

**Thomas Ward, *Ordered by Love: An Introduction to John Duns Scotus*.** Angelico Press, 2022. ISBN: 978-1-00937-739-3, xii+139 pp., pbk \$18; also hbk, Kindle.

John Duns Scotus (b. 1265/66) ranks among the great Christian theologians of all ages. Along with Aquinas and Anselm, he is a jewel in the crown of Medieval thought. Anyone interested in the history of Christianity, philosophy, or systematic theology has plenty of reason to study Scotus. Thomas Ward has given us a fine place to begin.

Concise and approachable, *Ordered by Love* serves as an excellent introduction to the thought of Scotus for casual and advanced readers alike. Pastors, lay people, and academic specialists stand to gain. The book begins by setting the Medieval stage, and those new to the scholasticism of the period will learn about this broader movement in which Scotus was a player. Then we're off and running into the thought of Scotus. To mention a few highlights, we learn about Scotus's complex proof for God's existence, which is arguably even more compelling and intricate than the proofs we get from Aquinas; about Scotus's case for Mary's preservation from original sin; and about Scotus's theory as to where God gets his ideas from. The discussion of the latter (in Chapter Four) is the book's high point, and *Ordered by Love* would be worth reading for this chapter alone.

But make no mistake, *Ordered by Love* is more than an introduction to Scotus. It is, in its way, a love letter to Scotus, that learned Franciscan. And it is at the same time a love letter to Francis himself and to his biographer, G. K. Chesterton. Indeed, in spirit Ward's book is a sequel to Chesterton's own biography of Francis. In style, it is a tribute to Chestertonian wit and to that distinctive sense of enchantment that keeps us coming back to him over a century later. Ward's little book embodies these goods without slavishly copying them. Ward's training as a philosopher adds depth and rigor to splendid prose, giving *Ordered by Love* a timeless quality and making it a work in its own right.

A sampling of Ward as a stylist. Here he is on Scotus on human freedom:

The freedom for which God has made us free is to be the loyal subjects of Christ the King, lords and ladies of God's realm, noble but not sovereign. (112)

And on Scotus on Mary's dignity as mother of God:

It is an inconceivably lofty honor, to be so close to Christ. Her blood in his veins; his blood in hers. To have such a high rank in the court

of Christ the King—literally, the Queen Mother! Sheer awe at the marvel of a woman raised above the angels should prompt us to apply superlatives to her. (143)

And on Scotus on the human thirst for God:

There is something sadly ironic about Coleridge's mariner's groan that there is 'water, water everywhere nor any drop to drink.' He was dying of thirst on the salted sea. But Scotus would say that the plight of thirsty souls bereft of God is sadder still: they are dying of thirst surrounded by fresh water they do not know is there. (131)

Ward even makes the dry bones of scholastic metaphysics rattle with life. One of Scotus' most famous ideas is that every individual has his own "thisness" or haecceity, a tasteless odorless weightless property that makes you the you that you are. Explaining Scotus, Ward writes that for someone to be

the sort of thing that can belong to a time and a place and a people, she must already be an individual. Before she is a daughter or a sister or a citizen, she is a human being. But simply being human is clearly not sufficient to make her the very individual she is, because being human is what all human beings have in common. We recognize that she must have an identity which is prior to her situation in a nexus of social relations, but her humanity cannot explain that priority. (69)

By thus appreciating the need for a pre-social identity, we follow Scotus to the unique and irreplaceable "thisness" of each individual.

For all the ground it covers, though, *Ordered by Love* contains one conspicuous omission: Hell. Ward writes, "The story of the world has no red herrings and no loose ends: the plot is water-tight and there are no accidents. All is ordered by love" (141). But if all is ordered by love, then how do any creatures end up finally lost? Perhaps the idea is that, out of love for them, God lets rebellious creatures walk away from Him forever. But if their rebellion is not itself ordained by God—if God is genuinely seeking their salvation through Christ—then it seems there are some loose ends after all, indeed, likely billions of them. And yet, on the other hand, the picture of providence Ward paints is one in which God is meticulously and intimately involved in arranging the world's affairs:

You and even your hairs were among God's reasons for making this world. God does nothing by accident or thoughtlessly; the world is ordered by love. And God, as Scotus says, is a most methodical lover; so when He wills the world He wills all its individuals. (76)

This sounds like a God who is in control. But equally clear is that God “loves creatures extravagantly.” So how in a universe ordered by love do perhaps the majority of persons find themselves estranged from God forever? Since Scotus is no universalist, one can be forgiven for wondering how this is all meant to hang together.

This omission aside, what *Ordered by Love* does offer is plenty. For instance, at an especially bright spot in the book, we're introduced to one of Scotus' most influential ideas, his view of the Incarnation. For Scotus, “even if there had been no sin at all and no need of salvation, Christ would have become incarnate anyway” (137). Given that human beings did sin, the Incarnation led to the atonement. But, Scotus thinks, a world in which God becomes incarnate is worth having even apart from any atoning work the incarnation makes possible:

The Incarnation is not just the best thing that has happened. By it the universe attains a height of goodness infinitely outstripping whatever goodness it might have had without Incarnation. (138)

Earth for God to walk on and humanity for God to assume are in themselves sufficient—but not coercive—reasons for God to create in the first place. God creates a world to inhabit it; God creates humanity to take on its nature. For a universe in which God is thus incarnate is a thing far lovelier than a universe in which he is not. And while God may be under no obligation to create the best, we may expect him to create the sublime. As Ward puts it, “Theological imagination should err, if it errs at all, on the side of abundance” (144). And so we should err on the side of abundance by reading *Ordered by Love*.

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