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Seals, Zachary Willam

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The Beatific Vision in the *Synopsis Purioris*: Its Institutional and Medieval Context

Zachary Seals

With the recent interest in Neo-Calvinism on the rise in contemporary Reformed theological circles the question of its relationship to the scholasticism of Reformed Orthodoxy is given a new opportunity for examination.¹ The Dutch Neo-Calvinist stream of the Reformed movement is exemplified by Herman Bavinck (1854–1921) and G. C. Berkouwer (1903–1996) whose writings on eschatology stressed the inaugurated kingdom of God on earth and sought to put distance between the eschatological vision of divine glory found in Protestantism and its traditional counterparts. Additionally, both thinkers rejected the teaching man's final beatitude consists in the vision of God *per essentiam*.² For Bavinck, affirming a vision of God's essence was motivated by a concern to create space for condign merit to earn eternal blessedness and resulted from a Neoplatonic desire for a mystical union with the divine in nature's transcendence.³ Similarly for Berkouwer, the vision of God's essence resulted from a problematic affirmation of the supernatural aid found in the *lumen gloriae* which framed the entire discussion in an ontic nature/grace dualism instead of the more biblical ethical categories of sin/holiness.⁴ While Bavinck and Berkouwer recognized man's destiny reaches fulfillment in the eternal vision and contemplation of God they were equally concerned with the Roman Catholic teaching that man in his created nature is unfit for the vision of God and thereby requires a supernatural gift (*donum superadditum*) in order to be sufficiently deified for union with God.⁵ For these thinkers the key to a Reformed Protestantism is the rejection of what they deem a Neoplatonic contrast between the natural and supernatural.⁶ Notably, although Bavinck recognizes what he claims is a minority of Reformed thinkers who considered "such an essential

¹ Cory Brock and N. Gray Sutanto, *Neo-Calvinism: A Theological Introduction* (Lexham Academic) 2022.

² Cory Brock, Revisiting Bavinck and the Beatific Vision, *Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies*, vol 6.2 (2021) 367-382. N. Gray Sutanto, Herman Bavinck on the Beatific Vision. *International Journal of Systematic Theology* (Sept 2022). Cory argues Bavinck has not sidelined the beatific vision so much as denied the Roman Catholic emphasis on the the vision of the divine essence with a Reformed alternative which stresses the beatific vision of God's glory in the person of Christ qua humanity. Similarly, Sutanto concludes Bavinck's positive doctrine of the beatific vision is christological, covenantal, and ethical rather than ontological.

³ Herman Bavinck, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol 1, (Ada: Baker Academic, 2003), 539.

⁴ G.C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 149.

⁵ Bavinck, *ibid.*, Vol 1, 542, 545, 587. Berkouwer, *ibid.*, 152.

⁶ Brian G. Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny: Eschatology and the Image of God in Herman Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics*, (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 127.

vision of God not impossible” he still concludes “most of them...either brushed aside the “thorny questions” of scholasticism or totally rejected the vision of God in his essence.”⁷

Significantly however, Bavinck’s claims his own theology was profoundly influenced by the scholastic manual of Reformed theology from the University of Leiden the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* (1625, hereafter SPT).⁸ Rather than continuing the debate on Bavinck’s doctrine of the beatific vision, this piece seeks to contextualize his view amongst the discussion of the beatific vision found in the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* (1625, hereafter SPT) and then compare how the doctrine was progressively taught amongst the faculty at the University of Leiden. This historical context reveals the distinctive contribution offered by the SPT which primarily consists in its engagement with debates found in medieval scholasticism concerning the beatific vision. By surveying two exemplary thinkers from the medieval era, Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus, in consideration with what was found in the SPT, an example is provided which displays the eclectic appropriation of medieval sources within the Reformed Orthodox tradition. This demonstrates the Reformed tradition has a rich history of positively retrieving scholastic medieval theological debates and thereby provides an potential alternative for contemporary Reformed theologians which are not inclined towards Neo-Calvinism principled difference between Reformed and Roman Catholic approaches to the beatific vision.

1. Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus on the Beatific Vision

Before turning to the intramural Reformed debates it is important to set them within the broader context of the medieval discussion which established the various positions available for the theologian. While earlier in the twelfth and thirteenth century there were some such as Hugh of St Cher who denied a vision of the divine essence for the blessed (arguing largely from his reading of Chrysostom’s Homily on John) by the end of the 13th century the debate had shifted from whether the essence is seen to how the essence is seen.⁹ Albert the Great, Bonaventure, and Aquinas all disputed on how the light of glory was to be understood whereas the later Franciscan Duns Scotus rejected it as superfluous entirely. Due to limited space, the prominence of the figures considered and their respective traditions of followers being well established in the early 17th century, only Aquinas and Scotus will be considered here.¹⁰ Thomas addresses the beatific vision chiefly in his Sentences commentary (IV.D49.Q1-2) and *Summa Theologia* (ST.I.Q12 and ST.1-11.Q3.A8) although it arises in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* (SCG.III.ch25, 50-51,57) as well as his biblical commentaries (see 1 Cor 13:12, Matt 5:8, John 1:18). There are a great deal of various questions which Thomas addresses related to the beatific vision all of which will not be discussed here as they are not strictly relevant for comparison with Scotus or the treatment

⁷ Bavinck, Vol 1, 190.

⁸ Henk van den Belt and Mathilde de Vries-van Uden, Herman Bavinck’s Preface to the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae*, *Bavinck Review* 8 (2017) 101-114.

⁹ Trans. Katja Krause, *Thomas Aquinas on Seeing God*, (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2020), 26.

¹⁰ For an overview of the various medieval debates including a variety of lesser known figures see Severin Kitanov, *Beatific Enjoyment in Medieval Scholastic Debates*, (Blue Ridge Summit: Lexington Books, 2014).

found in the *SPT*. Rather, focusing on the points of contrast related to the beatific vision between Thomas and Scotus as filtered through the criterion of those issues alluded to in the *SPT* will be sufficient.

A. The Natural Desire to See God

Thomas argues “there resides in every man a natural desire to know the cause of any effect which he sees; and thence arises wonder in men. But if the intellect of the rational creature could not reach so far as to the first cause of things the natural desire would remain void.”¹¹ Thus, that there is a natural desire to see God in some sense is clear, but exactly how this desire is realized must be considered carefully.¹² Notice Thomas emphasizes the nature of the creature being considered here as that of one which is *rational*. Every being will have its respective goodness fulfilled in its unique analogical way and for an intellectual creature the desire to be united with its first principle consists in the intellect’s order towards knowing its cause. As Thomas says, “the perfection of any power is determined by the nature of its object.”¹³ Yet, a distinction must be made between what can be termed an “elicited appetite” and “innate appetite” for although Thomas did not use these exact terms, they helpfully capture distinct conceptual judgments he made.¹⁴ Put briefly, this is the distinction between “an inclination coming from the very nature of the will” which is an innate appetite and that which is “a movement or act of the will, aroused by prior knowledge” which is elicited. While an elicited act of the will can be said to be natural this does not make it the same as the innate appetite which is also natural. For example, Thomas asserts “man has a natural desire to know the causes of whatever he sees. Hence, through wondering at things with hidden causes, men first began to philosophize, and when they had discovered the cause, they were at rest.”¹⁵ Here the “natural” desire is clearly an elicited response to what is seen so while it is not innate it is natural in the sense no deliberation is needed to grasp the goodness of the object.¹⁶ Importantly, noting the

¹¹ ST.I.Q12.A1.

¹² Here there is a great deal of debate amongst Thomists regarding the *nouvelle theology* and the interpretation of Thomas provided by Henri de Lubac in *Surnaturel: études historiques*, (Paris: Aubier, 1946). For a recent overview of the debate consider, Jacob Wood, *To Stir a Restless Heart: Thomas Aquinas and Henri de Lubac on Nature, Grace, and the Desire for God*, (Washington D.C: CUA Press, 2019). Though de Lubac’s interpretation held a place of prominence in the twentieth century, here I follow the criticisms of de Lubac’s interpretation of Aquinas made by Feingold, Long, and Hütter which seek to return to the traditional majority Dominican understanding. Steven Long, *Natura Pura: On the Recovery of Nature in the Doctrine of Grace* (New York: Fordham, 2010), Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God according to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters* (Rome: Apollinare Studi, 2001), Reinhard Hütter, *Dust Bound for Heaven: Explorations in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012).

¹³ ST.I-II.Q3.A8)

¹⁴ Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God*, 15.

¹⁵ SCG3.C25.13

¹⁶ Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God*, 26.

elicited act of the will is natural does not mean the object can always be attained via natural power. While the desire is natural insofar as it is clear without deliberation the object it is ordered towards is good, when the object is of an infinite disproportionate to the active power of the agent then it is necessary for the engagement of a supernatural assistance for this natural desire to be fulfilled. For Thomas this assistance is called the light of glory.

B. The Light of Glory

It is the essence of God which is seen in the beatific vision, and yet this is not possible to achieve without the elevation of the created intellect which, strictly speaking, for Thomas has no natural potency to see the divine essence. For the intellect to see the essence of God “it is necessary that some supernatural disposition should be added to the intellect in order that it may be raised up to such a great and sublime height.”¹⁷ This disposition or *habitus* is supernatural in the sense that it is not acquired by natural powers or concreated with the soul, but that does not mean it is uncreated. On the contrary, Thomas is clear the light of glory is “created light” which strengthens the intellect to see the divine essence not as a replacement for the standard intelligible species in cognition (which is now just the divine essence) in which objects are known but as a habit by which God is seen. Notably, this teaching on the necessity of the light of glory follows consistently from Thomas’ understanding of the natural desire to see God as being elicited and not innate. If the natural desire to see God were innate, then it could be realized without an added disposition as will be seen in Scotus in the next section. One way of illustrating this is by observing for Aquinas the reception of this created light of glory is due to an obediential potency in the creature which is *not* a natural potency. Aquinas distinguishes these two notions in a variety of texts, one of which is the following: “A double capability may be remarked in human nature: one, in respect of the order of natural power, and this is always fulfilled by God, Who apportions to each according to its natural capability; the other in respect to the order of the Divine power, which all creatures implicitly obey”¹⁸ This obediential potency then is not natural since the agent which realizes it is supernatural although the potency does reside in the creature which can be worked in beyond natural causes.

C. Formality of blessedness

Finally, although both Aquinas and Scotus agree the beatific vision culminates in the sight of the divine essence and that beatitude is essentially an operation there is considerable disagreement regarding whether the intrinsic formality of blessedness consists in the operation merely of the intellect or other faculties as well. For Aquinas the argument proceeds based off of the analysis provided above regarding the unique good of each nature. “Thus it is that, as everything desires the perfection of its nature, intellectual nature desires naturally to be happy. Now that which is most perfect in any intellectual nature is the intellectual operation, by which in some sense it grasps everything. Whence the beatitude of every intellectual nature consists in

¹⁷ ST.I.Q12.A5.

¹⁸ ST.III.Q1.A3.Rep3

understanding”¹⁹ Of course this is not to exclude a sense in which the will achieves its respective perfection as well. The question is merely what the substance of beatitude is and while the enjoyment of the will may rightly be an effect of the vision of God for Aquinas it is not strictly speaking the formality of beatitude *per se*.

At this point turning to Scotus provides a helpful point of contrast. Scotus addresses the beatific vision in various places throughout his *Quodlibetal* questions, particularly when addressing the nature of cognition (Q6 & 13) but most directly in the forty ninth distinction of the fourth book in the *Ordinatio*. Significantly, Scotus is not concerned merely to engage with Aquinas and more regularly responds to Henry of Ghent and Richard of Middleton on doctrinal matters. When he does engage with Aquinas he only cites Aquinas’ sentences commentary and does not appear to be familiar with the arguments from the *Summa*. The order will proceed as established earlier:

A. *The Natural Desire to See God*

For Scotus it is important to distinguish the various senses in which something can be “natural.” First, Scotus distinguishes between a natural active principle and a natural passive principle.²⁰ When considering passive principles Scotus argues what makes something natural is not the act itself or what it is ordered towards but merely the agent doing the movement. If a supernatural agent is moving a natural agent above their proportion than the passive thing is moved supernaturally whereas if the agent is moved in accordance with typical secondary causes than it is natural. Thus, unlike for Aquinas, whereas the required potency to see God was obediential and thereby *not* natural since it is elicited for Scotus the natural desire to see God is innate.²¹ This innate desire can be realized without the addition of any *habitus* or disposition as the intellect *per creation* is already designed with the capacity to see God “naturally”. Of course, this is not to imply there is no great disproportion between the finite creature and the infinite divine essence. Rather Scotus’ conception of what is “natural” for the intellect includes whatever is possible to be known. “Every being endowed by nature with a possible intellect can know naturally everything knowable, i.e. so far as such a thing itself is concerned, it is capable of receiving such knowledge.”²² Thus, whereas if the creaturely intellect is absolutely considered in itself Scotus would affirm it is naturally capable of seeing the divine essence insofar as what is affirmed is merely to say the divine essence is knowable. However, if considered on the side of

¹⁹ ST.I.Q26.Resp

²⁰ Ord. IV. D.43.Q4.

²¹ Notably, two early modern scholastic manuals of theology which sought to demarcate exactly where the lines of disagreement lay between the Thomist and Scotist schools highlighted this point. Francesco Macedo, *Collationes Doctrinae S. Thomae Et Scoti cum differentiis inter utrumque*, (Padua: 1671), vol 1, 12: “*Utrum ea potentia receptiva formae supernaturalis, dicenda sit obedientialis, an naturalis? Alij dicant quicquid volent, Scoto, ac mihi placet appellare naturalem.*” Juan de Rada, *Sancti Thomae et Scoti controversiarum theologiarum quaestionum resolutio*, (Paris: 1589), 2: “*An potentia susceptiva actus supernaturalis sit naturalis ordine ad huiusmodi actum? Circa a hunc primum articulum est opinio caietani opusculo de potentia afferentis partem negativam questionis quam omnes Thomistae sequuntur. Opposita sententia est doctoris subtilis prima questione prologi super sententias.*”

²² *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, XIV

activity, Scotus affirms the necessity for the special motion of God to produce the vision of his essence “and he does not function as a cause that moves any created intellect in a natural fashion.”²³ For Scotus then on the side of the divine agent acting the beatific vision is supernatural, but on the side of the creature realizing the fullest potential of its nature the act of seeing the divine is natural. Scotus is so emphatic that the creature is not able to contribute causal power to the cognizance of the divine essence that he affirms the innate desire to see God is paired with an intuitive cognition as opposed to abstractive cognition.

B. The Light of Glory

Scotus asserts “nay can created nature by its natural activity produce this vision or make this divine object perfectly present, since it cannot contain within itself in a perfect way this divine essence” which results in his distinction between abstractive and intuitive cognition.²⁴ Intuitive cognition is “knowledge of a present object as present and of an existing object as existing...it is a matter of perfection in the act of knowing qua knowledge that what is first known can be attained perfectly and this is so when it is attained in itself and not just in some diminished or derivative likeness.”²⁵ Scotus makes clear here that the intelligible species usually engaged in abstractive cognition is unnecessary for intuitive cognition which is an immediate act.²⁶ His argument for how this applies to the beatific vision is the following: “since abstractive cognition concerns equally the existent and the nonexistent if the beatific act were of this sort one could be beatifically happy with a nonexistent object which is impossible. Also, abstractive knowledge is possible where the object is not attained but only in some likeness. Beatitude on the contrary can never be found unless the beatific object is reached immediately and in itself.”²⁷ These considerations then make clear why Scotus rejects the need for the light of glory. Not only does the beatific vision as intuitive cognition make the created disposition of a light of glory unnecessary but the affirmation that the beatific vision is possible “naturally” for the creature has an innate disposition renders an additional habit superfluous. For Scotus the innate disposition in man’s nature is sufficient for God to make himself immediately present to the blessed. The light of glory is unneeded for “no habit which elevates a power can have an object that transcends the primary object of that power. Otherwise, it would not be a habit of that potency, but it would represent a power or potency in its own right, or else it would transform our early power into another power entirely, for it would have a different primary object.”²⁸

C. The Formality of Blessedness

Finally, and more briefly, Scotus argues against Aquinas’ claim that beatitude consists formally in the sole operation of the speculative intellect. By distinguishing between a beatitude of nature and beatitude of power (*Ord* IVD 49.4) Scotus can affirm Aquinas is correct that the

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., VI.

²⁶ Antoine Vos, *The Philosophy of John Duns Scotus*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 328.

²⁷ *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, VI 20.

²⁸ Ibid., XIV 42.

beatitude of an intellectual vision consists in the fulfillment of knowledge, but this cannot exclude the full beatification of the creature's power which includes the beatitude of the will. Thus, while vision is the supreme reward of the intellective power it is not the supreme reward of the whole man which includes the delight of the will. In this regard Scotus is closer to Richard of Middleton who argued a sense in which the formality of blessedness included multiple operations than Aquinas who argued it exclusively consists in the complete realization of the intellect.

In summary, it is important to recognize Scotus' different approach philosophically motivated by a different angle theologically yet without substantially disagreeing with Aquinas in many places. Though they disagreed on the principle of individuation which certainly had epistemological impact and Scotus became the standard reference point for discussions of "intuitive" cognition this does not mean his theological account of the beatific vision fundamentally differed from Thomas with regards to the vision of the divine essence.²⁹ Both affirmed the intelligible species could not be creaturely or a created similitude to see the divine essence, both affirmed the necessity of the supernatural agent to elevate the created intellect and both affirmed a sense in which the beatific vision is "natural" in the creature. Where they disagree is on how to define such a natural desire (with Aquinas claiming its elicited and Scotus it is innate), the status of obediential potency (Aquinas distinguishing it from natural potency and Scotus conflating the two), the necessity of the light of glory, and whether what is natural should be measured merely by passive potencies.³⁰ With these elements in mind we can now turn to an examination of the Dutch Reformed teaching on the beatific vision from the theological faculty at the University of Leiden in the decades leading up to the *SPT* which contextualizes the conclusions found there.

2. Historical Context at Leiden

The University of Leiden, the first established in the Netherlands (1575), was designed to "ameliorate the problem of unlettered clergy by providing more thorough theological schooling."³¹ Focusing strictly on the University of Leiden is an apt lens through which to consider the state of early modern Dutch Reformed theology due to its prominent influence on the Reformed tradition as a whole as well as its unique position in providing a test point where institutional affiliation can be considered as a criterion in examining doctrinal continuity.³² With regards to Leiden's impact on the Reformed tradition it should be noted the university quickly became an international hub of Reformed scholarship in the early 17th century as it reached a student body size and represented a geographical diversity which rivaled any other university in

²⁹ See John Boler, Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition, in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Thought*, ed. Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, Jan Pinborg, Eleonore Stump, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

³⁰ Wood, *Henri de Lubac and the Thomistic Tradition*, 379.

³¹ Christine Kooi, *Reformation in the Low Countries*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 137.

³² Todd Rester, *Theologia Viatorum: Institutional Continuity and the Reception of a theological Framework from Franciscus Junius's De theologia vera to Bernhardinus De Moor's Commentarius Perpetuus Vera*, Calvin Theological Seminary, Dissertation, 14.

Europe.³³ During its peak in the early half of the 17th century over half of its more than five hundred students were from other countries in Europe and many of its most famous faculty were from abroad as well.³⁴ With this sort of extensive reach in training pastors for ministry in Reformed churches across Europe the historian of Reformed theology would do well to consider what was taught by the faculty of theology at Leiden in this time. Additionally, Leiden was the home of an important confessional document known as the *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* which was intended to represent a unified Reformed theological position for Reformed ministers. This document was particularly necessary after the recent difficulties raised by the differing views present at the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619) raised the concern for a more extensive agreed upon formulation of doctrine by the theology faculty at Leiden.³⁵ As has been noted by others, there was ample precedent for the construction of a theological handbook by the collected faculty of a university and such compilations had already been completed earlier at Geneve, Heidelberg, and even in Leiden itself in 1611 and 1615. While there are a variety of proposed explanations for why another handbook was produced in 1625 (such as the establishment of an entirely new faculty and the need to clearly distinguish a post-Dordt position from the pre-Dordt disagreements) Stanglin has argued the most notable difference between the preceding Leiden handbooks and the *SPT* is the theological “spirit of cooperation and harmony” that can be found amongst the faculty.³⁶ Additionally, Stanglin observes a notable difference between the *SPT* and earlier theological handbooks at Leiden can be found in the rearrangement of the disputation on the resurrection of the body and eternal life to the end of the work as well as divided into two disputations to allow more detail.³⁷ Importantly, while the *SPT* as a whole features considerably longer disputations than the compilations of theological disputations which preceded them, the disputation on eternal life which treats the beatific vision also features a substantial advancement in doctrinal specificity compared to earlier treatments. A significant element of this greater specificity regarding disputed questions on the beatific vision relate to engagement with debates in medieval scholasticism which were becoming increasingly well-known during this time and often featured in Reformed scholastic texts. For example, the Reformed faculty at Leiden, were aware that the debate with the Remonstrants at Dordt in many ways were a Protestant echo of the earlier *De Auxiliis* controversy between Dominicans and Jesuits at the close of the sixteenth century and centered around considerable disagreement amongst Thomists.³⁸ Furthermore, that some of the Reformed at Leiden were reading contemporary commentators on the medieval

³³ Vos, Reformed Orthodoxy in the Netherlands, in *A Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy*, 127-128.

³⁴ Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 572.

³⁵ Vol 3, *Synopsis Purioris*, 17.

³⁶ Keith Stanglin, How Much Purer is the Synopsis Purioris Theologiae (1625)?, *Church History and Religious Culture* 98 (2018), 222-223. I would caution however that this unity should not be misconstrued as uniformity as there is evidence with the *Synopsis* of disagreement. For example, Walaeus argues angels are created in the image of God (disputation 12) whereas twice Thysius asserts only mankind was made in the image of God (Disputation 13 and on free will).

³⁷ Stanglin, *Ibid.*, 210.

³⁸ ed. Jordan Ballor, Matthew Gaetano, and David Systma, *Beyond Dordt and De Auxiliis: The Dynamics of Protestant and Catholic Soteriology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century*, (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

scholastics is evident by Voetius' comments that while he was a student there (1604-1610) he read Suarez, Zumel, Banez and others.³⁹ With this academic and educational context in mind, an examination and analysis of how the beatific vision was taught amongst the theological faculty at Leiden in the years leading up to the *SPT* will illuminate the areas in which it stands out.

A mere six years after the founding of the university, and one of the first on the theological faculty, Lambert Daneau was appointed in 1581 after arriving directly from teaching in Geneva.⁴⁰ Though he only taught for one year at the university it seems it was during this time that his opinion on the beatific vision shifted considerably. Upon arriving in Leiden, Daneau had recently completed his first biblical commentary which consisted of exegetical and theological remarks on 1 Timothy.⁴¹ In his commentary on 1 Timothy 6:16, Daneau produces several passages to defend his interpretation that the text is stressing the inaccessible mystery of God in relation to the creature. Though God is supremely knowable directly and comprehensively to himself the creature is only capable of similitudes. Such is the explanation for how it can be said Abraham, Moses, and other patriarchs saw God which was through symbolic representations and creaturely visible forms, but was not the divine essence itself. Here Daneau appeals to Chrysostom who was also avid in rejecting the possibility of a vision of the divine essence. Importantly, Daneau does recognize there are texts which appear to speak of a direct vision of God (1 John 3:2) and he even notes distinction 49 in Lombard's Sentences where the scholastics would dispute the question as well as various writings from Augustine on the subject.⁴² He then observes the objection that the vision of God's essence is motivated by Matthew 18:10 which claims the angels see the face of God. Nevertheless, while Daneau is keen to reject what he regards as vain and curious speculations he does seek to answer the question by appealing to his reading of Bernard of Clairvaux and, more importantly, Theodoret of Cyrus. To his reading of these figures, even the blessed angels do not see the essence of God which is utterly inscrutable. Do the scriptures contradict themselves by affirming in one place the patriarchs saw God and in another "no one has seen" God (1 Timothy 6:16; John 1:18)? Daneau resolves this dilemma by claiming when Paul denies anyone has seen God, he is denying anyone has had an *intuitive* vision of the divine essence ("as is said in the schools") which allows one to affirm a sense in which God was seen through created similitudes as Theodoret is keen to stress.⁴³ While it is unclear whether Daneau would follow Theodoret in the denial that the divine essence is "comprehended, or apprehended"⁴⁴ he certainly extended this reasoning into the life of the

³⁹ Andreas Beck, *Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676) on God, Freedom, and Contingency*, (Brill: Leiden, 2021), 34.

⁴⁰ Oliver Fatio, *Nihil pulchrius ordine: Contribution à l'étude de l'établissement de la discipline ecclésiastique aux Pays-Bas, ou Lambert Daneau aux Pays-Bas (1581-1583)*, (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 22.

⁴¹ Oliver Fatio, *Methode et Theologie*, (Geneve: Librairie Droz, 1976), 75. Lambert Daneau, *In D. Pavli Priorem Epistolam ad Timotheum commentarius*, Geneve, 1577.

⁴² Lambert Daneau, *In D. Pavli Priorem Epistolam ad Timotheum commentarius*, Geneve, 1577, 492.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 490.

⁴⁴ NPNF 2-03, *Theodoret, Jerome, Gennadius, & Rufinus: Historical Writings*, 384.

blessed in heaven when he concluded that if the angels cannot see the essence of God, then the departed saints cannot do so either.⁴⁵

Though Daneau left Leiden to teach in Ghent in 1582, Fatio has suggested it was during his time lecturing in Leiden that he prepared his larger systematic work, *Christianae Isagoge*, which was to be published the following year.⁴⁶ Significantly, in this work Danaeu appears to affirm a vision of the divine essence for the blessed. In the treatment on God's invisibility Daneau connects it to divine immutability by asserting all which can be seen is mutable.⁴⁷ Thus, when God appeared throughout the Old Testament in various forms these were always creaturely species because his essence is invisible and unchangeable. Yet, citing Mat 5:8 and 1 John 3:2, unlike the various creaturely species by which God is seen in the current order Danaeu claims the blessed will see God after death "*in ea ipsa substantia.*" Without a creaturely species to mediate this vision will be "*qua ipse est, quod est, suo nempe modo.*"⁴⁸ Granted, the vision will not be perfect and full for the blessed or the angels, but by this Daneau is appealing to the distinction between apprehension and comprehension evident from his now positive citation of Augustine's letter on the vision of God.

Daneau's later formulation would become the standard position at the University of Leiden though admittedly a number of theologians addressed the subject with less specificity choosing merely to repeat the biblical language. Franciscus Junius for example, (who taught from 1592-1602), in his widely read *Treatise on True Theology* (1594) spoke of the theology of vision where blessed spirits in glory see God "as he is" citing 1 John 3:2 in support.⁴⁹ Though caution is necessary, it is more reasonable to presume Junius would have clarified his statement with a specific denial of God's essence had he believed so. Nevertheless, this immense brevity on the exact object of the beatific vision and what constitutes the face-to-face vision (1 Cor 13:12) is repeated by Lucas Trelcatius Jr (teaching from 1602-1607) in his *Theologiae Institutio* (1608)⁵⁰ as well as Jacobus Arminius (teaching from 1603-1609) who treated the loci on eternal life in an earlier theological handbook produced by the faculty of theology at Leiden published in 1615. In this work, entitled *Syntagma disputationum theologicarum*, Arminius specifies the

⁴⁵ Danaeu, *In D. Pavli Priorem Epistolam ad Timotheum commentarius*, 492.

⁴⁶ Fatio, *Nihil Pulchrius Ordine*, 95. Lambert Danaeu, *Christianae Isagoge ad christianorum theologorum locos communes*, Geneve, 1583.

⁴⁷ Danaeu, *Ibid.*, 18-19.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁹ Franciscus Junius, "secunda plena qua spiritus beati gloriosam dei visionem obtinent in coelis & nos deum sicuti est visuri sumus" 170. Junius says the same "*per modum infusi habitus communicatum quo lumine caelestes illae creaturae vident creatorem suum, sicuti est*" in 1776.

⁵⁰ Lucas Trelcatius Jr, *Locorum Communium S. Theologiae Institutio per epitomen*, (Londini: Ex officina Nortoniana, 1608), 333.

cause of beatitude is eternal life which can be described as perfect union with God who will be seen face to face, thereby likely indicating a vision of God's essence as well.⁵¹

With the influential Counter Remonstrant Franciscus Gomarus however an important exception to this trend is found. From 1594-1611 Gomarus taught at Leiden during a time of immense growth for the university and theological controversy amongst the faculty.⁵² Likely around the year 1601 he began commenting on the Gospel of John and in his treatment of John 1:18 he argues fervently against a vision of the divine essence for the blessed.⁵³ In the treatise Gomarus primarily engages with Augustine, Bonaventure, and Aquinas. He claims the orthodox have diverse perspectives on whether the essence of God can be seen and interprets Chrysostom in support of his denial. Notably, Gomarus is aware medievals like Thomas and Bonaventure affirm a vision of the divine essence, but he remains convinced to see the divine essence is to go beyond human nature. His central concern is to avoid the undesirable conclusion that the saints would become omniscient in seeing the essence of God. For Gomarus the texts that speak of the vision of God refer to the manifestation of his glories in the person of Christ rather than the divine essence.⁵⁴ He is aware of the traditional Augustinian distinction between comprehension and apprehension, but finds it insufficient. He affirms a vision of Christ's flesh by glorified eyes of the flesh as well as an immaterial vision with the eye of the mind though not of the divine essence. He also affirms a natural desire for the vision of God though he denies the perfection of the intellect consists in a vision of the divine essence which is beyond its natural capacity. While more detail is provided here than in the prior treatments considered, there is no discussion of the light of glory or comment on whether the intellect or will is the formality of blessedness being considered as was featured prominently in medieval debates.

After the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619) the theological faculty at Leiden only consisted of Johannes Polyander due to the expulsion of the Remonstrants such as Episcopius. With the appointment of Antoine Thysius, Antonius Walaeus, and in 1620, Andre Rivet, a revived and unified faculty would produce the *SPT* (1625) which featured a much lengthier treatment of the beatific vision than that found in the prior compendiums published by the faculty. As has been noted above, this unity did not mean uniformity and some apparent disagreements are evident with the *SPT* itself. Yet, while Polyander and Thysius do not appear to have written on the subject, Andre Rivet seems to agree with the position Walaeus takes up against Gomarus. Before considering Walaeus' more in-depth treatment in his own *Loci* and the *SPT*, consider how his account aligns with the comments found in the commentary on Psalm 16 (1645) by Rivet.

⁵¹ Franciscus Gomarus, Jacobus Arminius, Lucas Trelcatius Jr, *Syntagma Disputationum theologicarum*, (Rotterdam: 1615), 320. "*actus illius est tum perfecta dei agnitio, quae visio dicitur a facie ad faciem, tum ejus sic cogniti dilectio & ex utraque existens fruitio Dei & acquiescentia cum frutione.*"

⁵² For the dating of Gomarus's life followed here, see J.P. van IJterson, *Franciscus Gomarus*, (Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1929).

⁵³ Franciscus Gomarus, *Opera theologica omnia*, (Amsterdam: 1644), 249-252.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, "*Non enim loquitur de visione essentiae divinae, sed gloriae: quae & in coelo relucet: & in Christo qui deus est patefactus in carne, in quo Pater tanquam in imagine sua refulget.*" 250.

It is often claimed amongst scholars of Reformed thought that a distinctively Reformed approach to the beatific vision ultimately and exclusively consists in the glorified sight of Christ in his humanity for eternity.⁵⁵ These claims are undermined however, not merely by the theologians considered which affirm a vision of the divine essence, but specifically by Rivet who argues emphatically the beatific vision cannot consist essentially in sight by glorified physical eyes.⁵⁶ He affirms an ocular vision of Christ, but compares it with the angels who also have the beatific vision which thereby results in affirming the essence of the vision must be spiritual. Notably, he affirms the strengthening of the intellect through the light of glory which is a created gift and affirms the vision is the perfection of the intellect in the knowledge of God. Rivetus cites Aquinas in support of his view the divine essence is apprehended though not seen comprehensively. He also notes “the ancients” used the metaphor of a vessel cast into the sea to depict how the intellect can apprehend the divine without exhaustively comprehending it though it is unclear whether he has John of Damascus or earlier figures in mind here.⁵⁷

We conclude this historical survey with Abraham Heidanus (1597-1678) who studied in Leiden in 1617 and was later appointed professor of theology there in 1648. Although his large work *Corpus theologiae christianae* (1689) is difficult to date due to it being published after his death, he is worth treating briefly as the final figure in our survey of theological faculty which treated the beatific vision and were educated at Leiden around the time of the *SPT*. Heidanus treats the beatific vision in his final chapter where he defends at length the necessity of affirming a vision of the divine essence as well as the utility of the light of glory in order to do so.⁵⁸ Like Rivet he denies the glorified eyes can see the divine essence, affirms they see the flesh of Christ, and yet maintains union with the divine essence itself through the intellectual sight of the soul is the achievement of true beatitude.

In review then, this survey has found in the years leading up to the *SPT* there was a sudden change in the trajectory regarding the nature of the beatific vision at Leiden. Though Daneau appears to initially have held the view of Gomarus in his earlier career, sometime during his lectures at Leiden he came to affirm a vision of the divine essence which was also held by Junius while Trelcatius Jr. and Arminius are unclear but likely affirm as well. Gomarus argued

⁵⁵ Kyle Strobel, "Jonathan Edwards's Reformed Doctrine of the Beatific Vision," in *Jonathan Edwards and Scotland* ed. Ken Minkema, Adriaan Neale and Kelly van Andel (Dunedin Academic Press, 2011), 182. Suzanne McDonald, "Beholding the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ", in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology*, ed. Kelly Kapic and Mark Jones, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 150. Seung Joo Lee, *Orders of Nature and Grace: Thomistic Concepts in the Moral Thought of Franciscus Junius (1545-1602)*, (PhD-Thesis, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2021), 180. Michael Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ*, (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2007), 281.

⁵⁶ Andre Rivet, *Commentarius in Psalmorum propheticorum, de mysteriis evangelicis, dodecadem selectam*, (Rotterdam; 1649), 122-126.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 125.

⁵⁸ Abraham Heidanus, Vol 2, *Corpus theologiae christianae*, (Lugduni batavorum: 1686), 631. "Tota ergo questio huc redit an in vita aeterna ipsam divinam essentiam immediate & intuitive beati sint visuri licet non adaequate? quia contentum est majus continente) an vero ejus quendam fulgorem tantum quae fit imago a Deo effluens quam vocant. Nos primum affirmamus, moti his rationibus."

firmly and with some engagement of the high medieval tradition against a vision of the divine essence, though he was not followed by the following generation of faculty. Andre Rivet appears to have followed the Thomistic view of endorsing the light of glory as well as the vision of the divine essence as does Heidanus. Rivet and Heidanus disagree with Gomarus, without naming him, in favor of the later medieval consensus represented in the Apostolic Constitution issued in 1336 *Benedictus Deus* which asserts the departed saints “have seen and see the divine essence with an intuitive vision and even face to face, without the mediation of any creature by way of object of vision.”⁵⁹ With this surrounding context established, an examination of how Antonius Walaeus treats the beatific vision in his own *Opera* and the *SPT* reveals the allegiance of this influential textbook of Reformed theology.

3. *The Beatific Vision in the SPT*

The beatific vision is treated in the final disputation of the synopsis concerning eternal life. Walaeus begins by noting faith is the beginning of life everlasting so there is a sense in which the sight of God is already present for the believer, yet properly speaking, the fulfillment of this vision will arrive for those who have departed this life and ultimately in with the resurrection of their bodies.⁶⁰ Importantly, Walaeus is clear that the vision of God in glory will include both the sight of Christ in his human nature with the eyes of the flesh as well as the sight of the divine essence with the eyes of the intellect.⁶¹ In agreement with both Aquinas and Scotus, Walaeus affirms the vision is intuitive and thereby denies any creaturely intelligible species mediates the vision although his equally emphatic language regarding the extraordinary light of glory certainly does not fit Scotus’ terminology. Scotus rejects an understanding of the light of glory as a habit because “No habit which elevates a power can have an object that transcends the primary object of that power.”⁶² It is not clear whether this is exactly what Aquinas would have affirmed in his understanding of the light of glory, but it is clear Walaeus does not follow Scotus in his rejection of the light of glory.⁶³

Some have claimed Walaeus’ denial of an abstract or expressed species is a denial of the Thomist idea that the divine essence is itself the intelligible species in the beatific vision. They conclude Walaeus’ endorsement of the impressed species (found in the *Opera*) is more akin to the Scotus conception of intuitive cognition as opposed to abstractive cognition.⁶⁴ This is unlikely for a few reasons. First, the use of an “impressed species” is common in medieval accounts of Aristotelian epistemology and can be found in Thomas as well as Scotus. Second, the language of “intuitive” is likely meant to be interpreted as denying that there is any created species through which the intellect sees God. This does *not* however mean the type of intuitive cognition Scotus had in mind which depended on his view of *haecceitas*, something Walaeus

⁵⁹ XII, Pope Benedict. “Benedictus Deus on the Beatific Vision of God - Papal Encyclicals Online.” Papal Encyclicals, July 27, 2017. <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/ben12/b12bdeus.htm>.

⁶⁰ *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae*, 585.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 589.

⁶² *Quaestiones Quodlibetales*, XIV 42.

⁶³ Antonius Walaeus, *Opera Omni*, 1643, 523.

⁶⁴ See ft 11 in Vol 3, 591.

gives no indication of being familiar with. Note, Walaeus will go on to explicitly affirm the need for a supernatural light in man's intellect in order to see the divine essence which he does not appear to think is in tension with his understanding that the vision of the divine essence is immediate. This is because the light of glory is not itself a species through which the object of vision is seen but rather a disposition which grants the power to realize a potency which could not be actualized by natural means. Walaeus says this supernatural light is necessary to take hold of the divine essence "in the same way" as the need for supernatural light in order to have fellowship with God in faith.⁶⁵ Thus, Walaeus appears to recognize there is a potency in mankind for a relationship with God, but the potency can only be realized by grace and not by a natural power. Therefore, he calls the light which is needed "supernatural." Yet, for Scotus the knowledge of God that man has a potency for qua humanity is, strictly speaking, natural. Scotus defines "natural" differently than Aquinas as anything that does not do violence to human nature. For Scotus, mankind's passive capacity for a supernatural perfection such as the beatific vision can be realized in a "natural" way since "a natural appetite is simply an ontological relationship between any faculty and that which perfects it."⁶⁶ As was seen above, for Thomas however, the concept of obediential potency is meant to distinguish what Scotus conflates with natural potency.⁶⁷ Thomas sees the need for a created disposition which is supernatural in mode to strengthen the capacity of the creature to see the essence of God which is above though not contrary to their created nature. In other words, Scotus' conception of an innate natural potency to see God which bypasses the need for the light of glory presumes an account of Walaeus does not appear to share. In the words of Ingham, for Scotus "the beatific vision is the natural fruition of the conditions already present in human nature."⁶⁸ Alternatively, Walaeus' method does not move from a consideration of what is possible for an intellect to what must be the case, as Scotus does, rather he reasons from what is actually the case, the inability of the creature to know God, to what is necessary, the light of glory, to strengthen its capacity. Whereas Scotus seems to reason from potency to act, Walaeus reasons from actuality to necessity/fittingness.

Finally, Walaeus himself explicitly claims in the *Opera* that while the Scotists and the Thomists disagreed on whether the divine persons are seen in the vision of the essence he sides with the Thomists.⁶⁹ Juan de Rada records in detail such a debate in his *Controversiae theologicae inter S. Thomam et Scotum* (1586) but since Walaeus does not engage with the debate and states his conclusion tentatively the matter should not be pressed further than warranted. Ultimately, like Aquinas and Scotus, while Walaeus does affirm the full recreation and glorification of the saint and thereby exalt the satisfaction, delight, and utter sanctification of every creaturely faculty, in his *Opera* Walaeus is clear he sides with the opinion of the Thomists against the Scotists that formal blessedness consists in the operation of the intellect. The intellect is "mans most excellent faculty" and while loving and enjoying what is known is undoubtedly required for

⁶⁵ Walaeus, *Opera*, 526.

⁶⁶ Allan Wolter, Duns Scotus on the Natural Desire for the Supernatural.

⁶⁷ Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God*.

⁶⁸ Ingham, *The Philosophical Vision of Duns Scotus*.

⁶⁹ Antonius Walaeus, *Opera*, 526.

true blessedness, these aspects are the fruits rather than the root of an intellectual creatures blessedness.⁷⁰

Conclusion: In the *SPT* as well as his own personal *Opera* Walaeus exemplifies an appreciative appropriation of the high medieval consensus that affirmed a vision of the divine essence. While retaining a typically Reformed emphasis that the vision is Christologically grounded and the eyes of the flesh see the person of Christ in his humanity, Walaeus also affirmed at least two more stereotypically “Thomist” theses: a knowledge of the persons in the vision of the essence and the primacy of the intellect in the formality of blessedness. The language of “intuitive”, being formalized in *Benedictus Deus* does not necessarily reflect a Scotist inheritance, and Walaeus’ emphatic acceptance of the light of glory strengthens this case. Additionally, it does not appear Walaeus understood the supernatural light of glory to enable a “natural” potency for the beatific vision as Scotus would have affirmed. Alternatively, while Gomarus was undoubtedly closer to a minority early medieval view which rejected a vision of the divine essence, and his own conclusion would later be taken up and defended by his most famous pupil Gisbertus Voetius, the results of this study have demonstrated his perspective was the minority position amongst the Dutch Reformed in the early 17th century and therefore should not be taken to be representative of the Reformed tradition as whole as is commonly claimed.

With these considerations in mind, caution should be exercised by contemporary Reformed systematians looking to find principled differences between the Roman Catholic and Reformed approaches to the beatific vision. Although there is certainly a place for distinctive emphasis on the centrality of Christ’s incarnate flesh in the beatific vision, there is a rich heritage in the Dutch reformed tradition from Danaeu, Junius, Walaeus, Rivet, and Heidanus which affirm a vision of the divine essence without concern such a position entails a capitulation to Neoplatonic mysticism or the nature/grace dualism which Bavinck and Berkouwer sought to avoid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.