



The Beauty of Christ: A Trinitarian Vision

Douglas F. Kelly



MENTOR

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INTRODUCTION

THE BEAUTY OF CHRIST: THE TRINITARIAN CONTEXT OF CHRISTOLOGY

In the announcement by the Archangel Gabriel of the miraculous conception of the Son of God to the Virgin Mary, the evangelist Matthew immediately recognized the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah: 'Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us' (Matthew 1:23, quoting Isaiah 7:14). In this second volume of our series, we are to consider the beauty of Christ with God, and the beauty of Christ with us, for he is *Immanuel*, 'God with us,' that is: (1) From all eternity, he is God, and (2) within the space/time series which he created, he has come down to be 'God with us'. It is particularly his coming down to us that accomplishes the ultimate restoration of purity and beauty to humanity and the cosmos and which constitutes the great theme of this second volume of *Systematic Theology*.

I. The Beauty of Christ with God

The eternal beauty of the One true God is most wonderfully concentrated in the Son of his love, in whose face we see the heart of the Father revealed (John 14:5-13). Christ comes as God made man, in order to show us who God is, and in so doing to save us and to renew the entire cosmos, which was his creation to begin with (John 1:3). God the eternal Son, who was made flesh by miraculous divine action in the womb of the chosen Jewish maiden, the Virgin Mary, finds his essential identity precisely as eternal God. He is *God the Son*; He has a Father, the Lord God Almighty, with whom and in whom, in the ineffable bond of charity of the Holy Spirit, he mutually indwells and coinheres, one of three coequal, undivided and yet distinct divine persons within the one Being of God.

Methodology

Since the Triune God is supremely personal: three Persons in one Being, it is worthy of the best efforts of our lives to seek to grasp something of the true character and beautiful qualities of the divine personhood. This is a

most demanding task for there is always mystery in personal being, even of a single human child, much more of the sovereign God, who is eternally three in one! But this generous God, who chooses not to be without us, has created us so that we may know him in supremely happy fellowship with him (John 17:3). It is in his written Word that we find the character and personal qualities of the God who chooses to reveal himself most clearly and authoritatively expressed. Hence, all that is to be said in this volume about the divine beauty, and especially that of the incarnate Son, in whose face we most clearly see the heart of the Father revealed, will be based on a reverent reading of the Holy Scriptures.

But I must add something more here to clarify the theological approach (or 'methodology') of this volume. While this volume is always seeking to open the relevant scriptural texts, to point out their 'scope' and to follow their 'scope,' as the basis of wholesome doctrine of 'the faith once delivered to the saints' (Jude 3), I have found it impossible to do so apart from 'the communion of saints' across many centuries, and from various traditions both East and West. That was also the case in the first volume of this series, which was for that purpose entitled: *Systematic Theology: Grounded in Holy Scripture and Understood in Light of the Church*.

Christ, in one of his parables, speaks of a householder bringing forth out of his treasure 'things that are new and old' (Matt. 13:52). That is what I have felt impelled to do with the veritable treasury of the theological writings of Church Fathers, Scholastics, Reformers, Puritans and Moderns. It is in a certain sort of communion with their minds that I have learned so much, and I am often quoting them both (1) to illuminate the scriptural truths I wish to express in this volume, and also (2) to expose others to the uplifting qualities of what these partially buried treasures still have to say.

As far as my own Protestant Reformed Tradition is concerned, it does seem that for some reason (perhaps the Enlightenment with its anti-Medieval spirit?), the eyes of many good theologians were functionally turned away from Medieval saints and earlier Church Fathers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Yet not long before, such mighty Reformed thinkers as John Calvin, John Owen, Thomas Goodwin and Samuel Rutherford, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, had mined gold and silver out of Patristic and Scholastic mines (although not without frequently severe criticism of these sources, where they failed to match up to Holy Scripture). It will take many years to tell, but it is my hope and prayer that these volumes may alert many Christian scholars to such beneficent sources, where they may – to change the figure – winnow afresh grain from chaff. That then is why I so frequently quote from others, and I trust that it will not be distracting from the main thrust of the text.

Guidance from Jonathan Edwards and Richard of Saint Victor on God and Beauty

Jonathan Edwards ascribes the origin of all beauty to God: '...the foundation and fountain of all being and all beauty ... of whom, and through whom, and to whom is all being and all perfection; and whose being and

beauty are, as it were, the sum and comprehension of all existence and excellence.¹ Roland A. Delattre shows that Edwards' understanding of beauty requires the love within the Trinity: "Tis peculiar to God that he has beauty within Himself."² Edwards goes on to note that there needs to be a plurality of persons in God for beauty to exist, for it requires 'consent' (or pleasure in the other). Here his reasoning is much like that of Richard of St. Victor, who saw that for love to exist, God had to be more than one Person at the same time.³ In Edwards' words: 'One alone cannot be excellent' or beautiful 'inasmuch as in such case there can be no consent... Therefore, if God is excellent, there must be a plurality in God; otherwise there can be no consent in Him.'⁴

It is quite impossible even to begin speaking of Christ, the eternal Son of God, without bowing before the entire Godhead: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As Gregory of Nazianzus said: 'No sooner do I conceive of the one than I am illumined by the splendour of the three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the one. When I think of any one of the three, I think of Him as the whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking escapes me.'⁵ Elsewhere he said: 'When I say God, I mean Father, Son and Holy Spirit.'⁶

Perichoresis and Love

This *perichoretic* relationship⁷ of the three Persons within the one Godhead, in which each of the three distinct persons coinheres, or mutually dwells within the other, in a delightful, fully satisfying, and eternal interchange of life, light, and love could rightly be said to constitute the fundamental beauty and all-sufficiency of God. That is, much of the beauty of God lies in the happy difference between the three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – loving, loved, and love itself, or giving, receiving, and gift.

Gregory of Nyssa speaks of this beauty as love of that which is infinitely good: 'The Deity is in very substance beautiful; and to the Deity the soul will in its state of purity have affinity, and will embrace it as like itself. Whenever this happens, then, there will be no longer need of the impulse of desire to lead the way to the beautiful...'⁸ He adds:

1 Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue* (University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor Paperback, 1960), 15.

2 Jonathan Edwards, 'Notes on the Mind' in Harvey G. Townsend, ed., *The Philosophy of Jonathan Edwards From His Private Notebooks* (University of Oregon Press: Eugene, Oregon, 1955), 45, quoted in Roland A. Delattre, *Beauty and Sensibility in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards: An Essay in Aesthetics and Theological Ethics* (Wipf & Stock Publishers: Eugene, Oregon, 2006), 18.

3 See D. F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology*, vol. one, 274-276.

4 Jonathan Edwards, *Miscellanies* (Yale University Collection of Edwards Manuscripts: Yale University Library), 117. Delattre adds: 'On this platform Edwards erects his ontological doctrine of the Trinity,' op. cit., 18.

5 Gregory Nazianzus, *Oration* 40,41.

6 *Oration* 45,4.

7 See volume 1 of this series, pp. 489-493.

8 Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1956), 449. I owe many of these references to Gregory of Nyssa, as well

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For the life of the Supreme Being is love, seeing that the beautiful is necessarily lovable to those who recognize it, and the Deity does recognize it, and so this recognition becomes love, that which He recognizes being essentially beautiful...no satiety interrupting this continuous capacity to love the beautiful, God's life will have its activity in love; which life is thus in itself beautiful, and is essentially of a loving disposition towards the beautiful, and receives no check to this activity of love...when you have a good, as here, which is in its essence incapable of a change for the worse, then that good will go on unchecked into infinity.⁹

It is as though the face of each of the three divine persons shines with serene beauty and profoundest delight as they look upon one another, according to the suggestion of Saint Augustine:

Therefore that unspeakable conjunction of the Father and His image is not without fruition, without love, without joy. Therefore that love, delight, felicity, or blessedness, if indeed it can be worthily expressed by any human word, is called by him, in short Use; and it is the Holy Spirit in the Trinity, not begotten, but the sweetness of the begetter, and of the begotten, filling all creatures according to their capacity...¹⁰

Augustine views the wonders of creation as having their source in the perfect beauty of the Creator: '...For in that Trinity is the supreme source of all things, and the most perfect beauty, and the most blessed delight. Those three, therefore, both seem to be mutually determined to each other, and are in themselves infinite...'¹¹

This beauty of loving and giving, receiving and sharing the gift within the three persons of the Holy Trinity lies behind God's original giving of himself to reveal himself to his image-bearers (Gen. 1:27,28), and then to redeem them from sin once they had fallen away from him (John 3:16; Rom. 8:32; I John 4:7-14). Such action means that in some true sense God has made a place for us within the beauty of the divine circumincession (or *perichoresis*). And so our High Priest prays to the Father: 'Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world' (John 17:24).

Both 'ontological' inner Trinitarian relationships of beauty and 'economical' movements both in the very act of creation and into redemptive history to save a lost humanity are joined in many places, not least in John 1:14: 'And the word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,)

as a number of the concepts behind them, and their bearings, to David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2003).

⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, op. cit., 450.

¹⁰ Augustine, *On the Trinity*, VI, X, 10 (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1956), 103.

¹¹ Ibid., VI, X, 12.

full of grace and truth.¹² It was the Word (or Logos), the Father's eternal Son (as John 1:18 makes clear), who became incarnate for our salvation. Or, in the words of Isaiah 7:14, 'God with us' is none less than the eternal God within Himself.

His coming down to us in the flesh is an aspect of the internal beauty of God; each person of the Trinity giving himself to the others, and receiving the returns of love from each one. We have some grasp of this in the Father giving himself to the Son and Spirit, the Son giving himself back to the Father and the Spirit, and the Spirit proceeding from both, and uniting both in ineffable ties of love, as he continually returns to them within the undivided oneness of the perichoretic Being.

Andrew Murray in *The Holiest of All: An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* commenting on the contrast in Hebrews 1:5 ('Unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son...') between the Son of God and the angels, takes us into the beauty of the love within the Trinity, and then outward to ourselves:

... God has a Son. This is the mystery of divine love; and that in a double sense. Because God is love He begets a Son, to whom He gives all He is and has Himself, in whose fellowship He finds His life and delight, through whom He can reveal Himself, with whom He shares the worship of all His creatures. And because God is love, this Son of God becomes the Son of Man, and the Son of Man, having been perfected for evermore, enters through death and resurrection into all the glory that belonged to the Son of God. And now this Son of God is to us the revelation, the bearer, of the love of the divine Being. In Him the love of God dwells in us; in Him we enter and rest in it. When God speaks to us in this His Son, it is the infinite love imparting itself to us, becoming the inward life of our life.¹³

Saint Thomas Aquinas defines Beauty

Long before Murray (nineteenth century) and Edwards (eighteenth century), it was also in the context of Trinitarian theology that Saint Thomas Aquinas had developed his definition of beauty (in the thirteenth century). In so doing, he was following Saint Augustine (fifth century),¹⁴ who followed Saint Hilary (fourth century).¹⁵ In *Summa Theologiae* (I. 39), Thomas expounds major issues in Trinitarian theology: I. 27-38: the divine processions; I. 28 – the divine relations, and I. 29-38 – the divine persons. Then, as John T. Slotemaker points out: 'In question 39 Thomas

12 This passage is exegeted in detail in chapter 3 of this volume.

13 Andrew Murray, *The Holiest of All: An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Oliphants Ltd.: London, 1965), 52, 53.

14 Augustine quotes (with one change) Hilary's 'triad' for beauty within the Trinitarian relations: *infinitas*, *species*, and *usus in munere*. The change made by Augustine (*De Trinitate* VI.10.11) is in the adjective for God. While Hilary says 'infinity', Augustine says 'eternal in Fatherhood', as discussed by John T. Slotemaker, 'Pulchritudo Christi: The Sources of Thomas Aquinas's Understanding of the Beauty of Christ,' in *Archa Verbi: Yearbook for the Study of Medieval Theology*, Vol. 8/2011 (Aschendorff Verlag: Munster, 2011), 119.

15 In *De Trinitate*, Book II, Hilary ascribes *infinitas* to the Father, *species in imagine* to the Son, and *usus in munere* to the Holy Spirit; that is, infinity to the Father, 'beauty in image' to the Son, and service (or application or making fruitful) in ministry to the Holy Spirit.

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analyzes how specific attributes or properties can be appropriated to the divine persons.¹⁶ Here is where St. Thomas sets forth the beauty of God. Dr. Slotemaker adds: ‘...Thomas argues that when one examines God absolutely according to His being...the appropriations of Hilary apply: eternity to the Father, species to the Son, and use to the Holy Spirit.’¹⁷ These three terms, taken together, constitute the beauty of the Lord.

Hence, in ST I. 39. a. 8 co., Thomas attributes *species* to the Son, by which, following Augustine, he means ‘beauty’.¹⁸ While Hilary describes the Son as *species* (which could be rendered ‘form’), Augustine stated that *species* actually should be taken as meaning ‘beauty’ in the harmony between the divine persons. Then Thomas goes on to list (in ST I. 39. a. 8) three properties of the beauty of the Son: *integritas sive perfectio*, *proportio sive consonantia*, and *claritas* (i.e. integrity or completeness, right proportion or harmony, and brightness).

The first quality of beauty is integrity or perfection, and ‘is understood to be in the Son because the Son is of the same nature as the Father’.¹⁹ Integrity means that the Son lacks nothing, for as Thomas stated, ‘things that lack something are thereby ugly’.²⁰ Or, as Dr. Caponi writes: ‘Integrity is a divine attribute: God lacks nothing proper to divinity or the achieving of his ends.’²¹ Thomas emphasizes ‘the correlation between the being (nature) of the Son and the being of the Father’.²²

The second quality of beauty in the analysis of Saint Thomas is proportion or harmony. That is, the Son is the express image of the Father. ‘Beauty, for Augustine and Thomas, is the perfect *imago* of the perfect being – The Son of God, as the *imago Dei*, is the perfect image of the perfect being, the Father.’²³ Concerning this primary relationship between the Father and the Son, Thomas states: ‘Right proportion (*debita proportio*) is consonant with what is proper to the Son inasmuch as he is the express image of the Father.’²⁴ Caponi adds: ‘Wherever there is right relationship – whether the rectitude flows from the will of God or from canons of human creativity – there is beauty.’²⁵

The third quality of beauty, according to Saint Thomas, is *claritas*. That is, ‘the Son as Word, is the light and splendor of the intellect.’ According to Holy Scripture, ‘God is light,’ and his Son is light. Christ is ‘the true light’ (John 1:9), and thus can proclaim: ‘I am the light of the world’ (8:12). Or as

16 Slotemaker, art. cit., 133.

17 Ibid.

18 Dr. Slotemaker shows that Thomas is following ‘Augustine’s analysis in *De Trinitate* VI.10.11, and his reading of Hilary’s attribution of *species* to the Son, which substantively informs Thomas’s analysis of the Son as beauty’ (art. cit., 135).

19 Slotemaker, art. cit., 135.

20 ST, I. 39. 8, resp., discussed in Francis J. Caponi, ‘Beauty, Justice, and Damnation in Thomas Aquinas,’ in *Pro Ecclesia*, Vol. XIX, No. 4, 392.

21 Ibid., 393.

22 Slotemaker, art. cit., 135.

23 Ibid.

24 ST, I, 39, 8, resp.

25 Caponi, art. cit., 392.

the Nicene Creed affirms, Christ is 'light of light.' Hebrews 1:3 says that 'He is the radiance of the glory of God, and the express image of his nature (or *character* in Greek).'

Thomas' doctrine of beauty is heavily indebted to Augustine, who interpreted the beauty of God '... as the beauty (*pulchritudo*) that accompanies the harmony (*congruentia*) and equality (*aequalitas*) between the persons.'²⁶ This Augustinian (Thomist) concept of the centrality of harmony for the existence of beauty is rather differently approached in Jonathan Edwards. As Delattre wrote: '...the primary model of beauty for Edwards is being's consent to being, rather than proportion or harmony.'²⁷ But what Edwards says about 'the consent of being to being' as concerns God himself, although not the same, is not really contradictory to Augustine's (and Thomas') emphasis on 'congruence'. Edwards speaks of this willing harmony (or congruence) between Father and Son as 'consent': 'One alone cannot be excellent' or beautiful 'inasmuch as in such case there can be no consent.'²⁸ So what does Edwards mean by 'consent to being'?

Jonathan Edwards defines beauty

Edwards considers communion to be the primary beauty of cordial consent among beings.²⁹ As concerns the Holy Trinity, Edwards states that 'God exerts Himself towards Himself no other way than in infinitely loving and delighting in Himself, in the mutual love of the Father and the Son. This makes the third – the personal Holy Spirit, or the holiness of God – which is His infinite beauty. And this is God's infinite consent to being in general [*Mind* 45, Part 9].'³⁰

He says it in a slightly different way elsewhere: 'The Holy Ghost is Himself the delight and joyfulness of the Father in that idea [of Himself which He has in the Son], and of the idea in the Father...So that, if we turn in all the ways in the world, we shall never be able to make more than these three, God, the idea of God, and delight in God [*Misc.* 94].'³¹

The ancient doctrine of *perichoresis* enables us to think together congruence and cordial consent to being. As Hilary said: 'They [i.e. the three divine persons] reciprocally contain one another, so that one should permanently envelope, and also be permanently enveloped by the Other, whom yet he envelopes.'³² This means that the three persons of the blessed Trinity are eternally one in being (thus, *congruent*), and at the same time, delight in the personal distinction of each other, taking delight in neither being dissolved into an amorphous mass, nor in being personally separated (thus, joyful *consent* to the personal and distinct being of the

26 Slotemaker, art. cit., 121.

27 Delattre, op. cit., 23.

28 Edwards, *Misc.* 117, quoted in Delattre, op. cit., 18.

29 Delattre, op. cit., 108.

30 Quoted in *Ibid.*, 152.

31 *Ibid.*, 154.

32 Hilary, *De Trinitate*, III. 1.

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others). The oneness in being, and triune distinctiveness of the three divine persons, with their joyful interchange of light, life, and love is the origin and fountain of all beauty of whatever sort.

Beauty and peace

This beauty of the Lord can also be approached through the concept of the serene peace that reigns within the blessed Trinity. David Bentley Hart has set it forth extensively (in his *The Beauty of the Infinite*), in contrast to the bitterness and violence found in so much of Post-modern deconstructionism, with its competing power claims of discordant communities of 'interpretation'.

Some fifty years earlier, the Scottish Presbyterian Pastor, William Still of Aberdeen (1911-1997), grasped the beauty of the Triune Persons in terms of the peace that flows through the Being of God:

God is the God of peace. He is at peace, in and with himself. A fundamental implication of the Holy Scriptures is that the triune God was, is and ever shall be in perfect accord with himself, person with person, office with office, and that he is satisfied with himself in the fulness and perfection of his wisdom, love and power. When infinite intelligence finds infinite perfections in itself, infinite stability and integrity of character are assured. This integrity is simply another name for God's righteousness, or rightness.... He rejoices in it so much that he desires it for his creatures, and that, not only for its own sake as a seed, but for its fruit which is peace (Isa. 32:17; Heb. 12:11).³³

Although it has been our intention to deal first with (1) God in himself, and only then, with (2) God with us, it is finally impossible to separate conceptually, with any strictness, these two aspects of the Trinity (*ontological* and *economical*), as we see in the quotation immediately above. That is because we time-bound, space-bound humans can only enter into a certain understanding (true, but limited) of these eternal, ontological Trinitarian realities through *the economy* (as the Church Fathers called it) of the history of creation, of providence, and of the redemption of the lost creation, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit create the cosmos out of nothing, plan for its future, and enter into its sinful brokenness through covenantal relationships, in order to restore it, as testified to by patriarchs, prophets, and apostles in Holy Scripture, as Karl Rahner brings out in *The Trinity*,³⁴ in which he shows that the economic Trinity is the ontological Trinity, and the ontological Trinity is the economic Trinity. In my understanding, however, this important fundamental identity does not have to abolish the traditional Orthodox distinction (but *not* separation) between the essence of the ontological Trinity and the energies manifested in the outward actions of the Triune God.³⁵

³³ William Still, *Towards Spiritual Maturity: Overcoming all evil in the Christian Life*, Revised Edition (Christian Focus: Geannies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland, 2010), 12, 13.

³⁴ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, 24-33.

³⁵ A total abolition of this traditional distinction would lead to a sort of univocal (rather than analogical) affirmation of distinctions within our understanding of the Being of God, and of the

II. The Beauty of Christ with us

Isaiah tells us that Christ is ‘Immanuel: God with us,’ and the evangelist Matthew puts Gabriel’s annunciation of Christ’s conception and Virgin Birth into this context. The triune God spoke worlds into existence, and placed the Adamic race in it, so that the Father could prepare for his Son an immaculate bride, and it is in terms of this relationship of love that all cosmic and human history unfolds. The Father’s love to the Son overflows into his preparation of a massive people, who will share forever in that divine love, which will be celebrated with boundless joy at ‘the marriage supper of the Lamb’ (Rev. 19:7-9; 21:2). The spotless bride, though called when marred by sin and its ugliness, has now been washed in the blood of the Son whiter than the snow from all her unsightly blotches, and perfected in holy beauty by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. And the world in which this bride is born, grows up, and is sanctified is one that still reflects the divine beauty of the heavenly Bridegroom.

Beauties of Creation point to God

The God whose own inner-trinitarian relations are beautiful has created beauty outside himself, and such created beauty says something significant about who God is in his own Being. The Psalms frequently praise him for such created beauty that reflects his own inherent loveliness.

From the very beginning of creation, the triune God displayed much of his beauty in the realm of nature, calling what He had made ‘very good’ [טוב מאד] as in Genesis 1:31. This beauty is frequently pointed out in the Psalms: ‘O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! Who hast set thy glory above the heavens’ (Ps. 8:1); ‘The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork...’ (Ps. 19:1); ‘Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness’ (Ps. 65:11); ‘The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works. All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD; and thy saints shall bless thee’; ‘Praise ye the LORD. Praise ye the LORD from the heavens: praise him in the heights...Let them praise the name of the LORD: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven’ (Ps. 148:1, 13).

Gregory of Nyssa in almost poetic fashion sings high praises to God for how he shows his own beauty in the wonders of the created order. Gregory describes the beauties both of (1) the natural realm and also (2) those of the human person, all of which reflect the splendor of the triune God.

First, he describes the loveliness of nature, as he meditates upon Genesis 2:1 (‘The heaven and the earth were finished’): ‘...the particular things were adorned with their appropriate beauty; the heaven with the rays of the stars, the sea and air with the living creatures that swim and fly,

language we employ about him. Jean-Marc Berthoud has explored the direction one strand of this univocal identity has taken in some of the scholastic theories of ‘created grace’ in *Le règne terrestre de Dieu* (L’Age d’Homme: Lausanne, 2011).

and the earth with all varieties of plants and animals...the earth was full, too, of her produce, bringing forth fruits at the same time with flowers; the meadows were full of all that grows therein, and all the mountain ridges...were crowned with young grass, and with the varied produce of the trees, just risen from the ground, yet shot up at once into their perfect beauty; and all the beasts that had come into life at God's command were rejoicing, we may suppose, and skipping about, running to and fro in the thickets in herds according to their kind, while every sheltered and shady spot was ringing with the chants of the song-birds...³⁶

Pierre Viret on Beauty in the birds and the natural environment

The sixteenth century Swiss Reformer, Pierre Viret (1511-1571), pastor of the Church in Lausanne, and colleague of John Calvin, also drew attention to the birds as a way of grasping attributes of God, their Creator. In a meditation on 'The Admirable Instinct of the Birds,' he speaks of such things as their architectural ability in building nests (describing them as 'masons'), and using a beak, which is effective in breaking hard seeds and cracking open thick shelled nuts, thereby feeding their young. Then he comments on God's words to Job about his need to consider the ways of the beasts whom God created, and thereby to perceive great attributes of God himself: 'It should come as no surprise when the Lord proposes the example and nature of the animals and birds he created, in order to teach him to recognize through these creatures God's own great power, wisdom, goodness and foresight.'³⁷

A world and millennium and a half away from Gregory, and two centuries away from Viret, Jonathan Edwards, in early eighteenth century New England, grasped with equal enthusiasm how the beauties of nature lead us up to the beauties of God (especially of Christ):

When we are delighted with flowery meadows and gentle breezes of wind, we may consider that we only see the emanations of the sweet benevolence of Jesus Christ; when we behold the fragrant rose and lily, we see his love and purity. So the green trees and fields, and singing of birds, are the emanations of his infinite joy and benignity; the easiness and naturalness of trees and vines [are] shadows of his infinite beauty and loveliness; the crystal rivers and murmuring streams have the footsteps of his sweet grace and bounty.... That beauteous light with which the world is filled in a clear day is a lively shadow of his spotless holiness and happiness, and delight in communicating himself.³⁸

³⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Volume V (I.5)*, p. 389.

³⁷ Originally published in *Dialogues du désordre qui est a present au monde* (1545), Third Dialogue: *La métamorphose*, 300-302. I have taken this section from a collection of extracts from Viret (and have translated it into English): C. Schnetzler, et al., *Pierre Viret d'Après Lui-Même* (Lausanne: Georges Bridel & Cie, 1911), 272. A brief and useful biography of Pierre Viret appeared in 2010 by Jean-Marc Berthoud: *Pierre Viret: A Forgotten Giant of the Reformation: The Apologetics, Ethics, and Economics of the Bible* (Zurich Publishing: Tallahassee, Florida, 2010).

³⁸ Jonathan Edwards, Miscellany No. 108, *Works*, 13: 278-80.

Introduction – The Beauty of Christ: The Trinitarian Context of Christology

Pierre Viret also traced out the loveliness of God's generous Being by arguing that God gave to mankind through the excellencies of the created order, not only what was necessary for survival, but also what was beautiful to see, and what excited our desires. That is, our Creator goes far above strict necessity, and provides a diversity of things that are lovely to behold and melodious to hear:

God not only provided these things [e.g. rivers, trees, animal inhabitants, waters, and birds...] to take care of the basic needs of mankind, but also to minister to their desires and pleasures, and to do so, he joined an excellent beauty to things that are profitable and useful. For how lovely it is to see beautiful islands in the sea, and [on the land] beautiful and clear fountains and running streams...flowing down the mountains...and then the beautiful little birds moving about, flying and singing among the trees with great melody and natural music!³⁹

Cecil F. Alexander expressed the natural beauty and the divine goodness in a hymn:

The purple-headed mountain,
The river running by,
The sunset, and the morning
That brightens up the sky,
The cold wind in the winter,
The pleasant summer sun,
The ripe fruits in the garden, -
He made them every one.

The tall trees in the greenwood,
The meadows where we play,
The rushes by the water,
We gather every day, -
He gave us eyes to see them,
And lips that we might tell
How great is God Almighty,
Who has made all things well.⁴⁰

Beauty in humankind

Gregory of Nyssa, after praising the Lord's loveliness in nature, then goes on to trace how much of his own beauty God placed within mankind:

...So human nature also, as it was made to rule the rest, was, by its likeness to the King of all, made as it were a living image, partaking with the archetype both in rank and in name, not vested in purple, nor giving indication of its rank by sceptre and diadem (for the archetype itself is not arrayed with these), but in stead of the purple robe, clothed in virtue, which is in truth the most royal of all raiment, and in place of the sceptre, leaning on the bliss of immortality, and instead of the royal diadem, decked with the crown of

³⁹ Viret in Schnetzler, et al., op. cit., 269.

⁴⁰ "All things bright and beautiful' by Cecil Frances Alexander (1823-1895).

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righteousness; so that it is shown to be perfectly like to the beauty of its archetype in all that belongs to the dignity of royalty.⁴¹

Jonathan Edwards taught that both bodily beauty and beauty of soul within humanity reflected something of the perfections of Christ. He wrote:

...when we behold the beauty of man's body in its perfection we still see like emanations of Christ's divine perfections, although they do not always flow from the mental excellencies of the person that has them. But we see far the most proper image of the beauty of Christ when we see beauty in the human soul.⁴²

In other words, he means that a person who is notably handsome or beautiful in his or her face and bodily build may or may not be indwelt by the Spirit of Christ. (One can think of the many human specimens over the millennia of the mythological Aphrodite or Adonis). Even so, their physical comeliness, in some way, comes from the beauty of the Lord. Yet Edwards holds that there is no beauty to compare with the beauty of 'Christ in you, the hope of glory' (Col. 1:27); that is, nothing on earth can be more beautiful than the personality of a believing man or woman, who is being sanctified by the Spirit of God into an ever fuller measure of likeness to Christ. Paul makes this point when he describes some of 'the messengers of the churches' as being 'the glory of Christ' (II Cor. 8:23).

In a remarkable meditation, Gregory interconnects the divine beauty within the human frame with the love that reigns within the Trinity:

And if you were to examine the other points also by which the divine beauty is expressed, you will find that to them too the likeness in the image which we present is perfectly preserved. The Godhead is mind and word: for 'in the beginning was the Word' (John 1:1), and the followers of Paul 'have the mind of Christ' which speaks in them: humanity too is not far removed from these: you see in yourself word and understanding, an imitation of the very Mind and Word. Again, God is love, and the fount of love: for this the great John declares that 'love is of God' and 'God is love' (I John 4:8): the Fashioner of our nature has made this to be our feature too: for 'hereby' He says, 'shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another' (I John 13:3) – thus, if this be absent, the whole stamp of the likeness is transformed.⁴³

That is to say, Gregory relates the beauty in creation, and especially in humanity, to the relationships within the Holy Trinity, such as (in his words immediately above) 'the Godhead,' 'Word,' and 'mind.' Those relationships are distinctive aspects (or actually, persons) of the love that God is. And we are invited into that love, for God and for one another, thereby showing the divine image.

We shall outlast the Beauties of Nature

41 Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, (IV.1), p. 391.

42 J. Edwards, *Misc.* 108, quoted in Delattre, *op. cit.*, 181-82.

43 Gregory of Nyssa, *op. cit.*, (V.2).

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C. S. Lewis with insight says that we shall outlast the beauties of nature, and that we are defined by the splendour *they represent*, rather than by themselves:

Nature is mortal; we shall outlive her. When all the suns and nebulae have passed away, each one of you will still be alive. Nature is only the image, the symbol; but it is the symbol Scripture invited me to use. We are summoned to pass in through Nature, beyond her, into the splendour which she fitfully reflects.⁴⁴

When Adam, head of the human race, rebelled, and by his sin brought death into the world (cf. Gen. 3 and Rom. 5:12-21), it caused a disastrous marring of his original beauty and integrity. God's just judgment upon Satan, the woman, the man, and the cosmos manifested the beauty of his pure righteousness, in which he, consistent with his holy character, punished the ugly cancer of sin, and provided a way for the restoration of mankind and the entire created order. This grace is seen in the first promise of the Gospel in Genesis 3:15,16 (expounded elsewhere). The malign ugliness of the disintegration of the beautiful order brought about by sin and death would not have the last word. Beauty would be restored, as is reflected in Romans 8:18-22, when it promises that 'the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God' (vs. 21).

The history of the Biblical covenants relates this long story of God's grace preserving a people through righteous Noah, and calling out Abraham to be 'father of the faithful.' As we saw elsewhere (vol. 1, chapter 6), the seed of Eve, the seed of Noah, the seed of Abraham would appear in the womb of the Virgin Mary to carry out the total fulness of the restoration of righteousness, life and beauty that his earthly forerunners had pointed towards in their own divinely ordained, but necessarily limited, ways.

The final consummation wrought by the manifestation of the Person and atoning work of Christ will be the out-raying of the glory of the triune God throughout the entire universe, when the resurrected one returns, and takes his people up to that realm that needs no temple, sun, nor moon: 'And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass. And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof' (Rev. 21:21-23).

Scriptural longings for and expressions that indicate beauty

This triune God, three in one, and one in three, whom we see most clearly in Christ, is at times mentioned in his own inspired revelation in terms of the most exquisite beauty. Psalm 90:17 is a concluding prayer by Moses (for the ancient

⁴⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (HarperOne: New York, 1980), 44.

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Hebrew tradition ascribes this Psalm to him), who had sought to see the personal glory of God in the closest possible way (cf. Exodus 33:18).⁴⁵ Moses cries out for 'the beauty of the Lord our God' as chief object of his intercession on behalf of the people of God. In response to Moses' request in Exodus 33:18 to see the glory of God, the Lord says (in verse 19), 'I will make all my goodness (or beauty) pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee.'

Insofar as all faithful theology is finally an opening of the clear teaching of the Holy Scriptures on any particular subject, in order to lay hold of the beauty that Moses longed to see and that Christ so fully exemplified and reflected, it is necessary to look at some of the specific Hebrew and Greek words that are used in Scripture to convey the sense of 'beauty.'

Shekinah glory (or beauty)

A major manifestation of this divine beauty was the glory cloud (spoken of by the *post-Biblical* rabbis as *shekinah*), which, according to the Hebrew signification, indicated a bright outshining of supernatural light.⁴⁶ Jonathan Edwards takes us to the point:

...God's glory [is] often represented by an effulgence, or emanation, or communication of light, from a luminary or fountain of light. What can so naturally and aptly represent the emanation of the internal glory of God; or the flowing forth and abundant communication of that infinite fulness of good that is in God? Light is very often in Scripture put for comfort, joy happiness, and for good in general.⁴⁷

Another Hebrew word, closely related to the outshining of the cloud of glory, was *kabod*, which actually implies that this divine beauty has *weight*. Jonathan Edwards also writes of this aspect of something so beautiful that it is 'heavy'. He correctly points out that 'glory' is often the translation in the English Bible of the original Hebrew word *kabod*. He adds:

The root it comes from, is either the verb, (כבד) which signifies *to be heavy*, or make heavy, or from the adjective (כבד) which signifies heavy or weighty... The Hebrew word (כבוד) ... commonly translated as glory... Sometimes it is used to signify what is *internal, inherent*, or in the *possession* of the person: and sometimes for *emanation, exhibition, or communication* of this internal glory...⁴⁸

Closely related to *kabodh* [כבוד] is *doxa* [δοξα]. Kittel notes that in the New Testament, *doxa* (which he relates to the Old Testament word, *kabodh*) '... denotes "divine and heavenly radiance," the "loftiness and majesty" of

⁴⁵ 'And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory.'

⁴⁶ The precise word *shekinah* is not found in the Old Testament. W. Van Gemeren states: 'Although the word "Shekinah" does not occur in the Bible, the root *skn* occurs not only in the verb ("dwell"), but also in the noun *miskan* ("dwelling place," "tabernacle") and the name Shecaniah ("Yahweh dwells"; e.g. I Ch. 3:21f.)... The Aramaic Tg. Onkelos renders this verse: "He will cause his Shekinah to dwell in the dwelling-place of Shem."' W. A. VanGemeren, 'Shekinah,' *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 4, G. Bromiley, ed. (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, 1988), 466.

⁴⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *Works* (Banner of Truth: Edinburgh, 1974 reprint), vol. 1, 117-18.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 116.

God, and even the “being of God” and his world.⁴⁹

The weighty glory was lovely, radiant and protective to the covenant people (as it stood behind them as a block to the hostile army of Pharaoh). At the same time, it was terrifying and confounding to their enemies (e.g. see Exodus 14:19-25). The Old Testament at times ascribes this glory directly to the Lord.

According to some verses in the Old Testament, the glory of the Lord can, in a certain sense, be seen in lightning. Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* finds in *kabodh yhwh* [כְּבוֹד יְהוָה] ‘...traits which point strongly to the phenomenon of a thunderstorm.’ He mentions Psalm 97:1 with clouds, lightning, and hills melting like wax, the vision in the call of Ezekiel, with storm, cloud, fire, lightning and the noise of rushing water, as well as the overhanging thunder clouds during the revelation at Sinai (Exod. 19:16), with the Lord descending in the fire (vs. 18). But *kabodh* also is employed for the personal beauty of the Lord in Exodus 33:18, where Moses desires to see the *kabodh* of the Lord. After hiding Moses in a cleft of the rock, and covering him with his hand, the Lord makes his *kal tobhi* [כַּל-טוֹבִי] to pass by.⁵⁰

In Exodus 40:34f., the cloud covers the tent and the *kabodh yhwh* fills it on the inside. Kittel concludes: ‘The nature of the *kabodh* itself is to be conceived as a radiant, fiery substance... The *kabodh* is a manifestation of the glory of God.’⁵¹ Much later in the history of Israel, David prayed that he might behold ‘the power and the glory [כְּבוֹדָךָ] of the Lord in the sanctuary’ (Ps. 63:2).

Why look at so many terms for beauty?

In English and most of the modern European languages, there is a main word for beauty, and several more terms express substantially the same concept (such as ‘lovely,’ ‘comely,’ or ‘handsome’ etc. in English). There seem to be even more words to convey something like ‘beauty’ in Hebrew than in our Indo-European tongues, so far as I know (as a non-expert in that subject). Hence, a careful survey of the many words somehow related to the idea of ‘beauty’ throughout the Old Testament would involve many pages. It is not appropriate to attempt that here, but nevertheless, since God is so central to the Old Testament, and since ‘beauty’ is so frequently found on its pages (sometimes directly describing God, and sometimes not), we must look at a few more of the main words for beauty in the Torah, as a pointer to how the inspired text would have its readers think of God’s own beauty.

A major Old Testament (Hebrew) word related to beauty is *yph* [יָפָה]: something like ‘fair or very beautiful.’⁵² In the Song of Solomon it is often applied to the beautiful bride, and the beauty of Jerusalem, although

49 Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, translated by G.. Bromiley (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI, 1965), vol. III, 237.

50 Kittel, *op. cit.*, vol. II, 239.

51 *Ibid.*, 240.

52 Van Gemeren, et al., 3636.

it is not directly ascribed to God, yet it is understood that such beauty ultimately comes from him. The Hebrew word related to 'wh [חַ] can describe 'the desire of the eyes' or 'pleasing to the eyes.' This desire is closely related to the longing for God, and to a husband's longing for his bride (as in Psalm 45:11 [חַ], which the Church Fathers saw as a messianic prophecy of Christ's pleasure in his church).⁵³

Another word for beautiful is *n'h* [נְה], and it means something like lovely or appropriate.⁵⁴ In Exodus 15:2 and Psalm 93:5 forms of it are directly attributed either to God or to his house, and it is also used in many other connections in the Old Testament. The Hebrew word *p'r* [פָּר] can refer to God beautifying his people with salvation, and other forms of it speak of ascribing glory to the Lord (I Chron. 22:5).⁵⁵ A form of it is used in Isaiah 63:12 to speak of God's arm of glory that went at Moses' right hand to make for himself an everlasting name. The Hebrew word *tob* [טוֹב] (frequently used during the six days of creation – declaring them 'good') is also directly used to speak of the goodness (or beauty) of God himself, as in Exodus 33:18-19, where Moses asks God to show him his glory.⁵⁶

The word *r'h* [רָחַ] (generally to have visions, or a manifestation of the Lord in a particular place – as in Genesis 12:7), appears in various forms in many Old Testament texts, and for example, in Psalm 34:8, the Psalmist is told 'to taste and see that the Lord is good (or beautiful to be seen or experienced)'.⁵⁷ It is used to describe the physical beauty of Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachel (cf. Gen. 12:11; 26:16; 26:7).

No beauty

On the contrary, Isaiah 53:2 says that there was 'no beauty' in him to make us desire the suffering servant, who was physically abused for our sakes so terribly that we 'hid our faces from him,' and yet it is the good news of all time that, 'with his stripes we are healed.' All the beauty we believers shall ever have comes from the ugly disfigurement and grief of 'the servant of the LORD.'

It is precisely in this place of 'no beauty' that the people of God have traced the supreme beauty. That is what the seventeenth century English poet, George Herbert saw as he expressed it in a poem on 'Dulness'. He speaks of Christ in his 'bloody death and undeserved,' and adds: 'Thou art my loveliness, my life, my light, Beauty alone to me...'⁵⁸

John Wesley (1703-1791) in his translation of a hymn of N. von Zinzendorf (1700-1760), sings of how the sight of this strange beauty of

53 Ibid., 203.

54 Ibid., 5533.

55 Ibid., 6995.

56 Ibid., 3201.

57 Ibid., 8011.

58 George Herbert, 'Dulness' in *George Herbert and the Seventeenth Century Religious Poets*, selected and edited by Mario A. Di Cesare, (W.W. Norton & Company: New York, 1978). A daily devotional guide to Herbert's poetic appreciation of the beauty of Christ in all of his graces and ways is found in Gerrit Scott Dawson (*Love Bade Me Welcome: Daily Readings with George Herbert* (Glen Lorian Books: Lenoir, North Carolina, 1997).

the cross transforms those who see it:

Jesus thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.

There are various Hebrew words that directly indicate what all can understand as beauty, such as *shepher* [שֹׁפֵר], which speaks of having ‘a beautiful inheritance’ in Psalm 16:6,⁵⁹ while *tipharat* [תִּפְאָרֶת] refers to the beauty and majesty of God, as in Psalm 96:6.⁶⁰ *noam* [נֹעַם] is ascribed directly to God, as in Psalm 27:4, expressing the desire to behold the beauty of the Lord.⁶¹

Probably though, *kabod* and *shekinah* come most closely to what the New Testament speaks of as God’s glory and brightness (or beauty) - as in John 1:14, Hebrews 1:3, and Revelation 21:23 and 22:5, among many other references in the Apocalypse. And these two concepts, scattered throughout several Old Testament passages, generally lie behind the Greek words employed in crucial texts on beauty or glory in the New Testament, as in John, Hebrews, Revelation, and elsewhere.

New Testament words for beauty usually come through the LXX Translation of the Hebrew Old Testament

Of course, most of the Greek words used in the New Testament come through the LXX, in which the third century B. C. Jewish scholars rendered the Hebrew Torah into Greek. The crucial word in the New Testament for the divine beauty is *doxa* (or ‘glory’), although *kalos* [καλος] is also important (to be discussed below). Kittel shows that *doxa* was used some 280 times in the LXX, and that of those renderings, *kabodh* lies behind 180 of them.⁶² Hence, ‘since *kabodh* can have the sense of “power,” “splendour,” “human glory,” *doxa* takes on the same meaning.... The *doxa theou* is the “divine glory” which reveals the nature of God in creation and in His acts, which fill both heaven and earth.’⁶³

In addition to *doxa*, the Greek word *kalos* is widely used. ‘It is most often the [LXX] rendering of *yafeli* [יָפֵה], e.g. Gn. 12:14; 29:17; 39:6; 41:2, etc., often with the addition τῶ ἐδέει (יָפֵה יְרֵאֵהוּ), and thus denoting ‘beautiful in respect of outward appearance...’⁶⁴ It often means ‘morally good’ and can be used synonymously with *agathos*.⁶⁵ In the Gospels, at times it refers to a ‘beautiful’ work, such as the woman anointing Jesus in Mark 14:3ff. In John, it is used of Christ as ‘the good Shepherd’ (or ‘beautiful Shepherd’).

59 An Gemenen, op cit., 8231.

60 Ibid., 6286.

61 Ibid., 5276.

62 Kittel, op. cit., vol. II, 242.

63 Ibid., 243, 244.

64 Ibid., vol. III, 543.

65 Ibid., 544.

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Beautiful outward appearance is manifest in the glory cloud. This same *shekinah* glory often rested upon the wilderness Tabernacle, and in later days filled Solomon's Temple at its dedication with such holy brightness that the priests had to go running outside it (cf. I Kings 8). The *kabod* and the *shekinah* are partial descriptions of God's own beauty, especially as it radiates from his Triune personal relations into the created order, especially to his chosen people, as Edwards suggested when he spoke of *kabod* as 'communication of this internal glory' (immediately above). The essay 'The Weight of Glory' by C. S. Lewis, which I have already quoted, addressed this topic as well. Whether in terms of glory or weight or lovely form, God's beauty consists in the inner relationships of light, life and love within the Trinity (i.e. known as 'the ontological Trinity'), and then, consequently into the saving economy for the human race within creation (known as 'the economical Trinity').

Inner-trinitarian beauty and creational beauty are often joined

The beauty of the inner Trinitarian relations and the beauty of its shining outwards into the space/time universe through Christ are joined together in various passages, such as Hebrews 1:1-2: '[God] hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high...'⁶⁶ The Apostle Paul speaks of this connection between the beautiful within the Trinity and the beautiful derived from him within his created image bearers in the process of redemption: 'For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' (II Cor. 4:6), and also, in the immediately preceding chapter: 'But we all with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed unto the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord' (II Cor. 3:18).

Varied illustrations of creational beauty in nature and in human creativity

Beauty can be defined not only by heavy significance and outshining radiance, but also by 'comely' or well-proportioned form: perhaps like a very beautiful human face, or the symmetry of an eighteenth century Georgian manor house in England, constructed, let us say, according to the designs of Palladio or Inigo Jones, or a Low-country South Carolina, Greek-revival plantation mansion with high white columns, supporting an imposing veranda at the end of a long avenue of ancient oak trees,⁶⁷ or the master painting of a gorgeous landscape by Constable, or the rendition of a beautiful city (such as Venice) by Canaletto, or a marble statue carved by

⁶⁶ See Chapter 3 of this volume for detailed exegesis of Hebrews 1.

⁶⁷ Saint Thomas speaks of the beauty (or 'limited integrity') of a well-constructed building that realizes the architect's ideal (cf. ST I.73.1).

Michelangelo in Rome or Florence. Such admirably proportioned beauty is seen in the elegant structure of the Chateau of Chenonceaux that with rare loveliness spans its white stone arches over the Loire River in France.

Or beauty could be traced in a different mode in the gorgeous blue colors in the ‘petals’ of the circular rose window of the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, ending their great and delicate length with roseate tones, or the stunning bluish hues in some of the splendid long and high windows of Chartres. To change the figure, beautiful and stately proportions could also be seen in the flight of Canadian geese in V-formation across a snow-covered North Carolina upland meadow, or the rising up of a large covey of quail from a cut-over corn field, when frightened by a bird-dog. Or one can see this elegant beauty of movement as a herd of deer splash through a shallow stream in the early twilight, in response to the noise of a farm-truck rattling down the dirt road.

Or in yet a different way, beauty can be traced in the sound of a bird song, the water flowing over Niagara Falls, or a Medieval Plain Song, a Fugue of J. S. Bach, or his ‘Saint Matthew Passion,’ Handel’s ‘Messiah,’ a Sonata of Mozart, a Symphony of Beethoven, Rachmaninov’s ‘Vespers’ sung by a choir in Saint Sophia Cathedral in Kiev, a melodious rendition of some of the grand African-American ‘spirituals’ by the Mississippi Mass Choir, or some of the Welsh hymns of William Williams or Titus Lewis, or the pointed Psalms sung by boys’ choirs in English Cathedrals and University Chapels, or unaccompanied Scottish Gaelic Psalmody in some of the heavily attended churches in the Hebridean Isle of Lewis. Or one can hear it in the sonorous peals of bells at the stroke of midnight on New Year’s morning in cities like Cambridge and Oxford.

The Old Testament on a few occasions, as we have seen above, speaks of the physical beauty and well-proportioned faces and bodies of such as Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Moses, Joseph, Saul, David, Bathsheba, and Absalom, as well as the lovers in the Song of Solomon. Thus Scripture teaches that God created both natural beauty and human beauty, and both of these forms of well-shaped comeliness point upwards to the beauty of God himself.

Augustine defined beauty in this sense of lovely proportion or symmetry, as the harmony between the various elements of an object.⁶⁸ Albert the Great combines these aspects of beauty in his definition: ‘Beauty consists in the gleaming of substantial or actual form over proportionally arranged parts of matter.’⁶⁹ His definition conveys something of the sense of *shekinah*, *kabod*, and ‘comeliness’ (as conveyed by the Greek: *kalos*).

How can finite creational beauty show us who the infinite Creator is?

We may say of the entire created order what will be said later (following the words of T. F. Torrance of the incarnation of Christ): ‘God reveals himself

⁶⁸ See Francesca Aran Murray, *Christ the Form of Beauty: A Study in Theology and Literature* (T & T Clark: Edinburgh, 1995), 211.

⁶⁹ Albert the Great, *Opusculum de pulchro et bono*, V, 456, quoted in Francesca Aran Murphy, op. cit., 211.

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in terms of what is not God.⁷⁰ That is to say that in the incarnation, we see most fully who the Father is, in the created humanity of the Son, and in a similar way, in the entire cosmos we see the shining beauty, stupendous power and brilliant complexity and harmony of the uncreated Light and eternal glory of the Trinity within what is created and temporal.

God is different from his creation; indeed, infinitely so, and yet, he calls it into being, makes space for it, and upholds it in its difference, as a realm in which he will show himself, without either merging with it, or annihilating it. Far from disdainning it, he pours himself out within it to redeem it. And this is where we see him: in creation, in the redemptive covenant of grace with Israel and the Church as set forth in Holy Scripture, and above all else, in the Lord Jesus Christ. If granted faith, we see and are transformed by the everlasting beauty of this infinitely glorious God. For all the difference between uncreated Being and created being, and for all the distance between infinity and finitude, God has made a place for us so that what the apostle said to the pagans in first century Greece – from their own poetry – must be said of us all: 'For in him, we live, and move, and have our being' (Acts 17:28).⁷¹

But to grasp, in whatever degree, the beauty and glory of the Lord in the created order, in the language of men and in the humanity of Christ, it is necessary to work in terms of *analogy*. That is because the creation is not the Creator, therefore, in order to know him, we have to look through the created order up to him. In other words, when, for example, Psalm 19:1 says, 'The heavens declare the glory of God,' are we to understand that David is saying that the sparkling beauties of the Milky Way are exactly the same as the brightness of the glory of the Being of God? If that be the case, then God himself would be material: perhaps a larger star, or like the theory of the Stoics, a cosmic force of rational, fiery substance, yet still an aspect of the natural realm, and not transcendent to it. But that cannot be right, according to the doctrine of creation given us in Genesis, chapter 1, for his glory was always in action, myriads of ages before the formation of the solar system. And as God himself speaks in Exodus 3:14 to Moses at the burning bush, the 'I AM THAT I AM' depends on nothing outside himself, while everything else directly depends upon him.

Or could it mean that God's glory is so different from that of the stars and galaxies that there is no connection, other than the mere sound of the words? But if that be true, then it would mean nothing to compare these two glories, and hence, we really know nothing of the divine glory when we gaze upon the shining stars in the night sky. If total difference be the case, then why would the writers of Holy Scripture bother to compare God to anything in the created order? It would have absolutely no content.

Or does David mean to say that God's glory is somewhat like that of the beautiful shining stars, but – because he is the creator of them – it could not be exactly the same? That approach certainly seems to be assumed when, in the Psalms, God is compared to a rock, a shepherd, or

⁷⁰ T. F. Torrance, *Incarnation*, 192.

⁷¹ This passage is exegeted in detail in vol. 1 of this series, pp. 140-43.

a hen gathering her chicks under her wings. And this is clearly the case when Christ calls himself 'the door' (John 10:7).

To put it very simply, the history of the doctrine of epistemology (*how knowing is related to being*) indicates three basic approaches to how concepts (or images or visions and prophecies) can convey what they are describing, especially as it comes to what the Bible affirms about the great Creator of all reality. These three different approaches have long been called: (1) *univocal*; (2) *equivocal*, and (3) *analogical*.

(1) **Univocal** (*with one voice*) assumes that the reality being described (or pictured) is essentially of the same being with those seeing or expressing it. God, for instance, is certainly greater than man who seeks to describe him, but still they are 'under' the same general concept of being. This is a sort of monism that holds to an eternal continuity between the divine and the creaturely; it rejects the biblical doctrine of creation out of nothing, which sees a metaphysical gap between the infinite and the finite; a gap which must be reflected in the way creatures speak of the infinite, so that even their best descriptions cannot be *univocal*. That is because the triune God is not a being, along with the beings of finite things and persons. Rather, he is 'I am that I am' (Exod. 3:14): all things depend on him; he depends on nothing; all beings flow from his creative activity, but he always was, is, and ever shall be. This understanding has to lie behind any accurate usage of human language to express who God is, and that is why the *univocal* cannot be the approach assumed in the Scriptures.

(2) **Equivocal** (*with the same sound – but with a completely different meaning*): e.g. such as 'knight' and 'night,' which happen to sound alike, but mean completely different things. This assumes a final agnosticism as concerns who or what the divine may be. It (or he) is held to be so different that words or concepts used to describe him get one nowhere.⁷² The great twentieth century scholar of Gnosticism, Hans Jonas, underlined the agnostic basis of Gnosticism: 'The gnostic God...is the totally different, the other, the unknown...this hidden God is a nihilistic conception: no *nomos* [law] emanates from him, no law for nature and thus none for

72 It seems that much of Gnosticism assumed a type of 'equivocalism,' in the sense that God could not really be known, although so many of their remaining writings are so convoluted, that it is hard to be clear on their epistemology. This equivocalism is the case, for instance, in *The Tripartite Tractate* (I, 5): 'This is the nature of the unbegotten one, which does not touch anything else, nor is it joined (to anything) in the manner of something which is limited. Rather, he possesses this constitution, without having a face or a form, things which are understood through perception, which the incomprehensible one transcends. If he is incomprehensible, then it follows that he is unknowable, that he is the one who is inconceivable by any thought, invisible in any thing, ineffable by any word, untouchable by any hand' (James M. Robinson, Director, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* [Harper & Row Publishers, New York, 1977], 57). Yet, a little later in the same treatise, the Gnostic writer appears to give back (at least partly) what he took away: 'He [also], without falsification, is all of the names.... He it is whom I call the form of the formless, the body of the bodiless, the face of the invisible, the word of [the] unutterable...' (Ibid., 63). But within a few more lines, the writer is clearly back into the agnostic (equivocal position): 'He is neither divided as a body, nor split up into the names which he has. He is now this, now something else, with each item being different. Yet he is entirely and completely himself...' (Ibid.). It would be difficult to give any content to these dialectical games, which are based on the denial of a clear revelation from God as to who he is.

human action as a part of the natural order.⁷³

Similarly, Bishop Demetrios Trakatellis shows in *The Transcendent God of Eugnostos* that the Gnostic god presented by Eugnostos 'has no name' (*Eugnostos* 71, 24-72, 6).⁷⁴ Trakatellis further notes that, 'In the *Apocryphon of John*, for instance, the author contends that the supreme God is unnameable because there is no one who existed, before him in order to name him' (*Apocryphon of John II*, 1:3, 16-17).⁷⁵ In other words, if God is unnameable, anything we say about him is equivocal.

Any reading of Holy Scripture will indicate, even to a child's mind, that this 'equivocal' approach is **not** the one used by the inspired writers of Holy Scripture. Isaiah's 'Thus saith the Lord' involves a particular content with true information about what the transcendent God is announcing through his prophet to his needy creatures in the finite realm. For example, what God calls 'sin' is not so different from what seventh century B. C. Israelites knew to be sin, that there is no similar meaning. The threatened judgments are based on the fact that the sinful people knew precisely what God was telling them through the prophet. It was not an equivocal message, for in that case, they could not have been fairly brought into judgment. Or, to go back to Psalm 19:1, David definitely thinks that the beauty of the stars in the evening sky do tell us something important about who God is, and so, he cannot have been speaking in an *equivocal* way.

(3) Analogical (*it is alike in some ways, and different in some ways*).⁷⁶ The great theologians, such as St. Thomas Aquinas, have explored analogy in careful detail (see *Summa Theologiae* I.13.3-5). Thomas considers analogy to be 'the application of a concept to different beings in ways that are simply diverse from each other and are only the same in a certain respect, *simpliciter diversa et eadem secundum quid*,' as E. L. Mascall states it.⁷⁷

St. Thomas distinguishes between analogy *duorum ad tertium* and analogy *unius ad alterum* (in *Summa Theologiae* I.xiii.5c and *Summa Contra Gentiles* I.xxxiv). Analogy *duorum ad tertium* does not really work for correct speech about God, for as Mascall points out, this would be 'attributing the same predicate to God and to a creature, [but] there is no being antecedent to God to whom the predicate can apply more formally and properly than it applies to him.'⁷⁸ Therefore, the alternative is the right one: *unius ad alterum*. This 'is founded not upon diverse relations which each of the analogates bears to a third, but upon a relation which one of them bears to

⁷³ Hans Jonas, *The Message of the Alien God & The Beginnings of Christianity: The Gnostic Religion*, Third Edition (Beacon Press: Boston, MA, 2001), 332.

⁷⁴ Demetrios Trakatellis, *The Transcendent God of Eugnostos: An Exegetical Contribution to the Study of the Gnostic Texts of Nag Hammadi With a Retroversion of the Lost Original Greek Text of Eugnostos the Blessed*, Translated by Charles Sarelis (Holy Cross Orthodox Press: Brookline, MA), 1991, p. 42.

⁷⁵ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 44.

⁷⁶ See the helpful discussion of analogy in D. B. Hart, op. cit., 62, 72, 234-35, 247, etc.

⁷⁷ E. L. Mascall, *Existence and Analogy* (Libra Books, Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd.: Norwich, 1966), 100.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.

the other.⁷⁹ He continues:

In this case the predicate belongs formally and properly to one of the analogates (which is thus not merely *an* analogate but is the *prime* analogate), and only relatively and derivatively to the other...In its theological application, where the analogates concerned are God and a creature, the relation upon which the analogy is based will be that of creaturely causality; creatures are related to God as to his effects...the perfections which are found formally in various finite modes in creatures exist *virtually* in God, that is to say, that he is able to produce them in his creatures...⁸⁰

St. Thomas notes that the analogies given to creatures are ‘proportional’ to God’s perfect knowledge of himself in the Logos, and the Logos enlightens us creatures who bear God’s image.⁸¹ By that means, we can share in God’s knowledge of himself, *analogically*. That is, we do not know the substance of God; our finite knowledge cannot be sufficient to grasp his infinite Being. Yet he has given us metaphors or analogies by which we may truly, though never exhaustively, grasp him (such as Shepherd, Rock, and Light). God is like our fathers and shepherds; he is like mighty rocks and beautiful luminaries, but he is also different, with an infinite difference. God transcends these analogies, but gives them so that we may truly grasp who he is, insofar as is appropriate for creatures. John Calvin called this process of God’s stooping low to help us understand who the infinitely great One is, God’s merciful ‘accommodation’ to our human weakness. He compared it to a nurse prattling over the crib of a baby. What God says in Scripture, or what he shows in nature, is not the measure of his all-surpassing greatness, yet these things are truly connected to who he is.⁸²

The prime analogy

Ephesians 3:14, 15 speaks of ‘the Father...of whom the whole family in heaven and on earth is named...’ This means that human parenthood and children in some sense participate in a crucial aspect of the trinitarian life. That is surely the prime *analogy*, from which all other analogies given in creation by means of the Logos are finally rooted.

Bavinck states this point clearly:

Since here on earth we walk by faith and not by sight we have only an analogical and proportional knowledge of God. We do not have a ‘direct or proper idea’ of God, but ‘an indirect or derived idea,’ an idea which is derived from the creaturely realm, but which, though inadequate, is not untrue, in as much as the creature is *God’s creature* and hence reveals something of

79 Ibid.

80 Ibid., 102.

81 Hans Urs Von Balthasar states that ‘This is the more true when the realm of the archetypes – the world of ideas, which is the *Logos* of God – becomes man and along with the archetype of man, represents in himself the archetype of the entire cosmos as well’ (*The Glory of the Lord – I – Seeing the Form*, 220).

82 John Calvin, *Institutes*, I. xiii.1.

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his excellencies.... In its epistemology Scripture, which is theological from beginning to end and derives everything from God, in spite of this fact, rather because of it, ascends to God *from the plane of the universe*, Isa. 40:26; Rom. 1:20. Just because everything is *from* God, everything points back to God.⁸³

Hence, the Fatherhood and Sonship of God, the glory and beauty of his being and works, are to be discerned *analogically*. That is the constant assumption of the Scriptures, and thereby we know God in truth, but not in infinite fulness. The distance of his infinity always makes room for the reality of our finite experience of him; his distance and difference from us is therefore good news, not bad news.⁸⁴

The prime analogy, given us in the Son who is the Logos (cf. John 1:1-8), is the divinely offered way for us mortals to participate in the immortal glory and beauty of the self-giving of the triune God (2 Pet. 1:4). This is exhibited in Christ's highly priestly prayer in John 17: 'I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world; thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word...'; 'And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them...'; 'And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one...' (John 17:6, 10, 22).

How do we reach the Triune Beauty?

Our access to the beauty of the triune God is only through the incarnate Son. Von Balthasar explains: 'The conclusion to be drawn from all this is that, just as we can never attain to the living God in any way except through his Son become man, but in this Son we can really attain to God in himself, so too, we ought never to speak of God's beauty without reference to the form and manner of appearing which he exhibits in salvation history.'⁸⁵

In the words of Jonathan Edwards:

By this sense of the moral beauty of divine things, is understood the sufficiency of Christ as a mediator; for 'tis only by the discovery of the beauty of the moral perfection of Christ, that the believer is let into the knowledge of the excellency of his person, so as to know anything more of it than the devils do: and 'tis only by the knowledge of the excellency of Christ's person, that any know his sufficiency as a mediator.⁸⁶

This prepares us to think of what Christ, the Father's eternal Son, has brought to us sinful humans in his incarnate person and saving work as Messiah of Israel and Saviour of the world. He has come down to share

⁸³ H. Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, 134.

⁸⁴ Etienne Gilson summarizes the centrality of analogy in *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*: 'In a Christian universe, in which beings are created by Being, every creature is a good and an analogue of the Good. At the root of all this order of relations there lies, therefore, a fundamental relation of analogy which rules every derived relation subsequently set up between creature and Creator' (p. 285).

⁸⁵ Von Balthasar, *op. cit.*, 124.

⁸⁶ Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, ed. John E. Smith (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1959), 125-26.

with us his knowledge of the Father in the Holy Spirit.

III. When Christ Comes Down to us, He brings the Beauty of the Trinity with Him

This is where Christology is rooted: the Father gifts the Son with a world and a bride (the church); the Spirit perfects the creation of the world and the creation of the bride, and the Son gives back these divine gifts to the Father in the fellowship of the Spirit. That is the life of the Holy Trinity: loving, giving and receiving, and giving back the precious gift in infinite love. The world and church, in their appropriate ways, are informed by the Logos, who from the eternal heart of the Father forms and enlightens all of which he is the agent both of creation and of redemption (John 1:3-5, 9). 'The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us' (John 1:14) so that the glory he always had with the Father might be manifested to us (John 17:5-6). In manifesting the divine glory in himself, he causes his people to realize that the glory came from the Father (John 17:7-8), and in the process of sharing in the Son's knowledge of the Father, the people of God are united to the Father through the Son (John 17:21), so that they too share in that glorious beauty of life with God (John 17:22).

What a zeal the Son had for his Father's glory, and what a zeal the Father had for his Son's glory! We see this zeal in the Gospel of John at a major turning point in Christ's ministry, when, on Palm Sunday, he is facing being glorified in death. Jesus prays: 'Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. Then there came a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again' (John 12:27-28). It is as though we are overhearing the voices of the economical Trinity saying the same thing as they did (and do) in the ontological Trinity: each Person is determined to glorify the other!

The zeal of Father and Son to glorify one another is the same when Christ goes out into the night at the conclusion of the Last Supper: 'Therefore, when he was gone out, Jesus said, "Now" is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him' (John 13:31-32). But ages before the Passion week, the Father had shaped the entire created order in the interests of the cosmic headship of his eternal Son, who would be both agent of creation (John 1:3), and then its agent of redemption, as the Apostle Paul writes:

Giving thanks unto the Father...who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and

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by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead: that in all things he might have the pre-eminence (Col. 1:12-18).

The beauty of the Lord in the Book of Revelation

The Book of Revelation takes an overview of the history and meaning of the creation, and in so doing, it focuses attention on Christ, from beginning to end. In the first three chapters of the Apocalypse, the risen Christ is the center of the Church. In chapter four, he is the center of the activity and purposes of the Throne of God in glory. In chapter five, he is the one who opens the Lamb's book of life, in which are the predestinated purposes of God, including the salvation of all the elect. In Chapters six to nineteen, 'the King of saints' (Rev. 15:3) is orchestrating all that happens within the nations, from his resurrection to his return. In chapter 20, he is in charge of all the details of 'the first resurrection' (that period – also known as 'the millennium', when multitudes from the Gentile nations pass from death to spiritual life, by faith in the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus. This period takes place between the first and second comings of Christ). In chapters twenty and twenty-one, the Lamb is the center of eternal glory, which he shares with all his people forevermore.

Revelation often shows how the glory that flows over from one Person of the blessed Trinity to the others, also finally encapsulates the people of God. For instance, 'the four and twenty elders' (representing Old Testament Israel and New Testament Church) join the four living heavenly creatures as they give '...glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, The four and twenty elders fall down before him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things and for thy pleasure they are and were created' (Rev. 4:9-11). They came to see the glory, and it functioned, as it were, as the agent that made them Christians, as they beheld the Father's glory in the face of Jesus: 'But we all with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed unto the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord' (II Cor. 3:18).

At the end of space/time history, we shall see, with the heavenly creatures and the saints of all ages above, that every aspect of creation has pointed to Christ's glory, and that he turns it all back to the glory of Father and Spirit. It is the same with the written Word, which has been given by Father, Son and Holy Spirit: every part of it one way or another points to the same divine trinitarian glory. From the Old Testament prophets all through the New Testament, the glory that Christ should achieve through his sufferings has been set forth, as Peter tells us:

Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us, they did

minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into (I Peter 1:10-12).

The necessity of sensibility

As the Holy Scriptures in their detailed ways lead us up to Christ, so from the other direction, we may say, with St. Jerome, that 'Christ is the key to the Scriptures'.⁸⁷ That is, the Old and New Testaments lead us to Christ, and then, with faith in Christ, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit poured out on the Church, we can make sense of the Scriptures, which would otherwise be closed. And with that in mind, we seek together the face of the Lord through the Word and Spirit; that is, it is only in union with Christ that we know Christ and understand his words. Union with Christ (which brings us into his knowledge of the Father) comes about with regeneration. Regeneration gives us the ability to perceive who God is.

It is a strong emphasis in Edwards' teaching on beauty that 'sensibility' is necessary in humans in order to see the beauty of God's Being, and then to receive it. It takes the New Birth in order to grasp it and to be grasped, and transformed by it: 'The first effect of the power of God in the heart in REGENERATION is to give the heart a divine taste or sense; to cause it to have a relish of the loveliness and sweetness of the supreme excellency of the Divine nature...'⁸⁸ Elsewhere he explains:

Spiritual understanding primarily consists in this sense, or taste of the moral beauty of divine things; so that no knowledge can be called spiritual, any further than it arises from this, and has this in it. But secondarily, it includes all that discerning and knowledge of things of religion, which depends upon and flows from such a sense. When the true beauty, and amiableness of the holiness or true moral good that is in divine things, is discovered to the soul, it as it were opens a new world to its view.⁸⁹

This saving insight granted to believers, is a result of their graciously granted union with Christ in his humanity, which was baptized in the same Spirit that he communicates to his church. Commenting on a statement in Athanasius' Third Festal Letter, 'We will become partakers of Christ if we hold fast to the Spirit' (3.4), Khaled Anatolios writes: '...the incarnate Word enables us to receive the Spirit through his own reception of the Spirit in his humanity. Through the correlated activity of Son and Spirit, we become "worded" and "sons" in the Son and thus are incorporated into the Son's stance of self-offering to the Father.'⁹⁰

In his *Charity and Its Fruits*, Edwards shows that the difference between

⁸⁷ Jerome takes the passage in Revelation 5, where only the Lamb can take the saving action to open the Book of Life, and applies it in an unusual way. He says that only Christ can enable us to understand the Scriptures (cf. *In Is.* 29, 11 (332A)). See Pierre Jay, *L'Exégèse de Saint Jerome d'Après son 'Commentaire sur Isaie'* (Etudes Augustiniennes: Paris, 1985), 388.

⁸⁸ Jonathan Edwards, 'A Treatise on Grace,' in *Selections from the Unpublished Writings of Jonathan Edwards of America*, ed. A. B. Grosart (Edinburgh, 1865), quoted in Delattre, op. cit., 4.

⁸⁹ J. Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 273.

⁹⁰ Khaled Anatolios, *The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine: Retrieving Nicea* (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, MI, 2011), 148.

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'the faith' of devils and that of true believers is that demons see only God's greatness, wisdom, and omnipotence, '...yet they see and feel nothing of his loveliness.'⁹¹ No doubt, Edwards is thinking of James 2:19: '... the devils also believe, and tremble.' But in the miracle of regeneration: 'It is this sight of the divine beauty of Christ that bows the will and draws the hearts of men.'⁹² This is another way of expressing the teaching of Christ to Nicodemus: '...Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God' (John 3:3). But once you see it, you wish to invite the world (in the words of David): 'O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him' (Psalm 34:8). That is the prayer with which this second volume is written, and it is the spirit in which Joseph Conder (1789-1855) composed this hymn:

Thou art the Everlasting Word,
The Father's only Son;
God manifestly seen and heard,
And heaven's beloved One!

In Thee most perfectly expressed,
The Father's glories shine:
Of the full Deity possessed,
Eternally divine.

True image of the Infinite,
Whose essence is concealed;
Brightness of uncreated light.
The heart of God revealed:

But the high mysteries of Thy Name
An angel's grasp transcend:
The Father only – glorious claim! –
The Son can comprehend:

Throughout the universe of bliss
The centre Thou and sun,
The eternal theme of praise is this,
To heaven's beloved One:

*Worthy, O Lamb of God, art Thou,
That every knee to Thee should bow!*

Therefore, in the next section (our first chapter) we study how Old and New Testaments witness to Christ, including the giving of his names and titles, in preparation for the setting forth of his Person and work. As the Lord has taken every detail into account in ordering all aspects of creation to speak of his Son, so must we seek to examine, in our necessarily limited way, the details – minor and major – concerning the Bible's witness to who Christ is. The same God who ordered creation to point above all else

⁹¹ Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits*, 135.

⁹² J. Edwards, 'True Grace,' *Works*, 4, 469-70, quoted in Delattre, op. cit., 205.

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to Christ in his beauty, also gave his inspired Word in such a way that all of its varied, and yet harmonious parts, set forth Christ, as Jesus himself stated: 'Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me (John 5:39).

Throughout the New Testament witness, we shall always be meeting the blessed Trinity, for as Jonathan Edwards said: 'God is glorified within Himself these two ways: 1. By appearing or being manifest to Himself in His own perfect idea, or in His Son who is the brightness of His glory. 2. By enjoying and delighting in Himself, by flowing forth in infinite love and delight towards Himself, or in His Holy Spirit. [Misc. 448].⁹³

Who the Triune God is, in himself, and then towards us, is the truest expression of all beauty. This vision of a Christ who comes forth to us from the beautiful and beatific life of the Trinity, and lifts us up to share in it by divine grace, has motivated the writing of this volume. And if several of the Church Fathers and Reformers were right, prophetic foreshadowings of that vision can be traced in a number of the Messianic Psalms. One of them, Psalm 45, foresaw the coming of the beautiful Saviour from the heart of God, so as to take us back up to him:

Thou'rt fairest of all men;
Grace in thy lips doth flow:
And therefore blessings evermore
on thee doth God bestow.

Of myrrh and spices sweet
a smell thy garments had,
Out of the iv'ry palaces,
whereby they made thee glad.

They shall be brought with joy,
and mirth on every side,
Into the palace of the King,
and there they shall abide.⁹⁴

⁹³ Delattre, op. cit, 155.

⁹⁴ Psalm 45:2,8,15, from *The Scottish Metrical Psalter*.