Elenctic Theology: Theology Proper

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*Part 2: Definitions, Distinctions & Attributes*

## Distinctions & Definitions

### Distinctions for Theology Proper & Trinitarianism[[1]](#footnote-1)

#### ***Introduction***

##### Theology students need to learn the various types of distinctions early in the process of theological study for many reasons. The proper use of distinctions assists one in understanding issues such as: (1) the Persons of the Trinity, (2) the relationship of the divine essence and attributes, (3) the difference between soul and spirit, and (4) the relationship of the intellect and will to the soul and spirit, and (5) the distinction between body and soul.

##### Below are brief definitions of the most common types of distinctions employed in theological discussions.

##### These are used to distinguish things in reality and in the mind and to distinguish within a single thing and to distinguish between multiple things.

##### Additional distinctions, such as the Type-Token distinction, will be addressed in later materials.

#### ***Types of Distinctions***

##### *Real or Essential Distinction (Distinctio Realis)*

###### This is a distinction between two independent things, that is, two distinct essences (or, more precisely, two substances).

###### These are separately existing things that exist in reality.

###### Example: A Cat and a Dog or two Cats or two Dogs

##### *Formal Distinction (Distinctio Formalis)*

###### In the mind there is a distinction between different ways of conceiving one and the same thing. This distinction can be, for example, logical or grammatical.

###### This is known as a mental or intra-mental distinction and is used for some types of things that do not exist separately or independently.

###### This is a distinction between two or more formal aspects of the essence of a thing.

###### The Formal Distinction with a Foundation in a Thing (*distinctio formalis ex parte rei*) means there is a distinction between formal objects within one and the same thing.

Example 1: Within a red ball the mind distinguishes the formal objects of redness, color, shape, and sphericity.

Example 2: Within the human soul-spirit, the mind distinguishes the formal powers or capacities of intellect, will, and affections, which are not separate things, but distinguishable faculties within a single thing.

##### *Modal Distinction (Distinctio Modalis)*

###### This is a distinction between various modes subsistence of a thing or the various ways in which a thing can exist.

###### The nature of the object being analyzed will determine which type of distinctions should be employed.

###### Whereas a formal distinction distinguishes between formal objects or properties within a thing, the modal distinction considers the distinct ways the entire essence can exist.

###### Example of a Modal Distinction: The three modes of water

##### *Distinction by Reason of Analysis (Distinctio Rationis Ratiocinatae)*

###### This is a rational distinction that has its basis or foundation in an external thing. It is not merely an intramental, rational distinction.

###### The distinction expresses a genuine distinction in an extramental reality.

###### This type of distinction is closely related to a Virtual Distinction.

###### Example: The Attributes of God

##### *Distinction by Reason Reasoning (Distinctio Rationis Rationans)*

###### This is merely a rational distinction grounded solely in the operation of reason, that is, it is merely intramental.

###### It is not grounded in an external thing.

###### Example: A distinction between a Unicorn and a Pegasus

### “Substance” & “Person” Terms for Theology Proper & Trinitarianism

Note that the definitions given below are not the only definitions for these metaphysical terms and concepts. The definitions are derived from the common definitions use by confessional Protetsant Scholastic theology.[[2]](#footnote-2) Note that the nature language is employed to describe the true God in His oneness, while the person language is employed to describe the Three Persons of the Trinity.

#### ***Nature Language***

##### *Essence (essentia)*

###### Essence is the whatness or quiddity of a thing.

###### It is those properties or qualities that make a being or thing precisely what it is, and not something else.

###### It distinguishes the *genus* of the thing, identifying

##### *Substance (substantia)*

###### A substance is the essence of a thing plus existence (*esse*).

###### Substance is the underlying “stuff” of things that exist. The emphasis is on the concrete reality of the thing as distinct from “essence,” which simply indicates what a thing is (Genus). Thus, a substance is an “existing essence.”

###### Substance can indicate the formal and material reality held in common by all members of a genus as well as the formal and material reality of an individual thing.

###### Substance is the “stuff” in which the properties of the thing inhere. Moreover, a substance maintains its identity through change, that is, when it gains or loses accidental properties.

##### *Nature* (*natura*)A third term used in speaking of God is the term “nature” (from Latin *natura*). There are three basic uses of *natura* in theology.

###### Some use it as a synonym for the terms “essence” and “substance.”

###### Some use the term to refer to a *particular* kind or species of essence in actual existence.

###### Some use it to refer to the entire created universe and its phenomena.

##### The words “essence” and “substance” and “nature” are commonly used by some as exact synonyms when discussing the Being of God, but there are important distinctions one should make when using the terms. See the definitions above.

#### ***Person Language[[3]](#footnote-3)***

##### *Person (Persona (Latin) or Prosopon (Greek))*

###### These terms originally indicated a dramatic role, or, more precisely, a mask worn by an actor in playing a role.

###### They later indicated the individual character in the play and thereby had an objective significance.

##### *Subsistent (Subsistentia (Latin) or Hypostasis (Greek))*

###### These terms indicate a particular being or existent.

###### Also, they indicate an individual instance of a given essence.

##### *Mode of Subsistence (Modus Subsistendi (Latin))*

###### This term indicates the mode or manner of the individual existence of a given thing.

###### This term is used to describe the individual Trinitarian Persons.

###### Note that this concept is distinguished from Modalism or Modalistic Monarchianism, a Trinitarian heresy.

##### *Intelligent, Self-Subsistent Being (Suppositum Intelligens (Latin))*

###### This term also indicates an instance of a rational substance.

###### The terms *individuum* and *suppositum* are synonyms, indicating an individual thing.

##### *Being (Ens (Latin))*

###### The term *ens* indicates an existing thing.

###### In Protestant Scholastic theology, *ens* is the most simple predicate. It indicates the coincidence of *esse*, the act of existing, with *essentia*, the whatness of the thing.

###### The terms *ens* and its synonym, *res*, commonly translated into English as “thing,” both indicate an existent in the basic sense.

#### ***Mutual Indwelling Language***

##### *Coinherence (Circumincessio (Latin), Perichoresis or Emperichoresis (Greek))*

###### These terms relate the concept that the Persons of the Trinity coinhere in the divine essence and in each Other.

###### Thus, the Persons of the Trinity are understood as indwelling each Other.

## Divine Attributes

### The Divine Attributes (*Attributa Divina*): An Introduction[[4]](#footnote-4)

#### ***Short Definitions of the Study and Classification of Attributes***

##### *Thiessen*By the attributes of God in distinction from the substance of God we mean the qualities that inhere in the substance and constitute and analytical and closer description of it. They are to be thought of as objectively real and not merely man’s subjective mode of conceiving God, and of the particular ways in which the divine essence exists and operates and not as denoting distinct parts of God.

##### *Shedd*The Divine attributes are modes either of the relation or of the operation of the Divine essence. They are, consequently, an analytical and closer description of the essence. . . . The attributes are not parts of the essence, of which the latter is composed. The whole essence is in each attribute, and the attribute in the essence. We must not conceive of the essence ***and*** the attributes, but ***in*** the attributes. The attributes are essential qualities of God.

##### *Muller*The designations of the divine essence employed by the finite intellect in its declaration concerning what God is.

#### ***Expanded Definition of the Concept of Divine Attributes[[5]](#footnote-5)***

##### Divine Attributes *(Attributa Divina)* are the conceptions or designations of the divine essence employed by the finite intellect in its declaration concerning what God is (*Quid sit Deus*?).

##### Since the intellect conceives of things by the enumeration of their attributes and cannot conceive of a single designation suitable to the infinite and simple essence of God, it designates the divine essence in terms of a series of perfections or properties (*perfectiones* or *proprietates)*, which it attributes to or predicates of God.

##### The Protestant scholastics recognize that they must immediately qualify the way in which attributes or properties are predicated of God.

###### The attributes (*attributa)* are not accidents (*accidentia)* inhering in and separable from the divine substance but are *attributa essentialia*, i.e., the divine attributes *are* the essence of God himself.

###### Since God is not a composite being, the attributes are not really distinguished parts of God. See the definition of a Real Distinction.

###### The attributes are, nevertheless, truly and properly predicated of God. Thus, the attributes are not really or essentially distinct from one another or from the divine essence as one thing is distinct from another, nor are they merely rationally distinct, in the reasoning of the individual.

##### This Distinction by Reason of Analysis (*distinctio* *rationis ratiocinatae)*, or distinction of ratiocinative reason, also called a “Virtual Distinction” (*distinctio virtualis)*, is taught by nearly all the Protestant scholastics and often used by them to distinguish the divine attributes.

#### ***The Relationship of God’s Attributes to His Essence***

##### *The Two Extremes to Avoid*

In attempting to explain the relationship of God’s attributes to His essence there are two extremes to be avoided:

###### ***Not a Real or Essential Distinction***God must not be represented as a composite Being, composed of many different parts, that is, we must not conceive of each attribute having a real, substantive, objective existence apart from the divine essence.

###### ***The Problem of No Distinction at All***We must not confound the attributes, making them all mean the same thing.

This is the same as denying them altogether.

Problems with this view

If, in God, eternity is identical with omniscience, omniscience with omnipotence, omnipotence with holiness, and so forth, then language about God is meaningless.

This is a Tautology or Tautological Fallacy (restating the same idea in different words).

#### ***The Conceptual Order of the Attributes***

##### *First Order Attributes*

##### *Second Order Attributes*

#####

#### ***The Distinction Between a Person and an Attribute***

### Various Systems for the Classifications of Divine Attributes

#### ***Immanent and Emanant Attributes***

##### **Immanent Attributes** (intransitive) – These are attributes which remain within the nature of God.

###### Example: spirituality

##### **Emanant Attributes** (transitive) - These are attributes which go out from and operate outside of the nature of God, affecting the creation.

###### Example: mercy

###### Some would argue that it makes no sense to speak of God’s mercy apart from the created beings to whom God shows Mercy (see Strong, pp. 247-47).

#### ***Absolute and Relative Attributes***

##### **Absolute Attributes** - These are attributes which He has in Himself. He has always possessed these qualities independent of the objects of creation.

###### Example: Infinity

##### **Relative Attributes** - These are attributes which are manifested through His relationship to creation

###### Example: omnipresence

##### Issues with this system

###### Did God possess the relative attributes prior to creation?

###### Did the divine nature experience some change at creation?

###### Is it more accurate to say that the relative attributes are applications of the absolute attributes to creation?

#### ***Natural and Moral Attributes***

##### **Natural Attributes** - These attributes are non-moral superlatives of God

###### Examples: knowledge, power

##### **Moral Attributes** - These attributes relate to God’s “rightness” or moral qualities.

###### Examples: holiness, love, mercy and faithfulness

##### Issue: The moral attributes are just as natural as the natural attributes, in that they are all essential qualities of the nature of God.

#### ***Positive and Negative Attributes***

##### **Positive Attributes** - These are attributes that elevate creaturely attributes to infinite perfection.

###### Examples: knowledge, truth, power, goodness, holiness, and wisdom

##### **Negative Attributes** - These are attributes that negate creaturely imperfection.

###### Examples: unity, simplicity, infinity, immensity, and immutability

##### This system favored by Lutheran Orthodoxy

#### ***Communicable and Incommunicable Attributes***

##### **Communicable Attributes**

###### These are attributes for which at least a partial counterpart are mirrored in his human creations.

###### Examples: love, mercy, and truth

##### **Incommunicable Attributes**

###### These are attributes unique to God, which are not transferable to creatures.

###### Examples: immutability, aseity, and omnipresence.

###### Note that these are often directly related to the infinity of God.

##### This system is favored by the Reform Churches (Calvinists).

### Definitions of the Divine Attributes*[[6]](#footnote-6)*

#### **Unity** (*Unitas*): Oneness; especially, as an attribute of God, the Unitas Dei, unity of God. God is one in an absolute sense because there is no other God and because the one God is an absolute unity incapable of division. *Unitas* indicates, therefore, that there is no *genus* God and that the one and only God is *simplex*, or simple. The scholastics, therefore, speak of a unity of singularity (*unitas* *singularitatis)*, or numerical oneness, and a unity of simplicity (*unitas simplicitatis)*, or noncomposite nature as both descriptive of the *unitas Dei*.

##### Questions

###### How does unity relate to the other attributes?

###### How does Unity agree with Trinitarianism?

###### How does unity related to simplicity?

#### **Simplicity** (*Simplicitas*): i.e., having an uncompounded or noncomposite nature; especially, the *simplicitas Dei* according to which God is understood as being absolutely free of any and all composition, not merely physical, but also rational or logical composition. Thus, God is not the sum of the divine attributes (*attributa divina)*; the attributes are understood to be identical with and inseparable from the essence of God (*essentia Dei)*. The scholastics observe that if God were even logically or rationally composite, God would necessarily be viewed as a result and in some sense contingent. Simplicity is the guarantee of the absolute ultimacy and perfection of God, so much so that it frequently appears in scholastic systems as the first divine attribute on which a right understanding of all other divine attributes depends.

##### Questions

###### What is the relationship between simplicity and infinity? Aseity? Immutability? Independence?

###### Contingency and finitude?

###### In light of Personhood?

#### **Aseity** (*Aseitas*): *self-existence*; a term derived from the language of self-existence used with reference to God by the scholastics: God is said to exist *a se*, from himself, thus, *a-se-itas*. The term is used synonymously with *autotheos*, of himself God. The Reformed orthodox define the consubstantiality of the Son and the Spirit with the Father as the essential *aseitas*, of each of the three persons. In this definition, they distinguish between personal *aseitas* involving a trinitarian error and the latter term, essential aseity, interpreting *homoousios* correctly. Thus, insofar as the *deitas*, or divinity, of the Son and the Spirit is communicated, which is to say, insofar as they are Persons in relation to the Father, they are not *a se*, but *a Patre*, from the Father. *Aseitas*, therefore, does not indicate an *autoprosopon*, a person of itself. Nevertheless, the *deitas* that the Son and Spirit have fully and completely is not a derived deity or divinity. In order to be truly God, the Son and Spirit, considered according to their divinity or according to the divine essence that is theirs, must be *autotheos* and have the attribute of *aseitas*. The Reformed doctrine, then, acknowledges the *aseitas* of the divine essence as such in each of the persons and, consequently, the *aseitas* of the Son and the Spirit considered *essentialiter*.

##### Questions

###### How does this relate to *Creatio ex Nihilo?*

###### How is essential aseity distinguished form personal aseity?

#### **Infinity** (*infinitas):* *infinitude*; especially, the *infinitas* *essentiae* *Dei*, or infinitude of the divine essence. By *infinitas Dei* the scholastics understand the limitlessness of the divine essence with regard to two *species* in particular, *aeternitas*, or eternity, and *immensitas*. The divine *infinitas* can also be described negatively and positively. It is not an infinity of corporeal quantity or extension but rather an infinity defined by the absence of limit; positively it is an infinite superiority over all things. In addition, this *infinitas Dei* or *infinitas essentiae* ought not to be viewed as an isolated attribute but as a property of the divine essence that extends to each and every one of the divine attributes, so that the divine knowledge or *scientia* is *omniscientia* and the divine *potentia*, *omnipotentia*, and so forth.

##### Questions

###### How is infinity positively conceptualized?

###### How is infinity negatively conceptualized?

#### **Immutability** (*Immutabilitas):* *changelessness*; especially, the *immutabilitas Dei*, or immutability of God, according to which God is understood as free from all mutation of being, attributes, place, or will, and from all physical and ethical change; or, in other words, the *immutabilitas Dei* indicates the eternal and perpetual identity of the divine essence with all its perfections. Specifically, immutability of *esse* indicates the *immortalitas*, or immortality, and *incorruptibilitas*, or incorruptibility, of God; immutability of *attributa* or *accidentia* indicates the changelessness of divine perfections; immutability of *locus*, or place, refers to the *omnipraesentia* , or omnipresence, of God that fills all things; and immutability of *voluntas*, or will, refers to the divine constancy in all that has been decreed and promised. God, therefore, does not repent; repentance is attributed to God in Scripture by anthropopathy (*anthropopatheia*) and indicates, not a change in God, but rather a changed relationship between God and man. Neither does creation imply a change in God and a denial of immutability. The scholastics distinguish between the *principium agendi*, or effective principle in creation, which is the divine essence itself, and the *effectum productum*, or produced effect, in creation, which is the created order. In the produced effect there is clearly change or mutation. The creation is a movement from nonexistence to existence. But in the effective principle, God, there is no change or mutation since God eternally and immutably wills to produce the creation. The change that occurs in creation is external to God.

##### Questions

###### How does God’s Personality relate to Immutability?

###### How does Immutability relate to God and Time?

#### **Immensity** (*Immensitas):* *immeasurability*; *immensurability*; especially, the *immensitas Dei*, or immeasurability of God. This attribute indicates the freedom of God from all limit of place. The divine essence is *sine mensura*, without measure, and fills all things repletively (*repletivus*). *Immensitas* can be distinguished from *omnipraesentia*, or omnipresence. The freedom of God from all limit of place or measure, i.e., *immensitas*, properly describes God in eternity apart from all created place; *omnipraesentia*, strictly defined, indicates the repletive presence of God in all created places and in relation to the limited presence of all creatures. Of course, place (*locus*) as such is characteristic of the finite, created order, without which there could be no place. The Protestant scholastics do not understand either place or space as an absolute. Thus, *immensitas* is an immanent, essential attribute of God in his distinction from the world, whereas *omnipraesentia* is a relative attribute that expresses the noncircumscriptive presence of God: God is *illocalis*, or nonlocal, and his presence *intensiva*, *indivisibilis*, and *incomprehensibilis*.

##### See Types of Presence (*infra*)

###### Local

###### Illocal

###### Repletive/Omni

#### **Omnipresence** (O*mnipraesentia*): frequently paired with *immensitas*, which indicates, literally, “without measure” (*sine mensura*). God is everywhere present in the sense of being unbounded by space or measure. God is everywhere present because He is an infinite spiritual, immaterial being who cannot be contained or restricted by physical dimensions.

##### Questions

###### See Types of Presence (*infra*)

###### Relation ot the concept of “Ontic or Being Space”?

###### Relation to Demon Possession (e.g., What does it mean for God and a demon to be in the same place at the same time?)

#### **Perfection** *(Perfectio):* the highest or most complete condition of any thing or attribute; thus the fullness or complete actuality of a thing or attribute. Perfection indicates both a transcendence of mutation and fulfillment of all potential or potency (*potentia*). The *perfectio* *Dei*, or perfection of God, is the absolute, unchanging excellence of God in his being and in all his attributes.

##### Questions

###### Related to Immutability—an most other attributes?

###### Related to the perfected saints?

#### **Eternity** (A*eternitas*): especially, the *aeternitas Dei*, or eternity of God. By this attribute, the scholastics understand the existence and continuance (*duratio*) of God without beginning or end and apart from all succession and change. Like the medieval scholastics, the Protestant scholastics accept also the definition of Boethius that eternity is the simultaneous and perfect possession of endless life (*aeternitas est interminabilis vitae tota simul et perfecta possessio*). Eternity therefore, transcends not only limited time but also infinite temporal succession, namely, time itself.

##### Questions

###### What is time in relation to eternity?

###### How does God relate to time?

###### What is Divine Personhood?

#### **Omniscience** (*omniscientia)*: *having all-knowledge and being all-knowing*; specifically, the attribute of God by which God knows all things, all events, and all circumstances of things and events perfectly and immediately in his timeless eternity (See *aeternitas*). The *omniscientia Dei* is therefore described by the scholastics as absolutely true (*verissima*), absolutely clear (*distinctissima*), simultaneous (*simultanea*), and immediate or intuitive (*intuitiva*). It is *verissima* because it is all encompassing, complete, and without defect; *distinctissima* because it lacks no detail, either concerning things possible or things actual or concerning which possibilities will be actualized and which will not; *simultanea* because eternal God is free from succession, not only in being, but also in knowing, and therefore knows all things at once, including the order and temporal succession of things; *intuitiva* because it knows all things by immediate apprehension rather than by disocourse of demonstration.

##### Questions

###### How does ominiscence relate to Natural, Middle (if held), and Free Knowledge?

###### How does omniscience relate to the Decree and Providence?

###### How does omniscience relate to free choice?

###### How does omniscience relate to divine sovereignty?

#### **Omnipotence** (*omnipotentia)*: *having all power and potency*, *being all-powerful*; an attribute of God; *omnipotentia* indicates the power, or *potentia*, of God *ad extra* by virtue of which he can do all things that are not contrary either to his will or his knowledge. In other words, the *omnipotentia Dei* is limited only by the essence or nature of God himself and by nothing external to God. Thus, the fact that God cannot do evil, cannot die, and cannot cease to be Father, Son, and Spirit is not a limit on or a contradiction of his *omnipotentia*. The scholastics agree with Augustine that all such hypothetical acts as would diminish God would be signs of weakness or of a defective willing, not evidences of omnipotence. Since, moreover, God himself is eternally fully actualized (*in actu*) and *never* in process or in potency (*in potentia*), the *potentia Dei*, the potency of God, or *omipotentia Dei*, refers to the divine activity *ad extra* and never to a change or a potential for change in the divine essence, which is, by definition, both perfect and immutably so (See *immutabilitas)*. Further, since God’s omnipotence is a *potentia* it cannot be a capacity for self-privation; i.e., a deficiency or deficient cause. The divine omnipotence may further be defined as the divine power or potential for the conferring of being and the active governance of all that is. In the former instance, which is the work of creation, the power of God is *omnipotentia absoluta* or *potentia absoluta* , since it observes no prior condition apart from the divine essence itself. This *omnipotentia absoluta* can be referred also to miracles. In the latter instance, which is the work of providence or continued creation (See *continuata creatio*; *providentia*), the power of God is *omnipotentia relativa sive ordinata*, relative or ordained omnipotence, or *potentia ordinata* since it is bound by laws of its own making.

##### Questions

###### Can an omnipotent Being do anything?

###### Is God’s inability to lie or change His mind a limitation of His omnipotence?

#### **Omnisapience** (*omnisapientia*): having all wisdom and being all-wise; specifically, the *omnisapientia* or *sapientia Dei*, the wisdom of the divine counsel (*consilium Dei*) by virtue of which God knows all causes and effects and ordains them to their proper ends and by which he ultimately accomplishes his own end in and through all created things. *Omnisapientia* can, therefore, be defined as the correspondence of God’s thought with the highest good, or *summum* *bonum*, of all things. Since, of course God is himself the *summum bonum* toward which all things ultimately tend, the definition can equally well read, the correspondence of God’s thought with God’s essence considered as the *summum bonum*. *Omnisapientia*, furthermore, can be distinguished from *omniscientia*. Whereas *omniscientia* refers to the knowledge that God has a *prima causa efficiens*, or first efficient cause, *omnisapientia* refers to God as *causa finalis*, final cause or goal. Thus, *scientia* and *omniscientia* indicate a pure or theoretical understanding, while *sapientia* and *omnisapientia* denote a practical understanding, a wise knowing that directs the ordering of ends and goals.

##### Questions

###### How does omnisapience relate to the certainty of divine foreknowledge?

###### How does omnisapience relate to the problem of evil and theodicies?

#### **Life** (*vita Dei*): *the life of God* is considered in two ways: (1) *essentialiter* or *in actu primo*, in its primary actuality, which is the divine essence itself since God is *autozoos* (aujtovzwo") and is self moved; and (2) *efficaciter*, effectually or ejnerghtikw" that is, *in actu secundo* or in its secondary actuality as the immanent activity of the Godhead, the *opera ad intra*, which proceed from the divine nature and are the life of the divine essence.

#### **Holiness** (*sanctitas):* *sanctity, inward or intrinsic righteousness*; the *sanctitas Dei*, or holiness of God, refers to the absolute goodness of God’s being and willing. It is a *sanctitas positiva*, or positive holiness, both intrinsically, in the essential goodness and righteousness of God, and extrinsically, in the goodness and righteousness of God’s will toward his creatures, speicfically, in his will that all rational creatures be holy as he himself is holy. It is also a *sanctitas negativa*, or negative holiness, in the sense that the goodness and righteousness of God remain inviolate and eternally separate from all that is sinful or tainted in the created order.

##### Questions

###### How is holiness positively conceptualized?

###### How is holiness negatively conceptualized?

#### **Wisdom** (*sapientia)*: the Latin equivalent of *σοφια* . In scholastic philosphy and theology, *sapientia* denotes a knowledge of first principles and the conclusions which can be drawn from them, particularly a knowledge of the good and the true. Thus, *sapientia* is the basis of distinctions between true and false in any specific body of knowledge (See *scientia*). *Sapientia* is also numbered among the divine attributes (See *omnisapientia*).

#### **Omnisufficiency** *(Omnisufficientia):* a divine attribute derived from the absolute life of God (*vita Dei*) and the divine self-existence (*aseitas*), indicating the absolute self-sufficiency of God. As self-existent life, God stands in need of nothing but is totally sufficient in and of himself.

#### **Independence** (*Independentia):* specifically, the *independentia Dei*, independence of God. As a divine attribute, independence indicates the ontological independence of God from the created order and stands as a corollary of both the all-sufficiency (*omnisufficientia*) of God and the self-existence (*aseitas*) of God. God is independent of all created things insofar as he stands in no need whatsoever of the created order; God is self-sufficient or all–sufficient in his being. The concept does not imply a lack of relationship to creation, but rather manifests God as the necessary being on whom all finite things depend. If God were not independent, there would be no ontological or providential ground of the existence of finite, non-necessary, or contingent things. Similarly, God, in order to be God, must be independent in the sense of being self-existent and prior to all other beings and, therefore, not owing his existence to a prior and higher source. If there were such a source of the existence of God, not only would God lack independence, God would not be God.

##### Questions

###### How does independence relate to simplicity?

#### **Blessedness** *(Beatitudo)*: specifically, *beatitudo aeterna*, eternal blessedness. The scholastics define *beatitudo aeterna* as the final condtiion in eternity of all who persevere in faith, consisting in the supernatural perfection of body and soul as bestowed on the faithful after death by the pure grace of God in Christ, to his own eternal glory. The supernatural perfection of the body is the incorruptibility and spirtuality of the resurrection (*resurrectio*), whereas the supernatural perfection of the soul consists in the intellecutal *visio Dei*, or vision of God, and the voluntary perfection of love for God, so that the will (*voluntas*) can no longer sin. Thus, blessedness consists in the perfect vision and enjoyment (*frui*) of God.

#### **Faithfulness** (*fidelitas)*: specifically, the *fidelitas Dei*, or faithfulness of God, that communicable or relative attribute according to which God is consistent and constant in his promises and in his grace. The *fidelitas Dei* rests directly on the intrinsic truthfulness of God (See *veracitas De*i) and the absolute immutability of God (See *immutabilitas Dei*); in order for God to be faithful, he must be essentially truthful and immutably so. In the theology of the English Reformed and of those continental theologians strongly influenced by the practical thrust of the English theology, the *fidelitas Dei* frequently appears in the practical section of the *locus* on immutability as the “use” to which the notion of divine immutability maybe put in Christian piety, i.e., a ground of Christian consolation.

#### **Glory** (*gloria)*: *brightness*, *splendor*; specifically, the *gloria Dei*, or glory of God. The scholastics include *gloria* among the divine attributes, usually in close association with *maiestas*, or majesty. Both terms, *gloria* and *maiestas*, indicate the infinite eminence of God, as manifest in the biblical language of the inaccessible light in which God dwells and the inapproachability of the “face of God.” *Gloria* indicates, specifically, the brightness or resplendence of God in his perfection and infinite eminence. This brightness and resplendence, moreover, belong to the divine essence and all its attributes, with the result that the *gloria Dei* and *maiestas Dei* are the divine essence itself, God as the absolute resplendence and the ultimate greatness.

#### **Immortality** *(immortalitas)*: an attribute or property of all spiritual beings that, insofar as it is immaterial and simple, is not subject to the dissolution that affects all material and complex substances. Absolute immortality, i.e., absolute, necessary, non-contingent, self-existent life, belongs only to God. The immortality of God can be argued in terms of the immateriality or spirituality and simplicity of God. Since God is Spirit, He is not subject to dissolution, and as absolute, infinite Spirit does not belong to the contingent order—as finite spirits do. God’s immortality is, more properly, a function of the divine life (*Vita Dei*) that God has of Himself. This divine life, by virtue of which God is eternally active, is identical with the divine essence. Since it is of the very essence of God that God lives, or exists, God is immortal in an absolute sense. Thus, any being that is not absolutely immortal could not be God.

#### **Light** (*lux Dei)*: *the light of God*; occasionally considered a divine attribute, according to which God is defined as absolute light, in which there is no darkness at all. Theologically, the *lux Dei* indicates the truth, wisdom, holiness, and purity of God, and also, preeminently, the divine self-sufficiency. God is light unto himself and the ultimate source of all light just as he is also the ultimate source of all life. *Lux Dei* is therefore a scriptural predication which indicates the *aseitas*, or self-existence, of God, the *omnisufficientia* or all-sufficiency, and the essential *necessitas* of God.

#### **Greatness** (*magnitudo)*: *greatness*, *magnitude*; as an attribute of God, the *magnitudo Dei*, the greatness of God in all his attributes, the greatness or magnitude of the divine essence itself. Specifically, *magnitudo* is used as a synonym for infinitude (infinitas) both in terms of the divine immensity (*immensitas*), or transcendence of space, and the divine eternity (*aeternitas*), or transcendence of time.

#### **Majesty** (*maiestas):* i.e., the *maiestas Dei*, or majesty of God, the supreme eminence of the divine essence and attributes, usually paired with *gloria*, the glory of God.

#### **Invisibility** (*invisibilitas):* a characteristic or attribute of a spiritual being. Since the eye, like all other organs of sense, perceives only objects and effects in the physical order, the order of spiritual being transcends its ability to perceive. The soul, angels apart from their occasional self-manifestation in bodily form, and God are therefore all invisible.

#### **Affections of the Divine** *(affectus voluntatis Dei):* *affections of the will of God*; viz., those divine attributes which, according to the strict faculty psychology held by the Protestant scholastics, appear as dispositions or conditions of the divine will; i.e., *amor* or love, *benevolentia* or goodness of will, *clementia* or clemency, *gratia* or grace, *ira* or wrath, *longanimitas* or longsuffering, *misericordia* or mercy, *odium* or hate, and *patientia* or patience.

#### **Benevolence** (*benevolentia):* literally, *goodwill* or *good willing*; a synonym for *eudokia* and *favor Dei*, related also to the good pleasure (*beneplacitum*) of God. The *benevolentia Dei* is one of the affections or attributes of God’s will.

#### **Clemency** (*clementia):* *mildness*; specifically, *clementia Dei: the mildness or clemency of God*; viz., that affection of the divine will, related to mercy (*misericordia*) and longsuffering (*longanimitas*), according to which God is gentle and forbearing toward his creatures.

#### **Wrath** (*ira):* *anger*, *ire*; specifically, the *ira Dei*, or wrath of God, against sin. The wrath of God may be counted either as a function of the *iustitia Dei*, the righteousness of God, and, specifically, of the *iustitia vindicativa sive punitiva*, the vindicatory or punitive righteousness of God; or as one of the affections of the divine will (*voluntas Dei*) in its relation to human sin. The *ira Dei* is both most clearly manifest and most fully satisfied in the death of Christ. It is also ultimately expressed in the damnation of those who do not have faith in Christ.

#### **Longsuffering** (*longanimitas):* the patient bearing of an offense, particularly over a long period of time; thus, the willingness of God to endure the offense of sin rather than immediately annihilate the world in its wickedness. The *longanimitas Dei* is the affection of the divine will according to which God wills to await repentance and to allow milennia to elapse, for the sake of mankind, between the fall and the final judgment. *Longanimitas* is virtually synonymous with *patientia*, indicating the height of patience.

#### **Mercy** (*misericordia):* *compassion*; specifically, the *misericordia Dei*, or mercy of God, according to which God has compassion on his fallen creatures in their inability to return to him; one of the affections of the divine will.

#### **Hatred** (*odium):* *animosity*, *aversion*; especially, the *odium Dei*, the hatred or aversion of God, which the Protestant scholastics frequently list among the affections of the divine will as indicative of the feeling of God toward sin and disobedience. The term *odium Dei* is recognized as an anthropopathism.

#### **Patience** (*patientia):* in God, *patientia* is synonymous with longsuffering (*longanimitas*).

#### **Happiness** (*felicitas):* *felicity*, both the *felicitas Dei*, or happiness of God, and the *felicitas beatorum*, or happiness of the blessed who dwell with God in the *coelum beatorum*, or heaven of the blessed (See *beati*; *beatitudo*). Since happiness can be defined as the attainment of the good, God, who is the highest good (*summum bonum*) and whose goodness (*bonitas*) is eternal and immutable in its perfection, must be eternally happy in himself. In addition, the blessed who have attained the fellowship of God, the *summum bonum* , must also be happy in the fruition of their fellowship. Finally, the happiness of man in this life must be defined in terms of the good toward which the individual is directed, with the result that true human happiness arises only out of the right ordering of life in the recognition that fellowship with God in Christ is the goal of human existence and the glory of God (*gloria Dei*) is the ultimate end of all mankind.

#### **Truthfulness** (*veracitas Dei):* *the truthfulness of God*, an attribute of God; the divine truthfulness is the ground on which all the promises of God and all the truths of revelation rest. Since God is infinite both in intellect and will, he can lack no knowledge and fail in none of his decrees. His promises are therefore sure and his truthfulness incapable of fault.

#### **Volition** (*voluntas Dei*): the will of God; the attribute of God according to which God may be said to have an appetitive potency (*potentia appetitiva*) *ad extra* that operates (1) to bring about the good known to and desired by God as the highest end or greatest good of all things and (2) to defeat all evil in the created order.

#### **Primacy** *(Primitas):* also *principitas*: *being of the highest order of importance*; the *primitas Dei* or *principitas Dei* arises as a corollary of the absolute life (*vita Dei*) and necessary self-existence (*aseitas*) of God. Since God alone exists of himself and is the sole ground of all non-necessary or contingent things (*contingentia*), God is also first or ultimate, the foundation of all things, the being of the highest order, the *primum ens*, or first being, and the *ens perfectissimum*, the perfect being.

#### **Love** (*amor Dei*): *the love of God*. Considered as a divine attribute, the love of God is defined as the propensity of the divine essence or nature for the good, both in the sense of God’s inward, intrinsic willing of the good, and in the sense of God’s external, extrinsic kindness towards His creatures.

#### **Justice** (*iustitia Dei):* *the justice or righteousness of God*.

##### Internal Righteousness is the holiness of the divine will and its perfect correspondence with the good of His eternal law (*lex archetypa*), which is the divine essence. Positive Holiness is the essential goodness of God and the goodness of God’s will toward His creatures. Negative Holiness is that the goodness of God remains inviolate and eternally separate from all that is sinful.

##### External Righteousness is the righteousness of God as it is manifest externally (*ad extra*) in the Law of God (*Lex Dei*). God’s External Righteousness can be distinguished into the following categories: Antecedent or Legislative Righteousness and Consequent or Judicial Righteousness.

##### Antecedent or Legislative Righteousness is the declaration of the standards of righteousness, which gives the individual and community notice of the expectations of righteousness before an act of obedience or disobedience occurs. There are two kinds of antecedent righteousness, or ectypal law, grounded in the archetypal law of the divine essence. Natural Law is the universal moral law either impressed on the minds of all people or immediately discerned by reason in it its encounter with the order of nature. The Mosaic Law is given by Special Revelation as a clear guide for human conduct.

##### Consequent or Judicial Righteousness is righteousness determined after a particular act is performed. It is often designated as “Particular Justice,” which can be either: Remunerative or Distributive, which rewards obedience in proportion to the value of the deed performed; or Retributive, Vindicatory or Punitive, which is a penalty exacted of a transgressor for the sake of vindicating or making restitution to the victim of the wrongdoing.

#### **Goodness** (*bonitas)*: *the goodness or moral excellence of God;* God is good in Himself (*in se*) and is the absolute good, the ground and standard of all created good.

#### **Grace** (*gratia Dei)*: *the grace of God*; the goodness of God toward mankind manifested as undeserved favor.

## Types of Presence[[7]](#footnote-7)

### Introduction

#### Understanding the type of presence of a being or thing helps the student of theology understand the relationship of the various types of substances which can be simultaneously present in a given instance.

#### This study will help the student understand issues such as (1) the dual natures of Christ, (2) the relationship of the human soul-spirit and body, (3) the various ways of understanding divine presence, and (4) demon possession.

### Local or Circumscriptive Presence

#### *Local Presence* is the mode of presence of *finite, physical* things.

#### This type is also designated as *Circumscriptive* *Presence* because a physical object is spatially extended and can located by circumscription.

#### Physical human bodies, as an example, are present *locally* and *circumscriptively*.

### Spiritual or Virtual Presence

#### **Introduction**

##### A *Spiritual* or *Virtual Presence,* in contrast to a *Local Presence*, is the mode of presence of any spiritual being, such as a human soul-spirit, an angel, or God.

##### Since a spiritual being is non-physical, it must manifest its presence in the physical world by a power (*virtus*) of operation.

#### **Types of Spiritual or Virtual Presence**

##### *Illocal or Definitive Presence*

###### *Illocal* or *Definitive Presence* is the mode of presence of a *finite*, spiritual being, which cannot be circumscribed or assigned to a spatially defined place (*locus*).

###### This mode of presence is defined and delimited (*definitiva*) by the finitude or limits of the being in its power of operation. This means that the limited, non-physical substance has limited causal powers as well as a limited presence.

###### Human soul-spirits, angels, and demons are present *illocally* and *definitively*.

###### Example: A finite spirit, angelic or human, can only act in one place at a time.

##### *Immensity, Omnipresence & Repletive Presence*

###### *Repletive Presence* is the mode of presence of God, the *infinite*, spiritual Being who fills (*repletiva*) every place, but cannot be contained or defined in any way by the place.

1 Kings 8:27: “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built!” (NASB)

God and the created universe are not coextensive in being or substance. The creation is limited and God is infinite.

###### Repletive presence is conceptually related to immensity and omnipresence.

*Immensity* means the divine substance is unlimited or immeasurable. It is an immanent, non-relative attribute of God. It is God’s substance considered apart from any relationship to creation.

*Omnipresence* is used to indicate the spiritual presence of God in all created places simultaneously. It is a relative attribute of God. It is God’s essence considered in its relationship to the creation.

*Omnipresence* may be distinguished from *Repletive Presence* in the sense that while *Omnipresence* affirms that God is present in every place in the creation, *Repletive Presence* affirms that God is everywhere present in the creation, while transcending the creation in His Being. Thus, the created universe and the divine Being are not co-extensive.

### Questions & Issues

#### How does the concept of presence relate to the issues of life and death, both spiritual and physical?

#### How does the concept of presence relate to the issue of demon possession?

#### How does the concept of presence relate to the issue of the work of angels?

#### How does the concept of presence relate to the issues of ontological Christology?

#### How does the concept of presence relate to the issue of whether God is in Hell? Or in unbelievers?

#### How does the concept of presence relate to the issue of the baptism of the Holy Spirit?

1. For more on the issue of distinctions, see Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin & Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985); Robert Audi, Ed., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy,* 2nd. Ed. (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1999). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *See* Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin & Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Note that (L) indicates a Latin word while (G) indicates a Greek word. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Most of this discussion of the attributes can be found in Richard Muller’s *Dictionary of Latin & Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *See, generally*, Muller, *DLGTT* and Turretin, *Institutes*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Note that the following definitions of the attributes are taken from Muller, *DLGTT* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *See* Muller, *DLGTT*, 147, 239-243. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)