

Richard of St. Victor

On the Trinity
Book One

Translated by Jonathan Couser

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Richard of St. Victor: On the Trinity¹

Book One

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Chapter I

5 **That we apprehend the knowledge of things in a threefold manner:
by experience, by reasoning, [and] by believing.**

10 If we wish to ascend to the knowledge of sublime things by sagacity of
mind, it is first worthwhile to know in what ways we are accustomed to ap-
prehend the knowledge of things. Accordingly, unless I am mistaken, we ap-
prehend the knowledge of things in a threefold manner. For we prove some
15 things by experience, others we gather by reasoning, [and] we attain the cer-
tainty of still others by believing.² And indeed we apprehend the knowledge
of temporal things by the experience itself; but we rise to the knowledge of
eternal things sometimes by reasoning and sometimes by believing. For some
20 of the things which we are commanded to believe appear to be not only above
reason, but also contrary to reason, unless they are discerned (*discutiantur*) by
a deep and most subtle investigation or rather manifested by divine revela-
tion.³ Accordingly in the cognizance or assertion of these things we are more
accustomed to rely on faith than on reasoning, on authority rather than argu-
mentation, according to that saying of the Prophet: *Unless you believe, you*

¹ This translation is based on the critical edition, ed. Jean Ribailier, *Richard de Saint-Victor: De Trinitate*. Textes Philosophiques du Moyen Age VI, Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin: Paris, 1958. Annotations are translated excerpts of Ribailier's own; where English translations of works cited are well-known, I have rendered Latin titles into English: otherwise, they have been left as Ribailier cites them. PL: Migne, Patrologia Latina. CC: Corpus Christianorum, Brepols.

² Concerning a threefold mode of thought, cf. Hugh of St. Victor, *De sacr.*, I.x.2 (PL CLXXVI, 329 ff.). Elsewhere Richard distinguishes a threefold mode of thought: by faith, by reason, and by contemplation, cf. *Benj. minor*, LXXIV (PL CXCVI, 53c).

³ On truths which are above reason, before reason, cf. Hugh of St. Victor, *De sacr.*, I.iii.30 (PL CLXXVI, 231d-232a); Richard, *Benj. major*, I.6, IV.3 and 17 (PL CXCVI, 72 a-b, 136d-137, 156-157).

*will not understand.*⁴ But it seems that even this saying and these words ought to be attended to diligently, since it is set forth to us by this authority that the understanding of these things is to be denied, not generally, but conditionally, when it is said, *Unless you believe, you will not understand.*

5 Therefore they who have trained their senses should not despair regarding the combining of such understanding, so long as they feel themselves to be firm in faith, and in their assertion proven constant in faith by all things.

Chapter II

10 **That nothing is held more firmly than what is apprehended by constant faith.**

But in these things this is marvelous beyond measure, that however much we are truly faithful we hold nothing more certainly, nothing more constantly than that which we apprehend by faith. For indeed they are revealed by the fathers and from heaven, and are confirmed by so many, so great, such
15 marvelous signs or prodigies, so that it appears to be a great madness to doubt even a little on them. And so the innumerable miracles which could only be produced by Providence both produce in us faith about this kind of thing and do not permit us to doubt. And so in their attestation and also their confirmation we use signs for arguments and prodigies as experiences. Would that the
20 Jews pay attention, would that the pagans give heed when we will be able to approach the Divine judgment with such a security of conscience on our part! Will we not be able to say with all confidence to God, “Lord, if there is an error, we have been deceived by you yourself, for these things have been confirmed for us with such signs and prodigies and by such means as could only
25 be brought about by you. Certainly they have been handed on to us by men of the highest sanctity. And they have been proven with the highest and with authentic testimony, you yourself “*cooperating and confirming the message by the signs which followed.*”⁵ Hence it is certain that the perfectly faithful are more prepared to die for the faith than to deny it. For without a doubt nothing
30 is more firmly held than that which is apprehended by constant faith.

⁴ Isaiah 7:9 (LXX). This statement is relied on by Augustine and Anselm, to prove that understanding cannot rise to God, except by faith. Cf. Augustine, *On Faith and the Creed* I (PL XL, 181), *On Christian Doctrine* II.xii.17 (PL XXXIV, 43), [others]; Anselm, *De fide Trin.*, preface and II (PL CLVIII, 261a, 263-265).

⁵ Mark 16:20.

Chapter III

That this work deals with those things which we are commanded to believe about eternal things.

5 And so it is indeed necessary to enter by faith into the knowledge of those things about which it is rightly said to us: *If you have not believed, you will not understand*; Nor should one stand at the entrance itself without moving, but always hasten toward a more profound and interior understanding and apply oneself with all zeal and the utmost diligence, so that we may have the power to advance by daily increments toward the understanding of those things which we hold in faith.⁶ In the full knowledge and understanding of 10 these things we will attain eternal life. Surely there is the utmost usefulness in this acquisition, and the utmost joy in the contemplation of these things. They are the highest riches, they are of eternal delight; in the taste of them is intimate sweetness, in their fruition is infinite enjoyment. And so we propose to concern ourselves in this work with those things which we are commanded to believe by the rule of the Catholic faith, not about any whatsoever, but about 15 the eternal ones. We intend to say nothing in this work about those things which we are commanded to believe, and which we do believe, about the sacraments of our redemption made in time. For the manner of proceeding is different in those cases. 20

Chapter IV

The procedure in this work: not only to adduce authorities but also to stand upon reasoning.

25 And so, in so far as God permits, it will be our intention in this work concerning those things which we believe, to adduce not only credible reasons but also necessary ones,⁷ and to preserve the teaching of our faith by clarification and explanation of the truth. For I believe without a doubt that although

⁶ That we ought to investigate by reason truths that we hold by faith, cf. Augustine, *The Trinity*, XV.ii.2 (PL XLII, 1058); Anselm, *De fide Trin.*, preface (PL CLVIII, 261a)

⁷ The expression “necessary reasons” appears to be inspired by Anselm; cf. *De fide Trin.*, IV (PL CLVIII, 272c); *Monologion*, preface and LXIV (ibid., 143a and 210c). On this expression, cf. also Robertus Milidunensis, *Sent.* I.ii.4; John of Salisbury, *Metalog.* II.13 (PL CXCIX, 871), [others]. On the expression “probable reasons,” in the present sense, cf. Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalion*, II.i (PL CLXXVI, 752a).

they may be hidden from our efforts for a while, there is no absence not only of probable but also of necessary arguments for the explanation of anything that has necessary being.

5 It is possible that all things which begin to be in time, at the pleasure of the Maker, should be and should not be. And so also, by the same token, their being can be not only gathered by reasoning, but also proven by experience. But those which are eternal are entirely unable not to be, as they never were not, thus certainly they never will not be. Indeed they always are what they are and not otherwise; nor can they be otherwise. It appears moreover
10 that it is entirely impossible for any necessary being to lack a necessary reason. But it is not characteristic of any soul to elicit this kind of argument from the deep and shadowy breast of nature, and publicly to draw out the arguments as from a certain secret place of wisdom. Many things are less worthy than this, many things less suitable, many things less learned; and what we should
15 always have before our eyes if it is possible, we consider rarely if at all. With what application, with what zeal should we apply ourselves to this occupation, with what zeal should we desire that sight, on which depends the highest beatitude of the salvation of everyone? Moreover I believe that I will have done no small thing if it is granted to me to assist learned minds in this occupation
20 at least a little, and to provoke lukewarm minds to such study by my own zeal.

Chapter V

A brief foretaste concerning what is discussed in the following.

I have frequently read that there is but one God, that he is eternal, un-
25 created, immense, that he is omnipotent and Lord of all things, that everything which is depends on him, that he is everywhere as a whole, not divided by parts. I have read about my God that he is one and triune, one in substance but three in person. All these things I have read, but whence all this should be proven, I do not remember having read. I have heard that in the true deity there is but one substance, that in the unity of the substance there are many
30 persons, each singular person distinguished from the other by his own property. I have read that there is a person there who is from himself, not from any other; that there is a person who is from only one person, and not from himself; and that there is there a person who is from a twin (*gemina*) person, not from only one.

35 I hear daily about the three that they are not three eternal beings but one eternal being, that they are not three uncreated nor three immense, but one

uncreated and one immense being. I hear about the three that they are not three omnipotent beings but one omnipotent being; I hear that there are by no means three Gods but one God, nor are there three Lords but there is one Lord. I discover that the Father is not made nor begotten, that the son is not made but is begotten, that the Holy Spirit is neither made nor begotten but proceeds.

All these things I frequently hear or read, but I do not recall having read whence all these things are proven. Authorities abound in all these matters, but not equally arguments; in all these things experience is lacking and arguments are rare. Therefore I suppose that I shall have done no little thing, as I said above, if I shall be able to assist learned minds in this occupation even a little. Even if it should not be granted to me to satisfy them.

Chapter VI

That universally every way of being can be comprehended under a threefold classification.

Therefore, so that it may stand on a plain, perspicuous, solid, and, as it were, immobile foundation of truth, the order of our reasoning should commence from that place whence nobody should have a basis for doubt or presume to recoil. Everything which is or can be either has being from eternity or begins to be in time, and again, everything which is or can be either has being from itself or it has being from something other than itself.

And so universally all being can be distinguished by a threefold reckoning. For the being of any existing thing will be either from eternity and by itself, or on the contrary neither from eternity nor by itself, or, mediately between these alternatives, from eternity indeed but not by itself.⁸ For that fourth [possibility], which appears to correspond to this third member as its converse, is in no sense permitted by nature itself. For nothing can be entirely by itself which is not from eternity. For anything which takes its being in time, there was a time when it was nothing, but as long as it was nothing it had (and could have had) entirely no being; when it was nothing, it neither received (nor could receive) being, whether from itself or from another. Otherwise it gave what it did not have and it made what it could not make. Therefore learn from this how impossible it is that anything should wholly be by itself that is

⁸ That everything can be distinguished by threefold reckoning, cf. Proclus, *In Parm.*; Boethius, *In Porphyrium dialog.*, I (PL LXIV, 11); Scotus Erigena, *De div. nat.* I.i (PL CXXII, 441b); Achardus, *De unitate et pluralitate*, I.2.

Chapter VIII

On that mode of being which is by itself, and is in itself from eternity.

5 But from that being which is neither from eternity nor from itself, it is gathered by reasoning also that that being which is from itself, both is something in itself and is also from eternity. For if nothing was from itself, there would not be [anything] at all, whence those things could exist which do not have their own being from themselves, nor could they have being. And so it is proven that any being from itself, thereby also is from eternity, as was already said; otherwise there was [a time] when nothingness, and then none of the future things would be, since that which gives, or could give, to itself or another a beginning of existence was at that time altogether nothing; how false this would be¹¹ shows itself evident, and the experience of existing things proves it.¹² Thus from these things which we see, we gather by sound reasoning also that there are things which we do not see: from transitory things [we gather] the eternal, from the worldly [we gather] the otherworldly, from human things [we gather] the divine. “For the invisible things” of God, “through the creatures of the earth, through the things which were made, are perceived by the understanding.”¹³

Chapter IX

20 On that mode of being which is from eternity, though not from itself.

25 It seems impossible to no one that something should have been from eternity which, however, is not from itself.¹⁴ It is, as it were, necessary for a cause always to precede its effect, and everything which is from another, must always succeed its principle. Certainly the ray of the sun proceeds from the sun, and draws its origin from it, and yet is coeval with the sun. In that it was, it produced the ray from itself, and was at no time without the ray. Therefore, if this corporal light has a ray coeval with it, why shouldn't that spiritual light have an inaccessible ray coeternal with it?

¹¹ I.e. that something which was or would be nothing could give itself existence.

¹² Cf. Augustine, *Confessions*, XI.iv.6

¹³ Romans 1:20. This statement is used by Augustine in various places, e.g.: *City of God*, VIII, 6 (CC XLVII, p.224), and XXII, 29 (CC XLVIII, p. 861); cf. also Abelard, *Theolog. Christ.* II (PL CLXXVIII, 1170D); P. Lombard, *Sententiae* I.iii.1, Quar 35-36.

¹⁴ Cf. Boethius, *In topica Ciceronis comment.*, II (PL LXIV, 1078d)

In created nature we read what we should think, or suppose, about uncreated nature: we see daily how in the operation of nature itself existence produces existence, and existence proceeds from existence. What therefore? Will there be no operation of nature in that superexcellent nature, or can there be nothing at all? Will that nature remain in itself entirely sterile, which gave this, our nature, the fruit of fecundity? And will that which imparted generation to others, be without any generation and sterile?¹⁵ From these considerations, it appears probable that in that superessential incommutability there is some being which is not from itself, something which will have been from eternity. But on this subject, we will provide a fuller and more efficacious argument in its place.

Chapter X

That the entire intention of this work revolves around only the two modes which are from eternity.

In this work we intend to discuss the twofold mode of being which we have said is from eternity, and the things which pertain to this consideration. For we intend for the moment to consider nothing about temporal things, that is, about those which pertain to the third mode, except insofar as their consideration proves necessary or useful to the investigation of eternal things. For just as we have from the Apostle, and as we already said above: “The invisible things” of God “through the things which were made, are perceived by the understanding.”¹⁶

How many times therefore do we attain the contemplation of invisible things by the observation of visible things. What else are we doing, as it were, but erecting a ladder by which we ascend in mind to the things which are above us? Hence it is that the process of all our reasoning begins from these things which we know by experience. Therefore we intentionally speak in this work about eternal things, but occasionally about temporal things. For our intention in this our work revolves entirely around those two modes of being which are from eternity.

¹⁵ On the fecundity of an uncreated nature, cf. Isaiah, 66:9; concerning this statement, cf. Abelard, *Sic et Non* XIX (PL CLXXVIII, 1379a); also Quodvultdeus, *Tract. adv. quinque haeres.*, IV.5 (PL XLII, 1106).

¹⁶ Romans 1:20

Chapter XI

Concerning the highest substance, which is from itself, both in that it is from eternity, and without any beginning.

5 Now therefore we must examine further that being which is from itself, whether, as was already said, it is established that its being is from eternity. However that is most certain, and hence, as I believe, no one can doubt it, since with such a multitude of existing things, and such multiple gradations of difference, there must be something highest. But we call the highest that than which nothing is greater and nothing is better.¹⁷ Without a doubt, however, a rational nature is better than an irrational nature. And so it is necessary that some rational substance would be the highest of all. But it has been established that what holds the highest place in this universe of things cannot receive what it itself is from its inferior. Therefore some substance must exist which both holds the highest place and is from itself. For, just as we have said and proven already, if nothing had been from itself, nothing would have been from eternity, and there would be neither origin of things, nor succession of things.

10 And so the evidence of the experience of things convinces [us] that there must be some substance from itself. For if nothing were from itself, none of the things which take their origin from elsewhere, and cannot be from themselves would be at all. And so that substance which is not from itself relates — it relates, I say, to that being which is from eternity without beginning.

Chapter XII

25 **Again, that only substance is from itself, from which also all other things are, and which has from itself all that it has.**

What has been said about the highest substance can be proved by further reasoning. Moreover it is most certain that in the whole universe of things nothing can be unless it has either the possibility of being from itself, or re-

¹⁷ Cf. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, I.7 (PL XXXIV, 22); *De moribus Manich.*, XIV, 24 (PL XXXII, 1321); Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, III, prose x (PL LXIII, 765); Anselm, *Proslogion*, II-IV (PL CLVIII, 227-229); *Liber Apologet.*, X (ibid., 260b). Theodoricus Carnotensis, *Glossa super libr. Boethii de Trin.* 18-19, ed. N. Haring, A.H.D.L.M.A., XXIII, 1957, p. 271. Achardus, *De unitate et pluralitate*, I. 5.

ceives being from another; for what cannot be does not exist at all.¹⁸ Therefore it is necessary, in order for something to exist, that it receive the capacity to be from the potency of being. And so everything that subsists in the universe of things receives being from the potency of being. But if all things are from that same potency, then indeed that potency is only from itself and has nothing unless from itself.¹⁹ If all things are from that potency, then [so is] every essence, every potency, every wisdom. If every being is from that [potency], that [potency] is the highest essence. If every capacity is from that [potency], it is the most potent. If every wisdom is from that [potency], it is highest wisdom. For it is impossible to give more than is had. Indeed, wisdom can be given by its possessor all at once, and can be entirely retained by the giver. But you cannot at all impart more wisdom than you have. And so there must have been a highest wisdom from which all wisdom took its origin.

But where there is no rational substance, wisdom cannot inhere at all; for wisdom can inhere only in a rational substance. And so the highest of all is also a rational substance, in which the highest wisdom inheres.²⁰ It is, I say, the highest of all, from which every essence is, namely every rational and irrational nature. And so, the potency of being is not other than the highest substance. Therefore the potency of being is only from itself, and indeed the highest substance can only be from itself, which isn't anything other than itself.

And so it is established, indeed, that everything which is is from the highest substance. But if all things are from this substance, then nothing is from itself besides that substance alone. And if every being exists from that substance, then beyond a doubt, that substance has every capacity, every possession that it has from itself. Therefore this substance is rightly called primordial, from which everything that is is assigned its principle and origin.

¹⁸ Cf. Augustine, *The Trinity*, III.ix.16 (PL XLII, 877-878)

¹⁹ Cf. Anselm, *Monologion*, V (PL CLVIII, 150a-b)

²⁰ Cf. Abelard, *Theolog. Christ.* V (PL CLXXVIII, 1317d); Augustine, *City of God*, VIII.5 (CC XLVII, p. 222), and *Summa Sent.*, I.6 (PL CLXXVI, 51b-c); Anselm, *Monologion*, V (PL CLVIII 150b)

Chapter XIII

That the highest substance is the same thing as potency itself, the same as wisdom itself; wherefore any of these is also the same as the other.

5 Now let us consider what has already been said, that the highest substance is the most powerful. But this is most certain, since that which it is to be powerful belongs to it from potency itself, that which it is to be wise comes from wisdom itself. Moreover it has been proven that all that it has, it has only from itself. Therefore, in order that it should have from itself only what it has from potency itself and from wisdom itself, it is necessary that these things
10 should not be anything other than [substance] itself. Otherwise what cannot be powerful or wise without potency or wisdom, which it has from these things themselves, would not have [these qualities] as much from themselves as from elsewhere. Moreover since each of them is the same as the highest substance, it follows that any of them is the same as the other.²¹

15

Chapter XIV

That the highest substance can have neither an equal, nor a superior

Moreover at this point we should now pay very close attention, for if substance is highest potency in itself, then it cannot itself be any [other] diverse substance. Otherwise diverse substances would be one and the one
20 would be diverse, which is entirely impossible.

But perhaps you say to this: “what if some [other] diverse substance could have the highest power, although it could not be the highest potency? Wouldn't they be equally powerful, if they both held the highest power?”²²

25 Without doubt or hesitation I affirm that, if one of them can have the highest potency, and it cannot be the highest power, then it is not equally

²¹ That the attributes of divinity are the same as its substance, cf. Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalion*, VII.17 (PL XXVI, 825d); *Summa Sent.*, (Ibid., 51 d); Robertus Milidunensis, *Sent.* I.ii.5 (ed. R.-M. Martin, p. 276). Richard here opposes Gilbertum Porret., as in *In Boeth. de Trinitate* (PL LXIV, 1290b), who asserts that the form of God or the divinity by which God is, is not Godself.; he rests on Boethius' saying, “Being is different from that which it is.” cf. *De Hebdomadibus* (PL LXIV, 1311 b), *The Trinity*, 17 (ibid., 1253 b).

²² Against Gilbert Porret, loc. cit., who distinguishes the substance which is, namely subsisting (*subsistentem*), and the substance by which it is, namely subsistence (*subsistentiam*).

powerful as that which can be both.²³ For partly to be able and partly not to be able to do what is possible to the other as a whole is not to enjoy the plenitude of potency itself, but only to participate in it. Moreover it is much greater and more excellent to have plenitude of some thing than to obtain it by participation. From these things, therefore, we gather clearly that the primordial substance cannot have an equal, just as it was evident from the above that it cannot have a superior.

Chapter XV

That it is impossible for the highest substance of its proper nature to have a partner.

And so it seems that, presiding over all and having no equal or superior naturally inheres in primordial substance. For what inheres substantially, without a doubt also inheres naturally. For since primordial substance itself is entirely the same as the highest potency, that it is most highly capable inheres naturally in it, and it cannot have an equal or more powerful partner. Let us see, therefore, if at least it could have an inferior partner in its proper nature. But how, I ask, will any substance you please be able to be inferior to the primordial essence, if [that would mean that] it naturally had something in common with that, which could not have an equal or superior? According to this any one will be the other, indeed any one will be superior and inferior to itself, and greater and lesser than itself. It is therefore impossible for primordial substance to have a partner in its proper nature.²⁴

Chapter XVI

That the highest substance is the same as divinity itself, and that there is no God unless he is substantially one

According to the discussion above, we already hold as certain that everything that is comes from the highest and sole substance, and that the highest substance has all that it has from itself. But if all things come from itself,

²³ That the highest substance cannot have an equal, cf. Anselm, *Monologion* IV (PL CLVIII, 148-150); cf. also Achardus, *De unitate et pluralitate*, I.3.; Abelard, *Introductio ad Theologiam*, III (PL CLXXVIII, 1089 c-d).

²⁴ cf. II Peter 1:4, Vulg. (“ut per haec efficiamini divinae consortes naturae...”).

therefore it also is divinity itself. But if it gave that [divinity] to another, and it didn't retain it itself, then what we have shown cannot have a superior has a superior. And so it is established that it simultaneously has and has retained [divinity]. Moreover God is he who has deity, and also he has what it is to be God from deity. But if the highest substance has what it is to be God from divinity itself, which has nothing except from itself, then surely deity itself is nothing other than the highest substance.²⁵ Therefore he could not give substance to any other, not I say in such a way that it would have deity, but so that it would be deity itself. Otherwise, what is impossible would have an equal. From this we gather that true divinity is in unity of substance, and that true unity of substance is in divinity itself. And so there is no God unless he is substantially one.

Chapter XVII

Again, that there is no God except one; that from himself everything that is, is; that he has all that he has only from himself; and the same thing is potency itself which is wisdom itself.

Hear now how easily we can prove that there is no god except one. Since it has nothing except from itself, it is established that divinity itself is not anything other than itself, lest we be convinced that what it has from divinity, it has from anything other than itself. And so divinity itself will be either incommunicable, or common to some things. But if it is incommunicable, it follows that there is no god but one. However if it were common with some things, it will certainly be common also to that substance which is not other than divinity itself. But one substance cannot be common to many substances; otherwise one and the same substance would be many, and many would be one; which is so false that reason does not permit its concealment. But if it is said to be common to many persons, according to that which has been said, it will certainly be common to them and to that substance which is nothing other than divinity itself²⁶. According to this certainly there will be one divinity in many persons, but only one substance. Therefore whether we say there is only one or many persons in the one divinity, nevertheless there will be no god unless he is substantially one. And so the one and only god is from himself,

²⁵ That the highest substance is divinity itself, cf. Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps.* LXVIII, I.5 (CC XXXIX, p. 905); P. Lombard, *Sententiae*, I.xxxiii.2, quar. 301. Cf. also Concilium Remense, Denz., 389.

²⁶ Cf. Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps.* loc. cit.; Boethius, *The Trinity*, III (PL LXIV 1251)

and thereby from eternity. And according to what has been proven about the highest substance, which is nothing other than itself, all that is is from itself, all that it has it has from itself, and the same thing itself is what potency itself is, and what wisdom itself is.

5

Chapter XVIII

That it is entirely impossible even for God himself to define a better than God.

And so if the wisdom of God and the potency of God are one and the same in all things, no perfection, no consummation is comprehended by one, that is not comprehended by the other in the same measure of integrity. And thus
10 nothing is greater, nothing is in any way better in his knowing than in his capacity, and thereby in his being, since his capacity is not something other than his being. Therefore whatever is apprehended or defined by his wisdom as best and highest, all this along with the same plenitude of integrity is comprehended by his potency, for the whole is included in his essence.²⁷ For as to the
15 summit of perfection, if he attains something by understanding, which he could not apprehend by efficacy, then without a doubt he would extend more magnificently by wisdom than by power, and one and the same substance would be both greater than itself and lesser than itself. For if the substance of
20 God, since it is nothing other than his wisdom or potency, were to extend itself further by wisdom than by potency (if it could have extended itself further by the former than by the latter), then certainly the one and the same substance would be greater by wisdom in comparison to its potency, and the same thing would be lesser by its potency in comparison to its wisdom. Therefore
25 nothing greater or better than God either can be defined by God himself or attained by the understanding.

Chapter XIX

If God himself cannot attain something better than God by understanding, so much the less can human thought.

30 And so if the divine knowledge can grasp nothing more perfect than God by understanding, how much less can human knowledge think of any-

²⁷ Cf. Anselm, *Proslogion*, II-IV (PL CLVIII, 227-229)

thing greater or better than God! For what human thought might grasp by understanding, could not escape the divine understanding. It is a kind of madness to believe that a human being, who cannot by any investigation attain to that which God is, should be able to ascend in thought beyond that which God is.

5 And so human thought is the more perfect and the better insofar as it approaches more closely to that which is God, though it doesn't reach that far.

Chapter XX

For investigators and those disputing about God it is customary to use a maxim and, as it were, a common concept of the soul.

10 It seems to happen almost as an endowment of nature that practically everybody, both the erudite and those less erudite, are accustomed to hold this almost as a rule. That is, they judge that whatever is best should unhesitatingly be attributed to God. What the exercise of reason does not teach them about this perspicuous rule, their devotion persuades them without the uncertainty of

15 doubt. Hence it is that even those who do not know that it can be proven, unhesitatingly affirm that God is himself immense, eternal, incommutable, most wise, omnipotent. And so it is a maxim for the erudite, it is almost universally as a common conception of the soul, to attribute to God whatever human estimation most highly attains.²⁸ Even the greatest teachers everywhere begin

20 their disputations with this solid certainty and as it were intimate foundation of truth when they intend to discuss the divine properties most highly and most reverently.

Chapter XXI

25 **That God is thus the most powerful in such a way that He is also omnipotent**

That God the most powerful exists as the most powerful is established sufficiently from the above. But it can be asked further: How it is that he is

²⁸ Cf. Augustine, *Confessions*, VII.iv.6; Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, III, prose x (PL LXIII, 765); Anselm, *Monologion*, XV (PL CLVIII, 162a-164a); *Proslogion*, III (ibid., 228b-c); Hugh of St. Victor, *De Sacr.*, I.iii.12 (PL CLXXVI 220d); Bernard of Clairvaux, *De consideratione*, V.7 (PL CLXXXII, 797a); Achardus, *De unitate et pluralitate*, I.5

called most powerful, whether because nobody is superior to Him in potency, or whether He is the most powerful such that He can do all things and is truly omnipotent. But if we deny omnipotence, then we are already convinced that we are able to think of something greater than God.²⁹ For it is greater to have
 5 omnipotence than any power whatever which lacks something of the plenitude of omnipotence. And that which is easy for man to understand, cannot hide divine wisdom. And so, if God understands anything by plenitude of potency which he cannot have, there will be something greater in his knowledge than
 10 in his capacity, neither of which is anything other than his own being. Therefore, according to what we have just argued, one and the same thing will be both greater than itself and lesser than itself — than which nothing is more impossible. Hence, therefore, without a doubt we gather that God can do all things whatsoever the capacity [for which] is a potency.

For we are said to be capable of many things which it is much better
 15 not to have been capable of than to be capable of. We are able to decline, we are able to die, we are able to be destroyed and to return to nothingness. Concerning whatever is of this kind, it is entirely greater not to be able [to do] each of these than to be able [to do them]. For these are indicators of infirmity rather than signs of majesty. And so God can do all those things, and certainly
 20 only those, whose capacity is some potency, as we have already said. And therefore we call him omnipotent the more correctly and rightly by withdrawing from his potency all arguments of infirmity.³⁰

Chapter XXII

That the wisdom of God is so high that it is perfect in everything.

25 What has been said already concerning the divine potency, can be asked about the divine wisdom using similar reasoning. Is it called the highest [wisdom], because no other can to be greater than it? Or is it so truly the highest that it is perfect in everything?³¹ But [the answer is] most certainly estab-

²⁹ Anselm, *Monologion*, XV (PL CLVIII, 164)

³⁰ Concerning this definition of the omnipotence of God, cf. Augustine, *The Trinity*, XV.xiv.23 (PL XLVII, 1077); Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, IV, prose 2 (PL LXIII, 795); Abelard, *Theolog. Christ.*, V (PL CLXXVIII, 1326 c-d); *Sic et Non*, XXXII (ibid., 1393 c); Hugh of St. Victor, *De sacr.*, I.ii.22 (PL CLXXVI, 214b); P. Lombard, *Sententiae*, I.xlii.2, quar., 382-384.

³¹ Concerning the distinction between plenitude and participation, being and having, cf. Augustine, *The Trinity*, V.x.11 (PL XLII, 918); Anselm, *Monologion* XVI (PL CLVIII, 164 ff.); Achardus, *De unitate et pluralitate*, I.7.

lished because where omnipotence is, the plenitude of wisdom cannot be absent. For if from the plenitude of wisdom there was lacking something of perfection in God which he could not have, without any ambiguity he would not be omnipotent. And concerning the wisdom of God it is established that concerning the perfection of all knowledge and prudence whatsoever, nothing is lacking in him the addition of which would make him greater or better. We should note how from the consideration of divine wisdom the plenitude of potency itself is discovered. And again, from the consideration of omnipotence the plenitude of wisdom is shown and proven.

10

Chapter XXIII

What is said about the wisdom of God is confirmed by different reasoning.

But what we have already said about the plenitude of divine wisdom, we can prove further by another reason. Indeed this is certain since whoever is wise, either is so by a plenitude of wisdom in itself, or by participation in wisdom. But already we have established that wisdom itself is the same as divine substance. Who, therefore, unless he is mad, would say that the substance of God would partly have wisdom and partly not have it, and he is himself not worthy of the plenitude [of wisdom]? Or that he might not have the force to have the plenitude of wisdom itself? Therefore just as the substance of God cannot fail to be complete, so it cannot lack the plenitude of wisdom.

20

Chapter XXIV

What was said above concerning the plenitude of divine potency is confirmed by the same reason.

What was said above concerning omnipotence is confirmed by similar reasoning. For just as any wise being is wise either by the plenitude of wisdom, or by participation in the same, so also to be sure any powerful being is so by the plenitude of potency or by participation in the same. However, it is impossible for anything to participate in itself. Therefore because God is omnipotent, he cannot be [so] by participation in potency, since the plenitude of potency is not anything other than God himself. And so it is established that he is powerful by the plenitude of potency. But where there is a plenitude of

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