



In Defense of Aristotle: Thomas Aquinas on the Identity of the Living Body and the Corpse of Christ

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Abstract

The so-called ‘Christianization’ of Aristotle in the Middle Ages and in particular by Thomas Aquinas remains a vexed debate. A case by case study seems to be a fruitful approach. One of these cases concerns Aristotle’s definition of the soul in *De anima* II, 1(412b10-25). Applying this philosophical claim to the theological question *Utrum Christus fuerit homo in triduo mortis* seems to be not without difficulty, as St. Thomas’ frequent treatments of this question show. In this paper I analyze these texts and show how Aquinas on multiple occasions follows *De anima* II, 1 and similar texts of Aristotle and defends a robust Aristotelian position, even in light of the significance of his recovery of Greek Church Fathers.

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The so-called ‘Christianization’ of Aristotle in the Middle Ages and by Thomas Aquinas in particular remains a vexed debate.¹ While there isn’t a general consensus on the question whether such a Christianization represents a deformation or a creative adaptation, a case by case study seems, as I have argued elsewhere, to be a much more fruitful approach than a general pronouncement on the matter.²

One of these cases concerns Aristotle’s definition of the soul in *De anima* II, 1. There Aristotle develops a general definition of a soul as “an actuality of the first kind of a natural organized body” (412b4, transl. J. A. Smith) or “the first actuality of a natural body which has organs” (transl. D.W. Hamlyn). In what follows, he gives two examples of the consequences of this account. First, if an axe were a natural body,

¹ For the Middle Ages in general see L. Bianchi (ed.), *Christian Readings of Aristotle from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011); for Thomas Aquinas in particular see G. Emery, M. Levering (eds.), *Aristotle in Aquinas’s Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

² For such case studies, see J. Vijgen, *The status of Eucharistic accidents ‘sine subiecto’: An Historical Survey up to Thomas Aquinas and selected reactions* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2013); J. Vijgen, ‘Aquinas’s Use of Aristotle in the Sacramental Theology of the Summa Theologiae, qq.60-90’, in: *Divinitas. Rivista internazionale di ricerca e di critica teologica* 57/2 (2014), 187-241; J. Vijgen, ‘The use of Aristotle in Aquinas’s biblical commentaries’, in: P. Roszak, J. Vijgen (eds.), *Reading Sacred Scripture with Thomas Aquinas. Hermeneutical Tools, Theological Questions and New Perspectives* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 287-346.

being an axe would be its essence or soul. Consequently, the disappearance of its essence or soul would cause the axe to be an axe “except in name” (J. A. Smith) or “except homonymously” (D.W. Hamlyn) or “except equivocally” (ὁμωνύμως) (Loeb translation). Secondly, the same applies to the parts of a living body. If sight functions as the soul of the eye, the removal of seeing causes the eye to be an eye “except in name – no more than the eye of a statue or of a painted figure” (412b20-21).

More in general, Aristotelian hylomorphism denies the specific and numerical identity of a dead human being and living human being. If the soul is the specifying form of man, its separation from the body entails the total corruption of the human substance. The denial of the numerical or individual identity results from the denial of the specific identity. It is impossible for an individual to persist in its identity after having ceased to pertain to the same species. Otherwise the absurd result would follow, i.e. it would remain the same while at the same time differing from itself because of its species. For this reason, indeed, a corpse can only be qualified as a man “in name” (*Meteor.* IV, 12, 389b31). Elsewhere, Aristotle is even more adamant: “When in what is added some opposite is contained from which a contradiction follows, it is not true but false (e.g. to call a dead man a man).” (*De Interpr.* 11, 21a21). The same is true for the parts of a corpse: “it is not a finger in any state that is the finger of a living thing, but the dead finger is a finger only homonymously” (*Met.* VII, 10, 1035b24-25). The same needs to be said for the eye, as we have seen. Once death occurs, the finger or the eye stops being an eye as such because it no longer has a proper function for the body, i.e. it no longer is an organ for touch or for sight. Similarly, once death occurs the organic unity constituting the body disappears.

1. The positions of St. Thomas in *III Sent.* d. 22, q. 1, a. 1

Thirteenth century readers of Aristotle bring these definitions and ideas on what constitutes the identity of a human being into dialogue with the theological question, inherited from the early days of scholastic theology, “Utrum Christus fuerit homo in triduo mortis”.³ Thomas discusses this question on five occasions (*In III Sent.* d. 22, q. 1, a. 1; *Quodl.* II, q. 1, a. 1 (Christmas 1269), *Quodl.* III, q. 2, a. 2 (Easter 1270); *Quodl.* IV, q. 5 (Easter 1271); *STh* III, q. 50, a. 5 (before 1273). In what follows I will discuss these texts chronologically with a particular emphasis on how St. Thomas incorporates Aristotle’s perspective.

In his *Scriptum*, Thomas claims that “all the moderns” (*omnes moderni*) are of the opinion that Christ was not a man during the triduum of his death. This is so for two reasons. First, man is constituted by the conjoining of body and soul, something which is absent during the Triduum, that is the days between his death and resurrection. Second, once the soul “recedes” from the body, the body is said to exist as body only

³ See A.M. Landgraf, A.M., ‘Das Problem Utrum Christus fuerit homo in triduo mortis in der Frühscholastik’, in: A.M. Landgraf, *Dogmengeschichte der Frühscholastik* II/I (Regensburg: Pustet, 1953), 273-319.

“aequivoce”.⁴ Indeed, if one is to strictly adhere to Aristotle, one has to argue as follows: if man is a composite of body and soul and if the body is really the body as long as it is animated by the soul, death, being the separation of body and soul, no longer allows to speak of a body in the strict sense. The corpse can only be considered a body in an equivocal sense, as Aristotle said regarding the eye. It is therefore not surprising that Thomas claims that those who hold the opposite position, i.e. that Christ was a man during the triduum of his death, do not hold to the position that the soul is the form of the body but rather regard the union of body and soul as a mere accidental one, falling into the error of Plato.⁵

A solution to the seemingly inescapable solution that the body of Christ was not the body of a man during the Triduum of his death is offered by arguing for a plurality of forms. For if at the time of death the soul is being separated from the body but the *forma corporeitas* remains, guaranteeing the identity of the matter and its determinate dimensions, the corpse is truly the same individual body as the living body. Not surprisingly, Thomas rejects this position. Even if one speaks of a *forma corporeitas*, the word ‘corporeitas’ can have two different meanings. Either it signifies the three dimensions of a body but in this case it is merely an accidental form; or it signifies the form from which the three dimensions derive but in this case it is a specific form. In other words, *forma corporeitas* can only be understood as the substantial form.⁶ Thomas offers an objection based on the Aristotelian dictum “homo est intellectus suus”. Together with the claim that the intellect survives after death, it seems licit to use the term ‘man’, even after death. The major of this argument cannot be found in Aristotle as such but goes back to EN IX, 8 (1168b31-35) where Aristotle argues that, just as a city is most properly identified with its most dominant part, so man is most properly identified with his intellect. In his response, Thomas correctly points out that Aristotle is speaking figuratively and uses the comparison of a city and its ruler to point out the function of what is best and most noble in man.⁷

An account very similar, including the role of Aristotle, can be found in his latest discussion of this topic in *STh* III, q. 50, a. 4. There are two differences however. While it remains erroneous for Thomas to call Christ *simpliciter et absolute loquendo* a man during the three days of his death, he admits that one can say he was a dead man (*homo mortuus*).⁸ The addition of and the emphasis on “mortuus” guarantees for

⁴ *In III Sent.* 22, q. 1, a. 1 (ed. Moos, 663).

⁵ *In III Sent.* 22, q. 1, a. 1 (ed. Moos, 663): “ut nauta navi, vel homo vestimento, sicut dicebant antiqui philosophi; quorum Plato, ut Gregorius Nyssenus narrat, dicebat, quod homo non est aliquid compositum ex anima et corpore; sed est anima utens corpore.”

⁶ Cf. *Quodl.* XII, 6, 1 co (LE 25/2, 406).

⁷ Cf. *In III Sent.* 22, q. 1, a. 1, ad 7 (ed. Moos, 664).

⁸ The related debate between survivalists and corruptionists largely rests on a truncated account of the soul-body unity, as understood by Aquinas. By means of his account, Aquinas is able to affirm both, i.e. the human being continues to exist in some way (survivalism), but the human being, for whom the body is integral to his nature, also ceases to exist after death (corruptionism). In other words, the state of existence of the separated soul is both a state of existence as well as a state of severely diminished existence. Because of the

Thomas that the discussion remains within the boundaries of Aristotelian hylomorphism, i.e. the soul as substantial form of the body; death as separation of body and soul; a body without a soul cannot be called 'body' *simpliciter et absolute loquendo*. Second and more clearly than in the *Scriptum*, he points to a solution which will become crucial later on, i.e. while the union of body and soul ceases at death – and this Christ has in common with other human beings – the hypostatic union of the Word with the soul and the body is not affected by death.⁹

2. *Quodlibet* II, q. 1, a. 1 (Christmas 1269)

Nevertheless, while hylomorphism safeguards the substantial unity of man, the problem of the numerical identity of the living body and the corpse is not resolved, as Thomas himself recognizes. For if the whole is a composite of form and matter, the removal of the form of the part results in the removal of the form of the whole. Hence, a removal of the soul from the body, as was the case with Christ, results in a removal of the form of the whole, i.e. humanity. In *Quodl.* II, q. 1, a. 1 (Christmas 1269), he precisely formulates such an objection.

In his response, however, he already notices a distinctiveness when it comes to Christ. In the case of Christ, the unity is made up of soul, body and divinity. The divine nature, being "the most perfect nature", cannot be made part of a less perfect nature, be it soul or body. Therefore it became united to a human nature of body and soul in the person of the Word. While there was a separation between the soul and the body in death -otherwise Christ's dead would not be real – no such separation took place between Christ's divinity, which remained united in the person of the Word. For Thomas this is apparent from the fact that the Creed says that the Son of God was buried and descended into hell. This would not make sense if the Creed wasn't attributing these different 'modes' (being buried and descending into hell) to the unity of the person of the Word.

This leads Thomas to argue for two different perspectives when it comes to talking about Christ at his moment of death. (1) From the perspective of the person, it can be said that there is a numerical identity between Christ's living and dead body.

separation of body and soul from the body-soul unity of substance, the separated soul is no longer an individual substance and hence it is no longer possible to apply a definition or a name to such a separated soul (*STh* I, q. 29, a. 1, ad 5). The fact that a separated soul is no longer an individual substance does not, however, entail the disappearance of the soul of the human being, to which it belonged before death; rather it subsists as the living soul of that human being. Put briefly, John continues to exist after death as the soul of John (survivalism) but not as John (corruptionism) but in a state, deprived of "the perfection of its [the soul's] nature" (*STh* I, q. 118, a. 3). In other words, while the separated soul retains much of the features and operations of the composite, it does not remain a person in the full objective, metaphysical sense. See S.-T. Bonino, 'L'âme séparée', in *Revue Thomiste* 116 (2016), 71-103 and M. Eitenmiller, 'On the Separated Soul according to St. Thomas Aquinas', in *Nova et Vetera (English Edition)* 17 (2019), 57-91.

⁹ Cf. *ST* III, q. 50, a. 4, ad 1: "Ad primum ergo dicendum quod verbum Dei suscepit animam et carnem unitam, et ideo illa susceptio fecit Deum hominem et hominem Deum. Non autem cessavit illa susceptio per separationem verbi ab anima vel a carne, cessavit tamen unio carnis et animae."

(2) From the perspective of Christ's human nature, however, two views are possible. (2a) If one considers his whole nature, that is, his humanity, and given that Christ's death was real, Christ was not a man during the three days of his death. Hence, one has to say he was not the same man, while remaining the same person. (2b) If one considers the components of his human nature, his soul remained numerically the same but not his body. That is to say, his body remained materially the same but, given that the soul as substantial form of the body is no longer there, one can no longer say simpliciter that Christ's body is the same numerically. Given that death is not simply a change but a corruption, one has to say that under the respect of matter, he is the same but under the respect of the form, he is not the same. In other words, in the case of the body of Christ, there is an identity between the living body and the corpse in the tomb but this identity is to be understood not absolutely but *secundum quid*. The body in the tomb is not the body of Christ in the proper sense of the term because each body is the body of someone as long as the soul has not yet left the body. Without the soul, without its substantial form, the body is no longer the body of someone.

In short, although Thomas underscores Christ's distinctiveness, the deciding factor for his negative response lies in the constitution of Christ's human nature, which he shares with all human beings and the reality of the death of his human nature.¹⁰

3. *Quodlibet* III, q. 2, a. 2 (Easter 1270)

One year later, in his *Quodl.* III, q. 2, a. 2 (Easter 1270), he explicitly treats the question, inspired by Aristotle, "whether the eye of Christ after his death can be called as such equivocally or univocally". As in *Quodl.* 2, the main argument in support of the equivocality is what Christ shares in common with other humans.¹¹ His response is basically Aristotelian, quoting from the passage from *De anima*, book II, mentioned above. Equivocal or univocal refer to whether or not the thing in question has the same definition. The *ratio* responsible for defining a species is taken from its specific form. The specific form of man is his rational soul. Once the rational soul is no longer united to a body, one can only use the term 'man' in an equivocal sense. Because what is the case for the whole, is also the case for the part of the whole, the separated eye can only be called as such equivocally. Once the ratio or notion of the species is removed, the name expressive of that ratio can no longer be used univocally. A denial of the removal of the ratio of the species would entail the denial that the separation of body and soul was not a true corruption.

Regarding the nature of this corruption, he employs a distinction proposed by John Damascene (*De Fide Orthodoxa*, book III): corruption can designate either the

¹⁰ Cf. *Quodl.* II, q. 1, a. 1 (LE 25/2, 211-212).

¹¹ *Quodl.* III, q. 2, a. 2 s. c. (LE 25/2, 246, ll. 18-23): "Set contra. Christus est uniuoce homo cum aliis hominibus, et mors eius fuit uera, sicut et aliorum hominum mors ; cum ergo oculus cuiuslibet hominis mortui equivoce oculus dicatur, uidetur quod etiam oculus Christi post mortem sit equivoce oculus."

separation of the soul from the body or the dissolution of the body. While corruption in the latter sense did not occur in Christ, the former kind of corruption has to be admitted for otherwise one ends up in some form of docetism, denying the truth of Christ's humanity. Such a denial would ultimately lead to a denial of the truth of the Gospel.

In short, because there occurred a true corruption, one is not allowed to say that Christ during the Triduum of his death was a man but rather a dead man (*non dicitur fuisse homo univoce, sed homo mortuus*) just as his eye was in an equivocal manner an eye or a dead eye (*nec oculus...fuit univoce oculus, sed aequivoce, sicut oculus mortuus*).

One of the objections tries to discard the use of philosophical reasoning in general and Aristotle in particular by arguing that philosophy and theology have an altogether different subject matter. Philosophers write about "pure man" (*homo purus*) whereas theologians write about Christ who was not "pure man" but man and God (*Christus non fuit purus homo, sed homo et Deus*). Consequently, whatever Aristotle says about the eye of a dead man, it does not apply to Christ (*non habet locum in Christo*).¹² But Thomas is adamant in his anti-docetism: "Even if Christ is not a pure man, he is however a true man and his death was a true death. Therefore, anything that is true of man as man and of the death of man, all this is true of Christ and his death."¹³

Another objection argues that the union with the person of the Word remains after Christ's death and consequently Christ's body before and after death are of the same substance (*idem secundum substantiam*). Hence there is no equivocation. In light of his future position, this objection is important because it already contains the core of his future argument. Thomas distinguishes between two meanings of 'substance'. (1) Substance can designate 'hypostasis' or the person of the Word. As such the hypostasis or supposit indeed accounts for the numerical identity of the body. (2) Substance can also designate 'essence' and as such the body of Christ becomes a substance (*substantificatur*) by way of its soul, acting as its form and not by way of the Word because the Word does not act as the form of Christ's body. This latter position (the Word acting in Christ "in loco animae") would directly result in the heresies of Arius and Apollinaris.¹⁴ It would also entail that the union of natures in Christ results in one single nature in Christ, which is the heretical position defended by Eutyches.

It seems, therefore, that in order to avoid these heresies, one has to hold that the identity of the living and dead body of Christ only holds on the level of substance understood as hypostasis but not on the level of substance understood as essence. But

¹² *Quodl.* III, q. 2, a. 2, obj. 2 (LE 25/2, 246, ll. 13-17): "Preterea. Philosophi loqui non noverunt nisi de homine puro, set Christus non fuit purus homo, set homo et Deus ; ergo quod Philosophus dicit, oculum hominis mortui esse equivoce oculum, non habet locum in Christo".

¹³ *Quodl.* III, q. 2, a. 2, ad 2 (LE 25/2, 247, ll. 98-102).

¹⁴ Thomas sees a direct connection between these two heresies. Here he has not so much Arius's claim that the Son is inferior to the Father in mind but the claim that the Word took the place of the human soul. Apollinaris claimed that Christ did have a human soul but only sensitive soul while the Word took the place of his intellectual soul.

the question of equivocation or not has to do with the definition of a thing, signifying the essence of a thing.¹⁵

4. *Quodlibet* IV, q. 5, a. un. (Easter 1271)

One can notice an important change in his quodlibetal question IV, q. 5 (Easter 1271) entitled “whether the body attached to the cross is numerically the same as the body lying in the grave”.

The single objection argues that a specific difference entails a numerical difference. Now, there is a similarity between the specific difference of a dead and a living being on the one hand and the body of Christ on the cross and in the tomb on the other hand. Hence, the body in both cases is not numerically the same.

The *sed contra*, however, claims that that which has one and the same supposit or hypostasis is also one and the same numerically. Both bodies, that which is on the cross and that which is in the tomb, are one and the same because the hypostasis of the Word has remained. Hence, both bodies are numerically the same.

The difference is clear. In *Quodl.* III, q. 2, a. 2 the fact that Christ and human beings possess the same human nature leads him to conclude that death, because it introduces a substantial difference between being animated and no longer animated, affects Christ’s human nature as well. What counts for human beings also counts for Christ. Hence, one is not justified in saying that the body of Christ in the tomb, having lost its substantial form, remains a man univocally. Here in *Quodl.* IV, q. 5 he explicitly affirms that both bodies are numerically the same.

The reasoning behind this change is clearly theological. Thomas does not enter into the philosophical aspects of the questions. In fact, he replies to the objection by saying that the objection “*non tenet in corpore Christi, propter unitatem hypostasis*”. In his response he sets the parameters of a solution by recalling the two extremes of two heresies which need to be avoided: 1/Christ did not have a human soul and the separation which occurred at death was a separation between the Word, acting as the soul, and the body; 2/there existed only one nature in Christ in which Christ’s body was united to the Word and hence his body was incorruptible. These heresies were also present in his *Quodl.* III as well as his use there of Damascene’s twofold sense of corruption.

Whereas previously the commonality between Christ and man was given such a weight that it led Thomas to conclude that both bodies (living and dead) were not numerically the same, despite the remaining identity of the person of the Word, now, however, the “greater unity” of the person of the Word is being given more weight. This leads Thomas to the opposite conclusion: “Hence, in order to exclude the first heresy, it is necessary to affirm the identity of the supposit of the body of Christ hanging on the cross and buried in the tomb. In order to exclude the second heresy, it

¹⁵ Cf. *Quodl.* III, q. 2, a. 2, ad 1 (LE 25/2, 245-246).

is necessary to affirm a true difference between death and life. But because the first unity is greater than the second difference, one has to say that the body of Christ hanging on the cross and the body lying in the tomb are numerically the same.”¹⁶

5. *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 50, a. 5 (1273)

In his final and more extensive treatment of this question in *STh* III, q. 50, a. 5 (1273), the *sed contra* comes from the Greek Church Father Athanasius’ *Letter to Epictetus* and in particular from a text which Thomas cites here for the first and only time in his entire oeuvre. The point of the quote is the claim that there is one and the same subject of all of the activities and sufferings and death of Christ, i.e. the Word of God in whom the natures are united.¹⁷

The first objection argues for a position Thomas once defended, i.e. because in all other human beings (*sicut et alii homines*), death installs an essential difference, there must be a numerical difference between the dead and the living body of Christ.

The second objection recalls the single objection of *Quodl.* IV, q. 5, a. un. but explicitly names its Aristotelian sources and in particular the text from *De Anima*, book II. “Further, according to the Philosopher [*Met.* V, 6, 1016b36], things specifically diverse are also numerically diverse. But Christ’s body, living and dead, was specifically diverse: because the eye or flesh of the dead is only called so equivocally, as is evident from the Philosopher [*De anima* II, 1(412b10-25); *Met.* VII, 10, 1035b25]. Therefore Christ’s body was not simply identically the same, living and dead.”¹⁸

The third objection is by now also well-known, i.e. because death is a substantial corruption, the body of Christ after death did not remain identically the same (*idem numero*).

This time the response centers on a delicate terminological distinction only after which Thomas mentions one of the theological heresies of his quodlibetal question IV, q. 5 (Easter 1271).

The term “simpliciter” can have two meanings: (1) either absolutely (*absolute*), i.e. without addition (*nullo addito*) as Aristotle says in *Topica* II, 11 (115b29) or (2) “altogether” i.e. “totally” (*omnino vel totaliter*).

Thus one can develop the following two arguments:

¹⁶ *Quodl.* IV, q. 5, a. un. (LE 25/2, p. 328, ll. 41-49).

¹⁷ *STh* III, q. 50, a. 5, s.c.: “Sed contra est quod Athanasius dicit, in epistola ad Epictetum, ‘circumciso corpore, et potato et manducante et laborante, et in ligno affixo, erat impassibile et incorporeum Dei verbum, hoc erat in sepulcro positum’. Sed corpus Christi vivum fuit circumcisum et in ligno affixum, corpus autem Christi mortuum fuit positum in sepulcro. Ergo hoc idem corpus quod fuit vivum, fuit et mortuum.” See PG 26, 1056A for a Latin translation of this Letter to Epictetus. He quotes from this letter only 4 times and only in the *Tertia Pars* (III, q. 16, a. 6; q. 46, a. 12; q. 50, a. 5; q. 52, a.2). St. Thomas most likely had access to the fifth century collection of canonical and dogmatic texts *Collectio Quesnelliana*. See M. Morard, ‘Thomas d’Aquin lecteur des conciles’, in: *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* 98 (2005), 211-366, here p. 349.

¹⁸ *STh* III, q. 50, a. 5, arg. 2. In *Met.* VII, 10 (1035b25) Aristotle writes that “for it is not a finger in any state that is the finger of a living thing, but the dead finger is a finger only homonymously”.

- (1) a: *Simpliciter* means absolutely or without addition
b: the identity of the subject is that which enables to say that a thing is simply identical
c: "But Christ's body living and dead was identical in its suppositum because alive and dead it had none other besides the Word of God, as was stated above. And it is in this sense that Athanasius is speaking in the passage quoted."
- (2) a: *Simpliciter* means altogether, i.e. totally
b: Life is an essential predicate of a living body
c: the body of Christ, dead and alive, is not simpliciter, i.e. totally, the same

Moreover, a total continuation of Christ's dead body would entail a denial of the reality of the corruption, understood as the separation of the soul from the body, which in turn would entail a denial of (1) Christ's humanity for he would not have been truly dead and (2) the salvific effect of his death for human beings.

In his response to the first objection, Thomas distinguishes between the death of a creature and the death of Christ. Only in Christ does the union with the hypostasis remain and therefore only in Christ does his body remain the same simpliciter, i.e. absolutely.

The same solution is used in his response to the second objection. In the case of a supposit subsisting in one nature, the loss of a unity of species entails the loss of a unity of identity (*unitas numeralis*). In Christ, however, the hypostasis of the Word of God subsists in two natures and hence in this case there is a continuation of identity because of the continuation of the hypostasis or suppositum of the Word of God.

The response to the third objection again applies the difference between Christ and human beings to the effect that corruption does not affect the suppositum and hence the unity of identity in Christ's living and dead body remains.

One notices that Thomas finds both in the *sed contra* and in the corpus in Athanasius a warrant for his teaching. But he also refers to the preceding articles where he had established, partly on the basis of two other of his Greek principal interlocutors, John of Damascene and Cyril of Alexandria, that the hypostatic union remains after the death of Christ.¹⁹

One also notices the doctrinal shift that takes place around Easter 1271. Previously Thomas denied the numerical identity of Christ's living and dead body on the basis of the commonality of Christ's human nature to that of other human beings because this commonality, understood in an Aristotelian sense, only allows to speak of the same body equivocally. Now, however, the numerical identity, so he claims,

¹⁹ Cf. *STh* III, q. 50, a. 2: "Et ideo, sicut ante mortem caro Christi unita fuit secundum personam et hypostasim verbo Dei, ita et remansit unita post mortem, ut scilicet non esset alia hypostasis verbi Dei et carnis Christi post mortem, ut Damascenus dicit, in III libro"; *STh* III, q. 50, a. 4: "Propter quod in epistola synodali Cyrilli dicitur, si quis non confitetur Dei verbum passum carne, et crucifixum carne, et quod mortem gustavit carne, anathema sit." For a view similar to ours with regard to the influence of the Greek Fathers see J. Wawrykow, 'Thomas Aquinas and Christology after 1277', in: J. A. Aertsen et alii (eds.), *Nach der Verurteilung von 1277* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2001), 299-319.

should be upheld on the basis of the distinctiveness of Christ's human nature, i.e. its hypostatic union with the person of the Word.

This doctrinal shift owes much to the influence of Albert the Great and Gilles of Rome. In his *De quindecim problematibus*, dated before the condemnation of 10 December 1270, Albert responds to a list of fifteen errors, sent to him by Gilles of Lessines, and defended at the Arts faculty in Paris. Number 14 is entitled: "Quod corpus Christi iacens in sepulchro et positum in cruce non est vel non fuit idem numero simpliciter, sed secundum quid."²⁰ In his short response, Albert begins by emphasizing the limits of philosophy, noting the imprudence of philosophy dealing with these matters. The crucial difference between the soul of Christ and any other soul after death lies in the ongoing relation to Christ's divinity.²¹ Gilles of Rome, however, in the *reportatio* of his lectures on the third book of the Sentences, dated 1269-1271, does not renounce the use of philosophical reasoning, as Albert seemed to do. He develops an argument to the extent that it is the Word which gives being to the soul; hence, the numerical identity of Word accounts for numerical identity in Christ.²²

²⁰ This proposition is not included in the ten propositions condemned on December 10, 1270 by Etienne Tempier, bishop of Paris. See H. Denifle, *Chartularium Universitatis Parisiensis*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1889), pp. 486-487, no. 432.

²¹ Albertus Magnus, *De quindecim problematibus*, ed. B. Geyer (Münster: Aschendorff, 1975), 43, ll. 60-81 (Editio Coloniensis 17/1): "Sed de corpore Christi loqui per philosophiam temerarium est, eo quod rationi humanae non subicitur. Tamen etiam hoc dictum contra rationem est corporis domini. In ipso enim fuit potestas ponendi animam et iterum sumendi eam virtute latentis in se divinitatis. Anima ergo Christi, quamvis per mortem destiterit a corpore, tamen numquam destitit a divinitate, quae latebat in corpore. ... De hoc tamen non multum loqui expedit philosopho."

²² Gilles' argument seems to be the following. In creatures, the being of the supposit is caused by the union of form with matter so that the numerical unity of the supposit results from that union and a separation of form from matter results in a different numerical unity. But suppose there would be a supposit which did not receive its being from the form but the form would receive its being from the supposit. In such a case, a variation in form does not result in a variation in being. Now this is precisely the case in Christ: the divine supposit does not receive being from the soul of Christ but the soul of Christ receives being from the divine supposit. In such a case it is the numerical identity of the divine supposit which guarantees the numerical unity *simpliciter* of the form. See the edition in C. Luna, 'La Reportatio della lettura di Egidio Romano sul Libro III delle Sentenze (CIm 8005) e il problema dell'autenticità dell'Ordinatio', in *Documenti e Studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* I, 1 (1990), 113-216, here 211, ll. 42-58: "Et quia in puro homine esse subpositi causatur ex unione forme cum materia, quia forma dat esse, propter hoc sequitur quod unitas numeralis esse subpositi causatur ex unitate forme. Et ideo quando separatur forma a materia, variatur ipsum esse, et sic variatur unitas numeralis. Sed si subpositum non reciperet esse a forma, sed e converso, tunc ad variationem forme non sequeretur variatio esse. (Et quia subpositum divinum non habet esse) ab anima Christi, sed e converso, propter hoc non valet in proposito. Unde cum unitas numeralis esse subpositi sit unitas simpliciter unius forme, (in) quantum habet esse a subposito, est unitas secundum quid. Sicut esse album (est) esse secundum quid respectu esse subpositi, ita esse humane nature in Christo, quod habet rationem forme, est esse secundum quid. Esse vero subpositi, quod habet a divinitate, est esse simpliciter. Et (quia) sicut res se habet ad esse, ita ad unum esse, patet quod predicta ratio deberet ponere totum e converso, scilicet quod corpus Christi mortuum et vivum est unum numero simpliciter et plurificatum secundum quid." See pp. 124-128 and 174-178 for the argument that Thomas most likely knew about this criticism by Gilles of his earlier position.

Equally important, as the explicit references to Athanasius, Cyrill of Alexandria (through the mediation of documentation attached to acts of the early ecumenical councils) and John of Damascene attests, is Thomas' increasing appropriation of Greek Church Fathers and materials associated with the early councils.²³

Important for our purposes, however, is to note that nowhere does Thomas renounce his teaching on the unicity of the substantial form in favor of a plurality of forms.²⁴ Nor does he entertain the possibility of matter existing without form or the introduction of a new form (*forma cadaveris*) into the corpse of Christ.²⁵

What does occur in Thomas' mind is a division of labor. Philosophically, adherence to hylomorphism entails affirming the non-identity between the body of a living human being and that of dead human being. Theologically, identifying the body of the dead Christ as the body of Christ is made possible by the role of the suppositum of the Word of God. That is to say, the argument is valid for man who has one nature whereas in the case of Christ who has two natures, hylomorphism is only valid for his human nature which loses its specific unity due to the corruption of death but retains its numerical unity because of the supposit of the Word of God.

Aristotelian hylomorphism can therefore be upheld without contradicting the Christian faith. The fact that Aquinas holds on to his largely Aristotelian anthropology is a testimony to his guiding principle that grace does not destroy, but perfects nature. The series of oppositions ("corpus mortuum cuiuscumque alterius homini" vs. "corpus autem Christi"; "in una sola natura ... sed hypostasis Verbi Dei subsistit in duabus naturis") result in limiting hylomorphism to human beings.

6. Conclusion

As part of the vexed debate regarding the so-called 'Christianization' of Aristotle in the Middle Ages and by Thomas Aquinas in particular, our chosen topic offers an illustration of Thomas' firm adherence to hylomorphism despite criticism.²⁶ The fact that in his commentaries on Aristotle's texts mentioned above Thomas refrains from a theological reinterpretation nor introduces a digression, juxtaposing the Christian faith, attests to his serene objectivity as a commentator of Aristotle.²⁷ This approach, however, does not preclude drawing attention to the limited scope of an Aristotelian

²³ See M. Plested, *Orthodox Readings of Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

²⁴ In fact, the controversy regarding the unicity of the substantial form and its defense by the Dominicans reveal "the birth of a tradition that one rightly calls Thomist". R. Cessario and C. Cuddy, *Thomas and the Thomists: The Achievement of Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2017), 52.

²⁵ Whether Thomas, under the influence of Averroes, changed Aristotle's conception of the body, as Fitzpatrick claims, lies beyond the scope of this paper. See Antonia Fitzpatrick, *Thomas Aquinas on Bodily Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

²⁶ For criticism of St. Thomas' position after his death by John Peckham, Roger Marston and others, see C. Köning-Pralong, *Avènement de l'aristotélisme en terre chrétienne* (Paris : Vrin, 2005), 207-219.

²⁷ For an extensive treatment of this question see L. Elders, *Aristote et Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Les Presses universitaires de l'IPC, 2018).

inquiry. From a Christian perspective, Thomas is correct to signal out the distinctiveness of the hypostatic union in Christ. Contrary to other passages where Thomas insists for example that the Nicomachean Ethics is concerned only with happiness of the present life or that Aristotle has no intention of discussing the operation of mind after death, such disclaimers are implicit but not less apparent with regard to our chosen topic.²⁸ Regarding our topic, such a disclaimer would hold that Christ is the exception that proves the rule of hylomorphism.²⁹

²⁸ For such explicit disclaimers see for instance *In I Eth.* l. 9, no. 113: "In this work the Philosopher speaks of happiness as it is attainable in this life, for happiness in a future life is entirely beyond the investigation of reason."; *In I Eth.* l. 15, no. 180: "It should be noted that the Philosopher is not here speaking of happiness in a future life, but of happiness in the present life."; *In III De Anima*, l. 10, no. 745: "But how it does know anything then is not part of our present enquiry".

²⁹ John of Paris, in his defense of Thomas' position, expresses this disclaimer as follows: "Philosophus autem non novit nisi simplices creaturas, in quibus non invenitur suppositum unum subsistere in duabus naturis, nec suppositum manere transeunte natura. Ideo universaliter dicit, quod quae different specie, different numero". See *Le Correctorium Corruptorii 'Circa' de Jean Quidort de Paris*, ed. J.-P. Müller (Roma: Anselmianum, 1941), a. 30 (31), 171.