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Rev. Benjamin T. G. Mayes
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Exegesis, or A More Copious Explanation of Certain Articles of the Christian Religion (1625)

ON THE NATURE OF GOD
AND
ON THE MOST HOLY MYSTERY OF THE TRINITY

JOHANN GERHARD

Translated by Richard J. Dinda

Edited with Annotations by Benjamin T. G. Mayes
Contents

Editor's Preface

Commonplace II (1625 Exegesis): On the Nature of God

Preface

1. Treating Thoroughly the Etymology of the Names of God
2. Which Explains the Homonyms of the Word
3. Synonyms
4. On the Question Whether God Exists
5. Who God Is
6. On the Unity of the Divine Essence
7. On the Divine Attributes in General
8. On the Divine Attributes in Particular

Section I: On the Spiritual and Incorporeal Essence of God
Section II: On the Invisibility of the Divine Essence
Section III: On the Simplicity of the Divine Essence
Section IV: On the Eternity of God
Section V: On the Immutability of God
Section VI: On the Immortality of God
Section VII: On the Infinity of God
Section VIII: On the Immensity of God
Section IX: On the Omnipotence of God
Section X: On the Goodness of God
Section XI: On the Mercy of God
Section XII: On the Righteousness of God
Section XIII: On the Omniscience of God
Section XIV: On the Omnisapience of God
Section XV: On the Will of God and His Freedom to Act
Section XVI: On the Truth of God
Section XVII: On the Perfection of God
Section XVIII: On the Majesty and Glory of God
Section XIX: On the Blessedness of God
Commonplace III (1625 Exegesis): On the Most Holy Mystery of the All-Hallowed and Ineffable Trinity

1. Containing the Introductory Preface
2. Which Explains the Nomenclature
3. Which Contains the General Argument for Affirming the Mystery of the Trinity
4. Which Contains the First Argument Drawn from the New Testament for Affirming the Mystery of the Trinity
5. Which Contains the Second Argument Drawn from the New Testament for Affirming the Mystery of the Trinity
6. Which Contains the Third Argument Drawn from the New Testament for Affirming the Mystery of the Trinity
7. Which Contains the Fourth Argument Drawn from the New Testament for Affirming the Mystery of the Trinity
8. Which Contains the First Argument Drawn from the Old Testament for Affirming the Mystery of the Trinity
9. Which Contains the Second Argument Drawn from the Old Testament for Affirming the Mystery of the Trinity
10. Which Contains the Third Argument Drawn from the Old Testament for Affirming the Mystery of the Trinity
11. Which Contains the Fourth Argument Drawn from the Old Testament for Affirming the Mystery of the Trinity
12. Which Embraces the Remaining Arguments That Can Be Produced from the Old Testament for Affirming the Mystery of the Trinity
13. Which Provides the Response to the Arguments of the Photinians

Works Cited

Scripture Index

Persons Index
Section IX: On the Omnipotence of God

§ 190. Up to this point we have been describing the eight attributes of the first class. Those that follow make up the second class, namely: (1) divine omnipotence, (2) goodness and mercy, (3) righteousness, (4) omnisapience and omniscience, (5) freedom of action, (6) truthfulness. We shall discuss these in the same manner and style.

Thesis.

Therefore our thesis is this: God is not only potent [i.e., powerful, mighty], not only multipotent, but truly omnipotent. God's omnipotence is confirmed (1) by Scripture: (1) Affirmatively, when it calls God "mighty" (Job 34:20), "omnipotent," the destroyer, who can destroy all things and reduce them to nothing in the same way that He makes all things out of nothing. (See Gen. 17:1; 49:25; etc.) He is called "mighty" (Deut. 10:17), "mighty in strength" (Job 9:4), "mighty" (Job 36:5), "robust" (Ps. 24:8), and "strong" (Ps. 89:38). This power, this strength, is infinite because God's essence itself is supreme power [παντοκράτορια]. (See 2 Cor. 6:18; Rev. 1:8).

(2) Effectively, when it witnesses that God can do all things. Matt. 3:9: "He is able to raise up children to Abraham from stones." Matt. 19:26: "With God all things are possible." Mark 14:36: "Father, all things are possible for You." Luke 18:27: "The things that are impossible with men are possible with God." Eph. 3:20: "By the power at work within us, He is able [potens] to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think." Here belong all supernatural works and miracles of the divine power.

(3) Negatively, when it says that nothing is difficult or impossible for God. Gen. 18:14: "Is anything too wonderful for Him?" That is, is anything separated from the activity of God, too arduous and difficult for Him to do? The Targum reads: "Will anything be hidden?" The Septuagint renders it "Will anything be impossible?" In Jer. 32:17, 27, the force of that question is explained by a negative: "Every word is not too wonderful for You." V. 27 repeats this in the form of a question: "I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Will any word be too wonderful for Me?" Zech. 8:6: "If this is marvelous and difficult in the eyes of that people, will it also be marvelous in My eyes?" Wisdom 11:17: "Your omnipotent hand was not impotent." Luke 1:37: "For with God no word is impossible." Rom. 9:19: "Who will resist His will?"

(4) Symbolically, when it attributes to God a mighty right hand, an outstretched and strong arm. 1 Chron. 29:12: "In Your hand are might and strength." Jer. 32:17: "You have made heaven and earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm," for this is the right hand of strength, the arm of power, etc. In Eph. 1:19 this is called "the exceeding greatness of the power of God." Wisdom 11:21: "It is always in Your power to show great strength, and who can withstand the might of Your arm?"

(II) God's omnipotence is confirmed by reason: (1) From the infinity of His essence. Divine power is the very essence of God because the attributes are His very essence. Yet the divine essence is infinite. Therefore the power of God also is infinite; but now infinite power is nothing else but omnipotence. (2) From the simplicity of the divine essence. God is utterly pure act; therefore the active principle and infinite power belong to Him.
especially, for He acts through Himself, not through a power added to His essence. He acts in such a way that He suffers nothing again, because He has nothing of passive power.\textsuperscript{39} (3) From God’s perfection. The more perfect anything is in creatures, the more endowed it is with power to act. From this [principle we speak of] primary matter,\textsuperscript{40} because it is established as purely passive in the lowest class of beings. Now God is the most perfect and highest being. Therefore the most perfect power to act belongs to Him. (4) From the creation and preservation of all things, which proves the infinite power of God.

§ 191. (III) The judgments of the fathers are added. Irenaeus, bk. 5, c. 7, p. 322: “Therefore neither the nature of any of the things that have been created nor the weakness of the flesh will be mightier than God’s will. For God is not (subject) to the things that He has created. All things are subject to God and serve His will.” Bk. 2, c. 52: “God is better than nature, and it belongs to Him to will... because He is good; and to be able, because He is powerful; and to make perfect, because He is rich and perfect.”

Justin, \textit{Evers. dogm. Arist.}, p. 86: “God has an immortal essence and unhindered power,” the kind of effectiveness of working that no hindrance at all may interrupt. P. 87: “He is not subject to the law of nature but acts with the supreme authority of will.”

Gregory of Nyssa, \textit{De resurr. Christi orat.} 3, f. 163: “God both is and is said to be omnipotent. But there is nothing perplex for Him who can do all things, nothing that He cannot disentangle or set free or finish.”

Maximus, \textit{De carit.}, bk. 4, no. 4: “It is absurd to be hesitant about the omnipotent God. Can He not bring into existence anything when it seems right to Him?”

** Basil, homily 1, \textit{Hexaem.}: “The Creator of this universe did not have only enough creative power for one world, but power exceeding this infinitely.” **

Augustine, \textit{De lib. arbit.}, bk. 3, c. 18: “It is madness to doubt the righteousness and omnipotence of God.”

** \textit{Enchir.}, c. 96: “For He is not truthfully called omnipotent for any other reason except that He can do whatever He wishes. Furthermore, the effect of His omnipotent will is not hindered by the will of any creature.” **

Sermon 119, \textit{De temp.}: “He is omnipotent to do great and small things. He is omnipotent to do heavenly and earthly things. He is omnipotent to do immortal and mortal things. He is omnipotent to do corporeal and spiritual things. He is omnipotent to do visible and invisible things. Finally, He is omnipotent to do all the things He wills to do.”

Sermon 139, \textit{De temp.}: “I am not saying, ‘Give me a Christian; give me a Jew,’ but, ‘Give me a pagan who worships many idols, a servant of devils, who does not say that God is omnipotent.’ He can deny Christ, but he cannot deny that God is omnipotent.”

The Damascene calls God “infinitely powerful, a power that knows no measure, limited by His will alone, for He can do all the things that He wants to do” (\textit{De orth. fid.}, bk. 1, c. 8).

\textsuperscript{39} That is, God’s power is active, producing effects on other things. He does not have “passive power” or the potential to be affected or changed by the acts of others.

\textsuperscript{40} Purely potential matter, without any form or actuality. When form and matter are combined, they produce actually existing beings. On the scale of beings, God is at the top, as pure actuality, and primary matter is at the bottom, as pure potentiality.
Philo, Alleg. legis, bk. 1: “As it is proper of fire to burn and of snow to cool, so it is proper of God to work, and this all the more because He is the author of the working also for all other things.”

See the statements of the heathen philosophers in Stobaeus, sermon 109, de spe. To these we should add the statement of Epicharmus: “Nothing is impossible for God,” and that of Homer in the Odyssey: “The gods can do all things.”

**Antithesis.**

§ 192. These things must be set against: (1) The heathen, who have doubts about the omnipotence of God and entertain excessively sordid thoughts about it. Galen, De usu part., bk. 11, vol. 1, c. 14, p. 378:

It was not enough for God, in order to produce hairs on the body, to do no more than will that they exist. For also if He wanted to make a stone into a man quickly, He could not do that. And it is this in which our opinion, and that of Plato and others among the Greeks who wrote correctly about the nature of things, differs from that of Moses. For he holds that if God wished to supply matter, matter was immediately supplied. He thinks that God can do all things, even if He wanted to make a horse or an ox out of ashes. We do not think this way, but we assert that nature cannot do some things and that not even God can approach these things. Rather, He selects that which is best to do from those things that He can do.

Pliny says that God is not omnipotent because “He cannot die, He cannot be wrong, nor can He make undone something that is done, etc.” (Nat. hist., bk. 1, c. 7). Luis Vives is correctly amazed that a man of such learning urges this childish sophistry. He says: “I am amazed that Pliny the Second, a man with so much wisdom and genius, scoffs so much against the omnipotence of God” (Comm. August. de civit. Dei, bk. 5, c. 10). Cyril of Alexandria calls that question as to “whether God is omnipotent because He cannot show that He is not God, cannot make Himself capable of sinning, and cannot cause Himself not to be good or life or righteousness,” etc., a question “that is greatly out of place” (Adv. anthropom., bk. 3, c. 13) and accordingly should be avoided “with all one's might.” Jobius Monachus calls the same trifling “a judgment and mockery of sophisticated denial.” He says that those who employ it “labor with wickedness or ignorance” (De incarn. verbi, bk. 3, c. 13, in Photius, Biblioth., p. 302). As Augustine learnedly argues (De civ. Dei, bk. 5, before the middle of c. 10):

The power of God is not diminished when one says that He cannot die nor be in error. For this is impossible for Him in such a way that if it were possible for Him, He would have less power. Indeed, He is correctly said to be omnipotent, though He can neither die nor be wrong. For He is said to be omnipotent as He does what He wills and does not suffer what He does not will—for if this were to happen to Him, He would by no means be omnipotent. Consequently, it is for this reason that He cannot do some things, because He is omnipotent.

_De Trinit.,_ bk. 15, c. 15: “God's power is great. He cannot lie because He cannot be in that place—is and is not—but rather is and is, not and not.” _De Spir. et lit._, last chapter: “As there is no impossibility, so also there is no iniquity with God.” _Contra Arianos_, c. 14:
“That He cannot do this (change) is not a deficiency of His power but is powerful, for it is as laudable for the Omnipotent to be incapable of change as it is laudable that the Omnipotent cannot die.” Alcuin, *De divinis officiis*, c. 41: “He is called ‘omnipotent’ because He can do all things. And why is He called ‘omnipotent’ when He cannot do all things? He cannot lie because He is unchangeable. However, it should be known that He can do whatever befits Himself.”

(II) *Bar Jesus*, that notorious magician called “Elymas” in Acts 13:8, for Dionysius the Areopagite (*De div. nomin.*., c. 8, p. 375) reports that he said: “If God is omnipotent, how is it that your theologian says that God Himself cannot do something?” Dionysius adds, “And he reproaches the divine Paul, who says that God cannot deny Himself.”

(III) The ancient heretics, such as the Carpocratians, who denied the omnipotence of God; the Messalians, who placed man not under the power of God but under that of the wicked angels, etc. “The sons of the heretics do not know the Omnipotent,” says Cyril of Jerusalem (*Catech.*).

(IV) Peter Abelard, who, as is apparent from epistle 190 of Bernard, claimed that “God cannot simply do anything besides those things that He does.” That is, he denied the absolute power of God41 and conceded only the ordinary power.42 His argument went like this: “God can do only that which He has foreknown from eternity and has decided He would do at some time. But He knew and decided to do at some time only that which He is doing. Therefore.” We respond. On the basis of the hypothesis, He cannot do anything except what He has foreknown and decided to do, for He is unchangeable. However, He is also able absolutely and simply to do those things that He has not decided to do.

§ 193. (V) Vorstius, who in many ways undermines the divine power. (1) He claims not only an active power but also a passive power in God, because He receives into Himself new real accidents, namely, new decrees. Yet passive power does not belong to that which is mere and pure act, such as God is. Passive power is a characteristic of imperfection, which does not belong to God, the supreme and utterly perfect being, etc. Passive power is the principle of changeability, which does not belong to the immutable essence of God. Passive power stems from matter, but God is separated from all matter and is completely incorporeal. Passive power is stated with respect to receiving form, either substantial or accidental. But the divine essence is immutable and perfect because it receives no form.

(2) He denies that the power of God is infinite and immense because it does not extend to impossible things. We respond. Things are said to be impossible in two ways: first, *in a certain respect* [secundum quid], which is impossible as far as humans are concerned. Second, *absolutely*, which is simply impossible. If Vorstius is speaking about impossible things taken the first way, it is false to say that divine power does not extend to impossible things, for Christ’s statement is clear: “With man this is impossible, but

41 That is, the omnipotence of God limited only by His own nature.

42 Or “ordained power,” i.e., what God can do given the fact that He has created this world and wants to preserve it.
with God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26) and “What is impossible with men is possible with God” (Luke 18:27). But if he is speaking about impossible things taken in the second way, it is false to say that the divine power is not infinite just because it does not extend to impossible things. Although, as concerns the outward sound of the words, some nonpower (if I may speak so) may be attributed to God when 2 Tim. 2:13 asserts that “He cannot lie and cannot deny Himself,” nevertheless, as concerns the thing signified by the words, a power is attributed to God by the very fact that He is not subject to such changes and imperfections, as Augustine argues elegantly (De symb., bk. 1, c. 1):

God is omnipotent, and because He is omnipotent, He cannot die, He cannot be deceived, He cannot tell a lie. How many things there are that He cannot do, and yet He is omnipotent, and for this reason He is omnipotent, because He cannot do them. For if He could die, He would not be omnipotent. If He could lie, if He could be deceived, if He could deceive, if He could act unjustly, He would not be omnipotent, because if this were in Him, He who would be omnipotent would not be worthy.

Accordingly, those words which deny that God is able to do such things as are contrary to His nature attribute not impotence but rather perfection and power to God. For this reason Scripture absolutely and simply declares that God can do all things and that nothing is impossible for Him. The Scholastics respond as follows: Just as one speaks of knowledge with respect to knowable things, so one speaks of power with respect to possible things. Therefore impossible things are not subject to power and thus do not at all limit or restrict the infinity of His power. For if they were subject to power, they would not be impossible.

§ 194. (VI) The Calvinists, who likewise restrict the infinite power of God. Luther writes: “It is a chief basis of Calvinist doctrine that most of his defenders think that God cannot do what He promises in His Word” (vol. 1, Jena ed., German, fol. 463 f.a.).43

* Lambert Daneau, Elench. haeret., p. 167: “God cannot do all things.” Abdias Liberinus, Syntagm., p. 13: “For it is clearly impossible that God can do all things.” Valentinus Hellopaeus [Zikzai], De re sacram., f. 598: “We confess that God is omnipotent, but in such a way that He cannot do all things.” (See Prodrom. Darmstatinorum, c. 3, § 4.) **

Crocius, indeed, calls it a calumny that the Calvinists are said to deny the omnipotence of God (p. 2, Conversat. Pruten., p. 494). On the contrary: (1) If anyone denies that God by His power can accomplish that which He asserts with clear words that He will do, He denies the omnipotence of God. The Calvinists do this, as is clear from their article on the Supper and on the presence of Christ in the Church. (2) They assert that God cannot do those things that involve a contradiction in the judgment of our reason. (3) They refer those things that are possible for God to the things that are simply impossible. (See our De glor. Dei, disp. 5, §§ 17–19.) (4) They deny that God is able to accomplish what is beyond nature and reason. In so doing, they make the measure into something measured, for the power of God is the measure that measures and is the efficient cause of nature, human reason, and all created things.

43 This citation could not be located.—Ed.
§ 195. (VII) The Photinians, who likewise (1) daringly determine what God can or cannot do on the basis of the principles of nature and the comprehension of our reason. Theodosius Schimberg, *Praefat. refut. Carolii praemissa*, f. 12: “As concerns things impossible for the mind, God does not have such great power as to cause them to exist in reality.” Schmalz, *Contra Frantz.*, disp. 1, p. 3: He claims “that God Himself cannot do the things that by nature are impossible.” He takes “the things that by nature are impossible” to mean those things that, when evaluated according to the laws of nature, seem to our reason incapable of being done. Consequently, he writes: “To say that blood can be changed in such a way that it is not corruptible is to overturn the nature of things—something that God never does” (*Exam. 157 error.*, error 155, p. 41). *Catech. Racov.*, p. 65: “You should know that the begetting of the Son from the essence of God is completely impossible,” namely, because our reason does not understand how God could have begotten for Himself a coeternal Son from eternity. (See our *Praelect. in meth. theol.*, part 2, c. 2; and *De glor. Dei*, disp. 10, § 9, where we showed that this hypothesis—that we must commit to our reason the judgment concerning matters that are simply impossible and contradictory—is the source of all Photinianism and of almost all their errors, and is extremely false and wicked.)

(2) They say that God is omnipotent in such a way that He can do everything that He wills. See Ostorodt, *Instit.*, c. 3, p. 27, and the *Catech. Racov.*, p. 32. We respond. Augustine is indeed correct in saying: “For we do not truthfully call Him ‘omnipotent’ for any other reason except that He can do whatever He wills, nor is the effect of His omnipotent will impeded by the will of any creature” (*Enchir.*, c. 96). Also, *De civ. Dei*, bk. 21, c. 7: “He is not called ‘omnipotent’ for any other reason except that He can do whatever He wills.” However, we must not take this exclusively, as if God could not do more than He wills and actually does, because He can accomplish even that which He, for certain reasons, neither wishes to do nor does. Matt. 3:9: “God is able to raise up from these stones sons to Abraham.” So Augustine himself writes: “Because the Lord raised Lazarus, He undoubtedly had the power. However, because He did not raise Judas, must we say that He did not have the power? He could have, but He did not wish to. For had He wished to, He would have done it with the same power” (*De natur. et grat.*, c. 7). Therefore we must distinguish between the sign of omnipotence and the formal consideration [*ratio formalis*] of omnipotence. The sign of omnipotence is to be able to do absolutely whatever He wills; the formal consideration of omnipotence is to be able to do all possible things.

(3) They deprive God the Father of His power and dominion. Eniedinus, *Explic. loc.*, p. 279: “One must affirm clearly that the Father is excluded indeed not from all dominion but from that dominion which the apostle attributes to Christ Jesus in 1 Cor. 8:6.” Schmalz, *Exam. 157 error.*, p. 55: “In His own person, God now rules no one but administers all judgment in the person of Christ.” In his *Refut. corum, quae exam. 100 error. Smiglec. objecerat*, p. 55, he argues: “Christ the man, ruling in heaven, is not subject to the Father until the Day of Judgment.” He writes: “The fact that God is said to be the head of Christ (1 Cor. 11:3) can be said in this respect: that God gave Him the power that He now has; and again in this respect: that God is superior to Christ even if Christ is not subject to Him; and, finally, in this respect: that this power of Christ will not be like this
forever.” If you say, “A created thing is subject to its creator and depends on Him in its being,” he responds: “By virtue of being created, a created thing cannot help but be subject to its creator, but nothing keeps the created thing from being able, at least for a time, to be made by God to not depend on God.”

Against this insanity and madness we set forth these theorems: (a) The power of the Father and the Son is one and the kingdom that they both administer is one. Therefore as the power and kingdom of the Father is eternal, so also the power and kingdom of the Son is eternal and vice versa. (b) According to His human nature, Christ is inferior to and less than the Father (John 14:28; 1 Cor. 11:3; 15:27). (c) Scripture says that finally at the Last Judgment the Son will be subjected to the Father. Nazianzen (Orat. 4. de theol.) and Cyril [of Alexandria] (Thesaur., bk. 1, c. 18) explain this as referring to the mystical body of Christ, which is the Church. Thus the meaning is that when He hands His kingdom over to God the Father, it will happen that the Church clearly will be subjected to God and all the faults—because of which the Church Militant did not appear to be perfectly subject to Him—will be removed from that most happy kingdom. The apostolic text sets Christ before us to be considered in two ways: (a) with respect to His person; (b) insofar as He constitutes one body with the faithful and the elect. Epiphanius claims that the apostle is not speaking about a true subjection but about a declaration of subjection, for he says that He is to be subjected at the time when, according to His humanity, He has already been subjected, because He then will cease representing the person of the Ruler and the King (Haeres. 69).

§ 196. (VIII) Domingo de Soto, who says: “Our intellect rejects the idea that God cannot do that which He immediately intended—though this does not involve a contradiction—and that He can do that alone of which our intellect can conceive” (Phys., bk. 3, q. 4). But in this way, our finite intelligence will be established as the norm of the infinite power of God, and many mysteries of faith that our intellect rejects will have to be denied, if it is not illumined divinely. De Soto presses the words of Luke 1:37 [“Because with God no word will be impossible”]. We respond. We take “word” to mean whatever God has promised, but we do not restrict the power of God according to our understanding (Eph. 3:20).

Questions on God’s omnipotence.

§ 197. (I) The question arises: Is it correct to say that God’s power is infinite? We respond. Regardless of the retorts of Vorstius and others, we are correct in saying that God’s power is infinite. But how is God’s essence infinite when it does not produce an infinite effect? We respond. Scaliger, Exerc. 365, sect. 8: “Because He does not produce finite effects with finite but with infinite power. Therefore it does not follow: ‘The action is finite, therefore so is the power,’ because the eternal continuation of His essence and power surpasses the work that is now done.” Therefore God’s power is called “infinite”: (1) With respect to intrinsic entity, for it is the very essence of God that is infinite. (2) With regard to extrinsic objects, because it can do all things possible, and for this reason it

44 Or “character of being,” “that relation according to which it can be said of a thing that it is there or it exists.” Deferrari, s.v. “entitas.”
is also called “omnipotence,” which means the power to do all possible things. However, possible things of this kind are innumerable and so many cannot be counted but that more are given.

** The power of God is infinite: (1) *In and of itself, or by its own nature,* just as is God Himself, whose essential character is that He is called “infinite.” (2) *With respect to objects,* which, already made, not only are different and countless but also an infinite number of others could be made by Him, if this were pleasing to His wisdom. (3) *With regard to its manner of acting,* because God never acts so intensively and effectively that He cannot act still more intensively and effectively. (4) *With respect to the material* upon which it acts, which God can never lack because He has no need of prepared matter, and if He wished, He could easily prepare some. **

God's power is called “infinite”: (3) *With regard to extrinsic effects,* because they can be stretched to the extreme point of passivity [*passio*], so long as passive power remains in them. (4) *With regard to action,* because it never works so perfectly that it cannot work more perfectly. (5) *With regard to duration,* because God does not begin to be able to do something that He could not do before nor can He now do something that He will be unable to do later. Instead, His power is always equal and is unending and unfailing.

Thomas, *De pot.*, q. 1, art. 2: “Divine power is infinite intrinsically and extrinsically—extensively with regard to object, intensively with regard to action.”

But how is it infinite when His knowledge surpasses it? We respond. His power, considered *intrinsically* according to entity, is not surpassed by His knowledge. Considered *extrinsically* with regard to its object, it is surpassed *with respect to number,* because more things are subject to God’s knowledge than to His power. However, it is not surpassed *with respect to proportion,* because as the wisdom of God extends to all knowable things, so the power of God extends to all possible things.

** Isidore of Pelusium, bk. 2, epistle 117: “If we are asked whether all things are possible for God, we should respond: The things that are fitting for Him—and this is the way to answer every useless question—He can indeed do all of them, but He wills to do the best things.” **

§ 198. (II) The question arises: *Is the power of God distinguished from the will of God?* We respond. From the simplicity of the divine essence it is obvious that it is not distinguished really. However, the question is whether it is distinguished by *reason.* Durand (1, *Sent.*, 38, q. 1) and others answer affirmatively, because powers are distinguished by their actions. But to know, to will, and to produce are distinct actions. [Therefore.] They also answer affirmatively because, in an intellectual creature, executing power or might is distinct from intellect and will. However, it is more correct to claim that power is not distinguished from will in God *even by reason:* (1) Because Holy Scripture presents God’s will to us as the cause of all things. Ps. 115:3: “Our God is in the heavens. He has done whatever He pleased.” Ps. 148:5: “He spoke and they were made; He gave the order and they were created.” Isa. 46:10: “All My will shall be accomplished.” Eph. 1:[11]: “He does all things according to the counsel of His will.”

45 That is, character of being.
(2) It is a mark of imperfection that in an intellectual creature executing power is distinguished from will. But every imperfection must be removed from God. Surely the will of man is not so effective that by the very fact that it wants something to exist of itself, it immediately begins to exist. From this [it is clear that], in addition to will, it needs executing power. However, God’s will, because it is the infinite essence of God itself, is so active and busy that by the very fact that it wants something to exist, that something immediately is made and exists. From this [it is clear that] it is in no need of a power besides the will. Nevertheless we should note that: (a) The will of God is being taken here not absolutely and intrinsically as it is in God’s essence, but relatively and extrinsically as it functions as the principle that produces creatures. (b) We are not discussing here the personal power that acts naturally and internally [ad intra], as is the power to beget and to spirate, but the extrinsic power that acts freely, working what, when, and as much as seems best to God.

§ 199. (III) The question arises: Is it correct to say that God cannot do contradictory things? This is on the lips and in the heart of everyone and is something that even the Scholastics prove with this reasoning:

God is called “omnipotent” because He has power to do all possible things, namely, whatever things are absolutely possible with respect not only to created nature but also to His own divine nature. However, those things that imply a contradiction are in no way possible because a contradiction posits being and nonbeing simultaneously. Moreover, only a nonbeing cannot be made by God, for what is made ought to be partly like the one who made it. But that which is nothing or a nonbeing does not have a likeness with God but is contrary to Him. Therefore to create a nonbeing is not power but impotence. (Thomas, [Summa theologica], p. 1, q. 24, art. 3)

An implication of contradiction is nothing else but opposition. But that which is opposed to being done is impossible to be done. We concede that God does not do things that imply a contradiction and that are simply impossible, but we add that one must distinguish between things that are impossible for nature and those that are impossible by nature. Things impossible for nature are those that go beyond the usual course of nature, such as for the sun to stand still, fire not to burn, etc. Things impossible by nature are those that contradict the nature and definition of the thing and in themselves imply being and nonbeing simultaneously. We call the former “things impossible in a certain respect [κατά τι]” and the latter “things impossible simply and wholly [ἀπλῶς καὶ ὅλως].” Therefore we say that God can do the former but not the latter.

Socinus, Defens. animadv., p. 53: “Something is called impossible in two ways: respectively and absolutely. For that is called impossible which someone or some people cannot do, namely, with respect to those people who cannot do it. Also, that is said to be impossible which by itself can in no way be done or exist.” But we deny that it should be determined from the principles of our reason what things are truly contradictory in the mysteries of faith. Consequently, we urge these theorems: (1) Whatever God in Holy Scripture asserts that He can do and promises that He will do is not truly contradictory, even if it seems particularly contradictory to our reason. The logic is obvious. Things that truly are absolutely and simply contradictory are also absolutely and simply impossible. Yet the
things God in Holy Scripture says He can do and promises He will do are not impossible—otherwise the truthfulness of God would be imperiled. For if they were absolutely impossible, how would God truly promise that He would perform them? Therefore they are also not absolutely and simply contradictory. Thus it seems contradictory to our reason that the body of Christ is present in many places at one and the same time yet is nonetheless a true and natural body. But because in the institution of the Eucharist God promised that He would furnish the body of Christ to us, being present by means of the blessed bread, therefore we should not consider that to be absolutely and simply contradictory. (See our De gloria Dei, disp. 10, § 9.)

(2) Those things that imply a contradiction and cannot be done with respect to human power and wisdom—we should not immediately claim that they imply a contradiction and are impossible with respect to divine power. The reason for the first portion is clear. Because human power is finite, those things that imply a contradiction and are impossible with respect to human power—such as raising the dead—do not immediately imply a contradiction with respect to divine power nor are they impossible for God since His power is infinite. Luke 18:27: “Things that are impossible with man are possible with God.” Socius, Defens. animadv., p. 54: “If ‘with man’ means the same thing as ‘as it seems to humans,’ then ‘with God’ also will mean the same thing as ‘as it seems to God.’ But it would be truly wicked to say that.” Therefore “impossible with man” is understood to mean those things that humans cannot do. Nevertheless these things are possible with God, that is, God can do them. The reason for the second part of the theorem we find in Eph. 3:20: As our power is finite, so also is our knowledge. Therefore it cannot be the measure of God’s infinite power. Let us, then, confess that God can do something and that we cannot know and investigate the fact that it can be done.

(3) Those things that do not contradict the nature and essence of the thing nor remove a part of its essential definition we should not list among the things that are absolutely impossible and simply contradictory. The reason is that only those things imply a contradiction which conflict with the nature and essence of the thing. To imply a contradiction is to deny and overthrow the essence. In this matter, then, concerning the power of God toward external things [res ad extra], that which overthrows the essence—either of divine power or of the object about which that power is involved or both—is what implies a contradiction. In this way, it implies a contradiction for God to lie, because this conflicts with the nature and essence of the truthful God. Conversely, therefore, those things that do not conflict with the nature and essence of a thing nor remove an essential part of the definition should not be considered as absolutely impossible and simply contradictory. Thus for something to be a true body and not to be circumscribed in actuality to an external place are not contradictory, because place is neither of the essence of a body nor a necessary accident of it, as can be demonstrated from Aristotle (De coel., bk. 12, c. 4), Zabarella (De nat. scient. constit., c. 12), and Scaliger (Exerc. 5). Therefore it must not be denied that God can cause something to be a body that is not circumscribed by an external place. To be circumscribed by an external place is an adjunct of a body. Every

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46 That is, something added to or connected with.
adjunct comes to its subject in addition to its essence. Therefore when one denies local circumscriptio,n he is not denying the essence of the body but that which is added beyond its essence, that is, its adjunct. Furthermore, when one removes that which is in addition to the essence, he does not at the same time remove the essence. Therefore it does not imply a contradiction for something to be a true body and not to be circumscribed by place, for the same thing is not being both affirmed and denied.

(4) One cannot prove manifestly and demonstratively that something implies a contradiction unless he first have a full and complete understanding of that thing against whose nature it is said to militate. The reason is, that which militates against the nature of a thing finally implies a contradiction. But now even if we can promise ourselves some (but not a full and perfect) understanding of created things, nevertheless we have a much smaller and inferior knowledge of the divine essence. Therefore we should not affirm rashly that something conflicts with the nature of a created thing or even with the divine essence itself and thus implies a contradiction and is simply impossible. Furthermore, because the knowledge we seek from the revealed Word is much more perfect, solid, and certain than that which descends from natural principles and from the leadership of our reason, therefore we should not say that the things that are given us to be believed in the revealed Word imply a contradiction, however much they seem to do exactly that according to the norm of natural principles and of our reason. Calvin, Instit., bk. 3, c. 23, § 5: “Does he” (Celestine) “wish the power of God to be so limited that it can do no more than his mind comprehends?” Polanus, Syst., bk. 2, c. 29, p. 287: “We must not limit God’s power to the narrow dimensions of our intelligence. God can do many things that man’s reason cannot comprehend. The incarnation of the Logos and the other mysteries of faith are examples of this.” Why, then, do they declare (wickedly) from the leadership and comprehension of reason so daringly that God cannot cause one body to be in many places? Yet from these words, it readily appears what great impudence it is for the Photinians, who walk in the footsteps of the Calvinists, to say: “It implies a contradiction and is simply impossible for God to be one in essence and three in persons, for God to beget a Son from eternity of His own essence, for the divine and human natures in Christ to be personally united,” etc.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Title</th>
<th>English Title/Transl.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambrose of Milan</td>
<td>De fide ad Grat.</td>
<td>De fide ad Gratianum (MPL 16)</td>
<td>(NPNF 2 10)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>De inst. virg.</td>
<td>De institutione virginis (MPL 16)</td>
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<td>De interpellat.</td>
<td>De interpellatione Job et David (MPL 14)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>De parad.</td>
<td>De paradiso (CSEL 32,1)</td>
<td>On Paradise (FC 42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>De poenit.</td>
<td>De paenitentia (CSEL 73)</td>
<td>On Penitence (NPNF 2 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>De Spiritu s.</td>
<td>De Spiritu Sancto (CSEL 79)</td>
<td>On the Holy Spirit (NPNF 2 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>De vocat.</td>
<td>Prosper of Aquitaine, De vocatione omnium gentium (MPL 17, 51)</td>
<td>On the Calling of All the Gentiles (ACW 15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ephesians</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Epist. ad</td>
<td>EPistle 63, to the Church of Vercelli (NPNF 2 10)</td>
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<td>Vercell. eccles.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hexaem.</td>
<td>Hexameron (Augsburg: Johann Schübler, 1472)</td>
<td>Six Days of Creation (FC 42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psalms</td>
<td>Enarrationes in XII Psalmos Davidicos, or Expositio Psalmi CXVIII (CSEL 44, 52)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Romans</td>
<td>Ambrosiaster, Commentarius in epistulas Paulinas (CSEL 81, 1–3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrada</td>
<td>Defens. conc.</td>
<td>Defensio tridentinac fidei catholicae, et integerrimae (Ingolstadii: apud Davidem Sartorium, 1580)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(Diogo Paiva de Andrade)</td>
<td>Trid.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Anselm of Canterbury</td>
<td>Collect.</td>
<td>Opera omnia quatuor tomis comprehensa (Köln: Peter Cholinus, 1612)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cur Deus homo</td>
<td>Cur Deus homo (MPL 138)</td>
<td>Why God Became Man</td>
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<td></td>
<td>De volunt.</td>
<td>De voluntate (MPL 138)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monol.</td>
<td>Monologium (MPL 158)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Proslog.</td>
<td>Proslogion seu alloquium de Dei existentia (MPL 158)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Prosol.</td>
<td>See: Proslog.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aratus</td>
<td>Phaenomena</td>
<td>Arati phaenomena: M. T. Cicerone interprete (s.l., 1589)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arias Montano, Benito</td>
<td>Joseph.</td>
<td>Liber Joseph, sive de arcano sermone ad sacri apparatus instructionem (Antverpiae: Christophorus Plantinus, 1571)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Biblia Hebraica (Antwerp: Christophe Plantin, 1584)</td>
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<td>Novum testamentum Graece, cum vulgata interpretatione Latina Graeci contextus lineis inserta (Antwerp: Christophe Plantin, 1584)</td>
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<td>Analyt.</td>
<td>Organi . . . pars prima eaq. analytica (Basel: Eusebius Episcopius, 1577)</td>
<td>Prior Analytics</td>
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<td>De anim.</td>
<td>De anima</td>
<td>On the Soul</td>
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<td>De coelo</td>
<td>Lib. iiij. de celo et mundo (Lyon: Jacque Myt, 1529)</td>
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<td>See: De coelo et mundo</td>
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</tbody>
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