

## Naturally deadly?

### The human body of Christ between the needs of reason and the reasons of faith

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#### Handout

1. Intervention in two parts: a) the doctrine of William of Ware: Whether Christ would have died even if he had not been crucified; b) comparison with the thought of Duns Scotus; conclusions.

Guilelmus de Ware, *Questione* 33 on the third book of *Sentenze*: Firenze, Bibl. Naz., ms. A IV 42 (Sarnano, Bibl. Com., ms. E 97). Transcription of Barnaba Hechich (at Commissio Scotistica Internationalis, Rome).

= Ioannes Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* III, d. 16.

#### William of Ware: Christ was necessarily mortal

2. *Utrum Christus naturaliter fuisset mortuus si poena aliqua illata sibi non fuisset.*

Seven arguments that Christ would not have died a natural death if he had not been crucified. Three approaches: physical, theological and according to reason.

3. Physical approach = incorruptibility of form and matter taken in themselves, and of their compound when the resulting body is endowed with a perpetual equilibrium between its parts. Christ, a perfect man, did not suffer any imbalance between his components and reintegrated with food what his body naturally lost.

4. Theological approach [← « Therefore, just as through one person sin entered the world, and through sin, death, and thus death came to all, inasmuch as all sinned» (Rm 5, 12) / « For God formed man to be imperishable; the image of his own nature he made him. But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world, and they who are in his possession experience it. » (Sap 2, 24)].

= Etiological reading of death as a consequence of Adam's sin. It is found in the Fathers of the Church, *in primis* Augustine.

In Christ there was no guilt whatsoever, for he was sinless; if death is the penalty for the guilt of sin, Christ would not naturally have died, had he not been killed.

5. Approach according to reason [reflection *ab absurdo*]: if a man were to die without original sin, in the state of pure nature, his soul would not know where to go. Not in heaven, because it lacks the supernatural charity thanks to which he has access to the enjoyment of God, but not even to hell, because he has not committed no guilt.

Therefore Christ, considering only the sinless human nature in him, could not die.

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6. The arguments to the contrary are two [explanation of a physical nature]: every body is naturally corruptible. Death is common to humans and animals, but animals commit no guilt: *omne corpus compositum ex contrariis est naturaliter corruptibile*.

7. William of Ware's answer, *Doctor Fundatus*:

«Ad quaestionem dico quod omnis homo, quantum est ex parte corporis, est naturaliter corruptibilis in quocumque statu naturae, sive in statu naturae institutae sive gratiae sive gloriae; sed bene potest esse et fieri a Deo ex aliquo dono superaddito quod corpus eius non corrumpatur, - et hoc donum in statu innocentiae fuit iustitia originalis, in statu gloriae erit dos impassibilitatis. Christus ergo, ex quo fuit homo, fuit corruptibilis et habuit causam corruptionis intrinsecam» (GUILIELMUS DE WARE, *Sent.* III, q. 33, in corp.).

8. The intrinsic cause of the corruption of the body of Christ.

vs initial arguments: a body can corrupt itself either from matter or from the elements of the compound:

- by matter, which is the passive component, because it naturally tends to the alteration of the compound in search of new forms to which to attach itself to, causing the destruction of the body (cf. Aristoteles, *Physica* I, t. 79-80 (A c. 9, 192a 3-16);
- by the compound itself: in it the different forces are in such a balance that if one prevailed over the other, a disproportion would be harmful to the organism → possible extrinsic causes = the atmosphere that contains the body and the foods that support it: a lowering of the temperature or the assumption of a food that causes an alteration of the internal balance of the compound.

«Ergo cum in Christo fuerint omnes istae causae corruptionis, Christus fuisset mortuus, naturaliter loquendo, etiam si nulla passio sibi illata fuisset» (GUILIELMUS DE WARE, *Sent.* III, q. 33, in corp.).

9. Traditional interpretation of Christian theology (cf. Augustine and Anselm): before sin man was endowed with original justice → possibility of not dying (*posse non mori*). Once justice was lost through sin, man found himself in the need to die.

Therefore, sin is not the natural cause of dying, but only the cause that removes what prevented one from dying (*rationem causae removens prohibens mortem*), that is, original justice.

10. Saints and philosophers affirm the mortality of the human body from the natural point of view. Since Jesus Christ took on our flesh (cf. Rom 8:13), becoming a man in all things like us, except for sin (cf. Heb 4:15), he would still have died, perhaps late in life, unless that a special miracle did not intervene to make him immortal.

11. «Unde naturam humanam possumus tripliciter considerare: uno modo, in puris naturalibus, sine aliquo dono supernaturali; alio modo, cum aliquo dono supernaturali, sicut fuit in Adam; tertio modo, cum aliquo habitu vitioso, sicut modo communiter est in omnibus.

Primo modo considerando naturam, sic dico quod fuit Christus: non habuit enim donum originalis iustitiae, quae quidem fuit prohibens mortem, quasi ligans ipsam potentiam ad corruptionem et mortem, sicut habuit primus homo. Et ideo dico quod natura humana in Christo, quantumcumque fuisset sibi unita divinitas, relicta tamen sibi ut ageret quae sunt propria, fuisset aliquando corrupta et defecisset morte naturali, sine inflictione alicuius poenae ab extrinseco irrogatae sive illatae» (GUILIELMUS DE WARE, *Sent.* III, q. 33, in corp.).

**12.** Response to initial arguments.

Physical arguments: although matter and form taken in themselves are incorruptible, the substrate they comprise is temporal due to the action of multiple factors.

Intrinsic causes:

- a) tendency of matter to seek new forms
- b) precariousness of the balance of the internal forces of the human compound.
- c) any natural reality has an established life cycle that determines its duration

Extrinsic causes:

- a) climate action
- b) proximity to another body which can alter the dry-humid and cold-heat ratio
- c) tension of each element of the compound towards its natural place
- d) insufficient food replenishment

**13.** Theological arguments: it is not worth quoting the biblical passages in which the connection between sin and death is affirmed in order to argue that, since Christ had no sin, then he would not have died:

- a) in the state of innocence it was original justice that prevented death;
- b) even in the state of innocence there was some form of decay, related to the condition of nature; c) death is a natural condition for all animals, and in them it does not depend on guilt.

**14.** Argument *ab absurdo*: man created only with original nature (without grace for heaven, but also without sin for hell): for such a man God will provide a special dwelling place (*habitaculum aliud*). Or, it can be granted that he will go to heaven, but will not enjoy the vision of God because he lacks the supernatural gift of charity.

Paradoxical answer in the case of the Risen Christ: at the same time in paradise as God and in another unspecified otherworldly dwelling as man, or, in paradise but without enjoying the vision of God.

But, Christ, took on human nature as pure nature, then as man he merited, and greatly so, both by his virtuous actions and by his own passion → even as man he was justly destined for heaven.

**15.** *Doctor Fundatus*'s position is very clear: the human body, like any other animal body, is subject to the processes of generation and corruption, and therefore to death.

The first man enjoyed immortality because God had endowed him with a particular grace, original justice, which prevented the possible intrinsic and extrinsic causes of mortality from being realized. Once original righteousness was removed through sin, man was left without that protection, and therefore naturally experiences death.

Since Jesus Christ assumed human nature in its pure condition, devoid of both original righteousness and sin, his body was naturally marked by the inevitability of death, which would therefore have occurred even if he had not been crucified.

## John Duns Scotus: Christ was mortal by a supernatural intervention

16. Ioannes Duns Scotus, *Ord.* III, d. 16, q. 1-2 (IX, 535-561) ≡ *Lect.* III, d. 16, q. 1-2 (XX, 399-421).

q. 1: *Utrum Christus habuit necessitatem moriendi;*

q. 2: *Utrum in potestate animae Christi fuerit non mori ex violentia passionis.*

We focus only on the first, and in particular on the opinion of others reported by Scotus before setting forth his own.

17. *A multis* it is said that Christ had the necessity to die (*necessitas moriendi*), because in him the power of matter was as in all other men: once deprived of its forms (*privata aliis formis*), matter becomes the cause of corruption.

The "many" are Bonaventure, Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, Richard of Mediavilla, Peter of Tarantasia, Henry of Ghent. But, above all, William of Ware, whose opinion Scotus summarizes in five points.

18. 1. Matter is an element of instability in the compound, as it always tends to bind itself to other forms and to produce corruption in the compound to which it belongs. This makes the body an intrinsic cause of corruption in any state of human existence (*sive in statu naturae institutae sive gratiae sive gloriae*).

2. In the body of Christ there was the opposition of qualities (*contrarietas qualitatum*), according to the proportionate being of the different parts of the body. But the action induced by a force could cause the corruption of the body in a necessary way

19. 3. The elements naturally tend to their places, and when they are outside of them they undergo corruption and dissolution by nature, since no violent motion can remain in a stable manner.

4. The different parts of the organic soul are composed in different ways, to dominate the different organs in different ways, and between them there is opposition. Therefore from the mutual action and passion of the parts comes their corruption. But the corruption of the parts is the corruption of the whole.

5. Every generable and corruptible body has a certain period and a certain measure or duration, beyond which it cannot last. But the body of Christ was generable and corruptible, and therefore it too had a set period, beyond which he could not remain alive.

20. Scotus refutes this view: the reasons given are not valid.

Except for the last one, they also apply to his glorious body of Christ after the resurrection, as well as to ours before and after the final judgment.

William himself:

«Omnis homo, quantum est ex parte corporis, est naturaliter corruptibilis in quocumque statu naturae, sive in statu naturae institutae sive gratiae sive gloriae» (GUILLELMUS DE WARE, *Sent.* III, q. 33, in corp.).

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**21.** Not the first reason, because the form of Christ's soul did not remove all privation by communicating itself through the essence to the body, either before or after the resurrection = Christ's body always retained the potentiality proper to matter (*privatio*), by which it tends towards a form.

Not the second and third, because even the glorious body of Christ is a mixture in which oppositions remain. It would seem that the body of Christ in heaven suffers even more the tension of its constituent elements, particularly towards the earth, of which it is primarily made.

Not the fourth reason, for if the parts that make up the body were the same, before and after the resurrection, the glorious body would also be corrupted in a necessary way.

**22.** Not the fifth, because it is not true that every body has a fixed duration. Post the divine conservative action (*posita cum hoc general manutenentia divina*) and removed every extrinsic corrupting element, the stone would never be corrupted. Sometimes extrinsic agents can extend the life span of some bodies. Only simple bodies are corrupted by extrinsic causes, and their duration depends on what causes their corruption.

**23.** Two considerations:

- The characteristics of the matter of which Christ the mortal body is formed also apply to his glorious body, which *naturaliter loquendo*, is corruptible.
- a certain paradoxical coloring of the Scotian response. How is it possible that the body of Christ in heaven maintains the deprivation proper to matter, that it suffers oppositions of forces within it? And even that it remains eternally in a violent condition, given that its natural place would be the earth and not the heaven?

**24.** → Commentary on the fourth book of the *Sentenze* = how the qualities which characterize the mortal body are also in the glorious body and yet there they are incorruptible.

Cf. *Ord.* IV, d. 49, p. 2, q.un., *Utrum corpus hominis beati post resurrectionem erit impassibile.*

Since man cannot be blessed in this mortal life, but all man deserves bliss, then he will be blessed with whole self, in an immortal body, befitting his immortal soul. Immortality ← incorruptibility ← impassibility by virtue of a proximate power, which acts as an impediment extrinsic cause: the divine will, which does not act in accordance with the secondary causes, by which the bodies should be corrupted.

**25.** In order to argue that Christ would have died even if he had not been crucified, it is not appropriate to resort to the intrinsic causes by which a body is corruptible, an other explanation must be found. It is not on the level of nature that the causes must be sought, but on that of the supernature.

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**26.** Recall that according to William, human nature can be considered in three ways:

- purely according to nature, without any supernatural gift;
  - with the gift of original justice;
  - with original sin.
- the Word assumed nature according to the first mode.

Scotus presents a fourth option: the assumption of human nature as destined for glory. It is more perfect than the others, and it must be thought that in becoming man, the Word has become perfect man. However, if Christ had lived his earthly life with glorious human nature, he would not have suffered

→ by miraculous intervention the glory of the soul did not redound on the body, leaving it in the natural necessity of dying.

**27.** «Sed unde fuit haec necessitas moriendi? Hoc fuit quia corpus sibi dimissum, comparando naturam ad sua principia et ad qualitates consequentes eam naturaliter, per privationem redundantiae gloriae fuit animale, et ideo non sub pleno dominio animae ad prohibendum passionem in corpore; ideo etiam fuit in corpore eius corruptio et restauratio per sumptionem alimenti; sed non potuit fieri restauratio ita perfecta, quod corpus maneret immortale, nisi anima perfectum dominium habuisset super corpus» (IOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Ord.* III, d. 16, q. 1-2, n. 30).

**28.** IOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Lect.* II, d. 19, q. un., n. 10: causes of Adam's mortality before sin: imbalance induced by an alteration causing total loss of root moisture in the compound; other accidental causes of death, such as lack of self-control, poor climate conditions and violence suffered.

In the present matter, however: only two causes of natural death.

- a. Although Christ replenished with food what he lost through natural metabolic processes, that food was not refined, but corrupt, which is what we eat on a regular basis.
- b. And even if he had had the fruit of the tree of life (*lignum vitae*), he would still have died because of the intrinsic need of the body, which, endowed with weak nutritional powers, because limited and not enhanced by a special gift, would not have been able to rebalance with food what had been lost in a natural way.

«Debilitas igitur virtutis et impuritas alimenti extrinseci fuissent sufficiens causa suae mortis naturaliter» (IOANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Ord.* III, d. 16, q. 1-2, n. 35).

**29.** For Scotus (≈ William) too, sin is a sufficient cause of dying, but not a necessary one. It is stated in Scripture that because of sin the body dies in a demeritorial sense.

Since there was never sin in Christ from the first moment he assumed the innocent nature, there was no demeritory cause in him.

However, there are also other causes of dying, and these are the ones that cause death by necessity of nature.

## Conclusion

**30. *Doctor Subtilis*:** a solution that is more careful to consider the consequences of the hypostatic union between the Word of God and the human nature of Jesus.

In the incarnation not only supernatural intervention by which the divine person of the Son takes on mortal flesh, but also further miraculous intervention, by which God prevents Christ's glorious soul from having full dominion over his body, because otherwise he could not have died for the salvation of humanity.

→ left in its condition of naturalness, the body of Christ was able to suffer the passion and, if this had not happened, he would still have gone to death for the concurrence of extrinsic and intrinsic corruptive causalities, as for any other human person.

**31. *Doctor Fundatus*:** highlights the characteristic of the naturalness of the body of Christ, like any other animal body.

It does not necessitate affirming the existence of further supernatural intervention by God after the incarnation.

Indeed, if anything - on the contrary - he could have been immortal only if a miracle had intervened to make so. The body of Christ is not only the *locus theologicus* of the Christian faith, but also the *locus philosophicus* where the ordinary revelation of nature is manifested.

**32.** The body of Christ, though deified, is a body like any other.

In this, both William of Ware and John Duns Scotus agree.

He could not have redeemed our humanity if the Word of God had not assumed it all the way down.

What deep philosophical and theological repercussions this has on our body, on the body of each one of us, this is the provocation that we can derive from the long-distance dialogue with these two great masters of the past.