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## A SUPREMELY IDLE QUESTION? ISSUES OF THE BEATIFIC VISION DEBATE BETWEEN 1331–1336\*

*A Zénon, ami et maître*

This paper consists of two parts. The first part will offer a summary of the short, but extremely intensive debate about the beatific vision between 1331 and 1336 in the Latin Church. The second part will attempt to identify certain cardinal problems implied by the debate. These problems branch into different directions, ranging from doctrinal and historical to historiographical aspects, all three of which I'd like to address in the following paper.<sup>1</sup>

The controversy primarily addressed two issues of medieval eschatology.<sup>2</sup> First, the *time* (and not the nature) of the ultimate beatitude of the saints (that is, of the souls of those who died sinlessly), in particular whether it is immediate (that is, right after the separation of the soul from the body and before the Last Judgement) or whether it will be granted only after the Last Judgement. The issue of the essential nature of the vision (that is, whether the vision is a *visio essentialis* or not) was left out of the controversy, since it was assumed by all

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\*I would like to express my gratitude to the anonymous reviewer for the thorough criticism of my paper, and for some additional bibliography. All remaining issues are my responsibility. Again, when not indicated otherwise, the translations are mine. I thank John Kee for correcting my English.

<sup>1</sup>My discussion will leave the political aspects aside, however. This aspect has been treated by I. IRIBARREN, "Theological Authority at the Papal Court in Avignon: the Beatific Vision Controversy," *La vie culturelle, intellectuelle et scientifique à la cour des Papes d'Avignon*, edited by J. Hamesse, Turnhout: Brepols, 2006, p. 277–301.

<sup>2</sup>The problem of the beatific vision is neither mentioned in L. BOROS, *Mysterium mortis. Der Mensch in der letzten Entscheidung*, Olten – Freiburg i.Br.: Walter-Verlag, 1973; nor in J. RATZINGER, *Eschatologie. Tod und ewiges Leben*, ed. 2, Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1978.

parties.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, whether there is a difference between the vision granted to the saintly souls in their intermediate status (that is, after the separation from the body but before the Last Judgement) and the final vision they will receive after the Last Judgement, and if there is a difference, how do the two visions differ from each other?<sup>4</sup>

From a contemporary perspective, aspects of medieval eschatology, that is, scholastic inquiries about the events around the end times as “the last things,” seem to be both distant and of a rarefied and dubious nature. On closer inspection, however, the seemingly abstract and unfamiliar dispute leads to a sophisticated discussion of the character of the beatitude of souls in the “middle state” between highly trained theologians, one with far-reaching consequences, both theological and ecclesiological. I will argue that at heart the debate was about the role of theological methodology, the role of Church tradition, and ultimately about the meaning of the history of salvation. The debate showed in a nutshell the essence of developments in scholastic theology which continued to have a lasting influence on the Western Church.<sup>5</sup>

Let me begin with a historical reconstruction of the debate.<sup>6</sup>

“You are bringing some strange things to our ears” (*nova infers auribus nostris*, Acts 17:20). With these words of the Athenians, originally addressed to St. Paul when inviting him to talk on the Areopagus, Jean d’Aragon, patriarch

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<sup>3</sup> About the significance of the issue of the essential vision, which was the dominant view of the Latin West, while it was denied by most Greek theologians, see V. LOSSKY, *The Vision of God*, Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1983.

<sup>4</sup> A voluminous monograph with an extensive bibliography on the subject of the beatific vision has been published by CHR. TROTTMAN, *La vision béatifique. Des disputes scolastiques à sa définition par Benoît XII*, Rome: Bibliothèques des Écoles Françaises d’Athènes et de Rome, 1995. The older book by G. HOFFMANN, *Der Streit über die seelige Schau Gottes (1331–1338)*, Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1917, is still excellent. On the earlier phase of the issues it is worth consulting N. WICKI, *Die Lehre von der himmlischen Seligkeit in der mittelalterlichen Scholastik von Petrus Lombardus bis Thomas von Aquin*, Freiburg: Universitätsverlag Freiburg, 1954.

<sup>5</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum looks at this issue slightly differently: “matters of Christology, epistemology, and soteriology, pastoral care and papal authority” were at stake (C.W. BYNUM, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, p. 286).

<sup>6</sup> The history of the debate, its main events, principal actors, and chronology, have been covered in detail by G. HOFFMANN, *Der Streit über die seelige Schau Gottes*, and more recently by M. DYKMANS, *Les sermons de Jean XXII sur la vision béatifique. Texte précédé par d’une introduction et suivi d’une chronologie de la controverse avec la liste des écrits pour et contre le pape*, (Miscellanea Historiae Pontificiae, 34), Rome: Presses de l’Université Grégorienne, 1973; A. MAIER, “Schriften, Daten und Personen aus dem Visio-Streit unter Johann XXII,” *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae*, vol. 9 (1971), p. 143–186 (reprinted in A. MAIER, *Ausgehendes Mittelalter*, vol. 3, edited by A. Paravicini Bagliani, Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1977, p. 543–590).

of Alexandria and reigning archbishop of Tarragona, concluded his somewhat puzzled answer to Pope John XXII in the late summer of 1332.<sup>7</sup>

The answer was occasioned by the request of the pope, who wanted to inquire about Jean d'Aragon's opinion on his theological position concerning the beatific vision. The pope put forward his views in a series of sermons delivered about half a year before,<sup>8</sup> an act which caused consternation in the Latin theological realm. As in the previous line in Acts, the Athenians ask Paul: "May we know what is this new doctrine, whereof you speak?"<sup>9</sup> The shrewd choice of words by the young patriarch at the same time both expressed respect for the authority of the pope and implied clearly that he considered the papal view to be a novelty. After a short but careful analysis, the young archbishop duly and firmly rejected the views of the pope. His rejection was neither the first, nor the last among the negative answers the pope received about his theological overture.

According to contemporary chronicles and other sources, Pope John XXII did indeed take his audience by surprise in Avignon, when in the sermon he preached on All Saints Day in 1331 he denied the immediate bliss of the departed souls of the saints.<sup>10</sup> The pope did not deny a certain form of judgement, or even a certain form of bliss for the souls of the saints, but maintained that the ultimate beatitude will only be awarded to them after the Last Judgement, understood as following the general resurrection. (Beatitude is a result of the Final Judgement, but in the meantime the saints expect that this will be granted to them.)

This sermon signalled the beginning of what later came to be termed the *visio beatifica* controversy. As the Augustinian Hermit, and later general of his order, Thomas of Strasbourg wrote a few years later, probably in 1335, "[the assertion] troubled well-nigh the whole Christian world by claiming that the souls cleansed [from their sins], having separated from their bodies, do not see in an

<sup>7</sup>M. DYKMANS, "Lettre de Jean d'Aragon, patriarche d'Alexandrie, au pape Jean XXII sur la vision béatifique," *Analecta Sacra Tarraconensia*, vol. 42 (1969), p. 165. The reactions to the view of the pope considering it as novelty were analysed in IDEM, *Les sermons de Jean XXII sur la vision béatifique*, p. 12–33.

<sup>8</sup>The six sermons were edited (only two are preserved, of other two there are extracts, and the last two can only be reconstructed from fragments and quotations) in M. DYKMANS, *Les sermons de Jean XXII sur la vision béatifique*; and IDEM, "Nouveaux textes de Jean XXII sur la vision béatifique," *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique*, vol. 66 (1971), p. 401–417. Analysis of the sermons in: CHR. TROTTMANN, *La vision béatifique*, p. 691–695.

<sup>9</sup>I use the New King James translation, since this is relatively closest to the Vulgate. In other cases, if not indicated otherwise, the translations are mine.

<sup>10</sup>"[...] quod dictum multos scandalisavit [...] in principio scandalum magnum de hoc fuerit [...]" (H. GÉRAUD, *Chronique de Guillaume de Nangis et de ses continuateurs*, vol. 2, Paris: Jules Renouard, 1843, p. 127). See also Thomas of Strasbourg and Thomas Waleys below.

uncovered [that is, direct] and beatific way the divine essence, until they recover their bodies at the general resurrection of the dead.”<sup>11</sup>

The aging pope, already eighty-seven years old at the time, proposed the view to his illustrious audience of cardinals and theologians that the departed souls of the just who lived before the Incarnation (the prophets and holy men) rested in the “bosom of Abraham,” and after the Resurrection Christ would take them with him and join them to those saintly souls who lived after the passion and the resurrection. They would be put to rest under the altar of God, according to Revelations 6:9, which is their temporary reward. This verse had been the basis of the eschatology of Bernard of Clairvaux, as basically the whole argument of the pope was taken over from Bernard.<sup>12</sup>

It is not decided by Augustine, says the pope, what exactly that phrase “the bosom of Abraham” means.<sup>13</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, however, the great Cistercian authority from the early 12<sup>th</sup> century, explains it as that part of hell which does not have light, but whose inhabitants enjoy peace and wait in the consoling certitude of the advent of Christ. It is geographically separated from hell proper by an immense chasm to prevent trespassing.<sup>14</sup> After his death, nevertheless, Christ descended to this place and liberated the inhabitants by taking them with him to join the other blessed under his altar.<sup>15</sup>

The “altar of Christ,” which is now the collective resting place of the just, is interpreted by the pope, once again following Bernard, as the humanity of Christ. The souls are protected and comforted by the humanity of Christ in this place until the Last Judgement, when they will be elevated above the altar, that is, they will see not only Christ’s humanity but also his divinity.

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<sup>11</sup> The complete passage: “Modernis autem temporibus aliqui surrexerunt, qui frivolis suis assertionibus circa istud presuppositum quasi totum mundum christianum turbaverunt, dicentes animas purgatas, a suis corporibus exutas non videre nude, et beatifice divinam essentiam, donec [...] sua corpora in universali mortuorum resurrectione resumant” (THOMAE AB ARGENTINA *Commentaria in IIII libros sententiarum*, Venetiis, 1564, f. 198a). The translation and the explanatory insertions are mine. See also A. MAIER, “Schriften, Daten und Personen aus dem Visio-Streit unter Johann XXII.”

<sup>12</sup> M. DYKMANS, *Les sermons de Jean XXII sur la vision béatifique*, p. 93. The sermon of Bernard is his fourth sermon for All Saints (PL 183, 471C sq.).

<sup>13</sup> In fact, Bernard also makes such a comment in *De consideratione*, V, 4 (PL 182, 793C), quoted by B. DE VREGILLE, “L’attente des saints d’après saint Bernard,” *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, vol. 3 (1948), p. 225–244. The quote “[...] sinum illud [...] Abrahae curiosius scrutari, et sub altari, quodcumque illud est” is on p. 240.

<sup>14</sup> Lc 16:26, quoted by the pope following BERNARD, *Sermo IV in festo omnium sanctorum*; PL 183, 472A. See M. DYKMANS, *Les sermons de Jean XXII sur la vision béatifique*, 94, l. 7.

<sup>15</sup> Based on BERNARD CLAREVALLENSIS, *Sermo IV in festo omnium sanctorum*; PL 183, 471B–475B. Vregille lists also his *De diligendo Deo* (PL 182, 993–995); *De consideratione*, IV, 9 (PL 182, 793); *Sermo LXXVII in Cant.* (PL 183, 1157).

The souls will, therefore, only see the divine essence, that is God himself, after the Last Judgement.

But in what sort of bliss do the souls participate in the interim? What does the bliss before the judgement consist of? It means the freedom from tears, that is, from suffering and from the pitfalls of sin. This is the meaning of the heavenly peace implied by the liturgical farewell phrase at the funerals “may they rest in peace” (*requiescant in pace*), which means liberation from the incertitude of the end. An even stronger argument could be made on the basis of the *Memento* of the canon of the mass “and they sleep the sleep of peace” (*et dormiunt in somno pacis*). The blessed know what they can expect, but they don’t participate in it yet. The beatific vision is delayed until Judgement Day.<sup>16</sup>

But why can’t they enter the eternal bliss once they are liberated from sin and suffering? The pope’s answer is clear: because they have not yet assumed their bodies, something which will only happen at the general resurrection. It is entirely unreasonable that an imperfect part (the soul on its own) should receive the final perfection, before it has become perfect itself (resuming its body again in order to become the complete person). The pope adheres strictly to the principle that the human person is a unity of body and soul.

Once the souls have received their bodies, they will be invited to the peace of God instead of the peace of their own. This is what is meant by the passage in Matthew: “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”<sup>17</sup>

On the third Sunday of the Advent in that same year the pope delivered another sermon. This time copies were prepared in advance with the intention that anyone interested could have them. Commenting on the passage: “Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, rejoice,”<sup>18</sup> he started with the analysis of the joy which results from the present expectation of the future reward. The whole future reward consists, as Augustine says, in the vision of God.<sup>19</sup> This vision is the complete vision of the deity and of the divine essence, for this is the ultimate end of our cravings, beyond which there remains nothing desirable.

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<sup>16</sup> Quoted by A. MAIER. ‘Zur Textüberlieferung einiger Gutachten des Johannes de Neapoli,’ *Ausgehendes Mittelalter*, vol. 3, edited by A. Paravicini Bagliani, Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1977, p. 494.

<sup>17</sup> Mt 25:34.

<sup>18</sup> Phil. 4:4.

<sup>19</sup> A somewhat concocted quote from AUGUSTINE, *De Civitate Dei*, XXII, 28: “tua beata visio erit nostri laboris praemium [...]” and *De Trinitate* 1, 9: “de Filio solo [...] et in eius visione merces tota promittitur dilectionis et desiderii nostri [...]” and *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 90, 16. The passage has become a classic after PETER OF LOMBARD, *In Psalmos*, 15, 2 (PL 191, 854) and WILLIAM OF AUXERRE, *Summa aurea*, Paris, 1500, f. 300, col. 1. Quoted by M. DYKMANS, *Les sermons de Jean XXII sur la vision béatifique*, p. 101, n. 6.

Having established these foundations, the pope makes a subtle move to avoid a possible pitfall. He says that love is not excluded by vision, that is, they are not opposed to each other for it is impossible to see the divine essence without loving it. Then he adds that the eventual prioritisation between love and vision is not a concern for him at the moment. This remark is clearly an evasive manoeuvre to bypass a thorny problem of the day, which had been hotly debated between the Thomists and the Scotists, namely, whether understanding or will has the priority in the *visio* from among the faculties of the human soul, and by implication, whether the *visio beata* is an intellective or an intentional *visio*.<sup>20</sup> The main concern of the pope was the *w h e n* of the vision and not its nature.

Then the pope moves on to the next question: who will receive this vision? Of course, these are the just, but are the meritorious acts by which they deserved the bliss performed by their souls or by their bodies, or by both together? One cannot say, however, only by the body or only by the soul. The pope now makes reference to the Aristotelian philosophical maxim that the action of something must be the action of an existing particular thing taken as a whole. *Actio est suppositi et existentis* — which in the scholastic parlance means that if I talk, it is neither my mouth alone, nor my mind alone, but my person as a whole, who takes the responsibility for the action of talking.

Since the reward is due to the acting subject, if it is not the part but the whole which is the subject of an action, then the reward is also due to the subject as a whole. Therefore, the reward, the vision of the divine essence, is due to the whole person, complete with body and soul. This connection, however, is only re-established at the resurrection. This is also “the reasonable view” of Bernard — once again the pope adds his favourite Latin authority to his argument.<sup>21</sup>

By this time the pope felt the need to refer to those who were startled by his previous sermon. Brothers, he says, in a matter of faith we should pay more attention to the authority of the Holy Writ than to the writings of the *doctores*, however saintly they might be. This remark shows that the pope was aware that his views about the subject are unlike those of the theologians of the period.

The pope then surveys the Scriptures and concludes that all the eschatological passages indicate the bliss of the eternal kingdom and the eternal life, but none of them speaks about the vision of the divine essence, that is, a vision of the Godhead as the supernatural unity of the divine persons. Avoiding the issue of “essential,” a term of philosophical origin, the pope adopts the Biblical

<sup>20</sup> See I. IRIBARREN, “Theological Authority at the Papal Court in Avignon,” p. 280–282.

<sup>21</sup> On Bernard’s divergent 14<sup>th</sup> century interpretation see CHR. TROTTMANN, “Deux interprétations contradictoires de Saint Bernard: les sermons de Jean XXII sur la vision béatifique et les traités inédits du cardinal Jacques Fournier,” *Mélanges de l’Ecole française de Rome. Moyen-Âge*, vol. 105/1 (1993), p. 327–379.

terminology of Mt 15:31–46, Jn 17:3 and Jn 5:28–29, thereby pointing out that the kingdom and the eternal life follow the Last Judgement. This is in tune with the second greatest authority, the Creeds, that is, the Apostolic, the Nicene, and the pseudo-Athanasian creeds.<sup>22</sup>

In descending order the pope lists the authorities of the apostles, the liturgy, the canon law, and, finally, offers a long list of the passages from the Church Fathers. Apart from Bernard and Augustine, who were mentioned in the previous sermon, the new authorities enlisted are Hugh of Saint Victor, Cassiodore, Bede, John Damascene, and the Glosses on the Scriptures.<sup>23</sup> The pope admits that the sinless souls immediately depart to heaven, and that there are variations of clarity in the vision according to the sanctity of the defuncts, as was part of the common opinion, but he denies that this would include the final beatitude. He repeats his earlier position unequivocally: the saints don't presently see the divine essence.<sup>24</sup> Not even the apostles. This last statement was reported as if the pope had said (though he certainly implied) that not even the Holy Mother of God has attained the final beatitude yet. This view was the last straw, received with due horror by the pious secessionist Franciscans in the court of Louis the Bavarian.<sup>25</sup>

At the end of the sermon the pope adds two theological arguments. The first is based on the concept of justice. If the soul received the beatitude now, this would imply the strange situation that the reward (or, in the symmetrical case of condemnation, penalty) would come before the judgement.

Second, if there were an immediate judgement, then the body could not add anything to the bliss of the soul already attained — relying on the premise that God could not be seen with bodily eyes —, and therefore the glory of the soul could not be increased by the resurrection.<sup>26</sup>

By these arguments the pope denies the standard theology of the day that there are two judgements, first a personal or individual judgement, right after death, and then a universal judgement (which goes back to the Gregorian *Dialogues*<sup>27</sup>). This evolved in the 12<sup>th</sup> century as the official view opposed to

<sup>22</sup>M. DYKMANS, *Les sermons de Jean XXII sur la vision béatifique*, p. 108–109 (no. 15–18).

<sup>23</sup>Ibidem, p. 118–137 (no. 35–68).

<sup>24</sup>“[...] pro nunc non vident sancti deitatem” (ibidem, p. 137, no. 70).

<sup>25</sup>The chief figures of the group were William Ockham, Franciscus de Marchia, and Bonagratia of Bergamo, all accomplished theologians. See A. MAIER, “Zwei unbekannte Streitschriften gegen Johann XXII. aus dem Kreis der Münchener Minoriten,” *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae*, vol. 5 (1967), p. 41–78 (reprinted in *Ausgehendes Mittelalter*, vol. 3, edited by A. Paravicini Bagliani, Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1977, p. 373–414.).

<sup>26</sup>M. DYKMANS, *Les sermons de Jean XXII sur la vision béatifique*, p. 138. no. 73.

<sup>27</sup>GREGORII MAGNI, *Dialogi*, IV, 26 and 29.

the Cathars, who had also denied immediate reward.<sup>28</sup> (No surprise then that the charge of Catharism against the pope came up in the *Libellus* of Durand of St.-Pourçain.<sup>29</sup>)

The third sermon followed on the 5<sup>th</sup> of January, 1332. For the vigil of the Epiphany the theme was “Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel.”<sup>30</sup> Since according to the etymology of the day the name “Israel” was interpreted as “sees God,” it prompted a renewed discussion of the judgement and the vision. First, the pope added that what applies to the blessed, applies also to the sinners. Their cases are symmetrical. As the blessed will not receive the eternal reward, so the sinners will not go to eternal punishment until the final day, either. Again, the demons cannot be in hell proper now, for then they would not be able to tempt us. The demons are outside the hell, and are above us and among us.<sup>31</sup>

Then the pope confronted the opinion according to which his views were novel. He cannot speak otherwise but as the saints did (meaning the Church Fathers) and, what is more, as the Holy Scriptures speak. His opinion is not new, not invented by him, but it is the opinion of the doctors of old. Can anyone cite a verdict of the Church on this issue? — asks the pope in a rhetorical question.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February 1332, in a fourth sermon of which we only have some fragments preserved in Ockham and in an anonymous opponent of the pope, he seems to have resented the discontent with his views. There are murmurs against our views, I know well, he says, but I cannot act differently. *Ego dico quod non possum aliter facere.* The murmurs are the more incomprehensible as both the scriptural and the patristic authorities evidence the papal position. As in his previous sermons, John here again encourages the masters to put forward texts which would prove the contrary.

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<sup>28</sup>PREPOSITINUS OF CREMONA, *Summa contra haereticos*, edited by J.N. Garvin, J.A. Corbett, Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1958, p. 207: “Quod autem dicitur de premiis et poenis hic et alibi in die iudicii, fiendum ideo dicitur non quod iam non sit factum ex parte sed quia tunc plenius fiet vel quia tunc omnibus factum esse innotescet.” And MONETA DE CRÉMONE, *Adversus Catharos et Valdenses libri quinque*, edited by Th.-A. Richini, Rome: Typographia Palladis, 1743 (reprint: Ridgewood: Gregg Press, 1964), p. 376: “Solutio praedictorum est quod duplex est iudicium, unum novissimum, id est in novissimo die faciendum de toto homine, id est secundum animam et corpus, alterum vero de homine interiori tantum, id est de anima.” Quoted by M. DYKMANS, “De Jean XXII au Concile de Florence ou les avatars d’une hérésie gréco-latin,” *Revue d’Histoire Ecclésiastique*, vol. 68 (1973), p. 33.

<sup>29</sup>DURANDUS OF SAINT-POURÇAIN, *Libellus de vision Dei*, as edited in: G. CREMASCOLI, “Il *Libellus de visione Dei* di Durando di S. Porziano,” *Studi Medievali*, vol. 25 (1984), p. 421, ll. 39–40.

<sup>30</sup>Mt 2:20.

<sup>31</sup>M. DYKMANS, *Les sermons de Jean XXII sur la vision béatifique*, p. 146.



Apparently news about the papal sermons spread quickly, and the proposal about the postponement of the beatific vision precipitated general consternation. It signalled the beginning of a great dispute. All sorts of accusations were hurled against the pope. He was alternately called ignorant in theological matters or a heretic by the more hot-headed opponents, like William of Ockham and the other Franciscans in the court of Louis the Bavarian. In a letter addressed to Phillip VI Valois, the king of France, the pope had to remind him that he should not give heed to the accusations since he — the pope speaking for himself — was not a professional theologian. (Which was the case, actually, as he was a canon law specialist.) But the secessionist Franciscans were not the only ones revolting.

The pope, feeling the strong resistance, circulated copies of his speeches and asked for comments of the great authorities in the summer of 1332. By far most of the answers were cold and rejecting, like that of John of Aragon. Among the few and qualified supporters of the papal view were Gerald Odonis the Franciscan general and Cardinal Hannibal Ceccano together with the former Oxford chancellor John Lutterell and the Franciscan Walter Chatton.

William of Ockham, the leading theologian of the secessionist Franciscans in the court of the emperor, was among the first to attack the papal positions openly.<sup>32</sup> Later that year, Armand of Belvézer, the master of the Sacred Palace and John of Naples, both Dominicans, rejected the papal view. In September, the pope asked for the opinion of Robert of Anjou, the king of Sicily, allowing him to contradict the papal view. Robert answered to the negative two months later.<sup>33</sup>

In December, an unknown Dominican master discussed and rejected the papal view before thirty bachelors at the theological faculty of the University of Paris. There were many sermons held both in Paris, but also in Avignon, mostly but not exclusively by Dominicans, against John's theology of the delayed vision.

In January 1333, two highly influential theologians, the Cistercian Jaques Fournier, the future Pope Benedict XII, and another leading Dominican, Thomas of Strasbourg, sent their treatises to the pope, politely but firmly rejecting his views.

Again, at the same time, the Dominican Thomas Waleys preached in the convent of Avignon, declaring that the whole of Christianity was scandalised by the

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<sup>32</sup>WILLIAM OCKHAM, *Opus nonaginta dierum*, c. 93, 120, 124. Quoted by: M. DYKMANS, *Les sermons de Jean XXII sur la vision béatifique*, p. 167.

<sup>33</sup>My summary of the reactions is based on M. DYKMANS, *Les sermons de Jean XXII sur la vision béatifique*; A. MAIER, "Schriften, Daten, und Personen aus dem Visio-Streit unter Johann XXII;" and CHR. TROTTMANN, *La vision béatifique*, p. 471–522.

erroneous novelties of the postponement of the beatific vision. The Inquisition arrested him, and a trial began.<sup>34</sup>

In the spring, a board of the Inquisition was put together of accomplished theologians to judge the views of Waleys and Durand of Saint-Pourçain, the formerly Dominican bishop of Meaux, a distinguished and independent-minded theological authority of the period.

As an answer to his critics, in May 1333 the pope published a long list of authorities in favour of his opinion, and against the opposite view (this list has not survived).

In December 1333, Gerald Odonis, the minister general of the Franciscans, held a disputation in Paris about the beatific vision. He did not propose, however, an outright defence of the papal view. He was a “qualified” supporter. Odonis put forward the view that there are three stages of the vision: one down here, one partial but still direct vision for the blessed before the judgement, and a final, specifically different vision reserved after the judgement. That is, Odonis suggested a compromise: there is some kind of vision now — that is, no absolute denial — but the later vision will surpass it, being of a different *species* of vision.<sup>35</sup>

His views were firmly rejected by the University of Paris. As news of the scandal reached the king, Phillip VI, he invited twenty-nine theological masters to his palace in Vincennes, and proposed two questions to them. The first question was: whether the souls of the saints in heaven see God face to face before the Last Judgement. The second: whether the vision they have now will be replaced by another, subsequent vision after the judgement. The two questions were related, however, not to the papal position directly, for the positive answer to the first question would have made the second answer superfluous, but to the more nuanced and conciliatory position of Gerald Odonis. By implication, however, the masters clearly decided against the papal position which Odonis was supposed to defend.

In their answer, which was sent to the pope, the twenty-nine masters declared that concerning the first question, the blessed saints in heaven have a pure, clear, beatific, intuitive, and immediate vision of the divine essence and of the Trinity.<sup>36</sup> Concerning the second, “the vision specified, which the saints now have, will not disappear when they receive again their bodies, and will not be replaced

<sup>34</sup> See the process in TH. KÄPPEL, *Le procès contre Thomas Waleys O.P. Étude et documents*, Rome: Istituto Storico Domenicano, 1936.

<sup>35</sup> CHR. TROTTMANN, *Guiral Ot. La vision de Dieu aux multiples formes*, Paris: Vrin, 2001. Also W. DUBA, “The Beatific Vision in the *Sentences* Commentary of Gerald Odonis,” *Vivarium*, vol. 47 (2009), p. 348–363.

<sup>36</sup> *CUP*, vol. 2, n. 981, p. 430.

by another vision.”<sup>37</sup> The Paris masters made a point. The problem with Odonis’ suggestion was that if there is a specific difference between the vision now (the *visio moderna* — as it was called), and the vision after the resurrection, only the second can be called truly beatific. The first can only be an anticipation of some kind, certainly a defective vision, offering justification for the papal position, at least to some extent.

The masters added, significantly, that “jam quod crediderunt videntes, quod speraverunt, tenentes, non in spe sed in re sunt beatae,” that is, “what they had believed, they see now, what they had desired they have now, being blessed not in hope but in reality.”

In 1334 the debate continued on an even more heated level. Reportedly, between May and July that year, Cardinal Napoleon Orsini contrived a plot with Baudouin of Luxemburg, the archbishop-elect of Trier, and emperor Louis of Bavaria, to call a general council to depose the pope. Constant reference was made to the pope’s theological errors. The likely political interests notwithstanding, the excuse adopted clearly indicated the importance of the debate.

Later in July Cardinal Ceccano called together a theological commission to settle the issue, which proved to be largely unsuccessful. The outcome of the commission only supported the gradual increase of vision.

John XXII died on the 4<sup>th</sup> of December 1334.

On the day before his death, John retracted his views.<sup>38</sup> This recantation, however, was ambiguous, probably even shrewd. He reportedly said (as published by his successor, Benedict XII):

We profess and believe that the souls separated from their bodies and completely purified are in heaven, that is, in the kingdom of the heavens, in paradise, with Jesus Christ, in the company of the angels, and following the ordinary economy of the law [that is, not considering the possibilities of the absolute omnipotence of God — GG], they see God and the divine essence clearly, face to face, to the extent which is allowed by the state and condition of the separated soul.<sup>39</sup>

The calculated language of the pope seems to allow the possibility that the separated souls see God differently than the souls reunited with their bodies at the resurrection. Small surprise that his retraction was not taken as genuine by his enemies, but rather considered as false, void, or as forced onto a dying person.

<sup>37</sup>Ibidem: “dicta visio quam nunc habent, resumtis corporibus minime evacuabitur alia succedente.”

<sup>38</sup>CUP, vol. 2.1, no. 987, p. 441

<sup>39</sup>DH 991: “Fatemur siquidem et credimus, quod animae purgatae separatae a corporibus sunt in caelo, caelorum regno et paradiso et cum Christo in consortio angelorum congregatae et vident Deum de communi lege ac divinam essentiam facie ad faciem clare, in quantum status et condicio compatitur animae separatae.” My emphasis.

Anneliese Maier was surely right when she pointed out that the recantation of the pope is nothing other than a repetition of the results of the theological commission led by Cardinal Ceccano that year, which basically accepted the views of Gerald mentioned before.

His successor was elected in the person of the Cistercian Jacques Fournier, who adopted the name Benedict XII. Previously as a cardinal he wrote a long treatise on the vision, in which he maintained that the intensity of the vision will grow after the judgement. The two visions are not *s p e c i f i c a l l y* different, but the later one is more intense than the first.<sup>40</sup>

After assuming his pontificate, he quickly set out to resolve the issue. First, he publicly admonished the mendicant orders not to ventilate this extremely idle issue, *supervacua questio*, which only provokes useless excitement.<sup>41</sup> Second, on the feast of the Purification of the Virgin Mary (2<sup>nd</sup> February, 1335), he delivered a sermon in which he maintained against the view of his predecessor that the saints see clearly the essence of God.<sup>42</sup>

Then, in July of the same year, the new pope summoned a consistorium of nineteen<sup>43</sup> important *doctores* (theological “noteworthies”) of the period under the presidency of Peter Paludanus OP, and among them Richard Fitzralph,<sup>44</sup> Gerald Odonis,<sup>45</sup> Walter Chatton, probably Walter Burleigh and other great names. The major orders engaged in theology, the Dominicans, Franciscans, Augustinians and the Carmelites, were all represented by their leading schol-

<sup>40</sup>His treatise *De statu animarum sanctorum ante generale iudicium* survives in ms. Vat. Lat. 4006 (now available online: [https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS\\_Vat.lat.4006](https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.lat.4006)). The treatise is summarized in CHR. TROTTMANN, *La vision béatifique*; and IDEM, “Deux interprétations contradictoires de saint Bernard,” p. 350–365. See also A. MAIER, “Zwei Proömien Benedikts XII,” *Ausgehendes Mittelalter*, vol. 3, edited by A. Paravicini Bagliani, Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1977, p. 447–480.

<sup>41</sup>J. LOSERTH, *Die Königsaalger Geschichts-quellen. Fontes rerum austriacarum, Scriptores*, 8, Vienna: Gerold, 1875, p. 515. Also M. DYKMANS, *Les sermons de Jean XXII sur la vision béatifique*, p. 194, no. 23.

<sup>42</sup>BALUZIUS, *Vitae paparum Avenionensium*, Paris, 1693, p. 221. For the members: *CUP*, vol. 2.1, p. 454.

<sup>43</sup>“Ad [...] quaestionem dicunt novem magistri simpliciter quod sic; alii vero 10 magistri [...]” — then once again: “14 magistri [...], duo alii [...] tres vero [...]” (TH. KÄPPEL, *Le procès contre Thomas Waleys O.P.*, p. 86–87). The edition is based on the single surviving Wolfenbüttel ms.

<sup>44</sup>On Fitzralph see the excellent monograph of K. WALSH, *A Fourteenth-Century Scholar and Primate: Richard Fitzralph of Armagh*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1981, esp. p. 85–107 on the beatific vision controversy. See also Fitzralph’s *Summa domini Armacani in quaestionibus Armenorum*, edidit J. Sudor, Paris, 1511 (accessed at: <http://dadun.unav.edu/handle/10171/27330> on 7<sup>th</sup> August, 2018).

<sup>45</sup>CHR. TROTTMANN, *Guiral Ot*; see also: A. MAIER, “Die Pariser Disputation des Geraldus Odonis,” *Ausgehendes Mittelalter*, vol. 3, edited by A. Paravicini Bagliani, Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1977, p. 319–372.

ars.<sup>46</sup> This preliminary consultation resulted in twelve theses responding to the questions of Benedict XII. The answers became the foundations of the dogmatic constitution *Benedictus Deus*.

The record (*concordantia responsionum*) of the meeting has survived.<sup>47</sup> It is worthy of a thorough analysis, but now I will only mention the most important responses here.

1. “That the deceased martyrs and saints immediately after death see the divine essence, intuitively, without any mediating created being, since the divine essence shows itself to them, and they are blessed by this vision before the General Judgement (*ante iudicium generale*).” — It is to be observed that the qualification of the subject, that is “soul” (of the saints), is missing. It might be an omission since the next one mentions the soul.
2. “The souls which are in need of purification, after their expiation will receive the divine vision.” This is equivalent to saying that the soul burdened by venial sins will inevitably go to heaven (pretty much a tenure-track position, so to say).
3. “That this vision will not suffer diminution but it will continue in eternity.”

According to the minutes these three points received unanimous support, although some of the theologians only approved it with an “agreed,” while the others stated their reasons.<sup>48</sup> Again, the consistory agreed (sixth point) that all authorities and arguments to the contrary had been sufficiently solved. Then

8. “That the soul will enjoy the same fruition of the divine essence before and after the General Judgement, without interruption, and it will not be multiplied numerically.” — That is, there will be no other second vision after the first. This point precludes any difference between the immediate and the later vision.

The record hints at some opposition to this point, allowing for an increase after the resurrection but this latter was clearly a minority view.

Finally, the twelfth question asked whether it was possible to gather from the authorities collected in the new pope’s treatise (which he had written as Jacques Fournier before his election) that the souls after the resurrection see God “more

<sup>46</sup>The list is analysed in G. HOFFMANN, *Der Streit über die seelige Schau Gottes*, p. 106–107.

<sup>47</sup>Edited in TH. KÄPPELI, *Le procès contre Thomas Waleys O.P.*, p. 84–87.

<sup>48</sup>“Ad omnes et singulas questiones [...] concordant responsiones omnium magistrorum” (TH. KÄPPELI, *Le procès contre Thomas Waleys O.P.*, p. 86).

perfectly, closer, more fully, clearer, more integrally and whether their beatitude would increase in these specified terms.”<sup>49</sup>

On this issue the views were mixed. Fourteen said yes to the possibility (!) of such an interpretation, two said no, and three others voiced the view that an increase in quality or quantity was not intended by the saintly authorities. What they meant was an increase which comes about because of the increase in the number of the congregation of the *beati*.

The record of the consistory shows a remarkable level of agreement among the participating theologians, although some of them (at least Gerald Odonis and Walter Chatton) were supporters of differentiating between the present and the future vision in some sense. In fact, even Benedict himself (as cardinal) supported the view of quantitative increase.

The bull was officially promulgated on the 29<sup>th</sup> of January, 1336. In this constitution the pope states that

according to the ordinary ruling of God after the passion and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, the blessed will see and do see already the divine essence intuitively and ever face to face, without any created intermediary which would interpose itself as an object of vision, but by the divine essence manifesting itself to them without a veil, clearly and openly, so that in this vision the divine essence is enjoyed by the souls before the general judgement, and this vision will continue even after the final judgement without interruption or replacement forever.<sup>50</sup>

The constitution stated apodictically that 1) the divine essence is seen by the blessed 2) immediately after death, and 3) directly, without any created image, 4) before the judgement, and 5) without a change after the resurrection.

Considering the subtlety of the problem, the doctrine dogmatized by Benedict XII seems to be an impatient and ruthless intervention. The new dogma completely bypasses the central issue of theological anthropology (whether the soul can be identified with the human person), and what is more, it dispenses both with the significance of the Last Judgement (since it renders a “last” judgement redundant) and with the resurrection, by rendering it immaterial, since it becomes extremely difficult to explain what is added at the resurrection to what has been already awarded to the saints.

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<sup>49</sup>“An [...] possit apparere [...] quod dicte anime sancte in resurrexione et post generale iudicium perfectius, vicinius, plenius, clarius, integralius dei essenciam visure sint quam modo videant et quod tunc eorum beatitudo augeatur, addicionem sic acceptura” (TH. KÄPPEL, *Le procès contre Thomas Waleys O.P.*, p. 87).

<sup>50</sup>The sources for the text of the Bull are collected in G. HOFFMANN, *Der Streit über die seelige Schau Gottes*, p. 107, n. 3.

The dogmatic decision, on the other hand, clearly did not specify that the vision is only of the soul (like in the case of Durandus) and leaves the role of the body unspecified.

There is a clear affinity of this text to the letter of the Paris masters and neither did Benedict XII insist on his own previous, slightly different view, since in his treatise on the subject he originally maintained the view that the beatified souls will enjoy a great increase (*magnum augmentum*) after the resurrection.<sup>51</sup>

This concludes our brief recapitulation of this debate. The temperament of our times might wonder if the admonition of Benedict XII to the mendicant friars was not entirely misplaced. To modern ears the debate sounds quite obscure and puzzling, even to the theologically minded, to the extent that it hardly shows up in the handbooks dealing with medieval theology.<sup>52</sup> Why were these arcane issues so important? For, indeed, we must be concerned about the fate of our souls after death, but what was really at stake?

After this short recapitulation of the events I'm entering the second part of my paper in which I would like to deal with the deeper issues related to the controversy.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> As reported by CAESARIS BARONII *Annales Ecclesiastici*, vol. 25, Bar-le-Duc – Paris – Fribourg, 1880, p. 27a: “[...] aliquibus dicentibus probabiliter et quod post generalem resurrectionem vel iudicium generale Dei essentiam dictae animae perfectius, plenius, vicinius, clarius non solum extensive sed et intensive visurae essent; et quod earum beatitudo essentialis post generale iudicium magnum acciperet augmentum: quae opinio visa fuit mihi tunc verior et magis consona dictis sanctorum et adhuc etiam, omni assertione temeraria circumscripta probabilior mihi etiam videtur.”

<sup>52</sup> E.g. the debate is not mentioned in M. GERWING, *Theologie im Mittelalter*, ed. 2, Paderborn – München – Wien – Zürich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2002; W. LEPPIN, *Theologie im Mittelalter*, Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2007; U.W. LEINSLE, *Einführung in die scholastische Theologie*, Paderborn – München – Wien – Zürich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1995; or H. CHADWICK, *East and West: The Making of a Rift in the Church. From Apostolic times Until the Council of Florence*, Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, despite its bearing on the differences between East and West. See GY. GERÉBY, “Hidden Themes in Fourteenth-Century Byzantine and Latin Theological Debates: Monarchianism and Crypto-Dyophysitism,” *Greeks, Latins, and Intellectual History 1204–1500*, edited by M. Hinterberger, C. Schabel, Leuven – Paris – Walpole: Peeters, 2011, p. 183–212.

<sup>53</sup> For this part of the paper, that is, from the theological point of view the best analysis is the penetrating study — not considered by CHR. TROTTMANN, *La vision béatifique* — of E. LEWALTER, “Thomas von Aquin und die Bulle *Benedictus Deus* von 1336,” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, vol. 54 (1935), p. 399–461. See also: F. LAKNER, “Zur Eschatologie des Johannes XXII,” *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, vol. 72 (1950), p. 326–333; and D. DOUIE, “John XXII and the Beatific Vision,” *Dominican Studies*, vol. 3 (1950), p. 154–174. For a Neo-Orthodox point of view V. LOSSKY, *The Vision of God*, is still very interesting. More dogmatic approaches in: M. DYKMANS, “De Jean XXII au concile de Florence,” and M.-D. CHENU, “L’homme, la nature, l’esprit,” *Archives d’Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Âge*, vol. 36 (1969), p. 123–130.

For the historian, a number of questions now emerge, with the first concerning the initiative of the pope. Why did he raise the issue of the vision at all? What could have been his purpose in raising the issue, which was not at the forefront of the contemporary debates?<sup>54</sup>

Secondly, was he really innovating? Regarding this Church historians could ask whether the theological views of the pope were really unorthodox?<sup>55</sup>

As to the first set of questions the puzzle about the possible motivations of the pope continues to elude explanation.<sup>56</sup>

In the early accounts various interpretations had been offered for this unusual theological intervention of the ageing pope. The chronicles and early modern historians tended to accept fantastic explanations for John's unexpected theological proposal. These accounts attributed the seemingly fortuitous and provocative intervention of John XXII against the accepted view to the impact of some visionary experiences, or stories heard in his childhood, or to the over-ambitious character of the pope who wanted to leave his mark in theology, or even to senility. There were even accusations of Cathar influence, which can be surely dismissed.<sup>57</sup>

A more sensible suggestion for the motivation of the pope, accepted by some scholars, is to attribute to him ignorance in theological matters. Against this widespread view, however, serious objections can be raised. John XXII was certainly not ignorant or inexperienced in theology, even if his degree was in law (which he apologetically mentioned in his letter to the French king).<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Annaliese Maier has observed that the problems of the beatific vision had well-nigh disappeared from the horizon of theologians of the period. A. MAIER, "Schriften, Daten, und Personen aus dem Visio-Streit unter Johann XXII," p. 545.

<sup>55</sup> Actually, the phrase "heretical pope" was coined during this debate by Ockham, which later was taken over and popularised by Umberto Eco in his bestselling *The Name of the Rose*, translated by W. Weaver, New York: Warner, 1980, p. 174. Eco summarizes the problem very well, and even hints at the practical social aspect I'll get back to below. For Ockham, see WILLIAM OCKHAM, *Compendium errorum Ioannis Papae XXII*, in *Opera politica IV*, edited by H.S. Offler, Oxford: British Academy, 1997, p. 56–64. On the possibility of papal heresy: *ibidem*, cap. VII, p. 65–77.

<sup>56</sup> On John XXII the basic work is that of N. VALOIS, "Jaques Duèse, pape sous le nom de Jean XXII," *Histoire Littéraire de France*, vol. 34, Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1914.

<sup>57</sup> These — and other — curious, even fantastic explanations are examined by CHR. TROTTMAN, "Deux interprétations contradictoires de saint Bernard."

<sup>58</sup> There exists a copy of the quodlibetal questions of GERARD OF ABBEVILLE with the marginal notes of the pope which contained a question "Quaeritur utrum animae beatae resumtis corporibus clarius videant lumen increatum quam videant modo" (M. DYKMANS, *Les sermons de Jean XXII sur la vision béatifique*, p. 28). Again, John XXII commissioned an abbreviation to be prepared of the *Summa theologiae* of Aquinas for his library. I. IRIBARREN, "Theological authority at the Papal Court in Avignon," p. 285, n. 25.



Two important humanists of the period, Albertino Mussato and Petrarch, both testified to the impressive eloquence and intellect of the pope,<sup>59</sup> and generally he was considered a very learned man.<sup>60</sup> Nor did other circumstances imply his uninformedness. His papacy oversaw a good number of trials against famous theologians of the day, e.g. about the papal power in the case of Marsilius of Padua and John of Jandun, or the examination of the doctrines of John Peter Olivi, ensuing which certain theses were condemned in the *Gloriosam ecclesiam* bull of 1318.

Of course, the main issues during the reign of John XXII were the problem of evangelical poverty, prompting bulls like *Cum inter nonnullos* against the Franciscan spirituals in 1323, and the case of papal primacy. However, while his interests concerned primarily Church political matters, these issues certainly involved major theological considerations, too. It was also during his pontificate that views of the Dominican Meister Eckhart and that of the Franciscan William Ockham were censured, and that the great Dominican Thomas Aquinas was beatified. He had ruled against alchemy and magic,<sup>61</sup> and defended Jews against the Pastoureaux “crusade.”<sup>62</sup> As reported by contemporaries, the pope entertained a great plan to unify the Church torn apart by countless conflicts, including the rift between the Latin and the oriental Churches.<sup>63</sup> His papacy saw the unification efforts with the Armenians, and promoted the study of Eastern languages, chiefly Greek, Arabic, and “Chaldean,” that is, Syriac, indicating increased unification efforts with the Eastern Churches. Especially his negotiations with the Armenians touched directly on the central theological issues separating East and West at that time.

The papal curia was also constantly involved with universities, as in the case of promotions or other matters of regulations and discipline, even if these were primarily administrative issues.

All these circumstantial pieces of evidence indicate that during his long reign (1316–1334) John XXII could not have avoided involvement in theological problems. That is, it is very unlikely that the pope could not have been aware of the weight of the issues raised by his views on the beatific vision. What he might have underestimated, however, was the reaction of the professional theologians — but more about that later.

<sup>59</sup>“Alta eloquentia scientiaque peditus” (Mussatus), “homo perstudiosus” (Petrarch), quoted by BALUZIUS, *Vitae paparum Avenionensium*, vol. 1, col. 587–588.

<sup>60</sup>“Corpore parvus, sed virtute et scientia maximus” (J.D. MANSI, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, vol. 25, Venice, 1782, col. 567).

<sup>61</sup>See A. BOUREAU, *Satan hérétique. Histoire de la démonologie (1280–1330)*, Paris: Odile Jacob, 2009.

<sup>62</sup>N. VALOIS, “Jaques Duèse, pape sous le nom de Jean XXII,” p. 421.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 441.

Before undertaking an attempt to explain the case, it is advisable to address a methodological issue. Christian Trottman in his huge and learned book devoted to the beatific vision debate traced the opinions on the “vision” from its historical origins starting from early Christianity. His study then followed the developments in Late Antiquity, into the early Middle Ages and finally through High Scholasticism.<sup>64</sup> However, even a more detailed exploration than this impressive account of preceding — and often conflicting — views on the beatific vision cannot explain the pope’s extraordinary proposal.<sup>65</sup>

Trottman adopted the methodological presupposition that “ideas developed” which is — albeit a common assumption of the historians of ideas — fundamentally flawed, since even the most impressive conspectus of previous views cannot offer an explanation for the two-pronged problem of the pope’s raising of the issue and its nearly unanimous rejection.

The “evolutionary” or “developmental” approach is built on the presupposition that there is a kind of “advancement” of the same idea as successive generations of theologians build on, or elaborate the work, if not “results,” of previous generations.<sup>66</sup> I will suggest that this linear approach is certainly not suitable to describe the genesis of the bull *Benedictus Deus* which concluded the debate. In fact, based on the variety of views it emerges that there is neither a unilinear development, nor a straight course either for the emergence of the papal view or for its explicit rejection by contemporaries culminating in Benedict XII’s *Benedictus Deus*, which discards even Benedict’s own earlier view.

There is a consensus, and justly so, that the proposal of John XXII was as unexpected as it was strange. Nothing pointed towards this development. In fact, the pope seems to have followed the standard views of his period before the final years of his papacy. In his letter to the Armenian bishops in 1321 he said that according to the teaching of the Roman Church the sinless souls “are immediately (*mox*) received in heaven, while those who left the world in mortal sin or solely in a state of original sin immediately descend to hell.”<sup>67</sup>

On another occasion, in a letter of 1326 to the (Latin) Patriarch of Jerusalem

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<sup>64</sup>CHR. TROTTMAN, *La vision béatifique*. A good list of the patristic and medieval authorities on the issue (both Latin and Greek) is provided in the entry by X. LE BACHELET, “Benoît XII,” *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, edited by E. Vacant, E. Magenot, vol. 2, Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1910, coll. 653–704.

<sup>65</sup>An important review of Trottman’s book is that of K. EMERY, “A Forced March Towards Beatitude: Christian Trottman’s *Histoire* of the Beatific Vision,” *Vivarium*, vol. 37/2 (1999), p. 258–281.

<sup>66</sup>Trottman speaks about “les progrès de la scolastique” (*La vision béatifique*, p. 26 and 747). I would suggest “changement” instead, as it will become clear below.

<sup>67</sup>“(Haec est igitur doctrina quam tenet et praedicat sacrosancta Romana Ecclesia) [...] illorum vero animas, qui [...] nullam omnino peccati maculam incurrerunt [...] in coelum mox recipi: illorum autem animas, quae in mortali peccato vel cum solo originali discedunt, mox in infernum de-

about the errors and heresies of the Cypriot Greeks the pope admonished the patriarch to act against the view that the saints are not in Paradise until the Last Judgement but are in an interim place.<sup>68</sup>

First the pope had been clearly following the trends of his days, but then he chose to promote an “archaic” or “ancient” view, out of tune with contemporary theological consensus. Why did he choose to depart from it in such an unexpected way? The departure is the more significant since in the letter to the Armenians he employed basically the same formulation that was accepted at the Council of Lyon in 1274, signed by the Eastern emperor Michael Paleologue, where it is stated that the souls depart for heaven or hell immediately (*mox*) after their deaths.<sup>69</sup>

It is to be noted that the issue of the purgatory did not come up either in the time of Photius in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, nor in the time of Michael Keryllarios in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The first real debate on purgatory happened in 1231 between a Franciscan friar and George Bardanes,<sup>70</sup> which date supports the opinion of Jacques Le Goff, who claims that the issue only emerged in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, and received its first official mention in 1254 by Innocent IV in his letter to the papal legate to the Greeks.<sup>71</sup>

It seems to be clear, then, that John XXII had changed his views. First, he used the conventional formulae, but apparently realized later that this seemingly settled issue was not so innocent at all.

The first element to notice is that the prime authority for John XXII was Bernard of Clairvaux. Why did John XXII revert to 12<sup>th</sup> century theological ideas, reaching out to Augustine (via Bernard of Clairvaux), and other earlier patristic authorities “out of the blue,” so to say, and why were these earlier great

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scendere [...]” (CAESARIS BARONII *Annales ecclesiastici*, vol. 24: 1313–1333, Barri Ducis – Parisiis – Friburgi Helv.: Ex typis Sancti Pauli, 1880, Annus 1321, no. 11, p. 145). F. LAKNER, “Zur Eschatologie bei Johannes XXII,” quotes only the second part. See also J.E. WEAKLAND, “Pope John XXII and the Beatific Vision Controversy,” *Annuaire Medieval*, vol. 9 (1968), p. 76–84.

<sup>68</sup> “[...] Graeci aliqui, qui pro maiori parte in regno morantur eodem, negant purgatorium et infernum, asserentes mendaciter et temere, nullum sanctorum esse in paradiso usque post iudicium generale, sed interim in certo loco quiescere sine poena [...] Cupientes [...] predictos errores et haereses [...] extirpari [...]” (CAESARIS BARONII *Annales ecclesiastici*, vol. 24, Annus 1326, n. 28–29, p. 308). This view was more-or-less standard Greek view: N. CONSTAS, “‘To Sleep, Perchance to Dream’: The Middle State of Souls in Patristic and Byzantine Literature,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 55 (2001), p. 91–124.

<sup>69</sup> “illorum [...] animas qui [...] nullam omnino peccati maculam incurrerunt [...] mox in coelum recipi [...] qui in mortali peccato [...] decedunt [...] mox in infernum descendere” (*DH*, no. 857–858). See also F. LAKNER, “Zur Eschatologie des Johannes XXII,” p. 326.

<sup>70</sup> M.P. RONCAGLIA, *Georges Bardanès métropolitane de Corfou et Barthélemy de l'ordre franciscain*, Roma: Scuola Tipografica Italo-Orientale S. Nilo, 1953.

<sup>71</sup> *DH*, no. 838. Cf. J. LE GOFF, *The Birth of Purgatory*, translated by A. Goldhammer, London: Scholar Press, 1990.

authorities rejected, or understood in radically different ways by the contemporaries in nearly perfect unison?<sup>72</sup> It has to be stressed again that the motivation is as unclear as it is intriguing.

Gisbert Greshake, as a historian of dogma, proposed the view that the pope was principally addressing a scripturally and dogmatically unclear and incoherent situation, where the relation between the individual and the universal judgement was not clarified.<sup>73</sup> This seems to be the view of Trottmann, too, who goes so far as to call Benedict XII the “man of Providence,”<sup>74</sup> who, in his opinion, at last settles the controversial issue of the vision for good.

This interpretation, however, does not go deep enough. First, while the dogmatic situation was indeed somewhat hazy, there were pointers available in the West, for example the formula of Lyon. Second, why did the alleged need for the clarification of this obscure and difficult theological point become such a pressing issue for the pope? Greshake clearly pointed out an important facet of the problem, but this description is not an explanation yet. It leaves the room open for all of the above explanations ranging from ambition to ignorance.

In the following section I suggest a different explanation. In opposition to the alleged ignorance of John XXII in theology, I will suggest that the pope might have realized that there were serious issues at stake which reach out to the deepest concerns in Christian theology, ranging from eschatological issues to ecclesiology.

I will also argue that he seems to have correctly identified a fundamental change in theology (meaning the Latin theology of the West) between Bernard of Clairvaux (c. 1090–1153) and the scholastic theology of his days. This change can be well illustrated by the transformation of the ideas of Thomas Aquinas himself in the case of the beatific vision, implying that the modification of the mainstream understanding of the beatific vision changed during the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

This change was concomitant to a radical reinterpretation of the tradition, in many aspects amounting to the eclipse of the patristic authorities in early 14<sup>th</sup> century scholastic discourse. The pope might have realized that this reinterpretation of the beatific vision jeopardized a fundamental aspect of the conception of the Church, its communitarian character — in fact, the very idea of the *communio sanctorum*. Modern scholarship, brought up in and accustomed to

<sup>72</sup> Cf. CHR. TROTTMANN, “Deux interprétations contradictoires de saint Bernard.”

<sup>73</sup> “In der Schau Gottes (Kontroverse) die Position von Johann XXII [...] Prinzipiell gründet diese Auffassung in einer sowohl bereits biblisch wie auch dann glaubensgeschichtlich nicht voll geklärten und in sich inkohärenten Verhältnisbestimmung v. individueller u. universaler eschatolog. Vollendung” (G. GRESHAKE, LThK, 3rd ed., vol. 2, p. 198).

<sup>74</sup> “Le Cardinal blanc [...] se présentait effectivement comme l’homme providentiel [...]” (CHR. TROTTMANN, *La vision béatifique*, p. 747).

the dogmatized position of late Scholasticism, has sometimes noted, but rarely appropriately evaluated this change, which affected the foundations of Christian theology.<sup>75</sup>

I am aware that any attempt at explanation, including the one I propose, necessarily has to remain speculative. However, a piecemeal reconstruction of the complex picture might suggest a certain convergence of motifs.

Thereby I suggest that the origin of the 14<sup>th</sup> century debate should not be considered as a direct continuation of the early Christian or patristic approaches. Of course, on a very general level the Biblical and patristic ideas formed a kind of background and provided stimuli for the scholastic theologians of the High Middle Ages, but as I hinted at above, there is no linear development in the theological ideas. Priorities varied, methodologies changed and interpretations of the past authorities changed accordingly, as their status changed, too.

The patristic prehistory, the “Fathers,” the “*auctoritates*,” offered a background orientation and provided reference points, but mainly as guides and signposts. Their canonized fold was approved by tradition and consisted of very specific figures of authority, who were, however, not approached according to modern historical sensibilities. Their role was to serve as a canopy, or rather as a quarry for quotations. No scholastic theologian ever tried to write a comprehensive account of, e.g. Augustine’s theology, pointing out the developments and changes in his thought, or contextualising him within his age. There were no “monographs” devoted to particular authors, as there were no critical attempts to establish the oeuvres, sifting the genuine from the dubious, except in rare and conspicuous cases. Selected quotations often taken out of context summarized the characteristic views attributed to the authorities.

Secondly, by the early Middle Ages the Latin realm had developed its own, distinctive theological voice. It is not our concern here whether this specific theology was indebted to the authority of Augustine, or whether it was a program of the Carolingian theologians. What matters is that the canon of the authorities for the Latin West was primarily constituted by Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and Gregory, to which a rather limited set of Greek authors was added, like the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus (from the 9<sup>th</sup> century onwards, but without the commentaries), Origen (who was not considered as condemned in the West, and whose many works had been around since the 4<sup>th</sup> century), and certain translated works of Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus Confessor

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<sup>75</sup> Few studies realized this central motif of far-reaching consequences. An exception is the brilliant study of E. LEWALTER, “Thomas von Aquin und die Bulle *Benedictus Deus* von 1336.”

(from the 9<sup>th</sup> century), and finally of John Chrysostom and John Damascene (since Burgundio's translations in 1150).<sup>76</sup>

While the theology of the Latin West cannot be regarded, of course, as totally indigenous, some ideas did emerge in the Latin context which can indeed be characterised as original and distinctive.<sup>77</sup> The examples of the Augustinian theology of grace, the *filioque*, or the approach to the images in the *Libri Carolini* are well known. A less often realized difference is that while Augustine calls God the *summum bonum* without much reflection or hesitation, the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus (following the Cappadocian Fathers) stresses that God is beyond goodness, that is, God is not "good" in the ordinary sense.<sup>78</sup> This last issue, which is an expression of the unknowability of the divine essence, is directly related to the problem of the beatific vision.

On the basis of the Augustinian approach, the eschatological problem became increasingly articulated in the West during High Scholasticism and more so than it was the case in the contemporary Byzantine realm. Purgatory, the investigations into the nature of the vision of the separated soul,<sup>79</sup> the epistemological implications of the vision of the saints, and many related issues exercised the mind of the schoolmen in a thoroughly analytic way. On the other hand, as Nicholas Constatas showed, "the Byzantines had no 'system' regarding the last things. Eschatology remained an open horizon within theology for them, an openness perhaps intended to draw experience and thought toward that which lies beyond the bounds of the world of space and time."<sup>80</sup>

The West developed differently. A sign of indigenous developments in the beatific vision debate can be identified in the reaction to the Cathars who maintained the delay of the final beatitude until the end of times. As a response, fifteen years after the Albigensian Crusade in 1226, on 13<sup>th</sup> of January 1241, a board of the theological faculty of the University of Paris condemned ten theses as false. Later, in 1244, this condemnation was approved by the local bishop,

<sup>76</sup>Unfortunately there is no proper catalogue of the Greek patristic texts available in Latin for the West. Certain important translations of the great authorities are, of course, well known but there is no thorough collection of the Greek theological materials accessible in the Latin West. E.g. how much was known of the *Theological orations* of Gregory Nazianzen?

<sup>77</sup>For the main points see H. CHADWICK, *East and West*.

<sup>78</sup>E.g. "[...] ipse est summum bonum" (AUGUSTINUS, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, LXX, 2; PL 36, 896); "[...] ostenderem Deum summe bonum et immutabilem creatorem esse [...]" (IDEM, *Retractationes*, I, 10; PL 32, 599). Cf. PS-DIONYSIUS, *De mystica theologia*, I, 1; and *De divinis nominibus*, 125, 14; 126, 16; 138, 3. The Latin term in the translation of Saracenus, *superbonus*, shows up only on four occasions in Aquinas (*In De divinis nominibus*, pref., cap. 2, 1, 1; and 1, 2).

<sup>79</sup>Cf. the quodlibetal questions of Bernardus de Trilia or Matthaëus of Aquasparta on the cognition of the separated souls.

<sup>80</sup>N. CONSTAS, "To Sleep, Perchance to Dream," p. 124.

William of Auvergne. The first of these condemnations relate to the unknowability of the divine essence.

It is an error to say that the divine essence in itself will be seen neither by the angels, nor by human beings. This error we reject, and those who represent or defend it, we excommunicate on the authority of Bishop William. We firmly believe and assert instead that God will be seen in his essence or substance by the angels, by all the saints, and is already seen now by all the glorified souls.<sup>81</sup>

Trottmann suggests, following Chenu, that this condemnation reflects the rediscovery and increasing influence of certain Greek Patristic texts.<sup>82</sup> This is a rather ambivalent assessment, though, since this decision in fact rejects and condemns a fundamental tenet of Greek theology. As indicated above, standard Greek theology — as a reaction to the 4<sup>th</sup> century Eunomian debate — was unanimous about the unknowability of the divine essence. Again, a reaction to Greek authors could not have been a new phenomenon, since the works of Eriugena — often in clandestine ways — were already transmitting this idea, supported by the availability of the *Corpus Aeropagiticum* and the other few texts listed above, which all maintained that the divine essence remains hidden from human inquiry. Authorities for this tradition of theology also included John Damascene's *De fide orthodoxa* and the commentary of John Chrysostom on the Gospel of John, which had been available for nearly a century by then.<sup>83</sup>

Therefore I would rather suggest that 1241 was a logical step for a dogmatic theology shaping its identity, stressing its independence from the Greek tradition.

While the 1241 decision legally pertained only the purview of the Bishop of Paris, its import was magnified by the significance of the University, which was already emerging as the theological and intellectual centre of the Latin

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<sup>81</sup>“Quod divina essentia in se nec ab homine nec ab angelo videbitur. Hunc errorem reprobamus et assertores et defensores auctoritate Wilhermi episcopi excommunicamus. Firmiter autem credimus et asserimus, quod Deus in sua essentia vel substantia videbitur ab angelis et omnibus sanctis et videtur ab animabus glorificatis” (*CUP*, vol. 1, p. 170). Cf. P.-M. DE CONTENSON, “Hugues de Saint Cher et la condamnation de 1241,” *Revue des Sciences Théologiques et Philosophiques*, vol. 22 (1955), p. 72–78; M.-D. CHENU, “Le dernier avatar de la théologie orientale en Occident au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Mélanges Auguste Pelzer: études d'histoire littéraire et doctrinale de la scholastique médiévale offertes à Auguste Pelzer à l'occasion de son soixante-dixième anniversaire*, Leuven: Bibliothèque de l'Université, 1947, p. 159–181.

<sup>82</sup>CHR. TROTTMANN, *La vision béatifique*, p. 116; cf. M.-D. CHENU, “Le dernier avatar de la théologie orientale en Occident au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle.”

<sup>83</sup>In fact, the condemnation seems to react directly to the view to be found in St. John Chrysostom's *Homily 15 in John* on “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.”

realm, and its weight had only increased in the meantime.<sup>84</sup> Therefore, when John XXII raised the issue of the vision once again about a hundred years after the Paris decision, he ran against the semi-dogmatic stance of the now even more important theological centre of the period.

The Paris decision might be related in a somewhat nebulous way to the generally decreasing role of Greek and patristic theology in the West. While John Scotus Eriugena in the 9<sup>th</sup> century could constantly admire “the wonderfully apt and more precise formulations of the Greeks,”<sup>85</sup> by the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> century Richard of St. Victor († 1173) flatly declared that “qui non sumus Graeci,” — we, who are not Greeks.<sup>86</sup> By the 13<sup>th</sup> century the critical approach to the Greek Fathers went as far as Aquinas’ unreserved rejection of the great Greek authority: “on this point John Damascene is not to be trusted.”<sup>87</sup>

Humbert de Romans (c.1200–1277), the fifth general of the Dominican Order, expressed very well the conflict between the Latin and the Greek approaches in his treatise on the nature of their theological differences. He mentions as the third cause of the disagreements:

[...] the ignorance of the Greeks. Science and studies have for the most part disappeared in their realm, and therefore they cannot understand what is told to them in terms of arguments, but they insist on certain councils, and on traditions which were bequeathed to them by their predecessors, behaving like certain heretical idiots, for whom reasons do not matter.<sup>88</sup>

What Humbert is frustrated about is certainly the lack of a theological culture comparable to that of the Latins, which in the case of this eminent Dominican must be the “modern” argumentative culture of the Latin universities.

<sup>84</sup>R.W. SOUTHERN, “The Changing Role of the Universities in Europe,” *Historical Research*, vol. 60 (1987), p. 133–146; W.J. COURTENAY, “Inquiry and Inquisition: Academic Freedom in Medieval Universities,” *Church History*, vol. 58 (1989), p. 168–181; IDEM, “John XXII and the University of Paris,” *La vie culturelle, intellectuelle et scientifique à la cour des Papes d’Avignon*, edited by J. Hamesse, Turnhout: Brepols, 2006, p. 237–254.

<sup>85</sup>“Graeci autem solito more res acutius considerantes expressiusque significantes” (JOANNES SCOTUS ERIGENA, *De divisione naturae* (*Periphyseon*), V; PL 122, 955A).

<sup>86</sup>RICHARD OF ST. VICTOR, *De Trinitate*, PL 196, 932D.

<sup>87</sup>For example: “[...] Damasceno in hac parte non creditur” (*Super I Sent.*, d. 11, q. 1, a. 1, ad 3); “[...] in hoc non est standum sententiae Damasceni” (*De potentia*, q. 10, a. 4, ad 24).

<sup>88</sup>“Tertium est inscitia Graecorum. Periiit enim apud eos pro magna parte scientia cum studio, et ideo non intelligunt quae dicuntur eis per rationes, sed adhaerent semper quibusdam conciliis, et quibusdam quae tradita sunt eis a predecessoribus suis, sicut faciunt quidam haeretici idiotae, ad quos ratio nihil valet” (*Opus tripartitum*, 2, c. 11, in: K. MICHEL, *Das Opus tripartitum des Humbertus de Romanis, O.P.: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Kreuzzugsidee und der kirchlichen Unionsbewegungen*, Styria: Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1926 [my emphasis]).



(The charge against the Greeks that their analytic skills are defective has been repeated countless times, up until recent scholarship.)<sup>89</sup>

Indeed, by that time the dogmatic differences evolving between the Greek-speaking Eastern realms and the Latin-speaking West became divisive. Although certain ideas had survived, especially among the monastic theologians, like Bernard of Clairvaux, in the eyes of the “moderns” they belonged to the past. It is telling that Durandus of St. Pourçain, the great Dominican theologian of the day who led the theological opposition to the views of John XXII, frankly dismissed the authority of Bernard as “weak in disputation.”<sup>90</sup>

A symbolic anecdote summarises the situation. Reportedly, the pope reminded the Franciscan Walter Chatton that the theological masters of the day let their biblical commentaries be flooded with philosophical terms and stereotypic opinions. The phlegmatic answer of the Oxonian master expressed the prevailing attitude: “Well, we don’t read them much anyway.”<sup>91</sup>

Small wonder then that the pope seemed to be an innovator for the contemporary Latin academic theological establishment, which was conveniently trained by the universities in logic, Aristotelian philosophy, epistemology and a selective library of Latin patristic texts. The “scientific turn” of medieval theology, as already observed by Roger Bacon, shifted its attention from “history” (that is, from the Bible as the source for the history of salvation) to the study of “quaestiones,” the analytic study of theological problems.<sup>92</sup>

At this point one has to ask a much less often treated question concerning the reception of the papal views. The theologians of the University of Paris,

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<sup>89</sup>The best modern example is the extremely learned book by G. PODSKALSKY, *Theologie und Philosophie in Byzanz*, (Byzantinisches Archiv, 15), München: Beck, 1977. See also the earlier, pre-Vatican II volumes of M. JUGIE, *Theologia dogmatica Christianorum orientalium*, vol. 1–5, Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1926–1935.

<sup>90</sup>“Ultimo restat respondere ad auctoritatem beati Bernardi [...] et est notandum quod licet Bernardus fuerit vir magne devotionis in oratione et sermonibus, non fuit tamen magne auctoritatis in disputationibus” (DURANDUS DE SAINT-POURÇAIN, *Libellus de visione Dei*, edited by G. Cremascoli, p. 441, ll. 636–639). NICOLAUS DE LYRA tried to save the authority of Bernard by attributing the sermons “to another Bernard”: “[...] iste Bernardus non fuit ille famosus de Claravalle sed alius eiusdem nominis et ordinis, sicut dicunt illi qui melius noverunt opera beati Bernardi” (NICHOLAS OF LYRA, “*De visione divinae essentiae*” by Nicholas of Lyra,” edited by M. Woodward, *Franciscan Studies*, vol. 63 [2005], p. 395–396).

<sup>91</sup>M. DYKMANS, *Les sermons de Jean XXII sur la vision béatifique*, p. 73. Tullio Gregory quotes Arnald of Villanova († 1311) complaining that “moderni theologi exulant a scriptura sacra” (T. GREGORY, “Escatologia e aristotelismo nella scolastica medievale,” *L’attesa dell’età nuova nella spiritualità della fine del Medioevo*, edited by AA. VV., Todi: Accademia Tudertina, 1962, p. 278).

<sup>92</sup>“Et mirum est quod sic est exaltatus liber Sententiarum, quia liber historiarum est magis proprius theologiae;” “[...] tamen a quinquaginta annis theologi principaliter occupati sunt circa questiones [...]” (from the *Opus minus* and the *Compendium studii theologiae* respectively, quoted by T. GREGORY, “Escatologia e aristotelismo nella scolastica medievale,” p. 268, fn. 13).

irrespective of their allegiances as Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, Carmelites or Cistercians, all closed their ranks for the saints' immediate and face-to-face vision of God against the papal view of the delayed vision.

What sort of explanation can be given for the immediate and nearly universal rejection of the papal views? How could it be that nearly every Latin theologian of note repudiated the opinion of the pope? In fact, hardly anybody, not even his trusted court theologians — like Armand of Belvézer, Jaques Fournier or even Geraldus Odonis — supported him unconditionally.<sup>93</sup>

This united front requires an explanation. I suggest that the joining of ranks against the papal view owes to certain common presuppositions embedded in the shared theological culture of the schools. The guild of professional theologians, trained in the same schools, reacted in concert to defend what seemed to them as a direct attack on their commonly assumed theological approach.

Let me elaborate on this point. For High Scholasticism, that is, for the schools in the century before the beatific vision debate, it was a well-known problem whether theology could be a science. This issue is related to the problem of the beatific vision via contemporary epistemic presuppositions. According to the standard Aristotelian epistemology of the age, human knowledge is about truth. Truth is inseparably connected to propositions. Only truth can be known, and only propositions (and their combinations) can be true. Human knowledge is therefore essentially propositional. In scholastic parlance they are the objects of knowledge. (Not an unreasonable position, philosophically speaking.) Now propositions are formed by the joining of concepts. The human mind, however, acquires its concepts (or mental contents) through the senses. Empiricism was a shared common assumption. There is nothing in the intellect which was not previously in the senses. *Nihil est in intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensu*, as the scholastic maxim says.

Science is of course knowledge, and knowledge takes in the aforesaid precise sense the form of true propositions. Now propositions are either true evidently,

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<sup>93</sup>There were very few voices for the papal position and even those were only cautiously supportive, and only in a qualified sense. Among these few were Cardinal Ceccano, Guiral Ot OFM (in a qualified sense), Walter Chatton OFM, John Lutterell, William of Alnwick (or his successor), and an anonymous Carmelite. In opposition argued Durandus of St. Pourcain (OP, then bishop of Meaux), Peter Paludanus OP (then patriarch of Jerusalem), Pierre Roger (the later pope Clement VI), Thomas Waleys OP, Nicolaus de Lyra OFM, William Ockham OFM, Thomas of Strasbourg OESA, Armand of Belvézer OP, Robert d'Anjou (king of Naples), Jean d'Aragon (archbishop of Tarragona and Latin patriarch of Alexandria), cardinal Jacques Fournier (the later Pope Benedict XII), the twenty-nine masters of the University of Paris, and many others according to the chronicles. See M. DYKMANS, *Les sermons de Jean XXII sur la vision béatifique*, p. 165–219; and A. MAIER, "Schriften, Daten und Personen aus dem Visio-Streit unter Johann XXII."

as principles, or are derived from principles. The whole normative edifice of science in the High Middle Ages was based on the *Second Analytics* of Aristotle. Aristotle's appealing concept of science was modelled on mathematics, but modified for the purpose of philosophy or metaphysics. The Aristotelian criteria for first principles were evident truth, universality, primitiveness, and necessity. Starting from such principles the theses, that is, conclusions, could be deduced with the help of the rules of inference. (An aside: this is why Aquinas formulates his famous problem precisely as: Whether the sacred doctrine is a science? — that is, can the body of theological propositions be cast into a branch of science in conformity to the requirements of the *Second Analytics*?)

How then are the theological statements true? Could it be that — as in the case of any other science — theological propositions are either deduced from first principles, or that they are true first principles themselves?

In the case of ordinary human sciences, the first principles of a particular science are either basic truths, or, as in the case of the subordinate sciences, specific principles are taken over from a more fundamental science (a “higher” science). Aquinas famously gives the example of the relation of music to arithmetic, or optics to geometry. The theory of ratios established by geometry is taken over in optics, and the fundamental propositions about numbers in music are taken over from arithmetic.<sup>94</sup> Along these lines one arrives at metaphysics which provides the utmost basic principles for the consecutive sciences, like the principle of bivalence, of the excluded middle, the first principles about being, oneness and unity, etc. These principles are then used as taken for granted, and not established by all the other sciences, called subordinate sciences in this sense.

Now what happens in the case of theology? The first principles of theology, like the stock example “God is triune,” must be true. But how is it established in this world, *in statu viatoris*? At this point there is no difference between Thomas Aquinas and his critics, like William of Ockham. The truth of the theological principles ought to be evident from the intuitive vision of the divine essence granted to the saints and the blessed.

In the “heavenly homeland,” *in patria*, the saints can and do know by immediate certainty that the fundamental truth of Christian theology, the statement that God is triune, is true. They know this statement, for they only have to see this truth (the act of vision without bodily senses is, of course, a problematic notion). This immediate awareness, *cognitio intuitiva*, is of existing reality, in the sense that when we look at a particular simple state of affairs, we know immediately and intuitively that this individual thing is of a particular nature, or in a particular state, e.g. that the wall here and now is white. There is no need,

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<sup>94</sup>AQUINAS, *ST*, I, q. 1, a. 2, corp.

indeed, there is no possibility to recur to something more fundamental in the case of intuitive knowledge. A particular basic fact cannot be deduced from any more basic propositions. (Intuitive knowledge is opposed to abstractive knowledge, which can be of nonexistents. This is the reason that the definition of the *Benedictus Deus* uses the term “intuitive.”)

Where Aquinas and Ockham disagree is about the exact nature of the relationship between the intuitive certainty *in patria* and the theology of the *viator*, that is, about the accessibility of the knowledge of the blessed for theology down here. Let me stress again that (between Aquinas and Ockham) there is no disagreement that the principles of theology are valid. They have to be b e c a u s e the blessed do possess an intuitive certainty of them. The difference is about the relation of the two levels of knowledge. Can the evident knowledge of the saints serve as a sure starting point for the theology down here?

Let it be mentioned that Aquinas in this case does commit a rare but gross mistake in epistemic logic when he assumes from the fact that I believe that Saint Peter knows the proposition “God is triune” is true, that I would also be entitled to claim the knowledge of this truth for myself.<sup>95</sup>

Irrespective of the justified critique of Ockham, there lies an important problem here, implied by this general epistemological framework. Faith would be useless for the believer if there were no guarantee of the truth of his or her beliefs. This might happen in two ways. First, if the theological truths in a certain empirical way ascertained by the blessed were not of the same type as the pilgrim’s object of belief (the sentences expressing faith), then this knowledge could not justify theological principles in this life. For if the knowledge of the blessed were of a different k i n d, it could not serve as a foundation of the belief of the “pilgrim on earth,” the *viator*. This problem seems to be the background of the answer of the Paris masters to the king’s question on the specific difference between the vision granted to the blessed before and after the final judgement, namely that they are the same. One can see what is at stake: the p o s s i b i l i t y of theological knowledge here on earth.

The second problem is even weightier. If there is no beatific vision available now (for the saints), there is no possibility that theology could be a s c i e n c e — at least not until the Last Judgement and the concomitant beatific vision. If the real vision yielding knowledge came only after the judgement, and the

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<sup>95</sup> From the fact that *a* believes that *b* knows a proposition *p*, it does not follow that *a* knows proposition *p*. See WILLIAM OCKHAM, *In I Librum Sententiarum*, prol. q. 7, in: *Opera Theologica I*, edited by G. Gál, S. Brown, New York: St. Bonaventure, 1967, p. 199: “Unde nihil est dicere quod ego scio conclusiones aliquas, quia tu scis principia quibus ego credo, quia tu dicis ea. Et eodem modo puerile est dicere quod ego scio conclusiones theologiae, quia Deus scit principia quibus ego credo, quia ipse revelat ea.”

present vision of the saints were only a diminished version, theology could not lay claim to necessary truth in any sense, whatever high level of knowledge the future conditions of vision will offer.

I would suggest that this is one of the central issues underlying the debate. Of course, torrents of scriptural and patristic quotations were hurled against each other by the two parties. But if my interpretation is remotely correct, the view of the pope did not have a chance of succeeding. Any delay in the vision would have undermined the very program of the university theological establishment.<sup>96</sup>

Let me illustrate the above by two examples. One is taken from the sermon of the Dominican Thomas Waleys, a bitter opponent of the papal position, and the other from a cautious supporter, John Lutterell.

Thomas Waleys criticises the postponement of the vision, for then “the white robes of knowledge will be taken away from them [the saints — GyG], and they will be vested with the rags of faith dependent on further syllogising.”<sup>97</sup>

Lutterell, on the other hand, trying to circumvent the problem of the specifically different visions, devises the argument that in the interim state (called in Latin *visio moderna*) God provides a vision of himself in the form of a created image. The uncreated vision after the judgement will be infinitely more perfect, but the created image will also yield sufficient guarantee for the truths of faith.<sup>98</sup>

In this contemporary environment, dominated and united by the common presuppositions of a scholastic discourse based on a rigorous scientific ideal of “theology as a science,” the claim of the pope “I have studied the *originalia sanctorum*”<sup>99</sup> rang hollow.

I think this doctrinal — and institutional — embeddedness might explain why so few theologians of the theological establishment sided with the pope. Underestimating this establishment might have been John XXII’s mistake when he started the debate.

He could have argued that even Thomas Aquinas maintained the possibility of an increase in the intensity of the vision after the resurrection (taking the

<sup>96</sup> Similar view was suggested by I. IRIBARREN, “Theological Authority at the Papal Court in Avignon.” I owe this reference to my anonymous reviewer.

<sup>97</sup> TH. KÄPPELI, *Le procès contre Thomas Waleys O.P.*, p. 158.

<sup>98</sup> F. HOFFMANN, *Die Schriften des Oxforder Kanzlers Iohannes Lutterell. Texte zur Theologie des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts*, Leipzig: St. Benno Verlag, 1957, p. 109.

<sup>99</sup> “[...] aliqui murmurant [...] Et si non inveniunt in suis scartapellis ea quae dicuntur, totum reputant blasphemum, et hoc est quod non student in originalibus sanctorum et in scriptura sacra” (*Sermo IV*, 2, quoted in M. DYKMANS, *Les sermons de Jean XXII sur la vision béatifique*, p. 149–150). The same wording is used in the consistory of 1334 (see *CUP*, vol. 2.1, n. 983., p. 435).

extensive increase for granted) in his *Sentences* commentary,<sup>100</sup> following the view of Peter Lombard.<sup>101</sup> In fact, Aquinas relied on the principle that the human being (*homo*) is only perfect as a union of soul and body. He explicitly rejected the view (he refers to Porphyry via Augustine) that human nature resided in the soul alone. Then he moves on to say that

Some people assumed that the whole of human nature resides in the soul, in such a way that the soul uses the body like an instrument, or like the sailor uses the boat, and consequently the blessed soul will not be deprived of happiness relying on its natural desire [...] but this view is refuted by the Philosopher who showed in the second book of the *De anima* that the soul is united to the body as form is united to matter.<sup>102</sup>

In the next paragraph Aquinas uses an argument very similar to the argument deployed by John XXII when he said that the reward is due to the subject of an action, and it is the human being as a whole who acts in this life, composed of soul and body.<sup>103</sup>

Aquinas, however, changed his view in the *Summa*. In I-II, q. 4, a. 5, while investigating the question of whether the body is necessary for man's happiness, he speaks in opposition to his earlier view.

Consequently that happiness which can be had in this life depends, in a way, on the body. But as to perfect Happiness, which consists in the vision of God, some have maintained that it is not possible for the soul separated from the body; and have said that the souls of saints, when separated from their bodies, do not attain to that Happiness until the Day of Judgement, when they will receive their bodies back again. And this is shown to be false, both by authority and by reason. [...] it is evident that the souls of the saints, separated from their bodies, "walk by sight," seeing the Essence of God, wherein is true Happiness [...] For the intellect needs not the body for its operation, save on account of the

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<sup>100</sup>"Beatitudo sanctorum erit major post resurrectionem corporis quam ante" (AQUINAS, *Super IV Sent.*, d. 49, q. 1, a. 4, qc. 1).

<sup>101</sup>"Sine omni scrupulo credendum est eos [sanctos — GyG] habituros maiorem gloriam post iudicium quam ante" (PETRUS LOMBARDUS, *Magistri Petri Lombardi Sententiae in IV libris distinctae*, l. 4, d. 49, cap. 4 [n. 283]).

<sup>102</sup>"Quidam vero posuerunt totam hominis naturam in anima constare, ita ut anima corpore uteretur sicut instrumento, aut sicut nauta navi; unde secundum hanc opinionem sequitur quod sola anima beatificata naturali desiderio beatitudinis non frustraretur; et sic non oportet ponere resurrectionem. Sed hoc fundamentum sufficienter philosophus in 2 de anima destruit, ostendens animam corpori sicut formam materiae uniri" (AQUINAS, *Super IV Sent.*, d. 43, q. 1, a. 1).

<sup>103</sup>"Ad tertium dicendum, quod anima non comparatur ad corpus solum ut operans ad instrumentum quo operatur, sed etiam ut forma ad materiam; unde operatio est conjuncti, et non tantum animae, ut patet per philosophum in 1 de anima. Et quia operanti debetur operis merces, oportet quod ipse homo compositus ex anima et corpore operis sui mercedem accipiat" (ibidem, d. 43, q. 1, a.1, qc. 1). Cf. M. DYKMAN, *Les sermons de Jean XXII sur la vision béatifique*, p. 139.

phantasms, wherein it looks on the intelligible truth, as stated in I:84:7. Now it is evident that the Divine Essence cannot be seen by means of phantasms, as stated in I:12:3. Wherefore, since man's perfect Happiness consists in the vision of the Divine Essence, it does not depend on the body. Consequently, without the body the soul can be happy.<sup>104</sup>

It is difficult to explain why Aquinas contradicted himself. One could object that in the first quotation Aquinas opposes the anthropology of the Platonists, while in the second he speaks about eschatological beatitude, hence the difference in the views emerges from the different context. This objection, however, is misguided. Aquinas in the *Summa* clearly asserts that the vision of the divine essence is the ultimate happiness, and that it makes the soul happy without the body. He adds that the body will only supply something like beauty or a quick mind to the human person who is essentially constituted by the soul. Therefore, beauty and a quick mind are *accidental* to the person. Hence — following his analogy — the body is only accidental to the soul. This view, however, is nothing else but a denial of the unity of the human person. This is what I would like to call “crypto-Platonism.” Aquinas explicitly rejects the anthropology of Platonism, but in this case it creeps back in the form of the beatific vision.

However, while the discrepancy between his two views was known, he was held to maintain the “orthodox” view. Ernst Lewalter showed on the basis of the marginal notes to Peter Paludanus' commentary on the *Sentences* (IV, d. 49, q. 6 — written in the second decade of the 14<sup>th</sup> century) that Aquinas' first view (together with those of Godfrey of Fontaines) was rejected with the arguments of Durandus, while the second view was supported by Durandus, to which Paludanus added some of his own arguments.<sup>105</sup> In tune with the nature of

<sup>104</sup>[...] Manifestum est autem quod ad beatitudinem huius vitae, de necessitate requiritur corpus. [...] Et sic beatitudo quae in hac vita haberi potest, dependet quodammodo ex corpore. Sed circa beatitudinem perfectam, quae in Dei visione consistit, aliqui posuerunt quod non potest animae advenire sine corpore existenti; dicentes quod animae sanctorum a corporibus separatae, ad illam beatitudinem non perveniunt usque ad diem iudicii, quando corpora resument. Quod quidem apparet esse falsum et auctoritate, et ratione. [...] Animae autem sanctorum a corporibus separatae, sunt Deo praesentes, [...] Unde manifestum est quod animae sanctorum separatae a corporibus, ambulant per speciem, Dei essentiam videntes, in quo est vera beatitudo. [...] Nam intellectus ad suam operationem non indiget corpore nisi propter phantasmata, in quibus veritatem intelligibilem contuetur, ut in primo dictum est. Manifestum est autem quod divina essentia per phantasmata videri non potest, ut in primo ostensum est. Unde, cum in visione divinae essentiae perfecta hominis beatitudo consistat, non dependet beatitudo perfecta hominis a corpore. Unde sine corpore potest anima esse beata” (English version available at <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/2004.htm#article5>, accessed 16<sup>th</sup> August, 2018).

<sup>105</sup>PETRUS A PALUDE, *Lucubrationum opus in quartum Sententiarum*, Salamanticae, 1552, 524b–528a. Lewalter showed that the questio of Peter basically repeats the q. 7 of Durandus' commentary. See E. LEWALTER, “Thomas von Aquin und die Bulle *Benedictus Deus* von 1336,” p. 413 sq.

the reception of Aquinas, the *Sentence commentary* receded into the background and the *Summa* and the later works became the standard reference works.

Finally, permit me to merely scratch the surface of another important implication of the controversy, one which concerns ecclesiology.

John XXII in his first sermon asks the question (following Bernard of Clairvaux again) when shall the saints enter in the joy of the Lord? (The phrase alludes to Mt 25:21 and 23) The answer is that after the resumption of the body, since the reward is due to the acting agent as a whole, as it was shown above. (The pope takes it for granted that although the saints resume their bodies before the Final Judgement, and the final beatitude will be granted to them after the Judgement, there will be no change in their bliss.) The pope quotes Bernard: "In the joy of your Lord' the soul will not enter without the body, as the prelate will not enter without 'his flock'."<sup>106</sup>

This is a crucial point of theological anthropology. The beatific vision, "entering the joy of the Lord" is essentially connected to the Last Judgement. Judgement Day, however, is preceded by the general resurrection. Thereby the relationship between body and soul becomes an eschatological problem. However, both the Resurrection and the judgement are, in principle (at least in ancient Christianity), communitarian, and not individual acts. This is implied by the Creedal formula "He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead" which implies a universal judgement of all humanity. The eschatological City of God will be opened for all the elect together, as it is said in Revelations 6:11 to the martyrs that "they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed."

According to the pope, there is no individual judgement which would imply individual salvation (or damnation). There is just one judgement, the last one, which is an event establishing the community of the saints. The whole Church is called to judgement as a community, as a people of God. In his second sermon the pope explains the passage Bernard adopted from Hebr 11:39–40 "that they should not be made perfect apart from us."<sup>107</sup> According to the pope it is a greater honour for Christ to introduce everybody together to the kingdom and the promise than to lead them there one by one.<sup>108</sup> Later the pope alludes

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<sup>106</sup>M. DYKMANS, *Les sermons de Jean XXII sur la vision béatifique*, p. 98. John XXII quotes BERNARDUS CLAREVALLENSIS, *Sermo III in festo omnium sanctorum* (PL 183, 469A): "Exspectantes donec [...] impleatur numerus fratrum. In illam enim beatissimam domum nec sine nobis intrabunt, nec sine corporibus suis, id est nec sancti sine plebe, nec spiritus sine carne."

<sup>107</sup>BERNARDUS CLAREVALLENSIS, *Sermones in Cantica Canticorum* (PL 183, 1157B).

<sup>108</sup>M. DYKMANS, *Les sermons de Jean XXII sur la vision béatifique*, p. 116–117.



to the adage that “we are the body of Christ.”<sup>109</sup> He alludes again to the same problem in his penultimate sermon: “we here will be accepted all together”.<sup>110</sup>

This communitarian view, however, implies that the final fulfilment, the ultimate beatitude, will be given only after the end of times in a moment that transcends the history of the world.

But then, if the beatific vision is not yet granted even to the saints, not only the scientific program of scholastic theology will fail, but, as Durandus remarks, this view denies the existence of the purgatory. It denies purgatory, since if reward or chastisement only pertains to the resurrected person as a whole, and the judgement is final, there remains no room for “purgation.”<sup>111</sup> Again, Durandus adds that the view about the delay of the vision is pernicious since it hurts “the sincerity of faith.” The weak would be scandalised that the promised reward of the faithful, or the chastisement of the sinners, is pushed so far into the future that nobody can know anything about it. Durandus recalls the case of Arnaldus de Villanova who predicted the arrival of the Antichrist but relegated it to so far in the future that nobody will live to see whether what he said will be true or not.<sup>112</sup> The same issue comes up in the anonymous Franciscan sermon edited by Dykmans.<sup>113</sup>

Umberto Eco summarized the problem in the fictitious dialogue between Michael of Cesena and Ubertino of Casale in his *The Name of the Rose*, discussing the delay of the beatific vision (well in advance of the event).

“[...] He [John XXII — GyG] is planning some mad if not perverse propositions that would change the very substance of doctrine and would deprive our preaching of all power!” [...] “It seems John is planning to declare that the just will not enjoy the beatific vision until after judgement. [...] And, more, it seems that he wants to go further and assert that nor will hell be open before that day [...] not even for the devils!” “Lord Jesus, assist us!” Jerome cried. “And what will we tell sinners, then, if we cannot threaten them with an immediate hell the moment they are dead?” [...].<sup>114</sup>

<sup>109</sup>Ibidem, p. 131.

<sup>110</sup>“Hoc omnes simul accepturi sumus” (ibidem, p. 155).

<sup>111</sup>DURANDUS DE SAINT-POURÇAIN, *Libellus de visione Dei*, edited by G. Cremascoli, ll. 544–555.

<sup>112</sup>Ibidem, ll. 488–501.

<sup>113</sup>M. DYKMANS, “Les frères mineurs d’Avignon au début de 1333 et le sermon de Gautier de Chatoon sur la vision béatifique,” *Archives d’Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age*, vol. 38 (1971), p. 105–148.

<sup>114</sup>U. Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, p. 174.

If there is no purgatory, there are no indulgences either, and no assurance for salvation or chastisement, since both reward and punishment will be relegated to an event beyond history.<sup>115</sup>

#### SUMMARY

Against a trend in the scholarship on the beatific vision controversy, I have suggested that the pope was a conservative, traditionalist theologian, who far from being ignorant seems to have understood deeply the implications of the dominant eschatological view of his times. The theories of scholastics about the beatific vision developed not only against the “Greek” view, but also against standard 12<sup>th</sup> century Latin opinion, let alone the Augustinian eschatological tradition.

Hence it is certainly not the case that John XXII proposed something novel.<sup>116</sup> It is difficult to call him the innovator when he proposed an established traditional view.<sup>117</sup> A thorough reading of his sermons shows that he intended to return to an archaic, more scripturally and patristically oriented way of theologising, against the prevalent “scientific” trend. In this he might be classified as one of the great critics of the scholastic method.

He seems to have realised that this dominant view, which developed in the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and became standard by the early 14<sup>th</sup>, stressed the role of the individual judgement at the expense of the communitarian view of a general judgement. He had not realised, however, the embeddedness of the standard view both theologically and institutionally.

In retrospect it is obvious that distinction 49 of the fourth book of the *Sentences* (which discussed the beatific vision) was duly commented upon, but there was no specific attention devoted to it for a long time. The issue receded into the background like the Bosom of Abraham (the symbol of the place where the souls of the Old Testament saints wait for the Judgement before Christ) disappeared

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<sup>115</sup>Trottmann also hints at this aspect. See CHR. TROTTMANN, “*Facies et essentia* dans les conceptions médiévales de la vision de Dieu,” *Micrologus*, vol. 5 (1997), p. 11.

<sup>116</sup>Dykmans and many other scholars still call the papal view as “une nouveauté” (M. DYKMANS, *Les sermons de Jean XXII sur la vision béatifique*, p. 12) despite their own collection of materials which show the traditionalism of the pope.

<sup>117</sup>“The fourteenth [type of transfiguration — GyG] will happen with the souls of the saints. Although the souls of the saints rejoice already with Christ in heavens, but when they will resume their bodies, transformed as the so glorious and radiating body of Christ, they will rejoice incomparably more. Then will they have complete, perfect, and consummate joy” (ACHARD DE SAINT-VICTOR [around 1150], *Sermons inédits*, edited by J. Chatillon, Paris, 1920, p. 129; quoted by M. DYKMANS, *Les sermons de Jean XXII sur la vision béatifique*, p. 41, fn. 1).

from the Western portals in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>118</sup> (This development largely coincided with the appearance of individual judgement in iconography.) This development also meant, however, that the view of the immediate reward became the established and unquestioned view of the period.

This price was paid for this “modern” view in order to secure a foundation for the great program of scientific theology which required certitude, or at least its possibility in some form, and this program coincided with pastoral purposes, too. The nearly universal rejection of the papal view seems to have emerged from the institutional entrenchment of both theological and pastoral concerns.

The pope seems to have realized the problem of the individual judgement only later in his life. He was, however, surely not under some kind of Greek influence, since he did allow for the essential vision. He realized, however, that the granting of the fullness of the reward (or punishment) immediately after death implies a sort of substance dualism, the trace of a hidden form of Platonism, which morphed into scholasticism. Stressing the role of the soul alone at the expense of the body not only promoted the return of a crypto-Platonic metaphysics of the soul, but also rendered the significance of the resurrection void. Speculations about the epistemology of the disembodied soul promoted metaphysics instead of the view of the *eschaton* as the transcendent end of the history of salvation, diminishing the role of the Church as an eschatologically oriented community.

The language was missing for making these ecclesiological consequences explicit. Contemporary ecclesiology was dominated by the issues of property (the issue of evangelical poverty raised by the spiritual Franciscans), the relation between the secular rulers and the papacy (the political conflict between the Holy Roman Emperor or the French king and the pope), and finally by the conflict between the pope and the council.

In light of these great issues, the debate about the “vision” seemed to be empty and devoid of real significance. Finally, Pope Benedict wanted to put an end to an issue which in his view only served to raise excitement and scandal. In his haste, however, he entrenched those implications of the innovation of high scholasticism which promoted an individual approach to salvation, a dilution of the Church as the *communio sanctorum*, and a dematerialisation of the resurrection.

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<sup>118</sup> Cf. J. BASCHET, *Le sein du père. Abraham et la paternité dans l'Occident médiéval*, Paris: Gallimard, 2000. His Freudian interpretation of the development, however, is misguided.

## APPENDIX

### THE GREEK ASPECT

Katherine Walsh suggested in her learned book about Richard Fitzralph some kind of Greek influence which might have explained the initiative of John XXII.<sup>119</sup> There are, indeed, similarities between the views suggested by John XXII and the standard Patristic-Eastern eschatology, such as the fact that both accept that the ultimate beatitude will arrive after the Last Judgement. Again, both assume that the souls proceed immediately to their allotted places where they wait for judgement to come. Both assume that the final bliss will be the reward of the united human person, and that it will happen in at a general judgement.

On the other hand, for the Greeks there is no essential vision, and some views even allow for a kind of sleep for the soul. The place of the separated souls is not specified and there is no purgatory.<sup>120</sup>

Consider for example the Hymn VIII of Ephrem the Syrian on Paradise. Here Ephrem comments on the Good Thief, to whom Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). For Ephrem, however, Paradise cannot be entered by the soul alone, since it is blind without the body which provides the organs for seeing.

I imagined that he was already there // but then I considered // how the soul cannot have perception of Paradise, // without its mate, the body // its instrument and lyre.

[...]

That the soul cannot see // without the body's frame // [...] See how each looks // and attests to the other // how the body has need of the soul // in order to live // and the soul too requires the body // in order to see and hear.

[...]

Thus in the delightful mansions // on the borders of Paradise // do the souls of the just // and righteous reside // awaiting there // the bodies they love // so that, at the opening // of the Garden's gate // both bodies and soul might proclaim // amidst hosannas // Blessed is He who has brought Adam from Sheol and returned him to Paradise in the company of many.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> See K. WALSH, *A Fourteenth-Century Scholar and Primate*, p. 85–107 on the beatific vision controversy.

<sup>120</sup> See N. CONSTAS, "To Sleep, Perchance to Dream."

<sup>121</sup> SAINT EPHREM, *Hymns on Paradise*, introduction and translation by S. Brock, New York: St. Vladimir Seminary Press, 1990, p. 131 sq. I owe the reference to István Bugár.

The Greek tradition continued in a similar vein. The relatively recent Greek catechesis of 1899 by St. Nectarios of Aegina (1846–1920) states that

The souls after death cross to a certain state, which is called middle state, and they wait there in expectation until the judgement at the second coming of Christ.<sup>122</sup>

Nectarius makes reference to the 18<sup>th</sup> clause of the creed of the 1672 Jerusalem council. It declares that

We believe that the souls of those who fell asleep are either in calm or in pain, each according to their own actions. Separated from the bodies, they move immediately to the place of happiness or to the place of sorrow and pain, but we believe that neither to perfect enjoyment, nor to perfect condemnation. Only after the common resurrection, when the soul would be united to the body together which it lived well or sinfully, will receive each the perfect happiness or condemnation.<sup>123</sup>

Mark of Ephesus, the principal spokesman of the Greeks at the Council of Florence-Ferrara in 1438/9, would maintain, according to the tradition already present in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, that neither the just nor the wicked will attain their final state of either bliss or condemnation before the last day. The Greeks certainly agreed that prayers for the departed are necessary and helpful, but Mark insisted that even the just need them; as it is in the Eucharistic canon of Chrysostom's liturgy. Here the "bloodless sacrifice" is offered for "patriarchs, prophets, apostles and every righteous spirit made perfect in faith," and even for the Virgin Mary herself. The communion of saints is still in expectation of the ultimate fulfilment of the Second Coming and of the general resurrection, when a decisive event will declare for each of them their individual destinies.

While it was possible for the Greek emperor, Michael Palaeologus, to subscribe to the ecumenical profession of faith at the Council of Lyon in 1274, it became well-nigh impossible after 9 January 1336.

<sup>122</sup> ΑΓΙΟΥ ΝΕΚΤΑΡΙΟΥ, *Ορθοδοξος Ιερα Κατηχησις*. Θεσσαλονικη, 1899 (repr. 1984), p. 64–65.

<sup>123</sup> "Πιστεύομεν τὰς τῶν κεκοιμημένων ψυχὰς εἶναι ἢ ἐν ἀνέσει ἢ ἐν ὀδύνῃ καθ' ὅτι ἕκαστος ἔπραξεν· χωριζόμενας γὰρ ἀπὸ τῶν σωμάτων παραυτικά ἢ πρὸς εὐφροσύνην ἢ πρὸς λύπην καὶ στεναγμὸν ἐκδημεῖν ὁμολογουμένης μέντοι μήτε τῆς ἀπολαύσεως μήτε τῆς κατακρίσεως τελείας. Μετὰ γὰρ τὴν κοινὴν ἀνάστασιν ὅτε ἡ ψυχὴ ἐνωθεῖ τῷ σώματι μεθ' οὗ καλῶς ἢ πονηρῶς ἐπολιτεύσατο ἀπολήψεται ἕκαστος τὸ τέλειον ἢ τῆς ἀπολαύσεως ἢ τῆς κατακρίσεως δηλονότι." For the text see: I. KARMIRIS, *Dogmatica et Symbolica monumenta orthodoxae catholicae ecclesiae*, ed. 2, Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlag-Anst, 1968, p. 764–765.

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## A SUPREMELY IDLE QUESTION? ISSUES OF THE BEATIFIC VISION DEBATE BETWEEN 1331–1336

### S U M M A R Y

The beatific vision debate (1331–1336) presents two problems. First, what could have been the motivation of Pope John XXII for raising the issue? Second, why was his proposed theology of the delayed vision rejected nearly unanimously? This paper, after a summary of the debate, tries to answer these two questions. It appears that the pope initiated the controversy in the name of a conservative theology reaching back past High Scholasticism to Patristic authors. It emerges that it was High Scholasticism that introduced a new interpretation of the vision, probably motivated by institutional and pastoral concerns. The universities' program of "scientific theology" required reassurances of the truth of theological principles, while a delay of the rewards seemed to present difficulties for the theologically less educated believers. This change, however, came at the price of surrendering the concept of the *communio sanctorum* and the resurrection to an individualist eschatology and crypto-Platonic metaphysics of the soul.

KEYWORDS: beatific vision; John XXII; Benedict XII; Bull *Benedictus Deus*; critique of the scholastic method; theology as a science; resurrection; Last Judgement; Platonism