St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology

Sovereignty

Rebekka Klein

First published: 24 August 2023

https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/Sovereignty

Citation

Klein, Rebekka. 2023. 'Sovereignty', *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*. Edited by Brendan N. Wolfe et al. https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/Sovereignty Accessed: 16 June 2026

Copyright information

Copyright © Rebekka Klein CC BY-NC

ISSN 2753-3492

Sovereignty

Rebekka Klein

The article presents sovereignty within the context of Christian theology, not as an abstract concept of political theory and action but as a complex historical concept which reflects how power can be generated and performatively exercised as a dynamic and relational phenomenon. It presents a politico-theological genealogy of sovereignty by examining the lines of connection between the modern politics of a free and contingent power and the Christian confession of God as free in the sense of omnipotent. From the earliest days of Christianity, God is addressed as a saving power, far superior in its action to all political, social, and religious powers. The scholastic concept of omnipotence portrays God in a dynamic and free relationship with his creation, and by this overcomes the metaphysical notion of a natural, eternal order of the social world. This opens the way for the modern idea of a sovereign political order based on freedom.

Keywords: Political theology, Doctrine of God, Power, Divine omnipotence, Early church, Divine freedom, Twentieth-century philosophy, Suffering, Law

Table of contents

1 A matter of political theology: the capacity of sovereign power to form a body politic

1.1 The secular belief in sovereignty and its theological shadow

1.2 From metaphysics to the performance of power: Macchiavelli

1.3 Sovereignty as law-making power: Bodin, Schmitt, Derrida, Agamben

1.4 Sovereignty as embodiment of the transcendence of power: Kantorowicz, Lefort, Santner

2 The doctrine of God as power theory '*avant la lettre*'

3 The Christian confession of God's omnipotence and its confrontation with the biblical testimony

3.1 Omnipotence as a metaphysical image of God

3.2 God's power as power of relationality

4 The Jewish-Greek heritage and the political theology of God as *pantokrator*

4.1 God as the world-supremacy and ordering power in the Septuagint

4.2 God as the power to destroy all world-powers in the New Testament

5 The problem of divine omnipotence in Augustine and medieval-scholastic thought

5.1 Augustine: power as ability of the will of God

5.2 Late Scholasticism: the God of free decision who brings forth a contingent order

5.3 Scotus: power as capacity to act 'without or even against the law'

5.4 Ockham: divine freedom as exposure of the contingency of the orders of the world

5.5 Theological discovery of power as contingency-generating capacity of free beings

6 On the threshold of modern times: divine and human sovereignty in the thinking of the Reformers

6.1 Sovereignty as the essence of God's restless doing and effecting

6.2 God's sovereignty as a participatory exercise of power in Jesus Christ and the church

7 Crisis of God's power in the modern era

7.1 Modern criticism of God's omnipotence in philosophy and theology

7.2 Argument against the abolition of a theory of power in theology

8 Regaining, weakening, and deconstructing sovereignty

8.1 Two ways of dealing with the sovereignty of God

8.2 Regaining sovereignty: Barth

8.3 Renunciation of God's omnipotence: theology 'after Auschwitz'

8.4 Reconfiguring a nonsovereign sovereignty: God's (im-)potentiality

1 A matter of political theology: the capacity of sovereign power to form a body politic

1.1 The secular belief in sovereignty and its theological shadow

Modern political thought does not begin with the moral question of the possibility of the good but with the political question of the operation of a sovereign power. The efficacy of sovereign power is that it constitutes a body politic which represents and manifests the unity of a political community, without this unity being metaphysically anchored in a ground of being or in the nature of things. This power of sovereignty to form a body politic, a political community in its unity, is implemented in ever new variations in the various modern forms of state and government (monarchy, democracy, dictatorship). The belief that sovereign power exists – that it is possible, real, and practically effective – thus proves to be an identity-forming feature of the political forms of life in modernity. Whether the monarch, the state, the people, or the constitution – and therein human dignity – holds the sovereign position is ultimately irrelevant: sovereign power in each case takes the form of a 'belief' that produces the political community in its unity and binds it into a quasi-civil-religious form.

This 'belief' consists in the fact that sovereignty is not only fiction but reality, that it is an essential truth and not mere ideology. Because the appeal to sovereignty is not factual knowledge but has its source in the political imagination, modern state theory feels compelled to address the question of the justification of sovereignty within a political theology (Schmitt 1922). But, while political theology virtually affirms the work of political metaphysics, political ideologies, and imagination in modern law and politics, in the context of liberal legal theory and ethics there have already been attempts in the twentieth century to radically demystify the 'belief' in sovereignty. Hans Kelsen, for instance, speaks of the concept of sovereignty as 'the theoretical cloak for highly practical postulates' (Kelsen 1928: 1). Its change of meaning and its immense flexibility in interpretation had made it possible that sovereignty could not be removed from modern state and legal theory for centuries. It had always been used by those political forces that wanted to elevate a new subject of rule to the highest position in the hierarchy of valid values, and which thus sought to argue, for example, within the state in the name of the prince against the people, or in the name of the state against supranational powers, or finally in the name of the individual against the state (Kelsen 1970: 165). Clothed in scientific dogma, sovereignty (according to Kelsen) is in danger of degenerating into a 'truly tragic mask' (1970: 164) of legal and state theory. Its historical contingency and its power-political character are systematically denied. From a secular perspective, the politics of sovereignty thus stands for a typically modern view of political orders as orders of freedom, which, in contrast to pre-modern 'natural' orders, are based on man's capacity to give himself a law and an order of human coexistence. The figuration of a sovereign power as the supreme decision-

making power among human beings underlines in this way the affirmation of the historical contingency of political orders and their character as orders of freedom in the modern sense.

The politics of sovereignty in the modern era is thus associated with the assumption that political power can be justified and executed free of a metaphysical or theological investiture. However, this not only changes the form of the legitimation of power, but also the question of what characterizes political power and – above all – in what it consists. First of all, with the decoupling of the question of power from the action of a transcendent creator God who establishes, maintains, and completes human orders of life, a transition into new media of the exercise of power takes place. The manifestation of power is transferred into a new symbolic register, into an order of distance, representation, and disembodiment of the political (Lefort 2006; Balke 2009). In the course of modernity, it is no longer the prince or the monarch, the people or the nation, but non-personal entities such as the constitution or the law (as a practice of legal interpretation) or individual legal principles such as human dignity that are seen as manifestations of sovereign power (Haltern 2007). Hence the manifestations of sovereignty prove to be changeable in the horizon of modern politics, but not sovereignty's function and structure, as twentieth century studies on the afterlife of modern sovereignty have shown. The sovereign function consists in establishing a political order while keeping it open to the 'exceptional case' of its abolition or relating it to such an eventuality (Schmitt 1922). The problem inherent in the modern politics of sovereignty, that contingent orders of freedom can potentially always be invalidated by confrontation with a social reality that cannot be subsumed under them and can turn into a 'state of exception', is not vanishing in modern liberal democracies but is even exacerbated by their rule of individual rights (Menke 2015). In the following, it will be shown to what extent this function of sovereignty has emerged by opening the metaphysical theory of power to the challenge that there is a free creator of this world (Blumenberg 2020).

1.2 From metaphysics to the performance of power: Macchiavelli

The fundamental premise of the political theories in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is that a stable order of human coexistence by no means comes about by itself, but can only be achieved and established through the installation and exercise of a sovereign form of power. According to these theories, political order is based on dynamics and not on nature. Ever since political philosophy, with Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527), Jean Bodin (1530–1596), and Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), took its leave of Aristotelian state ethics, it has assumed that no natural moral foundation can motivate and justify the institution of a normative order of the polity. Instead, the foundation and maintenance of a stable political order of rule is only possible through the exercise of sovereign power.

The medium and substance of the political is therefore not the laws of ‘nature’, ‘reason’, or ‘God’s will’, but the dynamics of ‘power’ itself. But what is sovereign power, and how does it become politically visible and effective?

In the theory of the state of antiquity, for example in Plato’s Politeia (c. 374 BCE), the state appears as the image of a ‘natural order’ of justice. The social institutions of the political community are normatively enacted as correspondences to an imaginary order of being and legitimated as expressions of a transcendent truth. In contrast, the sixteenth-century Florentine Machiavelli chooses an opposite starting point for his theory of rule (*Il Principe*, 1513). Unlike the political thinkers before him, who were influenced by the late antique and medieval synthesis of Christianity and philosophy, Machiavelli assumes that the question of the genesis of authority and political order must be negotiated in a completely new way, in the immanence of the political, and thus starting from a relation of difference. He carries out the turn towards a centring of political thinking around the question of how a sovereign power must be constituted, a power which is to be founded, maintained, and expanded in relation to a society that is divided, torn, and contradictorily constituted. Accordingly, power is seen by Machiavelli as a risky form of founding unity in the midst of social differences and divisions. That conflict and difference might be principally indissoluble is subtly reflected theoretically for the first time in Machiavelli. According to him, it is the prince who can performatively, i.e. effectively, endow and maintain a singular and sovereign ruling position vis-à-vis a community of the many, ‘his’ people. The principle ‘to be nothing – to seem everything’, i.e. an understanding of politics as performative instead of substance, is therefore the condition for the acquisition and preservation of power. This is because this principle allows the exercise of power to be based entirely on the control of the differential relationship between society (people) and ruler (prince). According to Machiavelli, this is possible only through a conscious and rational use of the power of political fictions, which can bring about the belief in a sovereign ruler’s position. Precisely at the moment when a prince understands that power is not, but must always first become, he can consciously seize it.

Where, on the other hand, the bond between the people and the prince – established by the exercise of power – is lost, sovereignty is in danger of being lost or depotentiated. Its existence is thus always tied to an effective foundation, that is, to the shaping of a register of the relations and bonds of people and ruler or of society and representation of their sovereign position. In relation to the concepts of the theory of power of antiquity, this means that political power is not sufficiently described by the concordance of persuasive power (*auctoritas*) and sanctioning power (*potestas*) alone, but that its understanding must also include the aspect of the performative power (*potentia*, *dynamis*) for the foundation, establishment, maintenance, or suspension of power relations. It can be shown that precisely this profoundly modern idea that sovereign power is grounded in *potentia*, in a

dynamic of freedom, is already part of the scholastic concept of omnipotence (see section 5).

1.3 Sovereignty as law-making power: Bodin, Schmitt, Derrida, Agamben

The concept of sovereignty gained significance in constitutional law with the emergence of absolutist forms of rule at the beginning of the modern era. Here, talk of the sovereignty of the prince, and later also of the state, reflects the changed conditions of political communitization. At the end of the Middle Ages, the dissolution of the supranational legal community of the Roman Empire – as well as the universal church of the Middle Ages – set in motion a far-reaching lifting of the restrictions on state rule. This brought about the possibility of conceptualizing a supreme decision-making power in relation to an earthly ruling subject. The word *souverain*, which comes from French, reflects this development in terms of state and law. Already established in French literature since the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, *souverain* as a spatial metaphor ('highest height', 'summit') first referred to the religious realm (God as sovereign father and high priest) and was then transferred to political sovereignty (Quaritsch 1986: 13–14, 32–34).

In the sixteenth century, the jurist Jean Bodin, in his *Six Books on the State*, declared the competence to legislate and abolish without the consent of a third party to be an indispensable condition of sovereignty. Now, 'sovereign' is considered to be that instance of power which makes undivided and final decisions, and therefore advances to be the only legitimate source of rule. With this focus of sovereignty on a law-making power, Bodin prepared the narrowing down to juridical questions of legitimacy that are characteristic of modern theories of sovereignty (Röttgers 1990: 138–143). At the same time, he thereby obscured the 'metaphysical' problem of the theory of power, which had occupied scholastic theology long before Bodin (see section 5). With their differentiation between *potentia absoluta et ordinata* (absolute and ordained power) in the concept of divine omnipotence, the scholastics were concerned with the possibility of thinking about power not only as endowment and preservation of the existing legal order, but also as suspension and transgression, in the context of God's acting without contradiction.

Legitimatory models, following Bodin, continue to deal with the legal form of sovereignty in the tradition of the scholastic *potentia ordinata*, and elevate the inner entanglement of power and legal order to the criterion of its validity (from Montesquieu to Locke to Kelsen). However, in the twentieth century, the state theorist Carl Schmitt points to a conflict between sovereignty and law: a sovereign is the only authority that can suspend the rule of law and thus stands outside law itself. Following Schmitt's famous dictum that a sovereign is he who decides on the state of exception (like a God who performs miracles), the theological rootedness of sovereignty is therefore emphasized. Schmitt holds the view

that all concepts of modern state theory are secularized theological concepts. He makes secularization the key category for an adequate understanding of modern politics and its relationship to religion. Under this category, he further subsumes not only the formal breaking from explicitly religious patterns of interpretation of the political, but also the systematic problem that a structural identity between political and theological concepts is simultaneously maintained. The uncovering of this structural identity in the context of an investigation of the 'political theology' of modernity can help to disclose the hidden persistence of theological metaphysics, and in this way develop a counter-narrative to the seemingly unbroken rationalism of modernity. Schmitt's theory thus sets in motion a new perception of the intricate connections between politics and religion in modernity. However, he is also accused of having contributed to a remythification of functionalist political concepts, and of not recognizing the intrinsic right of modernity's secularization dynamics (Blumenberg 1983; Kahn 2011; Haltern 2007).

In a critical overcoming of the position of Schmitt, the philosophers Giorgio Agamben (1998) and Jacques Derrida (2005, 2010) observe an even further-reaching inner dialectic of law and sovereign violence. According to them, sovereignty does not stand outside law, but appears in the midst of it as a sovereign violence of exclusion (of life). In the modern politics of sovereignty, the sovereign power that institutes or suspends law in the last instance is, in contrast to scholastic thinking about God's *potentia absoluta*, no longer traced back to a transcendent subject outside all legal orders. Rather, it is localized in the midst of them as exclusion. This has catastrophic consequences. In the form of lawless spaces (concentration camps, asylum prisons, transit centres) and existences (refugee, stateless person, comatose), a biopolitical sovereign power takes shape, increasingly elevating the state of exception to the rule. In this sense, the politics of sovereignty is characteristic of the phenomena of biopolitical availability and destruction of human life in lawless spaces observed in modernity.

1.4 Sovereignty as embodiment of the transcendence of power: Kantorowicz, Lefort, Santner

A number of other studies on the political genesis of modernity argue that sovereign power takes its characteristic form in a particular political-theological dynamic: the embodiment and incarnation of the transcendence of power in a political subject. This subject becomes the medium of bringing forth sovereignty by being invested with a mandate that transcends time and space, which at the same time can be viewed in its body in space and time and is 'bound' in it. Sovereign power is thus identical with a medial dynamic of embodying the unavailable in something available, the infinite in something finite. It takes new forms by recasting the media of embodiment or by transferring the sovereign function from one medium to another. In a significant way, such a change has occurred with the transition from monarchy to democracy. Whereas sovereign power previously had its locus in the

body of the modern monarch, after the end of monarchy it is located in the symbolic-imaginary body of the nation. The dynamic of sovereign power thus consists in producing a political subject of a special kind. This subject undergoes a doubling and splitting of its existence, which allows it to embody the transcendence of power and thus its superiority over all other forms of power.

For the historical justification of this thesis, reference can be made to the influential study by historian Ernst H. Kantorowicz, who shows in his 1957 book *The King's Two Bodies* that the form of rule of the monarchs of the early modern period is based on a doubling of their personhood (*persona mixta*; *gemina persona* [twin person]) already established in the eleventh and twelfth centuries: Christ-centred kingship. According to this conception, the king becomes the image of Christ (*rex imago Dei*) through his anointing, and can appear at the same time as a mortal man and as the representative of Christ on earth appointed by God. Through this metaphysical doubling of the natural person, he can function as a mediator who, analogous to the Christian concept of sonship with God, makes possible a union of the earthly with the eternal and in this way transcends the finitude of the earthly commonwealth. The doubling of his person is shown in the fact that a double body is attributed to the king: his immortal-exalted body lives on after his death, while the mortal body expires. According to Kantorowicz, the double-body theory is to be understood as an early form of political theology or the sacralization of the political. It was not until the late Middle Ages that it was given a constitutional justification that was separate from the theological one, and in the early modern period it was secularized by taking into account the political theology of the English and French monarchs.

In his essay 'The Permanence of the Theologico-Political?' (2006), philosopher Claude Lefort takes up Kantorowicz's theory. He asks what happened to the king's sacred body in the transition to democratic modernity, and shows that, with the public execution of Louis XVI during the French Revolution, the phantasmatic investment in the locus of sovereign power that characterized the double-body theory was not abolished, but rather deepened and confirmed. According to Lefort, the transfer of sovereignty from the king to the people or nation continues in a latent way the idea that sovereign power manifests itself in a real body. To be sure, the new nation-state and modern democracy do not possess a real person in whom the sovereignty of power, i.e. the binding of an infinite power in an earthly vessel, is vividly condensed in a unique way. Nevertheless, modern democracy still invokes the sovereign power of the electorate and ritualizes it in the form of the democratic election. There, the vote of the individual is recorded as a number and transferred into a fictitious-symbolic register. Subsequently, a temporary representation of sovereign power is formed from this symbolic act of counting the votes: the parliament. According to Lefort, democracy is therefore founded in a fictitious dissolution of the social reality of society into a symbolic register. The consequence of this dissolution is that democracy keeps the actual sovereign latent. The embodiment of his power is therefore

the ‘empty place’, the vacancy of power, which arises anew at the end of each cycle of representation and which must be endured in the restlessness of the form of government characteristic of democracy. In the mode of latency, that is, of a withdrawn presence, an absent-present, sovereign power thus also appears in democracy. Lefort therefore sees modern democracy as a political experiment with an open outcome. Its venture consists in systematically emptying the place where sovereign power shows itself at fixed intervals, thus keeping it permanently free of all real instances. At the same time, however, this emptiness keeps open the imaginary longing for the incarnation of the sovereign and opens the door for its own ‘overturning’ into totalitarian ideologies and dictatorships, which Lefort sees as ‘ghostly doppelgangers’ of the modern project of a latency of power.

In contrast, the literary scholar Eric Santner sees the medial transmission of sovereign power in modernity as characterized less by latency and emptiness than by a specific dynamic of the dissemination of the body into ‘political flesh’. Santner, too, claims that the theological principle of incarnation has emigrated from religion in the narrow sense into the forms of life of modern culture and its politics. He follows Kantorowicz’s theory of double embodiment, but unlike Lefort he sees the dynamic of embodiment thwarted by a dynamic of disembodiment that is no less ambivalent and precarious than the latency of the locus of power described by Lefort. Santner, in his studies on the political economy of sovereignty (*The Weight of All Flesh*, 2016; *Sovereignty Inc.*, 2020), reveals that there is a ghostly double of the royal body in which it leads an afterlife after its disappearance: the ‘flesh’ of late capitalist consumer society. Influenced by psychoanalysis, Santner thematizes in ‘flesh’ that ontological wound of the subject that no form of symbolic embodiment or imaginary transgression can ever close. It is the origin of those libidinous-affective bonds of human beings, which are played upon and ‘populated’ by the capitalist system of commodity economy. In the intersection between somatic and symbolic existence of each subject, there remains a residue that haunts it as a ‘ghostly double’. ‘Flesh’, unlike ‘body’, is not a place in time and space, but a structure of split immanent in the subject, in which the sovereign function of binding transcendence into immanence can become effective in the late modern society overformed by capitalism. The specificity of ‘flesh’ is to be able to become horrifically ‘formless’ and therein to deprive any form of life of its power. Unlike for Lefort, the place of sovereign power for Santner is thus not vacant, so that it can be ‘occupied’ again and again by changing parties or persons from the people. Unlike the imagined ‘body’ of the transcendence of sovereign power, Santner’s flesh is pure drive – a libidinous energy that we cannot dispose of in framing and binding life in any way. It is the perfect medium of an immortal power of sovereignty.

2 The doctrine of God as power theory ‘*avant la lettre*’

The normative question of how Christian faith should relate to the contemporary politics of sovereignty must be distinguished from the political-theological genealogy of the politics of sovereignty in modern times. Against this background it cannot simply be asserted that God is sovereign in the sense of the political theory. Rather, the theological understanding of God's sovereignty is a much more complex one, historically as well as presently. Precisely because of its complex and ambivalent relationship to the question of power, Christian theology – and more specifically its doctrine of God – has been called a 'power theory *avant la lettre*' (Stoellger 2008: 3). For just as present-day Christianity invokes God's omnipotence and insists on its pastoral and consolatory meaning (Van den Brink 1993; Bachmann 2019; cf. criticism in Tanner 1988), it also calls for the paradox of all power thinking in the 'power of the crucified', and for a critique of and emancipation from all powers of this world that are absolutized like idols (Barth 1947; Bonhoeffer 2001; Moltmann 1972; Cone 1975).

Thus, modern theology has taken the ideological exaltation and hypostasis of human power with the dictum of a 'masterless violence' (Karl Barth) and thus tried to place the secular orders of freedom back under its theological supervision (Anselm 2015). It uses the talk of God's sovereignty to dismantle the misuse of power by men as well as to emphasize the theologically important rule of thinking a difference between God and his creation. Christian faith, it points out, is always about a completely different power, one that operates from the validity of a 'completely Other', and thus transcends the power exercised by and between humans in its immanence. In this perspective, the speech of an abstract omnipotence of God is an impoverishment, which conceals the relationality of God's true power as love for man and its sense of solidarity (Moltmann 1972). But this tendency of modern theology to think of God as a loving promoter and enabler of man has in turn been criticized with the argument that this is only an adaptation to the modern suspicion that the sovereignty of God means a tyrannical rule of God over his creatures (Tanner 1988). To escape this accusation, modern theology is inclined to address the power of God and his relationship to his creation only under the aspect that God is 'simply an enabler, a persuader, or a cooperator' (Tanner 1988: 164) of creatures.

But, even with its paradoxes of power and its attempts to disempower the ideological excesses of sovereign power or the hypermasculine interpretation of sovereignty as brute force, theology has not completely distanced itself from the question of power. Rather, it remains wedded to the question of power at the core of its doctrine of God to this day, even if instead of omnipotence it only wants to proclaim the powerlessness of the Crucified One who, on closer examination, is by no means powerless and without power in this world (Askani 2018). As 'weak power', the power of the Crucified and Risen One is at the same time a sovereign power that has changed and is to change the world. The talk of God's weakness can therefore be interpreted as the 'figure of a third' from which the

dialectical opposition of omnipotence and powerlessness is subverted and opened to new ways of thinking about God (Klein and Rass 2017). All attempts to overcome sovereignty therefore end up as attempts to reconfigure a non-sovereign sovereignty, or at least to see it as a disruptive rather than an operative force (see section 8.4).

3 The Christian confession of God's omnipotence and its confrontation with the biblical testimony

From the very beginnings of Christian theology, the soteriological saving power of God has been associated with political ideas of universal and imperial rule. The fact that God is omnipotent and does not rest indifferently to the world, or on the other hand is not dependent on the world and subject to its course, is one of the fundamental convictions of the Christian theological tradition. Thus, already in the Apostles' Creed (c. fifth century) it says: 'I believe in God the Father, the Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth'. All other symbols of early Christianity also explicitly refer to God as omnipotent. In the Apostles' and the Nicene Creeds, omnipotence is the only predicate of the Creator God. Since the beginnings of Christianity, it seems to function as the epitome and 'compendium' of God's sovereign being (Barth 1947).

In contrast is the fact that the basic conviction of God's omnipotence is by no means regarded as incontrovertible within the more recent history of theology. On the contrary, this conviction experiences a momentous, primarily morally-motivated critique within the horizon of the question of theodicy in the twentieth century (Bauke-Ruegg 1998: 37–111). In modern theology, there are repeated calls to account for the 'difference between an essentially metaphysically determined (occidental) concept of omnipotence and a biblically grounded concept of omnipotence' (Bachmann 2019: 94) or even to renounce the concept of God's omnipotence altogether (Moltmann 1972; Jonas 1984; Schiwy 1995). This theological debate of the twentieth century can illustrate the observation (see section 2) that modern theology feels compelled to distinguish the talk of God's sovereignty from the idea of a tyranny or rule by force. In the course of the critique of God's omnipotence, a new understanding of his power is elaborated from the biblical texts, which conceive it as relational and in solidarity with human beings.

3.1 Omnipotence as a metaphysical image of God

Theology of the twentieth century has pointed out that the talk of God's omnipotence goes back to a metaphysical image of God, which continues in modern theism, and focuses on an abstract 'all-capability' of God (Hoping 1997). In contrast, the image of God in the biblical tradition is relational and not abstract. It is characterized by the idea of a power in relationship, namely the relationship of God's love to human beings as his creatures (Brunner 1938; Moltmann 1972; Jüngel 1986). The biblical image of God in the concrete

linguistic form of the Hebrew and Greek tradition is therefore not based on an image of God that is close to the modern doctrine of a (mono-)theism (Moltmann 2002). It does not tell of a God who rules as a divine monarch, emotionally uninvolved over the world as his creation, but of God as a cooperative partner of man, embodied in his relationship to the people of Israel and in his relationship to Jesus Christ (Moltmann 1980). Moreover, the Old Testament already describes God's power above all at the place of historically powerful deeds for the people of Israel, while the modern idea that God can do everything and that his power is universal is initially still foreign to biblical thinking and at best is alluded to in the intensification of God's uniqueness as creator of heaven and earth in Deut 4:35 as well as in Isa 40:25–28 and Isa 43:10–13 (Hoping 1997).

3.2 God's power as power of relationality

In recent theology the biblical testimony is repeatedly brought into play provocatively, against traditional theological patterns of thought, and the question is asked whether the omnipotent God is actually the God of whom the biblical traditions testify and whom people encountered in the person of Jesus Christ. In the New Testament testimonies that report on this encounter with Jesus and interpret it as an encounter with God, it is claimed that God in Jesus Christ by no means showed himself to be omnipotent, omniscient, infallible, and immune to everything human and suffering. Rather, especially in the synoptic gospel accounts, an encounter is described with a God who, in his incarnation and passion on the cross, shows himself to be incarnate, vulnerable, doubtful, and weak. Thus Jürgen Moltmann (1972), in his influential critique of theology's thinking of omnipotence, recalls Jesus' anguished exclamation on the cross: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' in Mark 15:34 and Matt 27:46. Jesus' suffering and death are here portrayed as a powerless and helpless suffering. This is underscored by reporting others, chief priests and scribes, who also observed this suffering and mockingly exclaimed: 'He has helped others and cannot help himself' (Mark 15:31). It is further reported that the criminals and robbers who were nailed to the cross with the man Jesus publicly revile him. They cry out: 'You who tear down the temple and build it up in three days, help yourself if you are the Son of God, and come down from the cross!' (Matt 27:40). Here obviously a contradiction with the idea of a God ruling over the world opens up. For the fact that Jesus' suffering emerges entirely as a deeply human suffering is emphasized repeatedly in the New Testament testimonies. In John's Gospel, this suffering of Jesus is commented on by the exclamation of the Roman governor Pontius Pilate: 'Behold, what a man!' (John 19:5). Behold, he suffers and is truly weak. He does not conquer or overcome suffering, but is inferior to it like an ordinary man.

At the same time, this is not to be considered in isolation from the complex unity of the biblical traditions. Thus, both in the New Testament (see section 4) and in the Old Testament clear evidence can be found for a power of God encompassing creation and for

his perception as a ‘world ruler’ (Hoping 1997). Already the Old Testament knows not only the historically powerful God of the people of Israel, but also a creator God who possesses a universal power encompassing heaven and earth (Isa 40:26). It knows the idea that God exists before the existence of the world (Isa 40:28; 44:6; Ps 90:2) and it speaks of a universal scope of his creative power (Isa 44:24; Job 38). In Ps 135:6, as well as in Isa 46:10 and Job 42:2, God is said to be able to do all that he has determined.

4 The Jewish-Greek heritage and the political theology of God as *pantokrator*

Against all modern criticism and questioning of the idea of God’s sovereignty in the sense of his omnipotence, it should first be noted that the idea of a special potential of God which is superior to all other earthly powers is very old. It is a fact that omnipotence is one of the oldest attributes of God in Christianity. Usually, it is traced back conceptually to the Greek *pantokrator* (Latin: *omnitenens*/*omnipotens*). Although related descriptions of God, such as *basileus* (king), *kyrios* (lord), *despotes* (ruler), *demiourgos* (author), and *poietes* (creator), should also be considered (Zimmermann 2007: 167–344), it should not necessarily be assumed that in the context of early Christianity there was already talk of one (or even a central) attribute of God, as has been the case in Christianity’s later doctrine of God. Rather, the predicate ‘the Almighty’ is initially a name of God that has its place in liturgy and prayer. Historically, this can be traced back to the *Didache* (10:3), the oldest church order of the early Christians (about 100 CE). At the latest, with the beginning of the third century, the confession of God, the Almighty is found in the baptismal creeds. The church fathers Irenaeus and Tertullian also consider it an indispensable part of the church’s rule of faith (Stöhr 1971).

4.1 God as the world-supremacy and ordering power in the Septuagint

Biblical research has shown that a first approach to the formation of this name of God is to be sought in early Judaism and in the course of the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek and Latin. The Septuagint (third century BCE) translates the Hebrew names of God *shaddaj* and *zebaoth* in roughly a half of the occurrences by the Greek *pantokrator*, which the Vulgate later renders (primarily as a translation of *shaddaj*) in 80 places as *deus omnipotens* (Bachmann 2019: 110–188). In addition, the term *pantokrator* is freely introduced into the translation in about 15 places in the Septuagint (Stowasser 2017).

The term *pantokrator* is not simply taken over from Hellenistic culture in the Septuagint, but is used probably for the first time in Hellenistic Judaism in a style-forming way, possibly even invented as a neologism (Lust, Eynikel and Hauspie 2003), to bring out the uniqueness, otherness, and superiority of the belief in the God of Israel in the context of

Hellenistic culture. On one hand, the term is able to accommodate the requirements of a deity in the Greek sense and to articulate a universal presence of the God of Israel. At the same time, however, its use also corrects the Greek notion of perfection, which envisions 'not needing to act and therefore not needing power' (Van den Brink 1998). Furthermore, *pantokrator* also creates a counter term to the Roman expression *autokrator*/*imperator*, by contrasting the exaggeration expressed in the worship of the emperor who these terms described (Zimmermann 2007). Other early Jewish sources, such as the *Letter of Aristeas*, prove that the term *pantokrator* is not understood as a static characteristic of God, but primarily as a dynamic characteristic of his activity in the preservation of the world. In this way, a connection to Stoic thought can also be seen (Hommel 1983; Feldmeier 2011; Van den Brink 1993).

By introducing the Greek word *pantokrator* into the imaginary world of early Judaism and its Hebrew Bible, a demarcation is made, not only cross-culturally. It also initiates a shift of emphasis in thinking about the fullness of God's power in the context of early Judaism. In early Judaism, it is characteristic to find a new kind of conception taking the place of the Hebrew world of imagination and tradition, in which God's fullness of power is often told in stories and parables. Speech of the *pantokrator* expresses the idea that the God of Israel rules over the whole reality he created. He is not one among many powers but the absolutely central and supreme power. This emphasis is also found, for example, in Philo of Alexandria, who places the world-supremacy and ordering power of the true God at the centre of his theology. Hellenistic Diaspora Judaism thus relies on a conceptual intensification of the idea of power in order to distinguish itself from the surrounding Hellenistic and Roman culture (Feldmeier 1997: 23). Especially in the distress caused amongst Jewish society by the superiority of the Hellenistic and Roman culture, the interpretation of the God of Israel as *pantokrator* is a liberating and hope-giving perspective. The appearance of this idea in Judaism then determines the further development of the use of *pantokrator* in early Christianity: the idea of God's being God is deepened soteriologically (in relation to salvation). The term becomes virtually synonymous with a 'counterfactual' divine saving power that reaches far beyond what can be expected from the powers of this world (Feldmeier 2011; Bachmann 2019).

4.2 God as the power to destroy all world-powers in the New Testament

In the New Testament tradition of God-speech, the concept of *pantokrator* is already presupposed and shaped by Diaspora Judaism. Thus, the predicate of omnipotence is found primarily in the Apocalypse of John (Rev 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7, 14; 19:6, 15; 21:22), where it is mostly taken from the Septuagint and points to an original liturgical context for its use. Outside of this text, it is encountered only in 2 Cor 6:18 in a subordinate clause and, in substance, in the Gospels – namely, in the confession that no thing is

impossible to God (Luke 1:37; Mark 10:27/Matt 19:26/Luke 18:27; Mark 14:36/Matt 26:39). In these texts, the focus is not on a conceptual doctrine of God's omnipotence, but on a request or promise in the context of a concrete situation that God will carry out his will for the salvation of his people.

A conceptual intensification of the theological doctrine of power occurs in the Apocalypse of John. Here the concept of *pantokrator* gains its political sharpness. The rise of the Almighty, which is reported in Revelation 19, has as its reverse the downfall of Rome in Revelation 18. God's omnipotence is understood here as his power to judge the anti-divine powers of the world and to establish a rule that will destroy all apparently triumphant world powers, beginning with Rome. The concept of omnipotence is thus developed as a predicate of God in a specific social context. It stands for a theology that can also assert itself politically and brings God back into play in a hopeless situation. God's omnipotence thereby appears as the opposite of the Roman world power, for it determines itself as a participatory saviour power in that God accepts his own, like Jesus Christ (the Lamb), as his sons. God's power is thus determined relationally and modally, in that its participatory and soteriological sense is brought to the fore (Feldmeier 2011).

These findings as a whole thus indicate that the concept of omnipotence as a predicate of God arose in the context of the theological confrontation of early Judaism and Christianity with Hellenism and the Roman world empire. It was a concept genuinely developed in cultural contact with the prevailing worldview and political ideology. At the same time, the concept can be seen historically as a link between the early Christianity and Jewish tradition. All in all, the predicate of omnipotence occurs rather marginally in the Bible (Feldmeier 1997).

5 The problem of divine omnipotence in Augustine and medieval-scholastic thought

In patristic theology, the idea of God's omnipotence receives a new meaning through the inclusion of Stoic ways of thinking, as well as through the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing). Henceforth, it describes an ability or attribute of God. Stoic thought and its idea of a promoter and nurturer of the world finds expression in the Christian doctrine of the continuous preservation of the world by divine providence (Hommel 1983; Van den Brink 1993). The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, developed by early Christian apologists in the second century, also leads to a deepening of the idea of God's omnipotence, as it emphasizes the free and creative activity of a God who is not dependent on any primordial matter. In this way, the name '*pantokrator*' for God is transformed into the attribute and description of a God who is 'all-sustaining' and 'all-powerful'. The early Jewish and New Testament idea of God's counterfactual saving power in concrete oppressive political realities, in contrast, recedes into the background. Finally,

from the third/fourth century on, the predicate of omnipotence is also applied to Jesus Christ in the course of developments within trinitarian theology.

5.1 Augustine: power as ability of the will of God

The innovations in dealing with the idea of the omnipotent God are also reflected in Augustine's theology in the fifth century. He explicitly declares the *omnipotentia* of God as theologically indispensable. In addition, he distinguishes the term 'all-capable' (*omnipotens*) from 'all-sustainer' (*omnitenens*) and 'all-creator' (*omnicreans*) and thus emphasizes God's sole efficacy. Understood as *potentia*, i.e. as power and ability, omnipotence for Augustine is a capability strictly bound to and qualified by God's will. He determines omnipotence as God's ability to do anything he wills (*neque enim ob aliud veraciter vocatur omnipotens, nisi quoniam quidquid vult potest* [for he is called Almighty for no other than that he can do whatsoever he willeth], Enchiridion 96). Augustine also determines God's non-capability entirely from his will. For God can only not do what he does not want. For example, he cannot deny himself, cannot sin or lie, cannot deceive himself and cannot die, cannot become miserable or be defeated (Schaede 2009). Further, for Augustine, God's omnipotence is a power in the sense of *potestas*, i.e. it is to be understood as legitimately exercised power, since it is committed to justice and thus ethically qualified. Evil, which God permits within the framework of his omnipotence, thus also arises in its existence from God's just counsel, for God wills man's free will to evil and to good. Augustine transfers this model also to Christ, who as Almighty had to suffer on the cross and had to want to do the impossible for God himself, namely to die. It is precisely in this that Christ shows his omnipotence, that he can make the unrighteous righteous.

5.2 Late Scholasticism: the God of free decision who brings forth a contingent order

Augustine, with his binding of ability to God's will, does not yet decisively inquire beyond God's factual acts. A concept that also reflects more comprehensively the possibilities of God's radically free will towards his creation, on the other hand, only fully emerges in the late theological scholasticism of the thirteenth-century Middle Ages. Here the concept of omnipotence is made the locus of reflection on the power of a free being, the epitome of which is the Christian God. Scholastic theologians like John Duns Scotus claim that there is no philosophically provable concept of an infinite power. This can only be the object of faith. In the scholastic concept of divine omnipotence, the ancient philosophical concepts of *dynamis* and *potentia* are brought together, which denote the ability or capacity to make everything possible without contradiction. Both, however, are considered reduced to a personal conception of origin, as it corresponds to the biblical conception of God. With the theological distinction between a *potentia absoluta et ordinata* of God (Alexander of Hales, Duns Scotus, William of Ockham) the problem of an unlimited fullness of power and

arbitrariness of God is then revealed and at the same time an attempt is made to solve it factually.

It would be a misunderstanding to assume that there is only a single theory of God's absolute power in late scholastic theology. Rather, it is a matter of different theories, or a series of different problems, which are worked out along the lines of the distinction between the *potentia absoluta et ordinata* of God (Randi 1987). The latter emerges in light of the prevailing Aristotelian-oriented theology, which is increasingly called into question at the end of the thirteenth century, with its model of a universe in which a Creator always acts with necessity and within strict causal chains. There is a renaissance of Augustinian, voluntaristic ways of thinking and thus a renewed dynamization of the understanding of God (Leppin 2012; Leppin 2003). The question of 'who God is' is no longer unfolded from cognition and knowledge, but from the will and its propensity for beauty, love, and simplicity (Ingham 2006). Following the biblical tradition and its personal image of God, the moment of his freedom in relation to creation is thought to be grasped more precisely through dynamic-active descriptions of God's will, in order to clearly emphasize the difference of the Christian worldview from the Aristotelian doctrine of the unmoved mover. The God of omnipotence is therefore, in the sense of the late Scholastic distinction of *potentia absoluta et ordinata*, a God of free decision who brings forth a contingent order and not an order of necessity. Theologically, a reorientation takes place which defines God's power as the freedom not to commit oneself to a single order of the world and which allows this freedom of God to become the origin and source of a radical contingency of the world.

5.3 Scotus: power as capacity to act 'without or even against the law'

The model formed by Augustine to understand the freedom of the creator God in the sense of his freedom of will and to reflect it theologically is, however, accentuated in a different way in the doctrine of the *potentia absoluta*. Thus, Duns Scotus resorts to the talk of an absolute power of God in order to make clear that God, besides his will to act according to the valid laws of his creation (*potentia ordinata*), also possesses the capacity to act 'without or even against the law' (*potentia absoluta*). He is so free in his will that all created orders are of contingent nature for him, i.e. God is able to order and determine his creation as it is, but also differently. At the same time however his power to change reality according to its possibilities is limited in the fact that it cannot proceed inordinately, i.e. in a disorderly way. If God abolishes and undermines existing orders, then this always happens according to his own (salvation) order and with the will to create new orders, and by no means occurs anarchically or without goal and plan (Leppin 2003).

5.4 Ockham: divine freedom as exposure of the contingency of the orders of the world

On the other hand for William of Ockham, who received Duns Scotus' ideas, the absolute power of God denotes something essentially different, namely a complex of logical possibilities which is open to God alone and which has nothing to do with what God actually does, does not do, or wants to do. Ockham emphasizes, against Duns Scotus, that in speaking about the absolute and the ordered power of God what is designated is not two, but a single unified action of God. According to this, there are not two different spheres of action in God's creation, but God, as a free being, is also able to break through the ordered course of the world by special actions. Nevertheless, God cannot act outside the framework of the valid world order, because this goes back to his own arrangement. An arbitrary or anarchic action of God is thus excluded, but a situation on a contingent individual case related to a new action of God, in which he is not bound to the regular course of things alone, is not. With Ockham, therefore, God appears as the free sovereign being who enacts laws and binds himself to them in his actions, but can renounce them at any point at which the realization of his plan of salvation requires it, since he is not bound to these laws but ultimately only to his arrangement of a plan of salvation.

Since Ockham repeatedly compares God in this regard with the pope, whom he likewise conceives as being able to break through what he has legally decreed at any time, he has been accused of an attachment of his thought to the medieval context of his time. In this accusation, Ockham reflects, at the place of the doctrine of omnipotence, the rise of the papacy to an ideologically sole determining power which could no longer be controlled by anyone, and in this sense depicts God merely as an oversized pope (Leppin 2003). Others, however, see in Ockham's theology the connection to the discourse of modernity and its ideas of a sovereign shaping of the world, since it accomplishes in the exposure of divine freedom an exposure of the contingency of the orders of the world (Röttgers 1990).

5.5 Theological discovery of power as contingency-generating capacity of free beings

With the help of the scholastic distinction between *potentia absoluta et ordinata*, it is theologically revealed and defended on one hand that the decision of a free being is not subject to the necessity of the world and instead is the origin of radical contingency in it. On the other hand, theological limits are placed onto the concept of divine power in that it (a) can act only within the framework of what is logically possible without contradiction, (b) must always be justified relative to the existing orders of the world, and (c) remains bound in its ordered as well as in its disordered form to an (salvation) order of God. The medieval theological thinking-through of God's omnipotence – as a power that sovereignly deals with the possibility of radical contingency and a changeability of the world, which

at the same time promotes an underhanded emancipation of worldly power – can now be theologically affirmed as a contingent order (Röttgers 1990). The legacy of the late scholastic doctrines of God's *potentia absoluta* is therefore not the threatening arbitrary freedom of God, against which modern culture and modern man supposedly must assert themselves and emancipate themselves through reason (Blumenberg 1983), but rather the lasting 'endowment' of power as a contingent and contingency-producing capacity of free beings.

6 On the threshold of modern times: divine and human sovereignty in the thinking of the Reformers

In the transition to modern times, the doctrine of God's omnipotence is increasingly associated with the horror of God's arbitrary freedom. The rejection of an abstract 'omnipotence' of God and the idea of a 'power in itself', which is independent of the order of creation and salvation of the world, has repeatedly dominated the theological discussion since the Reformation. Martin Luther and John Calvin, for example, sharply oppose talk of a *potentia Dei absoluta* and associate it with an absolute power of God that is no longer comprehensible to human beings and that makes an assurance of salvation impossible for them. Luther and Calvin contrast the *potentia* doctrine of the scholastics with the God who reveals himself historically in Jesus Christ and in the glory of his creation, to whom the Christian man can adhere in his faith as a justified sinner. Both, however, also know about the 'hidden God' (Luther) and the hidden counsels of God (Calvin) and thus indicate that God's revelation is binding, which does not imply any participation or even control of man over the events of salvation. Man cannot become aware of the true meaning of creation on his own without God's sovereign action of grace. According to Luther, man's will is unfree, and according to Calvin, man's ability to recognize the Creator from his creation is corrupted by the Fall.

6.1 Sovereignty as the essence of God's restless doing and effecting

Beyond the demonstrative renunciation of a unqualified *potentia* of God, the Reformers also negotiate the area of omnipotence positively, especially within the doctrine of providence, where ideas concerning the freedom of God and a certain openness of his action, previously associated with the *potentia absoluta*, find their place in the history of salvation. At the same time, the treatment of God within the framework of the doctrine of providence as a free being and sovereign over the world tends to make every moment of God's free decision merge into the logic of an economy of salvation, of God's governing and administering action, so that God cannot for a second leave the world to itself. In particular, Calvin allows God's power to be completely absorbed in the sovereignty of his temporal action, so as not to allow any speculation about a divine use of power that might

run counter to God's action of grace. Accordingly, God's omnipotence is not located in ability and possibility (*possibilitas*), but exclusively in God's factual action (*potestas*), in which he emerges as the sole author of all good for man (Schaede 2009). In particular, God's sovereignty is shown in the fact that he is still able to bring good out of evil and to turn even the greatest human misfortune to good in the sense of his promises. Therefore, God's sovereign handling of the courses of the world and his ability to break through its supposedly irrefutable orders in individual cases is the sole reason for the certainty of faith. For, according to Calvin, trust in God's sovereignty alone can dispel doubts in dealing with reality, because God is always able to assert himself even 'against appearances'.

For Calvin, omnipotence and sovereignty do not refer to a quality but rather to the essence of God. The sovereign God is not a resting being-in-itself, but a restless effecting with which he constantly accompanies the course of the world. According to Calvin, the world is *gloriae suae theatrum*, a scene of God's glory and honour (Link 2021). In it, God's salvific action and providence are reflected. But man's ability to be himself in the image of the Almighty and to reflect his glory was lost with the Fall, and his natural ability to know God was corrupted (*Institutes* I.5.9). Therefore, God's counsels remain hidden from man until He reveals them to him in faith. However, if God actively rejects individual humans, as Calvin teaches in his theory of double predestination (*Institutes* III.24.12), they are lost.

6.2 God's sovereignty as a participatory exercise of power in Jesus Christ and the church

Calvin's sovereign God has therefore been compared to an absolutist monarch who can invest himself with power only through the humiliation and subjugation of others and who does not recognize human beings as sovereign counterparts or even as sources of power and strength alongside himself (Röttgers 1980). At the same time, however, it must be remembered that Calvin, in addition to the image of a God who always powerfully asserts himself in reality, also draws a picture of a human being who powerfully participates in this worldly government of God: for Calvin, in Christ God has shown that his power does not culminate in rejecting man, but rather in actively preventing the rejection and, through his love, making man again a part of a creation that glorifies God and thus a counterpart and image of a sovereign being. For Calvin, this is expressed quite concretely in the fact that in the Christian congregation no individual is to exercise the office of representing Christ on earth and even preside over the whole church like a monarch, while the members of the congregation are subject to him (*Institutes* IV.6.9). Rather, the leadership of the church is to take place in the division of powers and the fanning out of functions of a threefold – namely prophetic, priestly, and royal – office. Calvin understands the threefold ecclesiastical office, and thus the leadership by a plurality of church members, as participation in the leadership office of Christ, who determines and leads his church not through the sanctification of one person but through the participation

of many. Calvin's interpretation of God's sovereignty as a participatory exercise of power in Jesus Christ has therefore also been interpreted as a theological opening with regard to a representative-democratic form of church leadership and thus of human coexistence in general (Busch 2001).

7 Crisis of God's power in the modern era

With the beginning of modern times, the talk of God's omnipotence – in the sense of God's ability to intervene effectively in individual situations in the world to realize his plan of salvation – increasingly enters a crisis. Historical experiences such as the religious wars of the seventeenth century, the Lisbon earthquake in 1755, and the two world wars and the Holocaust in the twentieth century, mark serious incisions: in view of the experience of powerlessness, suffering, and death on a hitherto unimaginable scale, the belief in the effective intervention of a benevolent God no longer seems plausible, or at least becomes in need of strong explanation. But even if it is assumed that God consciously permits the evil perpetrated by humans, or the evils and natural catastrophes that are beyond the reach of human action, in order to give his creation and humans autonomy and free scope for development, God's ability to act for the good appears to be at least limited by the existence of the evil that he permits. The philosopher John Leslie Mackie (1955) therefore speaks in the twentieth century of a 'paradox of omnipotence': an omnipotent God could not actually create events in the world that he could not control, because the existence of these events that he could not control (anymore) would make his omnipotence impossible in the strict sense, finding its limit in them. Precisely this idea, that God performs acts which ultimately limit (or even annul) his unconditional ability to act, ultimately contradicts the doctrine of an omnipotent God.

7.1 Modern criticism of God's omnipotence in philosophy and theology

The idea of God's omnipotence further comes into conflict in modern times with the newly-discovered human maturity and the self-determination of man through reason. The emancipation of man from all external authorities, and the orientation solely on the use of his reason, leads to the rejection of all heteronomy. Orientation to an omnipotent God is therefore equated with heteronomy. Another field is opened up in the nineteenth century by the critique of religion. The philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach claimed that the attribution of omnipotence to a perfect and eternal being was merely an exaggerated projection of the human striving for absoluteness (Feuerbach 1881). The omnipotent God is only a cipher for a human need. In the almighty God, man basically worships himself. Accordingly, the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche can say that the 'death of God', in the sense of a farewell to the metaphysical conception of a supratemporal being, will have been also the end of man (Nietzsche 1964).

On the part of theology, critical impulses from modern thinkers are taken up and worked into a critique of omnipotence. Of central importance is the argument that omnipotence is a conception of God that is alien to the Christian religion. Rather, the idea of God's omnipotence is portrayed to be a philosophical-metaphysical idea that has been improperly introduced into the biblical image of God (Moltmann 1972; Barth 1956). The predicate of omnipotence is thus not necessarily to be regarded as part of the genuinely biblical tradition, and accordingly it is not to be retained. Rather, it is due to the influence of Hellenistic and neo-Platonic philosophy on early Christianity, which had led to a falsification of the original biblically-attested understanding of God (Brunner 1930).

This critique of omnipotence is also connected with a critique of the concept of God in philosophy, and especially of the idea of God in the philosophical theism of modern times. Thus, the argument is developed that already, through the interpretation of the Hebrew *el shaddaj* as *pantokrator* in the Septuagint, the multiplicity of the original expression was abandoned in favour of a conceptual-abstract intensification, and the multi-layered biblical image of God was subjected to the unifying logic of monotheism. In this transition a movement took place, away from an understanding of God with a specific sphere of action for creating and maintaining the world, toward a God who had to become the absolute subject of dominion over everything. The modern theism that later developed out of this movement is therefore an improper abstraction, against which the biblical God is to be rediscovered as the God who paradoxically deals with power, namely as the suffering (and, in this, as the redeeming) God (Moltmann 1972).

7.2 Argument against the abolition of a theory of power in theology

The attempt to 'purge' the Christian understanding of God of its metaphysical components and influences is, however, countered with the argument that a contrast between Hebrew-biblical and Greek-unbiblical thinking is untenable in view of the complex historical findings of the interconnections in late antique Judaism and early Christianity (Körtner 2018: 242–247). Rather, Christian theology's tense place between myth and metaphysics existed from the beginning, and one should not subject its doctrine of God to a 'remythification' by appealing to an original perspective of scripture (Körtner 2018; Körtner 1999; Bayer 1994; Ebeling 1979). The scripture of the first Christians, namely the Septuagint, had already been a product of intercultural exchange and of the encounter between Hebrew and Hellenistic thought. Greek-Hebrew thinking is indissolubly intertwined in Christianity, as can be seen not least in the central early Christian predication of God as *pantokrator*, which represents a bridge between the two ways of thinking (see section 4).

8 Regaining, weakening, and deconstructing sovereignty

One goal of twentieth-century Christian theology has been to break the link between Christian belief in the omnipotent God and the totalitarian sovereignty doctrines of political modernity. The Christian doctrine of God, it was argued, should not legitimize human hierarchical relationships and totalitarian forms of rule, or promote them through forms of sacralization of the political (Tanner 1992). In particular, the idea of God as a monarch in heaven, as an autocrat beholden to nothing and no one but his own will, is seen as a religious foundation of totalitarian forms of political rule (Moltmann 1980). At the same time, however, it is unclear to what extent it is still possible to speak of God's sovereignty, and how it is to be put in relation to the liberal-democratic doctrines of sovereignty in modern politics, for example.

8.1 Two ways of dealing with the sovereignty of God

In the twentieth century, efforts to articulate God's sovereignty in a new way and to respond theologically to the modern critique of a theistically conceived idea of God's omnipotence, as well as to that of a legitimization of totalitarian regimes by a God who omnipotently dominates history, are intensifying. Beyond the question of when and how God intervenes in the world in a disruptive way and can bring about extraordinary events, the talk of God's omnipotence is highlighted again theologically in the sense of his sovereignty, as well as his freedom and transcendence vis-à-vis the world. Finally, this also culminates in the emergence of a form of Christian theology that seeks to take leave of the idea of omnipotence per se, and instead asserts that the Christian God is correctly recognized precisely in that he performs his being God in a paradoxical way, as a voluntary relinquishment of his fullness of power.

Both approaches – the one of rearticulation of and the other of farewell to God's omnipotence – have in common the belief that the idea of omnipotence, in the form of an abstract omnipotence and an unlimited fullness of God's power, appears wrong to them. They therefore react with a profound revision of the speech of God. One side prefers to hold on to the fact of a free and sovereign existence of God in relation to the world, and to interpret this by new conceptions, which renounce the theory of omnipotence in the criticized sense. The other side, however, attacks the free and sovereign existence of God per se, seeking to weaken it and finally to abolish it completely in its relevance for a Christian understanding of God. Accordingly, the form of thinking of a God 'without omnipotence' is repeatedly exposed to the reproach of no longer being able to think of God as a free being in relation to his creation and of degrading him instead to a powerless companion of the world.

8.2 Regaining sovereignty: Barth

The protagonist of the first way is Karl Barth, the influential Protestant theologian of the twentieth century. According to him, omnipotence is to be strictly related to God's action and to God's reality, which is opened for man in God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Omnipotence has a fundamentally liberating and redeeming character in that it asserts itself as the power of the living against the powers of sin and death. By binding it to his act of revelation, Barth ensures that God's power is not spoken of arbitrarily and abstractly. Power is thus to be handled theologically as a strictly relational and modal concept that crucially qualifies the relationship between Creator and creature. Instead of a quality that belongs to God alone, Barth sees God's power as an expression of his perfection. It indicates an action of God, which man may correspond to and come close to, in that his reality is transformed and shaped by the reality of God.

According to Barth, God's power exists only in the medium of a specific form of perception for man, namely in the form of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Accordingly, God's power is qualified in that it victoriously opposes every form of a 'power in itself'. It never appears as *potentia*, as a free ability of God merely founded in itself, but is rather *potestas*, namely a legitimate and justified action of God, which is at the same time an expression of his love and justice (Barth 1947). Barth's constructive critique of omnipotence thus starts with a fundamental scepticism toward the concept of power itself. This concept refers to something contrary to God, something demonic and evil (Barth 1969). Thus, the idea of a free and sovereign power which is exercised without any binding to order and law is an apt description of the devil, against whom God has victoriously defended himself by realizing himself as a 'holy, just, merciful, patient and benevolent power' (Barth 1969: 55–56).

The relation of God's power to all other forms of earthly-final power is therefore determined by Barth as a relation of transcendence and relativization, i.e. God's omnipotence is a power different from and superior to all finite powers. It cannot manifest itself in the place of finite power, since it is other to an abstract epitome of power. Yet Barth determines the relation of divine and human power not only negatively. Especially in his late doctrine of reconciliation, he emphasizes the orienting function and mode of operation of God's power: in Christ, as mediator and medium of God's action, it becomes visible and formative for the Christian ethos that God's power is a creative power, and that it consists of a reconciling relationship between God and sinful man in which man may become God's partner and participate in the perfection of God's humanity.

The philosopher Sören Kierkegaard (1954) has represented the opinion that omnipotence, rightly understood, can exist only in the self-retraction of God. Divine omnipotence, he argues, differs from finite power in that it is an expression of goodness. Therefore, it cannot make the recipients of this goodness dependent on itself, but only independent

and free. The fact that one subjugates the other is not an expression of true power, but rather its human perversion. Barth conceives God's omnipotence in a similar way: strictly relationally and modally as a relational power liberating man in faith. However, he qualifies it not only anthropologically (in terms of humanity) and hamartiologically (in terms of sin), but also politically-theologically, conceiving it as redemption from subjection to the absolute power of every finite power which imprisons man in its 'idolatrous' reality. According to Barth, man cannot free himself from the seductive power of political ideologies and regimes generated by his own actions because he is not capable of disillusioning himself without God's action. In faith, however, he can be taken into a relationship of authority and power that frees him from the political ideologies that absolutize power (Klein 2016).

8.3 Renunciation of God's omnipotence: theology 'after Auschwitz'

Barth does not completely reject the concept of power, but rather wants to develop and qualify it anew from God's reconciliatory action in Jesus Christ. For other contemporary theologians however, such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, it is precisely the renunciation of omnipotence that can guarantee God's 'being God'. God does not help man by virtue of his omnipotence, but by virtue of his weakness and suffering, Bonhoeffer wrote in his prison letters in 1944. The demand to no longer interpret God's being by speaking of his omnipotence is then condensed within the framework of the so-called 'theology after Auschwitz', which is associated with Protestant theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann (1972) and Dorothee Sölle (1981), but also with Catholic theologians such as Günther Schiwy (1995) and Johann Baptist Metz (2006). This form of theology emerges as a response to the inhuman crimes of the Holocaust in the twentieth century and understands them as a 'contingency shock' to Christian theology. Its starting point is the question why God (and with him the church and theology) remained silent at Auschwitz, did not intervene. Against this background, the talk of God as a 'Lord of history' has to be abandoned, and theology is forced to radically rethink its talk of God's relationship to his creation.

In particular, Jürgen Moltmann points out that in view of Auschwitz it is no longer possible to speak of a God who is incapable of suffering and who keeps himself far away from the world. A theology 'after' Auschwitz must be a theology 'in' Auschwitz and thus be able to make clear to what extent God was in Auschwitz with the suffering, dying, and martyred. To this end, theology must above all leave behind the concept of omnipotence procured from metaphysics. Instead, it has to understand God anew from the event of the cross, that is, from his suffering. Moltmann therefore speaks confrontationally of a suffering rather than an omnipotent God. Jesus' final utterance, attested in the Gospels – 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Mark 15:34; Matt 27:46) – is the occasion for Moltmann to reflect on a new dimension of abandonment in God. He speaks in this

context of the ‘non-God’ in God, to express that God is no longer identical with himself on the cross. This must also be radically noted in the theological doctrine of God. For it is precisely in this suffering and in the (self-) abandonment of God that the saving and liberating message of the Christian faith lies. Taking up the rabbinic doctrine of God’s *Zimzum*, of his self-removal, and of God’s indwelling in his creation (*Shechina*), Moltmann develops the image of a God who is ready to suffer and who, in suffering, becomes at odds with himself, who, thanks to his Trinitarian love story, cannot turn away from his Son on the cross. The concept of omnipotence is therefore to be abandoned, since it suggests that God’s being God knows a side that is not open to creation or devoted to it.

Moltmann’s push to dispense with the concept of God’s omnipotence altogether was not met with total approval. Johann Baptist Metz, for example, also advocated a theology after Auschwitz, and saw that the talk of a suffering and powerless God was in danger of equating God with his Son and reducing God merely to a reflection of human suffering. Moreover, Moltmann’s farewell to omnipotence is inconsistent and self-contradictory, since in the context of his talk of a love of God that victoriously overcomes suffering he ultimately puts a new figure of sovereignty into the picture: the love of God that never fails because of suffering and is always victorious in the end. Furthermore, Metz does not see the renunciation of a metaphysical concept of God but a transformation of it. A theology after Auschwitz does not have to perpetuate suffering in God and thus make people even more desolate, but to keep alive the disturbing suffering ‘in’ God and to trust him with a redemption of his creation despite all historical catastrophes.

A more fundamental critique of the concept of omnipotence has also been put forward by the Jewish philosopher Hans Jonas (1984). In his version of a myth of suffering and of the unconditional immanence of God, he points out that the concept of omnipotence is in any case irrelevant and should therefore be abandoned. For Jonas, power is only meaningful as a relational concept. Without an object and a counterpart there is no power. And where power meets an object, it is limited at the same time and is therefore not absolute or omnipotent. The imagined omnipotence of God is therefore the epitome of its powerlessness because it has no object to which it refers. To speak of omnipotence is not only paradoxical but even senseless and self-cancelling.

In the twentieth century there are more and more voices calling for scepticism, criticism, or even a complete farewell to the concept of omnipotence in Christianity. But the confession of God as a sovereign and free being is not simply put aside. Interpretations that read God’s sovereignty as a relationship of dominion over his creation and want to locate God’s presence solely in the medium of his action are, however, increasingly being replaced by new ones. These new interpretations seek to characterize God’s being as relational, touchable, sensitive to suffering, and vulnerable, but also as perceptive, as sharing, and compassionate with his creation, and to describe his relationship to the world not as one

of domination but as an interactive-cooperative relationship or even as a form of empathy and sensitivity. The new theological reflections in the twentieth century can therefore be understood as attempts to recover a sovereign God who is neither an apathetic observer nor a powerless and merely suffering companion of human beings, but at the same time exists as a dynamic reality of his own in relation to his creation.

8.4 Reconfiguring a nonsovereign sovereignty: God's (im-)potentiality

The 'working through' the sovereignty also continues in radical political theologies of the twenty-first century. Thinkers influenced by a post-metaphysical, deconstructive philosophy ask for the messianic power of disruption and seek to rethink the sovereignty of God in terms of the potentiality of his presence. In doing so, reflections by philosophers such as John D. Caputo (2006) on the weakness of God touch upon those of process theologians such as Catherine Keller (2005), who redraws the nature of divine sovereignty from a theopoetics and ontology of becoming. Following Giorgio Agamben's interpretation of messianic power as inoperativity, Clayton Crockett (2011) interprets a non-sovereign sovereignty as potentiality that is always in relation to its own impotentiality. Finally, in a cosmotheological and neomaterialist rereading of Derrida's deconstruction, he develops a reinterpretation of divine power as energy (Crockett 2022). The 'undermining of a hypermasculine powerful God' and the search for a 'power that exceeds actual power or crude force' (Crockett 2011: 54) unites the recent approaches. The theological transitions of God's power, and the attempt to reconfigure it, thereby reflect not only the adherence to God's reality in a changing world, but also the (im)possibility of thinking about God and his relationship to his creation 'without' sovereignty.

Attributions

Copyright Rebekka Klein (CC BY-NC)

Bibliography

Further reading

- Agamben, Giorgio. 1998. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Caputo, John D. 2006. *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Crockett, Clayton. 2011. *Radical Political Theology*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 2010. *The Beast and the Sovereign*. 2 vols. Chicago: Chicago University Press. Second volume published in 2011.
- Lefort, Claude. 2006. 'The Permanence of the Theologico-Political?', in *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*. Edited by Hent de Vries. New York: Fordham University Press, 148–187. https://doi.org/10.5422/fso/9780823226443.003.0007
- Santner, Eric. 2016. *The Weight of All Flesh*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ullrich, Calvin. 2021. *Sovereignty and Event: The Political in John D. Caputo's Radical Theology*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Works cited

- Agamben, Giorgio. 1998. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Anselm, Reiner. 2015. 'Politische Ethik', in *Handbuch der Evangelischen Ethik*. Edited by Wolfgang Huber, Torsten Meireis, and Hans-Richard Reuter. München: Beck, 194–265.
- Askani, Hans-Christoph. 2018. 'Ist die "Ohnmacht Gottes" eine theologische Lösung?', in *Das Letzte – der Erste. Gott denken. Festschrift für Ingolf U. Dalferth zum 70. Geburtstag*. Edited by Hans-Peter Großhans, Michael Moxter, and Philipp Stoellger. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1–18.
- Augustinus, Aurelius. 1903. *Enchiridion*. Edited by Otto Scheel. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Bachmann, Michael. 2019. *Gott der Allmächtige. Der Pantokrator der Bibel und die Theodizeediskussion*. Freiburg: Herder.
- Balke, Friedrich. 2009. *Figuren der Souveränität*. München: Fink.
- Barth, Karl. 1947. *Dogmatik im Grundriß. Vorlesungen gehalten im Sommersemester 1946 an der Universität Bonn*. Zürich: Theologischer Verlag.
- Barth, Karl. 1956. *Die Menschlichkeit Gottes*. Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag.
- Barth, Karl. 1969. *Church Dogmatics II.I. The Knowledge of God. The Reality of God*. Translated by George T. Thomson. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.

- Bauke-Ruegg, Jan. 1998. *Die Allmacht Gottes. Systematisch-theologische Erwägungen zwischen Metaphysik, Postmoderne und Poesie*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Bayer, Oswald. 1994. *Theologie*. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus.
- Blumenberg, Hans. 1983. *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*. Translated by Robert M. Wallace. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Blumenberg, Hans. 2020. *Beiträge zum Problem der Ursprünglichkeit der mittelalterlich-scholastischen Ontologie*. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
- Bodin, Jean. 1967. *Six Books of the Commonwealth (1576)*. Translated by M. J. Tooley. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. 2001. *Letter and Papers from Prison (1943-45)*. Edited by Eberhard Bethge and John Bowden. London: SCM.
- Brunner, Emil. 1930. 'Die Gottesidee der Philosophen und der Schöpfergott des Glaubens', in *Gott und Mensch. Vier Untersuchungen über das personhafte Sein*. Edited by Emil Brunner. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1–23.
- Brunner, Emil. 1938. *Wahrheit als Begegnung*. Zürich: Zwingli-Verlag.
- Busch, Eberhard. 2001. 'Calvin und die Demokratie', in *Bibliothek und Reformation. Miszellen aus der Johannes a Lasco Bibliothek Emden*. Edited by Christoph Strohm. Wuppertal: Foedus, 117–150.
- Calvin, John. 1961. *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translated by Ford Lewis Battles. London: SCM Press.
- Caputo, John D. 2006. *The Weakness of God: A Theology of the Event*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Crockett, Clayton. 2011. *Radical Political Theology*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Crockett, Clayton. 2022. *Energy and Change: A New Materialist Cosmotheology*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Cone, James. 1975. *God of the Oppressed*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.
- Derrida, Jacques. 2005. *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 2010. *The Beast and the Sovereign*. 2 vols. Chicago: Chicago University Press. Second volume published in 2011.
- Ebeling, Gerhard. 1979. *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*. Volume 2. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Feldmeier, Reinhard. 1997. 'Nicht Übermacht noch Impotenz. Zum biblischen Ursprung des Allmachtsbekenntnisses', in *Der Allmächtige. Annäherungen an ein umstrittenes Gottesprädikat*. Edited by Werner H. Ritter, Wolfgang Schoberth, Günther Altner, and Reinhard Feldmeier. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 13–42.
- Feldmeier, Reinhard. 2011. 'Vom "Herrn der Heerscharen" zum "Allmächtigen". Die Septuaginta als Wegbereiterin einer christlichen Gotteslehre II. Der

neutestamentliche Befund', in *Die Septuaginta und das frühe Christentum*. Edited by Thomas S. Sculley and Hermann Lichtenberger. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 140–152.

- Feuerbach, Ludwig. 1881. *The Essence of Christianity*. Translated by Marian Evans. London: Trübner. 2nd edition.
- Haltern, Ulrich. 2007. *Was bedeutet Souveränität?* Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Hommel, Hildebrecht. 1983. 'Pantokrator', in *Sebasmata. Studien Zur Antiken Religionsgeschichte Und Zum Frühen Christentum*. Volume 1. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Hoping, Helmut. 1997. 'Abschied vom allmächtigen Gott?', *Trierer Theologische Zeitschrift* 106: 177–188.
- Ingham, Mary B. 2006. *Johannes Duns Scotus*. Münster: Aschendorff.
- Jonas, Hans. 1984. *Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz. Eine jüdische Stimme*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.
- Jüngel, Eberhard. 1986. 'Gottes ursprüngliches Anfangen als schöpferische Selbstbegrenzung', in *Gottes Zukunft – Zukunft der Welt. Festschrift für Jürgen Moltmann*. Edited by Hermann Deuser and Jürgen Moltmann. München: Kaiser, 265–275.
- Kahn, Paul W. 2011. *Political Theology. Four New Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kantorowicz, Ernst. 1957. *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Keller, Catherine. 2005. *God and Power. Counter-Apocalyptic Journeys*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Kelsen, Hans. 1928. *Das Problem der Souveränität und die Theorie des Völkerrechts. Beitrag zu einer reinen Rechtslehre*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Kelsen, Hans. 1970. 'Der Wandel des Souveränitätsbegriffes', in *Volkssouveränität und Staatssouveränität*. Edited by Hanns Kurz. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 164–178.
- Kierkegaard, Sören. 1954. 'Eine literarische Anzeige. Anhang: Reflexionen über Christentum und Naturwissenschaft (1846)', in *Gesammelte Werke, Abt. 17: Eine literarische Anzeige*. Translated by Emanuel Hirsch. Düsseldorf: Diederichs.
- Klein, Rebekka A. 2016. *Depotenzierung der Souveränität. Religion und politische Ideologie bei Claude Lefort, Slavoj Žižek und Karl Barth*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Klein, Rebekka A., and Friederike Rass. 2017. *Gottes schwache Macht. Alternativen zur Rede von Gottes Allmacht und Ohnmacht*. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt.
- Körtner, Ulrich H. J. 2018. *Dogmatik*. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt.

- Körtner, Ulrich H. J. 1999. ‘Metaphysik und Moderne. Zur Ortsbestimmung christlicher Theologie zwischen Mythos und Metaphysik’, *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 41: 225–244.
- Lefort, Claude. 2006. ‘The Permanence of the Theologico-Political?’, in *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*. Edited by Hent de Vries. New York: Fordham University Press, 148–187. https://doi.org/10.5422/fso/9780823226443.003.0007
- Leppin, Volker. 2003. *Wilhelm von Ockham. Gelehrter, Streiter, Bettelmönch*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- Leppin, Volker. 2012. *Geschichte des mittelalterlichen Christentums*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Link, Christian. 2021. *Die Theologie Calvins im Rahmen der europäischen Reformation*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Lust, Johan, Erik Eynikel, and Katrin Hauspie. 2003. *Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft. 2nd edition.
- Mackie, John Leslie. 1955. ‘Omnipotence and Evil’, *Mind* 64: 200–212.
- Menke, Christoph. 2015. *Kritik der Rechte*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.
- Metz, Johann Baptist. 2006. *Memoria passionis. Ein provozierendes Gedächtnis in pluralistischer Gesellschaft*. Freiburg: Herder.
- Moltmann, Jürgen. 1972. *Der gekreuzigte Gott. Das Kreuz Christi als Grund und Kritik aller Theologie*. München: Kaiser.
- Moltmann, Jürgen. 1980. *Trinität und Reich Gottes. Zur Gotteslehre*. München: Kaiser.
- Moltmann, Jürgen. 2002. ‘Kein Monotheismus gleicht dem anderen: Destruktion eines untauglichen Begriffs’, *Evangelische Theologie* 62: 112–122.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 1964. *The Joyful Wisdom*. The Complete Works Volume 10. Translated by Oscar Levy. New York: Russel & Russel.
- Plato. 2012. *Republic*. Translated by Christopher Rowe. London: Penguin.
- Machiavelli, Niccolò. 2015. *The Prince*. Translated by Peter E. Bondanella. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Quaritsch, Helmut. 1986. *Souveränität. Entstehung und Entwicklung des Begriffs in Frankreich und Deutschland vom 13. Jh. bis 1806*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot.
- Randi, Eugenio. 1987. ‘A Scotist Way of Distiguishing Between God’s Absolute and Ordained Powers’, in *From Ockham to Wyclif*. Edited by Anne Hudson and Michael Wilks. Oxford: Blackwell, 43–50.
- Röttgers, Kurt. 1980. ‘Macht’, in *Historisches Wörterbuch Der Philosophie*. Volume 5. Basel: Schwabe, 585–604.
- Röttgers, Kurt. 1990. *Spuren der Macht. Begriffsgeschichte und Systematik*. Freiburg: Alber.
- Santner, Eric. 2016. *The Weight of All Flesh*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Santner, Eric. 2020. *Sovereignty, Inc.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Schaede, Stephan. 2009. 'Das reformierte "A-B-C" der Allmacht? Augustinus – Calvin – Barth', *Zeitschrift für Dialektische Theologie* 25: 72–94.
- Schiwy, Günther. 1995. *Abschied vom allmächtigen Gott*. München: Kösel.
- Schmitt, Carl. 1922. *Politische Theologie*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot.
- Sölle, Dorothee. 1981. 'Vater, Macht und Barbarei', *Concilium (D)* 17.: 223–227.
- Stoellger, Philipp. 2008. 'Sprachen der Macht zwischen potentia, impotentia und potentia passiva', in *Sprachen der Macht. Gesten der Er- und Entmächtigung in Text und Interpretation*. Edited by Philipp Stoellger. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1–32.
- Stöhr, Johannes. 1971. 'Allmacht (Omnipotenz) Gottes', in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*. Volume 1. Basel: Schwabe, 193–194.
- Stowasser, Martin. 2017. 'Pantokrator', *Das Wissenschaftliche Bibellexikon Im Internet*. https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/200154/
- Tanner, Kathryn. 1988. *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* Oxford: Blackwell.
- Tanner, Kathryn. 1992. *The Politics of God*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Van den Brink, Gijsbert. 1993. *Almighty God: A Study of the Doctrine of Divine Omnipotence*. Kampen: Kok Pharos.
- Van den Brink, Gijsbert. 1998. 'Allmacht', in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. Volume 1. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 319–320. 4th edition.
- Zimmermann, Christiane. 2007. *Die Namen des Vaters. Studien zu ausgewählten neutestamentlichen Gottesbezeichnungen vor ihrem frühjüdischen und paganen Sprachhorizont*. Leiden: Brill.