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WHAT DOES BEAUTY HAVE TO DO WITH THE TRINITY? FROM AUGUSTINE TO DUNS SCOTUS

This paper will address a very specific task. Throughout the centuries theologians referred to the “beauty” of the Trinity or its specific persons. What exactly is the meaning of the word “beauty” in this case and can one speak of the “aesthetics” of the Trinity? The question will be treated historically, using material from Augustine, Bonaventure and John Duns Scotus. Augustine is certainly the greatest of Christian aestheticians.¹ Bonaventure represents the thirteenth-century Franciscan tradition that is both interested in aesthetic matters and is Augustinian in nature.² Duns Scotus is also supportive of both the Augustinian and the Bonaventurian traditions, and has, perhaps, the most developed and profound analysis of the Trinity in medieval thought.³

The paper will use the approach that von Balthasar dubbed “theological aesthetics,” as opposed to “aesthetic theology.”⁴ This means that the analysis will start not with aesthetic or artistic experience used for theological purposes, but with systematic theology proper, and show how certain aesthetic issues naturally come out of certain theological

¹ Cf. for example R.J. O’Connell, *Art and the Christian Intelligence in St. Augustine* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978); C. Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); J.-M. Fontanier, *La beauté selon saint Augustin* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 1998).

² Cf. e.g. E.J.M. Spargo, *The Category of the Aesthetic in the Philosophy of Saint Bonaventure* (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: The Franciscan Institute, 1953); K. Peter, *Die Lehre von der Schönheit nach Bonaventura* (Werl: Dietrich-Coelde-Verlag, 1964).

³ On Scotus’s contribution to the doctrine of the Trinity see, e.g., R. Cross, *Duns Scotus on God* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

⁴ On the differences between the two see H.U. von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord. A Theological Aesthetics. Volume 1: Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, eds. Joseph Fessio and John Riches (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1983), 38; O. Bychkov, “Introduction,” in O. Bychkov and J. Fodor, *Theological Aesthetics after von Balthasar* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), xii.

problems. We ought to mention also that in this sort of approach, as von Balthasar demonstrated, the use of the terms “beauty” or “aesthetic” is often purely analogical: that is, aesthetic examples properly speaking only provide analogies to certain phenomena in the divine.

One of the more common uses of the term “beauty” is when this term is applied to the Trinity as a whole, that is, as something one, as one God, or as one essence. Now if beauty in late ancient and medieval times—Augustine being a typical example—is generally understood as something that involves a degree of complexity, how can the divine principle as such, as something one and simple, be called beauty? Both Plotinus and Augustine provide some solutions to this problem.⁵ However, since this issue does not concern the Trinity as trinity, and is not even a specifically Christian problem, we will provide only a very brief answer. At least since the time of Plato the highest principle, or the divine was associated with the aesthetic notion τὸ καλόν. Although τὸ καλόν is frequently rendered as “the beautiful,” or as *pulchrum* in the Latin tradition, it really signifies a high degree of excellence of any kind, with additional connotations “awesome” or “magnificent.”⁶ It is in this sense that the divine principle as one and simple can be called τὸ καλόν, or “beautiful” which is really a modern misnomer for the Greek term.

However, the proper way of addressing the issue of the beauty of the Trinity is by speaking of the Trinity as something relational, or of Trinitarian relations. It is precisely here that Duns Scotus’s meticulous analysis of Trinitarian relations becomes invaluable. The discussion of relations resulted in such a tremendous effort on the part of Scotus that he became extremely concerned lest the issue at any time be deemed unimportant which would annul his great work: because in this case, he writes, “... all Catholic theologians, who take great pains to lay out the information about relations in common first, and about particular relations afterwards,

⁵ Notably by presenting harmony and proportion as a particular case of unity: cf. Plotinus, *Enn.* 1.6 and Augustine, *De vera relig.* 30.55 and 32.60.

⁶ This meaning does partially carry into the Latin notion *pulchrum*: for example, even for Bonaventure a “beautiful” image in one sense is the one that is most accurate, i.e., most excellent: see below.

would have labored in vain, filling their treatises with numerous questions.”⁷

The first type of relations that Scotus refers to here is common relations, such as identity, equality or likeness, which are common to all three persons insofar as they share the same essence. For example, all persons are equal or alike as regards their power, wisdom and other “pure perfections” that they have by virtue of having the essence.⁸ The second type of relations is personal relations which are specific to each person and are, in fact, the only thing that makes the persons distinct, or, according to Scotus’s vocabulary, “constitutes” the persons. In other words, these are the relations of difference. For example, “active generation” is specific to the Father regarding the Son, but not to the Son who is related to the Father through “passive generation,” and so on.

Now if one looks at the standard understanding of beauty in Antiquity and the Middle Ages the most logical locus for Trinitarian beauty seems to be precisely common relations of equality. The association between beauty and the proportion of equality or symmetry is standard in the ancient world and, what is more important for the Christian tradition, in Augustine. He repeats numerous times that equality is the main principle of beauty. Ultimately all other aesthetic principles—not only harmony but also unity, since it is the simplest case of equality—are reducible to equality.⁹ God as the Trinity in this case perfectly fits the main criterion of beauty, because, according to Augustine, “nothing in him is

⁷ *Rep.* I-A, Dist. 25, n. 26. In the present article I use the *Reportatio Parisiensis* instead of the *Lectura* or *Ordinatio*: both because of my recent work on its edition and translation and because the *Reportatio* likely presents the most advanced stage of Scotus’s thought. See Introduction to A. Wolter and O. Bychkov, *John Duns Scotus. The Examined Report of the Paris Lecture (Reportatio I-A)*, vol 2. (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2008). A. Vos’ argument to the contrary based on his chronology, according to which *Rep.* I was almost contemporary to the completion of *Ord.* I-II, is addressed above in my Introduction to this collection of essays.

⁸ Cf. Cross, *Duns Scotus on God*, 247-48: “... Scotus simply maintains that the divine persons are equal in all respects. This equality is explained by the divine essence, which is equally perfect in all divine persons.” Cross lists various sorts of such equality, e.g., in greatness, eternity, or power.

⁹ Cf. Augustine, *De musica* 6.13.38; *De vera rel.* 30.55.

unequal, nothing unlike another.”¹⁰ The designation “beauty” in application to God would, of course, be strictly analogical: God is beautiful *just like* symmetrical or proportionate material objects are beautiful.

Both Bonaventure and Scotus follow Augustine closely in asserting that all persons of the Trinity are equal or alike insofar as they are founded in the one divine essence, that is, by virtue of the common relations of equality and likeness among them. Thus according to Bonaventure,¹¹ who echoes Augustine’s *De vera religione* 30.55, beauty arises both from equality and inequality. In God, where there is supreme perfection, beauty is found “on account of most perfect equality and likeness of equal [things] ... because in each of the equal persons there is the highest perfection of all sorts.” It is only in created hierarchies, which possess lower degrees of perfection, that beauty is formed “from some [proportional] gradation of unequal [things].” In *Sent.* I, Dist. 31¹² he states that the relations of equality and likeness are certainly relations, but it is precisely the identity and unity of the divine essence in all persons that founds these relations.

Duns Scotus is in perfect agreement with Bonaventure on this point. Discussing the common relations of identity, equality and likeness in *Rep.* I-A, Dist. 31, q. 1 n. 1, he presents Augustine’s position on what makes the Son equal to the Father:¹³ “... *He is not equal* as regards being defined as the Son in relation to the Father [i.e., as regards something relative]; it remains therefore that he is equal as regards something that is defined in relation to itself.” “Therefore,” Scotus infers, “he is equal as regards the substance.” In his reply, Scotus echoes Bonaventure in stating that, on the one hand equality is indeed something relational, (n. 17) but on the other hand it is the essence that founds equality in all persons (n. 18). “... For the essence,” he writes, “as absolutely one in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, is the foundation of equality of any particular person vis-à-vis another one, and therefore any [person] is called equal to another ac-

¹⁰ *De musica* 6.14.44.

¹¹ *Sent.* II, d. 9, a. un., q. 8 Resp. My translation here and below.

¹² *Sent.* I, dist. 31, p. 1, a. un. q. 2.

¹³ *De Trin.* 5, c. 6, n. 7 (CCSL 50, 212).

cording to substance.” Thus, while confirming that the Son *is not equal* to the Father as far as the relation of origin (that is, filiation) is concerned, Scotus stresses that he is equal if one considers the commonality of the essence in the persons.¹⁴

Scotus brings further precision into the matter by discussing the issue of mutuality of relations. For Scotus, real relations must be mutual, that is, if A is really related to B then B should also be really related to A. Now such mutual relations are either opposing or not. For example, relations of production are mutual but opposing: the relation of active generation in the Father is matched by the opposing relation of passive generation in the Son. In the case of the relation of equality,¹⁵ a relation of equality in the Father to the Son is matched by an equal relation in the Son to the Father, i.e., the persons are perfectly equal insofar as they are related by a relation of equality.

At this point, however, some problems become noticeable. For example, both Augustine and Scotus, echoing Augustine, mention that the Son “is not equal” to the Father insofar as the personal relations of origin or production are concerned: that is, the relations of difference that constitute individual persons. If the standard medieval criterion of beauty is that of perfect equality, can one speak of the beauty of the Trinity when one considers personal relations, or the relations of difference, where such equality seems to be absent?

According to R. Cross who examines “anti-subordinationist strategies” in Scotus,¹⁶ Scotus, as Gregory of Nazianzus before him, thinks that although persons are not equal in terms of quasi-causal¹⁷ relationships of procession, the divin-

¹⁴ He sums up his position in n. 21: “... it is clear that the Son *is not equal* to the Father from the point of view of his position in respect to the Father, that is, on account of that relation of origin (i.e., filiation) by which he is related to the Father ... However, the Son is equal to the Father on account of [the relation of] equality according to the first mode, [i.e., quantitatively] as well as equal to him under the aspect of substance according to the second mode, because the substance or essence is the foundation of equality in them.”

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, q. 3, n. 13.

¹⁶ R. Cross, *Duns Scotus on God*, Chapter 18, 245-48.

¹⁷ Cross thinks that it is inevitable to think of relations of origin as in some sense causal. In our experience, this can be confirmed by Scotus’s discussion of the nature of production, e.g., in *Rep.* I-A, dist. 26, q. 3, n.

ity of each person is equal, and this is sufficient against any accusation of subordinationism (245). Indeed, Scotus routinely holds that the divine persons have all their so-called “pure perfections,” such as wisdom or infinity, by virtue of having the essence. Since they all share the same essence they are equal as regards pure perfections. In whatever they are not equal does not constitute a pure perfection and thus a particular person is not in any way deficient by not having a personal property of another person.

So the common medieval position is that essential equality of the persons is sufficient. In other words, the Trinity is already beautiful by virtue of having the essence and being divided into generic persons who are all equal by virtue of sharing the essence. But does this mean that it is not beautiful as far as personal relations are concerned, i.e., purely relationally? And what about the beauty of particular individual persons? In fact, can one really speak of true “equality” if in respect to the very characteristics that constitute the persons they are not equal? In any case it seems that if “perfect equality” is required for beauty, any inequality between the persons, even relational, may fail to satisfy this criterion.

Duns Scotus’s meticulous analysis of Trinitarian relations is a good indicator of potential “tension points” in the question of equality of the divine persons as far as personal relations of difference are concerned. As, according to Scotus, “... besides the [divine] nature nothing more is required for the makeup of the persons except [their] incommunicability,” the role of relations of origin is merely to provide this incommunicability.¹⁸ Thus the divine persons are equal in all, up to having the property of incommunicability itself, except for *the way* they are incommunicable.¹⁹ However, why certain relations, for example, paternity, are incommunicable, and some similar ones, for example, spiration, are communicable,

101, where some dependence in the case of generation seems unavoidable (although the official position is that no person is dependent on another): “Indeed, the product does not exist of itself, but it has its existence in an unqualified sense from another.”

¹⁸ *Rep.* I-A, dist. 26, q. 1, n. 30.

¹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, q. 2, n. 70.

has no logical explanation. Scotus simply affirms that this is the nature of these individual properties, or the haecceity of these relations.²⁰ That is to say, if any inequality or subordination is implied by the difference of relations of origin it would be “just so” by virtue of their individual nature.

The most challenging logical, or even, one could say, phenomenological problem here is how to think what is called the “priority of origin” in the divine persons. The official position that Scotus holds in common with many other contemporaries is that the Father is “prior to the Son by origin and still ... simultaneous with him by nature.”²¹ Scotus further clarifies (n. 143) that simultaneity here is precisely one of nature, but not “in attaining some perfection,” which can mean no other thing except that the Father is prior to the Son in attaining perfection, or even prior in perfection,²² despite being equal in nature. Another problem appears when Scotus tries to explain why neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit can produce like the Father after the productive principle has been communicated to them. Apparently, this principle, while remaining productive in the Father, ceases to be productive once it is communicated.²³

One of the more explicit statements about the inequality of the persons comes when Scotus discusses the question whether the divine essence is of itself determined to subsist first of all in the first person.²⁴ Depending on the type of primacy, Scotus clarifies, the essence may or may not be determined of itself to subsist first of all in the first person.²⁵ In the case of the “primacy of immediateness, however,” (*ibid.*,

²⁰ Cf. *ibid.*, q. 1, n. 30, n. 43; also cf. *ibid.*, q. 3, n. 100.

²¹ Dist. 26, q. 4, n. 141.

²² Cf. n. 145, where Scotus refers to Aristotle’s idea that it is impossible for two species to be equal in perfection: “Therefore, one correlative can very well be prior to the other in perfection and at the same time simultaneous [with it] in nature.”

²³ Dist. 27, p. II, q. 1, n. 141.

²⁴ Dist. 28, q. 3.

²⁵ E.g., speaking of “the primacy of adequateness of the intensive type” (n. 96) the essence is “primarily” determined to relate to any person, not just the first (i.e., they are all equally primary and any person is adequate for the essence to subsist in, so there is equality in this regard). Also, by the primacy of adequateness of the extensive type the essence is in all three, not only in the first (n. 97).

n. 98) the essence “is [of itself] determined to assume first of all its subsistence in the first person, and not in the second or third.” As before, it is the priority of origin of the first person that causes this proclivity in the essence towards the first person, although this proclivity does not come from the essence itself. The lack of “symmetry” between persons becomes so apparent that Scotus is forced twice to make a direct statement about the inequality of persons as regards the order of their appearance in the essence. Thus, arguing against Henry of Ghent he states the following (ibid., n. 99): “*Nor do I understand it, as some do, in the sense that the three relations primarily rise up or ‘sprout out’ from the essence all equally and at once...*”²⁶ And immediately after he restates the same point differently (n. 100): “From this, it is evident that *they do not have a sound opinion, who say that those three modes,*²⁷ as it were, *in an equal manner perfect the essence* in its second act, just as the three angles in an equal manner perfect a triangle.”²⁸

As if the statements about the inequality of the persons resulting from the relations of origin were not enough of a problem, Scotus also consistently introduces the terminology of subordination while conceptualizing the statement that the Father works *through* the Son. He uses two related terms

²⁶ My italics. Scotus continues immediately after: “In fact, [I understand it in the sense] that, as has been said, [the essence] is of itself determined to subsist [most] immediately in the first relative person through the first property, which it is determined to have first: and this first person is, furthermore, of itself determined to have the first property. Now the essence, primarily determined to have this [first property], exists and subsists as truly as [it would have] if it were an absolute person. Further, insofar as it [i.e., the essence] has being in the first instant of origin in the first subsistence, it is communicated to the second subsistence in the second instant of origin—and insofar as it has being in both, it is communicated to the third subsistence in the third instant of origin; and this is the order among the persons in respect to having the essence.”

²⁷ I.e., relational modes, or ways of having the essence.

²⁸ Scotus continues: “Indeed, it is true that the properties of the three persons are equally in the essence in the sense that none precedes another by nature, for all are simultaneous by nature. However, one [property] does precede another by origin, for the first one produces the second, and the first and the second [together produce] the third, and the producer *qua* producer is prior in origin than the product.” Cf. the same idea restated in n. 111.

in application to the persons of the Trinity other than the Father—*subauctoritas* and *subauthentic*—which are difficult to interpret except in terms of subordinate authority. Occasionally the term *minoritas* is also used, after Hilary and Peter Lombard, meaning the same thing, that is, some sort of a diminished authority.²⁹ For example, the issue of the authority of the Father and “subauthority” or subordinate authority of the Son comes up during the discussion of creation and of “sending” or spirating the Holy Spirit.³⁰ “... It must be said,” Scotus sums up, “that although the works of the Trinity may be undivided, they do not, however, operate in the same way regarding authority and subordination (*subauctoritas*).” According to Scotus, it does not follow that “the Father does something that the Son does not do” but it does follow “that the Father does or creates in some way through the Son.”³¹

The same idea appears in Scotus’s discussion of Trinitarian relations in *Rep.* I-A, Dist. 32. Although Scotus presents a hypothetical case, it is clear that he tries to work out the situation with relations of production within the Trinity using an analogy with divine creation where the relation of the Father to the Son is presented as that of authority to subordinate authority.³²

²⁹ Cf. *Rep.* I-A, Dist. 19, p. II, q. 2, n. 95. Scotus explains that the terms *maioritas* and *minoritas* employed by Hilary and quoted by Peter Lombard (*Sent.* I, d. 19, c. 4) in application to God mean the same thing as “authority” and “subordinate authority.”

³⁰ Cf. *Rep.* I-A, dist. 14-15, q. 1-2, n. 12: “In this way, therefore, it would be said that ‘to be sent,’ by virtue of its wording, connotes the effect in the creature, but subordinately; (*subauthentic*) and to send connotes the effect with authority or the fecundity of sending, that is, authoritatively. (*authentic*) In a similar way it is evident from an analogy: The Father is said to create through the Son, that is, to be creative authoritatively, that is, to bestow action on him; and the Son is said to create subordinately through the Father...”. Re. spiration see also *ibid.*, Dist. 12, n. 37, 48. The same idea about the subordinate authority of the Son reappears in Dist. 34, q. 3, n. 20.

³¹ *Ibid.*, Dist. 14-15, q. 1-2, n. 13.

³² One could explain the meaning of “subordinate authority” in this case as follows: when the Son acts, this is an action of the Father “in a remote way,” in the sense that the Son receives everything from the Father and therefore acts “subordinately.” E.g. when the car brakes it is actually the brake pads that stop the wheel, but it is the driver who acts through the brakepads, so we usually say that the driver brakes. Cf. Dist. 32, q. 2, n.

To sum up, if one looks at the relations that distinguish the persons in the Trinity, the Father appears to be prior to other persons in origin and in perfection and has superior authority compared to them. Can this really be compatible with the proportion of perfect equality required for beauty? There has been a recent claim that one can speak of the “beauty” of the Trinity precisely because of the “peaceful interplay” of the “relations of difference,” i.e., something that resembles the Kantian notion of the beautiful as a free and harmonious interplay of faculties.³³ However, a careful analysis of the medieval theology of Trinitarian relations shows that in the actual history of the Christian doctrine this understanding must be qualified at best. Thus the only type of relation that features some sort of even mutuality is a common relation, such as the relations of equality, likeness, or identity that pertain equally to all persons. However, these are not “relations of difference.” At the same time, the proper relations of difference, i.e., personal relations, hardly introduce any equality that would be sufficient for the appellation “beauty.”

We must now turn to the next issue. It is well known that the appellation “beauty” in the history of Western Christianity does go beyond common relations in the Trinity, or beyond the Trinity qua one common divine essence. It is sometimes used in application to the second person of the Trinity, or the Son. In which sense can the Son be viewed as “beauty”?

This tradition goes back to Augustine who in *De Trinitate* 6.10.11³⁴ interprets a brief and unclear passage from Hilary.

35: “Whence if ‘to elucidate’ were formally some sort of acting, in the statement ‘the Father speaks by means of the Word’ that ablative would function as a reference to someone elucidating actively [, but] subordinately, exactly as [it functions] in the statement ‘The Father creates by the agency of the Word’ (meaning that the Father and Son are one and the same principle of creating), where ‘the Word’ [in the ablative] stands for the principle that acts[, except] subordinately. (Now [I stress] this would have been the case with ‘speaking’ if it were acting — but it isn’t.)” In his reply to q. 1 (ibid., n. 38) Scotus also mentions “subordinate authority” as regards the position of the Holy Spirit towards the Father and Son as “spirators.”

³³ Cf. the section on the Trinity in D.B. Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite. The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI, Cambridge, UK: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003).

³⁴ *CCSL* 50, 241.

The passage from Hilary, *De Trinitate* 2.1³⁵ reads as follows: “in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit [there is] infinity in the eternal, beautiful form (*species*) in the image, and use in the gift.” The expression “beautiful form in the image,” Augustine explains, refers to the second person of the Trinity. He continues:

For an image (*imago*), if it expresses perfectly that of which it is an image, is itself equated to [its prototype,] not [the prototype] to its image. Now in that [statement about] the Image he used the name *species*, I believe, on account of beauty (*propter pulchritudinem*), [for in this Image] [i.e., in Christ as the Image] there is already such harmony, and equality of the first rank, and likeness of the first degree, disagreeing in no respect, and in no manner unequal, and in no part dissimilar, but continually corresponding to him of whom it is the Image.

It is clear that Augustine in this case does not speak of the beauty of the relation of equality as common to all three persons and based on the commonality of the essence. Beauty in this case acts as a personal property of the Son that it specific to the Son as a person. It is also clear why Augustine associates the Son with beauty. The Son is a perfectly adequate image of the Father that is absolutely equal to him, and, as we remember, equality, proportionality, and symmetry are standard criteria of beauty for Augustine.³⁶ What is different, then, is the origin of equality in this case. While equality as a common relation is based on the commonality of essence in all three persons, equality in the Son as something specific to this person is based on his ability to reflect, image, represent or express the Father adequately. The association between, on the one hand the Son as image, and on the other hand beauty is also furthered by the general proximity between the concepts beauty and shape or form, although this point does not receive proper elaboration in Augustine.

³⁵ CCSL 62, 38.

³⁶ E.g., in *De ordine* Bk. 2 and *De musica* Bk. 6.

In the late Middle Ages, the Augustinian association between the Son and the notion “beautiful form” or *species* is best developed by Bonaventure.³⁷ In *Sent.* I, dist. 27 Bonaventure lists several properties which are appropriate to the Son as the Word that are crucial to his discussion of the Son as beauty. Thus the concept of “cognition” that is included in the concept of the word is closely followed by “conception of likeness” and “expression” or “manifestation of something,” which can be summed up by one notion of “express likeness.”³⁸ Thus the concept of “knowledge” there is tightly linked to the notions of intuiting and generating an image or likeness, which is also expressly manifested (*ibid.*).

Bonaventure clearly presents equality and likeness in the Son as personal, and not common or mutual qualities. Thus in Dist. 31 he distinguishes between the two senses of “equal” and “like” in the Trinity:³⁹ first, “insofar as they imply agreement in quantity or quality,” and second, “insofar as they imply, over and above agreement, perfect imitation or expression and manifestation.” In the first sense, just as with Scotus’s common relations, “likeness” and “equality” are paired relations, so there are always two equal relations, that is, of A to B and of B to A. In this sense equality and likeness belongs to all persons. “... In the second sense,” Bonaventure continues, “‘like’ and ‘equal’ add to this the [personal] notion of origin: whence ‘equal’ is used in the sense of ‘equated’ or ‘made adequate’ and ‘like’ in the sense of ‘likened.’ In this sense it is only appropriate to someone who is ‘from another ...,’” or to the Son. In this second sense the Father is not a likeness of the Son through imitation, nor is he equated to the

³⁷ Bonaventure was, of course, developing the ideas of Alexander of Hales and the so-called “*Summa* of Alexander of Hales” (abbreviated here as *SH*, edited as Alexander de Hales, *Summa theologica, libri I-III*, 4 vols. [Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1924, 1928, 1930, 1948]) where the issue is already briefly discussed: cf. Alexander of Hales, *Glossa in quatuor libros Sententiarum, liber 1, Bibliotheca Franciscana scholastica Medii Aevi* 12 (Quaracchi, Florence: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1951), 306 (Dist. 31); *S.H.* I, pars II, inq. 2, tr. 2, sect. 2, qu. 1 (vol. 1, 641); *S.H.* II, pars II, inq. 1, tr. 2, qu. 3 c. 4 (vol. 3, 53).

³⁸ *Sent.* I, dist. 27, p. II, a. un., q. 3, Resp.

³⁹ *Sent.* I, dist. 31, p. I, a. un., q. 3, Resp.

Son through procession from someone else, but he equates the Son to himself.⁴⁰

The most important context for the medieval understanding of the Son as beauty is Dist. 31, p. II, a. 1, q. 3 where Bonaventure discusses Hilary's attribution of the notion "form-beauty" to the Son. Indeed, one of the obvious objections to such an attribution⁴¹ is that the term *species* in its meaning "form" cannot be specifically attributed to anything, and as "beauty" it is more appropriate to the Father who is the source and prototype of all beauty.⁴² Bonaventure, however, defends the view that Hilary attributes "beauty" to the Son as his personal property. Answering Objection no. 5, he states that there are two reasons for ascribing "perfect beauty" to the Son. First, if one takes "beauty" in the sense "excellence," the Son is beauty "because he is a perfect [that is, precise and excellent] and express likeness" and "therefore he is beautiful in relation to him whom he expresses," that is, the Father.⁴³ Thus equality here can be seen as a personal property of the Son who "... in relation to the Father ... possessess the beauty of equality, because he expresses him perfectly, as a 'beautiful' [that is, excellent] image..." (ibid.).

The Son is also "perfect beauty" insofar as he is the exemplar and principle of all, or is the *cause of beauty* in all. One must stress that the Son is beauty not as the "cause of all," which would rather be the Father or the Trinity as a whole,

⁴⁰ Further in Dist. 31, p. II, a. 1, q. 1, Resp., discussing Hilary's scheme of appropriation, Bonaventure again affirms that "... as far as God is concerned 'image' is predicated on account of expression or manifestation according to the identity of nature," and therefore 'image' qua uncreated is used in a personal or relational sense, i.e., is not grounded on the commonality of essence in the persons, for "it signifies procession" and procession due to the unity of nature is "only of a person." "So," Bonaventure concludes, "preserving the proper way of speaking, 'image' is predicated according to personal relation..."

⁴¹ Bonaventure's Objection No. 2.

⁴² One could say, the Father is "beauty" in its first meaning as τὸ καλόν.

⁴³ Bonaventure confirms this sense of "beauty" as excellence (sense no. 1, according to our classification in this paper) answering to Objections 2-4 by providing an example of a picture that is called "beautiful" when it presents a good likeness.

but precisely as the principle of imaging and shaping,⁴⁴ and therefore form and beauty, in all created things. In other words, he “has beauty in relation to all beauty modeled on the exemplar” (ibid.).⁴⁵ The second person of the Trinity, then, is unique in being connected, on the one hand to the Father through the principle of perfect likeness, and on the other hand to the created world through the principle of imaging, form, and expression. This double connection, which is specific to this person, Bonaventure contends, is most adequately expressed by the term “beauty” which encompassess all the above meanings.

Duns Scotus adds nothing radically different to Bonaventure’s view of beauty as a personal property of the Son, but it is significant that this meticulous mind maintains the same view without finding it problematic. Thus he attributes beauty to the Son already in *Rep.* I-A, dist. 3, q. 3, speaking of the vestiges of the Trinity in creatures.⁴⁶ His main discussion of

⁴⁴ Bonaventure further states (ibid.) that the Son “... in relation to the [created] things ... possesses all their ‘reasons’...,” that is, blueprints or schemata, or something that is directly linked to the form and beauty of things.

⁴⁵ According to Bonaventure, insofar as the Son is the *species*, or the principle of form, likeness, and expression in things, he is also the principle of cognition since cognition essentially happens through recognizing (copying or expressing) the form or things, be it their physical shape or concept: “by virtue of having the principle of perfect likeness he possesses the principle of cognition” (ibid.). This idea further reinforces the connection between the Son and creatures for whom he serves as the principle of knowledge as well as of their form. In dist. 35, a. un., q. 1, Ad 3 Bonaventure makes an interesting remark about the divine idea as an archetypal exemplar or ideal likeness which, paradoxically, expresses the thing better than it does itself: “There is another [type of] likeness, which is the expressive truth itself of an object of cognition, and it is likeness precisely by virtue of being truth. Now this likeness expresses the thing better than the thing itself could express itself, because this very thing receives its principle of expression precisely from that [original likeness]. Now cognition according to this [likeness] is more perfect, and it is by this [sort of likeness] that God knows.” At this point he speaks of divine ideas, but it does give us some idea as to how the Son can serve as the “perfect form and beauty” for the created things: precisely in this “better-than-the-thing-itself” status. This also perfectly explains the sense in which the Son can be seen as the perfect principle of cognition of things.

⁴⁶ Scotus reacts to Augustine’s passage from Bk. VI of the *Trinity*, where he says that “every created thing has number, form, and order, which are the primary origins of beauty” (n. 74). Scotus replies (n. 80)

Hilary's and Augustine's attribution of "beautiful form" to the Son is in Rep. I-A, Dist 34, q. 3.⁴⁷ First of all, he states that in order for certain properties such as "beauty" to be ascribed to specific persons there should be some "specific agreement between [such] essential [properties] and the proper characteristic of some person" (n. 16). This means that Scotus, just as Bonaventure, speaks of beauty as the Son's personal property: there must be some kinship between beauty and his personal traits.⁴⁸ Scotus further (n. 17) comments specifically on Hilary's attribution of "beauty":

Beautiful form, on the other hand, is ascribed to the Word or the Son, because it is beauty which requires integrity, due proportion and some manifestation or disclosure of some power (and this third property harmonizes with the proper characteristic "word"). Now the Father does not have the essence in such a way that it is measured by someone. The Son, in his turn, receives the divine essence from the Father as a whole, or integrally. Similarly, in order to be equal to the Father, he receives the essence according to some adequate and due proportion. Finally, because he is the Son and Word of the Father, he is [something] disclosing, and is like some light and disclosure. And it is in this way that Augustine in Bk. VI of *The Trinity*, chapter 9 accepts [these ascribed properties] from Hilary.

It is remarkable that Scotus's three criteria of beauty (integrity, proportion, manifestation) are identical to those of

regarding this attribution of "number, beauty/shapeliness (*species*), and order": "The first two represent as a likeness, and the third as a correspondence. Number and unity can be attributed to the Father, beauty to the Son, because beauty and shapeliness come from a combination of many things that agree with one another, as is evident in bodies, and it cannot be as conveniently attributed to the Father as to the Son, who is primarily the beauty of the Father..."

⁴⁷ As a matter of fact, *Ord.* I does not contain a parallel text or discussion.

⁴⁸ It is also interesting that further (*ibid.*, n. 18) Scotus discusses another property ascribed to the Son by Augustine in *De doct. Christ.*, namely, equality, and views it this time not as a common property but as a personal property "by appropriation": again, in agreement with Bonaventure.

Aquinas, which means that he is essentially in agreement with the Dominican here, and the theory of the Son as beauty simply represents a widely accepted point of view.⁴⁹ It appears, then, that the beauty of “equality” that belongs to the Son—either as the image of the Father or as the exemplar of created form—has nothing to do with equality as a common relation that is responsible for the beauty of the Trinity as a whole. This is a separate, third sense in which one can speak of beauty within the Trinity as specifically belonging to the Son.

One is forced to admit, then, that in the developed Christian systematic theology, as exemplified by the Franciscan tradition of Bonaventure and Duns Scotus, beauty in application to the Trinity is simply understood equivocally. One can distinguish at least three senses in which the Trinity can be spoken of in terms of “beauty”: the Trinity as “one God,” in the sense of beauty-excellence (the Greek τὸ καλόν); the three persons of the Trinity as equal, i.e., mutually related through the common relation of equality (their beauty results from the proportion of equality, parallel to earthly beauty); finally, beauty results from the personal relations of procession within the Trinity, specifically from that of the Son who proceeds in the manner of image or form: the categories often seen in terms of aesthetics in application to created reality. In each of the three senses “beauty” is understood strictly analogously to the secular notion of aesthetic beauty, and each sense requires a separate analysis.

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⁴⁹ Cf. Aquinas, *Summa* I, qu. 39, a. 8, in the same context of attributing the property “beauty” to the Son: “However, species or ‘beauty’ is alike to the [personal] properties of the Son. Indeed, three things are required for beauty: First integrity or perfection ... Then, proper proportion or harmony. And also clarity ... As for the first, it is alike to the properties of the Son insofar as the Son has in himself truly and perfectly his Father’s nature... As for the second, it coincides with the properties of the Son insofar as he is the express image of the Father ... Finally, as for the third, it coincides with the properties of the Son insofar as he is the Word, ‘which is the light and splendor of the intellect...’”.