In a 1987 essay Richard Southern raised a number of significant issues concerning the respective roles of Parisian masters and the papacy in judging the orthodoxy of university teaching.1 Southern’s principal argument was that the balance of authority between the magisterium and the papacy in matters of interpreting orthodoxy, a balanced working relationship that Southern claimed existed throughout most of the thirteenth century, began to crumble in the late thirteenth century and shifted decisively away from the magisterium in 1318 when John XXII initiated the practice of adjudicating questions of orthodox teaching and writing at the papal court rather than by theologians at the universities of Paris and Oxford. The essay left the impression that this shift was never reversed and that for the remainder of the Middle Ages judicial authority in matters of faith and doctrine belonged to the papacy, contested for a time by Conciliarists but not by doctors of theology as a distinct group.

In the following year, in a presidential address to the American Society of Church history, I suggested two modifications to Southern’s perceptive thesis.2 The first was that theological masters did not lose their role in judging the orthodoxy of the writings and teachings of university masters and bachelors. It was a shift in the location of that forum, namely from Paris or Oxford to the papal curia at Avignon. John XXII usually sought advice before issuing doctrinal pronouncements, and when determining the orthodoxy of the teaching or statements of university theologians he consistently relied on commissions composed predominantly of Parisian and Oxford masters of theology.

1 R.W. Southern, “The Changing Role of Universities in Medieval Europe,” Historical Research 60 (1987), 133–46. As far as I am aware, Southern was the first to propose that the adjudication of such cases at Avignon, studied in detail by Josef Koch and others, marked a conscious shift in papal policy by John XXII.

These commissions, acting under the authority or supervision of a cardinal or prelate, were appointed by the pope to examine the writings or lists of suspect statements of their university colleagues and to offer their judgment on each statement as to whether it was heretical, simply erroneous, ill-sounding, offensive to pious ears, or permissible in the schools. Final judgment was left to papal authority. The second modification to Southern’s thesis was that 1318 did not mark a permanent change in such judicial procedures. The venue for these cases shifted back to Paris with the death of Benedict XII and the coronation of Clement VI. Cases pending from the last years of Pope Benedict were quickly resolved, with the exception of that of Nicholas of Autrecourt, which dragged on until his condemnation at Avignon in 1346 and his recantation at Paris in 1347. All subsequent cases arising from teaching at Paris were adjudicated at Paris. And just as Southern attributed the shift from Paris to Avignon to the initiative of John XXII, I attributed the shift from Avignon back to the universities of Paris and Oxford to a change in policy on the part of Clement VI.

Hans Thijssen, in his final chapter on “academic freedom and teaching authority” in *Censure and Heresy at the University of Paris*, rejected the assumption of papal initiative, either with John XXII or Clement VI. Thijssen attributed the shift in judicial venue from university to the papal court to be a result either of where charges were brought, that is, where the initial denunciation was made, as in the case of Jean de Pouilly, or as a result of appeal, as in the case of Meister Eckhart. If denunciations were lodged at Avignon, the papal court would be the court of first instance, just as in the case of Eckhart, it would be a court of appeal. For Thijssen, what appeared to be papal initiative was simply a result of where accusations were actually presented. Similarly, the fact that cases arising after 1342 were adjudicated at Paris or Oxford was again a result of the judicial forum initially chosen by accusers.

Zénon Kaluza had earlier arrived at a similar conclusion in the case

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3 J.M.M.H. Thijssen, *Censure and Heresy at the University of Paris, 1200–1400* (Philadelphia, 1998), pp. 12–19, especially 18–19: “Even though John XXII and even more so Benedict XII probably encouraged the centralization of the examination of doctrinal orthodoxy, the significance of this ‘move to Avignon’ should not be exaggerated…. There was never really a shift in the balance of forces from university to papacy, as Southern claims. First, several jurisdictions were competent in handling charges of false teaching. The choice of the judicial form was determined from below, by person or persons who informed the authorities about their suspicions…. it is more accurate to speak of papal responses than of papal initiatives.”