In the fall of 1539, John Calvin responded to Cardinal Jacopo Sadoletto’s *Epistola ad senatum populemque Genevensem* (1539) at the behest of the Genevan City Council. Sadoletto was a reform-minded humanist who served on Pope Paul III’s commission for reform beginning in 1536, and he was instrumental in writing the *Consilium de emendanda Ecclesia* with Cardinal Contarini. In his open letter to the Genevan City Council, Sadoletto encourages the citizens of the city to remain part of the Catholic Church, while simultaneously acknowledging the need for ecclesiastical reform. Sadoletto’s letter and Calvin’s response are classic texts in the history of the sixteenth-century Reformation, as it is in Calvin’s *Responsio ad Sadoleti Epistolam* (1540) where he puts forth his clearest explication of Church history—in particular narrating the relationship between the Reformers and the Patristic period. Calvin writes, “you know, Sadoletto…not only that our agreement with antiquity is far closer than yours, but that all we have attempted has been to renew that ancient form of the church”.

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2 CO 5, p. 394: “Scis hoc, Sadoleto, et, si infitiari pergis, faciam ut te scivisse ac cal-lide vafreque dissimulasse omnes intelligent: non modo longe meliorem nobis cum antiquitate consensionem esse quam vobis, sed nihil aliud conari quam ut instauretur aliquando vetusta illa ecclesiae facies, quae primo ab hominibus indoctis, et non opti-mis, deformata et foedata, postea a pontifice romano et eius factione flagitirose lacerata et prope deleta est”. Calvin, as the Latin text makes clear, strongly criticizes the Roman
Calvin goes on in his Reply to define the “ancient form of the Church” he has in mind and what constitutes “agreement”. The ancient Church is defined by Calvin not as the apostolic era, but that “ancient form of the Church” evident in the writings of Chrysostom and Basil among the Greeks, and Cyprian, Ambrose and Augustine among the Latins.\(^3\) Further, Calvin argues that he is in agreement with the “fountainhead” of the Church—\(^4\) the fourth and fifth centuries—with respect to doctrine, discipline, sacraments and ceremonies.\(^5\) The continuity argument presented here is perhaps strongest in Calvin’s Reply to Sadoleto in 1540, but an abbreviated form of the argument is evident as early as his Dedicatory Epistle to King Francis at the introduction of the 1536 Institutes.\(^6\)

In August of 1535, Calvin wrote a prefatory address to King Francis as an apologia for Reformation theology, particularly emphasizing his agreement with the fathers. Calvin’s argument anticipates the Reply to Sadoleto,\(^7\) but Calvin also includes the charge that the fathers were Church and the Pope. The translation is taken from J. C. Olin, A Reformation Debate: Sadoleto’s Letter to the Genevans and Calvin’s Reply, New York 1966, p. 62.

\(^3\) Cf. CO 5, p. 394: “Sed ut eatenus tibi indulgeam, statue, queso, tibi ob oculos veterem illam ecclesiae faciem, qualem Chrysostomi et Basili et aetate apud Graecos, Cypriani, Ambrosii, Augustini saeculo apud Latinos exstitisse, ipsorum monumenta fidei faciunt: postea ruinas, quae apud vos ex illa supersunt, contemplare”.

\(^4\) Calvin explicitly refers to the fourth and fifth centuries as a font (\textit{fons}), and, Calvin here is using the term font not simply as a source, or origin, but in the sense mentioned by H. G. Gadamer. Gadamer argues that “as a philological term the concept of fons was first introduced in the age of humanism, but there it does not primarily refer to the concept that was known from the study of sources; rather, the maxim \textit{‘ad fontes,’} the return of the sources, is to be understood as a reference to the original undistorted truth of the classical authors” (id., \textit{Truth and Method}, translated by J. Weinsheimer / D. G. Marshall, New York \textcopyright 1999, p. 502). Calvin understood the patristic fathers to be a source of truth, not simply a source or origin.

\(^5\) The bulk of Calvin’s argument is a demonstration of how the Reformation churches are in agreement with the fourth- and fifth-century churches regarding these four aspects.

\(^6\) On this issue, one should also see Calvin’s Commentary on Seneca (1532), the \textit{Psychopannychia} (1534), and the “Preface” to the Neuchâtel Bible (1535). All of these texts contain some interaction with the church fathers, although they do not appeal to the same narrative of continuity that is expressed in the Dedicatory Epistle to King Francis and the Reply to Sadoleto.

\(^7\) Cf. CO 1, Braunschweig 1863 (\textit{Corpus reformatorum} 29), p. 16: “Praeterea calumniose nobis Patres opponunt (antiquos et melioris adhuc saeculi scriptores intelligo) ac si eos haberent suae impietatis suffragatores, quorum autoritate si dirimendum certamen esset, melior victoriae pars ad nos inclinaret”.

as “anti-speculative” as the Reformers. The claim here is specifically aimed at the “scholastic subtleties” of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, a concern of both Luther and Calvin. Interestingly, Calvin surmises, “if the fathers were now brought back to life, and heard such brawling art as these persons call speculative theology, there is nothing they would less suppose than that these folk were disputing about God!” As early as 1535–40 John Calvin, the Parisian trained humanist and rhetorically gifted theologian, crafts his own meta-history and offers a compelling theological interpretation of the first 1500 years of the Church. The message of Calvin is quite simple: theologically and historically his own thought and that of the burgeoning Reformation is in greater continuity with the theology of the fathers than that of the early sixteenth-century Catholic Church.

The influence of Calvin’s historical interpretation of Christian doctrine is both broad and deep, and Protestant historiography in many ways remains problematically grounded in an “agreement with ante-Nicene/Nicene/post-Nicene” narrative. This historiographical question cannot be discussed in detail here, other than to note that

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8 Cf. ibid., p. 19: “Patres omnes uno pectore execrati sunt, et uno ore detestati sanctum Dei verbum sophistarum argutiis contaminari, et dialecticorum rixis implicari”.

9 Ibid.: “[...] ut si nunc patres suscitentur, et huius modi iurgandi artem audiant (quam speculativam theologiam appellant) nihil minus credant, quam de Deo haberi disputationem?”


11 Cf. A. N. S. Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers*, Grand Rapids (Mich.) 1999, p. 54. Lane argues that “Calvin’s use of the fathers was a masterly sixteenth-century attempt to relate Protestantism to historic Christianity: to trace many of its doctrines to the Early Church and to show how Roman error had arisen. His case, as it stands, is not adequate for today. In the first place, modern historical study of the Early Church has made us more aware of the differences between the sixteenth-century Reformers and the fathers, even between Calvin and his beloved Augustine. Secondly, Calvin operated with an essentially static concept of doctrine where we, living in a post-Newmanian age, see doctrine more in terms of development and other such dynamic concepts”.

12 A recent edition of the *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* dedicated a “Themenwespunkt” to “Post-Confessional Reformation History” and discussed some of the historiographical trends relevant to the present discussion. Cf. the articles by: P. Benedict, “What is Post-Confessional Reformation History?”; S. Hendrix, “Post-Confessional Research and Confessional Commitment”; L. Roper, “Allegiance and
it has had a lasting influence on Calvin scholarship. This predominant historiographical lens has dominated the question that is at the heart of the present essay—regarding the nature of Calvin’s trinitarian theology—and locates Calvin either within a Greek (Cappadocian: Basil the Great, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa) or Latin (Augustine) trinitarian framework. Further, this framework is chronologically limited to the fourth and fifth centuries; the literature is not making arguments regarding a “broadly patristic framework” as transmitted through Anselm, Richard of St. Victor or John Duns Scotus, but it claims that Calvin was Augustinian, Nazianzen or Nyssen, per se. The result is a frustrating lack of engagement with the medieval sources that Calvin did know and with which he engaged throughout his life.

In one of his final essays, the late Heiko Oberman explicas this general problem, stating that “Calvin specialists not only believed they could do with even less knowledge of the Middle Ages than was needed for Luther and Erasmus but failed to appreciate how catholic Calvin was, viewing him too exclusively as a humanistic interpreter of the Bible and too little as one engaged in dialogue with the patres and doctores of the confessing church of all ages”. Oberman’s plea, as he continues his argument, encourages Calvin scholars to pursue not only the patristic and medieval influences on Calvin in general, but specifically the relationship between the great John Duns Scotus and John Calvin, as significant theological parallels

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14 The present claim is limited to Calvin’s trinitarian doctrine, although it should be noted that there has been extensive research on the relationship between John Calvin and John Duns Scotus in particular. The argument that Duns Scotus influenced the Genevan reformer can be divided into two historical waves: the first wave lasted from the late nineteenth century through the 1950’s, and the second was grounded in the work of K. Reuter. The first wave is discussed positively by Wandel (Calvin: Origin and Development (cf. n. 10), pp. 126–131, esp. n. 46), who also cites the work of H. Bois, W. Walker and R. Seeberg. But, as Wandel notes, this first wave of scholarship can probably be traced back as early as A. Ritschl’s “Geschichtliche Sudien zur christlichen Lehre von Gott”, in: Gesammelte Aufsätze: Neue Folge, Freiburg 1896, pp. 25–176. Despite the counter-arguments by A. Lecerf, Wandel remained optimistic about historians tracing out further the lines of influence between Duns Scotus (Scotism) and John Calvin. The second wave of scholarship is encapsulated in the “Reuter thesis”, in which Reuter argued that while at the Collège de Montaigu Calvin studied under the famous Scottish theologian John Mair (Major) and, in particular, acquired knowledge
remain to be discovered,\textsuperscript{15} despite the frustrating lack of citation on Calvin’s part.

The present work argues that despite Calvin’s constant dialogue with both ante-Nicene and post-Nicene fathers, certain aspects of his trinitarian thought as early as the 1536 *Institutes* betray his medieval sources. The argument will proceed by first explicating the various trends in scholarship, which see Calvin’s trinitarian doctrine as either fundamentally Western (Augustinian) or Eastern (Cappadocian). The argument will be made that neither claim has sufficient justification in Calvin’s text, particularly because much theological ground had been traversed between the fourth and the sixteenth centuries. The second section of the paper will briefly describe John Duns Scotus’ account of the distinction of persons by absolute properties, noting the divergence between Scotus and the earlier patristic and medieval tradition. The argument here will follow closely the recent work of Russell Friedman and his narration of trinitarian developments in the late thirteenth and first half of the fourteenth centuries. Finally, the paper will conclude with an analysis of Calvin’s trinitarian theology in the 1536 *Institutes*, examining how the persons of the Trinity are distinct.

\textsuperscript{15} Regarding the relationship between Scotus and reformation theology the recent work of D. Bolliger, *Infiniti Contemplatio: Grundzüge der Scotus- und Scotismus-rezeption im Werk Huldrych Zwinglis*, Leiden-Boston 2003 (Studies in the history of Christian thought 107), is a compelling demonstration of the influence of Scotus on Zwingli. In particular, Bolliger traces the influence of Duns Scotus’ trinitarian theology on the reformation thought of Luther and Zwingli.
John Calvin had an extensive knowledge of the patristic tradition as is already evident in his earliest works, and his familiarity with their writings increased throughout his lifetime. In particular, Calvin demonstrates a detailed understanding of ante-Nicene and post-Nicene trinitarian theology, and he relied on this knowledge when debating with Cardinal Sadoleto about the continuity of the reformation churches with the patristic tradition. Calvin’s extensive knowledge of the fathers, and the lack of citations from high or late medieval authors throughout his corpus, has led those searching for the roots of Calvin’s trinitarian doctrine to the patristic era, and specifically to the trinitarian doctrine that developed in the fourth and fifth centuries through the writings of the Cappadocian fathers and Augustine. This is notable as it is neither the Cappadocians nor Augustine whose trinitarian doctrine Calvin cited the most frequently—and arguably knew the best—from the patristic period. In his extensive arguments with Pierre Caroli († ca. 1545) and Michael Servetus († 1553), Calvin most significantly engages with the ante-Nicenes (Tertullian/Irenaeus), motivated by


Servetus’ claim that the doctrine of God was corrupted at Nicaea (325) through the development of trinitarian doctrine. Regardless, it is not the trinitarian doctrine of Irenaeus or Tertullian that scholars have argued is a source of Calvin’s doctrine of God, but the later authors of the fourth and fifth century—some of the same fourth century authors Calvin explicitly cites in his reply to Sadoleto.\(^\text{18}\)

The present discussion will consider briefly the arguments in favor of either an Augustinian or a Cappadocian influence on Calvin’s trinitarian theology as explicated in the works of Benjamin Warfield,\(^\text{19}\) Paul Helm\(^\text{20}\) and Thomas Torrance.\(^\text{21}\) Warfield and Helm argue for predominately Augustinian influence, while Torrance favors Gregory

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\(^\text{18}\) The “continuity argument” is offered—predominately by modern theologians/systematicians—despite the insistence of scholars such as I. Backus who argues that, “as with his doctrine of the Church, Calvin’s doctrine of the Trinity does not depend on the fathers. His main concern is to show the reader that the doctrine has a sound biblical basis. The fathers who are cited are cited for the terminology they provide, for the complements they bring to the biblical text and finally as allies from the past, the most striking instance being Gregory of Nazianzus who is portrayed as sharing Calvin’s uncertainty about how to talk about the Trinity. While it is certain that Calvin could not and would not have conceived elaborating his doctrine of the Trinity in the Institutes without taking Nicene teaching into account, he makes very sure that he grounds the Nicene teaching in the Biblical text. Secondly, he refers to Greek (Gregory of Nazianzus and Cyril) and Latin (Augustine) fathers in one and the same breath and does not distinguish two corpora […]” (Historical Method (cf. n. 16), pp. 110 sq.). A similar argument is made by R. A. Muller, Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Triunity of God (The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725), 4 vols., Grand Rapids (Mich.) 2003, pp. 71 sqq. Neither Muller nor Backus find sufficient justification for considering Calvin’s trinitarian theology either Augustinian or Cappadocian. While I agree with Backus and Muller regarding Calvin’s use of the fathers in his trinitarian doctrine, I disagree with Backus about the implication that Calvin simply deduced it from Scripture. While Scripture was central in Calvin’s theology, I think Backus here is underestimating the role of the medieval tradition in Calvin’s thought.

\(^\text{19}\) Cf. B. Warfield, “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Trinity”, in: S. Craig (ed.), Calvin in Augustine, Philadelphia 1974, pp. 189–284. Muller correctly notes (Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics (cf. n. 18), p. 24) that the work of Warfield and Torrance remain the most significant studies of Calvin’s trinitarian thought, although he is critical of both.


of Nazianzus; interestingly, both arguments for continuity locate the influence in the distinction of persons.

Warfield argues with respect to Calvin that, “if distinctions must be drawn, he is unmistakably Western rather than Eastern in his conception of the doctrine, an Augustinian rather than an Athanasian”.

Further, Warfield notes that Calvin is Augustinian specifically regarding the distinction of persons, a tool that is used to “protect” the divinity of Christ. Warfield argues for an Augustinian influence of the divine relations on Calvin, as it is with respect to the divine relations that the distinction between the Father and Son constitutes “equalization rather than subordination”. The divinity of Christ is protected, according to Warfield, through the “equalization” of persons constituted by the divine relations—a doctrine that Warfield finds grounded in Augustine.

The more recent argument of Paul Helm is similar to that of Warfield, in that Helm argues for the primacy of Augustinian influence with respect to the distinction of persons. After considering a passage from book seven of Augustine’s *De Trinitate*, Helm argues that Calvin follows Augustine closely in his account of how the term person functions in trinitarian language to denote a “rather mysterious relational property”. This relational property allows for Calvin to claim a “dif-

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22 B. Warfield, “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Trinity” (cf. n. 19), p. 229. Aside from the obvious problem with the strict dichotomy between Eastern and Western trinitarian theologies, it remains somewhat unclear what Augustinian primacy, over and against Athanasius, would mean in this respect.

23 Ibid., pp. 273–284.

24 Ibid., pp. 229 sq.: “That is to say, the principle of his construction of the Trinitarian distinctions is equalization rather than subordination. He [Calvin] does, indeed, still speak in the old language of refined subordinationism which had been fixed in the Church by the Nicene formulas; and he expressly allows an ‘order’ of first, second and third in the Trinitarian relations. But he conceives more clearly and applies more purely than had ever previously been done the principle of equalization in his thought of the relation of the Persons to one another, and thereby, as we have already hinted, marks an epoch in the history of the doctrine of the Trinity”. Warfield here sees an Augustinian equality of persons, over and against the emphasis of the primity of the Father that is found throughout much Eastern theology. For an explication of the primity of the Father, cf. J. Behr, *The Nicene Faith: Formation of Christian Theology*, 2 vols., Crestwood (N.Y.) 2004, pp. 305–318 and 360–370.

25 In his discussion of “Calvin’s sources”—one that looks only at the Cappadocians and Augustine—Helm (*John Calvin’s Ideas* (cf. n. 20), pp. 50–52) concludes, “it is therefore not unreasonable to suppose that Calvin’s views on the Trinity were strongly influenced by Augustine”. Although, citing the work of A. N. S. Lane (cf. n. 11), Helm is more cautious than others on this point.

26 P. Helm, *John Calvin’s Ideas* (cf. n. 11), p. 38.
ferentiation by a ‘peculiar quality’ (sed proprietate quadem [sic!] esse distinctos), such that there are properties each person possesses that distinguish it from the other two. Calvin’s argument that the persons are distinct by a “peculiar quality” will be discussed in more detail below, but what is significant for the present argument is that Helm finds this language ultimately grounded in Augustine’s De Trinitate. Further, and this will be contested below, Helm argues that the properties that distinguish the persons are “relational”; that the properties in question are the traditional relational properties such that the Father and Son are distinct because of paternity and filiation.

The work of T. F. Torrance is distinct from that of Warfield and Helm in that Torrance claims Calvin is indebted to the Cappadocians fathers, particularly the thought of Gregory Nazianzus. Torrance bases his argument on several pieces of evidence: 1) the distinction of persons by the divine relations; 2) a particular quotation from Calvin supporting Gregory’s doctrine of the Trinity, and 3) the nickname...

27 Ibid. For the passage in question, cf. infra, n. 85.
28 One problem that arises with Helm’s argument is that Calvin’s language of properties or qualities is not Augustinian in any strict sense. Augustine does employ the term proprietas/proprietatis throughout De Trinitate (cf. III, c. 11, n. 27; IV, c. 20, n. 29; IX, c. 1, n. 1; XV, c. 16, n. 25), but in none of the cases is it used to refer to a property that distinguishes the persons in a non-relational sense. As will be argued below, Augustine understood the relevant properties to be strictly relational, whereas Calvin did not.
29 An interesting variation of Torrance is James Mackey, who argues that Calvin is closer to Gregory of Nyssa than Gregory Nazianzus; cf. J. Mackey, The Christian Experience of God as Trinity, London, 1983, pp. 191–195. A variation of Mackey’s argument can also be found in C. Schwöbel, “The Triune God of Grace: The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Theology of the Reformers”, in: J. M. Byrne (ed.), The Christian Understanding of God Today, Dublin 1993, pp. 49–63. Schwöbel argues that a Cappadocian influence is evident “where he attributes to the Father the beginning of all effects, the fount and origin of all things, the Son as the wisdom, the counsel and the distribution of all divine works and the Holy Spirit as the power and efficacy in all divine actions” (p. 51).
30 Cf. T. F. Torrance, “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Trinity” (cf. n. 21), pp. 176–180. Regarding this claim, a few points must be noted. First, Calvin does not emphasize the distinction of persons by relation (relatio) to the extent that Torrance claims. Second, while Gregory Nazianzus does distinguish the persons by relation (σχέσις) in the Theological Orations (cf. XXVIII, 22 and 26; XIX, 5 and 16; XXXI, 7 and 9), Augustine makes an almost identical claim—which is much more developed—in books V–VII of De Trinitate. Cf. A. J. Mason (ed.), The Five Theological Orations of Gregory of Nazianzus, Cambridge 1899 (Cambridge Patristic Texts).
31 The quotation in question appears in the 1539 and subsequent editions, and is found in the Institutes, Lib. I, c. 13, n. 17, in: CO 2, Branschweig 1864 (Corpus reformatorum 30), p. 10. Calvin cites the passage in Greek; in English it reads, “I cannot think of the One without immediately being surrounded by the radiance of the Three;
“Theologian” given to Calvin by Melanchthon. The latter two claims are unsubstantial, leaving the weight of Torrance’s argument to be the distinction of persons by divine relations. This claim, as with that of Warfield and Helm, locates a theological parallel between Calvin and the alleged patristic antecedent on the subject of the distinction of the persons by relation, and goes on to claim that this is significant evidence of specific influence.

The importance of these arguments is that they demonstrate the tendency in Calvin scholarship to look for narrowly patristic antecedents. Several comments can be made regarding this literature; first, one should note that the arguments supporting the influence of the patristic fathers on Calvin’s trinitarian theology have been soundly criticized by Irena Backus and Richard Muller, although neither Muller nor Backus offers an alternative account, often implying that Calvin’s trinitarian doctrine is deduced from Scripture. While it is easy to agree with Backus and Muller in their critiques of the three positions considered above, the general approach is problematic because it is highly unlikely that Calvin simply “deduced” his trinitarian doctrine from Scripture. Second, these accounts tend to shadow a paradigm uncovered by Michel Barnes and Basil Studer regarding the influence of Théodore de Régnon, particularly through the persistence—given nor can I discern the Three without at once being carried back to the One”. The phrase is interesting, but does not imply that Calvin was “Cappadocian” in his trinitarian thought. Cf. T. F. Torrance, “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Trinity” (cf. n. 21), p. 176.

32 This argument is perhaps Torrance’s most unsatisfying, claiming, “it is hardly surprising, therefore, that Melanchthon should have given to Calvin the designation ‘Theologian’ with which the Greek East had distinguished Gregory Nazianzen as ‘Gregory the Theologian’”. First, outside of the “East” the term is hardly used for Gregory in the sixteenth century; second, it is not that “shocking” of a term to apply to a theologian such as Calvin. Cf. T. F. Torrance, “Calvin’s Doctrine of the Trinity” (cf. n. 21), p. 179.

33 Cf. supra, n. 18.

the assumption of patristic antecedents—to reduce the discussion to either Augustinian or Cappadocian influence. Third, in response to these arguments, it is evident in the later-medieval tradition that there emerges out of Augustine at least three distinct “traditions” of trinitarian theology, and this polyphony of voices problematically confuses simple attempts to trace Augustinian influence back to the Bishop of Hippo.

II. John Duns Scotus: The Distinction of Persons by an Absolute Property

The theology of John Duns Scotus has been the object of recent study, although like many fourteenth-century authors his theological opinions remain understudied when compared to his strictly philosophical views. His trinitarian doctrine (and Mariology) is perhaps the exception, as there is a substantial body of literature on Scotus’ trinitarian theology. The present overview of the great Scottish thinker makes no claim of originality, and in fact will remain close to the work of Russell Friedman as the work of Friedman most fully grasps the daring originality of Scotus.

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35 The paradigm reported by Barnes—“that patristic trinitarian theology, as represented by the Cappadocians, proceeds from the diversity of persons while scholastic trinitarian theology, as represented by Augustine, proceeds from the unity of nature”—is not followed per se, but it is hard not to view reductive readings of “either the antecedent is Eastern or it is Western” as not being related to this basic paradigm (“De Régnon Reconsidered” (cf. n. 34), p. 51). What is striking is that Calvin is “reduced” to either an Augustinian or Cappadocian account, despite his continued engagement with the ante-Nicene fathers. If one were intent on locating patristic sources in Calvin, his extensive knowledge and engagement with the ante-Nicenes should be taken into account.


37 Cf. F. Wetter, Die Trinitätslehre des Johannes Duns Scotus, Münster 1967 (Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters 41/5); R. Cross, Duns Scotus on God, Aldershot 2005.

The creativity of Scotus presents itself because of the continuity of tradition that preceded Scotus in the Latin west from the time of Augustine of Hippo to Thomas Aquinas; a tradition that generally understood the persons of the Trinity to be distinct by relation.\(^{39}\) This position is developed in Augustine’s *De Trinitate* and is grounded in the realization that the Scriptural and Creedal terms ‘father’ and ‘son’ are relational (or relative) terms not substantial terms. For Augustine the term ‘father’ is relational in the sense that what it means to be a father necessitates a certain relationship with another, in the case of the Trinity, the son. The relational terms of father and son are distinguished in trinitarian discourse from substantial terms—such as ‘great’, ‘good’, ‘eternal’ and ‘omnipotent’—that refer to the three divine persons equally, and are said with respect to each person *ad se*.\(^{40}\)

These substantial terms are understood by Augustine to be said with reference to the divine essence (*secundum substantiam*) and to each

\(^{39}\) The list of medieval authors that developed an alternative account is limited. Friedman notes Robert Grosseteste and William of Auvergne as two theologians who held that the persons were absolutes (*In principio erat Verbum* (cf. n. 38), p. 207). The trinitarian theology of Peter Abelard was also remarkably novel, and avoided the language of trinitarian relations. Cf. E. M. Buytaert, “Abelard’s Trinitarian Doctrine”, in: id. (ed.), *Peter Abelard*, Leuven-The Hague 1974 (Mediaevalia Lovaniensia. Series 1, Studia 2); C. J. Mews, *Abelard and Heloise*, Oxford 2005, pp. 101–122.

\(^{40}\) Cf. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, V, c. 11, n. 12 (ed. W. J. Mountain), Turnhout 1968 (CCSL 50), pp. 218 sq.: “Quod autem proprie singula in eadem trinitate dicuntur nullo modo ad se ipsa sed ad inuicem aut ad creaturam dicuntur, et ideo relatiue non substantialiter ea dici manifestum est. Sicut enim trinitas unus deus dicitur, magnus, bonus, aeternus, omnipotens, idemque ipsa sua sic dici potest deitas, ipsa sua magnitudo, ipsa sua bonitas, ipsa sua aeternitas, ipsa sua omnipotentia; non sic potest dici trinitas Pater, nisi forte translate ad creaturam propter adoptionem filiorum”. 
person of the Trinity individually. Conversely, the relative or relational terms—‘Father’, ‘Son’ and ‘Holy Spirit’ (i.e., ‘Gift’)—are said 
ad ad aliquid (secundum relativum not secundum accidentis or secundum substantiam), and in their reference “to another” denote a distinction of persons.41 Therefore within the Trinity the father has a particular relationship with the son (paternitas), and the son with the father (filiatio), and the Trinity of persons is distinct from each other because of these divine relations.42 Augustine and Boethius develop and support this basic view, such that Boethius will famously claim that “substantia continet unitatem, relatio multiplicat trinitatem”.43

This trinitarian position, with minor modifications, is followed throughout the early medieval period; for example Alcuin († 804).44

41 Regarding the Holy Spirit: “Sed tamen ille spiritus sanctus qui non trinitas sed in trinitate intelligitur in eo quod proprie dicitur spiritus sanctus, relatiue dicitur cum et ad patrem et ad filium referet quia spiritus sanctus et patris et filii spiritus est” (ibid., p. 219). Regarding the Father and Son: “Si vero quod dicitur pater ad se ipsum diceretur non ad filium, et quod dicitur filius ad se ipsum diceretur non ad patrem, secundum substantiam diceretur et ille pater et ille filius. Sed quia et pater non dicitur pater nisi ex eo quod est ei filius et filius non dicitur nisi ex eo quod habet patrem, non secundum substantiam haec dicuntur quia non quisque eorum ad se ipsum sed ad inuiem atque ad alterutrum ista dicuntur; neque secundum accidentis quia et quod dicitur pater, et quod dicitur filius aeternum atque incommutabile est eis. Quamobrem quamvis diuersum sit patrem esse et filium esse, non est tamen diuersa substantia quia hoc non secundum substantiam dicuntur sed secundum relationum, quod tamen relationum non est accidens, quia non est mutabile” (ibid., V, c. 5, n. 6, p. 210).

42 The distinction that Augustine makes here is best presented in Boethius’ letter to John the Deacon; cf. Boethius, Vtrum Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus de divinitate substantialiter praedicentur (ed. C. Moreschini), in: De Consolatione Philosophiae—Opuscula Theologica, Leipzig 2000 (Bibliotheca Teubneriana), pp. 184 sq.: “Quod si personae divisa sunt, substantia vero indivisa, necesse est quod vocabulum ex personis originem capit id ad substantiam non pertinere; at trinitatem personarum diversitas fecit: trinitas igitur non pertinet ad substantiam. Quo fit ut neque Pater neque Filius neque Spiritus sanctus neque trinitas de Deo substantialiter praedicetur, sed, ut dictum est, ad aliquid. Deus vero veritas omnipotens substantia inmutabilis virtus sapientia et quicquid huicmodi excogitari potest substantialiter de divinitatem dicuntur”.


Anselm († 1109), Peter Lombard († 1160) and Clarembald of Arras († ca. 1187) all held a trinitarian theology that relies on the distinction of persons by relation. This is to simplify their theological positions considerably, as the role of Aristotle’s *Categories* progressively came to influence the discussion of divine relations, but in general the role of

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relations in trinitarian discussions remains consistent and central well into the thirteenth century. The position of Thomas Aquinas, which has become the subject of intense study in the last decade, modifies and strengthens the role of divine relations by offering a variant account of relative opposition. The position of Thomas Aquinas need not detain us presently, other than to note that his account became the object of an extended critique by Bonaventure, Henry of Ghent, John Duns Scotus, Henry Harclay and others. In particular, the Franciscan theologians—following Bonaventure and the secular master Henry of Ghent—objected strongly to Aquinas’ account of relations of opposition, often preferring “disparate” relations.

Given this brief overview, the recent narrative of Russell Friedman is of particular interest. He argues that Scotus was not only aware of the centrality of divine relations noted above, but that he consciously re-narrated the concept of theological authority (auctoritas) in an attempt to buttress his controversial theology of distinction by absolute properties. Thus, following Friedman, Scotus was “creating space for what he himself recognized was a radical trinitarian theology, one that might well meet with disapproval and censure”. The argument for distinction by absolute properties is found in distinction 26 of book I of the *Ordinatio*, the version that Scotus revised for publication on the basis of his Oxford lectures on the *Sentences* between 1298 and 1299. The present discussion will offer an overview of Scotus’ position on the distinction of persons in distinction 26.

The question that Scotus is considering throughout distinction 26 is “whether the persons are constituted in personal being through relations of origin” (*Utrum personae constituantur in esse personali per

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and its Legacy, and the *Harvard Theological Review* 100/2 (2007), which is dedicated to patristic trinitarian theology.


His approach is to consider three opinions: (1) that the persons are distinguished in-and-of themselves (*quod personae se ipsis distinguuntur*),51 (2) that the persons are distinguished/constituted through relations (*personas constitui per relationes*),52 and (3) that the persons are absolutes (*personas divinas esse absolutas*).53 The first opinion is attributed to Prepositinus and is quickly dismissed.55 The second opinion, supporting the distinction of the persons by divine relation, is the center of Scotus’ attention; as Friedman notes, throughout the question the Subtle Doctor engages in a complex strategy that redefines theological *auctoritas*, arguing specifically that scriptural or ecclesiastical authority does not require the relations view.56 This particular argument engages Matthew 28,19, Proverbs 30 (incorrectly), the Apostles’ Creed the Nicene Creed, the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), and the Second Council of Lyon (1274); an argument that attempts to disarm the tradition behind the relation view by clearing some theological space for the third position: the distinction of persons by absolute properties.

Scotus begins his own positive account by considering two arguments against the theory of absolute properties, and he offers his own response to these arguments.57 In short, Scotus rejects both of these counter arguments and moves quickly into his arguments against the

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52 Cf. ibid., nn. 6–14, pp. 2 sqq.
53 Cf. ibid., nn. 15–31, pp. 4–10.
54 Cf. ibid., nn. 56–72, pp. 22–29.
57 Scotus considers the two following arguments: (1) if the persons are constituted by absolute properties, composition would arise when an absolute (non-relational personal property) was added to an absolute (essence); (2) if the persons are constituted by absolute properties, then the divine essence is distinguished and numbered in the persons. Cf. ibid., nn. 24 and 26, p. 6. As Friedman notes, these problems do not arise for the relation account, due to the “dual nature of relation to protect divine simplicity: relation disappears into (*transire in*) substance when compared to it, but is really distinguished from its opposite”. For a detailed analysis of these arguments and
relation account. The first argument that Scotus makes is that prior to any relation existing between two (or more) things, those things must already exist.\(^\text{58}\) Since the things that are related (relata) must pre-exist the relation, the relation cannot constitute the things being related; in explicitly trinitarian terms, the Father must logically pre-exist his relation to the Son, such that the Father-Son relation cannot be constitutive of the Father per se.

The second argument that Scotus offers is grounded, as Friedman notes, in the trinitarian doctrine of Bonaventure, which relies on an emphasis of procession/production over relation.\(^\text{59}\) The argument itself is quite simple: the divine relation cannot exist or produce unless the suppositum that constitutes the relation in question is first produced. That is, the relation of paternity cannot exist unless the Son—whose existence is necessary in order for the Father’s paternity to exist—is first produced, ‘first’ being understood here with respect to logical priority. The conclusion is that, with a conceptual or logical priority given to the divine processions over the divine relations, Scotus argues that the divine origins must function more centrally in distinguishing the persons than the relation account for how the persons are distinguished allows. This basic trinitarian insight is central to the Franciscan tradition following Bonaventure, and it is the root of the language of “fontal plentitude” that characterizes the person of the Father.

The third and final argument of Scotus against the relation view is his most sophisticated philosophical objection, which can only be summarized here briefly. Scotus argues that the relational property of paternity is a communicable or shareable property, in that it belongs

\(^{58}\) Cf. Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio*, I, dist. 26, n. 33 (cf. n. 51), pp. 10 sq.: “Relatio aliquid referitur formaliter (sicut albedine aliquis dealbatur), non ipsamet relatio referitur (quia secundum beatum Augustinum VII *De Trinitate* cap. 2, ‘omne relativum est aliquid excepta relatione’; et in principio cap. 3: ‘Si Pater’—inquit—‘non est ad se, non erit aliquid quod referitur’; relatio enim non referitur, quia illud quod referitur relatione, non est aliquid postea, nec simul natura,—ergo prius naturaliter); sed essentialia non referitur realiter, ergo suppositum tantum referetur; ergo prius naturaliter suppositum et naturaliter quam relatio. Non ergo primo constituitur vel distinguitur suppositum divinum relatione”.

\(^{59}\) Cf. ibid., nn. 38–44, pp. 13 sqq. This argument is much more involved, but see Scotus’ comment that: “relatio non potest originari nisi aliquo prius originato, aut in relato aut in termino; ergo persona divina quae primo originatur, non potest tantum esse relatio subsistens, sed oportet ponere aliquid absolutum quod primo originatur”.

to a shared category, i.e. relation. The problem arises because it is difficult to see how a property belonging to a communicable/shareable category could distinguish the persons, or explain the persons’ incommunicability. This argument is summarized well by Friedman, who notes that “for the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit to be made distinct by paternity and filiation and procession these distinctive features should have nothing in common with each other that could be abstracted from them”. The problem simply being that a communicable property (as Scotus maintains paternity/filiation/spiration are) cannot be the sole basis for arguing that the individual persons are distinct (incommunicable).

In good scholastic form, Scotus does offer counter arguments to those set forth above, but most important for historical purposes is his claim following these arguments that it is possible that “pers

The result of this brief overview is that the trinitarian theology of John Duns Scotus is significant as a historical marker and, in particular, can help illuminate the historical origins of trinitarian claims that are clearly indebted to Scotus and the discussion that arises after the beginning of the fourteenth century. For example, Pierre d’Ailly (Petrus de Alliaco)—writing three-quarters of a century after Scotus—states in article 1, question 8 of book 1 of his Sentence Commentary (Utrum Spiritus Sanctus procedit a Pater et Filio tanquam uno principio?) that there are four methods of distinguishing the persons. Cardinal Pierre

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60 Cf. ibid., nn. 46–50, pp. 16 sq. Scotus offers five arguments for the claim that paternity is communicable (non est incommunicabilis). For a good explication of these five arguments, cf. R. Cross, Duns Scotus on God (cf. n. 37), pp. 198 sq.

61 Cf. Duns Scotus, Ordinatio, I, dist. 26, n. 45 (cf. n. 51), pp. 15 sq.


64 Petrus de Alliaco, Quaestiones super libros sententiarum cum quibusdam in fine adjunctis, I, q. 8, a. 1, C, Strasbourg 1490 (reprinted in Frankfurt a.M. 1968): “Quantumigitur ad primum notandum est quod de constitutione et distinctione personarum in divinis diversae fuerunt opiniones. Una fuit quod personae seipsis distinguuntur. Secunda fuit quod precise per relationes reales distinguuntur. Tertia fuit quod primo distinguuntur per proprietates absolutas et quasi secundario per relationes. Quarta posset esse quod precise distinguenter per proprietates absolutas”. It is important to note
d’Ailly is clearly no Scotist, in any strict sense of the term, but tends to follow the theology of Gregory of Rimini. Regardless, by the end of the fourteenth century, several methods of distinguishing the persons exist, and d’Ailly offers the four possibilities: (1) the persons are distinguished in-and-of themselves, (2) the persons are distinguished by real relations, (3) the persons are distinguished by absolute properties and secondarily by relations, and (4) the persons are distinguished (could have been distinguished) by absolute properties.65 Further, the categories established by d’Ailly would be understood by his contemporaries to be identified with specific persons; as Friedman notes, “the fact of the matter is that the position of absolute persons became associated with Scotus’ name, and evoked sharp criticism from Dominicans and everything from rejection to apology from Franciscans”.66 Thus, in the same way that the persons being distinct in-and-of themselves (seipsis) is attributed to Prepositinus by Scotus, the argument for distinction by absolute properties (per proprietates absolutas) is attributed to Duns Scotus by the subsequent tradition.

Regardless of Scotus’ later arguments in favor of divine relations,67 the discussion in Ordinatio 1.26 had a significant impact on how trinitarian theology was practiced after the Subtle Doctor. The focus on relations shifted, and alternative possibilities for distinguishing the persons arose; furthermore, while the majority of medieval masters retained the language of relations in one way or another, they recognized that the priority could be placed on the divine relations, on an

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67 On Scotus’ rejection of the arguments for absolute properties, and his shift to the relations view, cf. R. Cross, Duns Scotus on God (cf. n. 37), p. 201.
III. The Distinction of Persons in Calvin's 1536 Institutes

John Calvin was only twenty-seven years old when the first edition of the *Institutes* was published, he was a young scholar, raised devoutly Catholic, and trained at the University of Paris. The early *Institutes* offer an interesting point of departure for analyzing Calvin's trinitarian thought, as only in the 1536 *Institutes* can one glimpse his use of language, terms and sources prior to the criticism of Pierre Caroli, who later charged Calvin and William Farel († 1565) with Arianism. Further, a close reading of Calvin's trinitarian theology in 1536 quickly dispels the claims that he was interested in developing a trinitarian doctrine without the use of technical language, or that in the 1536

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68 The influence of what are traditionally labeled “Ockhamist” and “Scotist” theology on the early sixteenth century, in particular regarding the doctrine of God and the role of theology as a science, must be considered with much more detail than it has heretofore. The influence of authors such as William Ockham, Robert Holcot, Pierre d’Ailly, Gregory of Rimini and John Major on the anti-trinitarian theology of Michael Servetus was recognized by A. Harnack and R. H. Bainton. Cf. R. H. Bainton, “Michael Servetus and the Trinitarian Speculation of the Middle Ages”, in: B. Becker (ed.), *Autour de Michel Servet et de Sebastien Castellion*, Haarlem 1953, pp. 29–46. However, the narrative retellings of Harnack and Bainton remain problematically grounded in a negative reduction of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century theology as “fideistic” with respect to the doctrine of God. More positively some of these same authors—Ockham, Rimini, d’Ailly and Gabriel Biel—influenced Luther’s doctrine of God. Therefore, whether one is considering the broadly “Ockhamist” influence on the doctrine of God in Servetus and Luther, or a broadly “Scotistic” influence on Calvin and Zwingli, the fact remains that the great scholastic systems developed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries played a significant role in how the Reformation theologians thought about the triune God.

69 The full title of Calvin’s early *Institutes* is: *Christianae Religionis Institutio Totam Fere Pietatis Summam et quiquid est in Doctrina Salutis Cognitu Necessarium Complectens. Omnibus Pietatis Studiosis Lectu Dignissimum Opus Ac Recens Editum*.

70 Cf. J. K. Farge, *Biographical Register of Paris Doctors of Theology, 1500–1536*, Toronto 1980 (Subsidia Mediaevalia 10); id., *Orthodoxy and Reform in Early Reformation France: The Faculty of Theology of Paris, 1500–1543*, Leiden 1985 (Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought 32).

71 On Caroli, cf. supra, n. 17.

72 Cf. P. Helm, *John Calvin’s Ideas* (cf. n. 20), p. 41: “A doctrine of the Trinity, then, that mentions neither ‘trinity’, nor ‘person’ nor ‘substance’, nor the begetting of the Son nor the procession of the Spirit, is what Calvin in principle favours”. This claim is
Institutes Calvin was not particularly concerned with trinitarian theology. The present discussion will limit itself to an analysis of Calvin’s method of distinguishing the persons in 1536 and, based on that interpretation of Calvin, will argue that in the quest for Calvin’s sources one must look beyond the fourth-century patristic tradition.

The trinitarian analysis found in the early Institutes is striking in its lack of explicit quotations from either the patristic or medieval tradition, although Calvin engages both patristic and medieval theology in later sections of the work. The lack of citations by Calvin makes it particularly difficult to trace the sources of his trinitarian doctrine, and with respect to the early Institutes, the absence of direct

odd, inasmuch as no historical evidence supports the claim that Calvin ever explicated a doctrine of the Trinity that did not include those three terms.

Most scholars have assumed that Calvin’s doctrine of the Trinity “expands” along with the rest of the Institutes between 1536 and 1559, largely because of the debates with Caroli and Servetus. But, that is not entirely accurate. For example, if one simply compares the amount of “space” that the discussion of the Trinity occupies in the 1536 and 1559 editions it is somewhat surprising that trinitarian speculation occupies some 7.6% of the text in 1536—a number that drops to only 2.6% by the final edition. Further, Warfield (“Calvin’s Doctrine” (cf. n. 19), p. 218) argues that while Calvin did expand the discussion of the Trinity in the later editions of the Institutes, particularly the 1559 edition, little “substantive” development of Calvin’s thought on the Trinity was evident.

J. van Oort (“John Calvin and the Church Fathers” (cf. n. 16), p. 667) accurately notes that in the section De Fide of the early Institutes, dealing with the Trinity, there is not a single identifiable patristic citation. What is striking about this is that throughout every other chapter in the early Institutes, Calvin cites patristic authorities, and those authorities support his overall argument in the preface, that his position is in agreement with the patristic fathers. That is, in a work that explicitly claims patristic continuity it is remarkable that Calvin does not cite the fathers in response to the arguments of Arius and Sabellius that he reports—an omission that lends greater credence to the claim that Calvin’s central trinitarian claim in this work is not Patristic in any strict sense.

Prior to his arrival in Basel, Calvin spent his “college days” at the Collège de Montaigu (1523–1527), and was variously in Orléans, Bourges and Paris until he fled Paris sometime late in 1533 after the “Nicolas Cop Affair”. Throughout the year of 1534, Calvin stayed with his friend Louis du Tillet in Saintonge, but also made extensive trips to forfeit his ecclesiastical benefices. During his stay with du Tillet, he had access to some three or four thousand volumes, and Wendel argues that perhaps it was here that Calvin established the “foundations for the future Institutes”. This claim is supported by La Vallee (“Calvin’s Criticism” (cf. n. 14), pp. 247–250), who argues that it is probable—if one rejects the Reuter thesis (on which, cf. supra, n. 14), as he does—that Calvin learned much about the Scholastics during this period of study. For, as La Vallee (ibid., p. 249) argues, “in this work [1536 Institutes] he already displays a masterful knowledge of theology and levels criticism at the Scholastics some 134 times in the course of his argument”; cf. A. N. S. Lane, John Calvin (cf. n. 11), pp. 168–178.
quotations favors the arguments for neither patristic nor medieval influence. However, by 1536 Calvin was aware of a great breadth of medieval thought, as La Vallee demonstrates, and it will be argued here that with respect to the distinction of persons, the trinitarian theology of John Calvin is remarkably distinct from that of the fourth-century patristic fathers. Calvin is aware of the patristic tradition that distinguished the persons by relation, but simply does not follow them in his own positive account.

The structure of the early *Institutes* follows the basic catechetical format of the sixteenth century, as evidenced in Luther’s *Small* (1529) and *Large Catechism* (1530) and Calvin’s *Catechismus, sive christianae religionis institutio* (1538). Calvin analyzes the doctrine of the Trinity throughout the second section: *De Fide, ubi et Symbolum, quod Apostolicum vocant, explicatur*. This discussion of Faith and the Creed is further divided into five sections: 1) an untitled prologue analyzing the doctrine of the Trinity, 2) *Pars Symboli Prima*, 3) *Pars Symboli Secunda*, 4) *Pars Symboli Tertia* and 5) *Pars Symboli Quarta*. Calvin understood the Apostolic Creed as comprising four distinct sections—regarding the Father, Son, Holy Spirit and Church—which correspond to the *Pars Symboli Prima*, *Pars Symboli Secunda*, *Pars Symboli Tertia*

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76 Richard Muller remains skeptical about such projects, arguing (*Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (cf. n. 18), p. 73) that “it is, therefore, virtually impossible to identify medieval antecedents to Protestant trinitarianism: Torrance’s attempts to associate Calvin’s work with the thought of Richard of St. Victor, merely on the basis of Calvin’s apparently non-Boethian understanding of *persona*, are particularly vacuous: Calvin does not, after all, use Richard’s (or Scotus’) definition of person as ‘*divinae naturae incommunicabilis existentia*’, nor does his text offer any explicit or implicit indications of an attempt to read the Victorine model through the thought of Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzen, and Cyril of Alexandria”. Muller clearly has Calvin in mind, but regarding other Reformers his claim is certainly overstated—in particular this statement has been challenged in Luther scholarship with respect to tracing the influence of medieval trinitarian theology on Luther. Cf. S. Knuutila / R. Saarinen, “Innertrinitarische Theologie in der Scholastik und bei Luther”, in: O. Bayer / R. W. Jenson / S. Knuutila (edd.), *Caritas Dei: Festschrift für Tuomo Mannermaa zum 60 Geburtstag*, Helsinki 1997 (Schriften der Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft 39), pp. 243 sqq.; id., "Luther's Trinitarian Theology and its Medieval Background", in: *Studia Theologica* 53/1 (1999), pp. 3–12; P. Kärkkäinen, *Luthers trinitarische Theologie des Heiligen Geistes*, Mainz 2005 (Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte Mainz 208); G. White, *Luther as Nominalist* (cf. n. 64).


Calvin’s trinitarian theology is explicated in the first four sections, although primarily in the untitled prologue. The prologue is where Calvin develops his own “trinitarian grammar”—analyzing the unity and triunity of God and the distinction of persons.

The traditional arguments, as explicated in section two, locate Calvin’s trinitarian theology in dialogue with the early Church fathers, specifically noting parallels with respect to the distinction of persons by relation. But, the question remains, what is the role of relations in Calvin’s trinitarian theology in the 1536 Institutes? Calvin’s only discussion of the divine relations occurs early in the prologue of the section De fide, where he both considers various heresies and defines his trinitarian language and grammar. Calvin earlier explicated his own position of the distinction of persons evident in the Biblical text and moves into a discussion of the early Church heresies.80 He writes that with respect to the Trinity three are named, three are described and three are distinguished (tres nominantur, tres describuntur, tres distinguuntur). In responding to the question—qui tres?—Calvin argues with the orthodoxi veteres that the three are not three Gods, nor three essences (non tres dii, non tres essentiae). The Greeks, Calvin notes,

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79 Calvin divided the Apostolic Creed into the following sections: 1) Credo in Deum patrem omnipotentem, creatorem coeli et terrae. 2) Et in Iesum Christum, filium eius unicum, Dominum nostrum, qui conceptus est e spiritu sancto, natus ex Maria virgine, passus sub Pontio Pilato, crucifixus, mortuus, et sepultus; descendit ad infernos, tertia die resurrexit a mortuis, ascendit in coelum, sedet ad dexteram patris: inde venturus ad iudicandum vivos et mortuos. 3) Credo in spiritum sanctum. 4) Credo sanctam ecclesiam catholicam, sanctorum communionem, remissionem peccatorum, carnis resurrectionem, vitam aeternam (CO 1, pp. 56–81).

80 Cf. CO 1, pp. 58 sq.: “Unum igitur aeternum illum Deum esse oportet, qui alibi negat se daturum suam gloriam alteri (Ies. 43). Et tamen cum dicitur principio fuisse apud Deum, patremque fecisse per illum saecula; praeterea cum ipse testatur, claritatem suam se habuisse apud patrem, antequam mundus fiet, distinctio ostenditur; magis etiam perspicue ex eo, quod non pater venisse et carmen nostrum induisse, sed filius a patre exisse, ut ad nos descendenter et homo fiet dicetur (Ioan. 1. Hebr. 1. Ioan. 17. Ioan. 16 et alibi. Zach. 13). Utrumque simul apud alterum prophetam expressum est, ubi pater socium vel cognatum ipsum appellat. Non est autem Deo cognatus vel socius, nisi quatenus Deus. Rursum, si socius est, distinctum esse oportet, quando non est societas nisi inter duos. Spiritum sanctum diserte Deum esse pronuntiat Petrus in Actis (Act. 5). Alium tamen esse a Christo, plus decem locis ex Ioannis Evangelio constat (Ioan. 14. 15). Sed omnium clarissime hoc totum mysterium explicavit Paulus (Rom. 8), cum spiritum Christi, et spiritum eius qui suscitavit Iesum a mortuis, promiscue vocavit. Si enim unus est patris et filii spiritus, pater et filius unum sint oportet. Rursum, spiritum ipsum unum esse cum patre et filio convenient, cum nullus a spiritu suo diversus sit”.

argued for one οὐσίαν and three υποστάσεις, while the Latins agreed in meaning but preferred the language of one essentiam and three personas. It is in the context of this discussion of trinitarian language that Calvin notes in passing that by this language—presumably the language of both the Greeks and the Latins—they meant to indicate a certain relationship (quo relationem quandam indicare voluerunt). However, Calvin’s lack of comment on the language of relations is significant. Calvin is clearly aware of the traditional language used by Augustine and the Cappadocians, but remains ambivalent about whether or not this language is useful for explaining the distinction of persons.

What is intriguing about this passage is its location between two independent discussions of how the persons of the Trinity are distinct. Previously, Calvin gave an account that relied explicitly on Scripture to explain how the three persons are distinct, and following his brief comment on relation noted above, Calvin embarks on another explanation of the distinction of persons. This latter account, assuming the earlier argument based on Scripture, is technically more precise and relies on certain theological and philosophical presuppositions that are contrary to the relations account. The context, again, is historical for Calvin, as he recognizes the “boundary” positions of Arius and Sabellius as a fundamental confusion over the distinction of persons; Arius distinguishes the Father and Son too strongly, and Sabellius does not distinguish the persons sufficiently. Calvin, at this point in the argument, does not return to a discussion of relations—although

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81 Cf. CO 1, p. 59: “Rursum, tres nominantur, tres describuntur, tres distinguuntur. Unus itaque, et tres, unus Deus, una essentia. Qui tres? Non tres dixi, non tres essentiae. Utrumque ut significarent orthodoxi veteres, dixerunt unam esse οὐσίαν, tres υποστάσεις, id est, substantiam unam, tres in una substantia, substantia. Latini, cum per omnia sensu convenirent, alterum tantum nomen reddiderunt, in altero quiddam aliud expresserunt. Dixerunt enim unam essentiam, quod nomen graeco illi respondebat, tres vero personas; quo relationem quandam indicare voluerunt”.

82 The argument that Calvin relies on positive and negative “boundaries” is clearly Calvin, and not an anachronistic “Lindbeckian” reading of Calvin. Cf. CO 1, p. 62: “Verum ubi occurrendum est, ex una parte Arianis, ex altera Sabellianis […]”.

83 Cf. CO 1, p. 61: “Arius fatebatur Christum Deum et filium Dei, quia evidentibus scripturis reluctari non poterat et quasi probe defunctus, consensum aliquem cum aliis simulabat. At interim non desinebat iactare, Christum creatum esse et initium habuisse ut reliquias creaturas. Quo flexilem hominis vafritiem e latribris extraherent veteres, ultra progressi sunt et declararunt Christum aeternum patris filium, patrique consubstantiale esse”.

84 Cf. CO 1, pp. 61 sq.: “Surrexit postea Sabellius, qui patris, filii et spiritus sancti nomina vana esse disputabat, nec distinctionis alicuius causa posita, sed diversa esse Dei attributa, cuiusmodi plurima habentur; si in certamen ventum esset, fatebatur se
he understands the language of relations to have been the method of the fourth century. Instead, Calvin ignores the language of relations in favor of a theory that incorporates the language of certain or distinct properties.

The theory that Calvin puts forth states, “the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God, nevertheless the Son is not the Father, nor the Holy Spirit the Son; but they have been distinguished by a certain property.” The distinction by a particular or certain property (proprietas quadam) is itself significant, as Calvin is clear that the distinction here is by a property but does not understand this property as relational. This idea is reminiscent of Scotus’ early theory, which according to Richard Cross, argues that the persons are constituted “not by relations but by some sort of absolute (non-relational or monadic) property.” The distinction here between Calvin and the earlier tradition is complicated, as the Greek and Latin fathers also employed the language of properties. One must recall that for Augustine or Gregory of Nazianzen the properties in question are explicitly relational properties. Contrarily, Scotus and Calvin have in mind a particular property that is not one of the divine relations, but is specific to each person of the Trinity; further, these properties function to distinguish the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

John Calvin’s account of the three properties that distinguish the persons is found in the concluding paragraph of the prologue of De fide. The argument he puts forth is that Scripture’s way of distinguishing the three persons is “to attribute to the Father the beginning [i.e.,

credere Patrem deum, Filium deum, Spiritum deum, sed postea elabebatur, nihil se aliud dixisse, quam si Deum fortem et iustam et sapientem vocasset”.

CO 1, p. 62: “Utinam sepulta essent, constaret haec modo inter omnes fides, patrem, filium, et spiritum sanctum unum esse Deum, nec tamen aut filium, patrem esse, aut spiritum sanctum, filium, sed proprietate quadam esse distinctos”.

R. Cross, Duns Scotus on God (cf. n. 37), p. 195.

87 Within the theological language of Gregory of Nazianzus (or of Basil), the term ‘God’ denotes God’s essence and is an absolute term, whereas the terms ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ denote divine relations (σχέσις) which are particularities (ἰδιότης) of the three persons of the Trinity. The divine relations (σχέσις) —as complexes of particularities (ἰδιότης)—are what constitute the individual hypostases within the Trinity. Ayres (Nicaea and Its Legacy (cf. n. 48), p. 202) argues that the relative, or relational, names are “an aspect of something’s ἱδιωματα”. Further, it is evident in Basil’s Contra Eunomium that the properties or particularities in question are fatherhood and sonship; that is, they are the relational characteristics. Cf. Basil of Césaréa, Contra Eunome, I, 8 (edd. B. Sesboüé / G. M. de Durand / L. Doutreleau), t. 1, Paris 1982 (Sources Chrétiennes 299), pp. 196 sqq.
source or principle] of acting, the font and origin of all things, to assign to the Son wisdom and the counsel of acting, to refer to the Spirit the power and the efficacy of action”. The first thing to note about Calvin’s triad is that he clearly argues that the persons are distinct by particular properties or characteristics, and that principium/fons, sapientia and virtus are the three that distinguish the persons. The language Calvin employs is remarkably careful, in that he avoids using the language of attributes in a strict sense. The reason is that divine attributes cannot function to distinguish the persons—only properties can distinguish the persons. The three terms are functioning as properties, not attributes, and Calvin intentionally uses a variety of verbs (attribuo, assigno, refero) to describe how these three properties are employed. Further, Calvin insists throughout the text that these are three properties and not simply attributes.

The triad (principium, sapientia, virtus) Calvin develops is not a common triadic structure found throughout the medieval tradition.

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88 CO 1, p. 62: “Siquidem ita eas scriptura distinguit, ut patri principium agendi, rerumque omnium fontem et originem attribuat, Filio, sapientiam et consilium agendi assignet, ad Spiritum, virtutem efficaciamque actionis referat”.

89 The medieval tradition—following Augustine—was loath to designate three triadic attributes (power, wisdom, goodness) to individual persons of the Trinity secundum relativum instead of secundum substantiam, for the obvious reason that all three persons of the Trinity are powerful, wise and good. On this question, cf. Peter Abelard, Theologia “Summi boni” (edd. E. M. Buytaert / C. J. Mews), in: Petri Abaelardi Opera Theologica 3, Turnhout 1987 (CCCM 13), pp. 83–201; and the critiques of Abelard by William of St. Thierry, Disputatio aduersus Abaelardum, PL 180, col. 249–282, and Gautier de Mortagne, Liber de Trinitate, PL 209, col. 573–590. Gautier, in his interesting but neglected De Trinitate, is particularly clear and concise in his criticism of Abelard. For more on this particular triad, cf. D. Poirel, Livre de la nature et débat trinitaire au XIIe siècle: Le De tribus diebus de Hughes de Saint-Victor, Turnhout 2002 (Bibliotheca Victorina 14), pp. 261–423.

90 Cf. P. Gemeinhardt, “Logic, Tradition, and Ecumenics” (cf. n. 45), p. 50. Gemeinhardt argues that following Richard of St. Victor, “what distinguishes the persons is their mode of origin, that is, deriving being from itself, from one other person and from two other persons. These modes of origin are fundamental for the divine appropriations of, e.g., power, wisdom and benignity or unity, equality and connection, as Augustine once had distinguished Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Hence a remarkable progress in trinitarian definitory: Richard draws a lucid distinction between properties and appropriations while keeping a balance of both”.

Further, two of these individual terms or properties—*sapientia* and *virtus*—are clearly not relational terms in a strict sense. Rather, these terms are traditionally used in trinitarian discourse *secundum substantiam*, not *secundum relativum*. In this respect, Calvin seems to have adopted Scriptural language for the properties that individuate the persons. Of course, despite Scriptural warrant for these particular distinguishing properties, the philosophical position that Calvin is relying on here must be a Scotistic one in which the persons can be distinct by an absolute property that is unique to that person.

Second, this discussion of the distinction of persons occurs at the conclusion of Calvin’s prologue to a commentary on the Apostolic Creed. As noted above, Calvin understands the first section of the Creed to be a discussion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Therefore, these are Calvin’s last words on the Trinity before discussing the trinitarian persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These three trinitarian names (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) had been understood by Augustine and the subsequent tradition to be relative terms, as noted above, denoting a relationship *ad aliquid*. Interestingly, the last discussion Calvin has about the distinction of the divine persons prior to his discussion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit employs terms to distinguish the persons that are neither creedal terms nor identifiable relational terms. In his discussion of the Creed that follows, Calvin uses the creedal language—as he must—but still claims in those individual sections on the Father, Son and Holy Spirit that the particular properties discussed above distinguish the persons. The point here is that Calvin would have had to consciously avoid the language of relations in the 1536 *Institutes*, since the text is a commentary on the Apostles’ Creed. This perhaps explains Calvin’s analysis of his trinitarian grammar in the prologue prior to discussing the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Calvin does use those relational terms, but only after first having established that the properties *principium/fons*, *sapientia* and *virtus* are what distinguish the persons. One possible motivation for Calvin’s avoidance could be the explicitly Aristotelian nature of the discussion of divine relations as it developed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. These centuries developed, in the language of Marilyn McCord Adams, a “Categories Metaphysics” to analyze the distinction of persons. Cf. M. M. Adams, “The Metaphysics
the creedal and patristic use of the relational terms ‘Father’, ‘Son’ and ‘Holy Spirit’ to indicate a distinction of persons, Calvin argues that the persons are distinct by the properties *principium/fons, sapientia* and *virtus*.93

The third point I want to make is that Calvin is insistent that each property is not simply a static noun, but also inherently contains some act or divine action. Thus, the Son is not simply wisdom (*sapientia*) but the “counsel of acting” (*consilium agendi*). Therefore, while the personal properties that distinguish the persons are not relational (*ad aliquid*)—in that the terms *sapientia* or *virtus* are not “to another”—they are understood to be absolute principles that act, or are involved in action. In scholastic language, one could say that each supposit contains a mode of being and a mode of action, in which the mode of action follows the mode of existence.94

The basic trinitarian grammar that Calvin establishes in the prologue is developed in the subsequent sections dedicated to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And, while those discussions focus narrowly on the individual persons of the Trinity, they are clearly informed throughout by Calvin’s basic claims in the prologue. That is, the governing theological grammar that Calvin uses throughout the text is established in the prologue and remains remarkably consistent, not only throughout the early *Institutes* but in the later recensions as well.

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93 Calvin’s position can only distinguish the Father, Son and Holy Spirit here if there is an absolute property that is functioning to distinguish them. Calvin, it must be noted, does not explicitly cite Scotus on this point, but given his insistence that the persons are distinct by a particular or certain property (*proprietate quadam*)—which is clearly not relational—his position only makes theological or philosophical sense if the properties in question are absolute in the way explicated by Scotus.

94 The action ascribed to each property by Calvin remains somewhat confused, as it is unclear whether these are understood by Calvin to be intra-trinitarian acts or acts *ad extra*. If these acts are understood to be *ad extra*, and seemingly involve the works of the persons in relation to the created order, the thesis is hardly satisfying, given that the distinction of persons cannot be contingent on creation. But, as Bruce Marshall pointed out in an email exchange, to attribute “*virtus actionis*” to the Holy Spirit would presumably attribute the inner-trinitarian power of generating to the Holy Spirit, which would turn the Spirit into the *principium* of the Son—obviously an unintended and problematic attribution.
IV. Conclusion

John Calvin rarely cites his medieval predecessors. Despite this fact, Heiko Oberman is correct in his judgment that Calvin scholars must attend to Calvin’s relationship to the great Duns Scotus if they hope to understand his hidden subtleties. Oberman argues that “as Calvin himself said that we can discern the hand of God in creation only through the spectacles of Scripture, so we can say that on the essential and critical points in his theology he read Holy Scripture through Scotistic glasses”.

These glasses remain frustratingly hidden from view, but with respect to Calvin’s doctrine of God, certain parallels can be drawn and must be attended to.

One should step back and consider a few implications of this study. First, while it is clear that Calvin does read and learn from the fourth-century trinitarian debates, his trinitarian thought in 1536 can be considered neither Augustinian nor Cappadocian with regards to the distinction of persons. Second, Calvin’s argument that the persons are distinct by three non-relational properties is one that belongs to the late medieval context, particularly the trinitarian theology that develops with and after John Duns Scotus. Third, the present work relies heavily on the tentative groundwork that has been laid by medievalists studying the historical theology of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

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96 It was noted above (cf. n. 14) that K. Reuter argues that while at the Collège de Montaigu Calvin studied under the famous Scottish theologian John Mair (Major) and acquired knowledge of scholastics such as Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas, John Duns Scotus, Bradwardine and Gregory of Rimini. Reuter’s final version of this claim is found in *Vom Scholaren bis zum jungen Reformator: Studien zum Werdegang Johannes Calvins* and was written prior (Neukirchen 1981) to some interesting work on the Collège de Montaigu by P. Bakker and J. Farge. The works cited by Farge above (cf. n. 70) and the recent work by Bakker, and others, on the Collège de Montaigu perhaps invites a reevaluation of Reuter’s general thesis. This historical work extends beyond the limits of the present paper but is ultimately significant for establishing Calvin’s knowledge of Scotistic theology. See the fine essays in: P. J. J. M. Bakker (ed.), *The Collège de Montaigu at the University of Paris. Aspects of its Institutional and Spiritual History*, Nijmegen 2000 (History of Universities 22).
97 One of the lingering questions regarding this interpretation of Calvin is whether or not there are more immediate sources of his trinitarian theology. In a version of this paper offered at the Sixteenth Century Society Conference (Salt Lake City 2006), both Timothy Wengert and Pekka Kärkkäinen questioned the possible influence of Philip Melanchthon on Calvin’s trinitarian theology. A close reading of Philip Melanchthon and Martin Luther offers little insight into the sources of Calvin’s trinitarian theology.
centuries, and a more accurate picture cannot be sketched without further research into the theological developments between 1350 and 1500. Finally, a definitive answer to these questions must reach beyond the 1536 *Institutes* and look specifically at how Calvin develops and accommodates his language of distinct properties to the language of relations in the later recensions of the *Institutes*. Calvin never abandons the three distinguishing properties set out in 1536, which justifies the present study, but he does join to it a substantive discussion of the divine relations in the later recensions of the work.