THE QUODLIBETA OF JOHN OF POUilly († CA. 1328) AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL DEBATES AT PARIS 1307–1312

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In the medieval and early modern periods, John of Pouilly was known above all for his trial at the Papal Curia in Avignon (1318–21), where he retracted his censured theses concerning the pastoral authority of the pope following their condemnation, since this condemnation, long afterwards the subject of vigorous defense but also criticism, settled the disastrous conflict over the pastoral privileges of the mendicant orders.1 John, born in Pouilly (either near Beauvais or, more likely, near Laon), held one of the secular chairs of theology at the University of Paris from 1307 to 1312.2 He was a student of Henry of Ghent and Godfrey of Fontaines, and he bragged that he had also been a student of the famous Dominican theologians Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas.3 Therefore, in the 1270s he personally experienced the renaissance of theology at the Dominican studium in Paris, but also the disciplinary action against the Parisian philosophers and theologians by Bishop Étienne Tempier.

The secular schools in Paris were particularly affected by the condemnation, since, according to the course of study, their teachers came from the arts faculty. The spokesman for the secular masters in the last quarter of the thirteenth century was Henry of Ghent, one of the advisors (assessores) to the Parisian bishop in the condemnation. But as magister artium (and thus of philosophy), he was familiar with the influence and impact of philosophy and the arts masters on theology.

2 On his biography see the still valid article by N. Valois in Histoire littéraire de la France 34 (1914), pp. 220–81, and J. Koch, “Der Prozess gegen den Magister Johannes de Polliaco und seine Vorgeschichte,” RTAM 5 (1933), pp. 391–422.
3 John of Pouilly, Quodl. I, q. 5 (P 10vb; for manuscript sigla, see at note 12 below): “…doctores excellentissimi, scilicet Albertus, Thomas et Godefredus…illi mihi contemporanei et conterranei fuerunt et etiam doctores mei…” But when could John have heard Albert and Thomas in Paris?
He wanted to stem this influence and to bring theology back to the patristic tradition. His followers in the schools, the Gandavistae, swore by the words of their teacher and would tolerate no contradiction. The ecclesiastical condemnation (under cover of the authority of Holy Scripture) and Henry’s reputation within the walls of the University enticed and seduced these followers into academic intolerance, which John of Pouilly at times bemoaned bitterly.

In the controversial question whether the freedom of the will has a rational foundation as free choice (*liberum arbitrium*), which Henry of Ghent and his students rejected in the strongest terms on biblical grounds, John of Pouilly remarks in *Quodlibet II*, q. 13:

‘God be praised!’ I know—and it was not too long ago—that in Paris there was only one who tried to defend this position, which I hold as correct. God knows the reason and, likewise so do I! Now many defend it at Paris, and among them the better thinkers, and it must be held, as long as the natural capacity to judge lasts and the nature of things does [not] change.4

John resisted this “school-conformism” of the Gandavistae and promoted the argumentative openness of scientific theology, externally in the realm of the schools and internally in the understanding of science. In the *Quodlibeta* he took this path.

This chapter is divided into five sections with the following topics: 1) How John of Pouilly’s *Quodlibeta* I–V (I–VI in the Nuremberg manuscript) are transmitted in two redactions and are part of a larger body of questions; 2) how the scholastic debates in these *Quodlibeta* reveal numerous insights into the theological schools of the University of Paris, above all on the opposition to and rejection of Henry of Ghent and his followers, the Gandavistae; 3) John’s necessary reorientation of theological knowledge along the lines of Aristotelian thought; 4) how the scholastic disputes reveal the focal points and difficult issues of the discussion: a) the truth of faith and its demonstrability, b) human freedom as freedom of judgment and choice, c) the necessary *habitus* of moral goods, of grace, and of the eternal vision of God, d) the internal and external constitution of the Church, e) current problems; 5) the development of the schools in the *Quodlibeta*.

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