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Florian Wöller • Ueli Zahnd (eds.)

Dominican Culture, Dominican Theology

The Order of Preachers and Its Spheres of Action (1215 – ca. 1600)

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In Vigilia Sancti Iohannis Babtiste
St Vicent Ferrer on the Vigil of John the Baptist in a Catalán Sermon[1]

Alberto Ferreiro

1. Introduction

The centrality of John the Baptist leading up to the manifestation of Jesus—whom he declared was the Messiah and the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world—made him the greatest of the prophets. Jesus declared as much that of all born before John the Baptist no one was greater.[2] That would be from Abraham, Moses, Elijah and all the patriarchs and prophets combined. They all in one way or another anticipated the appearance of the Messiah; however, it was reserved for John to reveal Him at the river Jordan when Jesus came to be baptized by him. It was there that John heard God's voice from heaven as Jesus came out of the water, "This is my beloved Son, listen to Him" (Matt 3:17). Vicent Ferrer found in the main events of John's life moral lessons to impart to Christians to help them follow Christ faithfully.

2. The Uniqueness of John the Baptist

The sermon titled *In Vigilia Sancti Iohannis Babtiste* is number twenty-six in the edition of Josep Sanchis Sivera. Vicent chose Jer 1:5, "Antequam exires de vulva sanctificavi te" ("[Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and] before you were born, I consecrated you") for the *thema*.[3] The unique role and status of John the Baptist as precursor of Jesus formed the foundation of the sermon. God chose John the Baptist, as the *thema* verse from Jeremiah announced, even before he was born to accomplish great things for the kingdom of God. The en-

[1] I want to thank the organizing committee, especially Prof. Dr. Florian Wöller, for inviting me to present a version of this study at the *Annual Conference of the International Society for the Study of Medieval Theology* (IGTM), 29 June–2 July 2021. I extend my gratitude to Steve Perisho, Theology, History, and Philosophy Librarian at Seattle Pacific University for helping me locate essential bibliography. Also, Prof. Dr. Tomàs Martínez Romero, Catedràtic, Universitat Jaume I, Castelló de la Plana, for helping with some fine points on the sermon.

[2] Vincentius Ferrerius: *Sermo 26, in vigilia sancti Iohannis Baptiste*, ed. Josep Sanchis Sivera: *Sermons, Volum II* (Els Nostres Clàssics, Sermons de Sant Vicent Ferrer. Col·lecció B, Volums en Quart 5), Barcelona 1934.

[3] Vincentius Ferrerius *Sermo 26*, ed. Sanchis Sivera, pp. 5–12. All English scripture quotations are from the Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition.

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tire lengthy introduction leaves no doubt on this matter where Vicent expounded on his exceptional status.

Vicent did not hide his enthusiasm for John the Baptist, he set out to explain how among all of the saints since the beginning of the world until Jesus Christ he was the greatest ever born. Vicent added that God conferred on him an excellency like no other.[4] Among all of the saints that appeared before him, he was in the first place of importance. This included the patriarchs, the prophets that prophesied the coming of Christ, all priests and even secular rulers whom God appointed to govern the people, even dukes were mentioned by name. John the Baptist had a friendship with God that was deeper than any of his predecessors in the Old Testament.[5] All that the prophets and patriarchs had anticipated reached their apogee with the Incarnation. It was confirmed by the public declaration of John the Baptist that Jesus was the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world. This explains why Jesus said of John the Baptist, "Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist" (Matt 11:11).[6] Vicent paused to expound for the congregation more about Jesus's expression: "Amen, dico vobis". Jesus never swore any oaths, but only said "Amen"—it reflects absence of doubt, and truthfulness. Vicent encouraged all to speak this way and teach it to their children. Vicent echoed Jesus's command, "Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from the Evil One" (Matt 5:37).

Vicent halted again to illuminate the question of how John the Baptist had been more a friend of God and holier than all the saints before him.[7] He utilized the image of a fiery pit around which people gather for warmth. A person that is closer to the fire feels the warmth better than someone who is twenty steps away from it. In the same way, John the Baptist was closer to Jesus than any other saint, as such he received ardent heat from Jesus's love.[8] Who was without sin, Vicent asked: "et quis sine crimine vivit nisi Christus?" Only Jesus was

4 Vincentius Ferrerius *Sermo 26*, ed. Sanchis Sivera, p. 5: "La qual toqua gran excel·lència de mossènyer sent Johan Babtista, sapiats que entre tots los sants que foren del principi del món fins a Jesuchrist, major fo sent Johan Babtista."

5 *Ibid.*: "Dich entre tots los sants qui foren primers, axí com los patriarches [...], aprés, los prophetes, qui prophetaren lo adveniment de Jesuchrist e del temps present; aprés, los sacerdots, que·s donaven al serví de Déu en lo temple; aprés, los regidors del poble, qui governaven bé segons Déu [...] aprés, los duchs [...]. Veus ací los sants del vell Testament; mas, yo dich ara que, sobre tots aquests sants, fo sent Johan Babtista pus amich de Déu que degú dels altres."

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6: "Amen, dico uobis, inter natos mulierum non surrexit maior Iohanne Babtista." Vulgate: "Amen dico vobis, non surrexit inter natos mulierum maior Ioanne Baptista: qui autem minor est in regno caelorum, maior est illo." The text as we have it wrongly attributes this to the Gospel of John.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 6: "Aprés, ¿voleu saber per què sent Johan Babtiste fo més amich de Déu e pus sant dels altres sants?"

8 *Ibid.*: "Si ací havie hun gran foch clar e entorn havie molta gent, aquell qui estaria pus prop del foch se escalfarie més que aquell qui estarie ·XX· passes lluny. Axí, sent Johan Babtista fo pus prop de Jesuchrist que·ls altres sants, e per ço fo pus sant, qui rebé més de calor del foch clar de Jesuchrist, foch ardent per la amor que·ns ha portada, e clar sens peccat degú."

without sin even though tempted in every way.[9] Jesus manifested himself in his middle years ("e·l mig dels anys") to reveal his work, as the prophet Habbakuk announced: "O Lord, I have heard the report of thee, and thy work, o Lord, do I fear. In the midst of the years renew it; in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy" (Hab 3:2).[10]

John the Baptist was closer to Jesus in other ways, his family lineage. They were after all cousins, both had been foretold by the prophets. Their mothers Mary and Elizabeth experienced angelic visitations surrounding their pregnancy. They were also bonded by the word—John preached the last word when he announced that Jesus was the Lamb of God who is the living Word. In comparison, Abraham who was the first of the patriarchs, King David from whom he descended, and the company of Old Testament prophets were chronologically very far from Jesus. John the Baptist, on the other hand, was only six months older than Jesus ("hic est mensis sextus") this was in reference to Elizabeth, as Luke tells us, "and behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren" (Luke 1:36).[11] Vicent mentioned as additional proof of the nearness of Jesus and John, the twenty five generations that separated Abraham from Jesus (Matt 1:17 says that it was 42 generations). The prophets prophesied about Jesus from a great distance. John the Baptist, on the other hand, in person revealed Christ to the world, "ecce Agnus Dei, qui tollit peccata mundi." All of these factors combined is what made him superior than all of the prophets, patriarchs, and saints.[12] What of the prominent New Testament persons? Vicent believed John the Baptist to have been holier than the apostles who had been with Jesus. Vicent, however, did not elaborate this final point, he moved on. Maybe what Vicent had in mind is that John the Baptist never faltered in faith as the apostles did, so that placed him in a different category. Vicent surprisingly did not include in this discussion the Virgin Mary.[13]

[9] See Heb 4:15, "For we have not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning."

[10] Vincentius Ferrerius *Sermo 26*, ed. Sanchis Sivera, p. 6: "Domine, opus tuum in medio annorum meorum uiuifica illud"; Vulgate: "Domine, audivi auditionem tuam, et timui. Domine, opus tuum, in medio annorum vivifica illud; in medio annorum notum facies: cum iratus fueris, misericordiae recordaberis."

[11] Vulgate: "Et ecce Elisabeth cognata tua, et ipsa concepit filium in senectute sua: et hic mensis sextus est illi, quae vocatur sterilis."

[12] Vincentius Ferrerius *Sermo 26*, ed. Sanchis Sivera, p. 6: "Aprés, *in genere*, sent Matheu, volent comptar les generacions de Abraam fins a Jesuchrist, comptà ·XXV· generacions, e de sant Johan la segona pus prop de Jesuchrist. Aprés, del offici; los propehetes prophetizaren lo temps advenidor, e sent Johan del temps present [...]. Johan Babtista fo lo pus sant e lo major amich de Déu que·ls patriarches, ne·ls prophetes, ne·ls altres."

[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7: "Mas, dels sants del novell Testament no·u gosarie hom dir que ell fo lo pus sant, certament, car los apòstols qui estigueren ab Jesuchrist, foren de gran santedat; mas, ara lo tema diu açò: antequam."

3. The Five Sanctifications

After the foundational exposition on the uniqueness of John the Baptist, Vicent launched into the main purpose of the sermon. Vicent shared that he found five 'sanctifications/ *sanctificavi*' that operated in the life of John, and explained that they were derived from Holy Scripture where God revealed them for the sanctification of his creatures.[14] They are: 1. Final contrition/ *final contrició*, 2. Penitential conversion/ *penitencial conversió*, 3. Martyrial affliction/ *martirial aflicció*, 4. Babtismal absolution/ *babtismal ablució*, and 5. Special predestination/ *special prevenció*.

3.1 Final Contrition

On the theme of final contrition Vicent dedicated extended exposition and divided the material into two sections. What did Vicent mean by final contrition? He was referring to what we sometimes call a deathbed confession. Since this is the lengthiest section of the sermon for the sake of clarity and space I will get straight to the point as to what Vicent wanted to communicate.

3.1.1 The Example of the Good Thief

In the first section Vicent directed his attention to the crucifixion and the two thieves who were executed with Jesus, specifically the one who was promised Paradise. Vicent's exegesis of this event had implications for the Sacrament of Baptism and the extent and possible limitations of the mercy of God. He explained that final contrition was offered to a person that lived a bad life, but now in the final moments of life, God grants that person the gift of contrition to repent for the many mundane sins committed. Sometimes a man or woman ("algun hom o dona") wasted their entire life in pomposity, arrogance, and vanity, but when the end of life arrived, God intervenes to offer the gift of contrition.[15] The miserable wretch cries out, "O, wretched me, what will happen to my soul?" Vicent apparently had old people in mind in this pressing situation. He said they were unable to fast because of their advanced age, the most they could do is perhaps hear a Mass. Vicent did not mention taking communion, it was assumed they were in a state of unrepented sin, so were denied the sacrament.[16] Vicent, however, interjected that he would demonstrate how God sanctifies some unrepentant people ("Veus ací com sanctifique Déus algunes creatures") who were on their death bed to attain salvation.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 7: "Yo he cerquat en la sancta Scriptura quantes sanctificacions ha ordenat Déus per a sanctificació de la creatura."

[15] *Ibid.*: "Quan ve que la persona viu algun temps en mala vida, e será ja en la fi de sos dies, e Déus li done contrició de sos peccats que ha fets tants, en tant que tots sos peccats són mundes. Ara, a la pràtica. Serà algun hom o dona que tota sa vida haurà despesa en pompes, ufans e vanitats; e quan vindrà en la fi, Déus li darà aquella contrició."

[16] *Ibid.*: "O, mesquí! E què serà fet de la mia ànima? E plore, que no fa alre, e no pot dejunar, que ja és vell, mas irà a la església a hoir alguna missa [...]. Veus ací com sanctifique Déus algunes creatures."

Vicent offered hope for God's grace for those who led scandalous lives right to the very end of life. This is why he chose as the perfect example the repentant robber or good thief who was crucified with Jesus. The four Gospels report the event about the two criminals with differences in detail. Matthew (Matt 27:38, 44) says two robbers were crucified, one on the right and one on the left, both of them reviled Jesus. Mark's (Mark 15:27, 32) account is identical to that in Matthew. Luke (Luke 23:32, 39–43) called them criminals sentenced to die with Jesus. The unrepentant thief reviled Jesus while the repentant rebuked him for his audacity. The repentant thief was the one that Jesus promised to take to Paradise. Luke did not specify which thief was on the left or to the right of Jesus. As we shall see this detail was important for Vicent. Lastly, John (John 19:18) recorded the briefest statement when he noted that two others on either side of Jesus were also crucified. John did not include any verbal exchange between the thieves and Jesus.

Of the four Gospels Vicent chose the account in Luke to advance his teaching. Vicent was certain that the repentant thief had lived an evil life his entire life. This thief, moreover, Vicent believed was the one crucified to the right of Jesus and was the one God offered final contrition. He was the one who entreated Jesus, "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingly power" ("Domine, memento mei dum veneris in regnum tuum", Luke 23:42). At this point Vicent made a comment about Purgatory that will be fully explored below. Vicent added that Luke did not to convey the thief's contrition, he thought that the thief must have implored Jesus with emotion filled words revealing a broken heart, so he likely cried out, "Do... Do... Doomine!" (A word on Vicent's style of preaching is that he was known to integrate theatrics at junctures of his sermons, much like a one-person act. He would assume the voice of the person or persons adapting his voice to their character to reveal their state of mind. We find one here when the thief cried out. On account of this heartfelt repentance he was sanctified.)[17]

Vicent said with conviction that he knew—what the Gospels do not reveal—that the repentant thief was to the right of Jesus and the manner of how final contrition was bestowed on him. Here Vicent was at his creative best! His spontaneous exegesis is a frequent feature in many of his sermons for dramatic effect, and I have not been able to locate in any of the exegesis of the Church Fathers what follows on this detail. It flowed from Vicent's imagination—what I have called homiletical license. In no instance did he violate the message of the text. Mount Calvary, he informed us, was high as a mountain and the cross of Jesus was positioned there at the highest point ("Monti Calvari està axí alt com una montanya, e la creu de Jesuchrist estava axí alta").[18] The crosses of the thieves were below him—"e la creu del ladre axí baxa"—, the one of the penitent thief

[17] *Ibid.*: "Mas no legim, en tota la Scriptura santa, sinó del ladre de la dreta, qui tingué mala vida e visqué en peccats tota sa vida, e en la fi Déus li donà contrició, e sens purgatori lo mès en paraís, quan fo crucificat ab ell e dix-li: *Domine, memento mei dum ueneris in regnum tuum*; mas sent Luch no diu la continència, mas podeu pensar quinya devie ésser aquella contrició que per lo cor devie rompre. Deye axí: Do... Do... Doomine!, plorant, ab paraules trenquades. Axí fo santificat."

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 8.

was positioned on the right side—"al costat dret"—and the obdurate thief on the left—"al costat sinistre".[19] Vicent clarified why these details were essential, they disclose how the thief received the grace of "final contrició" (repentance) that resulted in his immediate sanctification and salvation. The sun shining down on Mount Calvary emanated from the left side; therefore, the shadow of Jesus's arm came over the thief on the right side. At the touch of the shadow he was converted and sanctified.[20]

Vicent reminded his audience that this was similar to one of Peter's healings in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 5:12–16, "axí com legim de mossènyer sent Pere"). In that scene, when ill people learned that Peter was about to pass by, they were positioned so that Peter's shadow would cover them and as many as it went over were healed—"e posaven-hi los malalts ves la ombra de sent Pere; e quan sent Pere venie, axí com passave, la sua ombra toquave a la hun malalt." Vicent was convinced that they surely cried out, "Oh, I have been healed!"—"Oo, yo ja só guarit!" Here is another example of Vicent's theatrics. Vicent asked, was it not a marvel that the shadow of Jesus converted and sanctified the repentant thief? Vicent noted, however, that nowhere else is it read (in Scripture) of others sanctified by God through final contrition. If there were any elsewhere, they were few ("mas pochs"). This was a sole case; it was not intended to establish a norm to bypass extended periods of repentance eventually leading to an end-of-life Baptism. A main lesson is that God was not bound to the Sacraments to confer salvation.[21] Vicent closed with a quote and prayer from Jeremiah when the prophet prayed for sinners, "Congregabo quasi gregem ad victimam [et sanctifica eos in die occisionis] sui " ("Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and set them apart for the day of slaughter", Jer 12:3).[22] Vicent explained that in ancient times, before a ram was sacrificed, it was first washed. The ram symbolized the sinners that God was going to wash before their own death, so as to prevent their destruction. Vicent diligently warned believers not to be so confident. He had said earlier that the good thief was an exceptional example of final contrition. It was a warning to sinners not to press their luck hoping for a last-minute confession at death's door, death can come at any moment.

3.1.2 The Question of Purgatory

We can now turn to the topic of Purgatory and the remarkable statement that Vicent made on how it applied to the good thief. He taught, "e sens purgatori lo mès en paraís" ("without any Purgatory he was taken to Paradise").[23] This is an extraordinary teaching on how the good thief reached Paradise. Prior to the fourteenth century there was already a long development of doctrine regarding the afterlife and the various options that souls had as to where they would spend eternity. In Catholic theology, first there is the Limbo for those who died in Original Sin without deserving Hell. In the West medieval theologians end-

19 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

20 *Ibid.*: "E lo sol venie d'esta part, e donave sobre lo braç de Jesuchrist, el la ombra del braç de Jesuchrist donà al ladre de la dreta, e per aquel toquament fo convertit e santificat."

21 *Ibid.*

22 Vulgate: "Et tu, Domine, nosti me, vidisti me, et probasti cor meum tecum. Congrega eos quasi gregem ad victimam, et sanctifica eos in die occisionis."

23 Vincentius Ferrerius *Sermo 26*, ed. Sanchis Sivera, p. 7.



Fig. 8.1: Martin Schongauer (c. 1435/50–1491), *Christ's Descent into Limbo*, Musée d'Unterlinden, Colmar, France. Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, New York. ART 15838

ed up dividing the underworld into four possible places for a soul to reside: one, Hell where no one ever gets out. Second, the Limbo of the Patriarchs and prophets–also known as Abraham's Bosom–later to include the innumerable throng of the righteous with Adam and Eve always being first in line in artistic representation (see fig. 8.1). Jesus emptied this abode in what is called the Harrowing of Hell. Third, Purgatory, which in the Orthodox tradition never became official doctrine. The eminent scholar Jacques Le Goff noted that "in the area of dogma and theology, Purgatory was ultimately enshrined in the doctrine of the Catholic Church between the middles of the fifteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century, the first being affirmed against the Greeks at the Council of Florence (1439) and the later against the Protestants at the Council of Trent (1562)."[24] Purgatory is also a place where all souls therein will eventual-

[24] Le Goff, Jacques: *The Birth of Purgatory*, trad. Arthur Goldhammer, Chicago 1986, pp. 356–360: 357. This is a fundamental starting point on Purgatory; for an additional select

ly enter into Paradise. Fourth, the Limbo of unbaptized infants. These infants do not suffer but at the same time they were denied the Beatific Vision, so it was speculated. Limbo for unbaptized infants never became official doctrine in the Catholic Church, in present times it is rapidly being abandoned as a point of debate, a curiosity of the past. It has, nevertheless, not gone without much discussion.[25] Vicent discussed the fate of these infants in another sermon titled *Johannis Decollati* that I have analyzed in a different study.[26]

When Vicent plainly said that the good thief bypassed Purgatory altogether on his way to Paradise, the requirement of Baptism was not relevant at this point. He never spent any time in Abraham's Bosom. Artistic depiction that focus on the good thief are rare. There is an exquisite fresco in the Greek Orthodox Byzantine Church of Panagia Ties Asinou (Our Lady of Asinou) in Nikitari, Cyprus, that shows the good thief with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Abraham's Bosom (see fig. 8.2). That view does not harmonize with the Catholic view that the good thief went to Purgatory after he died. Absent an emergency, Baptism became a requirement for entry into the Church and to attain salvation after the Ascension. There is another extraordinary element to the good thief's salvation that was not lost to the Church Fathers, and Vicent agreed with them. This would mean that the good thief was the first person to enter Paradise, he was granted a one-way non-stop trip to Paradise. He was there before any of the Apostles, even the Virgin Mary. What is not said by Vicent is what he did while he had to wait until Jesus completed the Paschal Mystery. Did he linger with Jesus in the time he was in the tomb for three days? If the Harrowing of Hell happened at that time, then he and all there were immediately escorted to Paradise; if the Harrowing did not happen until after the Resurrection, did he wait at the first of the line? Vicent said elsewhere that all in Abraham's Bosom were

listing of studies, see: Malý, Tomáš: "Early Modern Purgatory: Reformation Debates and Post-Tridentine Change", in *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 106 (2015), pp. 242–272; Pasulka, Diana W.: *Heaven Can Wait: Purgatory in Catholic Devotional and Popular Culture*, New York 2014; Biesinger, Albert/Kessler, Michael: *Himmel, Hölle, Fegefeuer: Theologisches Kontaktstudium 1995* (Kontakte 3), Tübingen 1995; Atwell, Robert R.: "From Augustine to Gregory the Great: An Evaluation of the Emergence of the Doctrine of Purgatory", in *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 38.2 (1987), pp. 173–186; Broer, Ingo et al.: "Fegefeuer", in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* III (^{3}1995), coll. 1204–1210.

25 On Limbo the reader can begin by consulting: Franceschini, Chiara: *Storia del limbo*, Milano 2017; Carpin, Attilo: *Il limbo nella teologia medievale*, Bologna 2006; Sullivan, Francis A.: "The Development of Doctrine about Infants Who Die Unbaptized", in *Theological Studies* 72.1 (2011), pp. 3–14; Beiting, Christopher: "The Third Place: Augustine, Pelagius, and the Theological Roots of the Idea of Limbo", in *Augustiniana* 48 (1998), pp. 5–30; Pateau, Jean: *Le salut des enfants morts sans baptême d'après Saint Thomas d'Aquin: "où est Abel, mon frère"?* Perpignan 2017; Cai, Yilun: "Robert Bellarmine's Idea of the Child Who Dies Unbaptized in the Commentary on the *Summa Theologiae*", in *Journal of Early Modern Christianity* 1.1 (2014), pp. 143–164; *The Hope of Salvation for Infants who Die Without Being Baptised*, ed. Pontifical International Theological Commission, Rome 2007.

26 Vincentius Ferrerius: *Sermo 76 Iohannis Decollati*, ed. Gert Schib: *Sermons, Volum III* (Els Nostres Clàssics, Obres Completes dels Escriptors Catalans Medievals, Col·lecció B, Volums en Quart 6), Barcelona 1975, pp. 159–165; see Ferreiro, Alberto: "*Stela de l'alba és appellat sent Johan Babtista*: the Martyrdom of John the Baptist in a Sermon in Catalán of St. Vicent Ferrer", in *Gregorianum* 102.2 (2021), pp. 311–328.



Fig. 8.2: Lunette of the Last Judgment: Personification of Land and Sea (top); Saint Peter opening the gate with a key and the elect with the good thief, Abraham, Virgin Mary, Isaac, and Jacob. Byzantine fresco, early 14th century Panagia Ties Asinou (Our Lady of Asinou), Nikitari, Cyprus. Photo: Alfredo Dagli Orti/Art Resource, New York. ART 429383

escorted to Paradise after the Ascension. The way Vicent expressed it, however, he waited no time at all, he died and off he went.

Vicent, furthermore, agreed with the tradition that no one could enter Paradise before Jesus cleared the way. The path to Paradise was closed since the Fall and remained so until Christ opened the way. Prior to that all of the righteous went to the abode of the righteous where they waited for the day of liberation. So what are we to make of Enoch and Elijah about whom it was said they did not taste of death? Did they or did they not actually go to Paradise? If they did, that means the good thief was not the first to go there. The Church Fathers are not in harmony as to who got there first, other than the good thief before the Paschal Mystery was completed. Bede taught that Enoch and Elijah pre-figured the Ascension of Jesus. Bede said of Elijah being taken to heaven, "By this action of his soaring aloft it is meant that [Elijah] was not taken up into heaven itself, as was our Lord, but into the height of the air [above the earth], from where he was borne invisibly to the joys of paradise."[27] Origen focused on Elijah

[27] The texts for Bede, Origen, and Peter Chrysologus are in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament V. 1–2 Kings, 1–2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, eds. Marco Conti/Gianluca Pilara, Downers Grove, IL 2008, pp. 143–145: 144 for the Bede quote.

being the pre-cursor of Christ. Peter Chrysologus offered a creative explanation for Elijah's flight, he fasted so much that he was light enough to fly to heaven, meaning that fasting will help a person achieve salvation. The commentaries of the Church Fathers on Enoch are varied but what they all have in common is to spiritualize the event.[28] Of greater importance is that none of the Fathers said that Enoch or Elijah were the first in Paradise, or that that privileged place was reserved for the good thief. Their ascent 'to heaven' was perhaps a figurative way of saying they went to the place of the righteous. When Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus in the Transfiguration, they were given temporary permission to leave Abraham's Bosom, to where they returned to. They too had to wait for the Paschal Mystery to be completed by Jesus before entering Paradise, no exceptions.

In another sermon, *FFeria IIIIa [Post Dominicam] XIII Post Trinitatem*, Vicent said that the souls of Adam, Noah, the Holy Innocents, the parents of Mary, Joachim and Anna, Joseph, and John the Baptist all went to Limbo. Vicent added that they entered Paradise after the Ascension of Christ. He did not mention Enoch or Elijah here, did he have to?[29] Lastly on the Church Fathers, Jerome in his commentary on the rich man and Lazarus stated most clearly the importance of the conversion of the penitent thief on the cross, "That flaming, flashing sword was keeping Paradise safe. No one could open the gates that Christ closed. The thief was the first to enter with Christ."[30] This became the consensus view in the unfolding exegesis of the Church and the development of the idea of the afterlife. That is, that the good thief went immediately to Paradise with Christ, thus making him the first to enter there.

Vicent was not finished with the theme of final contrition, he left behind the good thief and then launched on a lengthy story about two men who came upon a treasure on their way to answering a summons from a king. On the way one of them came upon a bag full of florins. In short, both men spent the money in different ways, one more responsible than the other. In the end, the king ordered them to be brought to his presence ("¡Tost, tost! Preneu-lo e pengau-lo"), qualifying that he will not receive into his city naked men ("que yo no poble la mia ciutat de hòmens despullats")—being naked before God meaning here to lack good works. In the end, when they came before the king, one is described as a fool—"foll "—the other one wise—"savi ".[31] There are several parables in the New Testament that reflect what Vicent was teaching through this story; the wise and foolish virgins, the talents, and the prodigal son come readily to mind.[32]

[28] The texts on Enoch are in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament I. Genesis 1–11*, ed. Andrew Louth, Downers Grove IL 2001, pp. 119–121.

[29] Vincentius Ferrerius: *Sermo 80 FFeria IIIIa [Post Dominicam]*, ed. Schib: *Sermons, Volum III*, pp. 199–207: 203.

[30] A convenient inventory of the exegesis of the Church Fathers can be found in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament III. Luke*, ed. Arthur A. Just jr., Downers Grove, IL 2003, pp. 363–367, for Jerome, pp. 366–367. For the Latin edition of the *Homilia in Lucam, de Lazaro et divite*, see Hieronymus: *Opera. Pars 2: Opera homiletica*, ed. Germain Morin (Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 78), Turnhout 1958, pp. 507–516.

[31] Vincentius Ferrerius *Sermo 26*, ed. Sanchis Sivera, p. 10.

[32] They can be found respectively in Matt 25:1–13, Matt 25:14–30, and Luke 15:11–32.

The king in this story was Jesus, who issued a call to travel to his city in Paradise, upon arrival he promised the faithful riches. The florins—said to be 12—that were found in the path were twelve things necessary for true penance. He did not list here what those 12 things were. Instead, Vicent referred his audience to a previous sermon titled *Nemo ascendit* [the *thema* based on John 3:13][33] and another titled *Ecce dies venient* for the first Saturday of Advent where he unpacked more about penance and recognition of sin ("peccatorum cognicio").[34] The point of this lengthy first section on final contrition was to warn against living a scandalous life and waiting to the very end for a deathbed confession. That is why he balanced the first section of the goof thief on the cross with the story about the foolish and wise people. The first was to instruct that while God's mercy is unlimited, to receive it had limitations of time. Even though it was possible to have last-minute salvation without Baptism and bypassing Purgatory, it was not establishing a new standard. The norm was to live a life of holiness and faithfulness to God that would end in a happy death.

3.2 Penitential Conversion

The second topic was labeled by Vicent as penitential conversion ("penitencial conversió"), and included the idea that God granted grace to save (justify) persons ("satisfer les persones").[35] To explain what this meant, Vicent proposed an imaginary young person who at the age of twenty said to himself, "I could live to fifty years." That person reasoned that death was not a threat any time soon, it was far off into the future. So they gave themselves up to abundant sin. Upon realizing that God extended grace to repentant people, he cried out, "Gads, I have sinned a great deal!"[36] At that the young person converted and entered in service of God, similar to a religious or priest ("com ara, si és hun religiós [...] si és hun prevere"). Vicent addressed his audience directly; he told them this grace was for them too. Suddenly the people realized, "Oh, what a bad life I have had against God, my neighbor, my soul" ("O, ta mala vida he tenguda contra Déu e mon proïsme e contra la mia ànima").[37] Becoming aware in that way, they converted to God and so obtained sanctification. David served as an

[33] This sermon is a Latin one named *FFeria* 4ª, that is why it is not in the Catalán collection, it is in Vincentius Ferrerius: *Sermonario de Perugia: Convento dei Domenicani, ms. 477*, eds. Francisco M. Gimeno Blay et al., Valencia 2006, p. 290.

[34] Vincentius Ferrerius *Sermo 26*, ed. Sanchis Sivera, p. 10: "Que fo foll, e l'altre savi; mas, Déus o vulla que vosaltres no siau en aquesta follia, Lo rey és Jesuchrist, e diu-te que vajes a la sua ciutat de paraís, que, quan tu seràs lla, ell te farà rich. Donchs, tu pren ·XII· florins per al camí; e quiscú obrit vostres bossots, que yo los vos daré, e són ·XII· coses que són necessàries a vera penitència." The sermon *Ecce dies ueniunt*: *Sabbato Primo Adventus Domini* is found in ed. Gret Schib: *Sermons. Volum VI* (Els Nostres Clàssics. Obres Completes dels Escriptors Catalans Medievals. Col·lecció B. Volums en Quart 9), Barcelona 1988, pp. 191–193.

[35] Vincentius Ferrerius *Sermo 26*, ed. Sanchis Sivera, p. 10.

[36] *Ibid.*: "Com ara que la persona jove, que haurà ·XX· anys o més, e diu: 'Yo encara puch viure ·L· anys' e veus que no spere la mort. Mas, què fa? Done's a peccats. Mas, quan ve que Déus fa gràcia a la persona: 'Hee, massa has peccat!'."

[37] *Ibid.*

example of a sincere penitent which inspired him to sing, "God is our refuge and strength [...]. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High" (Ps 45:1, 4 [46: 2, 5]).[38] When a person embarks on a good life, it is like a river of joy ("fluminis impetus cum gaudio") that leads them to the city of God in Paradise ("e alegre la ciutat de paraís"). Angels, moreover, in Paradise guard those who are in the world doing good and are witnesses of their penance ("car sapiats que·ls àngels qui són en paraís, guarden en aquest món baix, e vehen que tal hom fa penitència"). That is why angels too experience great joy: "Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents" ("Dico vobis quod gaudium est in celo super uno peccatore penitenciam agentem", Luke 15:7). When a person submits to penance and repents, they sanctify the habitation of the Most High ("sanctificauit tabernaculum suum Altissimus") which is the body and soul.[39]

Vicent turned to the example of Mary Magdalen who at one time was possessed by seven demons of mortal sin that Jesus exorcized from her ("e per ço legim de santa Maria Magdalena, de la qual Jesuchrist lançà ·VII· dimonis, ço és, set peccats mortals"). Vicent believed that all seven had a name: the first demon was Leviathan who represented pomposity, vanity, and pride. The second was Mammona (love of riches) and so on, the remaining five Vicent left unnamed in the present sermon ("lo primer dimoni se appelle Leviatan, e aquest la fahye pomposa, van e superbiosa, que·s preave més que no devie; lo segon se appelle Mammona").[40] Vicent directed the people to consult his sermon on Mary Magdalen and a second one on wedding/marriage ("vide sermonem suum, et sermonem nupciarum"). In the second sermon on marriage *De nupciis*, he listed the names of all seven demons (understood as the seven mortal sins), "tots los set peccats o capitans hi regnen: Leviatan, Mammona, Asmodeus, Belialberit, Belfegor, Astaroth, Belzebuch."[41] Even here Vicent referred his audience to another sermon ("in sermone de 'Assumpsit Jhesus alios 7 spiritus', FFeria IIIIa in quadragesima") where he fleshed out the meaning of all seven names of the Evil One.[42] After the seven demons were expelled Mary Magdalen was fully sanctified. Paul taught on sanctification, "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the return you get is sanctification and its end, eternal life" ("nunch liberati a peccato [servi facti estis iusticie] vitam eternam", Rom 6:22).[43]

[38] *Ibid.*: "Deus noster refugium: Fluminis impetus letificat ciuitatem Dei, sanctificauit eam Altissimus"; Vulgate: "Fluminis impetus laetificat civitatem Dei: sanctificavit tabernaculum suum Altissimus."

[39] Vulgate: "Dico vobis quod ita gaudium erit in caelo super uno peccatore poenitentiam agente."

[40] Vincentius Ferrerius *Sermo 26*, ed. Sanchis Sivera, p. 11.

[41] The sermon on wedding/marriage, *Sermo 144 FFeria IIIIa. De Nupciis*, is in ed. Gret Schib: *Sermons. Volum V* (Els Nostres Clàssics. Obres Completes dels Escriptors Catalans Medievals. Col·lecció B. Volums en Quart 8), Barcelona 1984, pp. 7–13: 8.

[42] The second sermon is *Sermo 163 FFeria IIIIa (Assumpsit alios VII spiritus nequiores se)*, *ibid.*, pp. 145–150.

[43] Vincentius Ferrerius *Sermo 26*, ed. Sanchis Sivera, p. 11; Vulgate: "Nunc vero liberati a peccato, servi autem facti Deo, habetis fructum vestrum in santificationem, finem vero vitam aeternam." For the Mary Magdalen sermon see Ferreiro, Alberto: "St. Vicent

This section was an ongoing exposition of the second half of the previous one on final contrition. Here what was highlighted were the choices people make that determine their relationship with God. Either one can choose to live a life of dissipation or follow one of good works and conversion. Mary Magdalen was a perfect example of the complete deliverance that God offers to every person. The choice was clear, a person can elect either the prospect of eternal death or eternal life.

3.3 Martyrial Affliction

The third way that God sanctifies a person's soul is through what Vicent named martyr's affliction ("martirial afflicció"). That is how martyrs were sanctified, as the prophet Zephania announced, "Be silent before the Lord God! For the day of the Lord is at hand; the Lord has prepared a sacrifice and consecrated his guests" ("Preparauit Dominus hostiam suam, sanctificavit suos vocatos" [Zeph 1:7].[44] Vicent maintained that "preparavit [...] hostiam" referred to the sacrifices of the body—such as prayers, fasts, and mortifications—to prepare for the time of the Antichrist that was dawning. At which time there would be many cruel deaths of martyrs.[45]

There is a prominent eschatological element in Vicent's teaching; he speculated in other sermons about the Antichrist. He believed that the Antichrist was born in 1403, and that meant the end-times were imminent.[46] Vicent encouraged his flock to be strong and not deny the Christian faith. He recommended daily observance of Matins, Vespers, and recitation of the minor Creed ("Donchs, per ço que siats forts e que no renegueu la fe christiana, digau quiscun dia a matí e vespre lo Credo menor, etc...").[47] Vicent availed himself of a familiar image that Jesus used as recorded in Matt 5:14–16, "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do men light a lamp and put under a bushel,

Ferrer's Catalán Sermon on Saint Mary Magdalene", in *Anuario de estudios medievales* 40.1 (2010), pp. 415–433; and Viera, David J.: "Vincent Ferrer on Mary Magdalen: A technique for hagiographic sermons", in *Hispanófilia* 34 (1991), pp. 61–66.

44 Vulgate: "Silete a facie Domini Dei, quia iuxta est dies Domini: quia praeparavit Dominus hostiam; sanctificavit vocatos suos."

45 Vincentius Ferrerius *Sermo 26*, ed. Sanchis Sivera, p. 11.

46 *Ibid.*: "*La òstia apelle sacrifici del cors, mas diu 'preparauit;' açò diu, bona gent, per vosaltres, ara que vos vullau preparar per aquell temps de Antichrist, car llavors seran martiris molt cruels.*" On his teaching about the Antichrist consult the sermon, *Quinys continents faran los cristians e·l temps de l'antechrist*, ed. Schib: *Sermons. Volum VI*, pp. 229–235. For other sermons on the Antichrist, see Cátedra García, Pedro M.: *Sermón, Sociedad y Literatura en la Edad Media. San Vicente Ferrer en Castilla (1411–1412), estudio bibliográfico, literario y edición de los textos inéditos* (Estudios de Historia), Salamanca 1994, pp. 152–162, 162–166, 535–545, 547, 559, 561–573, 579–599, 621–660. A complete inventory of all of Vicent sermons is in Perarnau I Espelt, Josep: "Estudis i Inventari de Sermons de Sant Vicent Ferrer", in *Arxiu de Textos Catalans Antics* 18 (1999), pp. 63–113. For the historical context of the Antichrist sermons consult the magisterial study Daileader, Philip: *Saint Vincent Ferrer, His World and Life: Religion and Society in Late Medieval Europe* (The New Middle Ages), New York/ London 2016, in particular the chapter "Antichrist 1403", pp. 137–159.

47 Vincentius Ferrerius *Sermo 26*, ed. Sanchis Sivera, p. 11.

but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." Vicent refashioned it in this way: If a candle was lit but then placed in an enclosure, it would go out; if it was not hidden it would give light for all to see. David long ago revealed the source of the light, "Quoniam tu illuminas lucernam meam: Domine, illumina tenebras meas" ("Yes, you light my lamp; the Lord my God lightens my darkness", Ps 17 [18]:29).[48] Discipleship, Vicent counseled, was a way to keep the light of faith burning for all to see and imitate.

Furthermore, showing humility through kneeling was encouraged, as David professed, "Credidi, propter quod locutus sum, ego autem humilitatus sum nimis" ("I kept my faith, even when I said, 'I am greatly afflicted'", Ps 115 [116]:10). Humility is the sure path to Christian discipleship and salvation.[49] Vicent added that his teaching was grounded on the authority of Paul, "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" ("*Si credideris [quod Deus illum suscitavit a mortuis, salvus eris*], Rom 10:9).[50] The martyrdom, Vicent conveyed to his hearers, was a life of white martyrdom achieved through good works, humility, and self-sacrifice. He did warn that at the time of the Antichrist there would be martyrdom aplenty through cruelty, i.e. red martyrdom.

3.4 Baptismal Cleansing

The fourth way that God sanctifies his creatures is by means of baptismal cleansing ("babtismal ablució"). Infants are cleansed from original sin through baptism ("Així com los infants petits quan són mundats del peccat original per lo babtisme"). Vicent rhetorically asked: "What can I say about original sin?" ("¿E què vol dir peccat original?")[51] Vicent told an imaginary story to illustrate his point. Some honorable men made an image of gold of the Lord which they intended to carry to church. On the way the image fell into a pond.[52] Vicent asked, was it stained? Were they not going to place it anyway in the church? They washed it! This is similar to the soul that God made as beautiful as the sun ("que quan Déus la cree és pus bella que lo sol"). In the creation of man and woman they fell into a pond of sin and were stained. That is why God does not permit souls tainted by Original Sin to enter Paradise, unless they are washed by Baptism, as Jesus instructed: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" ("Nisi quis renatus fuerit [ex aqua

48 *Ibid.*: "Que una candela encesa, si la meteu en loch clos, tantos se apagarà; mas, si no està closa, cremarà e no se amortarà"; Vulgate: "Quoniam tu illuminas lucernam meam, Domine; Deus meus, illumina tenebras meas." Also relevant is Mark 4:21.

49 *Ibid.*: "Genolls ficats en terra.... e així vos salvarets"; Vulgate: "Alleluia. Credidi, propter quod locutus sum; ego autem humiliatus sum nimis."

50 *Ibid.*; Vulgate: "Quia si confitearis in ore tuo Dominum Iesum, et in corde tuo credideris quod Deus illum suscitavit a mortuis, salvus eris."

51 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

52 *Ibid.*: "Si los prohòmens d'esta vila havien feta una ymaga d'or de nostre Senyor, e veus que porten-la a la església per metre-la allí, e, així com van a la església, cau la ymaga en hun fangar."

et Spiritu sancto, non potest introire in regnum Dei]", John 3:5).[53] Baptism is not only for infants. If a prominent Jew or an infidel submitted to Baptism with true faith, their soul too was sanctified ("E no solament dels infants petits, mas de hun juheu gran o altre infel, si ve al babtisme ab vera credència, la sua ànima és santificada allí"), as Paul taught, "for once you were in darkness, but now your are light in the Lord" ("Aliquando peccatores fuistis [num autem lux in Domino]", Eph 5:8).[54]

Baptism is the only way to wash away Original Sin; it is a prerequisite to enter into the body of Christ, the Church. The teaching about the repentant good thief on the cross was not intended by Vicent to undermine this teaching. Vicent likely said nothing about Baptism since it had not yet been instituted by Christ as a prerequisite to salvation. In the normal steps to salvation believers are bound to the Sacraments, beginning with Baptism. The new Catechism of the Catholic Church sums up well the critical role of Baptism, "God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments" (1257).

3.5 Special Predestination

The fifth and final sanctification of souls was "special prevenció", it is but a mere two sentences long in the text of this edition. It may have been longer in the original text. In any case, the fifth sanctification was bestowed on John the Baptist, to empower him spiritually ("prevengut spiritualment") as revealed in the Gospel of Luke, "And he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb" ("Spiritu sancto replebitur ex utero matris sue", Luke 1:15).[55] He was the last and most privileged of the prophets since he was the one who revealed publicly to the world the Savior and Son of God. Jesus declared in another place that he was Elijah who was to come, "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John; and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come" (Matt 11:13–14). An angel of the Lord revealed to John's father Zechariah that John would "go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah" (Luke 1:17). John from the beginning had an abundant anointing from God to fortify him for the mission entrusted to him.

4. Conclusion

The entire purpose of the sermon was to establish the incomparable place of John the Baptist in Salvation History. The sermon became a venue to explore the topics of Limbo, Purgatory, and Baptism through the person of the good thief that died with Jesus on Calvary. Vicent's view that the good thief was the

[53] *Ibid.*; Vulgate: "Respondit Iesus: Amen, amen dico tibi, nisi quis renatus fuerit ex aqua, et Spiritu sancto, non potest introire in regnum Dei."

[54] *Ibid.*; Vulgate: "Eratis enim aliquando tenebrae: nunc autem lux in Domino. Ut filii lucis ambulate."

[55] *Ibid.*; Vulgate: "erit enim magnus coram Domino: et vinum et siceram non bibet, et Spiritu sancto replebitur adhuc ex utero matris suae."

first to enter Paradise with Jesus is a rare one, with the exception of Jerome, not articulated so explicitly by other exegetes. That feature alone makes this sermon rather special. At the pastoral level the sermon had direct relevance to believers, John was offered as an example to follow. The same Spirit of God that John received was also promised to all Christians, that was inaugurated in the Church in a dramatic way on the day of Pentecost. All five sanctifications that Vicent expounded were directed at Christians, they were revealed in the life of John the Baptist for the whole Church.