



# THE POWER OF GOD

— *by Thomas Aquinas* —

TRANSLATED BY RICHARD J. REGAN

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BY THOMAS AQUINAS

*Translated by*

RICHARD J. REGAN

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# *Contents*

|                               |      |
|-------------------------------|------|
| <i>Preface</i>                | xi   |
| <i>Biblical Abbreviations</i> | xiii |
| <i>Other Abbreviations</i>    | xv   |
| <i>Introduction</i>           | xvii |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Question 1: <i>The Power of God Absolutely</i> | 3 |
|--|---|

## Articles

1. Is There Power in God? 3
2. Is God's Power Infinite? 6
3. Are Things Impossible for Nature Possible for God? 9
4. Should We Judge Something to Be Possible or Impossible by Lower or Higher Causes? 12
5. Can God Cause Things That He Does Not Cause and Abandon Things That He Causes? 14
6. Can God Do Things Possible for Others, Such as Sinning, Walking, and the Like? 17
7. Why Do We Call God Almighty? 19

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Question 2: <i>The Power in the Godhead to Generate</i> | 21 |
|---|----|

## Articles

1. Is There a Power in the Godhead to Generate? 21
2. Do We Speak of the Generative Power in God Essentially or Notionally? 25

3. Does the Generative Power Proceed to the Act of Generation at the Will's Command? 27
4. Can There Be Several Sons in God? 30
5. Is the Power to Generate Included in Omnipotence? 32
6. Are the Power to Generate and the Power to Create the Same? 34

Question 3: *Creation, the First Effect of Divine Power*

36

Articles

1. Can God create Something Out of Nothing? 36
2. Is Creation a Change? 39
3. Is Creation Something Really in a Creature, or If It Is, What Is It? 41
4. Is the Power to Create or the Act of Creation Communicable to a Creature? 43
5. Can There Be Anything That God Did Not Create? 48
6. Is There Only One Source of Creation? 50
7. Is God Active in the Actions of Nature? 54
8. Does God Act in Nature by Creating, That Is, Is Creation Involved in Nature's Action? 59
9. Does Creation Bring the Rational Soul into Existence, or Does the Transmission of Semen? 62
10. Is the Rational Soul Created in the Body or outside It? 68
11. Does Semen Create or Transmit the Sensory and Vegetative Souls? 71
12. Is a Sensory or Vegetative Soul in the Semen at the Moment of Its Emission? 74
13. Can Any Being from Another Being Be Eternal? 76
14. Can What Essentially Differs from God Have Always Existed? 79
15. Did Things Proceed from God by a Natural Necessity or by a Decision of His Will? 81
16. Can Multiplicity Proceed from One First Thing? 84
17. Has the World Always Existed? 89
18. Were the Angels Created before the Visible World? 94
19. Could the Angels Have Existed before the Visible World? 98

Question 4: *The Creation of Unformed Matter* 100

Articles

1. Did the Creation of Unformed Matter Precede in Time the Creation of Things? 100
2. Was the Formation of Matter All at Once or Successively? 109

Question 5: *The Preservation of Things in Existence by God* 132

Articles

1. Does God Preserve Things in Existence, or Do They Remain in Existence Intrinsically, with All God's Action Circumscribed? 132
2. Can God Communicate to a Creature to Be Intrinsically Preserved in Existing without God? 137
3. Can God Annihilate a Creature? 138
4. Should a Creature Be Annihilated, or Is Any? 141
5. Does Heavenly Motion at Some Time Cease? 144
6. Can a Human Being Know When the Heavenly Motion Ends? 149
7. Do the Elements Remain When Heavenly Motion Ceases? 151
8. Do Action and Being Acted Upon Remain When Heavenly Motion Ceases? 154
9. Do Plants, Irrational Animals, and Minerals Remain after the World's End? 156
10. Do Human Bodies Remain When Heavenly Motion Ceases? 158

Question 6: *Miracles* 161

Articles

1. Can God Do Anything in Created Things Outside Natural Causes, Whether Contrary to Nature or Contrary to the Course of Nature? 161
2. Can We Call All the Things God Does without Natural Causes or Contrary to the Course of Nature Miracles? 165
3. Can Spiritual Creatures by Their Natural Powers Cause Miracles? 167
4. Can Good Angels and Human Beings Work Miracles by a Gift of Grace? 172



5. Do Devils Also Act to Work Miracles? 174
6. Do Angels and Devils Have Bodies by Nature United to Them? 176
7. Can Angels or Devils Assume Bodies? 182
8. Can an Angel or Devil with an Assumed Body Perform the Actions of a Living Body? 185
9. Should We Attribute Miraculous Activity to Faith? 187
10. Do Certain Sensibly Perceptible and Material Things, Deeds, or Words Force Devils to Work the Miracles that Magical Skills Seem to Cause? 189

Question 7: *The Simplicity of the Divine Essence*

193

Articles

1. Is God Simple? 193
2. Is the Essence or Substance in God the Same as His Existing? 196
3. Is God in a Genus? 200
4. Do We Predicate *Good, Wise, Just* of God as Accidents? 202
5. Do the Aforementioned Terms Signify the Divine Substance? 205
6. Are These Terms Synonymous? 210
7. Do We Predicate Such Terms of God and Creatures Univocally or Equivocally? 213
8. Is There a Relation between God and a Creature? 216
9. Do Such Relations between Creatures and God Really Exist in Creatures Themselves? 219
10. Is God Really Related to a Creature, So That the Relation Is Something in God? 222
11. Are These Temporal Relations in God Conceptually? 225

Question 8: *The Things That We Predicate of God Eternally*

227

Articles

1. Are the Relations Predicated of God Eternally, Which the Terms *Father* and *Son* Signify, Real or Purely Conceptual Relations? 227
2. Is Relation in God His Substance? 231

3. Do the Relations Constitute and Distinguish the Persons or Hypostases? 234
4. Does a Hypostasis Remain When We Exclude a Relation Conceptually? 238

Question 9: *The Divine Persons*

242

Articles

1. How Is Person Related to Essence, Subsistence, and Hypostasis? 242
2. What Is a Person? 244
3. Can There Be Personhood in God? 248
4. Does the Word *Person* Signify Something Relative to Something Absolute in the Godhead? 250
5. Are There Several Persons in the Godhead? 254
6. Can We Properly Predicate the Word *Person* in the Plural in the Godhead? 259
7. How Do We Predicate Numerical Terms of Divine Persons, Namely, Whether Positively or Only Negatively? 260
8. Is There Any Diversity in God? 266
9. Are There Three, or More or Less, Persons in the Godhead? 268

Question 10: *The Procession of the Divine Persons*

276

Articles

1. Is There Procession in the Divine Persons? 276
2. Are There One or More Processions in the Godhead? 280
3. What Is the Order of Procession to Relation in the Godhead? 286
4. Does the Holy Spirit Proceed from the Son? 288
5. Would the Holy Spirit Still Be from the Son if He Were Not to Proceed from Him? 296

Notes

305

Bibliography

319

Index

321

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## Preface

THE DOMINICAN FATHERS have not yet completed editing the Leonine text of Thomas Aquinas's Disputed Questions on the Power of God, nor are they expected to do so any time soon. One Dominican Father before his death had completed editing Q. 3, on creation, but the text has not yet been published. Susan C. Selner-Wright had access to the text and translated it, with commentary (see Bibliography). My translation of the entire treatise is based on the best text currently available: Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones Disputatae*, II:7–276 (Turin: Marietti, 1949). That text, however, has a few typographical errors (e.g., *causale* for *casuale* in connection with Democritus, famous for attributing the motion of matter to chance [*casus*]). Such typos are fortunately easy to spot.

I have taken the liberty of transforming the text's format in one respect. I first relate the question-and-answer of each article and then list objections and replies. I include those objections that elicited the longest replies, sometimes several pages long, as well as a sample of other objections and replies. Professional academicians may understandably wish that all the objections and replies be included, but I think that one can very well comprehend the basic questions and answers without reference to every objection and reply. There is also a consideration of economy. Were I to include all of the objections and replies, the text would be twice its present extensive size. The present text should suffice for the use of most students and readers. For study of the objections and replies not included in this book, specialists and students can consult Lawrence Shapcote, *On the Power of God*, 3 vols. (London: Burns, Oates, and Washbourne, 1934).

I have provided the notes given in the Marietti text. The notes, however, are frequently incomplete, and there are many places where there should be notes. Scholars will have to await publication of the authoritative Leonine text. I have used the Latin titles of texts of Aristotle where that titling is in general usage (e.g., the *De anima*). For other authors, I have used the English titles of works when the English titles are commonplace and readily recognizable but have retained Latin or Greek titles where an English translation might not be recognizable.

(e.g., the *Hexameron*). I add a comment on my translation of the Latin word *suppositum*, which features prominently in Thomas' discussion of the Persons in the Trinity. Most translators leave the Latin word in place, as Shapcote does, or use the equivalent but unfamiliar English word *supposit*. There is no need to do so. The *Index Thomisticus* cites several places where Thomas defines *suppositum* as *existing individual*, and the unabridged English dictionary gives the same definition of the English equivalent.

I have provided an Introduction that chiefly summarizes Thomas' theses and arguments, and a Bibliography that refers the reader to a comprehensive compilation by Brian Davies, to which I have added a list of more recent notable works.

Richard J. Regan  
Bronx, N.Y.

## *Biblical Abbreviations*

|        |               |
|--------|---------------|
| Col.   | Colossians    |
| Cor.   | Corinthians   |
| Eccl   | Ecclesiastes  |
| Ex.    | Exodus        |
| Ez.    | Ezekiel       |
| Gal.   | Galatians     |
| Gen.   | Genesis       |
| Hebr.  | Hebrews       |
| Hos.   | Hosea         |
| Is.    | Isaiah        |
| Jn.    | John          |
| Jon.   | Jonah         |
| Jos.   | Josiah        |
| Kgs.   | Kings         |
| Lk.    | Luke          |
| Mt.    | Matthew       |
| Prov.  | Proverbs      |
| Ps.    | Psalms        |
| Rev.   | Revelation    |
| Rom.   | Romans        |
| Sam.   | Samuel        |
| Sir.   | Sirach        |
| Thess. | Thessalonians |
| Tim.   | Timothy       |
| Tob.   | Tobias        |
| Zcch.  | Zechariah     |

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## *Other Abbreviations*

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| A., AA.        | article, articles                                 |
| Comm.          | comment   |
| Counterobj(s). | Counterobjection(s).                              |
| CT             | Thomas Aquinas, <i>Compendium of Theology</i>     |
| Dist.          | distinction                                       |
| Hom.           | homily  |
| n., nn.        | number(s)   |
| Obj(s).        | objection(s)                                      |
| Prop(s).       | proposition(s)                                    |
| Q., QQ.        | question, questions                               |
| SCG            | Thomas Aquinas, <i>Summary against the Pagans</i> |
| ST             | Thomas Aquinas, <i>Summary of Theology</i>        |



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## *Introduction*

THE PHILOSOPHER-THEOLOGIAN Thomas Aquinas (A.D. 1224/1225–1274) composed three comprehensive treatises on God, human beings, and the universe: the *ST*, the *SCG*, and the *CT*. Earlier, he also wrote an extensive *Commentary on the Sentences* of Peter Lombard, a standard practice of the masters of theology at the University of Paris. In addition, he composed treatises on particular topics, the Disputed Questions, one of which is on the power of God (the *De potentia*).

During the academic year, masters at the University of Paris were required to conduct frequent public disputations on theological topics. These disputations were an integral part of a theological program of studies. Thomas did so with great frequency, especially in the three years of his first professorship at Paris (1256–1259), when he held one every other week during term. The Disputed Questions of Thomas consist of a systematic series of discussions on the questions. Two mornings were normally set aside for a public disputation, during which lectures by the faculty were suspended.

On the first morning, an audience of masters, bachelors, students, and attendants attacked a thesis chosen by a master and announced beforehand. A bachelor, directed by the master, defended the thesis. The master presided and controlled the discussion and gave his resolution. On the next scheduled morning, the master briefly summarized in order the points raised and briefly responded by citing rational arguments and biblical and ecclesiastical authority. Then he gave a detailed explanation and proof of the thesis, followed by specific replies to the objections. The master or a reporter under his direction recorded the disputations. Each article in the Disputed Questions reports a disputation, and the articles in the longest series of disputations were grouped into questions.

Thomas returned to Italy in 1259 and was an advisor to the papal court and regent master of Dominicans in their course of studies until 1267. As master of Dominicans in studies there, Thomas conducted disputations like those in

Paris, one of which was the *De potentia*. While scholars agree that he compiled the latter during this period, the place and exact date are disputed. According to Pierre Mandonnet, the disputations were written during Thomas' stay at Anagni (1259–1261), but according to Martin Grabmann, they were written at Rome when Thomas was regent of studies at the Priory of Santa Sabina (1265–1267).

### *The Disputed Questions on the Power of God*

Like all Thomas' other works, the *De potentia* is a theological treatise. He speculated on the tenets of the Christian faith, using rational arguments to support theses but always from a theological perspective.

Question 1 considers God's power in general. As God is pure actuality and perfect, his power is necessarily infinite, that is, unlimited (AA. 1 and 2), and can do more than nature can (A. 3). He distinguishes things possible by lower causes, that is, nature, and things possible by higher causes, that is, spiritual creatures and God (A. 4). God can cause other things than those he does, and he can annihilate creatures, although it would be contrary to his wisdom to do so (A. 5). God cannot do contradictory things, things contrary to his goodness, such as sin, or his essence, such as walking (A. 6). God is almighty in this sense (A. 7). Thomas bases these positions on arguments from natural reason.

In Question 2, Thomas moves from considering the power of God to cause external things in the world to considering the power in the Godhead to generate naturally, that is, the Son within the Trinity. As an orthodox Christian, he accepts on faith that there is a power to generate the Son (A. 1). Unlike the power to create external things, the power in the Godhead to generate the Son is essential to the Godhead, but the common divine nature, because it needs to be the source of an action of generation that befits only the Father, needs to be the source insofar as it belongs to the Father as a personal property (A. 2). As in the case of our intellect conceiving a word, that is, the form of what it understands, God's will is in no way the source of the divine generation. Although the Godhead wills the Son and the generation of the Son, God's will does not freely decide whether to generate the Son, something possible only regarding the creation of creatures (A. 3). There is only one Son, since only the relation of sonship can distinguish the Son from the other Persons of the Trinity, and that relation constitutes the Person of the Son (A. 4). The power to generate the Son belongs to the omnipotence of God but only as that power belongs to the Father (A.5). The power to generate the Son and the power to create external things regard different kinds of action, although the powers as

power are the same (A. 6). Note that Thomas is not concerned with demonstrating from Scripture that the Father does generate the Son but rather aims to connect the generation of the Son to God's power.

In Question 3, Thomas returns to rational analysis of creation. It is the most extensive development of any question in the *De potentia* and one of the fullest in any of his works. Creation causes being from nothing, that is, no preexisting matter (A. 1), and he thereby distinguishes it from natural change, that is, causing something to exist from something else (A. 2). Creation, considered passively in a creature, is a real relation to its active cause, God (A. 3). The act of creation, since it causes the very existing of a creature, cannot be communicated to another creature (A. 4). God creates everything in the universe (A. 5), and he is the only source of everything (A. 6).

He is also active in the actions of nature (A. 7), but his action consists of being the primary cause of the actions of nature in conjunction with secondary natural causes, not creating the effects from nothing (A. 8). One part of nature, however, is an exception. The rational soul, although it is the form of the human body, is intrinsically immaterial because of its immaterial activities of understanding and reason. Therefore, God necessarily creates it out of nothing (A. 9) and in the body of each human being (A. 10). The sensory and vegetative souls are not created, but as the natural generative act by semen produces the body, so does it produce the sensory and vegetative souls in human beings (A. 11). Those souls are not in semen at the moment of its emission, but rather semen contains an active power derived from the begetter's soul to produce them in the begotten (A. 12).

The Son by nature proceeds eternally from the Father, since the Son could not be in a different way from the Father (A. 13). We cannot say that something essentially different from God, that is, something created, could not always exist by his will. Nonetheless, the tenets of the Catholic faith hold that no creature always existed (A. 14). Creatures proceed from God by his free will, not any natural necessity (A. 15). The multiplicity and diversity of creatures proceed directly from the first thing, God, not by a series of processions, and the multiplicity and diversity of creatures are required for the perfection of the universe (A. 16). As the Catholic faith holds, the world has not always existed, and no demonstration by reason can prove that it did. Time exists in the world, and God allots as much time to it as he wills (A. 17). Catholic teachers agree that the angels were created at the same time as the material world (A. 18), although they could have existed before it (A. 19).

Question 4 attempts to reconcile the rational analysis of the creation of the world, the rational soul, and angels in Question 3 with the first chapter of the Book of Genesis. First, Thomas opposed two approaches: one that would

presume that Scripture contains false propositions and things contrary to the Catholic faith; the other that would presume that the text prescribes a particular interpretation when Catholic teachers are divided about interpreting the text. As to the first, Thomas forthrightly declares that absolutely formless matter, that is, prime matter, is impossible, and nothing prevents us from understanding the formlessness of matter described in the text before the advent of form by the order of nature or origin, not in a temporal sense (A. 1). Then, in the lengthy A. 2, Thomas explains the two lines of interpreting the six days of creation and their morning and evenings. According to Augustine, the days indicate the successive production of forms in the mornings according to the order of nature, not temporally. Other saints interpret the six days of creation to indicate both the successive production of forms according to the order of nature and the temporal order. Thomas concludes that either interpretation is compatible with the Catholic faith and the context, although the second is more compatible with the words of the text. Thomas is not a biblical exegete in the modern sense, but neither is he a William Jennings Bryan fundamentalist.

Question 5 takes up the power of God in the preservation of things. In the first part (AA. 1–4), Thomas argues from reason that creatures always depend on God for their existing, with their every action prescribed by him, and that nothing created remains in existence by reason of itself (A. 1). God cannot communicate to a creature to be intrinsically preserved in existence apart from his power any more than he can communicate to a creature the power to create (A. 2). God could annihilate a creature (A. 3), but this would be contrary to his providence (A. 4). In the second part of this question (AA. 5–10), Thomas considers what will happen at the consummation of the world. Heavenly motion, no longer serving any function in the universe, will cease, and heavenly bodies will remain in stationary positions and beautify the cosmos (A. 5). No human being can know when this will occur (A. 6). The elements, namely, earth, fire, water, and air, will abide in their natural qualities (A. 7). Action and being acted upon will cease (A. 8). Other than the human body, material substances of mixed elements, namely, plants, irrational animals, and minerals will not remain, among other reasons because they will no longer be needed to satisfy human needs (A. 9). But human bodies will, since the immortal rational soul is their form, and are with the soul part of the perfection of the universe (A. 10).

In Question 6, Thomas considers the power to work miracles. Contrary to such Enlightenment thinkers as John Locke and David Hume, he argues that God as the cause of things existing can do things contrary to nature or the course of nature (A. 1). Thomas adopts Augustine's definition of a miracle as

“something different and unusual above the capacity of nature and apparently beyond the expectation of the one wondering about it” (A. 2). (The reader may note that a miracle so defined requires that God’s action *transcend* the action of natural things and the course of nature, although many or most Catholic theologians today hold that events involving an extraordinary and unusual concatenation of natural causes could qualify as a miracle.)

In addition to direct action by God, faith judges that spiritual creatures, namely, angels, can at his command cause the motion of the heavenly bodies and lower material substances. Angels produce certain wondrous effects on earth by their skill but do not work miracles by their natural spiritual power, contrary to the position of some philosophers (A. 3). Good angels can instrumentally work true miracles by a gift of grace, and so can good human beings (A. 4). Like good angels, devils have the power to move external material things and images in the imagination of human beings. They have the power to produce wondrous effects by their skill but none above their natural spiritual power (A. 5).

Article 6 considers whether angels and devils have bodies attached to them by nature. Some philosophers thought that all substances are material, and other philosophers thought that some substances are immaterial, but that they were always united to bodies as their form. Plato held that some immaterial substances are joined to airy bodies, and others to earthly bodies. But Aristotle denied the union of intellectual substances with airy bodies and posited some immaterial substances not united to a body. Thomas holds that, according to the true faith, angels and devils do not have bodies united to them by nature. Angels and devils can assume a human form in apparitions (A. 7), but they cannot with an assumed body perform the actions of a living one, such as speaking and eating (A. 8).

Saints rightly disposed can also instrumentally work miracles by their prayers and power, and even faith without charity congruously merits that one’s petition for a miracle be heard, although charity is the foundation of meriting (A. 9). Devils work their wondrous effects by magical skills. God, angels, or human beings can compel them to refrain from doing such things, higher devils can compel lower ones to perform works, and material things can in various ways entice devils (A. 10).

Question 7 examines what philosophical reason can say about the divine essence itself, matter also treated in *ST* 1, Q. 3. God, as the first actuality, is simple, that is, pure actuality without any mixture of potentiality (A. 1). As uncreated, his essence or substance is his existing, and he does not share in existing (A. 2). Thus he does not belong to any genus of things (A. 3). Affirmative, nonmetaphorical predicates about God, such as good, wise, and just, are

not accidents in God (A. 4). Rather, such predicates signify the divine essence itself, although defectively and imperfectly from the perfections of creatures (A. 5). Such predicates, however, are not synonymous, since our intellect conceives the divine essence by many deficient likenesses in creatures, as if reflections in a mirror (A. 6). We predicate the terms analogously, that is, in a sense partly the same and partly different, not univocally or purely equivocally (A. 7). There are relations between God and creatures (A. 8), the one of the creature really existing in the creature (A. 9) and the one of God to a creature being only conceptually in God (AA. 10 and 11).

The last three questions examine predication about God from eternity (Q. 8), the divine Persons (Q. 9) and the processions of the Son and the Holy Spirit (Q. 10). The examination is speculative theology, that is, rational speculation about the Trinity. In Q. 8, Thomas explains that the personal relations, such as Father and Son, that we predicate about God signify real, not purely conceptual, relations, and the Persons differ by relations, not anything absolute (A. 1). By analogy to the human intellect conceiving the word of what it understands but without the limitations of that process, the Father can originate the Son without prejudice to the unity of the divine essence. Since there is no composition in God, the internal relations in the Godhead are the divine substance itself but have a way of predication different from the substantial way we predicate things such as simplicity about God (A. 2). God the Father, as Father, is distinct from the other Persons, a hypothesis, that is, an existing individual, and his paternity constitutes him a hypostasis and distinguishes him from the other Persons (A. 3). When we conceptually exclude consideration of the internal relations in the Godhead, the Persons do not remain, and so neither do the hypostases, since what constitutes a hypostasis cannot remain when one excludes what constitutes it (A. 4).

Question 9 considers the notion of person, its relation to essence, subsistence, and hypostasis, and its presence in the Godhead. A substance as subject does not exist in another but subsists of itself. As such, the Greeks call a person a hypostasis. In immaterial things, there is no difference between essence and substance as existing individual, but there is in material things, since matter individuates the essence of such things. Person adds rational nature to hypostasis (A. 1). A person is an individual substance, or hypostasis, of a rational nature (A. 2). We can attribute personhood to God, since a person's way of existing is intellectual, namely, one who exists intrinsically (A. 3). The word *person* has something in common with the name predicated of God absolutely and something in common with the name we predicate to signify the internal relations in the Godhead. Divine Person formally signifies a distinct subsistent thing in the divine nature, and since such a Person can only be a relation

or something relative, it materially signifies the relation or relative thing and so a substance or hypostasis, not an essence. The signified relation of fatherhood, for example, is included in the meaning of a divine Person, the Father, who is something subsisting in the divine nature and distinguished by the relation (A. 4).

The plurality of Persons in the Godhead concerns matters subject to faith, and we cannot adequately understand it, but we can by analogy to our intellect clarify it. It belongs to the nature of understanding that there is the one who understands and the thing understood. Unlike our intellect, God conceives only one Word, which perfectly represents him and all things, and which has the same essence and nature of the intellect conceiving it. The remaining difference after we exclude the differences between our intellect and the divine intellect consists of our word proceeding from something other and the divine Word proceeding from something the same. Therefore, since differences cause number, the plurality in God consists only of the subsistent relations, and so there is a plurality of divine Persons (A. 5).

We properly predicate the word *person* in the Godhead in the plural, since there are plural properties in it, just as we predicate the word of human beings in the plural because of their individuating sources (A. 6). We predicate unity and the corresponding multiplicity in the Godhead compatible with a being, not what belongs to the genus of quantity. The unity of a being adds only the negation or lack of division, but insofar as unity and multiplicity include the meaning of the things of which we predicate them, we understand them positively (A. 7). We should speak about the Godhead in such a way that we do not occasion the errors of Arius and Sabellius, namely, the error of Arius that denied the essential unity of the Trinity and the error of Sabellius that denied the plurality of Persons. Thomas enumerates expressions to avoid regarding each error (A. 8). The Catholic faith maintains the unity of the divine essence in three really distinct Persons, no more and no less. There are only two kinds of intellectual action, namely, understanding and willing. By understanding his essence, God understands himself and all things, and by willing his goodness, he loves himself and all the things he wills. Therefore, since there is only one understanding and one willing in God, there is in the Godhead only one product of God's understanding, the Word, and one product of his Love, the Holy Spirit (A. 9).

The last question, Question 10, continues discussion of the divine Persons regarding the processions of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Processions from God come about in two ways, transitively in the creation of external things and immanently within the Godhead. In the second kind of action, there is the procession of the Word, the Son, and that of Love, the Holy Spirit (A. 1). The



origins of the processions multiply and distinguish them. The first procession in the Godhead, that of the Word, the Son, presupposes no other procession, and the second, that of Love, the Holy Spirit, presupposes the procession of the Word, since the love of anything can proceed from the will only if an understood good, the word, is the object of the will (A. 2). There is one way of understanding a relation in the Godhead, as constituting a divine Person, and another way of understanding a relation as such. Therefore, if one should consider a divine relation as such, it presupposes an understanding of procession. But if we consider the relation as constituting the Person, then the relation that constitutes the Person from whom there is a procession is conceptually prior to the procession, although the relation that constitutes the Person proceeding, even as such, is conceptually subsequent to procession (A. 3).

The last two articles of Question 10 consider in considerable depth the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Son, in conjunction with the Father. Thomas gives a number of rational arguments for this position, the first of which echoes A. 2 and asserts that there can be processions in the Godhead only in a successive order in which the second Person proceeding is from the first Person proceeding. To this and other rational arguments, Thomas adds brief scriptural ones. It is not enough to say, as the Greek Church does, that the Holy Spirit proceeds through the Son but not from him, since that whereby something is produced is always the source of what is produced. There is one and the same power in the Father and the Son in the procession of the Holy Spirit (A. 4). Thomas expands the argument against the position of the Greek Church on the procession of the Holy Spirit. From many considerations, Thomas concludes that the Holy Spirit would not differ from the Son if the Spirit were not to proceed from the Son, nor would the origination of the Spirit be different from generation (A. 5).

The *De potentia* is a theological work, chiefly about the Trinity. The principal patristic authority cited in the work is Augustine, the Church Father most highly regarded by Western medieval theologians. Nonetheless, the work contains much material that should be of interest to students of philosophy. For example, Thomas devotes extensive attention to the subject of creation, especially in Q. 3. He summarily explains the analogy of being, a central element of his philosophical analysis, in Q. 7, A. 7, and gives the classic example of predicating *healthy* of urine and medicine in Reply Counterobj. 2. And he explains the transcendental predication of *one* in Q. 7, A. 7. The principal philosophical authority cited in the work is Aristotle.

# *The Power of God*

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# *Question I*

## THE POWER OF GOD ABSOLUTELY

### *Article I*

#### Is There Power in God?

To clarify the point of this question, we should note that we speak of power in relation to actuality. But actuality is twofold, namely, the first actuality, which is the form, and the second actuality, which is activity. And as we see from the common understanding of human beings, they first attributed actuality to activity and, second, transferred actuality to the form, inasmuch as form is the source and end of activity.

And so power is likewise twofold: one, active power, to which an act corresponds, and the word *power* seems to have been first attributed in relation to action; the second, passive power, to which the first actuality, that is, the form, corresponds, and the word *power* seems likewise to have been secondarily applied to the form. And as nothing undergoes anything except by reason of passive power, so nothing acts except by reason of the first actuality, that is, the form. For I have said that the word *actuality* was initially applied to the first actuality from its relation to activity. But it belongs to God to be the pure and first actuality. And so acting and pouring out his likeness to other things belongs especially to him. And so also active power especially belongs to him, since we call power active insofar as it is the source of activity.

But we should also note that our intellect strives to express God as the most perfect thing. And because it can come to him only from the likeness of his effects and does not find in creatures anything so supremely perfect as to altogether exclude imperfection, it strives to designate him from the various perfections found in creatures, although all those perfections lack something. Nonetheless, our intellect does this in such a way that whatever imperfection

is connected with any of them is completely removed from God. For example, existing signifies something complete and simple but not subsistent, and substance signifies something subsistent but the subject of something else.

Therefore, we posit in God substance and existing, but substance by reason of subsistence, not by reason of underlying accidents, and existing by reason of simplicity and fullness, not by reason of inherence, whereby something inheres in something else. Likewise, we attribute activity to God by reason of his ultimate fullness, not by reason of the object into which his activity goes. And we attribute power to him by reason of what permanently abides and is the source of power, not by reason of what his activity accomplishes.

*Obj. 1.* Power is the source of action. But God's action, that is, his essence, has no source, since it is neither produced nor proceeding. Therefore, there is no power in God.

*Reply Obj. 1.* We should say that power is both the source of action and the source of an effect. And so, if we posit power in God as the source of an effect, we do not need to posit power as the source of his essence, that is, his action. Or we should say, and say better, that there are two kinds of relation in God. One kind is real, namely, the kind that distinguishes the Persons, such as fatherhood and sonship. Otherwise, the divine Persons would be distinguished conceptually, as Sabellius said, not really distinguished. The second kind of relation is only conceptual and signified when we say that God's action is from his essence, or that God acts by his essence. For these propositions designate certain relationships, and this so happens because, when we attribute action to God by reason of its nature requiring a source, we also attribute to it the relation of being from a source. And so this relation is only conceptual. But it belongs to the nature of action, not the nature of essence, to have a source. And so, although the divine essence has no source, neither really nor conceptually, divine action has a source conceptually.

*Obj. 5.* We should not signify anything about God by what is taken away from his primacy and simplicity. But God, inasmuch as he is simple and the first active thing,<sup>1</sup> acts by his essence. Therefore, we ought not to signify him as acting by power, which, at least in our way of signifying, adds something to his essence.

*Reply Obj. 5.* We should say that it is impossible to hold that God acts by his essence, and that there is no power in God, since power is what is the source of action. And so, because we hold that God acts by his essence, we hold that there is power in God. And so the nature of power does not derogate from his simplicity or primacy, since we do not posit anything, so to speak, in addition to his essence.

*Obj. 6.* According to Aristotle,<sup>2</sup> there is no difference in everlasting things between actual existing and potential existing, and so far more in the case of God. And where there is the same thing, we should take the common name from the

more excellent thing. But essence is more excellent than power, since power adds to essence. Therefore, we ought to name only essence about God, not power.

*Reply Obj. 6.* We should say that we understand the statement that there is no difference between actual existing and potential existing in everlasting things to refer to passive power, and so it has no bearing on the question at issue, since there is no such power in God. But since it is true that active power is the same thing in God as his essence, we should say that, although the divine essence and power are really the same thing in God, power requires a special name because it particularly adds a way of signifying. For names correspond to understandings, according to Aristotle.<sup>3</sup>

*Obj. 8.* Any power separated from its act is imperfect, and so, since nothing imperfect belongs to God, there can be no such power in God. Therefore, if there is power in God, it needs to be always united with an act, and so the power to create is always united with the act, and so it follows that he created things from eternity. But this is heretical.

*Reply Obj. 8.* We should say that God's power to create is always united with his act, that is, action, since action is the divine essence, but the effects follow according to the command of his will and the ordinance of his wisdom. And so his power to create does not need to be always united with its effect, just as creatures need not have existed from eternity.

*Obj. 9.* When something suffices for doing something, anything else is added superfluously. But God's essence suffices for God to do anything by it. Therefore, the power to do it is superfluously posited in him.

*Reply Obj. 9.* We should say that God's essence suffices for him to act by it, but his power is not superfluous, since we understand his power as if something added to his essence, but it adds in our way of understanding only the relation of source. For the essence itself, being the source of acting, has the aspect of power.

*Obj. 10.* But you will say that his power is different from his essence only according to our way of understanding, not really. On the contrary, every understanding to which nothing corresponds is empty and meaningless.

*Reply Obj. 10.* We should say that something in reality corresponds to understanding in two ways. It corresponds in one way directly, namely, when the intellect conceives the form of a thing existing outside the soul, as, for example, a human being or a stone. It corresponds in another way indirectly, namely, when something results from the act of understanding, and the intellect reflecting on itself considers it. And so a thing corresponds to the consideration by means of the intellect, that is, there is intelligence of the thing indirectly. For example, the intellect understands the nature of animal in a human being, in a horse, and many other species, and so it understands animal as a genus. To this understanding whereby the intellect understands genus, no

thing that is a genus exists outside the mind and directly corresponds to it. Rather, something corresponds to the intelligence that results from the representation. It likewise concerns the relation of source that adds God's power to his essence, since something real corresponds indirectly, not directly, to it. For example, our intellect understands a creature with a relation to, and dependency on, the creator, and since the intellect cannot understand one thing related to another without, conversely, also understanding a reciprocal relation, it understands in God a relation of source, which results from our way of understanding. And so the relation of source is related to the thing indirectly.

*Obj. 12.* You will say that the power we attribute to God is his essence, not a quality, and that his power and essence differ only conceptually. On the contrary, either something really corresponds to this concept or nothing does. If nothing does, the concept is empty. And if something real corresponds to it, something in God is consequently power besides his essence, as the notion of power adds to the notion of essence.

*Reply Obj. 12.* Something in divinity, namely, something one and the same, corresponds to the different notions of attributes. Our intellect is compelled to represent the simplest thing (i.e., God) by different forms because of his incomprehensibility, and so those different forms that our intellect conceives about God are in God as the cause of truth, inasmuch as all these forms can represent the very thing that is God. Nevertheless, the forms reside in our intellect as their subject.

*Obj. 13.* According to Aristotle,<sup>4</sup> all power and every productive thing should choose for the sake of something else. But nothing such belongs to God, since he himself is not for the sake of something else. Therefore, power does not belong to him.

*Reply Obj. 13.* We should say that Aristotle is thinking about active powers, productive things, and the like, which concern the products of skills and human affairs. For not even regarding natural things is it true that active power is always for the sake of its effects, since it is silly, for example, to say that the power of the sun is for the sake of the worms produced by its power. Far less is divine power for the sake of its effects.

## *Article 2*

### Is God's Power Infinite?

We should say that we speak of the infinite in two ways: in one way, privatively, and then we call something infinite that is constituted by nature to have an end and does not have any, and such an infinite is only in quantities;

in the second way, negatively, that something does not have an end. Understood in the first way, infinite cannot belong to God, both because he is without quantity, and because all privation denotes imperfection, which is far from God.

But the infinite predicated negatively belongs to God regarding all the things that are in him, since nothing limits him, neither his essence, his wisdom, his power, or his goodness. And so all the things in him are infinite. But we should especially note regarding the infinity of his power that, since active power results from actuality, the amount of power results from the amount of actuality. For the more actual each thing is, the more abundant its power.

God is infinite actuality, and this is evident because actuality is limited in only two ways: one regarding the active cause, as, the beauty of a house receives its size and dimensions from the will of the builder; the other regarding the recipient, as, for example, the heat in firewood is limited and receives its strength from the disposition of the firewood. But no active cause limits the divine actuality itself, since that actuality proceeds from himself, not anything else, nor does another, receiving thing limit him, since, inasmuch as there is no admixture of passive power in him, he himself is pure actuality, not received in something. For God is his very existing, received in nothing.

And so God is evidently infinite, and this can be shown as follows. The existing of a human being is limited to the species of human being, since the existing is received in the nature of the human species, and the same is true of the existing of a horse or any creature. But God's existing, since it is pure existing, not received in something, is not limited to a particular way of a perfection of existing but has the whole of existing in itself. And so, as existing, understood in a universal sense, can extend to infinite things, so is divine existing infinite. And so his excellence, that is, his active power, is infinite.

But we should note that, although his power by his essence has infinity, it receives a mode of infinity that its essence does not have, because we relate it to the things of which it is the source. For there are many things in the objects of power. There is also in activity an intensity regarding its efficacy, and so we can attribute a certain infinity to an active power by its conformity to the infinity of quantity, both continuous and discrete. It is conformed to the infinity of discrete quantity insofar as we note the quantity of power by many or few objects, and we call this extensive quantity. It is conformed to the infinity of continuous quantity insofar as we note the quantity of power insofar as it acts lightly or intensely, and we call this intensive quantity. The first quantity belongs to power regarding objects, and the second regarding the action, since active power is the source of both.



God's power is infinite in both of these ways, since he never causes so many effects without being able to cause more, nor does he ever act so intensely without being able to act more intensely. But we should not note the intensity of divine action as the action is in the active thing, so that it is always infinite, inasmuch as the action is the divine essence. Rather, we should note the intensity of divine action as it reaches to its effect, since God thus moves some things more efficaciously, others less.

*Obj. 1.* As the *Metaphysics* says,<sup>5</sup> an active power in nature to which no passive power were to correspond would be in vain. But no passive power in nature corresponds to God's infinite power. Therefore, God's infinite power would be in vain.

*Reply Obj. 1.* We should say that we can call nothing in God in vain, since something is in vain when it is the means to an end that it cannot attain, but God and the things in him is the end, not the means to an end. Or we should say that Aristotle is speaking about active natural power. For natural things and also all creatures are coordinated with one another. But God is outside this order, since he himself is the one for whom this whole order is ordained, as a good external to it, like an army is subordinate to its commander, according to Aristotle.<sup>6</sup> And so nothing in created things needs to correspond to what is in God.

*Obj. 2.* Aristotle proves that there is no infinite power of infinite magnitude, since it would consequently not act in time, inasmuch as a greater power acts in less time.<sup>7</sup> And so the greater the power is, the less the time. But there is no proportion of infinite power to finite power. Therefore, there is no proportion of the time in which infinite power acts to the time in which finite power acts. But there is a proportion between any time and any other time. Therefore, since finite power causes movement in time, infinite power will cause movement outside time. By the same reasoning, if God's power is infinite, it will always act outside time. But this is false.

*Reply Obj. 2.* We should say that, according to Averroes in his *Commentary on the Physics*,<sup>8</sup> demonstration about the proportion of time and the power of a cause of motion is valid regarding power infinite in magnitude. Such power is proportioned to an infinity of time, since both belong to a fixed genus, namely, continuous quantity, but this does not hold regarding an infinity without magnitude, one that is not proportioned to an infinity of time, being of a different nature. Or we should say, as touched upon in the objection, that God, because he acts by his will, measures his movement by what he moves, as he wills.

*Obj. 7.* Every distinct thing is finite. But God's power is distinct from other things. Therefore, it is finite.

*Reply Obj. 7.* We should say that something is distinct in two ways. It is in one way by something else connected to it, as we distinguish a human being from an ass by the specific difference of reason. And such a distinct thing needs to be finite, since the connected thing determines it to be something. Something is a distinct thing in a second way by itself, and God is distinct from all things in this way, since nothing can be added to him. And so he does not need to be finite, neither himself nor anything signified regarding him.

*Obj. 9.* If God's power is infinite, this can be only because it is the power to create infinite effects. But many other things have infinite effects potentially, such as the intellect, which can understand an infinite number of things potentially, and the sun, which can produce an infinite number of effects. Therefore, if we should call God's power infinite, by like reasoning many other powers will be infinite. But this is impossible.

*Reply Obj. 9.* We should say that, as in the case of quantities, one can consider the infinite by one dimension and not another, and also the infinite by every dimension, so also in the case of effects. For it is possible that a creature, inasmuch as it regards itself, can produce an infinite number of effects in a particular way, as regards number in the same species, and then the nature of all the effects is finite, as determined to one species, as if we should understand an infinite number of human beings or asses. But it is impossible that a creature can produce an infinite number of effects in every way, both numerically, specifically, and generically. This belongs only to God, and so only his power is absolutely infinite.

### Article 3

#### Are Things Impossible for Nature Possible for God?

We should say, as Aristotle says,<sup>9</sup> that we speak of possible and impossible in three ways. We speak of possible and impossible in one way as to a particular active or passive power, as we say that a human being can walk by the power to walk but not to fly. We speak of possible and impossible in a second way as to itself, not a particular power, as we call possible what is not impossible to exist, and impossible what necessarily does not exist. We speak of possible and impossible in a third way by the mathematical power in geometry, as we call a line potentially measurable, since its square is measurable. With the latter possibility omitted, let us consider the other two.

Therefore, we should note that we call something impossible as to itself, not as to a particular power, impossible by reason of the incompatibility of the terms, and every incompatibility of terms is in the nature of a contradiction.

Moreover, an affirmation and a negation are included in every contradiction, as Aristotle proves.<sup>10</sup> And so, in every such impossibility, a simultaneous affirmation and negation is signified. Such impossibility cannot be attributed to any active power, since every active power results from the actuality and entity of that to which it belongs.

And each active thing is by nature constituted to cause something like itself, and so the action of an active power terminates in existing. For, although action sometimes causes nonexisting, as is evident in passing away, this is only inasmuch as the existing of one thing is incompatible with the existing of something else. For example, being hot is incompatible with being cold, and so heat by its chief striving makes something become hot and destroys the thing's coldness as a result. But what is a simultaneous affirmation and negation cannot have the nature of a being or nonbeing, since existing takes away nonexisting, and nonexisting takes away existing. And so it can neither chiefly nor consequentially be the terminus of any action of an active power.

But we can note in two ways what we call impossible regarding a particular power. We can in one way because of the deficiency of the power of itself, namely, that it cannot extend to the effect, as when a natural active thing cannot change a particular matter. We can in a second way from something external, as when the power of something is prevented or restricted. Therefore, we say that something is impossible in three ways. We call something impossible in one way because of the deficiency of the active power, whether in changing the matter or in anything else. We call something impossible in a second way because of something resisting or hindering. We call something impossible in a third way because what we say is impossible cannot be the terminus of action.

Therefore, God can cause things impossible in nature in the first or second way, since his power, inasmuch as it is infinite, suffers in no deficiency, nor is there any matter that he can not change at will, since there cannot be resistance to his power. But God cannot cause what we call impossible in the third way, since he is the greatest actuality and the chief being. And so his action can only be terminated chiefly in being, and in nonbeing consequentially. And so he cannot cause affirmation and negation to be simultaneously true, or any things in which this kind of impossibility is included. Nor do we say that he cannot cause this because of a deficiency of his power. Rather, we say that he cannot because of the lack of possibility, which lack is from the nature of the possible. Therefore, some say that God can do it, but it cannot be done.

*Obj. 1.* An ordinary gloss on Rom. 11:24 says that God, as the author of nature, cannot do anything contrary to nature. But things impossible for nature are contrary to nature. Therefore, God cannot do them.