

Reforming Views of Reformed Scholasticism Introduction

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1 Introduction

The title of the present work is intentionally ambiguous: Scholasticism Reformed. It may be read, firstly, as a simple reversion of “Reformed scholasticism,” as indeed some of the contributions to this volume study aspects of the type of theology between the early Reformation and the Enlightenment that continued to use the traditional methods rooted in the medieval period. However, many of the contributions to this volume mirror the work of Willem J. van Asselt in going beyond the mere study of aspects of Reformed scholasticism. Either they contribute to a new interpretation of scholasticism, a “reformed” way of thinking about it and of evaluating its value and significance for contemporary theology, or they are contributions to contemporary theology that explicitly draw upon Reformed scholasticism. Thus, this Festschrift contributes to the resurgent interest in (medieval and) Reformed scholasticism, in which the scholar to whom it is dedicated has played such a major role.

In this introduction we aim to do three things at once. First, we will sketch the renaissance of interest in Reformed scholasticism and the radical reassessment brought about by recent scholarship. Given the role that Willem van Asselt has played in this revaluation, sketching it will go hand in hand with our second aim: introducing the main *foci* of Van Asselt’s scholarly interests. Finally, since all contributions to the present volume are somehow connected to Van Asselt’s work, we will introduce them in the course of our description of the resurgence of interest in Reformed scholasticism and Van Asselt’s contribution to it.

2 The Road towards the “New School”

When Van Asselt studied theology in the 1960s, candidates for the ministry in the Dutch Reformed Church (Nederlandse Hervormde

Kerk) had to obtain a bachelor's degree in theology followed by a separate curriculum offered within the University on behalf of the church. After completing this curriculum, Van Asselt became a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church (Hervormde gemeente) of Uitwijk in 1972. In 1977, he went to Steenwijk. In the meantime, he continued to study for a master's degree, preparing his master's thesis on Cocceius' doctrine of God.

The topic of this thesis was suggested to him by professor Simon van der Linde (1905–1995), who taught the history of Reformed Protestantism at Utrecht University from 1954–1976.¹ Van der Linde was known for his expertise on the “Nadere Reformatie” or “Further Reformation” in Dutch Reformed theology, a pietist movement starting with the Synod of Dordt (1618–1619) and ending towards the end of the eighteenth century, a movement parallel to English Puritanism and German Pietism. Some of the champions of the Further Reformation movement were leading Reformed scholastics; Gisbertus Voetius is the most famous example.

Simon van der Linde and his contemporaries shared a common picture of both the Further Reformation movement and the Reformed scholastics, a view that Van Asselt would later call the “old school” view of Reformed scholasticism. The common description of this view is the following: The Further Reformation movement started as an attempt to carry on Luther's and Calvin's Reformation into the practical life of the church. However, it soon began to degenerate under the pressure of an increasing emphasis on the doctrine of predestination. What started as a return to Scripture in the Reformation ended in a dogmatic system under the influence of a reintroduction of a scholastic way of thinking. Thus, both the Middle Ages and Reformed scholasticism were portrayed in strongly negative terms. The Reformation was portrayed as an initial break with the dark Middle Ages, a break that, unfortunately, was not fully completed until a new interest in the Bible arose by the emergence of historical-critical exegesis. The doctrine of predestination played a crucial role in this view. It was widely believed that particularly Theodore Beza reframed Calvin's teaching of a double predestination—which was held to be still ambiguous in Calvin

¹ Aart de Groot and Otto J. de Jong, eds. *Vier eeuwen theologie in Utrecht: bijdragen tot de geschiedenis van de theologische faculteit aan de Universiteit Utrecht* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2001), 75, 77, 85, 371; Aart de Groot, “Simon van der Linde,” in: *Biografisch Lexikon voor de Geschiedenis van het Nederlandse protestantisme* Vol. VI (eds. J. W. Buisman and G. Brinkman, Kampen: Kok, 2006), 170–172.

himself—in scholastic terms, making it the foundational² doctrine from which all other Reformed doctrines had to be derived—the famous idea of a “Zentraldogma” that directs everything in a doctrinal system.³

The choice of Cocceius wholly fits into this picture, as Van der Linde believed that Cocceius was among the first to correct the degenerate views of the Reformed scholastics, for instance, by introducing more biblical concepts into Reformed systematic theology, by being more open towards Enlightenment ideas—Descartes—and by introducing a more friendly “Zentraldogma” into Reformed theology, namely that of the covenant rather than that of predestination. Thus, Van der Linde had good reason to draw Van Asselt’s attention to Cocceius. The choice proved a lucky one: twenty-five years later, Van Asselt has broken with his teacher’s views but is still fascinated by Cocceius, on whom he is now the world’s leading expert.

The completion of Van Asselt’s master’s thesis in 1980 took place after Simon van der Linde’s retirement. Hence the supervision of Van Asselt’s dissertation, likewise on Cocceius, was undertaken by Van der Linde’s successor, Cornelis Graafland (1928–2004; professor of Reformed theology 1972–1993). Graafland was a renowned expert in the field of Reformed protestantism, who shared his teacher’s approach to its history. In his two magna opera, *From Calvin to Barth*⁴ and *From Calvin to Comrie*,⁵ he first traced the history of the doctrine of predestination, and then described the rise and development of the doctrine of the covenant. The dominant matrix is that of the antagonism between a theology based on predestination and a theology based on the covenant. In due time, Van Asselt would come to look on this matrix as a main mark of the

² Simon van der Linde, “Calvijn, calvinisme en Nadere Reformatie. Een omstreden onderwerp,” *Documentatieblad Nadere Reformatie* 6 (1982), 73–88.

³ Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker, “Introduction,” in: *Reformed Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise* (ed. idem, *Texts and Studies in Reformation and post-Reformation Thought*; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2001), 11–43.

⁴ C. Graafland, *Van Calvijn tot Barth* (’s-Gravenhage: Boekencentrum, 1987).

⁵ Graafland, *Van Calvijn tot Comrie: oorsprong en ontwikkeling van de leer van het verbond in het gereformeerd protestantisme*, 3 volumes (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1992–1996).

“old school” approach to Reformed protestantism in general, and Reformed scholasticism in particular.

During Van Asselt’s doctoral studies, still carried out alongside his tasks as a fulltime minister, first in Steenwijk and later on in Bennekom, the seeds for the new approach were sown. He became an active member of Antonie Vos’s new research group “Classic Reformed Theology” (onderzoeksgroep “Oude gereformeerde theologie”), founded in 1982. A number of Utrecht faculty members participated in this group: the systematic theologians J. M. (Hans) Hasselaar and his successor H. W. (Hans) de Knijff, and later on H. (Henri) Veldhuis. Among the philosophers of religion were L. J. (Luco) van den Brom, E. (Eef) Dekker, and later on, G. (Gijsbert) van den Brink. Quite a number of them have contributed to the present volume.

The formation of the Research Group Classic Reformed Theology led to the application of the methods of Anglo-Saxon post-Wittgensteinian analytic philosophy to the study of Reformed scholasticism. Analytic philosophy of religion had been introduced in Utrecht by Vincent Brümmer, who was a professor of the philosophy of religion from 1967–1997.⁶ Brümmer studied at Stellenbosch, Harvard, Amsterdam, Utrecht and Oxford, and contributed to the development of a new post-positivist philosophical approach to religion, in which the task of the philosopher was not so much to prove or refute the truth of religious claims, but to think through religious claims and practices in terms of their “deep grammar,” as Wittgenstein called it.⁷ This thinking through was done with the aid of conceptual analysis and, especially by Vos, modal logic. In this way Vos and others were able to throw new light on the argumentative structures of medieval and post-Reformation scholastic theology. Simultaneously, a similar development took place in the English speaking countries. The rise of Anglo-Saxon philosophical theology,

⁶ All students of theology became acquainted with the methodology through the obligatory philosophy of religion course on philosophical method, where they studied (the original Dutch 1975 edition of) Vincent Brümmer, *Theology and Philosophical Inquiry: An Introduction* (London: Macmillan, 1981).

⁷ Brümmer describes the development of his thought in: “Meanders in My Thinking: A Brief Intellectual Autobiography,” in *Brümmer on Meaning and the Christian faith: Collected Writings of Vincent Brümmer* (Ashgate contemporary thinkers on religion; Aldershot [England]: Ashgate, 2006), 3–27. Cf. Gijsbert van den Brink and Marcel Sarot, “Contemporary Philosophical Theology,” in: *Understanding the Attributes of God* (ed. Gijsbert van den Brink and Marcel Sarot, Contributions to Philosophical Theology 1; Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998), 9–32.

as this type of philosophy of religion came to be called later on,⁸ was closely intertwined with the new interest in both medieval and post-Reformation scholasticism.⁹

Van Asselt completed his dissertation, of which various chapters had been discussed in the research group “Classic Reformed Theology,” in 1988.¹⁰ Though at that time a more favorable approach to Reformed scholasticism had already been introduced by Antoon Vos during various sessions of the research group, Van Asselt’s dissertation still strongly reflected the “old school” reading of post-Reformation Reformed theology. The turn came in the early nineties. In these years one of the members of the research group, Eef Dekker, was preparing his dissertation on the theology of Jacob Arminius, Gomarus’ famous opponent.¹¹ In 1992, his attention was drawn to a monograph on Arminius by Richard A. Muller;¹² after that, Dekker contacted Muller and visited him in 1994. At the time, Muller had

⁸ Norman Kretzman, “Reason in Mystery,” in: *The Philosophy in Theology* (ed. G.N. Vesey, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 15–39.

⁹ See, e.g., Marilyn McCord Adams, *William Ockham* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987); Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus* (Great medieval thinkers; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Richard Cross, *Duns Scotus on God* (Ashgate studies in the history of philosophical theology; Aldershot, England: Ashgate Pub., 2005); Brian Davies and Brian Leftow, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Paul Helm and Oliver Crisp, eds., *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003); Norman Kretzman, Anthony J. P. Kenny and Jan Pinborg, eds., *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy: From the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism, 1100–1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Norman Kretzman and Eleonore Stump, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Craig Paterson and Matthew S. Pugh, eds., *Analytical Thomism: Traditions in Dialogue* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

¹⁰ Willem J. van Asselt, *Amicitia Dei: een onderzoek naar de structuur van de theologie van Johannes Coccejus (1603–1669)* (s.l.: s.n., 1988).

¹¹ Eef Dekker, *Rijker dan Midas: vrijheid, genade en predestinatie in de theologie van Jacobus Arminius (1559–1609)* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1993).

¹² Richard A. Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991).

already published *Christ and the Decree* (1986),¹³ in which he criticized the idea of predestination as a “Zentraldogma,” and the first volume of the *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, where he did the same but addressed methodological issues more extensively.¹⁴

When Van Asselt became a Lecturer in the history of Reformed protestantism at the Utrecht Faculty of Theology in 1993, he had already read the first volume of the PRRD, but it was Dekker who made in 1994 a first appointment for a guest lecture by Van Asselt at Calvin Theological Seminary—without Van Asselt’s prior consent! During and after Van Asselt’s visit to Grand Rapids Richard Muller and he had a number of thorough-going discussions on Cocceius and post-Reformation Reformed theology in general. These discussions contributed to Van Asselt’s “conversion” to the “new approach.”

3 Scotist Influences on Reformed Scholasticism

The research group “Classic Reformed Theology,” and the views of its founder, Antonie Vos Jaczn., had a major impact on Van Asselt’s research. Vos wrote a Ph.D. thesis in the philosophy of religion supervised by Vincent Brümmer.¹⁵ In the medieval intellectual tradition and especially in the philosophy of John Duns Scotus, he discovered a distinctly Christian philosophy able to meet the challenges of various atheist philosophies.

At the root of Vos’s theological thought lies a profound conviction of the philosophical credibility and—even more—superiority of Christian faith in what he considers to be its supreme articulation, that of the Augustinian-Franciscan tradition. Vos argues that from its very beginnings, Christianity has struggled with the Greek philosophical tradition, in which the relationship between the world and the absolute was thought of as a relationship of necessity.¹⁶

¹³ Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins*, *Studies in Historical Theology 2* (Durham, N.C.: Labyrinth Press, 1986).

¹⁴ Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics I* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987).

¹⁵ Antonie Vos, *Kennis en noodzakelijkheid: een kritische analyse van het absolute evidentialisme in wijsbegeerte en theologie* (*Dissertationes Neerlandicae 5*; Kampen: Kok, 1981). Other influences on Vos’ thought include his studies at Oxford and his studies in medieval history and philosophy with L. M. de Rijk.

¹⁶ Antonie Vos, “Ab uno disce omnes,” *Bijdragen* 60 (1999), 173–204.

Christianity had to break away from this view of the relationship between God and the world, as it left no room for the ideas of creation, freedom, revelation and incarnation, all of them constitutive elements of the Christian tradition. Augustine and Anselm were important landmarks in the process of breaking with the logic of necessity, a break that was completed by John Duns Scotus' idea of "synchronic contingency."¹⁷ This process led to various major innovations in philosophy during the Middle Ages, for example the development of modal categories in logic, and an innovative rethinking of various forms of implication.

Vos's view of the history of the Christian tradition offered those working on Reformed scholasticism an important insight into the relationship between the use of logical analysis in theological reflection and the content of that reflection. On the 'old view' of scholastic theology, it was assumed that the mere use of Aristotelian logic and distinctions would make a theologian materially dependent on Aristotelian philosophy, and thus prone to "distorting" the pureness of Christian faith with pagan philosophical concepts.¹⁸ Vos's insight into the flexible and transformative use of philosophical terminology during the Middle Ages—which owes much to L.M. de Rijk¹⁹—enabled him to correct these oversimplified views of the interaction between Greek philosophy and the Christian tradition. This opened up a wealth of new questions and fields of research with regard to Reformed scholasticism. Where most of the older studies concluded from the employment of Aristotelian or Thomist terminology that Aristotelian or Thomist positions were assumed, the question now became: if someone incorporated a philosophical concept, what use did he make of it? To what extent is the meaning of this concept changed by this use, and what is the exact theological claim made by means of it? Here, the post-Wittgensteinian II insight that terms acquire their meanings only when they are used in

¹⁷ John Duns Scotus, *Contingency and Freedom = Lectura I 39* (ed. Antonie Vos et al., *The New Synthese Historical Library 42*; Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994). See most recently Antonie Vos, *The Philosophy of John Duns Scotus* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

¹⁸ Of course, Von Harnack's famous thesis of the hellenisation of Christianity played a major role in the background.

¹⁹ L. M. de Rijk, *Logica modernorum II: a Contribution to the History of Early Terminist Logic. The Origin and Early Development of the Theory of Supposition* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1967). Vos was in close contact with L.M. de Rijk from 1964 onwards, and De Rijk had a major impact on his work.

specific contexts²⁰ is applied to the history of ideas. The meanings of philosophical concepts are no longer seen as fixed by their origins in Greek philosophy, but as subject to change. They are dependent on the use theologians make of them.²¹ The practical consequence of this new approach was that most existing research into Reformed scholasticism was now in need of substantial revision, if it had not to be done all over again.

The article by Martijn Bac and Theo Pleizier is a good illustration of this approach. Drawing on the work of L. M. de Rijk, they outline the major innovations of medieval thought, and apply the insights thus acquired to a specific example: William Twisse's *Discovery of Dr Jackson's Vanity*. It appears that Twisse used Aquinas' terminology to develop his own Scotistic position on the efficacy of divine willing. Contrary to Aquinas, Twisse conceives both of the will of God and of that which God wills as radically contingent. Here, Bac and Pleizier draw on Antonie Vos's discovery of the emergence of the notion of synchronic contingency in the work of John Duns Scotus. Vos's thesis is that only after Duns Scotus had fully developed the notion of synchronic contingency it became possible to think of the world as a free creation of God and to take account of human freedom. Bac and Pleizier illustrate this thesis by showing how Twisse, unlike Aquinas, by thinking causality in terms of synchronic contingency, was able to think the freedom of divine and human agency.

One of the reasons for devoting so much attention to the Scotist revolution and its influence on Reformed Scholasticism is, Vos has argued, that the nineteenth century—as a result of the collapse of the classical university education—brought about a lapse into necessitarianism. In the Netherlands, so Vos's specific thesis runs, this lapse occurred in 1845–46, when Cornelis Opzoomer revolutionized Dutch theology through his philosophical ideas. In this light, modern reductionist science and the demise of a Christian worldview are a return to the old Greek thinking in terms of a necessary world, a world that has no place neither for God, nor for academic theology. In such a world, faith can at best be considered as

²⁰ See Garth Hallett, *Wittgenstein's Definition of Meaning as Use* (The Orestes Brownson Series on Contemporary Thought and Affairs 6; New York: Fordham University Press, 1967).

²¹ For a similar development in Biblical interpretation, see James Barr's rebuttal of the "etymological fallacy" in his classic *The Semantics of Biblical Language* ([London]: Oxford University Press, 1961).

an irrational gift from an alien God that cannot be rationally accounted for.

It is exactly the tendency to a contemporary appropriation of Reformed scholasticism or scholasticism in general that Willemien Otten challenges in her contribution. She looks at the emphasis on the methodological character of (Reformed) scholasticism with a sense of irony. Van Asselt and Vos derive their emphasis on the methodological character of Reformed scholasticism from L. M. de Rijk, of whom Otten, like Vos, is a pupil. De Rijk, however, stressed the methodological and theologically neutral character of scholasticism for purposes exactly contrary to those of Van Asselt and Vos. For De Rijk, the methodologically neutral intellectual endeavour of the Middle Ages shows an intellectual power that goes far beyond the religious boundaries of Christianity. He interprets the medieval intellectual tradition as a forerunner of secular Enlightenment culture. Van Asselt and Vos, on the other hand, adduce the methodologically neutral character of scholasticism to argue for the methodological and theological soundness of an ecclesial, traditional Reformed theology. Otten takes issue both with De Rijk and with Van Asselt and Vos by criticizing the idea of scholasticism as a neutral methodology that they share. The intellectual endeavours of the great medieval thinkers cannot be taken out of their historical context to support either a secular modern culture or a traditional Reformed theology. She exemplifies her point through a discussion of Abelard's views on divine providence and redemption. According to Otten, Abelard's intellectual work was deeply embedded in his personal struggle for life, which gave his intellectual and theological work a rather fragmentary character. Life, Otten argues, is harder than any allegedly clean methodology can overcome. Thus, the adoption of a methodology suiting our own contemporary theological interests should take the requirements of our own context into account rather than appropriate some model from the past that as such may never have existed, since by appropriating it we disroot it from the form of life in which it was embedded.

Given their theological agenda, the interest of Vos and his followers in the history of theology is largely motivated by exploring how a theology that explicitly builds on the notion of a contingent world—in the sense of synchronic contingency—could be developed; in historical terms: how the ancient pre-Enlightenment fathers, be they pre- or post-Reformation thinkers, developed a theology in terms of synchronic contingency. This leads to reflection on the doctrine of God, God's foreknowledge, eternity, omnipotence and

will, but also on anthropology, the freedom of the will, and soteriology, the way in which the gift of grace in salvation respects human freedom. The essay by Vos and Dekker on synchronic contingency in Francis Turretin is a fine example of this endeavour. In this article, Vos and Dekker explain Turretin's view of the omnipotence of God, concentrating on the way in which the idea that God can do everything leads Turretin to reflections on the ontological status of the world and the nature of possibility. The upshot of these reflections is that God can indeed do everything, but everything does not include "nothing." Thus, God cannot actualize a state of affairs that is logically and ontologically impossible. Subsequently, Vos and Dekker discuss the theory of synchronic contingency; they show that for Turretin, what God can do is much more than what God did. In other words, the states of affairs that make up the actual world are just a small subset of what God could have realized. The fact that God decided to create a certain world does not make that world necessary. It remains contingent on God's will.

Though Antonie Vos's approach to the history of Christianity was a major impetus for a re-reading of scholastic texts, it is not uncontroversial.²² Van Asselt, while fundamentally agreeing with this approach and emphasizing the heuristic value of synchronic contingency, never fell out of his role as a historian whose second nature it has become to question comprehensive theories by confronting them with the particularities of history. In almost Maccovian discussions with foreign colleagues, Van Asselt could occasionally relativise the importance of this new "Zentraldogma" by humorously overstating it. These conversations with his friends are reflected in an article by one of them, R. A. Mylius, who describes the adventures of an until now unknown but still important seventeenth-century figure named Cornelis Elleboogius. In this article, the theory of possible worlds and synchronic contingency is questioned by suggesting that it can be misconstrued as leading to unexpected practical implications.

²² An example of a critique of Vos' reading of Reformed scholasticism is Paul Helm, "Synchronic Contingency in Reformed Scholasticism: A Note of Caution," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 57 (2003), 207–223 with a response by Vos and Beck, "Conceptual Patterns Related to Reformed Scholasticism," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 57 (2003), 224–233.

4 Reformed Scholasticism in the Netherlands and Abroad: Case Studies

Personal characteristics may add as much to one's academic career as they may hinder it. One characteristic of Van Asselt's personality has greatly helped him in creating a network for the study of Reformed scholasticism: his warm, chivalrous and enthusiastic personality. Van Asselt is always eager to learn from colleagues, and many of them became close friends. The present volume reflects the national and international network of the scholar celebrating his jubilee. Since the national and international cooperation that Van Asselt developed in his career went hand in hand with the development of the new approach to Reformed scholasticism, the introduction of a series of case studies that makes up the second part of this volume, provides a good opportunity to describe the further development of Van Asselt's academic work.

A first line of research that Van Asselt continued to engage in was the research on Cocceius. In his Ph.D. dissertation, attention to Cocceius' biography had to remain rather limited; this was a gap that was still to be filled. In 1997, Van Asselt published a Dutch monograph in which due attention was paid to the biographical details.²³ The "new approach" to Reformed scholasticism formed a second incentive to continue the study of Cocceius. In traditional research, Cocceius' theology was always seen as an exception to scholastic traditionalism. Now that the idea of Reformed scholasticism as mere traditionalism had been proven false, the question of Cocceius' relationship to Reformed scholasticism became urgent again, and it had to be answered differently. In his Dutch monograph Van Asselt already devotes a separate chapter to the question whether Cocceius can be seen as a scholastic; he gives an affirmative answer.²⁴ The reappraisal of Cocceius as a scholastic theologian in a newly discovered sense of the word, returned in the English translation of Van Asselt's dissertation, which appeared in 2001.²⁵ We will come back to the struggles surrounding that

²³ Willem J. van Asselt, *Johannes Coccejus: portret van een zeventiende-eeuws theoloog op oude en nieuwe wegen* (Kerkhistorische monografieën 6; Heerenveen: Groen, 1997).

²⁴ Van Asselt, *Johannes Coccejus*, 159–164. See also idem, "Cocceius Anti-Scholasticus?" in Van Asselt & Dekker, *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise*, 227–251.

²⁵ Willem J. van Asselt, *The Federal Theology of Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669)* (trans. from the Dutch by Raymond A. Blacketer; *Studies in the history of Christian thought* 100; Leiden: Brill, 2001).

translation when we introduce Raymond E. Blacketer's contribution. As a final tribute to the seventeenth-century federal theologian, Van Asselt organized a Dutch language conference on Cocceius in 2003, on Cocceius' 400th birthday.²⁶

The new interest in Reformed scholasticism started to bear fruit, not only in numerous articles, but also in larger projects. A first milestone was the research group's publication of a selection of disputations of Voetius in Dutch.²⁷ Through this publication, the new approach of the research group was introduced to a wider audience. Each disputation discussed was translated, preceded by a structural overview of its contents, and followed by an explanatory essay by one of the Research Group's members. Another milestone that deserves mention is the *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*,²⁸ particularly because it bears witness to a remarkable feature of Van Asselt's teaching: his ability to kindle enthusiasm in his students for academic research. Through the years, various assistants assisted Van Asselt in his teaching responsibilities, and a number of them contributed to what finally became the first introduction to Reformed scholasticism that was based on the new approach to the topic. It started as a reader for an introductory course, and grew out into a full scale introduction to the topic, including chapters on the antecedents, a description of the main aspects of scholastic methodology, descriptions of the main periods that can be distinguished in Reformed scholasticism, and discussions of the most important issues and representatives. The book was not only used in Utrecht, but also found its way to Apeldoorn, Kampen, and Amsterdam.

Two projects that are currently under way should be briefly mentioned here. Firstly, the above has already made clear why the freedom of the will is an important issue in the research of the research group "Classic Reformed Theology": the concept of synchronic contingency provides a novel tool for the research on Reformed scholastic views on human free will, and how it is related to, for instance, predestination and foreknowledge. The manuscript of a volume on this issue authored by the Research Group will soon

²⁶ The conference proceedings were published in *Kerk en Theologie* 54:4 (2003).

²⁷ W.J. van Asselt and E. Dekker, editors, *De scholastieke Voetius. Een luisteroefening aan de hand van Voetius' Disputationes Selectae* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1995).

²⁸ Willem J. van Asselt et al., *Inleiding in de gereformeerde scholastiek* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1998).

be published by Baker Academic. Van Asselt himself is currently engaged in a major research project on Johannes Maccovius (1588–1644), a professor of theology in Franeker who wrote an invaluable treatise on scholastic theological distinctions and rules²⁹ but who became infamous because his lifestyle “never quite equaled his theology.” An official report on Maccovius states how three students, knowing his talent for imbibing, once plied him with liquor in a brothel in Harlingen, and then as a joke placed him on his animal on the road to Bolsward. Maccovius, expecting to return to Franeker and too drunk to notice he had been put on the wrong road, discovered his mistake only on entering Bolsward.³⁰ It will be clear to all those who know Van Asselt in person that this type of cock and bull story in no way reduces the attraction that Maccovius holds for him. While Van Asselt is more moderate than Maccovius, he is known for his struggle against the caricature that Calvinists lack the gift of enjoying life, and he has certainly succeeded in living up to his own theoretical insights. Van Asselt is currently preparing a much-needed English translation of Maccovius’ *Distinctiones* with an Introduction, and hopes to publish a more comprehensive study of Maccovius’ life and work in the future. Whether Van Asselt will succeed in completely rehabilitating Maccovius, is a question time will answer.

As mentioned above, Van Asselt is a man of friendships, developing his academic networks much in that way, not only abroad, but also at home. At home meant, first of all, the Utrecht faculty. At Utrecht, Andreas Beck had been working on a dissertation on Gisbertus Voetius’ doctrine of God under the supervision of Van Asselt’s predecessor Graafland. After Beck had left Utrecht to become professor of church history at the Evangelical Theological Faculty at Heverlee, Belgium, he continued to work on the dissertation under this supervision of the two ‘Fathers’ of the Utrecht Research Group Classic Reformed Theology, Vos and Van Asselt. Beck’s magnum opus has been defended in 2007 with the

²⁹ Johannes Maccovius, *Distinctiones et regulae theologicae ac philosophicae* (Amsterdam: Ludovicus Elzevirius, 1656). Cf. W. J. van Asselt, “The Theologian’s Tool Kit: Johannes Maccovius (1588–1644) and the Development of Reformed Theological Distinctions,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 68 (2006), 23–40.

³⁰ Keith L. Sprunger, *The Learned Doctor William Ames: Dutch Backgrounds of English and American Puritanism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press 1972), 87–88; John Dykstra Eusden, “Introduction,” in *The Marrow of Theology* (William Ames; Durham, N.C.: Labyrinth Press 1983).

extraordinary professor for Reformed theology A. de Reuver as promotor.³¹

In his contribution to this volume, Beck investigates the relationship between Melanchthon and Voetius. In older scholarship, it has often been suggested that Melanchthon and Cocceius were close theological allies, over against Voetius. Beck shows that this thesis is completely mistaken, arguing for a basic convergence between Melanchthon's and Voetius' views on theology as a science, natural theology, and the concept of God as Trinity.

The study of Utrecht University's founding father Gisbertus Voetius is continued in the contribution by a longstanding colleague from the Utrecht Theology Faculty: Frits Broeyer. Broeyer is a known expert on the post-Reformation church history in the Netherlands, and particularly known for his research on the records of the Reformed church at Utrecht. In this contribution, however, he joins forces with the Utrecht scholastics, providing a cross-section of Voetius' *Selectae Disputationes*, with an emphasis on soteriological issues. Although Broeyer takes serious notice of the new approach to scholasticism in which Van Asselt has played such a major role, his approach shows that he is not fully convinced by it. Instead, Broeyer insists on those elements of Voetius's thought that are not so easily taken up into a contemporary theological framework, placing Voetius firmly into the historical context to which he belongs.

When it comes to research into Reformed scholasticism, Aza Goudriaan is a natural ally. Like various others, Aza started his research on Reformed scholasticism as a philosopher of religion rather than as a church historian. He wrote his Ph.D. dissertation in Leiden, supervised by Hendrik J. Adriaanse and inspired by Wolfhart Pannenberg, who has always had a strong interest in the history of seventeenth-century theology. Goudriaan's dissertation concentrates on the question of the knowledge of God in Suarez, Descartes, and Revius.³² Afterwards, Goudriaan continued his studies at Leiden University, at the Erasmus University of Rotterdam with a research project on Voetius, Petrus van Mastricht and Antonius Driessen and at the Free University of Amsterdam, where he currently is a

³¹ Andreas J. Beck, *Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676). Sein Theologieverständnis und seine Gotteslehre (Forschungen für Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte, 92; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007).*

³² Aza Goudriaan, *Philosophische Gotteserkenntnis bei Suárez und Descartes im Zusammenhang mit der niederländischen reformierten Theologie und Philosophie des 17. Jahrhunderts (Brill's studies in intellectual history, 98; Leiden: Brill, 1999).*

lecturer of patristics.³³ He also co-organized (with Fred van Lieburg) an international conference on the Synod of Dordt in Dordrecht, where Van Asselt gave a lecture. In the meantime, Goudriaan has become a regular member of the research group “Old Reformed Theology.” It is on the Synod of Dordt that Goudriaan provides a contribution in this volume.

The common view is that at the Synod of Dordt, the main controversy circled around predestination and grace. So far, little attention has been paid to the question of justification in the dispute between Arminius and Gomarus. Goudriaan argues that justification by faith was at the heart of the controversy. Through a detailed analysis of the discussion between Arminius and Gomarus, and a similar discussion between the Arminian Bertius and the Reformed orthodox Lubbertus, Goudriaan shows what the consequences of Arminius’ and Gomarus’ views are for the question of justification by faith. If sinful human beings are elected on the basis of foreseen faith—the faith that God foresees people to have according to God’s so-called “middle-knowledge”—then this faith becomes an act in which God plays no determinative role. Although God helps and stimulates the act of faith, the believer is free in a specific and far-reaching sense, to choose either for or against God’s offer of forgiveness. This allowed Arminius to account for the central role of the “justification by faith” in the Reformed tradition in a radical way. In Arminius’ view, it is really on account of the act performed by the believer that the believer is justified. In this sense, the act of faith has the character of a meritorious act. This meritorious nature of the act of faith elicited a furious response from the Reformed orthodox, because they on their part saw in this meritorious character of the act of faith by which we are justified, the end of the Reformed doctrine of justification by faith. If the hand of faith by which we receive Christ is not only an instrument, but a meritorious act, then it is no longer by Christ that we are justified, but by our own work, our act of faith! Goudriaan’s analysis of the debate is an ample illustration of the way in which the Reformed—on both sides—wrestled with maintaining the crucial role of the act of faith in salvation on the one hand, and maintaining the exclusiveness and sufficiency of Christ’s work in salvation on the other.

The connection between Utrecht and Grand Rapids has already been introduced. After the initial visit of Van Asselt to Grand Rapids,

³³ Goudriaan, *Reformed orthodoxy and philosophy, 1625–1750: Gisbertus Voetius, Petrus van Mastricht, and Anthonius Driessen* (Brill Studies in Church History, 26; Leiden: Brill, 2006).

Muller came to Utrecht, first for short visits, and later on as Belle van Zuylen professor, a guest professorship for half a year.³⁴ A key event in the further extension of the international dimension was the conference held at the occasion of the international conference on Reformation and Scholasticism, held at Utrecht in 1997.³⁵ Vincent Brümmer had been a regular visitor of the University of Nottingham in the context of the Erasmus exchange programme, where he met a young church historian working on a fresh approach to the scholastic theology of the great English puritan John Owen.³⁶ The connection with the Utrecht research context was easily made, and Trueman was invited to give a lecture at the conference on Reformation and scholasticism. Trueman's work on English Reformed scholasticism added the clear awareness that scholastic methodology, especially when conceived of as a methodology rather than as a shared set of convictions, was a really international phenomenon that crossed confessional and regional borders.³⁷ A third international member of the network who offered a paper at the Utrecht conference was Sebastian Rehnman, whom Trueman knew from their work on John Owen.³⁸ At that time, Rehnman was a PhD student at Oxford University, where John Platt did research into Reformed scholasticism.³⁹ Rehnman now offers a paper on the intersection between Reformed scholasticism and contemporary philosophical theology in part three of this volume.

Muller devotes his essay to Thomas Barlow's polemic against the new methodologies of his time. Analysing changes that Barlow's contemporaries proposed in the understanding of space and time, which hitherto had been seen as accidental properties of objects, Muller shows the dramatic changes that the new philosophies caused for the understanding of traditional theological concepts and

³⁴ Richard A. Muller, *Ad Fontes Argumentorum: The Sources of Reformed Theology in the 17th Century* (Utrecht: Faculteit der Godgeleerdheid, 1999).

³⁵ Van Asselt and Dekker, *Reformed Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise*.

³⁶ Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998).

³⁷ See also Carl R. Trueman & R.S. Clark (eds.), *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999).

³⁸ Sebastian Rehnman, *Divine Discourse: The Theological Methodology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002).

³⁹ John Platt, *Reformed Thought and Scholasticism: The Arguments for the Existence of God in Dutch theology, 1575-1650* (Studies in the history of Christian thought, 29; Leiden: Brill, 1982).

doctrines. In the new philosophies, “space” was increasingly reconceptualized as a category of its own rather than an accidental property of an object. Such reconceptualizations had massive theological consequences, as the idea that space is a category of its own destroyed the traditional order of the universe, where all substance was seen as rooted in the creative activity of God. Although the new philosophers by no means wanted to pave the way for atheism, their “disintegration” of the world into a fragmentary world of “atoms,” so Barlow held, was a first step on that way. Interestingly, Muller uses his analysis of Barlow for making a point about the alleged rationalism of the old Aristotelian philosophy. Muller suggests that the early Enlightenment thought that was to replace the classic schoolmen approach to philosophy and theology was much more rationalist than traditional Aristotelianism. If one reads between the lines of Muller’s contribution,⁴⁰ or pays special attention to the last three words of his article, one can even catch a certain longing for a return to the old scholastic methodology as a way out of the twenty-first-century theological conundrum. Of course to suggest that would go much beyond the church historian’s methodological boundaries. At any rate, these remarks show that behind and running through Muller’s reclaiming of the Reformed scholastic tradition, runs a certain contemporary theological agenda. As Muller told us during one of our lunch-sessions in 1999, he would like to go back to the seventeenth century, except for the state of the medical sciences.

Trueman’s contribution to the present volume is an excellent illustration of the international character of Reformed scholasticism. While Johannes Cocceius introduces the first full scale federal theology on the Continent, a similar rise of covenantal theology occurred in England and Scotland. Drawing primarily on the doctrine of the covenant of redemption (what Cocceius calls the *pactum salutis*, see Wisse’s contribution) as we find it in Gillespie (and John Owen), Trueman refutes some of the common criticisms of this notorious “eternal” contract between the persons of the Trinity. The main objection against this “piece of mythology,” as Karl Barth called it, is that it is a typical example of rational speculation about something—even in God—apart from any concrete indication for it in Scripture. Furthermore, it is also often

⁴⁰ E.g.: “Indeed, it is arguable that the predicted dangers of the new philosophies have been fulfilled a hundred-fold in the loss of comprehension of traditional terms, arguments, and categories that characterizes much of what has passed for theology in the twentieth and now passes for it in the twenty-first century.”

claimed that in the covenant of redemption, a “Trinitarian subset” is created because the Holy Spirit has no substantial role in the covenant. A final criticism of federal theology in general is that the classical federal theologians mistook the biblical concept of a covenant for some kind of contract. Through an analysis of Gillespie’s federal theology, Trueman shows how well Gillespie was aware of the exegetical issues surrounding the idea of the covenant of redemption, how fully Trinitarian in structure Gillespie’s and particularly Owen’s covenantal theology were, and how carefully the British federal theologians distinguished between the various forms of covenant as regards their contractual aspects.

Finally, Raymond Blacketer had a special place in the international network. When Heiko A. Oberman expressed his willingness to publish an English version of Van Asselt’s dissertation in his famous Brill series, Van Asselt’s growing involvement in the “new school” approach to the study of Reformed scholasticism, moved him to substantially revise his dissertation while it was being translated. The old view of Cocceius as the one who, under the influence of René Descartes, started to depart from the timeless rationalist theology that Reformed scholasticism was held to be, could no longer stand. Van Asselt went in search for a translator who had a good reading knowledge of Dutch, a profound knowledge of theological and scholastic technical terminology and an in-depth knowledge of the “new school.” Richard Muller brought him in contact with one of his PhD students, Raymond Blacketer. Blacketer turned out to be, as Van Asselt himself formulates it in the Foreword to the Brill volume “a translator greater than whom cannot be conceived.”⁴¹ Where Van Asselt’s revisions were insufficient, Blacketer confronted him with all remaining elements of the “old school heresies.” In this way Van Asselt was pushed to rethink a variety of aspects of his interpretation of Cocceius again, thus reworking his reading of Cocceius all the more profoundly from a more accurate historical framework.

Blacketer, who is by now a pastor in the Christian Reformed Church of Neerlandia, Canada, pursues his research into Calvin’s sermons on Deuteronomy in the direction of Reformed scholasticism with an essay on the homiletics of William Perkins, one of the most important Puritans in England and an important figure behind the Dutch “Further Reformation.” After having briefly introduced Perkins’ life and work, Blacketer describes the chief characteristics of his main homiletic work *The Arte of Prophecying*, paying due attention to Perkins’ theological methodology as well. Perkins

⁴¹ Van Asselt, *Federal Theology*, xiii.

applied the dialectic system of division of Petrus Ramus, a major methodological innovation in sixteenth-century scholasticism. Perkins saw the preaching of the Word of God as the main instrument for the reform of the church, which for him was and remained the Church of England. As a key instrument for reform, Perkins did not hesitate to employ all the instruments of classical rhetoric to make the message of the Gospel heard by the audience. Blacketer's analysis provides a good illustration of the continuity in the Christian tradition when it comes to the use of classical rhetoric in the homiletic praxis, starting with Augustine's moderate incorporation of rhetorical techniques in *De doctrina christiana*, and running through the Middle Ages, Reformation and post-Reformation orthodoxy, until it was lost with the decline of the classical university curriculum.

5 Reformed Scholasticism and Contemporary Theology

Willem van Asselt has always combined an interest in the history of theology with a passion for contemporary systematic theology. Throughout his career, he has continued direct conversation and cooperation with systematic theologians. Moreover, many of the biases against Reformed scholasticism that he tried to redress were put forward by systematic theologians. In refuting these misunderstandings, he could hardly avoid a more antagonistic engagement with systematic theologians.

Therefore it does not come as a surprise that in this Festschrift, a number of contributors have focused on the connection between Reformed theology, Reformed scholasticism and contemporary theology. Three areas feature here: first, the relationship of Reformed scholasticism/Cocceius to Barth, second, the relationship between Reformed scholasticism and contemporary philosophical theology and finally, the relationship between Reformed scholasticism and Cocceius and contemporary Trinitarian theology.

The question of the relationship between Reformed scholasticism/Cocceius and Barth is a natural one, as Barth's relationship to both Reformed scholasticism and Cocceius is complicated. On the one hand, Barth's critique of natural theology reinforced much of the critique of Reformed scholasticism and Cocceius as a theology that recognized a source of revelation outside Christ and thus saw a place for human autonomous reason seemingly independent of God. Willem van Asselt himself has argued in an article that for the Reformed scholastics, God revealed Himself in

nature as genuinely as He did in Christ.⁴² Both revelations depend on God's freedom to reveal Godself and thus, neither provides human beings with an argument for the existence of God that is independent of revelation. On the other hand, Barth had a considerable knowledge of both the Reformed and the Lutheran orthodox tradition, and often built on it in a positive way. Barth was well aware, for example, of the fact that the reading of Reformed scholasticism in terms of a "Zentraldogma" was historically unfounded.⁴³ But also materially, Barth's doctrine of God, for example, can be read as a new reading of traditional concepts of God as a *se*, transforming the traditional scholastic theological concepts from within. Thus, Barth both reinforced the negative evaluation of Reformed scholasticism, and fostered a new interest in it.

In this Festschrift, the essays by Reeling Brouwer and Wisse address the Barth-connection. Reeling Brouwer addresses the relationship between Barth and the Reformed scholastic Amandus Polanus, and Wisse addresses Barth's relation to Cocceius. Reeling Brouwer discusses Barth's reading of Polanus' doctrine of God, more specifically the question of the simplicity of God. He argues that while Barth did not take the historical context of Polanus' theology sufficiently into account, he had good reasons for rejecting Polanus' thinking in terms of radical unity, because Barth lived in a time in which the ideal of a single frame of reference for theology had collapsed.

In Wisse's contribution, Wisse reads Barth in the opposite direction. Whereas Reeling Brouwer stresses plurality in Barth, Wisse stresses a striking singularity in Barth's soteriology over against the duplexity in Cocceius' theology. While Cocceius' federal theology is often perceived as more friendly than scholastic predestinarian theology, Wisse portrays him as one whose soteriology is fully in line with the consensus of Dordt. Wisse shows that Cocceius' federal theology, rather than moderating Reformed predestinarian thought, is entirely dependent on it. He argues that through the duplexity of Cocceius' soteriology, one can account for the certainty of salvation on the one hand, and the communicative nature of the Gospel on the other. Barth's unifold soteriology fails to keep both together: either it leads to hard universalism, emphasizing certainty and implying the idea that all will be saved, or to soft

⁴² Van Asselt, "The Fundamental Meaning of Theology: Archetypal and Ectypal Theology in Seventeenth-Century Reformed Thought," *Westminster Theological Journal* 64 (2002/3), 319–335.

⁴³ Van Asselt and Dekker, "Introduction," 11–43.

universalism, emphasizing the communicative nature of the Gospel and ending up in Arminianism.

As we have mentioned above, the new interest in Reformed scholasticism did not emerge out of the blue. In Utrecht as elsewhere, it was closely related to the rise of philosophical theology. This is particularly true of the discussion concerning the classical attributes of God. One of the classics of analytic philosophy of religion on the question of the eternity of God was written by Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzman, philosophers of religion who also played a major part in a new Anglo-American interest in Medieval philosophy and theology.⁴⁴ Here, we see again an example of the very close connections between the historical questions of what exactly the ideas were that the ‘Fathers’ of the Church held, and whether these ideas can still be upheld today.

Two essays in this collection address these questions. In the first essay, Marcel Sarot argues against the tenability of the traditional view of the eternity of God as timeless. Contributing to a discussion that is still largely conducted in scholastic terms and by means of scholastic distinctions, Sarot develops his own views in two steps. (1) Arguing against an atemporally existing God, he shows that if God exists atemporally and is aware of a temporally existing world, then either the temporality of the world collapses into God’s eternity, or the eternity of God collapses into the temporality of the world. In light of the reality of the temporal nature of the world, Sarot argues that God must exist sempiternally.⁴⁵ (2) The most common position amongst those who believe that God exists sempiternally—e.g., Open theists—is that the future cannot be fully known, but that all possibilities can be known as possibilities. Sarot argues that this way of articulating God’s knowledge of the future assumes an untenable

⁴⁴ Eleonore Stump & Norman Kretzmann, “Eternity,” in *The Concept of God* (ed. Thomas V. Morris; Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987), 219–252. Cf notes 8–9 above.

⁴⁵ Sarot’s concerns here are parallel to those of Vos and his pupils: Sarot is concerned with the freedom of creation. Sarot takes a further step, however, when he argues that synchronic contingency does not suffice, because even if future free actions are synchronically contingent, they may still be determined and not free in a libertarian sense. Therefore Sarot is not content with ascribing, along the lines of Pleizier and Bac, and Vos and Dekker in their contributions, contingency to God, but argues that we must ascribe temporal—sempiternal!—existence to God as well. Cf. Sarot’s discussion with Nico den Bok & Eef Dekker: M. Sarot, “Alwetendheid en de dialoog tussen theologie en natuurwetenschap,” *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 56 (1994), 237–271; Eef Dekker & Nico den Bok, “Eeuwigheid, tijd en alwetendheid: Een antwoord aan Marcel Sarot,” *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 48 (1994), 216–229.

Aristotelian view of the future as a set of separate *possibilia*, some of which will be actualized while some will not. Sarot argues that the future should rather be seen along Hartshornian lines as largely consisting of series of continua. Viewed in this light, it is misleading to say that God can know all possibilities, but we should rather say that God can know the limits within which future actualities will have to fit.

In the second contribution from philosophical theology, Sebastian Rehnman develops a theodicy out of the work of the eighteenth-century protestant scholastic theologian Jonathan Edwards and defends its intellectual credibility. In contemporary philosophical theology, it is often argued that certain evils exist that an omnipotent God could have averted without losing greater goods, and that therefore such an omnipotent God does not exist. Rehnman shows that this argument assumes a consequentialist theory of meta-ethics, according to which the moral quality of an act depends on its consequences. However, consequentialism is incompatible with divine perfection even apart from evil in the world, since consequentialism would require a good God to actualize the greatest amount of good, and there is no such thing. Classical theism assumes a form of non-consequentialism. Drawing on Jonathan Edwards, Rehnman argues that the good that God aims at when creating is the intrinsic good consisting of the expression of God's own perfections, thus communicating God's own glory. If this is God's ultimate end, God may permit evil states of affairs as inferior, subordinate ends subservient to the ultimate end. The argument for this controversial position is given in outline, and draws upon a particular form of the meontic tradition: our ontology should not include evil, since evil is not real but is a lack of reality. Even if not everyone will be convinced by Rehnman's argument, he does make it clear that a study of Reformed scholasticism can help us to avoid some of the more common pitfalls in contemporary philosophical theology.

When Barth developed his doctrine of God, he sharply attacked the traditional concept of God as rationalistic, the product of Greek philosophy. Barth, and Karl Rahner on the Catholic side, became the fathers of what is now called the "Trinitarian Renaissance," an increasing interest in the significance of the doctrine of the Trinity during from the 1980s onwards.⁴⁶ In traditional theology—Aquinas

⁴⁶ Christoph Schwöbel, "The Renaissance of Trinitarian Theology: Reasons, Problems and Tasks," in *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Act* (ed. idem; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 1–30; Gerald O'Collins SJ, "The Holy Trinity: The State of the Questions," in *The Trinity:*

for example—so it was assumed, the doctrine of the Trinity is a mere Christian appendix to an essentially theistic, Greek philosophical concept of the absolute. It has even been claimed that the death of the God of theism that Nietzsche proclaimed and that became effectuated in large scale secularisation during the twentieth century, was caused by this overly generic concept of God, in which not the God of Christianity, but a god of our own making set the tone.⁴⁷ As one can easily see, this claim again shows an intrinsic intertwining of historical and systematic assertions. If the historical thesis is right, namely that the doctrine of the Trinity was indeed “forgotten” in the history of (Western) Christianity, then the systematic thesis may also be correct, and the new post-Barthian interest in reconceptualizing the whole of Christian theology in Trinitarian terms is perhaps indeed the way to go. If the thesis about the history of Christianity is flawed, however, then there might still be something to be learned from the traditional theology of the Trinity, perhaps even something that the modern Trinitarian theologies are unable to account for. The last two essays address these questions, interestingly, in an opposite way.

In his essay, Gijsbert van den Brink addresses the historical questions of the “forgotten” Trinity in the West, concentrating on the question whether and to what extent seventeenth-century Reformed orthodoxy may be held responsible for neglecting the doctrine. First, he outlines and subsequently evaluates Placher’s thesis that claims Reformed scholasticism to be responsible for forgetting the Trinity. Although Placher’s argument for his thesis fails to convince, Van den Brink argues that Placher still has a point. According to Van den Brink, the classic discussion of the *an sit*, *quid sit*, *quale sit* of God led to the negligence of the doctrine of the Trinity, which had little or no impact on the rest of Christian doctrine. Calvin, Van den Brink maintains, is an exception to this rule, and in that respect may count as a forerunner to the twentieth-century Trinitarian renaissance. Following Barth,

An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity (ed. Stephen Davis, Daniel Kendall and Gerald O’Collins; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1–25.

⁴⁷ See particularly Eberhard Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World: On the Foundation of the Theology of the Crucified one in the Dispute between Theism and Atheism* (trans. [from the third rev. German ed.] by Darrell L. Guder; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1983), and Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity* (2nd rev. ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

Pannenberg and Rahner, Van den Brink suggests that the traditional division in the doctrine of God, along with the more biblical orientation of the Reformed orthodox, led to the marginalization of the doctrine of the Trinity.

In a second contribution, Luco van den Brom does in fact the reverse. Van den Brom accepts the contemporary turn to Trinitarian and relational theology, but he suggests that the theology of a pre-modern theologian, Johannes Cocceius, provides us with insights and clues that point in the direction of what modern theology called 'relational' and 'Trinitarian' theology. In a first move, Van den Brom shows that the alleged clash between the post-Kantian historicizing of theology and the abstract and timeless system of Reformed scholasticism is based on misguided readings of both post-Kantian theology and scholasticism. Scholasticism was not a timeless system, as dogmatic statements in scholastic theology were embedded in a network of meanings, a theological deep grammar, just like twentieth-century dogmatic statements. In a second move, drawing on the theology of Johannes Cocceius, and especially his doctrine of God, Van den Brom argues that Cocceius was indeed deeply aware of the historical and grammatical status of theological claims about God. The fundamentally relational character of Cocceius' federal theology provides a means to articulate the relational character of theological claims. What can be said within the relationship cannot be taken out of it. This relational theology provides a middle-way between a realist type of theology, in which it is claimed that we can describe the nature of God independently of our relationship with God, and an anti-realist position, in which it is claimed that the way God is, is entirely dependent on our conception of God.

Partly in response to Van den Brom, Bert Loonstra argues, finally, that scholasticism and "scholastic-like" methods are natural allies of theological realism. If we take theological realism as the ontological position according to which the existence and nature of God are objectively given, i.e. are independent of our faith and theology, and if we take the scholastic method as aiming at terminological clarity and logical consistency, the scholastic method presupposes theological realism. As soon as one rejects realism, theology no longer describes an objective given but explores ideas, feelings and questions that sometimes cannot be expressed with clarity, and that, even if they can, need not be expressed with clarity since there is no external standard to measure them against, no given object to do justice to. Loonstra then goes on to argue, against Gerrit Manenschijn, Stanley Hauerwas and Luco van den Brom, that attempts to overcome the divide between realism and non-realism

necessarily fail. Finally, he argues, commenting on John Calvin and Karl Barth, that realism without scholasticism either becomes obscure or fails to properly communicate the truths that are being articulated.

6 The Future of Reformed Scholasticism

At the end of this introduction, the editors of this collection of essays would like to offer it to Willem van Asselt as a sign of honour and gratitude for all that he has done, both for the Faculty of Theology of the University of Utrecht, his colleagues and friends, and for the academic study of theology, especially the study of seventeenth-century Reformed thought. The collection in itself proves that his work has been fruitful, not only in the sense that Van Asselt is a prolific writer, but also in the sense that his work has given much occasion for further reflection, both in the field of church history and systematic theology.

The cooperation of so many contributors has made this collection into a good overview of the research into post-Reformation Reformed thought done during the last few decades, including the turn in that research in which Van Asselt has played a substantial role. Second, a number of contributions have also provided clues to what may be the future of the study of Reformed scholasticism.

Of course, the first clear conclusion to be drawn from the various case studies is that there are still many figures in the history of Reformed scholasticism that deserve much more attention from church historians and systematic theologians alike, as even the theology of then major figures like John Owen and Gisbertus Voetius has received little attention until now, not to speak of all those whose names we now even barely know. In addition, the debate concerning the question whether or not scholastic methodology can be seen as neutral deserves closer attention, given the different voices on this point in this collection. Finally, the strong input from the side of systematic theology into this collection raises questions concerning the interdisciplinary relationship between church history and systematic theology. Not only do systematic theologians to a considerable extent rely on research into the history of theology, but also church historians seem considerably entangled in concepts, questions, and presuppositions taken from contemporary theological debates, more than historical-critical methodology have commonly recognized. Thus, there is good reason for church historians and

systematic theologians to reflect further on the interrelationships of their disciplines.⁴⁸

7 *Post-scriptum* (July 2009)

This volume has been long in the making. The occasion for its production was Van Asselt's early retirement from his lectureship in the history of Reformed Protestantism at Utrecht University. At the time this volume approaches completion, Van Asselt has been a research professor at the Evangelical Theological Faculty of Leuven (Louvain, Belgium) for almost a year (from 1 September 2008 onwards). From that position he hopes to retire only in 2013. One of his colleagues there is Antonie Vos Jaczn., who was simultaneously appointed to a similar position. This underlines one of the messages of this introduction: the present *liber amicorum* is not intended as a tribute to a completed achievement, but as a contribution to an ongoing intellectual project. We hope that Van Asselt may for a long time to continue to have a leading role in this project.

⁴⁸ Cf. Maarten Wisse, "Towards a Theological Account of Theology: Reconceptualizing Church History and Systematic Theology," in *Orthodoxy, Process & Product: The Meta-Question* (ed. Lieven Boeve, Mathijs Lamberigts, and Terrence Merrigan; BETL; Leuven: Peeters, 2008), forthcoming.