A NEAPOLITAN HEAVEN: THE SENSORY UNIVERSE
OF G.B. GIUSTINIANI*

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In the Easter season of 1654, the Theatine Giovanni Battista Giustiniani delivered eighteen lectures in his order’s church of the Santi Apostoli in Naples. He took the celebration of Christ’s resurrection as an occasion to discuss the physical revival of humans in paradise. His views rested largely on the foundations of medieval eschatology, particularly the notion that survival and identity in the hereafter was of body as much as of soul.1 This also entailed the perfect reconstitution of the five senses. In two lectures on the subject, the Theatine’s oratory culminated in the promise that the blessed would perceive and enjoy not only the spiritual qualities but also the physical wonders of the empyrean – the outermost heavenly sphere, the luminous realm of God, saints, and angels.2

Giustiniani’s sermons stand at the intersection of theology and religious practice, of speculative thought and ideology in action. They raise important questions relevant to the history of early-modern sense perception. Is it possible to read Giustiniani’s speculations about the senses in the hereafter as indexes of views or concerns about the here-and-now? To what extent were his ideas true to their medieval-scholastic origins? And to what extent did they reflect trends in seventeenth-century religion,

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2 Giustiniani Giovanni Battista, Lo stato de corpi beati nell’empireo. Spiegato in diciotto letzioni dette nel tempo pascale nella Chiesa di Santi Apostoli di Napoli […] nelle quali con dottrine curiose, concetti, et erudizioni pellegrine si discorre della resurrettione degli eletti, e delle loro felicità, e glorie accidentali (Naples, Camillo Cavallo: 1654) 213–228 (“Lettione decimaquarta […] Della felicità de i cinque sentimenti de corpi beati, e particularmente della vista”) and 229–244 (“Lettione decimaquinta […] De i diletti sovrani, che haveranno i Beati negl’altri quattro sentimenti esteriori dell’udito, odorato, gusto, e tatto”). Henceforth, in-text citations of this work will be followed by the corresponding page numbers in this edition. Unless otherwise noted, translations of this and other works are mine.
culture, and politics? One need think only of the Galilean revolution, the European explorations of hitherto unknown lands, or the Baroque redefinitions of artistic media – all phenomena to which Giustiniani referred – to suspect that such trends must have affected traditional assumptions about the universe, the body, and sensory experience. If this is so, the question is how.

One promising way to consider this question is offered by the study of paradise – that vast projection screen of human expectations, hopes, and aspirations. Jean Delumeau, in his panoramic *Histoire du paradis*, has noted two Reformation-era developments. On the one hand, reform-minded Christians, including Erasmus, Luther, Marguerite de Navarre, and Calvin, warned against all too eager longings and literal imaginings – whether of the lost Eden, New World utopias, or the heavenly Jerusalem – based on the inadequacy of our senses to anticipate heaven. As St. Paul had said, mere mortals could not know ‘what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him’ (I Cor. 2:9). On the other hand, even where such warnings remained ineffective, such as in the Catholic Baroque, the trend was toward interiorization of the vision of God rather than description of its appearance; artistic representation focused more on the ascent of the soul than the depiction of the heavenly realm. The contemporary upheavals in geography and astronomy (Delumeau suggested) contributed significantly to the crisis of a medieval cosmology that had superimposed the hereafter onto the physical maps of the earth and the universe. Yet the picture is complicated by the stubborn endurance, even in the midst of the Copernican revolution, of a theological system that continued to see the empyrean as a fixed place in the incorruptible heavens. In this regard, the father of neo-scholasticism, Francisco Suárez, was not far removed from Thomas Aquinas.3

This contribution studies the issue of sense perception to test Delumeau’s hypothesis and, in the process, to learn more about religious attitudes regarding sensation. It does so by examining Giustiniani’s lectures with two complementary approaches. One is to locate the preacher’s views within the deep tradition of Catholic theology; this will require us to understand his study and citation practices. The other approach is to elucidate the context-specific aspects of Giustiniani’s views by clarifying his biography, the circumstances of his sermonizing efforts, and his ref-

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