

Archa Verbi
Subsidia, Vol. 3

Archa Verbi
Yearbook for the Study of
Medieval Theology

Subsidia

3

 **scotus** JOHN DUNS
1308–2008

Mary Beth Ingham and Oleg Bychkov (Eds)

John Duns Scotus, Philosopher

Proceedings of “The Quadruple Congress” on
John Duns Scotus
Part 1

Franciscan
Institute
Publications



 **Aschendorff**
Verlag

Archa Verbi
Annuario Societatis Internationalis pro Studiis
Theologiae Medii Aevi promovendis

Annuaire de la Société Internationale pour l'Étude de la Théologie Médiévale
Annuario della Società Internazionale per lo Studio della Teologia Medievale
Anuario de la Sociedad Internacional para los Estudios de la Teología Medieval
Jahrbuch der Internationalen Gesellschaft für Theologische Mediävistik
Yearbook of the International Society for the Study of Medieval Theology

Subsidia

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Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Bibliothek:
Die Deutsche Bibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detailliert
bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.ddb.de> abrufbar.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2010925581

Cover illustration:

Johannes Duns Scotus, Ordinato,
Bologna, Biblioteca Universitaria, Ms. 2237, f.1r (15th century)

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Gesamtherstellung: Druckzentrum Aschendorff, Münster, 2010

Gedruckt auf säurefreiem, alterungsbeständigem Papier[∞]

ISSN 1865-2964

Aschendorff Verlag Münster ISBN 978-3-402-10213-8

Franciscan Institute Publications ISBN 10: 1-57659-213-8 ISBN 13: 978-1-57659-213-7

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Introduction

John Duns Scotus, Philosopher

In April 2005, Franciscan Institute Director Michael Cusato, O.F.M., convened an international group of scholars to discuss plans for the 2008 celebration of the seventh centenary of the death of the Subtle Doctor, Blessed John Duns Scotus (1265–1308). The result of this initial planning session came to be called “The Quadruple Congress”: a series of conferences in North America and Europe, bringing together scholars and experts in a symposium-like reflection on the life, philosophy, theology and influence of John Duns Scotus. Four sites were selected for the congress: St. Bonaventure, NY, Oxford, England, Bonn-Cologne, Germany and Strasbourg, France. Each site agreed to focus on a particular aspect of Scotist thought, from its historical context to its historical legacy. Coordinators for each celebration would frame their conference according to their own preferred organizational style, inviting international as well as regional scholars. The papers from each conference would appear in a separate volume, part of a four volume set, published jointly by Franciscan Institute Publications (St. Bonaventure, New York) and Aschendorff Verlag (Münster, Germany).

The Quadruple Congress celebrated the work of Scotus according to a thematic focus and chronological frame:

- I. The first conference, held at St. Bonaventure, NY in October 2007, opened the Congress with a focus on Scotus’s philosophical inheritance and his *Opera Philosophica*.
- II. The second conference, held at Oriel College, Oxford in July 2008, dealt with Scotus’s theological writings.
- III. The third conference, co-hosted by the University of Bonn and the Thomas Institut, Cologne in November 2008, focused specifically on the Metaphysical and Ethical investigations of Scotus’s *Opera*. This conference also marked the seventh centenary of his death.
- IV. Finally, the fourth conference, co-hosted by the University of Strasbourg (France) and the University of Mainz (Germany) explored the legacy of Scotist thought, from the fourteenth – twentieth centuries.

These four conferences brought together an international group of scholars, both junior and senior specialists, in a joint effort to assess the significance of the work of this great medieval metaphysician and philosopher-

theologian. Other international celebrations also took place in Brazil, in Italy and at the Antonianum in Rome.

The articles contained in the present volume represent the first of the four conferences, held at St. Bonaventure University, NY in October 2007. The purpose of this conference was three-fold:

First, it would open the Quadruple Congress with an exploration of Scotus's philosophy: both in terms of his own philosophical inheritance as well as his Franciscan identity.

Second, it would celebrate the completion of the *Opera Philosophica*, under the direction of Timothy Noone, Catholic University of America.

Finally, it would celebrate the life and work of the eminent American Franciscan scholar, the late Allan B. Wolter, O.F.M. Wolter's work on Scotus's philosophical theology has marked generations of scholars in North America and throughout the world.

Scotus and Philosophy

We have chosen to entitle this first volume *John Duns Scotus, Philosopher*. This is, of course, subject to some debate, for Scotus is as much a theologian as he is a philosopher. However, in approaching the question of Scotus's philosophy, we must recall the particular role played by philosophy and by natural reasoning in the medieval university, and especially its central relationship to theology (*sacra doctrina*). For medieval masters like Bonaventure, Aquinas and Scotus, philosophical reasoning played a central role in approaching and discussing theological questions, such as the trinity of persons in God, Eucharistic transubstantiation, the nature of language about God and the possibility of theology as a science. Philosophical theology even today, as then, uses philosophical arguments for a conversation *ad extra*, in order to involve in a dialogue any intelligent observer, even non-Christian: as medieval theologians did in respect to pagan, Muslim and Jewish philosophers. However, Scotus's philosophical insights, most often tied to theological questions, are also philosophically important in their own right.

Situating Scotus in light of his predecessors always involves placing him within the context of theological and philosophical debates of post-1277 era: debates that involve a critique of Aristotelian philosophy and in which figures such as Henry of Ghent, Giles of Rome, Godfrey of Fontaines play a prominent role. It also means situating him in the context of his own Franciscan predecessors, Alexander of Hales, Peter John Olivi, Richard of Middleton, William of Ware, and Bonaventure of Bagnoregio. Most importantly, Scotus's philosophical predecessors also include non-Franciscan masters such as Robert Grosseteste and Islamic thinkers such as Avicenna (Ibn Sîna).

Three plenary addresses at St. Bonaventure that are part of the present volume drew our attention to both these contexts of his thought and major

thematic elements in Scotus's philosophical vision. In "Reflections on Franciscan Sources for Scotus's Philosophical Commentaries," Stephen Brown presents the Franciscan philosophical backdrop for Scotus's own Aristotelian commentaries. In "Ibn Sînâ (Avicenna) and John Duns Scotus," Thérèse-Anne Druart explores the Islamic backdrop to Scotus's metaphysics of being, and the nature of his relationship to Avicenna. In "Scotus on Doing Metaphysics *in statu isto*," Giorgio Pini traces Scotus's systematic argument for the univocity of being as it appears within the philosophical context of substance and accidents.

The remaining papers in this volume either expand the themes of the plenary addresses or fill out our understanding of Scotus as a philosopher in several important ways. Continuing the theme of Scotus's Franciscan heritage, the influence of Scotus's Franciscan identity is traced in the contributions of Mary Beth Ingham, Seamus Mulholland, and Timothy Noone. The philosophical context for Scotus's theological insights is central to the papers of Marilyn McCord Adams, Thomas Hipp, and Thomas Möllenbeck. Francesco Fiorentino, Severin Kitanov, and Graham McAleer explore the logical, metaphysical and psychological elements of Scotist thought. Finally, Cruz Gonzalez-Ayesta, Andrea Robiglio, and Antonie Vos deal with Scotus's ethical innovations, the notion of freedom and synchronic contingency.

The current selection thus provides the background and sources for, as well outlines, in a preliminary way, the philosophical issues which are important to Scotus's specific theological and philosophical teachings discussed in two subsequent volumes based on the Oxford and Bonn-Cologne conferences. For example, although the Oxford meeting focused on Scotus's theology, many topics discussed there were expressly philosophical, such as will and intellect, aesthetics and theory of relations, epistemology, and the nature of practical knowledge. The Bonn-Cologne meeting specifically focused on several major themes of Scotus's philosophy, most of which can be linked with the initial discussion provided by the papers at St. Bonaventure meeting: metaphysics, ontology, epistemology/theory of cognition, logic (including issues in semantics and predication), aesthetics, the status of science and the nature of theology as science, contingency theory and causality, and ethical issues such as will and emotions.

Our hope is that the current volume and the rest of the series will reinvigorate the discussion about John Duns Scotus's philosophical and theological inheritance and provide a useful tool for all those daring to study the thought of the Subtle Doctor.