

**The Death of Omnipotence and Birth of Amipotence** (2023). Thomas Jay Oord.  
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Thomas Jay Oord is a theologian, philosopher, a gifted speaker and is conversant across the lines of traditional disciplines. He is also quite adept (as was the Apostle Paul) at creating new words in the *lingua franca* to convey new meanings. He has done this in his previous books, but this is the first occasion where the new word appears in the title. “Amipotence” is here coined to convey the characteristic of God as all-loving. As he explains (after 120 pages) *amipotence* combines two Latin words *ami* and *potens*. The first means “love” as in amicable and amity; the second is Latin for power or influence. Oord coins this word to replace the misleading and non-scriptural word “omnipotence” that for centuries conveyed a sense that God is “all-powerful.” That’s what the first 120 pages of the book is about. Oord clearly and convincingly discusses how the notion of omnipotence is a mis-translation of previous Greek and Latin ideas about God – as Charles Hartshorne reminded us 80 years ago, omnipotence is the greatest theological mistake ever made. Think about it: if God might be omnipotent – that is, containing within the Godself ALL power – we have none – zero, and no free will, no foundation for ethics, and no social responsibility. As a concept it undercuts our entire spiritual life. Why would you bother to worship an omnipotent God? All you could expect to do would be to grovel at “his” feet (and it would essentially be a male “god”).

In the earlier chapters, Oord demonstrates that the Bible does not endorse omnipotence. The mistake is grafted in the King James translation where the Hebrew word “*el Shaddai*” appears in Genesis 17 and is translated “almighty” – but that is not the meaning of the Hebrew at all. The oldest meaning of the word – quite literally – is “breasts” and makes a lot of sense as God is promising Abram that he will “nourish” his descendants. Nourishing does not require omnipotence; rather this is a fertility function. And in later Hebrew scriptures, the word *el Shaddai* takes on the character of a warrior god – in Samuel, Isaiah, Joel, etc – who will “scatter the enemy kings across the land.” Here a different Hebrew word appears: *sabaoth*, which again is mistranslated as “almighty” – this word properly means forces, or armies, as in “the Lord of hosts” who will lead the Israelites to victory in battle. All this impels the great Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel to conclude in “Teaching Jewish Theology” that “the concept of omnipotence...is a non-Jewish idea.”

Oord goes on to demonstrate how these concepts were misconstrued in the Septuagint translation into Greek, and later in Jerome’s translation of the Vulgate into Latin. The upshot of the scholarship shows that there is no authentic biblical word, properly understood, that means almighty or omnipotent. The notion gained credence in our times through the work of John Calvin, who was a full-blown determinist in his concept of God, since this God is the only “power” and is the cause of all things, even sin and evil. Somehow in this theology, creatures are supposed to have responsibility, but this just creates a compatibilism that is a conceptual mistake since a God who is omnicause makes no sense. On the positive side, when we say “God is love” we are implying that there are no bounds to God’s love, that it is God’s nature to love, and if it is God’s nature to love, no qualifications are warranted. Thus: omnipotence. Whatever additional qualities we attribute to God, amipotence is privileged as basic: the foundation for all the rest. So let us stop praying to an omnipotent god and accept our own responsibilities for “loving our neighbor as we have first been loved by our God.”