. 48, 5; 49, 2.

<sup>d</sup>See 3a. 15, 1.

<sup>e</sup>The medieval style of citation of sources does not conform to modern conventions; the following is made up of four selections from numbers 4, 8 (2 selections) and 7 of chapter 3 of this letter. This custom was complicated by the practice of quoting an author, not from his work itself, but from an anthology of principal texts. At times St Thomas paraphrases rather than quotes. Note, however, his care to respect the sense of the passage. See M. D. Chenu, *Towards Understanding St Thomas* (Chicago, 1964) pp. 126–55; Vol. 7, ed. T. C. O'Brien, Introduction.

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## SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, 3a. 1, 2

peccati actum contrarium. Non ergo fuit necessarium ad reparationem humanæ naturæ Verbum Dei incarnari.

3. Præterea, ad salutem hominis præcipue pertinet ut Deum revereatur, unde dicitur *Malach.*, *Si ego Dominus, ubi timor meus? Si Pater, ubi honor meus?*<sup>3</sup> Sed ex hoc ipso homines Deum magis reverentur quod eum considerant super omnia elevatum, et ab hominum sensibus remotum, unde in *Ps.* dicitur, *Excelsus super omnes gentes Dominus, et super cælos gloria ejus;*<sup>4</sup> et postea subditur, *Quis sicut Dominus Deus noster?*<sup>5</sup> quod ad reverentiam pertinet. Ergo videtur non convenire humanæ saluti quod Deus nobis similis fieret per carnis assumptionem.

SED CONTRA, illud per quod humanum genus liberatur a perditione est necessarium ad humanam salutem. Sed mysterium divinæ incarnationis est hujusmodi secundum illud *Joann.*, *Sic Deus dilexit mundum ut Filium suum unigenitum daret, ut omnis qui credit in ipsum non pereat, sed habeat vitam æternam.*<sup>6</sup> Ergo necesse fuit ad humanam salutem Deum incarnari.

RESPONSIO: Dicendum quod ad finem aliquem dicitur aliquid esse necessarium dupliciter: uno modo, sine quo aliquid esse non potest, sicut cibus est necessarius ad conservationem humanæ vitæ; alio modo, per quod melius et convenientius pervenitur ad finem, sicut equus necessarius est ad iter. Primo modo Deum incarnari non fuit necessarium ad reparationem humanæ naturæ; Deus enim per suam omnipotentem virtutem poterat humanam naturam multis aliis modis reparare. Secundo autem modo necessarium fuit Deum incarnari ad humanæ naturæ reparationem.

Unde dicit Augustinus, *Ostendamus non alium modum possibilem Deum defuisse, cujus potestati omnia æqualiter subjacent: sed sanandæ miseræ nostræ convenientiorem alium modum non fuisse.*<sup>7</sup>

Et hoc quidem considerari potest quantum ad promotionem hominis in bono.

Primo quidem, quantum ad fidem, quæ magis certificatur ex hoc quod ipsi Deo loquenti credit. Unde Augustinus dicit, *Ut homo fidentius ambularet ad veritatem, ipsa Veritas, Dei Filius, homine assumpto, constituit atque fundavit fidem.*<sup>8</sup>

Secundo, quantum ad spem, quæ per hoc maxime erigitur. Unde Augustinus dicit, *Nihil tam necessarium fuit ad erigendam spem nostram quam ut demonstraretur nobis quantum diligeret nos Deus. Quid vero hujus rei isto indicio manifestius, quam ut Dei Filius naturæ nostræ dignatus est inire consortium?*<sup>9</sup>

<sup>3</sup>*Malachi* 1, 6<sup>5</sup>*Psalms* 112 [113], 5<sup>4</sup>*Psalms* 112 [113], 4