

**CARTESIANISM AND REFORMED SCHOLASTIC THEOLOGY:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE CONTROVERSY
BETWEEN CHRISTOPH WITTICH AND PETRUS VAN
MASTRICHT**

by

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DEDICATION

Regi autem saeculorum immortalis invisibili soli Deo honor et gloria in saecula saeculorum amen.

Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen.

DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis hereby handed in for the qualification M.A. (Philosophy) at the University of the Free State, is my own independent work and that I have not previously submitted the same work for a qualification at another University/faculty.

Jan Adriaan Schlebusch

I hereby declare that I concede copyright of the thesis to the University of the Free State.

Jan Adriaan Schlebusch

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Reformed scholasticism as practiced in the seventeenth century Netherlands has had a significant impact on the epistemological, theological and philosophical development of Protestantism since the Church Reformation of the sixteenth century. The philosophical developments of the time brought about major challenges for Reformed Theology – challenges it had until the time not yet dealt with. Particularly noteworthy to this author is the fact that since the Reformation, views on science, nature and morals have shifted to such an extent that one could legitimately argue that mainstream contemporary Protestantism and its sixteenth century predecessors adhere to different religions.¹ The question concerning the historical and theological developments contributing to this profound change is what gave rise to my interest in studying the dispute between Christoph Wittich and Petrus van Mastricht during the 1650s, and although a thorough study of how this dispute within its historic context contributed to this epistemological shift from the sixteenth century to the twenty-first falls beyond the scope of this study, such a future endeavour could hopefully benefit from this thesis. Of particular significance for this author was the challenge posed to the traditional Reformed understanding of Scripture's claims regarding morality by the epistemological claims of Cartesianism during the seventeenth century, that is, the issue in the dispute on which this study will focus.

When this study was first proposed to me by Professor Adriaan Neele from Yale Divinity School, who published a very authoritative work on Petrus van

¹ In this context, *religion* refers to an epistemological consciousness of all beliefs held.

Mastricht in 2009,² questions regarding epistemological first principles first arose in my mind. To this author's knowledge, not a single monograph on Van Mastricht's opponent in the dispute, Christoph Wittich, exists. However, a thorough account of the man and his background can be reconstructed through various sources. The Netherlands of the seventeenth century, the context in which these two men practiced theology, is also a fascinating period with regards to the theological and philosophical developments of the time, a study of which can contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between seventeenth century Reformed Scholasticism and the epistemological challenges it faced in Cartesianism. In addition, the light shed on the epistemological controversy that faced Reformed Scholasticism during that period by this study, could also contribute to the reconstruction of the history of Protestantism's handling of modernist epistemic challenges and its consequences for the relationship between Reformed theology and philosophy today.

These questions regarding theological epistemology and in particular its historic development within Reformed theology are what drove the study of these primary sources and their historical, philosophical and theological context. An investigation into the developments of post-Reformation Reformed scholasticism in the 17th century on the doctrine of the authority of Scripture, particularly in light of modernist epistemic developments very much interested this author. From the aforementioned epistemological shift, a definite deviation has also occurred away from the 1563 Heidelberg Catechism's threefold understanding of the law as explained in Question and Answer 115: that from it mankind knows its misery, is raised up to seek redemption in Christ and receive the Law as the infallible guide for

² The work is entitled *Petrus van Mastricht (1630-1706) Reformed Orthodoxy: Method and Piety*, and was published by Brill in Leiden, the Netherlands.

sanctification.³ In much of contemporary Protestantism, an antinomian view is prevalent, a view most certainly based on *Enlightenment* principles. This view is the conviction that special revelation is not the highest authority in regard to moral matters, but that biblical morality, often regarded as outdated, needs to be evaluated in light of contemporary rationalistic philosophical developments, to which ultimate authority is attributed. Especially because these texts have never been translated before, their potential role in shaping the gradual trajectory of theological and philosophical studies in the Western world over the past few centuries stimulated my interest in this study. A major purpose of this study is to shed light on Wittich's doctrine of Accommodation and how it relates to the historic Calvinist position on the authority of Scripture. The first ever translation and textual analysis of two chapters of each of these primary sources into English that will be presented in this thesis, in themselves, shed valuable light on the grammatical and stylistic study of the ecclesiastical Latin of the seventeenth century.

The main question this thesis will attempt to answer is the question to what extent Christoph Wittich's interpretation of Scripture in his *Dissertationes Duae Quorum Prior De S. Scripturae in rebus Philosophicis abusu*, i.e. which elements in his scriptural exegesis and hermeneutics as applied to biblical texts concerning practical and moral matters, can be regarded as Cartesian. To answer this question, one needs to take a look at the epistemological presuppositions with which Wittich approaches Scripture. With this in mind, the reply of Van Mastricht, *Vindicae veritatis et auctoritatis sacrae scripturae in rebus Philosophicis adversus dissertationes D. Christophori Wittichii*, must

³ Q. Why will God then have the ten commandments so strictly preached, since no man in this life can keep them?

A. First, that all our lifetime we may learn more and more to know our sinful nature, and thus become the more earnest in seeking the remission of sin, and righteousness in Christ; likewise, that we constantly endeavour and pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, that we may become more and more conformable to the image of God, till we arrive at the perfection proposed to us, in a life to come.

be analyzed with reference to the theological and philosophical principles from which he departs in order to refute Wittich's use of Scripture, as well as his application of them to the relevant texts.

The thesis is an interdisciplinary study involving Philosophy, Theology and Latin. The core of the thesis is the translation of the original Latin texts of the two primary sources: Wittich's *Dissertationes Duae Quarum Prior de S. Scripturae in rebus Philosophicis abusu*⁴ and Van Mastricht's *Vindicae veritatis et autoritatis sacrae scripturae in rebus Philosophicis adversus dissertationes D. Christophori Wittichii*.⁵ Following this introduction, Chapter 2 of this thesis will discuss the historical background of the sources. The third chapter is a translation of selected passages from Wittich, as well as a textual analysis thereof. The selected passages are Chapter one of Wittich's dissertation, where "The state of the controversy is laid out in the order of the argument",⁶ and the third chapter, where "many places in Scripture are shown, which contain discussions concerning practical and moral matters according to the opinion of the people, which is severed from the truth".⁷ Chapter 4 will be a translation and textual analysis of Van Mastricht's first chapter, written in reaction to Wittich's first chapter, *Status controversiae a D. Wittichio formatus, reformatur*,⁸ and finally his fifth chapter, his reaction to Wittich's sentiments in the fifth chapter of his dissertation, *Vindicatur loca ista Scripturae, quibus D. Wittichius demonstrare voluit, Scripturam in rebus moralibus et practicis, se saepissime componere captum erroneum vulgi*.⁹ The reason for the selection of these particular chapters from the two main

⁴ Two Dissertations – of which the first examines the misuse of the Holy Scripture with regard to Philosophical Matters.

⁵ Defense of the truth and authority of the Holy Scripture in Philosophical Matters against the Two Dissertations of Christoph Wittich.

⁶ Ponitur status controversiae sequentibus decidendae.

⁷ Ostenditur eadem multis locis Scripturae, qui, circa res Practicas et Morales, locutiones continent secundum opinionem hominum a veritate recedem.

⁸ Wherein the state of the dispute as formulated by the Treatise of Wittich, is reformulated.

⁹ In which a vindication is given of those places in which Christoph Wittich attempts to prove that Scripture speaks concerning moral and practical matters from the common error.

primary sources is the fact that in them the authors address the essence of the controversy between Cartesianism and Reformed Scholasticism as well as the particular application thereof in regard to Scripture's treatment of matters pertaining to morality. A complete translation of the entire *Vindicae Veritatis* and *Dissertationes Duae* fall beyond the scope of this study. Chapter 5 will discuss the theological and philosophical principles underlying the texts and the thesis will be concluded in Chapter 6, consisting of an overview of the two authors' different epistemological approaches to the exegesis of Scripture when it addresses moral and practical matters.

The historical background to the dispute between Wittich and Van Mastricht is vital to the correct understanding thereof and will be the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2

AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The history surrounding the theological and philosophical developments of the post-Reformation era of Reformed scholasticism is of particular importance to any scientific study on and a correct understanding of the content of those developments. Reformed orthodoxy or Reformed scholasticism can be described as a movement within Calvinist theological circles that aimed to produce, modeling of the great confessions of the Reformation, a comprehensive and detailed body of true, orthodox doctrine. The Reformers of the sixteenth century saw a great host of abuses and un-orthodox, non-scriptural doctrines within the Roman Catholic Church, which was seen to be turning Christianity into a man-made religion. With regard to epistemology for example, Calvin notes that the Roman Catholic Church erred in its view of Scripture deriving its authority from the Church rather than God alone (1559: 1.7.1). They attempted to reform Christianity in those areas where the Church had strayed and their confessions embodied this goal. The focus of the writings and confessions from this era thus do not present entire bodies of doctrine but only those particular points of doctrine where a return to orthodoxy was needed at the time. The Reformers were in fact, just that. The work of the Reformed scholastic theologians was thus an integral part of the continual development and eventual survival of Protestantism (Muller 1987:15-17). Muller (1987:17), however, also notes that

the development of Protestant doctrine ... in the great confessions of the 16th century and the Orthodox and Scholastic systems of the late

16th and 17th centuries was not a development from kerugma to dogma but rather a development consisting in the adjustment of a received body of doctrine and its systematic relations to the needs of Protestantism, in terms dictated by the Reformers on Scripture, grace, justification, and the sacraments.

Thus, Reformed scholastic orthodoxy stands in continuity with the great theological insights of the Reformers, but developed methodologically in a systematic way that is reliant on the scholastic forms and methods of the Middle Ages (Muller 1987:15).

2.2 Medieval Scholasticism

Medieval scholasticism arose from the European universities which harboured it. St Anselm (1033-1109) is considered by many to be the first scholastic: scholasticism reaching its peak in the thirteenth century (Rickaby 1911:2). Neo-Platonic conceptualism, the philosophical view that had dominated much of the early Middle Ages in the Western Church, was being replaced by Aristotelian realism (Rickaby 1911:6). One of the major factors in the rise of scholasticism in the Western Church was the translation of Aristotle into Latin, since many in the Western Church knew no Greek (Rickaby 1911:10). Two Dominican monks, Henry of Brabant (1207-1248) and William of Moerbeke (1215-1286) had translated almost all of Aristotle's known works into Latin. The works of the early medieval philosopher, Boethius (480-525), who had long been the chief authority on Aristotle, was also highly influential at the time (Rickaby 1911:11). Greatly differing from modern thought, Scholastic philosophy is based upon the distinction between *matter* and *form*, and it is also important to note its distinction between *substance* and *accident*. The schoolmen, as those who practice scholasticism are commonly known, believed that substance alone fully is, while accident only has diminished being. To the schoolmen, *substance* is

something being determinate, i.e. definitely *this* and not *that* (*hoc aliquid* as Aristotle's translators rendered it in Latin). They distinguished between the determinable, which they called *matter*, and the determinant, which they called *form*. They distinguished between forms that were *substantial* or *accidental*. All accidents are forms, but not all forms are accidents. The substantial form is what makes a thing what it is, but the accidental form may be removed without the essence of the thing perishing (Rickaby 1911:13-14).

European philosophical and theological thought from the eleventh to the eighteenth centuries show remarkable methodological continuity, heavily characterized by scholasticism. During this period European intellectual thought was very much dependent on theology and consequently the traditions of scholasticism and theology are closely interwoven. The leading figures of the reformation and post-reformation protestant orthodoxy were all products of the academic institutions that arose out of medieval scholasticism (Vos 2001:102; 105).

The theology of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries following the Reformation in the Western Church (i.e. the Counter-Reformation of Rome, as well as the orthodoxy of the Protestants), was, like that of the Middle Ages, also scholastic in nature; the medieval university forms the natural background of reformed scholasticism (Vos 2001:118). Muller (1987:17-18) describes this institutionalization of doctrine by the Protestant Scholastics at the time as

designed to develop a system on a highly technical level and in an extremely precise manner by means of the careful identification of topics, division of these topics into their basic parts, definition of the parts, and doctrinal or logical argumentation concerning the divisions and definitions.

Scholastic theology, so named by the Reformed orthodox themselves, is both a detailed and disputative system and is distinct from other forms and methods used by the early Reformers, such as ecclesiastical, catechetical or exegetical theology.¹ Characteristic of the school-method is its technical mastery and instrumental use of linguistic, logical, philosophical and traditional concepts. Therefore it is to be viewed as a logical and technical approach to the discipline of theology and is an academic method, which does not necessarily ally itself with a particular doctrinal or philosophical perspective as such.

The work of the Reformed scholastics was crucial for the survival of Protestantism as a theological system, and through scholasticism it received most of its doctrinal principles and definitions. They were responsible for the final formulation of the definition of Protestant theology, the Protestant doctrine of the Trinity, the Protestant Christology of the two states of Christ, the Protestant distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace and Christ's substitutionary atonement (Muller 1987:18-19).

The influence of scholastic Protestantism on the understanding of the authority of Scripture remains very relevant in our day. The early Reformers had given the Bible its place as the final authority over all doctrinal matters, but this doctrine of Scripture was codified and systematically set forth by the Reformed and Lutheran orthodox (Muller 1987:16).

There is, however, no discontinuity between the Reformers and the Reformed orthodox of the following centuries, since, despite the change in form and method when practicing theology, there was no change in substance. That the theological systems of Reformed orthodox in 1659 did not look like Calvin's *Institutes* of 1559 does not necessarily indicate a

¹ Ecclesiastical theology concerns itself with the Church's application of Scripture in the world beyond the text itself, catechetical theology with the teaching of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, and exegetical theology with the exposition of Scripture.

discontinuity. When Reformed orthodoxy is compared to the Reformation, one finds doctrinal continuity but methodological discontinuity (Muller 1987:20-21). This development of Protestant theology into a dogmatic system can be considered as a result of the desire of the Reformers to train their successors in their theological tradition (Muller 1987:26).

The Reformers approached their practice of theology with a host of presuppositions. The Reformed scholastics gave theology a thorough Protestant treatment and, with the help of scholastic methodology, took Reformed theology as an academic discipline to new heights. With the inception of early Protestant orthodoxy, Protestantism was no longer reforming the church, but rather establishing and protecting the church (Muller 1987:28-29). Therefore, Muller rightly states:

Rather than view this systematic development as arising from the inner logic of certain central dogmas, we ought to view it, more simply, as the result of the forces of institutionalization witnessed both in the Protestant confessions and in the larger theological context of the catholic or universal churchly tradition of which the Reformers and their successors strove to be part (1987:31).

The Reformed orthodox were very much aware of the need (especially at the time) for both theological and philosophical consistency. If their polemics were to succeed in their aims, an accurate exposition of the opponent's position was crucial. Furthermore, it was also the responsibility of early Protestant orthodoxy to establish a new and contextually suitable dialogue between theology and philosophy. Those nominally metaphysical issues which could only be dealt with by a fully developed and systematic theological system and be addressed only by one that was willing to adapt to the philosophical metaphysic suited to that system. Muller (1987:32) explains:

The Protestant Orthodox looked both to the precedents provided for a synthesis of philosophy and theology, reason and revelation, by the Scholastics of the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries and ... to the revived Aristotelianism of Zabarella and Suarez. The theology of the Reformation manifests a certain degree of continuity with the critical theology of the later Middle Ages, specifically with the Scotist and Nominalist emphasis on the diastasis of revelation and reason and on the need for reliance on authority in the construction of the body of Christian doctrine.

This interest in the philosophy of Suarez and Zabarella had the effect of both systematically broadening the theological system and placing it in dialogue with the collateral disciplines, more so than before. Therefore, it has to be clear that this development was no fall back to the earlier scholasticism, but rather a new development which, although owing its method to the schoolmen of the Middle Ages, stood very much in theological continuity with the Reformation (Muller 1987:33). Even though the early seventeenth century saw Descartes and Cherbury put forth their modern rationalism, along with the new science promoted by Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626), Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) and Johannes Kepler (1571-1630), these new developments did not affect Protestant theology until the mid-seventeenth century (Muller 1987:35). Christoph Wittich is probably, as far as the knowledge of the author stretches, the first Reformed theologian to incorporate Cartesian thought into his theology and, in particular, his view of Holy Scripture.

2.3 High Protestant Orthodoxy

The period from 1640 to the end of the seventeenth century is considered the period of high Protestant orthodoxy. This followed the period of early Protestant orthodoxy (1564-1640) and is characterized by further changes in

the dogmatic system. It elaborated, developed and modified the extant system created by early Protestant orthodoxy. It created new loci and new subdivisions of existing loci in order to adapt to the new dialogue it engaged in with philosophy. This was needed particularly in light of the threat posed by Remonstrant theology, which, although being an offshoot of Reformed theology, had a somewhat rationalistic structure since its inception. One of the most outstanding feats of the high orthodox theologians was their engagement in the polemical codification of Reformed orthodoxy's defense against the attacks launched by the new philosophical developments at the time. During this era, the theologians of Dordt were being replaced by their pupils and successors and this began the final codification of orthodox Protestant polemics and positive dogmatic theology in the Reformed Churches. This era was completed by the likes of Francis Turretin (1623-1687) and Johan Heinrich Heidegger (1633-1698) by the end of the seventeenth century (Muller 1987:37-38). In the early 1640s, Gisbert Voetius (1589-1676) was particularly prominent in the fight against the Cartesian "new philosophy" taught by Regius, who was appointed *professor ordinarius* at Utrecht (Duker 1910:142-143). Petrus van Mastricht (1630-1706) is considered one of the leading figures of Reformed scholasticism during the period of high Protestant orthodoxy. Van Mastricht served as a pastor in both Cleves and Glückstadt, before he became a professor of Practical Theology and Oriental Languages at Frankfurt-on-the-Oder in 1662. He was later, in 1677, appointed as Professor of Theology at Utrecht. His most outstanding work is widely regarded to be his *Theoretico-practica Theologia*, published in 1655 (Muller 1987:48).

Muller (1987:88) points out that Protestant scholasticism and the modern philosophical rationalism came to the fore during the same period in history: "This coincidence of inception and early development has led scholars to

raise the question of the relationship of Protestant Orthodoxy and Rationalism.”

There are many different viewpoints with regard to this relationship. First, Amand Saintes as discussed in Muller argues that the Reformation, by setting aside the authority of the Church and of tradition in favour of Scripture and the Reformed confessions, which derive their authority from Scripture, established an arbitrary support of the faith, which itself inevitably led to skepticism and opened the door for the individual rational subject to establish himself as the standard of truth. He further argues that the Reformed scholastics also extended the cause of rationalism by developing such an extremely detailed and technical theological system, the foundation of which rested more upon the polemics than on exegesis. Saintes says that the very reason on which the Reformed scholastics relied concerning matters of religion could just as easily be turned against Scripture itself, if it were to be found irreconcilable with the findings of natural science (Muller 1987:89). Lecky and Robertson, according to Muller, agree with Saintes and both also argue that the Reformation was essentially a movement away from ecclesiastical authority and norms toward secularism, individualism and even religious semi-rationalism, before eventually disintegrating into irrational ‘bibliolatry’ (Muller 1987:89). Hurst lays the blame for the rise of rationalism on Reformed orthodoxy and not the Reformation itself. He is of the opinion that the endless distinctions and dogmatic detail of their theological systems dragged Protestantism into a religious and intellectual abyss (Muller 1987:89). On the other hand, Muller explains that Max Weber argued that rationalism had its beginnings in Reformed scholasticism itself. Starting from the presupposition that there is a unity in the truth of both philosophy and theology, the Reformed scholastics didn’t view the natural knowledge of God as a threat to revealed knowledge. The Reformed scholastics, by virtue of doing this, gradually drew the topics of revealed religion into the bounds of

natural reason. The main problem they faced, therefore, was the establishment of epistemological boundaries for the authority of reason as independent from revelation. Reason itself, being intrinsically necessary for all systematic theological thinking, could of course not be thrown out of the door completely, but on the other hand, the excessive use of rational norms, as the "anti-Rationalists" of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries pointed out, could lead to the eventual subjection of Scriptural, revealed truths to the authority of natural reason. As Muller (1987:90-91) explains Weber's claims: "Human rationality ultimately becomes the principle according to which the will of God is explained."

Muller, however, differs from the findings of Hurst and Weber. The system that Protestant orthodoxy brought about, despite its rationalizing tendencies, never put rational proof on the same level as Scripture and neither did it support or encourage a rationalist epistemology. They acknowledged true and certain theological knowledge to be very much distinct from rational, philosophical or mathematical certainty. Within systematic theology, reason has an instrumental and not a magisterial function. Furthermore, it is also important to note that a positive relationship between faith and reason had also been maintained long before the rise of Protestant scholasticism in the Christian Aristotelianism present in the theologies of St. Augustine and that of the Middle Ages (Muller 1987:93-94).

Muller argues that the Protestant scholastics were ardent and uncompromising in their rejection of any philosophical ideas or truth claims that were noticeably at odds with the doctrines of Christianity. Any rational deductions that would contradict the truths of Scripture, e.g. Descartes's cosmology, were rejected. Muller himself admits that, although certainly true for the vast majority of the scholastics, this is a bit of a generalization, but then proceeds to point out that it even extends to Christoph Wittich, one of the scholastics most influenced by Cartesian views of substance and truth

(Muller 1987:94), and also an opponent of Van Mastricht with regard to the authority of Scripture in relation to natural reason.

Genuine rationalism, i.e. the assumption that reason has authority over or at least equal to that of Scripture or faith, can by no means be attributed to the scholastics, whether those of the Middle Ages or the post-Reformation Reformed theologians. Protestant scholasticism, unlike rationalism, denied reason the place of *principium cognoscendi*, but Protestant orthodoxy and rationalism were certainly in agreement concerning their profound search for the right method. Rationalism gradually rose to the forefront at the same time when Reformed orthodoxy, seldom flourishing after 1720, was dying (Muller 1987:97).

2.4 Descartes

René Descartes (1596-1650) is considered the father of modern philosophy. His influence on the Reformed orthodox scholars of the seventeenth-century Netherlands is unmistakable. The Netherlands was also the place where Cartesianism was first both received and criticized. The philosophies of Descartes and of Suarez (1548-1617) had been vigorously opposed by the polemics of Dutch theologians such as Revius, Heereboord and Voetius during the 1640s and 1650s. It is, of course, important to note that they interpreted Descartes from their particular historical context and that their writings reflect this context. This is particularly significant for any historical study of the philosophical and theological developments in Western thought at the time, as well as for contemporary theological and philosophical debates (Goudriaan 1999:1-3).

Christian philosophy, since the days of Dionysius Areopagita in the late fifth and early sixth centuries, has distinguished three ways to acquire knowledge of God: the *via eminentiae*, *via causalitatis*, and the *via negativa*. All three ways have creation as their point of departure. All three ways correspond in

the fact that they exclude the possibility of acquiring absolute or full knowledge of God. The latter obviously attempts to reveal what is untrue concerning God, while the *viae eminentiae* and *causalitatis* view God as the cause of all things, based on the presupposition that He surpasses His creation. The fundamental principles of these three ways remained pivotal even in the epistemology of the Reformed scholastics (Goudriaan 1999:4).

René Descartes, however, argued for a different *via* for establishing true and sure knowledge. The origins of this *via moderna* came to predominance as early as the fourteenth century. The proposition of Descartes, *ego cogito ergo sum*, answers the question that propelled his thought in the first place. Descartes was born from a wealthy family in 1596 and received his education as a young man from the Jesuit school at La Fleche, where he was an outstanding student. With mathematics being his true passion, Descartes was struck by the idea of a universal science based upon it. The concept was first proposed by Sir Francis Bacon, but the idea that it should be based on mathematics was entirely that of Descartes. The purpose of establishing such a science was to give man mastery over creation, thereby giving him the ability to subdue it according to his needs (Gillespie 1995:xii-2). The proposition or fundamental principle of Descartes, therefore, needs to be understood in light of his desire and attempt to establish this universal science. In the *Regulae* (AT² 10:362; CSM³ 1:10-11) he describes what the purpose of such a science is:

All knowledge is certain and evident cognition. Someone who has doubts about many things is no wiser than someone who has never

² Adam, C.; Tannery, P. 1964–1976. *Œuvres de Descartes*, vols. I–XII, revised edition. Paris: J. Vrin/C.N.R.S. [references to this work (abbreviated as AT) are by volume and page, separated by a colon].

³ Cottingham, J.; Stoothoff, R.; Murdoch, D.; and (for vol. 3) Kenny, A. eds. and trans. 1984. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vols. 1–3. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [All quotations are taken from this edition (abbreviated as CSM); References to this work are by volume and page, separated by a colon].

given them a thought; indeed, he appears less wise if he has formed a false opinion about any of them. Hence it is better not to study at all than to occupy ourselves with objects that are so difficult that we are unable to distinguish what is true from what is false, and are forced to take the doubtful as certain; for in such matters the risk of diminishing our knowledge is greater than our hope of increasing it. So, in accordance with this rule, we reject all such merely probable cognition and resolve to believe only what is perfectly known and incapable of being doubted (Gillespie 1995:3).

The problem that Descartes thus set out to solve was the overcoming of all doubt and the attainment of absolute certainty. Man can be deceived by God, his dreams and his senses (Goudriaan 1999:174). Only knowledge that is beyond any doubt is worth believing. This certainty, according to him, is founded upon the "indubitable conception of a clear and attentive mind" which "proceeds from the light of reason alone" (AT 10:368; CSM 1:14). His desire was for man to master nature and himself, similar to that of his predecessor, Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592). He radically differed from Montaigne, however, in that his desire for mastery was not for the sake of sanctification or serenity, but rather for prosperity and security. He realized, however, that it would be impossible to master nature without undertaking a metaphysical study concerning that which transcends nature (Gillespie 1995:3-4).

Descartes argued that the senses could deceive us thus and are not to be trusted in this search for indubitable knowledge. Also, because men's thoughts in dreams are often all too similar to reality, he strove to reject all ideas or apparent knowledge that had previously entered his mind. If, however, this skeptical path is followed, he admitted that even this is after all a cognitive process, and he observed the necessity of his existence in order for this cognitive process to be taking place. He, then, after taking this

skeptical path, concludes that *Ego cogito ergo sum*. To him this was beyond all doubt, since doubt itself presupposes the existence of a doubter (Gillespie 1995:4).

There are two major viewpoints concerning Descartes and his philosophy with regard to the Christian religion. One sees Descartes as a true natural rationalist, who treats metaphysics or theology as stumbling blocks that need to be overcome in order that natural reason can ultimately triumph in the world. A second school, however, actually views him as a great defender of Christianity in the midst of radical skepticism, and, considering that religion was already losing much ground during his lifetime, sees his doubts as merely a reaction to the symptoms of his time (Gillespie 1995:5-6).

Nonetheless, his desire from the start of his career as a philosopher was the establishment of a universal science. Such a science would necessarily need metaphysics in order to succeed, and would have to replace both scholasticism and skepticism. His desire was to construct this science anew from its very foundation, and, in order to do that, it would be necessary to rid himself of all his youthful opinions of which there can be any doubt, since it is necessary to deny all things that are in any way dubitable, as objects of knowledge (Gillespie 1995:6).

Descartes argued that we can be deceived by the senses, and further that the senses often do deceive us because through them we perceive things either distant or very small. If we are deceived about the things closest to us, we are mad. Descartes, however, was convinced that he himself was certainly not mad, because he was able to distinguish between things reasonable and unreasonable and therefore also doubt, which a madman cannot (Gillespie 1995:7).

Descartes presupposes an absolutely omnipotent⁴ God. This is a very important fact to note, since it is a crucial and non-negligible presupposition to remember in order to understand Cartesian philosophy. In fact, the very source of his doubt lies in the fact that an omnipotent God is able to deceive him. This theory of a deceiver-God is a problem with which Descartes struggles at the very *Anfang* of his philosophic enquiry (Gillespie 1995:8).

First, Descartes takes two possible ways of dealing with the possibility of divine deception: piety and atheism. He shows both to be insufficient, however. If God is good, then He would not deceive men. However, Descartes notes that it is undeniable that he is sometimes deceived and therefore, it is possible that he is always deceived. That disqualifies the path of piety. The fact that men are deceived, however, shows us to be imperfect beings and, therefore we cannot with absolute certainty say that there is no God. Therefore, the path of atheism fails also. Descartes' eventual conclusion is this: that there is indeed a God, but not necessarily a good and loving God, but possibly a *genius malignus* who employs his powers to deceive man, as he points out in AT 7:22; CSM 2:15. Therefore, he treats all external things as potential traps set up by this deceiver-God. One could actually avoid error by simply not believing anything. So, the positive affirmation of his first meditation is that man is able to avoid making errors and being deceived through doubting; however, it does not enable him to master nature yet (Gillespie 1995:9-10).

Secondly, Descartes's following meditation starts with his search or desire for an Archimedean point, on which he could stand in order to pursue true knowledge and certainty. He finds this in himself, and his Archimedean point is therefore the indubitable fact that he indeed exists. In AT, 7:25 and CSM, 2:17 Descartes claims:

⁴ *Omnipotent* as synonymous with *παντοκράτωρ* – actively governing all things, not in the sense of merely being able to do all things.

Let him deceive me as much as he can, he will never bring it about that I am nothing as long as I think that I am something ... [T]his proposition *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind (Gillespie 1995:10).

In this basic principle, Descartes finds certainty in the midst of doubt. Gillespie (1995:11) explains:

Ego cogito ergo sum is the answer to the radical doubt that arises in the face of an omnipotent God. This conclusion points to a fundamental question that was concealed at the very beginning of modernity. Cartesian rationalism and the modern world present themselves as a new beginning, as enlightenment, but behind this bright dawn of reason stands the dark and mysterious form of the omnipotent God.

2.5 Antirealism and Ockham

This view of a dark and mysterious yet omnipotent God finds its roots in the opposition towards the increasing influence of Aristotelian realism, as well as the suspicion of Islamic heresy after its re-introduction to the West by the Arab scholars Avicenna (980-1037) and Averroes (1126-1198), which eventually led to the condemnation of Aristotelian realism by the bishop of Paris in 1270 and in 1277. The antirealist movement emerged with Roscellinus (1050-1125) and Peter Abelard (1079-1142), who called realism into question during the twelfth century via the denial of extra-mental universals. Their adopted position is generally known as nominalism, due to their denial that universals were any more than mere *nomina* ("names") and their embrace of a radical individualist view of reality and the universe (Gillespie 1995:13-14).

Less than two centuries later, there followed a dispute over the Kingship of Christ between William Ockham (1287-1347) and the Franciscans on the one side and the pope on the other. The former maintained that as Christ has renounced His earthly dominion, his followers must imitate Him by following the path of poverty. Pope John XXII countered the Franciscan position by stating that Christ could not possibly have done such a thing, as it would be contrary to God's decree and God could not act contrary to what He had from eternity ordained. To this the Franciscans replied that He had done it not by His ordained power but by His absolute power. They argued that God was free to act contrary to His own decree. When the pope rejected this distinction, the Franciscans accused him of reviving the heretical Abelardian position that God was bound to save some people from eternity in order to be true to His previous decrees, and Ockham argued that this would mean that God is not absolutely omnipotent and able to predestine whom He pleases. For Ockham, sovereign divine omnipotence means that God's *potentia absoluta* supersedes his *potentia ordinate*; he also proceeds to affirm the supremacy of theology over philosophy. Thus, his view of omnipotence is one where God is all-able, rather than all-governing. God is also free to act without the use of secondary causes, and this view puts him at odds with Averroes, who argued that God is bound by natural causality. Ockham rejected theological rationalism and all limitations on divine action except for the law of non-contradiction (Gillespie 1995:15-17).

According to Ockham the very existence of categories binds God's power, which is why he rejects realism in favor of radical individualism. By creating universals, God would be limiting Himself in a way that is inconsistent with His absolute omnipotence. Absolute omnipotence, according to Ockham, necessitates radical individualism (Gillespie 1995:17).

In nominalism, logical explanations are failed human attempts to explain divine wisdom. Even though humans are too limited to fully grasp it, God

created and understands everything individually by means of a *cognitio intuitiva* and therefore He has no need for universals. If, as in Ockham's doctrine of God, *potentia absoluta* is elevated above *potentia ordinata*, the possibility for divine deception is opened up, which raises a fundamental epistemological problem (Gillespie 1995:18).

Ockham went as far as to say that God's *potentia absoluta* would allow Him even to save some people without the infusion of grace. Furthermore, since all men are merely related to God individualistically, the moral law is open to individual interpretation: all men are bound merely to their own conscience. This inevitably leads to the conclusion that human moral order is essentially self-determinant. Gillespie (1995:23) is, however, quick to qualify that

it would be a mistake ... to view this liberation from the traditional structures of authority that characterized medieval society as the advent of modern liberalism. While Nominalism clearly rejects the basic structure of medieval life and thought, it does not establish man as a free being capable of mastering nature and securing himself in the world. Rather it announces the utter insignificance of human beings in relation to God. Moreover, rather than establish man as lord of nature and his own destiny, it leaves him afloat in a universe utterly dependent upon a capricious divine will. Nominalism doesn't point toward the dawn of a new enlightenment but toward the dark form of an omnipotent and incomprehensible God.

The influence of nominalism continued to increase and was even dominating academic thought in Germany at the time Luther rose to prominence. The idea of such a distant and potentially malicious God probably gained credibility as the horrific socio-political circumstances of the times in Europe seemed to lend themselves to such an understanding of divinity (Gillespie 1995:24).

Ockham's nominalism emphasized divine indifference along with omnipotence. Thomas Bradwardine (1290-1349) and John of Mirecourt followed and even radicalized these teachings during the fourteenth century. By virtue of the nominalist rejection of categories and hierarchies, nominalism maintains that God is not a being, but a force. God is not only understood in light of His actions; to the nominalist, God is essentially action itself. This led men like Nicholas of Autrecourt (1299-1369) and John Buridan (1300-1358), among others, to turn to a scientific investigation of nature, since nature itself is the reflection of divinity (Gillespie 1995:25).

Nominalism helped shape many of the intellectual movements in Europe during the late Middle Ages. It paved the way for the seventeenth century English empiricism of Bacon and Hobbes. The Reformation agreed with the nominalist high view of divine omnipotence, while emphatically rejecting any notions of a deceiver-God who acts with *potentia absoluta* independently of his *potentia ordinata*. The Counter-Reformation continually took the claims of nominalism into account when it tried to re-establish the synthesis between theology and philosophy. The same goes for the Skeptics in their philosophical works. For example, while Suarez did reject Ockham's theory of radical individualism on the basis of his distinction between essence and existence, he did maintain that there are as many individual things as categories. Nominalism opened up the opportunity for the skeptics to question divine truthfulness and forced the Protestants to find themselves continually having to defend their doctrine on the compatibility of divine omnipotence and truthfulness (Gillespie 1995:26-27). Francisco Sanches (1550-1623) in his *Quid Nihil Scitur* further developed skepticism and greatly influenced the two great contemporaries of Descartes, Mersenne and Gassendi. His great contribution to the cause of skepticism was combining its trenchant strains with those of nominalism. His philosophy was extremely popular and influential in Paris during the seventeenth century, especially

among the libertines who held great offices of power at the time; and it was often used by the likes of Francois Veron (1575-1649) in his arguments against the Calvinists (Gillespie 1995:28).

2.6 Cartesianism and Divine Deception

The Nominalist notion of a deceiving God stands in the background and is the source of the question behind Descartes's fundamental principle. Therefore, the underlying purpose for Descartes that leads him to this principle of *ego cogito ergo sum* ("I think, therefore I am") is freeing man from the realm of divine deception and to give him his own foot on which to stand. It is sometimes claimed that there was a nominalist strain at La Fleche, where Descartes was an exceptional student, and also that one of Descartes's teachers, Varon, taught the doctrine of divine deception. Descartes had a very good knowledge of the Aristotelian realist position as well, especially via Aquinas. Descartes clearly desired a break with all past knowledge, but had conceded that some form of language was needed to describe and understand the various concepts of reality. He borrowed this language from scholasticism (Gillespie 1995:28-30).

The notion of an evil, deceiving and omnipotent God can already be found in Descartes's first work, the *Olympica*. Here the question surfaces, as to whether omnipotence and loving-kindness are two compatible characteristics of God. The main purpose of the *Olympica* was to put in writing a recollection of Descartes's dreams during November 1619, which apparently led him to the idea of establishing a universal science. This was his solution to the problem created by the tension between God's absolute omnipotence and the possible deception of mankind. Descartes lays out the basis for his new science in the fragmentary Rules, and he explained this to be the certainty of intuition, i.e. "the undoubting conception of an unclouded and attentive mind" that "springs from the light of reason alone" (AT 10:368;

CSM 1:14). Descartes, however, later abandoned his own principle around 1628-1629 after he suffered a skeptical crisis, which led him to search for a more metaphysical solution to the problem of doubt. He never abandoned the search for a universal science, however. In 1630 he wrote letters to Mersenne in which he doubted the necessary existence of eternal truths. While God's will is eternal, it does not necessarily force Him to create eternal truths. Descartes was forced to take a new route in search for his bastion against the possible deceptions of an omnipotent God (Gillespie 1995:30-32).

The presuppositions for Descartes's universal science are very much the same as those of nominalism, namely, absolute divine omnipotence, divine indifference, symbolic mathematics, the rejection of substantial forms and syllogistic logic. His emphasis on absolute certainty forced him to reject the empiricism of Bacon and Hobbes, because probable knowledge, for Descartes, was no knowledge at all. Therefore, Descartes's ultimate solution is that of *ego cogito ergo sum* – his only bastion against the deception of an omnipotent God. In this realm, where humans exercise their free will, man can be guaranteed certainty. This is, however, not a *via* to complete atheism, as there is a place for the existence of God within this realm, but only so long as God is subjected to human authority and laws and bound to act only in accordance thereunto (Gillespie 1995:32).

Ego cogito ergo sum was not merely a bastion against the deceiver-God to Descartes, but also his Archimedean point upon which his science, by which he wanted to conquer the world for man, is founded. The deceiving and irrational God needed to be dethroned and man needed to be made the master and possessor of nature. Descartes's science is both at odds with scholasticism, which made use of syllogistic logic, and with nominalism, which, by its rejection of extramental universals, favoured a logic of signs. To him, scholasticism is merely a form of rhetoric that really presents nothing factual, while nominalism merely reduces the universe to a chaotic

mass of matter. Like Bacon, Descartes dreamed of a universal science, but, as previously mentioned, found Bacon's empiricist reliance upon experience particularly troubling (Gillespie 1995:33-34).

Instead of the new science being based on mere experience, Descartes proposed experience understood and analyzed by a new mathematical way of thinking. All sciences (in actual fact, including genuine mathematics) were to be restructured on the model of Descartes's *mathesis universalis*. The purpose of science is not thinking but acting, and Descartes saw knowledge as the medium by which man can subdue nature and turn it to his own good use. True knowledge is only attainable by correct judgment. Affirming or denying that something is the case is the basis of all thinking and knowledge. Because judgments often go astray, however, it is necessary to identify the source and reason behind these errors in judgment and to find a way by which they could be avoided. Descartes saw the source of these mistakes as human reliance upon the senses and imagination. Our reliance upon these two aspects comes from the time when we are children, when we accept the existence of independent objects without question. As it is exhausting to the mind to think clearly, i.e. without the aid of our senses or imagination, we often rapidly fall back on our own prejudices. Descartes regards certainty of intuition as the only basis upon which true and evident knowledge is found, since it grasps that which is eternal and innate. Gillespie (1995:34-35) quotes Descartes as saying:

By 'intuition' I do not mean the fluctuating testimony of the senses or the deceptive judgment of the imagination as it botches things together, but the conceptions of a clear and attentive mind, which is so easy and distinct that there can be no room for doubt about what we understand.

Propositionally, the truth of the Cartesian fundamental principle resides not in its logical form but in the acting of the will via doubt that establishes it as fundamental. "I think, therefore I am" is not logically true, but necessarily true every time it is asserted by man's will. When seen in this light, the fundamental principle of Descartes is the will's self-assertion as indubitable, freeing itself from the possible deception of God and His creation. At the heart of the principle lies the fact that the will couldn't doubt itself, because that doubt would in itself be a form of self-affirmation (Gillespie 1995:46-47).

Descartes's radical doubt of the senses, which led him to doubt the existence of creation around him, has significant implications. God cannot be known from his creation, since its existence is doubtful and nothing can be derived from it. The doubt in man's senses is also the reason why God cannot be accurately known through Scripture, as one can also be deceived by reading it. Descartes doubted not only that man can truthfully hear the Scriptures, but also the truth of their witness. He strove for man to become able to acquire knowledge in general, but especially concerning the divine, without the aid of the senses, since as long as creation's existence and the truthfulness of the senses are doubted, Scripture cannot be trusted. Despite knowing very well that his philosophy would contribute to the decline of religion and would be irreconcilable with orthodox Christianity, he still made it clear that it was not his intention to destroy religion. However, Descartes was undoubtedly of the opinion that if the teachings of the Christian Scriptures are at odds with the intuitions of a clear and attentive mind, which has followed the steps to free itself from deception, then the religion is suspect and possibly false. When the content of Scripture is brought under the spotlight in the first meditation, it immediately has doubt cast upon it. With regard to Scripture's statement concerning the knowledge of God via His creation in Romans 1:19-20, Descartes answered that this text refers to the fact that everything we can know about God, can be shown by

arguments of our own expertise – he famously stated that knowledge of God’s existence “can be demonstrated by reasoning, which has no other source than our own mind”.⁵

The Cartesian motivation for a *mathesis universalis* is then to establish man’s lordship over reality after presupposing the nominalist ideas of an omnipotent, potentially deceiving God and a vulnerable, deceivable man. Knowledge, therefore, is changed from being an end in itself to being an instrument for the sake of power. For this reason, he engages upon a (potentially endless) search for indubitable knowledge (Gillespie 1995:26-27; 35). This sentiment is evident right at the beginning of Wittich’s Dissertation, where in his first paragraph he writes:

It is of the highest necessity, in the definition of knowledge, that we have full knowledge to become acquainted not only with the characteristic and true principles on which knowledge rests, and from which it deducts its conclusions, but also and above, that we use those in such a way that we can accept only those as genuine by not mixing strange things into them, if we labour at acquiring complete knowledge. (Wittich 1652:1:1).⁶

Even when Descartes, after the consideration of his first meditation, concluded that God is not an absolute malicious deceiver, he still concluded that God might (for practical reasons and without malicious intent) have spoken falsely through the writers of Scripture. This forms the foundation for Descartes’s *Accommodation Theory*, that is, the conviction that God through Scripture often brings forth falsities for the sake of accommodating the opinion of the readers. This aspect of Cartesian philosophy that plays such a

⁵ rationibus non aliunde petitis quam ab ipsamet nostra mente posse ostendi.

⁶ Summa est neccessitatis, ut in scientiarum constitutione non tantum propria et vera cognoscendi principia, quibus scientia innitatur, et ex quibus Conclusiones suas deducat, habeamus perfecta: Sed et insuperiis ita utamur, ut sola genuina acceptemus, aliena iis non admiscendo, si cognitionem solidam acquirere allaboremus.

major and decisive role in the work of Christoph Wittich in his *Dissertationes Duae*, when he argues that Scripture often speaks “according to the opinion of the people and not according to the accurate truth of the matter” (Goudriaan 1999:174-177).⁷ It is to this notion that Van Mastricht reacts in his *Vindiciae Veritatis*. It should be noted, however, that the Cartesian Accommodation Theory and the doctrine of *Accommodatio Dei* as taught by the 16th century Reformer, John Calvin, is very different. For Calvin, Divine Accommodation consists of God’s leniency to mankind in his revelation of His will. For example, God reduces his expectations of man in terms of righteousness and offers rewards for obedience; He stoops to enter into a covenant relationship with man. Various aspects of prayer is seen by Calvin as Divine concessions to human weaknesses and, for Calvin, Divine Accommodation is also present in the incarnation, whereby Christ accommodates himself to human weakness and lethargy for the sake of their salvation (Selderhuis 2009:374-376). Contrary to the Cartesian Accommodation Theory as applied to Scripture, Calvin (1979) also noted that the intention of the Holy Spirit equals the sole meaning of Scripture.

Descartes rarely quoted Scripture, and when he did, it was borrowed from other works which quoted Scripture. Neither did he ever use these quotes from Scripture to defend his philosophical positions. Goudriaan describes Descartes’s quotation of Romans 1:19-20 in his *Meditationes* as “immaterial” for his metaphysics, since the existence of material things is not a departure point in Cartesian cosmology but rather a conclusion. Descartes, however, claimed that his understanding of the physics of the origin of man, which he confessed to have been created as a perfect being, harmonizes with Genesis. The six days of creation were, for Descartes, an example of Scripture’s accommodation of its language to the opinions and sentiments of the audience at the time. Descartes would continue to say that God can bring

⁷ secundum opinionem vulgi, non secundum accuratam rei veritatem.

forward in the Scriptures *verbale mendacium* ("verbal lies") for the sake of the audience. The witness of Scripture, therefore, is to Descartes insufficient to liberate him from doubt. He attempted to reconcile Scripture with Copernican physics by saying that those passages which appear to contradict Copernicanism should be understood to be figuratively employed for the sake of its original audience (Goudriaan 2012:298-299).

2.7 Cartesianism and the Dutch Reformed Scholastics

Cartesianism's breakthrough in the Netherlands was partially due to the great concentration of Cartesians at Leiden, the most influential university in the republic at the time. Adriaan Heereboord (1614-1659), an influential teacher there at the time, pleaded for the freedom and independence of philosophy from theology, a freedom he justified by the principle that philosophy should be subject to reason alone. Despite fighting for Cartesianism, Heereboord never made any statements regarding the implications of Cartesian philosophy for Bible interpretation. This was, however, to be the major issue facing the Dutch Cartesians of the seventeenth century, such as himself, Christoph Wittich and Abraham Heidanus (1597-1678) (Frijhoff 2004:306-309). Johannes Cocceius, who was born in 1603 in Bremen and taught at Bremen and Franeker initially and later at Leiden, was to be Voetius's major opponent during the second quarter of the seventeenth century with regard to the debate surrounding Cartesianism and biblical exegesis. Their respective followers became known as Cocceians and Voetians respectively (Van Asselt 2001:23-26; 29). The main points of conflict were the relationship between the Old and the New Covenants, typological exegesis, the validity of the fourth commandment and most of all, the historical conception of revelation. The Voetians saw Cartesianism and Cocceianism as posing a similar threat. Voetius considered Cartesian subjectivism at odds with orthodox Christianity because of its definition of the will with respect to predestination, its conception of divine

omnipresence, its rejection of the cosmological argument for the existence of God, its methodology of doubt and its anthropological view that man's essence consists in thought (Van Asselt 2001:87) Van Mastricht was staunchly Voetian and although Wittich cannot be classified as a Cocceian, the dispute between the two groups in the seventeenth century Netherlands is noteworthy for contextual clarity in the current study.

According to Cocceius, philosophy may not be used as the criterion for the knowledge of truth, which is in harmony with godliness. Theological truths are interrelated in such a way that once one truth is given, all other truths that flow from it are necessarily given along with it. These truths rest on a certain foundation upon which the whole noetic structure is to be built. Philosophy is helpful in this regard in helping in the fight against heretics in this world. Much of what Cocceius argued for can be seen as ideas he borrowed from Ramism. Peter Ramus (1515-1572) opposed scholastic realism's speculations and distinctions which, to his mind, had no value for the practical life; he instead advocated a purely practical, efficient use of logic. As an empiricist, he wished to exclude all metaphysical presuppositions and desired no speculation beyond observable reality (Van Asselt 2001:73-74). The connection between the Ramist position and Cartesianism becomes very evident as one considers the Cartesian motivation for a *mathesis universalis* is indeed to establish man's lordship over reality, as previously noted.

Abraham Heidanus, a moderate Cartesian at Leiden, proved to be the driving force in getting Cocceius a teaching position there in 1650. Cocceius did not want to concern himself with philosophy, only with theology and he was grateful for Heidanus's view that theology and philosophy must each build its own foundation. In the *Considerationes de ultimis Mosis* (1650) he wrote that Cartesian doubt would lead to unbelief and godlessness. In the years to follow, however, Cocceius would recognize various points in Cartesian

philosophy as positive, largely due to the influence of Heidanus and his son-in-law, Frans Burman (1671-1719) (Van Asselt 2001:76-78). Another contributing factor was that Cocceius, after failing to attract as many students as his colleagues, supposedly approached Heidanus with this problem; Heidanus advised him to start speaking the Cartesian language, which supposedly led to an increase in Cocceius's student numbers (Van Asselt 2001:79).

Given Cocceius's rejection of Cartesianism, it is rather surprising that an 'alliance' would later come about between the Cocceians and Cartesians. The connection between the two is often understood in the fact that both view faith as an act of the will rather than one of understanding, something the Voetians completely rejected as a resurgence of Pelagianism.⁸ According to this understanding, Cocceian covenant theology presupposed a concept of faith in line with the concept that Cartesianism needed to ensure full harmony between faith and reason (Van Asselt 2001:82). Van Asselt (2001:83) however, believes that external factors brought about the alliance:

There were common enemies to be fought ... Cocceius first of all sought biblically orientated theology; his followers, however, discovered that this just did not work without philosophy. They felt philosophically uprooted and required a philosophical apparatus. Under these circumstances, Cartesianism volunteered itself as an ally. In this way his followers brought about a synthesis of the two systems, in spite of Cocceius' rejection of any such union.

Christoph Wittich, however, remains the first known Dutch scholastic to incorporate Cartesianism in his understanding of revelation and was

⁸ Pelagianism is the doctrine primarily characterized by a denial of original sin and an affirmation of man's ability to become righteous by the exercise of free-will.

undoubtedly influenced similarly with regards to natural theology than the followers of Cocceius was (Van Asselt 2001:83).

2.8 Christoph Wittich

Wittich was born in 1625 in the duchy of Silesia, a province in modern-day Poland, but of Dutch ancestry. He studied theology in Bremen, Groningen and Leiden, and taught theology, mathematics and Hebrew at Herborn (1651-1653), Duisburg (1653-1655), Nijmegen (1655-1671) and Leiden (1671-1687). After Wittich was appointed as professor at Herborn, the patron of the college, Count Louis Henry of Nassau, wrote a letter to several universities in the Netherlands expressing his concern about the unrest caused by the appointment of this Cartesian theologian, as well as that of another two years earlier, Johannes Clauberg (1622-1665). Specifically, the count inquired what they thought of Cartesianism and what its role in the curriculum of Dutch universities should be (Frijhoff 2004 281). After moving from Herborn to Duisberg, Wittich published his *Dissertationes Duae* in 1653, in which he discussed the “use and misuse of the Scripture” with regard to natural philosophy, and in which he argued for the Accommodation Theory, an attempt to reconcile Cartesian philosophy with Christian theology (Frijhoff 2004:305, 310).

His main purpose with the *Dissertationes Duae* was to demonstrate that Copernicus’s theories are compatible with Scripture. It is evident that Cartesianism is the foundation for the confidence with which he addresses the issue at hand. The mathematical proof of Descartes concerning the motion of the earth was to Wittich so absolute that he would find it necessary to build a theological argument around it (Vermij 2002:146-148). Wittich believed that it was the right time for a response to the Voetian objections to Cartesianism and defended a non-literal interpretation of the Bible in reaction to those who claimed that Descartes’s Copernicanism was

unscriptural. In doing this, he also helped formulate what would become an influential view concerning the relation between philosophy and theology. Wittich's writing of the *Dissertationes Duae*, therefore, can be seen as reacting to Gisbert Voetius's objections to the theory of scriptural accommodation which he expounded in the 1640s. Voetius rejected any accommodation theory that was based on an inferior estimation of Mosaic physics and elevated a foreign view of the design of the universe above that of Scripture (Duker 1910:164-165). Like Descartes, Wittich also argued for a complete separation of theology and philosophy, although Descartes even went as far as to say that he would refuse to engage in theological debates at all. Rheticus, Copernicus's only direct pupil, had written a treatise in which he argued that passages like Joshua 10 could be reconciled with his teacher's heliocentrism by understanding that God often accommodated his language to the limited understanding of the people of the time, which was published in Utrecht in 1651. This set Wittich up perfectly for writing his *Dissertationes*. Abraham Heidanus would later follow Wittich's separation of theology and philosophy (based on Descartes) and argue that the intermingling of philosophy and theology was a Roman Catholic heresy. Wittich attempted two objectives via his separation: to refute Danaeus and Voetius's attempts to reconstruct biblical physics and to refute the Socinian tendency to completely subject Scripture to the light of natural reason (Frijhoff 2004:310-312).

After attacks on the *Dissertationes Duae* (1653) he followed it up with *De Stylo Scripturae* in 1656, *Consensus Veritatis in Scriptura divina et infallibilire velatae cum veritate philosophica a Renato detecta* in 1659 and his *Theologica Pacifica* in 1671. Wittich explained that the reason for his writing the *Dissertationes Duae* was because two professors, Clauberg and his fellow German, Johannes Valentinus Andreae (1586-1654) who taught in Groningen and Herborn respectively, were accustomed to teaching that

Mosaic physics were composed in accordance with the misconceptions of the Middle Eastern audience at the time, were attacked for doing so by Martin Schoock (1614-1669) in his *De scepticismo* (1652) and by Jacob Du Bois in his *Dialogus theologico-astronomicus* (1653). These men were followers of Danaeus (Frijhoff 2004:310), who, with Gisbert Voetius, were champions of the fight for Dutch Reformed Scholasticism against Cartesianism in the seventeenth century (Frijhoff 2004:363).

2.9 Petrus van Mastricht

Van Mastricht, Wittich's opponent in this dispute, was born in 1630 in Cologne. Petrus's grandfather fled from Mastricht during Alva's reign and took up the family name Van Mastricht at Cologne. He was baptized in the Dutch Reformed congregation of Cologne. Johannes Hoornbeeck (1617-1666) gave Van Mastricht catechism lessons in that congregation, which he served from 1639-1643. Thereafter, Van Mastricht further pursued his studies at the Latin school in Duisberg before moving to Utrecht in 1647 to study at the academy there under Hoornbeeck, who taught Old Testament, Carolus von Maets (1597-1651), a professor in New Testament and Gisbertus Voetius who taught Van Mastricht didactic-dogmatic theology, whereby he received a thoroughly scholastic methodological education (Neele 2009:28-30). After completing his study in theology at Utrecht, he returned to Cologne in 1652. He was a candidate for the ministry at the time and received a call to serve as pastor in Xanten, which he accepted. He started working there in early 1653. In August 1655, the consistory at Cologne recommended the congregation at Mülheim am Rhein to call Van Mastricht, a call which he refused. He stayed on as a minister in Xanten until he eventually moved to Glückstadt in Schleswig-Holstein, where he served in a Reformed congregation (Neele 2009:31-34). In Glückstadt Van Mastricht lived in a very international and ecumenical environment, before accepting a call to teach Hebrew and Practical Theology at the University of Frankfurt an der

Oder, a university known as the “easternmost bastion of Calvinism.” He accepted this call over a separate one to be minister in Copenhagen, Denmark (Neele 2009: 36). After he completed his doctorate, Van Mastricht moved again to teach at Duisberg University in 1670, where he was involved with both the theological and philosophical faculties. The influence of the Cartesian thought of Clauberg (the first German Cartesian) and Wittich remained prominent during the time that Van Mastricht spent at Duisberg. It is interesting to note that the Duisberg theological faculty demanded that a professor should preach under supervision of the classis, and Van Mastricht began to preach for the Duisberg congregation in November 1676 (Neele 2009:39-41).

During this time Van Mastricht also completed his work, *Novitatum Cartesianarum gangraena, seu Theologia Cartesiana detecta*, which is regarded as the most influential academic attack on Cartesianism in the late-seventeenth century. Lutherans and even Jesuits like Giovanni B. De Benedictis had an extremely high regard for Van Mastricht’s polemic against Cartesianism. Michael Foertsius noted that Van Mastricht was the most commanding of all the critics of Cartesianism (Neele 2009:42-43).

Van Mastricht continued writing and publishing many works, which led to his nomination as professor by the Theological Faculty of Franeker in the Netherlands in 1675. However, Herman Witsius (1636-1708) was appointed instead of Van Mastricht (Neele 2009:44-46).

The “German period” of Van Mastricht’s life ended in 1677, when he was called to Utrecht to succeed Essenius and Voetius (Neele 2009:48). In 1682, he published the first of four books of his *Theoretico-practica Theologia*, which was well-received even in New England. In 1692 Van Mastricht also assisted the classis of Amsterdam by writing an anti-Cartesian work, the *Contra Beckerum*, because of the classis’s battle with Baltasar Bekker (1634-

1698). He also published the final edition of his *Theoretico-practica Theologia* (Neele 2009:52-55).

Due to physical weakness, Van Mastricht limited himself to a couple of lectures weekly from his home from 1700, and eventually died on February 9, 1706 (Neele 2009:57).

2.10 Conclusion

Cartesianism had a significant influence in seventeenth century Dutch Reformed scholastic circles. Reformed orthodoxy was, at the time, due to its attempt to codify a complete Reformed theological system with scholastic methodology, involved in a dynamic conversation with the philosophical developments of that era, and Cartesianism featured prominently. The two authors involved in our dispute wrote right at the height of Reformed scholasticism in the mid-seventeenth century, which adds to the importance and significance of the dispute upon the development of Dutch Reformed theology, and in particular its relationship with rationalism. Both Wittich and Van Mastricht can be regarded as champions in defending their respective positions within the theological framework of Reformed scholasticism.

In the next chapter, the focus will move to the translation and analysis of the text of Wittich's *Dissertationes Duae*, specifically the first and third chapters of his work. These focus on the application of the Accommodation Theory in the interpretation and exegesis of scriptural passages, and in particular those that address moral and practical matters.

CHAPTER 3

TRANSLATION AND TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF WITTICH'S *DISSERTATIONES DUAE*

(1) A Treatise on the use and misuse of Scripture with respect to natural philosophy

3.1 Title Page

Two Dissertations – *of which the first* examines the misuse of the Holy Scripture with regard to philosophical matters, 1. Whether the natural principle of physics is [found] in Scripture? 2. Whether it always speaks the accurate truth of natural matters, or rather more often follows the sentiment and opinion of the common people?

And the second,

relating to the disposition and ordering of the whole universe and of its original bodies and defends the sentiment of the noble Descartes about the real and quiet movement of the earth,

written by Christoph Wittich, ordained Professor of Theology in the Holy Scripture at the illustrious Duisburg Gymnasium and in that very place Pastor of the Church.

Amsterdam

Published by Ludwig Elsevier

1653

3.2 Translation of Chapter One

The state of the controversy is laid out in the order of the argument.

I. It is of the highest necessity, in the definition of knowledge, that we have full knowledge to become acquainted not only with the characteristic and true principles on which knowledge rests, and from which it deducts its conclusions, but also and above, that we use those in such a way that we can accept only those as genuine by not mixing strange things into them, if we labour at acquiring complete knowledge.

II. So far it is agreed almost unanimously about natural philosophy, that its origin is the light of reason that was instilled in our mind from the first creation by the right and legitimate use of which it came into existence, so that in the study of natural matters it is thus allowed to proceed in such a way to allow nothing except that with which it agrees, so that, although we do not acquire knowledge of all natural matters, we should be able to avoid falling into error.

III. But since there are people who attempt to add other things to this acknowledged principle by considering that even the Holy Scripture should be admitted into the register of the principles of physics, the value of the exertion will be to discern whether it agrees with the Holy Scripture, inasmuch as it is called the fountain, from which streams of *human wisdom* are drawn; that is what we are trying to determine.

IV. There are others with whom we will be occupied here; there is a twofold distinction: some people think that only in that sense the whole Holy Scripture is the origin of natural philosophy, in that wherever it speaks of natural matters, that which it says concerning these things, ought to be estimated as having been said accurately, and such things by which anybody is able to firmly support the descriptions of physics, regarding [it] different from the Holy Spirit, if he says that in the Scriptures man can sometimes better see the general opinion drawn from

perceptions, and follow it as the accurate truth. Others go further, believing that the Scriptures establish the principle of natural philosophy to such an extent that truthful physics can be drawn from it, and in the same manner brought the physics of Moses and the Christians and the *Physica Sacra* and others into the light; Casmannus¹, Danaeus², Vallesius³ and others also eagerly follow this opinion.

V. We, according to what is right to be done by all Christians, acknowledge with the greatest reverence the authority of Scripture, and we submit to it most willingly, by firmly believing that salvation is of God and the divine knowledge therein sufficiently grasped, "so that the man of God can be complete, fully furnished for every good work."⁴ Concerning the rest we have a firm persuasion that Scripture very often speaks about natural matters, as is clear, in such a way as if it is not precise (*ακριβειαν*) philosophical observation, or to such an extent that knowledge of natural philosophy cannot be drawn from there.

VI. Whether we prove irresistibly with the clearest arguments what faith will do, we hope for an attentive reader and who will consider the case without being influenced and without prejudice. Therefore we first undertake to show that Scripture very often speaks according to the opinion of men. When that has been proved, another conclusion, just as some or other following logically, will easily follow.

VII. However we ought to establish, what it is, that comes into question, so that we correctly understand the limits, and so that some place of a false claim not be allowed. Therefore, when we say that the Scriptures most often speak about natural matters, it should be known that it does so according to the opinion of the common people, not according to the

¹ Otto Casman (1562-1607) - http://rester.us/prdl/author_view.php?a_id=1041&s=0&limit=100 - Retrieved on 16/06/2013.

² Lambert Daneau (1530-1595) - http://rester.us/author_view.php?a_id=228. Retrieved on 16/06/2013.

³ Henri Valois (1603-1676) - <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15263a.htm>. Retrieved on 16/06/2013.

⁴ He quotes II Tim. 3:17.

accurate truth of the matter, and that 1. it is called the *opinion of the common people*, not in that sense, as if the whole people follow the perception of the leaders and external appearance, and this does not even often happen through those who desire to be more wise above the common people, but that the name arises from the more powerful or from the multitude, such an opinion is also understood which is founded upon the opinions of appearances and prejudices, however it happens and who hold to it, whether the name is obtained from an educated man, or whether it applies to the lower ranks.

VIII. 2. It is said that the Scripture *speaks* according to the opinion of the common people, that is, to use those formulas through which the people express their own opinion, whether it arises through uncomplicated or complicated limits: but yet the Holy Spirit does not therefore make this opinion His own, but that which He brings forth when the custom had been received and the formulas have been selected from the *trivium*,⁵ He understands correctly, just as if it is the source of all wisdom. In whatever manner also the Astronomers use the same formulas that have been derived from apparent prejudices of opinions, still they do not therefore create their own prejudices, as it will be more fully revealed in the refutation of objections. For the time being the Holy Spirit does not want to reveal in Scripture the naked truth, but He leaves it neutral, while nevertheless He permits it in the writings of men, so that such speeches contribute to Philosophy, and from there whether they are accurate and whether the common people learn [from it]. Therefore, God does speak to the people, but He does not think with them and so voluntarily grants what should be granted to men. Logic prescribes in the same manner that it is in the proverb: "with the masses should be spoken, but there should be agreement with the learned and wise". And Aristotle writes in Book 2, Chapter 2: *προσαζοοντεον ταις ονομασιας τα πραγματα καταπεροι πολλοι*, "We should apply the (names of matters) as the people apply it."

⁵ The foundational disciplines of medieval and early modern university education: grammar, logic and rhetoric (Douglas 2011:164).

IX. Scripture also in that case makes use of the rhetorical figure of speech, which is called *Metonymia Adjuncti*, by placing for that very case the opinion of men, namely *Adjunctum*, as Engaged for the sake of the Opposite around which it is occupied. This Glassius states in *Holy Rhetoric*, p. 62.

X. Yet it must also be noticed that Scripture, or the Holy Spirit in Scripture, only then says that He adapts Himself to the people, when through judgement He has drawn out certain prejudices concerning natural matters: but in those matters in regard to which the people learn nothing through judgement, He judges nothing so far to speak at some time from the truth of the matter, as when Ecclesiastes 1 speaks of the birth of a river.⁶

3.3 Annotations on Chapter One

Wittich outlines two questions concerning the problem or reason that led him to the writing of the treatise in the first place. These, like all questions, arise within a particular historical context, which is stated on the title page, the second dissertation: "relating to the disposition and ordering of the whole universe and of its original bodies and defends the sentiment of the noble Descartes about the real and quiet movement of the earth."⁷ It is therefore by following the philosophical principles of Cartesianism that Wittich is able to defend Copernican cosmology, to which he refers here against what he sees as contradictions thereof in Scripture. The title page also explains his own personal context when writing this treatise: that he was a Professor in Theology and pastor in Duisberg, and that the treatise was published in 1653 in Amsterdam by Ludwig Elzevier. This places the author and the text firmly in the context of the Dutch theological and philosophical academic circles which were so heavily influenced by Cartesian philosophy during the era of Reformed

⁶ Ecclesiastes 1:7.

⁷ *Dispositionem et Ordinem totius universi et principalium eius corporum tradit, sententiamque Nobilissimi Cartesii, de vera Quiete et Vero motu Terrae defendit.*

scholasticism, particularly the period at the end of early Reformed orthodoxy and the beginning of high Reformed orthodoxy in the middle of the seventeenth century (Muller 1987:37-38).

Wittich identifies the subject of the treatise, i.e. "the use and misuse of Scripture with respect to natural philosophy,"⁸ which firmly places a certain expectation within the mind of the reader. The reader can rightly expect it to be a defense of the Cartesian Accommodation Theory – as regards the relationship between revelation and natural science, of which Wittich was one of the most outstanding proponents (Frijhoff 2004:305, 310).

The purpose of the work's first chapter is to explain the nature of the controversy at hand. Wittich's Cartesian approach is evident from his very first paragraph. He expresses the sincere desire to come unto "genuine" and "unmixed" (*genuina* and *aliena* *non admiscendo*) knowledge of the truth (par. I), as he desires to free himself from all deception and doubt. The foundation on which genuine and unmixed knowledge rests is, according to Wittich, the reason of an enlightened mind (par. II): "so far it is agreed almost unanimously about natural philosophy, that its origin is the light of reason."⁹ He then, however, immediately dismisses any atheistic understanding of the light of reason as he affirms that this reason *menti nostrae a prima Creatione inditum* ("was instilled in our mind from the first creation"). His choice of the word *inditum*, the past participle of the verb *indo*, indicates that this gift of reason is to be understood as something which has its origin *extra nos*, and therefore it is by divine allowance that the study of natural matters can proceed freely. He then continues in the Cartesian trend, arguing that reason is the bastion against error and deception and by its correct application "we should be able to avoid falling into error."¹⁰

⁸ De Usu et Abusu Scripturae in Philosophia Naturali.

⁹ De Naturali Philosophia hactenus fere constat inter omnes, eius Principium esse Lumen rationis.

¹⁰ Nobis queamus cavere, ne in errores incidamus.

In paragraph III Wittich explains the purpose of the current treatise, which is to determine whether that which agrees reasonably with natural philosophy, also agrees with the witness of Scripture.

Wittich explains that there are three positions, to which he refers as *duplici differentia* ("a twofold distinction") regarding the matter at hand in the fourth paragraph, 1.) that the principles of physics are accurately described in Scripture; 2.) that Scripture speaks concerning natural matters according to the opinion of the common people at the time of its writing and 3.) that the true principles of physics and natural science can be deduced from Scripture.

He continues to state in paragraph V that he, as all Christians should, willingly submits to the authority of Scripture in matters of salvation, i.e. when it directly reveals knowledge of God. He quotes II Timothy 3:17 as support. However, he confirms his belief that when other matters are addressed in Scripture, it is not to be necessarily believed over the conclusions of the independent study of natural science and philosophy. Wittich, however, acknowledges that many of the faithful might be disturbed by this proposition, thus begging them in paragraph VI to rid themselves of all prejudice.

He proceeds to explain what he means by *vulgi opinionem* ("opinion of the common people") in paragraph VII, namely, that the distinguished leaders of the people, if not the masses themselves, came up with the various names and explanations regarding the natural phenomena they observed in the world around them. Wittich alleges that whether they arose from the leaders or the masses, they undoubtedly arose from *sensuum et praejudiciis* ("prejudices of opinions"). The Cartesian *via moderna* is primarily characterized by its desire to overcome what it considers to be prejudice, often caused by the observation of the senses, with hyperbolic doubt (Beck 2001:208). This presupposition is central in Wittich's analysis of Scripture's treatment of moral and practical matters.

In paragraph VIII of this chapter Wittich comes to the core issue at hand: the nature of the inspiration of Scripture, and consequently the nature of the content of Scripture. It should, for the purpose of our current study, first be noted that Wittich indeed does affirm that Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit and is not produced by men independently of His guidance. This is evident when he states:

It is said that the Scripture speaks according to the opinion of the common people, that is, to use those formulas through which the people express their own opinion, whether it arises through uncomplicated or complicated limits: but yet the Holy Spirit does not therefore make this opinion His own, but that which He brings forth when the custom had been received and the formulas have been selected from the trivium. He understands correctly, just as if it is the source of all wisdom.¹¹

However, according to Wittich, the Spirit actively chooses to allow freedom on natural matters to remain with the human authors of the biblical texts. According to Wittich the Holy Spirit remains indifferent to these prejudiced opinions of the authors of Scripture, as He is not concerned with it. The Spirit concerns Himself only with the core message of the passages and not with the natural matters described therein. Although the Spirit is able to reveal with absolute accuracy those natural matters, He doesn't. To buttress this *modus operandi* Wittich cites Aristotle, who wrote that for the sake of the message, it is useful to address matters in a way familiar to the audience; and Scripture often engages in this rhetorical figure of speech, as Glassius noted. This figure of speech is known as *Metonymia Adjuncti*, a form of metonymy in which a human opinion is presented as if it were the thing (reality) itself.

¹¹ Loqui dicitur Scriptura secundum opinionem vulgi, hoc est, utiillis formulis, quibus vulgus suam opinionem exprimit, sive hoc fiat per terminus simplices, sive per complexos: at non ideo etiam Sp. S. hanc opinionem suam facit, sed id quod more recepto et formulis e trivium desumptis profert, recte intelligit, pro ut est fons omnis Sapientiae.

Adjunctum is derived from the Latin verb *adjungo*,¹² which means “to connect to” or “to join to.” The fact that Wittich supports this description of this rhetorical phenomenon also indicates that he does not believe God had any malicious intent when departing from absolute truth in the Scriptures.

In the tenth and final paragraph of this chapter, Wittich notes that, had the Holy Spirit not accommodated His speech in Scripture to those prejudiced, uninvestigated opinions of men, it would have resulted in a lengthy discussion of those side matters in the Scriptures, drawing the attention away from the central message of Scripture. He concludes his first chapter by giving his first scriptural example of what he understands to be the application of this principle, i.e. Ecclesiastes 1:7, which speaks of “the birth of a river.”¹³

3.4 Translation of Chapter Three

Many places in Scripture are shown, which contain discussions concerning to practical and moral matters according to the opinion of the common people, which is severed from the truth.

I. The seventh argument is formed by us as such: even if many expressions of the common people regarding moral and practical matters are found in the Scripture according only to the opinion of the common people and not according to the truth of the matter, what wonder is it if it is argued that the Scripture often in natural matters follows the erroneous opinion of the common people? At least, if this would be not allowed here, it is clearly so that much less would have been allowed to be done with regard to moral matters, which relate closer to the goal of the Scriptures, than natural matters. It can be shown by many examples in the Scriptures, from which we propose the following: 1. The passage chosen is from Isaiah 49:24, together with verse 25: “Shall the prey be taken

¹² *Adjunctum* and *adiungo* in Classical Latin.

¹³ de fluminum ortu.

from the mighty? Or the captured of the righteous be delivered? But thus says Jehovah: 'Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the tyrant be delivered'." What is in the first verse called righteous, is in the following called a violent tyrant. Therefore, this is not righteousness, but nothing else but the opinion of that tyrant, who knows to conceal all his violence that had been done in the name of righteousness. For as we suspect that an error crept in, so that instead of קִידָּץ ("righteous one") in the former verse, it should read טִירָּן ("tyrant"), as some interpreters prefer, no necessity compels. Marloratus¹⁴ has complete confidence in this point, whose words are these:

In the meantime, this similarity has to be carefully noted, namely that the Church is oppressed by the tyranny of leaders and is exposed to the throats of wolves, and nevertheless the righteous is thought to be their prey! But in whatever manner they often boast that they are righteous lords and pride themselves on an empty title, the Lord declares that they are extremely unrighteous when He indicates that He Himself will be the avenger and that his power will burst forth for them.

II. A passage similar to this is Proverbs 18:17, which according to the Hebrew text has these words: "A righteous man, who was first in his lawsuit, arrives at his neighbour and investigates him", in which place the interpreters by "a righteous man" understand him, who to himself seems righteous. See Cartwright,¹⁵ the Dutch annotations¹⁶ and Junius.¹⁷ Matt. 9:13: "For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." By "righteous" Christ understood the Pharisees, who were so swollen up in their own righteousness and seemed to appear righteous to

¹⁴ French Reformer Augustin Marlorat (1506-1562) - <http://vufind.carli.illinois.edu/vf/Search/Author?author=Marlorat,%20Augustin>. Retrieved on 15/06/2013.

¹⁵ Thomas Cartwright (1535-1603) - <http://www.biblestudytools.com/history/brook-lives-puritans-vol-2/thomas-cartwright.html>. Retrieved on 10/06/2013.

¹⁶ On the Dutch *Statenvertaling*.

¹⁷ French Reformed Biblical Scholar Franciscus Junius - <http://www.juniusinstitute.org/about/junius/>. Retrieved on 11/06/2013.

themselves, since they were no less than those people, with which explanation the interpreters, namely the Dutch annotations, Pareus¹⁸ and Musculus,¹⁹ agree. A similar passage Ezekiel 3:20: "But if a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity" is interpreted by the Dutch annotators; although it could perhaps be accepted differently, I shall nevertheless add their words; *een rechtveerdige te weten in den schijn voor de menschen niet in der waarheyt voor Godt. Alsoo is het woord rechtveerdigh genomen.* Proverbs 18:17, Ezekiel 18:24, 26 and chapter 33:13. Matt. 9:13. Luk. 18:9, 14 the same, *geloove voor een schijn-geloof.* Luk. 8:13; Acts 8:13. *Ende liefde voor schijn-liefde* 1 Joh. 3:12, which in the Latin translation I render as 'righteous', namely in appearance in the sight of men, not in the truth of the matter in the sight of God: so is the word 'righteous' taken. Proverbs 18:17, Ezekiel 18:24, 26 and Chapter 33:13. Matt. 9:13 also, faith rather than the appearance of faith. Luk. 8:13; Acts 8:13, and love rather than the appearance of love, 1 John 3:12.

III. Proverbs 30:19: "The way of a man with a virgin." Here in Hebrew we have the word עַלְמָה ("a girl of marriageable age"), which the interpreters establish always indicates a virgin, untouched, who has not yet known a man in order to preserve her virginity, as of Mary, the mother of our Lord, of whom Isaiah foretold in his seventh chapter. But when the Jews object to this passage in Proverbs 30:19, in which they prefer to have the word עַלְמָה to be taken for a corrupted maiden, for in the next verse it is said: "This is the way of an adulterous woman", they reply that here it should be taken for such a person who becomes a virgin, according to the glory (*δοξαν*), because she presented herself as a virgin. Thus Cartwright concerning this passage [says]:

¹⁸ David Pareus (1548-1622) – German Reformed Theologian - http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/encyc08/Page_353.html. Retrieved on 11/06/2013.

¹⁹ Wolfgang Musculus (1497-1563) - <http://www.biblicaltraining.org/library/wolfgang-musculus>. Retrieved on 16/06/2013.

The Jews do not consider that the prophet of the Jews in this phrase *συγχωρηζῶς* (i.e.) speaks by special permission, just as he openly declares in the following verse; thus, although she is surely corrupted, she nevertheless presents herself as a virgin. In the same way enchanters, even though they are remarkably foolish, because they however wanted to be held as wise, and are held [as such]. They are not once called wise men in the Scriptures.

Similarly Scultetus²⁰ [writes] on Is. 7: Although the reference in Proverbs 30 speaks of a corrupted young woman:

That virgin, however, certainly cannot be called this truthfully (*αληθῶς*), but either by a disablement (*εἰρῶνικῶς*) or appearance (*δοξασιχῶς*) (note here that *εἰρῶνικῶς* is said while at the same time *δοξασιχῶς* is understood) it is not absurd.

Thus also Ursinus on Chapter 7 of Isaiah: "He calls her a virgin, that is, how a virgin is seen or how the virgin wants to be seen, even if she is indeed not a virgin, it is, not truly a virgin, but in appearance."

IV. Jer. 28:1: "Hanania the son of Azur the prophet, who was from Gibeon, spoke to me." And verse 5. "Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke to the prophet Hanania." Hanania is here equally called a prophet, as also Jeremiah [is], when nevertheless he is nothing of it, but a false prophet and a seducer of the people. Thus Hanania was not a prophet according to the truth of the matter, but according to the opinion of the Jews, who were deceived by himself. And thus Piscator²¹ in the notes on Jeremiah remarks: "He who declared himself a prophet. It is said according to opinion (*Κατα δόξαν*)."

²⁰ German Reformed Theologian Abraham Scultetus (1566-1625) - http://brillonline.nl/entries/religion-past-and-present/scultetus-abraham-SIM_025409?s.num=2. Retrieved on 11/06/2013.

²¹ German Reformed Theologian Johannes Piscator (1546-1625) - <http://www.encyclo.co.uk/define/Johannes%20Piscator>. Retrieved on 04/09/2013.

V. Mark 6:10:²² Herod Antipas is called king: "Now King Herod heard of Him," while however he was not a king, but only a tetrarch, just as he is called in Matthew 14.²³ And Josephus relates in his Book 17 on the Ancients, that after the death of Herod the Great, Caesar Augustus gave to Archelaus the middle part of the kingdom, which his father had possessed, the other part he distributed between the two remaining sons of Herod the Great, Antipas and Phillipus. Thus none of Herod's sons were made king, not even Archelaus, to whom befell half the kingdom and that had been the promised kingdom, and would have obtained [it] had he not incurred the wrath of Caesar, as can sufficiently be gathered from Josephus. Therefore Antipas could not in the cited place differently be called a king, except for the fact that he conducted himself as a king, and so in his own opinion and that of the people, he was regarded as king.

VI. II Cor. 4:4: "In the case of those people, the god of this age blinded their minds, namely the unbelievers." Here the devil is called the god of this age, but it cannot be understood other than by appearance (*δοξασιχως*) and putatively, even as it also must be, when the idols of the nations are throughout Scripture called gods, as among others in Ex. 23:24: "You shall not bow down to nor serve their gods", that is, of the Canaanites and other peoples, which God drove out before the eyes of the Israelites. Hence also the theologians, expressly those in Leiden in the Synopsis of Theology²⁴ Dispute 6 Article 13; where they attend to the name of God, remark:

It is either taken properly or improperly, improperly also either communally (*κοινωνικώς*) when it is attributed either to angels or men and others on account of excellent dignity or it is believed (*δοξασιχως*) from opinion and the deception in false gods.

²² Wittich seems to have used an incorrect reference here. The text he quotes is Mark 6:14.

²³ Verse 1.

²⁴ *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* (1625) composed by Johann Polyander, Andreas Rivetus, Antonius Thysius and Anthonius Walaëus (Van Den Belt, 2008: 148).

VII. Gal. 1:6: "I marvel that you are turning so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel." The doctrine of false apostles Paul calls another gospel, that is, according to the opinion of those men, since it is opposed to the gospel of Christ, and so being unworthy of the name Gospel. And so the interpreters explain; Perkins²⁵ comments on these words:

to another Gospel - to a different doctrine of salvation, which according to the opinion and words of false teachers, is another kind of gospel, more free and more distinct than that which Paul taught.

Musculus:

It could be, either that they themselves called their own doctrine another gospel or that their audience said so: this is a different gospel from that, which Paul preached to us: and so the Apostle imitates (*μίμητικῶς*) that seductive doctrine and proclaimed it another gospel. But the other which is not the gospel, cannot really be another gospel, just as a man cannot be another, who the man is not, and another Christ, who is not Christ; and another God, who is not truly God.

VIII. Hebrews 7:3. It is said of Melchizedek, that he was "without father, without mother, without descent: having neither beginning of days, nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, and remains a priest eternally." In any case, what is said concerning Melchizedek cannot be accepted as according to the truth (unless we want to follow the opinion of Cunaeus²⁶ in *de Republica Hebraeorum*, who through Melchizedek he understands as the Son of God Himself, to whose opinion, among the others, he is especially opposed, because the Son of God cannot be a type of Himself) for when a man has been, as the more probable opinion carries, even the

²⁵ William Perkins (1558-1602), the English theologian. - <http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/meetthepuritans/williamperkins.html>.

²⁶ Dutch scholar Pieter van der Kun (1586-1638) - http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0005_0_04759.html. Retrieved on 16/06/2013.

King of Salem, he undoubtedly had his own parents, genealogy, etc., but it is according to our knowledge that his parents are unknown. Therefore, just as Scripture in the previous examples adapted itself to our opinion, to be spoken according to our opinion about the matter, so here it accommodates itself to our knowledge so as not to speak that which is true, but to deny that which we do not know. The interpreters agree here and so also Pareus: "He is said to have been without father, without mother, not that he was as such in reality, but because the Holy Spirit represents it as such in history." In the same way Scultetus in the Epistle to the Hebrews, similar to what Gualtherus²⁷ has: "Scripture states it as such, not that he really would have been so in reality, or still survives, but so that he was made like the Son of God, that is, he proposes the same for the sake of the representation."

IX. In Jos. 2 it is said of the scouts, that some of the Jerichonians had pursued them. V. 7: "The men pursued them by the roads to the Jordan, through every single ford." V. 16: "Go to that mountain, lest the pursuers meet you." V. 22: "They departed and went to the mountain, and stayed there for three days until the pursuers returned, for they looked for them all along the way, but did not find them." In the Hebrew it has נָשִׁים רֹדְפוֹתָם which, if literally translated, will be "the men pursued after them." But those men were first hidden in the stalks of flax, which was on the roof of the house of Rachab, and then hid three days unnoticed in the mountains according to Rachab's advice. They could not then in the true sense be in pursuit of them, but here again we have an example of Scripture not speaking according to the truth of the matter, but according to the opinion of those people, namely the persecutors.

X. I Sam. 28:12: "When the woman saw Samuel", v. 14: "Saul, recognizing it was Samuel", v. 15: "Samuel however said to Saul 'Why have you disturbed me by summoning me?'" , v. 16: "And Samuel said to

²⁷ Rudolf Gualther (1519-1586) - <http://www.oxforddnb.com/index/68/101068323/>. Retrieved on 16/06/2013.

him: 'Why do you therefore consult me?'"', v. 20: "so much so that he was afraid because of the words of Samuel." That he who was summoned here by the witch at Saul's insistence, was the devil, is clear among all the orthodox believers, or mostly in that argument, that in no way to the devil, whose works magicians and necromancers make use of, such power is granted by God, so that at his holy command the holy dead should be subjected, by which he could dispose of their minds for his own pleasure. Meanwhile, more than once Samuel is mentioned, hence also the Ecclesiastical Apocrypha seems to have taken it as an occasion to truly connect this to Samuel. However Samuel is mentioned, because it brought back the appearance of Samuel and also from the opinion of Saul and the witch, not according to the truth of the matter. And this passage is a very strong [example] to prove our opinion.

XI. A similar passage is Deut. 18:10, 11: "There shall not be found among you one who practices witchcraft, or one who conjures a medium, or a soothsayer, or one who calls up the dead." Here the necromancers are said to consult the dead, when this is only done in the opinion of those men and others, not in the truth of the matter: they think that they consult these or those dead persons and initiate a conversation with them, while, however, it becomes the devil, who appears to them in the form of the dead, and deceives them.

XII. John 5:31: "If I testify about Myself, My testimony is not true." That is, according to your opinion, when you could be able to be doubtful about Him; for in other matters relating to the truth, the testimony of Christ is always steadfast, since He is truth itself, as He himself teaches in John 8:14, "Even if I testify of Myself, My testimony is true."

XIII. Phil 3:7: "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted as a loss on account of Christ." What was gain to me, not in reality, but in my opinion, which I had when I was not yet converted of the observation of the Decalogue and other constitutions, now of God and then of men by

which I wanted to be justified - those I now judge as dangerous to the divine light since I have been enlightened and I judge rightly.

XIV. Tit. 1:12: Epimenides is called a prophet of the Cretans: but he was not at all according to the truth of the matter, but only according to their opinion since he was held among them in such high esteem, that even after his death they made sacrifices to him, as Diogenes Laertius reports. Calvin's explanation may be noted here:

When the poets are sometimes by the Greeks called prophets, just as with the Latin poets, I simply accept it as a teacher: hence the title (as it seems) arose since they were always held as a 'divine race moved by divine inspiration' (γενος θειον και ενθουσιαστικον). Hence, also Adimantus in the second book of Plato's *Πολιτεία*, after he called the poets the sons of the gods, also adds that they have been made their prophets. I can therefore see that Paul accommodates his discourse to the common usage.

XV. II Pet. 2:1: "But there are false prophets also among the people etc., even denying the Lord who purchased them, and bring unto themselves swift destruction." If we look at the truth here, it certainly cannot be said that Christ has purchased them, and liberated them from sin and the bondage of the Devil, when the contrary is clear from their deeds, through which they show that they are still under the dominion of sin and of the devil. But because there are people in the external communion of the Church and who profess Christ, they seem to belong to his little flock, which Christ rescued from the jaws of Satan. And so to be "purchased" can only be accepted according to their own opinion and then [according to] the opinion of others, whereby they were considered to be redeemed.

And this is the common interpretation of the orthodox, when they reveal that the efficacy of the death of Christ pertains to the elect only. So the Dutch annotators note on this passage: *Dese worden hier gesecht van den Heere gekocht te zijn, ten aansien, dat se haer voor soodanige*

uytgeven ende dan anderen nae de liefde daer voor gehouden zijn, soo lange als zy in de gemeynschap der Kerche waren. Ziet diergelijke wyse van spreken. John 15:2. Rev. 22:19. Want Christus heeft door zijn bloedt waerlick ende in der daet alleen zijne gemeynte gekocht, Acts 20:28, Eph. 5:25. Dat is alleen die ware geloovige die altijd by Christum blijven, ende hem niet verloochen. Siet I John.2:19, Rev. 14:3-4.

That is:

They are here said to be purchased by the Lord, in that regard, that they sold themselves for such, and from others they are held as such through love as long as they are in the communion of the Church. See a similar formula of speaking in John 15:2, Rev. 22:19. For Christ by His blood truly and through His action redeemed His whole Church. Acts 20:28, Eph. 5:25, that is, only the true believers, who always remain with Christ, and never deny Him. See I John 2:19, Rev. 14:3, 4.

The interpretation of Pareus is the same:

They were redeemed 1. in regard to sufficient deliverance (*λυτεχ*) or with respect to the magnitude of the price, 2. and with respect to their own acknowledgement and boasting. For Christ paid the price for all; and many ungodly boast about Christ's redemption, but they do not apply that to themselves in faith. It is one thing to boast in truth, and another to determine through certainty that God is merciful to them for the sake of Christ's merit. 3. In the opinion of the common people.

Alstedius²⁸ consents in the *Pleiade Apostolica*, where among other things he notes here:

²⁸ John Henry Alstedius (1588-1638) – (Chalmers, A. 1812. - <http://words.fromoldbooks.org/Chalmers-Biography/a/alstedius-john-henry.html>. Retrieved on 23/11/2012).

In the reasoning of the application of Christ's death one should distinguish in justifying faith, temporary and historical faith and in the same way a boasting opinion and a judgement of love. As much as Christ purchased all and only his own sheep for faith that brings salvation (John 10), Christ even purchased the hypocrites.

But you might say: is it not sufficient if you have interpreted this passage in such a way that you say that Christ had purchased them in such a way that He fully paid that was in itself sufficient for their redemption, so that another explanation about the redemption would not be necessary. *Response*: it is not sufficient: for so Christ redeemed all and only those people, if you consider that as sufficient, for indeed [He redeemed] many worlds, that is many worlds of men who exist, have existed and will exist: but this is the discourse about those men, who were outside of the communion of the Church, and were therefore even judged to be in the internal communion with Christ, as [it] should happen according to the judgment of love. At least it will be sufficient, as you say, that they have been redeemed with regard to their acknowledgement. *Response 1*: Their acknowledgement arises from their own false opinion. 2. From that acknowledgement also arises an erroneous opinion of others about themselves. Therefore, an acceptance of redemption should nevertheless have a place as far as this opinion [is concerned].

3.5 Annotations on Chapter Three

The third chapter is summarized in the heading: "Many places in Scripture are shown, which contain discussions concerning to practical and moral matters according to the opinion of the common people, which is severed from the truth."²⁹

Wittich introduces this chapter by making the logical argument that, if Scripture is indeed written and accommodated to the opinions of the

²⁹ Ostenditur multis locis Scripturae, qui circa res Practicas et morales locutiones continent secundum opinionem hominum a veritate recedentem.

people of the time, it would include not only natural, but also practical and moral matters, since they all are intertwined in the worldview of the ancients. Therefore, we must grasp how moral and practical matters are addressed in Scripture to gain a holistic understanding of the context within the ancient world from which it arose. He says that if the Spirit did not accommodate His speech in Scripture to the common people, then there would most certainly be no accommodation with regard to moral or practical matters, *quae proprius ad scopum Scripturae spectant, quam res naturales* ("which relate closer to the goal of the Scriptures, than natural matters"). He deliberately employs the classical *a maiore ad minus* rhetorical strategy here: if the latter is true, the former most certainly has to be true. He claims that this proposition can be proven by several examples in the Scriptures, some of which he desires to point out.

His first example is from Isaiah 49:24-25. The text he quotes reads:

An auferetur a robust captura? An etiam captive turba justi eripietur? Quin sic ait Jehova et turba captiva robust auferetur, et captura violent eripietur. (Shall the prey be taken from the mighty? Or the captured of the righteous be delivered? But thus says Jehovah: 'Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the tyrant be delivered.')

That which in the text *vocabatur justus* ("is called righteous"), is, according to Wittich "nothing else but the opinion of that tyrant."³⁰ It becomes clear why Wittich chose the passive voice verb *vocabatur* when he referred to the message verse 24 conveys, as he is convinced that some kind of error crept into this text. He hereby succeeds in not giving the impression that these are the original words of the inspired author, for what is referred to as "captured of the righteous" in verse 24, "righteous" being a translation of the Hebrew word קִדָּץ, is called "prey of the tyrant" in the following verse, "tyrant" being a translation of יָדָע. Wittich claims

³⁰ nisi in opinione istius tyranni.

that the word קידצ in verse 24 is erroneous, and should read קידצ like in verse 25. He then quotes Marloratus, who taught that these verses should refer to those who exalt themselves and oppress the flock of the Lord, who also await the punishment of the Lord.

In paragraph II, the second passage Wittich references is Proverbs 18:17: "A righteous man, who was first in his lawsuit, arrives at his neighbour and investigates him."³¹ The text here only reads "a righteous man," but Wittich points to several exegetes who understood this to mean *videtur* ("appearing") righteous in his own eyes. Therefore, he argues that here again the Scripture is written from the perspective of a man and is not objectively accurate.

Next he quotes Christ Himself from Matthew 9:13: "For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."³² Wittich argues that Christ is referring to the Pharisees with the word *iustos* ("righteous"), when they were in fact, exactly the opposite. They were in reality only *turgebant propria iustitia et sibi iusti videbantur* ("so swollen up in their own righteousness and seemed to appear righteous to themselves"). He backs up his claim by saying that in the *Statenvertaling's* annotations of 1637, Pareus and Musculus are in agreement with him regarding the interpretation of this verse.

In conjunction with the Matthew text, he refers to Ezekiel 3:20: "But if a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity."³³ Again he quotes the Bible annotations of 1637 that the righteous man, as he is called here, is in truth not righteous before God, but only in appearance to men. The Dutch Bible annotations also mention that on several places in the Scripture this exact same principle is applied with regard to the use of the word "righteous," e.g. Proverbs 18:17; Ezekiel 18:24, 26; 33:13; Matt. 9:13 and Luk. 18:9, 14. The Bible also includes

³¹ Iustus, qui primus est in lite sua, advenitproximuseius et pervestigatum.

³² Non enim veni vocatum iustos, sed peccatores ad resipiscentiam.

³³ Sin avertetur iustus ai ustitia sua et faciet iniquitatem.

instances where the word “faith” actually refers to pseudo-faith, e.g. Luke 8:13 and Acts 8:13; moreover, in I John 3:12, “love” is taken for pseudo-love. He points out that this text in the Latin translation reads *iustus*, i.e. righteous. Mastricht doesn’t address this in his reply, but it is uncertain which text Wittich would have that contains the word “love” in I John 3:12, as none of the texts contain this word and all the Greek manuscripts read δίκαια (“righteous”).

He begins paragraph III by referring first to Proverbs 30:19, which he quotes as reading “The way of a man with a virgin.”³⁴ The Hebrew word here translated as virgin is *הַלְוָה*, which literally means “a girl of marriageable age.” He says that the main reason why this word has been understood by exegetes to mean a literal virgin, is because it is the same word used in seventh chapter of Isaiah, where in verse 14, the prophet clearly refers to Mary’s virginity with the same word. Therefore, when Scripture is compared to Scripture, consistency requires them to understand Proverbs 30:19 in this way. However, the very next verse reads, “This is the way of an adulterous woman”, and therefore the context of the passage makes it clear that *הַלְוָה* in verse 19 cannot possibly be a true virgin, but is rather a virgin according to her status in society, i.e. how she is perceived by the people. He however, defends the Isaiah 7 text as truly referring to an uncorrupted virgin by quoting Abraham Scultetus: “Although the reference in Proverbs 30 speaks of a corrupted young woman: ‘That virgin, however, certainly cannot be called this truthfully (*αλήθως*).’”³⁵

He quotes Jer. 28:1 and 5 at the beginning of paragraph IV: “Hanania the son of Azur the prophet, who was from Gibeon, spoke to me,” and “Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke to the prophet Hanania.”³⁶ Wittich argues that the Scripture falsely here calls Hanania a prophet, when he is not

³⁴ Viam viri in virgine.

³⁵ Quamvis locus Proverb. 30, de corrupta juvencula loquatur: Virginem tamen eam dici non quidem *αλήθως*.

³⁶ Allocutus est me Chanania filius Hazzarius Propheta, qui erat e Gibbone, et v. 5. Tum alloquens Iirmeia Propheta Chananiam Prophetam illum.

truly a prophet, but only in the false opinions of the people. Wittich therefore states that in truth he is a “false prophet and a seducer of the people.”³⁷

His next example in paragraph V is Mark 6:10. However, Wittich himself seems to have made a false reference here, since the passage he quotes (“Now King Herod heard of Him”³⁸) appears not in verse 10 of Matthew 6, but in verse 14. Nonetheless, Herod is indeed here called a king, “while however he was not a king, but only a tetrarch, just as he is called in Matthew 14.”³⁹ He is indeed called a “tetrarch” in the first verse of Matthew 14. Wittich refers to the seventeenth Book on the Ancients by Josephus, in which he writes that when the reign of Herod the Great ended, his territory was divided between his sons, none whom claimed the title of king. However, in practice they ruled as absolute monarchs, and Wittich argues that they would therefore have been considered as kings by their subjects – which, according to this understanding, makes this passage a fine example of Scripture speaking *secundum opinionem vulgi* (“according to the opinion of the common people”).

In paragraph VI Wittich refers to II Cor. 4:4: “In the case of those people, the god of this age blinded their minds, namely the unbelievers.”⁴⁰ Satan is here explicitly called the “god of this age,”⁴¹ but Wittich expresses that clearly the apostle meant this to be only *δοχαστικως* (“by appearance”), and not according to the truth of the matter. As a comparable example, he cites Ex. 23:24 as an instance where the idols of pagan nations are also called “gods.” To further support his argument, he cites dispute 6, article 13 of the *Synopsis of Theology*⁴² by the Leiden theologians, where concerning the name of God, it is written:

³⁷ Pseudopropheta et Seducator populi.

³⁸ Audivit autem haec Rex Herodes.

³⁹ Cum tamen non rex fuerit, sed tantum tetrarcha, quemadmodum vocatur Matt. 14.

⁴⁰ In quibus Deus huius seculi ex coecavit mentes, nempe in infidelibus.

⁴¹ Deus huius seculi.

⁴² Polyander, J. et al. 1625. *Synopsis purioris theologiae*. Leiden: Elzevier.

It is either taken properly or improperly, improperly also either communally (Κοινωνικῶς) when it is attributed either to angels or men and others on account of excellent dignity or it is believed (δοξασιχως) from opinion and the deception in false gods.⁴³

The name "God" in the Scriptures, they say, can be taken *proprie vel improprie* ("properly or improperly") to refer either to the one true God or to the many false gods of the pagan nations, who are, according to those peoples' opinions, actual gods.

He then turns to Galatians 1:6 in paragraph VII: "I marvel that you are turning so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel."⁴⁴ The doctrines of pseudo-apostles are here called "gospel" by Paul. Wittich says that Paul writes here according to the opinion of those who actually oppose Christ. In reality, therefore, their doctrines can in no way be regarded as gospel – since they do not proclaim the true good news about the one and only Saviour of mankind.

In paragraph VIII he refers to Hebrews 7:3, which speaks of Melchizedek: "without father, without mother, without descent: having neither beginning of days, nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, and remains a priest eternally."⁴⁵

Wittich argues that unless one is to interpret Melchizedek as Christ Himself, one cannot accept what is being said here as true. Wittich understands this Melchizedek to be the king of Salem, first mentioned in Genesis 14:18. He notes that this is an example where the Holy Spirit speaks not according to the truth of the matter, but according to the knowledge of his audience – for, in the references to Melchizedek in the Old Testament, there is never mention of his father, mother, genealogy,

⁴³ Illud vel proprie vel improprie sumi, improprie itidem vel Κοινωνικῶς quando angelis vel hominibus propter excellentem dignitatem etc. tribuitur, vel δοξασιχως ex opinione et errore falsis Diis.

⁴⁴ Miror vos itacito, desfero eo, qui vocavit vos in gratiam Christi, transferri in aliud Evangelium.

⁴⁵ sine patre, sine matre, sine genere: nec initium dierum, neque vitae finem habens, sed assimilates Filio Dei, manet Sacerdos in perpetuum.

birth or death. Wittich states that the Holy Spirit accommodates His speech “so as not to speak that which is true, but to deny that which we do not know.”⁴⁶ He quotes Gualtherus at the end of the paragraph as further support for his suggestion that the Spirit had deliberately done all of this to present Melchizedek as a prototype of Christ.

In paragraph IX Wittich refers to Joshua 2, especially verses 7, 16 and 22, where the text renders that the spies of Israel were pursued by men from Jericho. Verse 7 reads: “The men pursued them by the roads to the Jordan, through every single ford”; v. 16: “Go to that mountain, lest the pursuers meet you”; v. 22: “They departed and went to the mountain, and stayed there for three days until the pursuers returned, for they looked for them all along the way, but did not find them.”⁴⁷ The Hebrew words נָשִׂים רָדְפוּהֶם are here translated as “the men pursued them.” However, the spies hid in Rachab’s house for three days and thereafter fled unnoticed to the mountains. Therefore, the only viable answer to Wittich is that the Scriptures here spoke according to the opinion and from the perspective of the Jerichoan followers and not according to the facts of the matter.

Paragraph X starts with quotes from I Samuel 28:12: “When the woman saw Samuel”; v. 14: “Saul, recognizing it was Samuel”; v. 15: Samuel however said to Saul, ‘Why have you disturbed me by summoning me?’”; v. 16: “And Samuel said to him: ‘Why do you therefore consult me?’”; v. 20: “so much so that he was afraid because of the words of Samuel.”⁴⁸ Wittich explains that, as the ritual in which Saul engaged here was essentially satanic, it could not be that the real soul of the holy and redeemed prophet Samuel was called up, but rather that the necromancer

⁴⁶ ut non quid verum est dicat, sed quia nos non cognoscimus, neget.

⁴⁷ V. 7: Viri illi persecute fuerunt eos via ad Iordanem per vada singula. V. 16: ad istum montem itene occurrant vobis qui persequuntur. V. 22: Abeuntes venerunt in montem illum ac manserunt ibi tribus diebus, donec rediissent, qui persequabantur, quaesiverant enim eos, qui persequabantur tota via illa, sed non invenerant.

⁴⁸ V. 12: Cum autem videret mulier Samuelem, v. 14: Agnoscens Saul Samuelem esse, v. 15: dixit autem Samuel Sauli, quare commovisti me evocando me. V 16: Cui dixit Samuel, quare ergo consulis me? V. 20: adeo timebat valde a verbis Samuelis.

called up a demon who appeared as Samuel. After explaining this he states: "And this passage is a very strong [example] to prove our opinion."⁴⁹ Wittich emphasizes this passage as an example, because he knows that his interpretation of this passage has a lot of support within the Protestant church community, since both Calvin and Luther interpreted the passage in a similar fashion (Buckley 2013:221). However prominent this reading of the passage featured among the Reformers, a number of Church Fathers, including St. Augustine, follow a different tradition of interpreting the appearance of Samuel as indeed a veracious account of the summoning of a spirit from Hades (Rose 2013:411).

In paragraph XI he quotes a similar passage from Deuteronomy 18:10-11: "There shall not be found among you one who practices witchcraft, or one who conjures a medium, or a soothsayer, or one who calls up the dead."⁵⁰ This law against necromancers is also written according to the opinion of the common people, or the appearance of the matter, not the truth thereof, for he states that necromancers do not actually call up the souls of dead people, but merely demons who appear in their form.

He returns to the gospel of John for his next proof text (paragraph XII), where the apostle quotes Christ as saying (5:31): "If I testify about Myself, My testimony is not true."⁵¹ He writes concerning this statement: "That is, according to your opinion, when you could be able to be doubtful about Him;"⁵² since, of course Christ, being divine, always has an absolutely truthful testimony, as He Himself also states in John 8:14: "Even if I testify of Myself, My testimony is true."⁵³ By comparing these two passages, Wittich attempts to prove that the former is indeed *secundum opinionem vulgi*.

⁴⁹ Et hic locus valde firmus est ad probandam nostrum sententiam.

⁵⁰ Ne invenitor in teutensin cantatione, aut requires pythonem, aut ariolus, aut mortuos consulens.

⁵¹ Si ego testor de me ipso, testimonium meum non firmum.

⁵² nempe, secundum vestram opinionem, cum vos possitis de eo dubitare.

⁵³ Etiam si ego testor de me ipso, firmum est meum testimonium.

In paragraph XIII he refers to Philippians 3:7: *Sed quae mihi errant lucra, ea duxi propter Christum damna esse* ("But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss on account of Christ"). In reality, things apart from Christ is no *lucra* ("gain") whatsoever – all things outside Him are *damna* ("loss"). However, Wittich notes that Paul writes here

in my opinion, which I had when I was not yet converted of the observation of the Decalogue and other constitutions, now of God and then of men by which I wanted to be justified - those I now judge as dangerous to the divine light since I have been enlightened and I judge rightly.⁵⁴

His next proof text in paragraph XIV is Titus 1:12, where Epimenides is called a Cretan prophet. As a pagan, Wittich argues, Epimenides could not truly have been a prophet, but he is merely called that because this was the opinion the Cretans held of him, "since he was held among them in such high esteem, that even after his death they made sacrifices to him."⁵⁵

He also notes the significance of Calvin's observation when he explains that within the Graeco-Roman culture there existed a common practice to call poets "prophets", and that under the word "prophet" (*propheta*) he simply understands "teacher" (*doctor*). Calvin concludes then: "I can therefore see that Paul accommodates his discourse to the common usage."⁵⁶

Finally, he starts paragraph XV of this chapter by quoting II Peter 2:1: "But there were also false prophets among the people, even denying the Lord who purchased them."⁵⁷ Wittich notes that it is clear that these

⁵⁴ in mea opinione, quam habebam, cum nondum essem conversus, de observatione Decalogi et aliarum constitutionum, tum Dei tum etiam hominis, per quae volui justificari, ea nunc detrimentos a luce divina illustrates iudicio recto iudico.

⁵⁵ cum in tanto apud illos fuerit honore, ut etiam post mortem sacrificaverint.

⁵⁶ Quare mihi videtur Paulus ad commune usum sermonem accommodare.

⁵⁷ Fuerunt autem etiam Pseudoprophetae in populo et cetera. Etiam Dominum qui illos mercatus est, abnegantes.

people were not liberated and redeemed by Christ, since it is evident from their deeds that they are still under the dominion of Satan. Therefore, he writes: "And so to be 'purchased' can only be accepted according to their own opinion and then [according to] the opinion of others, whereby they were considered to be redeemed."⁵⁸

He affirms here again that it is far from his purpose to show how or from where these prejudices arose. He follows this up by affirming the doctrine of the limited atonement of Christ. He then refers to the Dutch *Statenvertaling* annotations, which explain that though part of the visible church, these men were not part of the church invisible, i.e. the true church redeemed and sealed by Christ, those who can never fall away but will preserve unto the end. Pareus, whom Wittich quotes next, agrees with the Dutch annotations in this regard and teaches that although Christ's sacrifice was indeed sufficient for all men without exception, it applies to the elect only. Thus, according to their hypocritical profession and those who believed them, they were part of the redeemed. Finally, Wittich appeals to John Henry Alstedius who wrote in the *Pleiade Apostolica* that John 10 makes it clear that Christ died only for the sins of His sheep and not all men.

Wittich then notes: "At least it will be sufficient, as you say, that they have been redeemed with regard to their acknowledgement,"⁵⁹ but responds to this by saying that their profession itself first "arises from their own false opinion,"⁶⁰ and secondly "from that acknowledgement also arises an erroneous opinion of others about themselves."⁶¹ Therefore, to Wittich it is clear that this passage is also written according to false opinions and not the truth of the matter.

⁵⁸ Itaque illud mercaritantum est accipiendum secundum opinionem tum ipsorum, tum aliorum, qua pro redemptis habebantur.

⁵⁹ At saltem satis erint, sidicas [referring to Alstedius], eos redemptos quoad professionem suam.

⁶⁰ oritur ex ipsorum falsa opinione.

⁶¹ Exi illap rofessione oritur etiam opinion aliorum de ipsis erronea.

3.6 Conclusion

Wittich regards the view that biblical passages which address moral and practical matters should be interpreted in light of the Theory of Accommodation. To him there is no question that the Holy Spirit in those biblical passages accommodated absolute moral and practical truths to the false and prejudiced opinions of the original audience to whom the books of Scripture were addressed. For this reason, he promotes the incorporation of the Cartesian Accommodation Theory in the exegesis of these passages.

The following chapter will consist of a translation and textual analysis of the first and fifth chapter of Van Mastricht's *Vindicae Veritatis*, as these were written in direct reaction to Wittich's claims, translated and analysed in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4

TRANSLATION AND TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF VAN MASTRICHT'S *VINDICIAE VERITATIS*

A defense of the truth and authority of the Holy Scripture in philosophical matters against the dissertations of Christoph Wittich

4.1 Translation of Chapter One

In which the state of the dispute as formulated by the dissertation of Wittich, is reformulated.

As the informed author, on account of the necessity of his treatise, which he wrote concerning the *use and misuse of Scripture in philosophy* to teach the reader, two things are regarded by him to be accurate, so that he wishes to compare to the knowledge of one or other concept that is already completed for himself and admonishes at the very outset that it is sufficiently characteristic and true, so that namely: 1. "He has full knowledge to become acquainted not only with the characteristic and true principles of knowing upon which knowledge that has to be learned in addition rests;" 2. "so that he can use it in such a way that he can accept only as genuine, that to which he does not mix strange things." This has so far been sufficiently good, provided that care is taken that these two epithets 'true' and 'characteristic' are not taken as synonymous in so far as that which does not become characteristic, is not acknowledged that it is the true principle. For some or other principle can be the true principle of some or other science which is not immediately characteristic of it. As it is seen in knowledge that it is subordinate to itself, when the principles of subordinate knowledge, and likewise the conclusions of true things can indeed be called subordinate,

although not characteristic, since they are taken from a changing science and transferred to subordinated [knowledge]. So, for example, the principles and conclusions of metaphysics are true, and the genuine principles of all philosophical knowledge, although not characteristic, in so far namely that the characteristic principles of all the other sciences, by virtue of its first principle, *The same matter cannot at the same time be and not be*: confirms and proves the denial, namely by leading to the disagreeable. Even the same should be understood about the Holy Scripture, yet perhaps that [it] is not made the characteristic foundation of philosophy, but yet it is correctly called its true principle. Thus Theology, expressed in the Holy Scripture, that all other knowledge, in so far as it leads to the ultimate end, and which is so much more in relation to *scientia subalternans* is the right teaching, because their conclusions, as [it is] approved by the testimony of the first truth, as it infallibly presupposes the truth, and correctly prescribes these [truths] to other sciences as principles in such a way that whatever is objected to, that that rightly be rejected as false. Therefore, although rightly established through authority, that true and characteristic principles should be accepted, it is however not in such a manner, that all other principles even of *scientia subalternans* and conclusions are immediately rejected as spurious and false principles.

2. In the second paragraph of Wittich's dissertation he establishes and also determines what thus becomes the true and genuine principle of philosophy, namely:

the light of reason by the right use of which the study of natural matters is thus allowed to proceed in such a way to allow nothing except that with which it agrees, so that, although we do not acquire knowledge of all natural matters, we should be able to avoid falling into error.

And so that we perceive the sense and truth of the words, the following three limits come to be explained: *First*, what is *natural philosophy*? (He takes it as a kind of philosophy).

I, indeed, in order to say my way of thinking in one word, I am of the opinion that it is nothing more than a joining together of the truths, which is certainly known by the light of reason. Secondly: What principle? I assume that the notion of a principle cannot be taken as an instrumentally effective principle, by which meaning the light of reason and even of the principle of theology is correctly established, for without reason we cannot perceive the truths of the Holy Scripture. Therefore, I would think that the voice of the principle here indicates the same as the truth and the general notion, from which is taken other propositions just as conclusions, and the same also happens in the case of *the rule, canon, norm of truth*, brought forth from some or other general notion. Thirdly: What is the light of reason? For what is taken for the light of reason is twofold. 1. Such as it was in the state of integrity by all, namely: far removed from deceitful fog. 2. Such as it is during this time among mankind after the Fall, in the knowledge of indeed supernatural things, deeply deprived and as far as a knowledge in natural matters, gravely wounded. Again the light of reason can be considered, *either distributively*: as far as it appears in this or that subject, e.g. in Aristotle, Plato, Descartes and others, *or collectively* as far as it is uniformly imprinted in the minds of all. Thus, it is asked: Whether, when the light of reason constitutes the principle of true philosophy, is it understood distributively? Thereupon it was revealed to him, which man's reason he eventually recognizes for such a principle, that of Aristotle or of Descartes? Or whose eventually? But if, however, he wants it to be accepted against the collective *light of reason*, then again I ask: Whether the perfect light of reason acknowledges that it is the principle of philosophy? Or could it indeed be perceived that imperfect is sufficient for this? It cannot later be

established because it cannot be understood why which reason an incorrect reason could be a real principle of some or other certain and firm knowledge such as the philosophy is that we have already laid down. But if the light of reason is absolutely perfect, and he wants to have it established as the principle of his philosophy, then he shall be obliged to point out, where then he thinks this appears? So that for the origin of the matter, we are able to go in investigation of that oracle of Apollo. I have therefore safely said that the light of reason exists nowhere more perfectly, than in Scripture. And that in case of no principle can it be more solid and certain and able to build upon knowledge, than of the Holy Scripture. And consequently, whatever is conveyed with it, is to be received just as if it were true, and whatever conflicts with it, disapproved as being false.

3. And so it seems to me that Wittich's dissertation is mistaken, when he argues in the third paragraph: he establishes that the light of correct reason and the light of Scripture are something else and another light indeed, for there is one and the same truth in both, which in both ways is known to us, namely in the divine revelation and in the remnants of correct reason. Therefore, so far one and the same light of truth is in both Scripture and reason. To which degree, however, that which flows forth from reason (since reason is subject to errors) is rightly forced to the infallible truth of Scripture, as if as an assault at *Lydiu* (?), at least so far, that nothing is accepted as truth that is in opposition to it, for it is more imperfect and more uncertain, and driven by merit to the more perfect and certain.

4. Moreover with *principles* (as Wittich rightly reminds in paragraph 4), it is either accepted as *adequate*, so that all conclusions in it can eventually be resolved, or *inadequate*, so that, although not all its conclusions are true, and by virtue of the syllogistic way it can be resolved, so that some conclusions [can] be acknowledged as truths, however they are not held in that principle, still those conclusions however, which are repugnant, [can] be

rejected as false. We defend that Scripture in the latter way is the principle of philosophy.

5. Furthermore, the dissertation of Wittich first proposes in his own opinion, and then explains it; he proposes in paragraph 5:

Concerning the rest we have a firm persuasion that Scripture very often speaks about natural matters, as is clear, in such a way as if it is not precise (*ακριβειαν*) philosophical observation, or to such an extent that knowledge of natural philosophy cannot be drawn from there.

On these words we comment here in passing. If knowledge of natural matters cannot for that reason be drawn out of Scripture, because that which it often said concerning natural matters are not what they are, but appear as if they are, or, to say it in one word, [they are] ordinary, and also even of moral and practical matters, indeed the learning of matters of faith cannot be drawn from Scripture, a consequence of reason: since (as is seen from chapters 3, 5 and 8) [it is] about moral and practical matters. Indeed concerning matters of faith, which are in some way knowable by the light of reason, Scripture is said by the dissertation of Wittich, "to speak according to the opinion of the common people, which is severed from the truth."

6. He explains the proposed thesis further in paragraph 7 and those following, which we shall see in the order, and if anything which occurs deserves comment, we shall add it. Thus paragraph 7 explains what he understands by the *opinion of the common people*: namely: "such [an opinion] which is founded over the apparent prejudices of opinions." It should be noted here 1. The opinion of the people, which is dependent upon the appearance of the senses, very often agrees with the truth of the matter itself. For if the senses will always or for the most part be deceived, the certainty of all knowledge is gravely diminished, and especially of physics. For every kind of knowledge, which is in understanding, first originates from

the senses. 2. We add in this place that it could be treated about the opinion of the common people is of this kind, which is conjoined with falsehood, or dissent from the truth of the matter, which is less accurately called *Opinion* by the author; when opinion becomes a disposition of doubtful true intellect, and also a disposition that is certainly false, it is more correctly called *error*. Therefore the accurate question of such a proposition ought to be: *Whether the Holy Spirit most often speaks falsely according to the common people.*

7. In paragraph 8 of Wittich's dissertation he explains what he understands under "to speak according to the opinion of the people, that is (he says) to use those formulas through which the people express their own opinion, whether it arises through uncomplicated or complicated limits." Response: This is not because there is a controversy between you and your adversaries, [on] *whether Scripture can use the formulas of the common people*. But, whether Scripture can use the formulas of the common people, that is, propositions or representations, assertions of axiom, which contain and express a certain false sentiment and indeed in such a way that it is their own. Furthermore, we willingly concede that to express the truth concerning natural matters, the Holy Spirit is able to apply the formula of speaking of the common people.

Yes indeed, we willingly admit that the same can often be done when considering matters of pure faith. In the meantime [we admit] that he can apply the formula which by itself indicates falsity, to please the common people; we are certainly tainted. He freely says

that the Holy Spirit does not therefore make this opinion of the common people His own, but that which He brings it forth when the custom had been received and the formulas have been selected out of the *trivium*; He understands correctly.

Response: 1. Gratuitously, I say, he asserts that, for what reason would have been brought forward, why the Holy Spirit extolling natural matters in this distinct manner of speaking, and the matters of faith, should be considered in these cases to make the meaning of the formulas His own with [these] words, rather than in those. For example, these two formulas of speaking, "the blood of Christ cleanses us from sin,"¹ and: "the sun moves."² I therefore ask why should the Holy Spirit, in that phrase, rather have been considered to make the meaning of that formula his own, than in this one? I place no argument here for us [other] than that they could obstruct his customary *coccismum* (?), which is namely: *the following refutes His reason*.

2. I, by the same reason, will have excused all the falsities of all the authors, by saying, that the author indeed uses this or that formula indicating falsity, [but] in the meantime perceives truth itself, so when for example Ptolemy says that the sun moves, why would I from the viewpoint of the Cartesians not say that he knows that the sun does not move, but that the earth [moves], although he might perhaps use a formula indicating the contrary, just like when the Holy Spirit, in Joshua 10 says that the sun moves, He understands that the sun does not move, but the earth.

3. When Paul makes the formula of Menander in I Cor. 15:33³ and of Epimenides in Titus 1:12, and of Aratus in Acts 17:28⁴ his own, is it to say that he does not make the perception and the opinion of those authors his own?

4. In whichever formulas of speaking, which he knowingly and willingly uses in a different meaning, in what he speaks to whom is not only uncivilized,

¹ Probable reference to I Joh. 1:7.

² A reference to Joshua 10:12-13 (among others) – see the end of the paragraph.

³ Paul's advice that evil communication corrupt good manners is "generally supposed to have been taken from Menander's lost comedy of Thais." – Adam Clarke (1979) on I Cor. 15:33.

⁴ In this verse the apostle Paul quotes Aratus.

but also deceptive because in both cases it is blasphemy to reflect about the Holy Spirit.

5. If the Holy Spirit in those formulas of speaking produces another, (because that formula produces and expresses the false opinion of the common people) while He understands and thinks something else, then He engages in a defect formula of a lie, which is nothing other than to speak in another way than one feels, and so Wittich's dissertation, wanting by his reply to avoid Charybdis, falls into Scylla.⁵

6. That a similarity taken from the astronomers does not affect the case, we shall show in the claim of the first argument in Chapter 8.8.

7. *To permit learned men to bring together such expressions [of the Holy Spirit] with philosophy, and to teach from there whether they are accurate or of the people.* This is nothing other than the Holy Spirit permitting the philosophers, Aristotle and others a judgement about the Holy Scripture, to explain wisdom, so that it could be judged by its daughters. We have reserved the discussions of those other words for consideration in the whole of this Chapter 2.

8. He continues:

Therefore, God does speak with the people, but He senses not with him (but with Descartes and other wise men) and so voluntarily composes what He prescribes to men that should be done through logic.

Response 1: The logic of nobody, perhaps by chance the Cartesian [logic] prescribes to speak falsely to the sense and satisfaction of another. 2. If it

⁵ Two mythological monsters living on either side of the Strait of Messina, featured in Homer's *Odyssey* and Virgil's *Aeneid*. Scylla dwelt on the rock of Scylla, opposite Charybdis, a whirlpool on the coast of Sicily. The idiomatic reference used by Van Maastricht originated from Horace and here indicates that while Wittich is seeking to avoid one fault, he falls into the other (Room 2001:230, 1054).

did prescribe it, this would however not therefore immediately agree with the Holy Spirit, who teaches the truth infallibly and without any respect of persons, as indeed about the Pharisees and Christ in Matt. 22.

9. Not only do we not deny that the Holy Spirit ought to “name matters by the names the common people name them” with us, but on the contrary we urge against you in this passage, since from this it follows, that He himself ought not to express the true opinion, after the formulas had expressed the false opinion of the people.

8. Further, that there is in this kind of speaking *Metonymia Adjuncti*, by which the (false) opinion of the common people is regarded in place of the truth, as in paragraph 9 of Wittich: what he proposes, we deny with this reasoning. 1. Figurative expressions are not false, as we submit that those formulas are that express the false opinion of the common people, but in those matters words are transferred from the truth of the matter to indicate a matter that is likewise true. 2. We do not intend to express false opinions of others through metaphorical expressions, but that a true comparison and analogy, to intercede with the proper matter, is indicated with a metaphorical meaning of the matter, either a third or both, namely: that the proper and metaphorical matter is indeed present, although of the proper matter, and more evidently, or through a greater extent. But in the case of the formulas of the common people the Holy Spirit does not intend to indicate the third kind, indeed of both agreeing through analogy, but only to express the false opinion of the people, and that His truth does not offend them. Of this see more below in Chapter 8 paragraph 12.

9. In the last paragraph of this chapter of the dissertation of Wittich, he determines when the Holy Spirit uses false expressions of this kind according to the opinion of the people. *Namely:*

[He] has drawn out certain prejudices concerning natural matters: but in those matters in regard to which the people learn nothing through judgement, He judges nothing so far to speak at some time from the truth of the matter.

Response 1: They therefore obtain false statements of this kind in: 1. In all natural matters, of which the people suffers from some prejudice, 2. in the majority of those, of which the common people know nothing through the senses, 3. *sometimes*, however, in those cases he speaks from the truth of the matter; add a reader in moral and practical matters, as from the third chapter of the first dissertation to see what it is and that in some way matters of faith are recognizable in Chapter 5 paragraph 8.

2. Take care, therefore, reader, to simply believe the Holy Spirit in these cases, but first compare it with your understanding, until you become one of the number of wise men.

3. From where shall we know for certain that the people, in the time of Moses and the prophets concerning this or that matter, had some prejudice?

10. From these it is now clear what becomes the essence of our controversy, namely: 1. The question is not whether the Holy Spirit, to express some truth, sometimes uses coarser words of the common people, for the sake of indicating the matter less equally, provided that they truly express that which should be indicated. 2. The question is not whether metaphorical *anthropopathicae* or allegorical expressions are found in the Scriptures, for those expressions are in themselves absolutely truthful, since that third one, and that analogy, which the Holy Spirit intends to indicate in them, is expressed truthfully. 3. The question is not whether the Holy Spirit occasionally in order to express the real matter, can use words which drew their origin from some prejudice of the people, as long as they truly express the matter that is to be indicated from daily use, for in the meaning of the

words, either good or bad, that name becomes imposed on this or that matter, not applied [to it], but what it indicates from use. Thus the essence of the controversy remains, therefore, in these two questions:

1. Whether the Holy Spirit, in those things which are false in themselves and display merely a naked kind of truth, can bring it about (that is, in the same way in which He usually brings forth His own opinion) only to that end that the people are not offended by His sermons.
2. Whether from the opinion in those expressions of the common people about the natural matters which the Holy Spirit has entrusted to philosophers, as namely such expressions that explore the light of reason, [one can] teach that Scripture neither speaks *accurately* (it is truly) or *commonly* (it is false). We deny either question, which the dissertation of Wittich affirms.

4.2 Annotations on Chapter One

After initiating his treatise with a dedication, Van Mastricht proceeds with the first chapter of his work, entitled "In which the state of the dispute as formulated by the dissertation of Wittich, is reformulated."⁶

He begins paragraph 1 by complimenting Wittich, referring to his treatise as a necessary and very valuable work. He also acknowledges Wittich's search for true and unmixed knowledge to be "sufficiently good" (*satis bene*). He is by no means slow, however, to criticize Wittich's Cartesian epistemology, as he accuses him of wrongly subordinating truth to knowledge. He immediately argues in favour of Scripture as the standard by which truth is measured, rather than human reason, since Scripture is the first truth which directs all other knowledge. Therefore, while Wittich might argue for empirical doubt, Van Mastricht makes it clear that other sciences must be

⁶ In quo status controversia a D. Witticho formatus, reformatur.

viewed in light of divine revelation. Thus, after acknowledging that Wittich theoretically has good intentions, Van Mastricht presents his first objection against Wittich:

true and characteristic principles should be accepted, it is however not in such a manner, that all other principles even of *scientia subalternans* and conclusions are immediately rejected as spurious and false principles.⁷

Van Mastricht starts paragraph 2 by quoting Wittich's statement concerning the *lumen rationis* ("light of reason"), namely "to allow nothing, except that with which it agrees."⁸ Van Mastricht has three questions with regard to this claim. First, he asks what is meant by "natural philosophy", which he takes to indicate philosophy in general. He then notes that reason itself is of course necessary to "perceive the truths,"⁹ although it is evident that his simple explanation of the function of reason purposefully distances himself from Wittich's position. Secondly, he asks to which philosophical principles Wittich refers. He points out that there is indeed an "instrumentally effective principle,"¹⁰ i.e. that the truths of Scripture cannot be understood or grasped by man without the use of reason. However, he rightly assumes from the context that this understanding is not what Wittich intended, and he therefore explains that "principle" here denotes "rule, canon or norm of truth." Thirdly he asks what the intended meaning of *lumen rationis* is, since there are two understandings often received. He notes that before the Fall, Adam indeed possessed a clear and attentive mind; however, this radically changed after man's reason was corrupted in the Fall, so that it is now, in its current state, "in the knowledge of indeed supernatural things, deeply

⁷ vera et propria principia esse suscipienda, non tamen sic, ut omnia aliena etiam subalternantis scientiae principia et conclusiones, ut spuria et notha statim rejiciantur.

⁸ nihil admittendo, nisi quod cum eo conveniat.

⁹ compagem veritatem.

¹⁰ principio quodam instrumentaliter effective.

deprived and as far as a knowledge in natural matters, gravely wounded.”¹¹ Then he describes the two understandings of the “light of reason”: it can be understood either distributively or collectively. Reason is distributive in the sense that it is gifted to some in certain fields of knowledge; he uses the examples of Plato and Aristotle, who were exceptionally gifted natural philosophers. Collective reason is that which is present and uniform in all people and “imprinted in the minds of all,”¹² a phrase whose passive indicates that reason originates and is given from God. If distributive reason is the intended meaning, the question which logically arises is whose reason should be accepted, for even the natural philosophers differed among themselves. On the other hand, collective reason is also insufficient to come unto any knowledge significant and meaningful, especially compared to that revealed in Scripture. Furthermore, it too is subjective in its application, and therefore Van Mastricht poses the challenge to Wittich: “If the light of reason is absolutely perfect, and he wants to have it established as the principle of his philosophy, then he shall be obliged to point out, where then he thinks this appears?”¹³ Van Mastricht therefore attacks Wittich’s presupposition here, namely that the light of reason is universally present in men. He explains that, unlike with reason, which often lets men down and in its depraved state and is rather inconsistent, Scripture is clear and sure. He thus exclaims again that the Bible should be the ultimate standard of truth.

In paragraph 3 he points to an alleged logical fallacy in Wittich’s argumentation. Van Mastricht argues that while truth is present in both Scripture and reason, and that both are to be used in the philosophical quest for knowledge, Wittich does, unknowingly, perhaps, deny the common source of all truth, since Scripture and natural reason would often be at odds

¹¹ cogitione, rerum quidem supernaturalium penitus orbatis, quoad naturalium vero scientiam, graviter Sauciatis.

¹² mentibus est impressum.

¹³ Si vero lumen rationis prorsus perfectum, philosophiae suae velit constitui principium, tum indicandum ei fuerit, ubinam hoc putet existere.

with each other. Therefore he rightly poses the question: To what degree can the light of reason override the witness of Scripture? He attempts to show that the Accommodation Theory of Wittich is in reality no accommodation (or co-operation) at all, but rather an inevitable conflict.

In paragraph 4, Van Mastricht argues that the principles of Cartesianism cannot be regarded as adequate means to the syllogistic knowledge which it claims. Scripture alone can be absolutely non-repugnant in this regard.

In paragraph 5, he contends that if the words of Scripture are absolutely contextualized, and the truths therein made out to be simply “spoken according to the opinion of the common people, which is severed from the truth,”¹⁴ then none of the content of Scripture can be viewed as absolutely true apart from that which is approved by the light of reason. This would inevitably have to be applied to practical, moral and faith matters, undermining scriptural authority at each point.

In paragraph 6, Van Mastricht quotes Wittich’s explanation of the *opinionem vulgi*, i.e. that the foundation of that knowledge is undoubtedly opinions arising from prejudices. He however maintains that, as knowledge often comes accurately through the senses, the prejudiced opinions of the people are often in complete harmony with the truth. He explains this common objection of the Reformed scholastics against Cartesianism, most notably from Voetius (Beck 2001:208): “for if the senses will always or for the most part be deceived, the certainty of all knowledge is gravely diminished, and especially of physics, for every kind of knowledge, which is in understanding, first originates from the senses.”¹⁵ This line of argument indicates that Van Mastricht sides with the Voetians in the controversy at hand. He goes on to

¹⁴ loqui secundam opinionem hominum, a veritate recedentem.

¹⁵ si enim semper aut plerumque fallerent sensus, graviter imminueretur certitudo omnium scientiarum, et praecipue physicae, quoniam omnis cognitio, quae est in intellectu, primo oritur a sensibus.

claim that Wittich is rather deceptive in referring merely to the “opinion of the common people”, his intention is thereby to convey this concept as intertwined with falsehood. He then concludes that the real and more accurate question should rather be “Whether the Holy Spirit most often speaks falsely according to the common people.”¹⁶

In paragraph 7, Van Mastricht refers to Wittich’s claim that the Holy Spirit in Scripture uses the formulas of the people whom He addresses, but thereafter insists that the dispute is not whether the Spirit actually uses these formulas of the people. The alternatives Wittich introduces are in reality no alternatives at all – since the idea that the Holy Spirit spoke in some kind of divine language about natural matters is not promoted by anyone. Wittich, therefore, wrongly believes himself to be at odds with his opponents in this regard. Van Mastricht further responds to Wittich’s sharp distinction in how the Holy Spirit speaks through Scripture on spiritual and natural matters, asking why the Spirit would accommodate His speech in the latter so that the people would understand, and not in the former. He then lists a series of objections against Wittich’s claim:

First, it would be absurd to argue that the Holy Spirit more carefully considered the readers when He authored the phrase “the sun moves”, referring to Joshua 10:12-13 (among others), than He does with the words “the blood of Christ cleanses us from sin” (I John. 1:7).

Secondly, people often speak in linguistic formulas that do not correspond with the scientific reality of the event they describe. Making use of a formula that, although linguistically sound, is technically scientifically erroneous, does not necessarily mean that the author is unaware of the scientific truth concerning the matters he describes. This is just as Cartesians themselves often use language in their speech that is technically scientifically inaccurate,

¹⁶ Anne Spiritus Sancte saepissime loquatur falsa cum vulgo.

even though they are fully aware of the scientific truth concerning the matter.

Thirdly, there are three examples where Paul quoted truthful statements from the pagan philosophers Menander, Aratus and Epimenides (Van Mastricht himself believes that Paul quotes Aratus in I Tim. 1:12 as well, yet scholars like Calvin differ from him in this regard).

With objections four to six he accuses Wittich of saying that the Holy Spirit speaks falsely, i.e. "to speak in another way than one feels."¹⁷

Van Mastricht then shows to what absurdities the Accommodation Theory can be taken with his seventh objection, as, if it is assumed that Scripture is filled with errors, then the Holy Spirit literally allows secular philosophers to judge the trustworthiness of Scripture.

Eighthly he quotes Wittich as saying that logic prescribed the Holy Spirit to speak falsely regarding several matters, accommodating them to the misconceptions of the common people. He responds by saying that no (true) logic prescribes men, much less God Himself, to bear false witness. Van Mastricht sarcastically inserts the clause "perhaps by chance the Cartesian [logic]".¹⁸ Moreover, since God is no respecter of persons, He always teaches the truth infallibly regardless of His audience.

This is evident from Christ's encounter with the Pharisees in Matthew 22, where the narrative records Jesus telling the parable of the wedding feast, and thereafter the Pharisees ask Him a question regarding taxes: whether it is lawful to pay taxes unto Caesar, since, after all, God is no respecter of persons (verse 16). Christ knows that the question is impertinent and is immediately angered by their evil intentions. Nonetheless, despite their wicked motives, they are indeed right to say that God is no respecter of

¹⁷ pronunciare aliter quam sentias.

¹⁸ nisi forte Carthesiana.

persons, so Christ rebukes only their misapplication of it. The Pharisees had completely disregarded the fact that the social order of the world was purposefully determined by God and Christ knew that they, who were students of the law of God, were completely disregarding the most basic implications of the fifth commandment.

With his ninth objection Van Mastricht explains that Wittich's analysis that since the Holy Spirit expresses Himself in the language of the common people, He therefore expresses Himself falsely, is a *non sequitur*. Wittich wrongly understands the expressions of certain natural and moral matters in Scripture to be "false opinions," simply because the mode of communication does not strive for strict technical accuracy.

In paragraph 8 Van Mastricht refutes the claim by Wittich that "there is in this kind of speaking *Metonymia Adjuncti*, by which the (false) opinion of the common people is regarded in place of the truth."¹⁹ He states that although figurative expressions can be false, they are not necessarily always false. He notes that Wittich completely disregards the semantic and stylistic function of a metaphor, since the purpose of a metaphor is to convey an analogy of the truth, and is by its very nature not to be understood literally.

In paragraph 9 Van Mastricht contends that Wittich's application of the Accommodation Theory goes much further than Scripture's description of purely natural phenomena, extending also to moral and practical matters (as he shows in chapter 3 of his work). Then he asks two related questions: first, whether learned men with secular knowledge are to be believed over the witness of the Holy Spirit; and second, whether the human authors of Scripture did indeed have certain false prejudices about specific natural matters, and if so, how they could possibly be determined.

¹⁹ esse in huius modi locutionibus metonymiam adjuncti qua opinion hominis (falsa) ponatur pro re (vera).

Finally, Van Mastricht makes a few observations to summarize the state of the controversy. He wisely commences this summary by briefly negating any possible misunderstandings regarding the controversy, which he had also discussed throughout the chapter. He says that the question is not whether the Holy Spirit expresses matters less accurately than is possible in order to accommodate the speech of Scripture to the audience at the time; neither is it about whether or not metaphorical language is used in Scripture, or whether the Holy Spirit, in His inspiration of the Scriptures, often draws words from the language of the common people to describe matters. He summarizes the real controversy in two issues: 1.) Whether or not the Spirit of God inaccurately authors certain statements, so that his reader is not offended; and 2.) Whether or not the Scriptures are in line with the findings of human reason. The dissertation of Wittich “teach[es] that Scripture neither speaks *accurately* (it is truly) nor *commonly* (it is false). We deny either question, which the dissertation of Wittich affirms.”²⁰ Van Mastricht here uses the plural form “we deny” (*nos negamus*), in my opinion to indicate the conformity between himself and all orthodox Christians. By this statement Van Mastricht also reveals his sentiments with regard to the controversy. Whereas Wittich tries to implement the Accommodation Theory to interpret Scripture in light of Copernican physics, Van Mastricht decidedly opts for a reception of the content of Scripture as truthful *through faith*.

4.3 Translation of Chapter Five

In which a vindication is given of those places in which Christoph Wittich attempts to prove that Scripture speaks about moral and practical matters from the common error.

²⁰ [indeque] discant loquatur ne Scriptura accurate (id est vere) an vulgariter (id est false). Utramque questionem nos negamus, D. Witt. affirmat.

I. The seventh argument which Wittich's dissertation brings for the confirmation of his opinion, has the following:

even if many expressions of the common people regarding moral and practical matters are found in the Scripture according only to the opinion of the common people and not according to the truth of the matter, what wonder is it if it is argued that the Scripture often in natural matters follows the erroneous opinion of the common people? At least, if this would be not allowed here, it clearly so that much less would have been allowed to be done with regard to moral matters, which relate closer to the goal of the Scriptures, than natural matters. It can be shown by many examples in the Scriptures.

Therefore:

II. Response 1. However, let a greater matter follow. The degrees through which it is finally arrived at skepticism, and yes, indeed, at the Libertines, could only be noticed in passing. Christoph Wittich said in Chapter 1 paragraph 10 that he was very often going to defend the Holy Spirit in natural matters, and indeed, yes, for the most part to talk according to the errors of the common people; this in itself is at least a great leap, not to mention that he renders the principle part of Scripture useless for us: for a large part of Scripture is occupied in those things, which by the light of reason are by some reason recognized. In this passage it would stand more firmly, and would more appropriately be defended, for the parts in this passage which are called moral matters, and it is shown, even in moral and practical matters (which more closely touch upon the purpose of Scripture) when the truthfulness of Scripture had been by-passed in order to accommodate itself to the errors of the common people, in which case it will necessarily follow that all certainty as well as opinions be eliminated from these texts. For if the Holy Spirit is understood to immediately afterwards

have spoken about moral and practical matters according to the errors of others, why shall we not reasonably suspect that the same could have happened in other cases?

The third step to completeness has thus far fallen short, here namely that the Holy Spirit, even in matters of faith, sometimes speaks according to the opinion of the common people. And this step, at least partially as far as this, namely the articles of faith, which by the light of reason are able to be perceived in another way: it is arranged above in Chapter 2 paragraph 13, when I engage with the essence and divine attributes. Not as far as the remaining part, that the matter is totally hopeless, later in paragraph 8 of this chapter on Melchizedek. Paragraph 12 will give proof about the truthfulness of Christ and paragraph 15 about the redemption by His blood. Oh, what prolific error!

But let us return to the matter. We deny the lesser, namely: that any example exists in the divine Scriptures, where God speaks about moral matters according to the false opinion of the common people.

22. The first passage is chosen from Isaiah 49:24, together with verse 25:

Shall the prey be taken from the mighty? Or the captured of the righteous be delivered? But thus says Jehova: 'Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the tyrant be delivered'. What is in the first verse called righteous, is in the following called a violent tyrant. Therefore, this is not righteousness, but nothing else but the opinion of that tyrant, who knows to conceal all his violence that had been done in the name of righteousness. For as we suspect that an error crept in, so that instead of קִידָּץ ("righteous one") in the former verse, it should read טִירָּן ("tyrant"), as some interpreters prefer, no necessity compels.

Response 1: That an error crept into the Sacred Text, should not only be suspected but also clearly against the priests, asserting that the original text is corrupt in many places, had to be denied, and when in the very present he brings division on the special providence of God concerning the preservation of the Holy Scripture as well as the infallible authority of the Scripture itself. If indeed the Holy Spirit is to be judged in this passage to have spoken according to the false opinion of that tyrant, I ask why, or for whose sake He had done this? Is it for the sake of that tyrant, in order not to offend him? Or is it for the sake of the people, the reader of this passage? First, I believe, either the dissertation of Wittich will not say, I am secondly of the opinion "that" (from his own opinion)

while Scripture is treating natural matters in a masterly way, it does not always follow the accurate truth, from there it comes forth that men have imbibed through their senses various prejudices about those signs which they hold as nature. (These words from Christoph Wittich's first dissertation Chapter 7 paragraph 11.)

When therefore this passage, and also the remaining points in this chapter, do not deal with natural matters, but practical and moral matters, with which Scripture is accustomed to deal with not in a masterly way but from a professed way, since the common people long ago derived no prejudice concerning this tyrant who certainly had not yet existed at that time, and finally, that this tyrant was not righteous was known by natural axiom, what reason was there, why the Holy Spirit would for the sake of the common people depart from the truth of the matter in this passage? 3. Why should the tyrant in this passage not be called righteous, in the same way in which some of the reprobate and unbelievers are sometimes in Scripture called branches of Christ, children of the kingdom, the people of God etc.? Therefore, when in these passages matters of faith are being treated, one

should not say that the Holy Spirit speaks falsely to capture the masses, by which reason you say that the Holy Spirit in this passage call a tyrant “righteous” according to the false opinion of that tyrant? And not rather under the law of war or the law of the sun? See the fourth note of the Dutch annotations. Nothing stands in the way of preventing us from saying that this tyrant is ironically called “righteous”: for the Holy Spirit Himself is sufficiently seen to clearly indicate, how He wants that קִדָּץ (“righteous one”) to be understood, when He, as if by the same breath explains that by יָדָץ (“tyrant”). 5. Finally, it is also uncertain if the tyrant is called “righteous” in this passage, for the words in the Hebrew text are יִמְלִיט, צָדִיק שְׁבִי-וָאֵם. With Pagnino²¹ we are able to easily interpret it here: *Or the captives of the righteous will escape?* So far as the epithet *what is right* is referred to, it is without a doubt clearer that it is not to the tyrant but to captivity through which, in this passage, the Church should be understood. Moreover, what is wrong that the Church in different respects can simultaneously truthfully be called *righteous* and *violent*? Since the Church becomes righteous, if it is considered in itself as violent in truth, in as much as [the Church] is held captive by the tyrants.

III. “A passage similar to this”, he says,

is Proverbs 18:17, which according to the Hebrew text has these words: “A righteous man, who was first in his lawsuit, arrives at his neighbour and investigates him”, in which place the interpreters by “a righteous man” understand him, who to himself seems righteous. See Cartwright, the Dutch annotations and Junius. Matt. 9:13: “For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” By “righteous” Christ understood the Pharisees, who were so swollen up in their own righteousness and seemed to appear righteous to

²¹ The Dominican Santes Pagnino (1470-1541) - <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11394e.htm>. Retrieved on 03/07/2013.

themselves, since they were no less than those people, with which explanation the interpreters, namely the Dutch annotations, Pareus and Musculus, agree. A similar passage Ezekiel 3:20 etc. is interpreted by the Dutch annotators etc.

Response 1: The response according to the preceding passage, when the necessary changes have been made, can be suitably applied to this one. 2. If he is here called righteous, who becomes so only in his own opinion, the other being unrighteous, the words following immediately, "arrives at his neighbour and investigates him," seem to indicate sufficiently that it is done ironically. 3. The words of Proverbs 18:17 can easily be accepted in this sense, first the righteous investigates himself, it is, inquires into his own conduct, before he summons his neighbour to judgement, similar to that of Christ in Matthew 7.²² First cast out the beam out of your own eye etc. 3. "In the manner of the Hebrew language he is called righteous, who is pronounced and declared to be righteous, or held as such in judgement." These are the words of Mercerus²³ at this point. But there is no objection to this argument, so that (the habit of righteousness) the most unrighteous according to the truth of the matter can not be called *righteous*. Especially for the passage Matt. 9:13, which first I note, that he deals with the matter of faith and indeed in a fundamental point. Then I deny that the passage is to be understood about the Pharisees, for if it follows that Christ had not called any of the Pharisees to repentance, [it] contradicts the whole evangelical history. For in the truth of the matter Christ did not come to call the righteous, for there were none such people in the world and, if they had existed, they would not have needed Christ's call. Neither do the Dutch annotators oppose this passage: *te roepen rechtverdige om dat daer*

²² The passage referred to here is found in Matthew 7:5.

²³ Jean Mercier (1510-1570), a French Hebraist - http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0014_0_13690.html. Retrieved on 24/05/2013.

soodanige geen en zijn, hoewel de Phariseen haer lieten voorstaen, dat se soodanige waren. From this it is manifestly clear, through the word *righteous* that those people are to be understood as righteous of that kind, of which there exist none in the world, but of those who are righteous only in their own opinion, many exist. This kind of opinion is also in Ezekiel 18:24, so that in the case of others cited by you it can conveniently be adapted. And therefore it will not be necessary to arrive at such a degree of extremity, that we can say that God speaks falsely for the sake of the understanding of the people.

IV. I proceed to the third passage that is in Proverbs 30:19:

“The way of a man with a virgin.” Here in Hebrew we have the word *עַלְמָה* (“a girl of marriageable age”), which the interpreters establish always indicates a virgin, untouched, who has not yet known a man in order to preserve her virginity, as of Mary, the mother of our Lord, of whom Isaiah foretold in his seventh chapter. But when the Jews object to this passage in Proverbs 30:19, in which they prefer to have the word *עַלְמָה* to be taken for a corrupted maiden, for in the next verse it is said: “This is the way of an adulterous woman”, they reply that here it should be taken for such a person who becomes a virgin, according to the glory (*δοξαν*), because she presented herself as a virgin.

Response: With the word *עַלְמָה* a corrupted virgin is not indicated in this passage, for if you say this, the argument of the Jews will rather strongly drive you, because from the word *עַלְמָה* in Isaiah 7, you will not be able to point out the uncorrupted virginity of the mother of Christ. Therefore it must be, that the word *עַלְמָה* as everywhere and so in this passage denotes a truly uncorrupted virgin, or who has never known a man. But the word *דֶּרֶךְ* (“way”): attempts, exertions, wonderful schemes and almost beyond

investigation, by which those adulterers and fornicators usually covet the chastity of virgins, for they attempt schemes etc. That by the word *viae* is described through the contents of the whole Old Testament²⁴ is certain and in the following verse: "This is the way of an adulterous woman." Nothing that follows immediately stands in the way of this statement: "This is the way of an adulterous woman", for with these words the attempts of adulterous women are compared, on which they depend to cover their committed crimes and strive to turn away from it, while those with which the fornicators and adulterers lie in ambush for the chastity of virgins, and it is said about those because they are just as wonderful. This meaning, indeed in my opinion, is clear.

V. I therefore proceed to the fourth passage, that is in Jeremiah 28:1. For me Hanania the son of the prophet Hazzuris is addressed here, who was from Gibeon. And verse 5. Then, Jeremiah the prophet is addressing Hanania here as a prophet.

Hanania is here equally called a prophet, as also Jeremiah [is], when nevertheless he is nothing of it, but a false prophet and a seducer of the people. Thus Hanania was not a prophet according to the truth of the matter, but according to the opinion of the Jews, who were deceived by himself.

Response 1: The word *prophet* in the Scriptures means any orator, publisher, preacher, whether he is true, or false, as in fact Hanania was, hence Rabbi Solomon²⁵ separates the word אִנְיָ from נֹב ("to speak"). 2. Although the word *prophet* particularly indicates true prophets, and what καλ ἐξωκλω indicates I don't deny, nothing stands in the way either of figurative

²⁴Abbreviated: V.T.

²⁵ Rabbi Solomon Luria (1510-1573) - <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/10192-luria#1860>. Retrieved on 28/06/2013.

discourse, or the worn out use that is also extended to others. So Titus 1:12 is attributed to Epimenides, as we will see below.

VI. The fifth passage is Mark 6:10:

Herod Antipas is called king: "Now King Herod heard of Him", while however he was not a king, but only a tetrarch, just as he is called in Matthew 14.²⁶ And Josephus relates in his Book 17 on the Ancients, that after the death of Herod the Great, Caesar Augustus gave to Archelaus the middle part of the kingdom, which his father had possessed, the other part he distributed between the two remaining sons of Herod the Great, Antipas and Phillipus. Thus none of Herod's sons were made king, not even Archelaus, to whom befell half the kingdom and that had been the promised kingdom, would have obtained [it] had he not incurred the wrath of Caesar, as can sufficiently be gathered from Josephus. Therefore Antipas could not in the cited place differently be called a king, except for the fact that he conducted himself as a king, and so in his own opinion and that of the people, he was regarded as king.

Response 1: That Herod Antipas, just as other tetrarchs are by way of metaphor called kings, the Dutch annotators assert in Matthew 14:1: *Dese Tetrarchen worden oock koningen geheeten om dat se als koningen regeerden*. You yourself acknowledge at the end of this paragraph with these words: "Therefore Antipas could not in the cited place differently be called a king, except for the fact that he conducted himself as a king" and therefore was similar to a king. 2. Herod Antipas was indeed at the same time king and tetrarch, although diverse with regard to what he could be called: A king indeed, insofar as by his first testament, he was named as his successor in

²⁶ Verse 1.

his kingdom by his father, Herod of Ascalon,²⁷ see Josephus' Book 17 on the Ancients, Chapter 8, from the beginning; he was indeed a tetrarch insofar as in the previous testament that had been changed, he was by the same appointed as tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, see the same Book 17 by Josephus, Chapter 10.3. Antipas, Phillippus and Archelaus were in the same way kings, as in which their father Herod the Great was, even though the kingdoms of his sons did not extend in extent to that of their father, yet the same ruling power, which their father held over the whole kingdom and the separate parts thereof, and fell back to each son by virtue of his tetrachship. Hence, Antipas was in this passage called king of one tetrarchy, and Archelaus king of two tetrarchies – see Micraelius's²⁸ *Syntagma historiae ecclesiasticae* Book 1, section 2, question 49. The title of king should not be measured as much from the extent of the kingdoms but from the nature of his reign. Therefore too much of what he says is clearly contrary to historical truth, which the dissertation of Wittich affirms, since "none of Herod's sons were there made king, not even Archelaus." For that Archelaus was named king by the second testament by his father Herod and after the death of Herod the Great, was elected and saluted as king, Josephus clearly affirms in Book 17, Chapter 10 on the Ancients. Nor is it, as you say that this was done by Caesar Augustus, for it was not the task of Augustus to appoint the king, but he was merely to confirm the appointment. Consequently it is also false, that "Archelaus, to whom befell half the kingdom and that had been the promised kingdom, would have obtained [it] had he not incurred the wrath of Caesar," since what Josephus affirms in Book 17, Chapter 13, that Caesar promised Archelaus the kingdom, seems only to be understood concerning the title or the name of 'king', by which Augustus, influenced by the

²⁷ Eusebius notes that Josephus relates that Herod the Great was an Idumean, but that Africanus claims that he descends from a certain Herod of Ascalon, which was a city of the Philistines. McGriffert notes that this Herod of Ascalon possibly never existed. (McGriffert, A.C. 1994: Book 1, Chapter 5).

²⁸ Johannes Micraelius (1597-1658) - <http://www.sfb-frueheneuzeit.uni-muenchen.de/projekte/zusatz/HistorischeTabellenwerke/Micraelius.html>. Retrieved on 28/06/2013.

accusations of the Jews, removed himself when he addressed him outside of ethnarchy. See Micraelius in the cited passage. I say nothing concerning that the name of king does not always indicate a supreme monarch, but that it is sometimes indeed also attributed by Homer to the imperial tributes (*δικασπολοις*) as also Agrippa in Acts 25:13.

VII. Compare the sixth passage, II Cor. 4:4:

“In the case of those people, the god of this age blinded their minds, namely the unbelievers.” Here the devil is called the god of this age, but it cannot be understood other than by appearance (*δοξασιχως*) and putatively, even as it also must be, when the idols of the nations are throughout Scripture called gods, as among others in Ex. 23:24: “You shall not bow down to nor serve their gods”, that is, of the Canaanites and other peoples, which God drove out before the eyes of the Israelites.

Response 1: The devil is in this passage called “god” not absolutely or simply, but relatively and with a restriction - god “of this age,” which paraphrased merely means, that he was such, that by the world he is considered as a god, either by the world or the ungodly people (for that meaning of the word ‘age’ comes up frequently in Scripture) in fact the majority are accustomed to exhibit [him] greater worship and service than to the true God. 2. The devil is in this passage called god, not as if the common people think, that the devil is the first cause or the creator of this world, but because the devil, in producing and administrating evil, actually primarily holds it in governing it, just as God Almighty is accustomed to do good things. Or because by the righteous judgement of God, He holds such power of obedience over his children (whence he is called “the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the children of disobedience” in Eph 2:2) such as God has over the whole universe. See the Dutch *Statenvertaling* annotations on this passage. The

devil therefore is truly god by this reason, although metaphorically. The dissertation of Wittich above acknowledges that metaphors, however, do not imply falsehood.

VIII. The seventh passage the dissertation of Wittich seeks out is from the Galatians 1:6:

"I marvel that you are turning so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel." The doctrine of false apostles Paul calls another gospel, that is, according to the opinion of those men, since it is opposed to the gospel of Christ, and so being unworthy of the name Gospel etc.

Response: 'Gospel' indicates joyous news in Latin, therefore the false doctrines of the false apostles can truly be called 'gospel', *or* that which is pleasant and joyous as it truly seemed to the mislead Galatians, as the apostle seems to imply, when he says that they are turned to that gospel, that is, with full consent of their own free will, and that with the greatest pleasure and information (*πληροφορία*) they had hurled themselves into that doctrine, as if it was some most joyful message or salvation and also eternal life: even though it would be obtained through false and illegitimate ways, he continued. It is said in verse 7 that there is no other gospel, besides that which had been taught by Paul to themselves, therefore no other ways to obtain a timely and indeed efficacious salvation are given, except that gospel which Paul had proposed to themselves.

IX. Then follows the eighth passage, chosen from the epistle to the Hebrews 7:3, where

it is said of Melchizedek, that he was "without father, without mother, without descent: having neither beginning of days, nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, and remains a priest eternally." In any case,

what is said concerning Melchizedek cannot be accepted as according to the truth (unless we want to follow the opinion of Cunaeus etc.) for when a man has been, as the more probable opinion carries, even the King of Salem, undoubtedly had his own parents, descent, etc., but it is according to our knowledge that his parents are unknown. Therefore, just as Scripture in the previous examples adapted itself to our opinion, to be spoken according to our opinion about the matter, so here it accommodates itself to our knowledge so as not to speak that which is true, but to deny that which we do not know etc.

Response 1: Here again the dissertation of Wittich exceeds the established limits and its promise, for he initially determined to defend that which was agreed upon, namely that the Holy Scripture, where it speaks about natural matters, most often accommodates itself to the erroneous understanding of the common people. Dissertation 1, Chapter 7, paragraph 11. After he had progressed further, he also showed that in understandable matters of faith it is done through some form of reason. Dissertation 1, Chapter 2, paragraph 13. Further at the same time in the whole third chapter he tries to demonstrate that this is also done in moral and practical matters. In this passage he lastly proves that the same can be done, for instance, in matters that are known through pure faith, neither through the senses, nor through understanding, nor by any other reason than faith alone can we know anything of Melchizedek. Therefore, just as, on account of this reason (from the opinion of the dissertation of Wittich 1 Chapter 7, paragraph 2) "we are in error if we want to draw out accurate physics and teach demonstrative knowledge from Scripture;" so by the same reason we are in error, if concerning moral matters, concerning matters of faith, which is by some extent known by reason, certainly for instance concerning matters of pure faith is known, we want to draw out accurate and demonstrative knowledge from the Scriptures to some degree. 2. The dissertation of Wittich said that

God sometimes speak falsely. "According to" opinion, either in favour of the common people, otherwise namely [in order] to "upset the common man and turn them away from other things revealed in Scripture." Dissertation I, chapter 2, paragraph 4. But here Scripture speaks directly *against* the opinion of the common people, for who has said, that the common people of the time of the apostle believed that Melchizedek was without father, without mother, without descent, without beginning of days, without end of life etc? Therefore, give me a reason why in the dissertation of Wittich, Chapter 1 [claims], or in whose favour the Holy Spirit in this passage departed from the accurate truth? 2. Why did the common people not reject Scripture, since Scripture says here, which is diametrically against their opinion? 3. But thirdly I say that Melchizedek truly was "without father, without mother, without descent" (*α πατωρ, α ματωρ, α γενεαλογητος*), not that he did not have a father or a mother or a genealogy, but in reality his father, his mother, his genealogy are not cited by Moses, just as he is truthfully called nameless, who did not submit his name to some epistle or book, not indeed that he has no name, but as I have already said, he did not submit it.

X. I proceed to the ninth passage, which is found in Jos. 2, where

it is said of the scouts, that some of the Jerichonians had pursued them. V. 7: "The men pursued them by the roads to the Jordan, through every single ford." V. 16: "Go to that mountain, lest the pursuers meet you." V. 22: "They departed and went to the mountain, and stayed there for three days until the pursuers returned, for they looked for them all along the way, but did not find them." In the Hebrew it has אָחֲרָם וְאֶחָד מֵהֶם which, if literally translated, will be, "the men pursued after them." But those men were first hidden in the stalks of flax, which was on the roof of the house of Rachab, and then hid three days unnoticed in the mountains according to Rachab's advice. They

could not then in the true sense be in pursuit of them, but here again we have an example of Scripture not speaking according to the truth of the matter, but according to the opinion of those people, namely the persecutors.

Response 1: Give me a reason why Scripture in this passage would speak according to the opinion of those persecutors. Whether therefore, not to throw them into confusion, He would divert from Scripture? Or in favour of the readers for whom the Bible was written? But from there you will prove that they had an erroneous opinion, because the Israelite scouts in fact, gave themselves over in flight, or in that way, that the persecutors of Jericho sought [them] and departed. 2. To persecute: in accordance with the contents of the universal biblical canon, [indicates] the same as far as the life of someone, or possessions, etc. and to prepare an ambush, and it is the same as to seek the soul of someone, as for example it is said in Acts 8:1, that "a great persecution arose against the Church which was at Jerusalem", although Christians there hid throughout the city, and did not flee. 3. Thirdly it can be said here that according to the truth of the matter in the intention is being told and the attempts of those persecutors in the same way, just as in Hebrews 11:17 it is said that Abraham sacrificed his son by faith, where, of course, it cannot sensibly be said that Scripture speaks falsely, when it deals with a matter perceiving faith.

XI. The tenth passage follows, which is taken from I Sam. 28:12:

"When the woman saw Samuel", v. 14: "Saul, recognizing it was Samuel", v. 15: "Samuel however said to Saul 'Why have you disturbed me by summoning me?'" , v. 16: "And Samuel said to him: 'Why do you therefore consult me?'" , v. 20: "so much so that he was afraid because of the words of Samuel." That he who was summoned here by the witch at Saul's insistence, was the devil, is clear among all

the orthodox believers, or mostly in that argument, that in no way to the devil, whose works magicians and necromancers make use of, such power is granted by God, so that at his holy command the holy dead should be subjected, by which he could dispose of their minds for his own pleasure. Meanwhile, more than once Samuel is mentioned, hence also the Ecclesiastical Apocrypha seems to have taken it as an occasion to truly connect this to Samuel. However Samuel is mentioned, because it brought back the appearance of Samuel and also from the opinion of Saul and the witch, not according to the truth of the matter. And this passage is a very strong [example] to prove our opinion.

Response 1: This is a well-known metaphor in the Scriptures by which it usually names similarities by the name of the matters themselves, as is rightly noted by St. Augustine in Book 2, Question 3 to Simplicianus, so that the wooden images are called Cherubs, and so Solomon is said to have made oxen of bronze, the Philistines are said to have made golden mice, and so by the common image of man is usually designated the name of the man himself, because of the resemblance which intercedes with the man himself, and that by the metaphor the devil is here called Samuel, because of the appearance and resemblance of Samuel which he carried, and it is not necessary to prove that with these very words you understand: "However Samuel is mentioned, because it brought back the appearance of Samuel and also from the opinion of Saul and the witch."

XII. "A similar passage," you say,

is Deut. 18:10, 11 ... Here the necromancers are said to consult the dead, when this is only done in the opinion of these men, not in the truth of the matter.

Response: The necromancers truly consult the dead, although to receive a response from the devil, who is hiding under the bodies of the dead.

XIII. The twelfth passage is John 5:31:

“If I testify about Myself, My testimony is not true.” That is, according to your opinion, when you could be able to be doubtful about Him; for in other matters relating to the truth, the testimony of Christ is always steadfast.

Response 1: Here again you have the example, benevolent reader, where the Holy Spirit, according to the dissertation of Wittich, reconciles himself in a matter that is most appropriately distinguishing faith according to the false opinion of others. 2. The word *αληθης* has a twofold meaning, 1. that which is absolutely true, 2. and that which is true in such a way, as to be apt in order to testify, which they call “suitable, faithful, firm” (*idoneum, fidele, firmum*) etc. and others. The dissertation of Beza in this passage, in the last of his versions, translated [it] with “suitable” (*idoneum*), of which interpretation Pareus says on this passage is: “Though *idoneum* can be translated to be any truth which is not suitable,” so I can perhaps speak the truth about myself, which however, is not suitable to bear witness concerning myself, but is required for that, so that the testimony in some way becomes suitable so that it becomes the whole truth, but even so that it becomes so for him who stands fast as witness of truth, about which he becomes convinced. And this fell short in the later testimony of Christ in respect of certain Jews, to the extent that it was really not suitable or true (*αληθης*), while in the other cases He was always considered firm and infallible as it is in John 8:14.

3. In these words there can be a rhetorical anticipation of whether this verse contains the prolepsis, where Christ in Chapter 8 verse 13 cites these very words of the Pharisees: “The Pharisees therefore said to Him, ‘You testify of

Yourself; Your testimony is not true.” The subject is contained in this fifth chapter then, and then in the following eighth chapter of this gospel, where Christ attacks the objection of the Pharisees in two ways. Indeed, by conceding it in the first, he precedes it and denies the consequence: “There is another who bears witness of Me”, verse 32, Chapter 5, as if to say, provided that your antecedent be true, namely that a testimony about Himself given by Himself does not become firm, it does not follow from there that My testimony is not firm, since not only do I testify about Myself, but there is also another who testifies about Me. Truly in the eighth chapter he clearly rebukes the antecedent: “Even if I bear witness of Myself” etc. Thus in this passage there is a clear concession, which is equally strongly in these words *given not granted*, but to the extent that the Holy Spirit by His own sound truth would be able to answer the false opinions of others, without special refutation, and it was said, to rather often overlook it for a time, unless I am mistaken.

XIV. Thus the 13th passage is Philippians 3:7: “‘But what things were gain to me, these I have counted as a loss on account of Christ.’ What was gain to me, not in reality, but in my opinion etc.” Response 1: You have, again, reader, an example where the Holy Spirit in matters of faith speaks falsely according to the opinion of another.

2. In this paragraph the apostle names the good works as loss, not absolutely, but with respect to Christ, “on account of Christ”, with respect namely to justification, which was obtained for us by Christ. Therefore, the observance of the law is in a different respect both a gain and a loss. Gain indeed, if it is considered as in Himself; loss if it is considered to what extent we intend to earn eternal life through it; in this respect the Apostle called it a loss with respect to the observance of the law.

XV. The fourteenth passage is from Titus 1:12 where

Epimenides is called a prophet of the Cretans: but he was not at all according to the truth of the matter, but only according to their opinion since he was held among them in such high esteem, that even after his death they made sacrifices to him, as Diogenes Laertius reports.

Response: 1. Indeed, that is eloquently indicated, when he is not simply called a prophet, but additionally, a *Cretan* prophet, that is, who was held as such by the Cretans. 2. We noted above that according to the use of Scripture “prophet” indicates any orator or teacher you want, whether the man is a believer, or an unbeliever, whether he is truthful or deceitful, even when they are faithful, uttering the prophecies of Christ, they are called so par excellence (*κατ’ ἐξοχὴν*).

3. You yourself indicate that there is metaphorical usage in that word when you say that by that word it was equal to the true prophets because he received equal honour from the Cretans as the true prophets did from the Jews, so much so that even after his death they sacrificed to him, as you quote from Diogenes Laertius.

XVI. A passage from II Peter 2:1 closes the [course of the] argument:

“But there are false prophets also among the people etc., even denying the Lord who purchased them, and bring unto themselves swift destruction.” If we look at the truth here, it certainly cannot be said that Christ has purchased them, and liberated them from sin and the bondage of the Devil, when the contrary is clear from their deeds, through which they show that they are still under the dominion of sin and of the devil. But because there are people in the external communion of the Church and who profess Christ, they seem to belong to his little flock, which Christ rescued from the jaws of Satan. And so to be “purchased” can only be accepted according to their own opinion

and then [according to] the opinion of others, whereby they were considered to be redeemed.

Response 1. You have here, dear reader, (at least according to the dissertation of Wittich), a passage containing an article of all the most essential foundations of the faith, of the redemption of the sinner through the death of Christ, on which the dissertation of Wittich dares to say that the Holy Spirit, after having deserted the accurate truth, speaks according to the false opinion of others; is it thus not an oral declaration that is contrary to facts when he very often repeats: that God establishes Himself only to speak on natural and moral matters according to the false opinion of the common people?

2. It is not said in this passage that *Christ* had purchased the false prophets: but Lord and Master, whose name nowhere (that I know of) denotes Christ. Nor is it said in this passage that the Lord (*δεσποτης*) had purchased the false prophets by his blood but simply that he purchased them, in so far as it is sometimes taken for a kind of liberation and acquisition, even in such a case, which happens without payment of the price. Isaiah 55:²⁹ Purchase (*αγοραζετε*) without money. Rev. 3:8:³⁰ buy from me with gold refined by fire. And finally, it is not said that the Lord Himself purchased them from sin and from the bondage of the devil, but simply that they are purchased. Therefore, the meaning of this passage is that God the Father acquired the false prophets for themselves, namely by the external calling, as from the ignorance of the world, and from the profane liberty of crimes, to the knowledge of Christ, to His external Church, and to teaching, to the service of the Lord, and really in truth, not purchased (*αγοραζεντες*) according to their own or other opinions, see Gomarus in his commentary on this passage,

²⁹ Verse 1.

³⁰ Van Mastricht seems to have used an incorrect reference here. The text he quotes is Revelation 3:18.

and with him the learned Amesius,³¹ first in his commentary on this passage and then in his *Antisynodales* (?) on the death of Christ, Chapter 6.6.

4.4 Annotations on Chapter Five

Van Mastricht summarizes that the purpose of this chapter is a defense of those verses which Wittich says are written according to the opinion of the common people and not according to the actual truth of the moral and practical matters they address.

He starts off paragraph I by quoting Wittich's opinion the Scripture speaks of moral and practical matters, not merely natural matters also according to the subjective opinion of the common people. To this he responds in paragraph II: "However, let a greater matter follow. The degrees through which it is finally arrived at skepticism, and yes, indeed, at the Libertines, could only be noticed in passing."³² He immediately associates Wittich with those acknowledged by all in the Reformed community to be heretics. He reiterates again that Wittich's opening statements in his first chapter were already a great leap. If only natural matters are accommodated in Scripture to the opinions of the common people, then a large part of the Scriptures are already rendered useless for us – yet if this were to extend even to moral and practical matters, then doubt is cast upon almost all the content of Scripture. By way of a logical syllogism, he asks concerning Wittich's position:

For if the Holy Spirit is understood to immediately afterwards have spoken about moral and practical matters according to the errors of

³¹ The English Protestant philosopher William Ames (1576-1633) - <http://venn.lib.cam.ac.uk/cgi-bin/search.pl?sur=&suro=c&fir=&firo=c&cit=&cito=c&c=all&tex=AMS593W&sy=&eye=&col=all&maxcount=50>. Retrieved on 03/07/2013.

³² quidem transeat major. Obiter tantum notentur gradus, quibus ad scepticismum, imo ad Libertinismum tantum pervenitur.

others, why shall we not reasonably suspect that the same could have happened in other cases?³³

This question is the essence and very crux of the debate at hand. According to Van Mastricht, it would be impossible to treat Scripture as authoritative on any moral matters if doubt were cast upon some of its moral claims. One is only able to cast doubt upon the Scriptures once a higher authority, in this case natural reason, is firmly upheld over it in the mind of the one who doubts. Therefore, once moral and practical matters are doubted – the rationalist reader of Scripture, having already established the authority of reason, can further accept or reject various scriptural teachings on the merits of natural reason and not faith. Van Mastricht goes on to say that although he is in error from the start, prior to the third chapter of Wittich's dissertation, he had not yet committed such a grave heresy as to distort passages relating to the divine essence and attributes. Nevertheless, as Van Mastricht correctly notes, in Wittich's third chapter in paragraph VIII – on Melchizedek, paragraph XII – on the truthfulness of Christ, and paragraph XV – on the redemption by his blood, he places doubt upon the truthfulness of the biblical testimony.

The first passage Wittich treats is Isaiah 49:24-25. Van Mastricht quotes Wittich regarding the passage:

What is in the first verse called righteous, is in the following called a violent tyrant. Therefore, this is not righteousness, but nothing else but the opinion of that tyrant, who knows to conceal all his violence that had been done in the name of righteousness. For as we suspect that an error crept in, so that instead of קִדָּץ ("righteous one") in the

³³ si enim subinde de rebus moralibus et practices secundum errore aliorum, Spiritus Sancte locutus deprehenditur, quidni in aliis idem fieri potuisse, rationabiliter suspicabimur?

former verse, it should read קִדָּץ ("tyrant"), as some interpreters prefer, no necessity compels.³⁴

He observes that this statement is unorthodox and contradicts the Holy Spirit's work in inspiring and preserving the text of Scripture. He then proceeds with a question, the premises of which is this precise accusation:

If indeed the Holy Spirit is to be judged in this passage to have spoken according to the false opinion of that tyrant, I ask why, or for whose sake He had done this? Is it for the sake of that tyrant, in order not to offend him? Or is it for the sake of the people, the reader of this passage?³⁵

According to Van Mastricht the Spirit would not have adapted Scripture here to the ideas of the tyrants, for there would be no purpose in seeking not to offend them; neither would there be any benefit to the audience for whom the passage was intended. No natural matters are addressed in this verse, but only practical and moral matters, which, of course, relate more closely to the purpose of the message which Scripture conveys. Moreover, Wittich's principle of scriptural accommodation cannot possibly apply to this tyrant. First, at the time of writing, he had not yet existed. Secondly, it was no secret that these tyrants were indeed tyrannical, so it would serve no purpose to depart from the truth of the matter in this case. Thirdly, there would be no rationale to call this tyrant "righteous" according to his own opinion. Wittich claims there would, but Van Mastricht answers by stating: "for the Holy Spirit Himself is sufficiently seen to clearly indicate, how He wants that קִדָּץ ('righteous one') to be understood, when He, as if by the

³⁴ Hic, qui priori versu vocabatur justus, sequenti vocatur violentus tyrannus. Itaque ista iustitia non est nisi in opinione istius tyranni, qui omnia sua violent facta titulo justitiae novit obtegere. Nam ut suspicemur mendum irrepsisse, ita ut pro קִדָּץ sit legendum יָדָץ, ut quidam interpretes volunt, nulla necessitas cogit.

³⁵ Siquidem Spiritus Sanctus hoc loco censendus sit, locutus fuisse secundum falsam opinionem istius tyranni, quaero cur, aut in cuius gratiam hoc fecerit? Anne in gratiam istius tyranni, ne istum offenderet? anne in gratiam vulgi, legentis hunc locum.

same breath explains that by צַדִּיק ('tyrant')."³⁶ Lastly, the words "the captured of the righteous be delivered" does not necessarily refer to the one who holds them in captivity, but to the fact that they are members of the Church, which is of course righteous, who are being held captive by the tyrant.

The next passage that Wittich treats and to which Van Mastricht responds (in paragraph III) is Proverbs 18:17, where the Hebrew text is translated as such: "A righteous man, who was first in his lawsuit, arrives at his neighbour and investigates him." In this passage, the "righteous man" is only called so according to his own opinion – similar to Matthew 9:13, where Christ states: "For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." By "righteous," Christ here indicates those who are self-righteous, righteous in their own eyes but not truthfully; otherwise they would not be in need of redemption by Christ – and Scripture is clear that all men have fallen short of the glory of God and is in definite need of redemption. Van Mastricht then makes clear how "righteous" in Matthew 9 is to be read: "that those people are to be understood as righteous of that kind, of which there exist none in the world, but of those who are righteous only in their own opinion, many exist."³⁷ Although he partially agrees with Wittich's analysis of this passage, he does however argue that "therefore it will not be necessary to arrive at such a degree of extremity, that we can say that God speaks falsely for the sake of the understanding of the people."³⁸ It is quite clear to Van Mastricht that the passages were intended by the Holy Spirit to be understood in a particular way, but also according to what is truthfully so, and therefore he disagrees with Wittich's claim that God ever placed his readers under a misconception, so as not to offend them.

³⁶ Ipse enim Spiritus S. sat clare videtur indicare, quomodo illud צַדִּיק intelligi velit, quando illud, eodem quasi halitu, per צַדִּיק exponit.

³⁷ eos per vocabulum *iustos*, intelligere huiusmodi iustos, quorum nulli in mundo existerent, eorum vero qui sua tantum opinione sunt iusti, multi existebant.

³⁸ none cesse erit eo extremitat is devenire, ut dicamus, Deum loqui falsum ad captum vulgi.

In paragraph IV he reacts to Wittich's treatment of Proverbs 30:19: "The way of a man with a virgin" and quotes Wittich's contention that the Hebrew word עַלְמָה ("girl of marriageable age") refers, not to an actual virgin, but to a corrupted young lady. The Jews also argue strongly in favor of this interpretation, as it is the same word used in Isaiah 7:14, which Christians understand to be a prophecy of Christ's virgin birth. Wittich understands this to refer to the virgin's social reputation, i.e. that she has the social status of a virgin, but Van Mastricht responds that such an interpretation would be a total concession to the Jews' false interpretation of Isaiah 7:14. He continues, "Therefore it must be, that the word עַלְמָה as everywhere and so in this passage denotes a truly uncorrupted virgin, or who has never known a man."³⁹ For Van Mastricht the text needs to be understood in light of adulterers coveting the virginity of young chaste women. He says that עַלְמָה is compared to the ways of an adulterous woman, whom the righteous avoid, but often accompanied by those men who also similarly desire to be with a virgin. Van Mastricht concludes: "This meaning, indeed in my opinion, is clear".⁴⁰

In paragraph V he treats Wittich's next cited passage, Jeremiah 28:1. Wittich states that Hanania is falsely called a prophet according to the opinion of the people, while he is in truth a mere pseudo-prophet and a "seducer of the people."⁴¹ Van Mastricht replies by saying that the word "prophet" (*propheta*) in the Scriptures often indicates "orator, preacher or clergy" (*oratorem, praeconem, ecclesiastem*), and does not necessarily indicate godliness or truthfulness. He says that exactly the same is done in Titus 1:12, where Epimedes is also called a "prophet" – a passage which Wittich also interprets similarly to this verse in Jeremiah 28.

³⁹ Dicendum igitur, vocem עַלְמָה ut ubique sic hoc loco nota re virginem vere incorruptam, sive quae virum nunquam cognovit.

⁴⁰ Hic sensus, meo quidem iudicio, planus est.

⁴¹ Seductor populi.

Van Mastricht continues quoting Wittich in paragraph VI:

The fifth passage is Mark 6:10: Herod Antipas is called king: "Now King Herod heard of Him", while however he was not a king, but only a tetrarch, just as he is called in Matthew 14."⁴²

According to Van Mastricht many tetrarchs were by way of metaphor called "kings," as Herod Antipas is in this passage:

For that Archelaus was named king by the second testament of his father Herod and after the death of Herod the Great, and was elected and saluted as king, Josephus affirms clearly in Book 17, chapter 10 on the Ancients.⁴³

He also quotes an annotation to the 1637 *Statenvertaling* which affirms this: "Dese Tetrarchen worden ook koningen geheten omdat se als koningen regeerden." Josephus further recalls in his *History on the Ancients* that Herod Antipas would indeed have been a king according to the first testament of his father, which named him as his successor. Although this was overruled by his second testament, which determined that the kingdom would be equally divided among his three sons as tetrarchies, they did, however, still rule those territories allotted to them as kings, in that they ruled in their territories as absolutely as their father did the whole kingdom. Wittich even admits this. Thus, Van Mastricht summarizes his interpretation of this passage: "The title of king should not be measured as much from the extent of the kingdoms but from nature of his reign."⁴⁴ He then also accuses Wittich of making a historical error when he claims that "Archelaus, to whom befell half the kingdom and that had been the promised kingdom, would

⁴² Locus quintus habetur Mark VI.10. Herodes Antipas vocatur Rex: "Audiuit autem Rex Herodes, cum tamen non Rex fuerit, sed tantum Tetrarcha, quemadmodum vocatur Matt. XIV."

⁴³ Et refert Josephus lib. xvii, antiquitatum, quid post mortem Herodis magni, Caesar Augustum Archelao mediam partem Regni, quod pater tenure at, concesserit, alterum vero partem distribuerit inter reliquos duos Herodis Magnifilios Antipam et Philippum. Nullus autem istorum Herodis filiorum Rex fuitfactus.

⁴⁴ Regis autem appellatio non tam ex latitudine regnorum, quam ex regnandi qualitate est dimetienda.

have obtained [it] had he not incurred the wrath of Caesar,"⁴⁵ since it is clear from Josephus's account that Caesar himself wanted to give Archelaus the kingship, but later removed the title because due to pressure put on him by the Jews. Finally, Van Mastricht notes that the title "king" did not always denote a monarch, but referred to any chief tributary, as is the case with Agrippa in Acts 25:13.

The next passage pertaining to this dispute, treated in paragraph VII, is II Corinthians 4:4: "In the case of those people, the god of this age blinded their minds, namely the unbelievers." Wittich argues that the devil is called "god" in this passage in a similar way that the pagan gods are called as such in the Old Testament; for example, in Exodus 23:24 they are gods in the eyes of those who worship them. The devil is therefore called "the god of this age" because he is precisely that to most people. Van Mastricht answers this by first noticing that the devil is not indiscriminately called "god" here, but is restricted to a specific time and sphere, "this age": he is "god" to those people who serve him as such. Secondly, he notes that the devil is termed a god not because many consider him to be an omnipotent creator and object of worship, but because he has achieved great success in spreading evil throughout the world. Van Mastricht agrees with the Dutch annotations on this passage, which treat the term metaphorically, after which he proceeds to assert that "the dissertation of Wittich above acknowledges that metaphors, however, do not imply falsehood."⁴⁶

The next passage that Wittich has selected and to which Van Mastricht reacts in paragraph VIII is Galatians 1:6: "I marvel that you are turning so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel." Wittich explains that what is called a "gospel" in this passage is only so

⁴⁵ Archelao universum Herodis Magni regnum fuisse promissum, illudque consecuturum fuisse, nisi iram Caesaris incurrisset.

⁴⁶ Metaphoras autem non implicare falsum D. Wittichius supra agnovit.

according to the opinions of those deceived men who adhere to it. Van Mastricht, however, points out that the Latin word for gospel, *evangelium* (a Latinization of the Greek word *εὐαγγέλιον*) means “joyous news,” and therefore false doctrines of false teachers can rightly be called *evangelium*, as it is indeed pleasant to the ears of their followers. They take great pleasure in their doctrine, although it was false. Furthermore, in verse 7 Paul states that there is no true gospel apart from the one which they have been taught by him, so the context also makes the intended meaning of the passage quite clear.

In paragraph IX he turns to Hebrews 7:3, the next passage Wittich cited in support for his theory: “Melchizedek [being] without father, without mother, without descent: having neither beginning of days, nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, and remains a priest eternally.” Wittich notes that this, of course, cannot be true, since no man can exist without birth, death, parents or genealogy, except Christ Himself, which both authors reject as plausible. Wittich thus argues that Scripture accommodates its presentation of Melchizedek according to the knowledge of the readers of Scripture, since, when Melchizedek is mentioned in the Old Testament, none of this is revealed.

Van Mastricht uses this opportunity to accuse Wittich of exceeding the self-imposed limits his Accommodation Theory:

he also showed that in understandable matters of faith it is done through some form of reason. Dissertation 1, Chapter 2, paragraph 13. Further at the same time in the whole third chapter he tries to demonstrate that this is also done in moral and practical matters.⁴⁷

Van Mastricht then refutes the absolute claims of Wittich’s empiricism:

⁴⁷ in rebus fidei ratione aliquot modo cognoscibilibus. Diss 1.c.2.art.13. Porro toto hoc capite tertio demonstrate nititur idem fieri in rebus moralibus ac practicis.

In this passage he lastly proves that the same can be done, for instance, in matters that are known through pure faith, neither through the senses, nor through understanding, nor by any other reason than faith alone can we know anything of Melchizedek.⁴⁸

In this paragraph, Van Mastricht states it plainly and unapologetically – the dissertation of Wittich affirms that God sometimes speaks falsely. He further states that while Wittich’s entire argument is an attempt to prove that the Spirit speaks falsely according to the opinion of man, this text is actually an example where the text contradicts the opinion of the common people:

But here Scripture speaks directly *against* the opinion of the common people, for who has said, that the common people of the time of the apostle believed that Melchizedek was without father, without mother, without descent, without beginning of days, without end of life etc?⁴⁹

Wittich, despite treating this passage as if it supports his theory, fails to mention any reason why this passage should be accommodated. Further, if there is indeed sense in the Spirit’s accommodation of His speech to the opinions of the common people, and if the Spirit is here obviously speaking contrary to common opinion, then why doesn’t the audience here reject the Scriptures? Van Mastricht grants that Wittich correctly ties the citation of Melchizedek to the book of Moses, but it does not follow that the common people held to that opinion at all.

Next is Joshua 2 where the text states that the scouts of Israel were pursued by the Jerichoans. Wittich explains that as the Jerichoans were not aware of the scouts’ whereabouts, they could not truly have been in pursuit of them; it only appeared, from the perspective of the scouts, as if they were in

⁴⁸ Hoc tandem loco probat, idem fieri in rebus puraputa fide cognitiss, necenim per sensus, nec per intellectum, neculla alia ratione quam sola fide de Melchisedeco quicquam cognoscere possumus.

⁴⁹ hic autem scriptura loquitur directe contra opinionem vel vulgi, quis enim dixerit, vulgus tempore Apostoli credidisse Melchisedecum fuisse absque patre, absque matre, absque genealogia, absque initio dierum, absque fine vitae etc.

pursuit. Van Mastricht replies to this in paragraph X by requesting for the purpose of this claimed diversion from the truth, for it would be nonsensical for the text to be accommodated to either the readers or the persecutors. He further notes that in its usage within the rest of the canon, *persequi* is “the same as far as the life of someone, or possessions, etc. and to prepare an ambush, and it is the same as to seek the soul of someone”⁵⁰ and then cites Acts 8:1 as an example: “a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem’, although Christians there hid throughout the city, and did not flee.”⁵¹ Finally he says that the text is indeed written according to the truth of the matter when it is understood to be according to the intention of the persecutors, just as it is in Hebrews 11:7, when it states that Abraham sacrificed Isaac. Though this is not what historically happened, it truthfully conveys his intention.

In paragraph XI Van Mastricht responds to Wittich’s treatment of I Samuel 28:12, 14-16 and 20. V. 12: “When the woman saw Samuel”, v. 14: “Saul, recognizing it was Samuel”, v. 15: “Samuel however said to Saul, ‘Why have you disturbed me by summoning me?’”, v. 16: “And Samuel said to him: ‘Why do you therefore consult me?’”, v. 20: “so much so that he was afraid because of the words of Samuel.” Van Mastricht directly quotes Wittich as saying that these verses are “a very strong [example] to prove our opinion,”⁵² for all orthodox interpreters agree that it was not really the soul of Samuel called up by the witch, but the devil appearing as Samuel, since the souls of the dead cannot be made obedient to necromancers, who make use of the power of Satan – not the power of God. Van Mastricht answers by applying the Reformed principle of *analogia fidei*, the exegetical rule that Scripture must be interpreted with Scripture. The Reformers as well as their

⁵⁰ idem quod alicuius vitae, bonis etc. insidias struere, sive quid idem est, quaerere alicuius animam.

⁵¹ Orta suisse ingens persecutio adversus Ecclesiam Hierosolymitanam, quamvis Christiani hinc inde passim in urbe laterent, nec fugam cepissent.

⁵² valde firmus est ad probandam nostram sententiam.

scholastic successors insisted that unclear passages in Scripture should be explained through comparison to clearer passages (Horton 2009:24). From this exegetical principle Van Mastricht argues that this is a metaphor, noting also that a characteristic of a scriptural metaphor is to “name similarities by the name of the matters themselves”;⁵³ he references St. Augustine as an authority to buttress his claim. He concludes that the devil is here called Samuel not to accommodate to the false opinion of Saul, but only metaphorically. Van Mastricht perceives that Wittich understands that such an explanation does not necessarily mean that the Holy Spirit follows Saul’s interpretation of the text.

In paragraph XII, Van Mastricht’s reaction to Wittich’s treatment of Deuteronomy 18:10 and 11 is inseparably related to the preceding argument, as Wittich again argues that the dead were not really consulted, but the devil. Van Mastricht answers that the necromancers did indeed truly consult the dead, but the response they received was from the devil.

In paragraph XIII the twelfth passage is treated, John 5:31: “If I testify about Myself, My testimony is not true.” Wittich says that Christ accommodated His choice of words to the opinion of the Pharisees in this passage, since they would not have believed Christ’s testimony if He testified of Himself. In Van Mastricht’s response, he observes that, again, this verse addresses a matter of faith, which is beyond the scope of the study Wittich promised to undertake. The Greek word translated as “truth” (*αληθης*) in this passage actually has a twofold meaning: first, it denotes absolute truth, and secondly, it denotes something that is truthful in such a way that it is simultaneously also *idoneum*, *fidele*, *firmum* (“suitable, faithful, firm”), and this is the way Van Mastricht understands it in this passage. Pareus agrees with this interpretation, for although Christ’s witness in itself is always

⁵³ est ... admodum trita qua similitudines appellare solet.

undoubtedly true because of His divinity, Christ's denial of His witness is understandable from the context: to some of the Jews, it would have been inappropriate for Christ to bear witness concerning Himself as the Messiah and they would only have been persuaded by an external witness concerning Christ. Thus, Christ phrases His words to convince the Jews that He is the Messiah prophesied by the Old Testament and the Anointed of God. That this is indeed the case is evident from another passage just a few chapters later in John 8:14, where Jesus indeed says to the Pharisees that even if He bears witness concerning Himself, it is true. Van Mastricht remarks that, in contrast to this incident with the Pharisees, "in the other cases He was always considered firm and infallible."⁵⁴ Van Mastricht explains why John 8:13 is the key to understanding the contexts of both passages. The Pharisees invented the idea that Christ's witness concerning Himself is untrue. Christ, for rhetorical purposes - and in what Van Mastricht does not regard as an accommodation - explains that even if one were to grant the antecedent (John 5:31), the Pharisees still had an erroneous conclusion. He proceeds to show them that even their antecedent was false in John 8:14.

The thirteenth passage in the dispute concerning how the Spirit addresses moral and practical matters is Philippians 3:7: "But what things were gain to me, these I have counted as a loss on account of Christ." Wittich, of course, understands the verse to be another example of how the Spirit accommodated his witness in Scripture to the opinion of unbelievers. Van Mastricht explains in paragraph XIV that seemingly good works, even those in accordance with God's law, are null and void when it comes to justification, which comes through faith in Christ alone.

The next verse treated in this dispute is Titus 1:12, where Epimenides is called a prophet. Wittich explains this by saying that he was certainly not a

⁵⁴ alias in se confideratum semper est firmum et infallibile.

true prophet, but was only held as such by the Cretans. In reply, Van Mastricht observes in paragraph XV that the text specifically indicates that Epimenides is a Cretan prophet, not simply a prophet without qualification, which in itself is enough to refute Wittich's incorrect understanding. He continues his response, however, by stating that in the Scripture *propheta* ("prophet") also often refers to *oratorem aut doctorem* ("orator or teacher"), whether such prophets are deceitful or not. The main reason given for this designation is the Cretans' honor and for their prophets, similar to the Jews' regard for the true prophets of the Old Testament.

In the final paragraph (XVI) he treats the last passage pertaining to the current dispute, II Peter 2:1:

But there are false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that purchased them, and bring unto themselves swift destruction.

Wittich explains that these people, being false teachers, could not have been atoned for and redeemed by Christ, as they were not in reality part of His flock, but only according to the perception of the people. According to Van Mastricht, Wittich's interpretation sees the text as falsely representing a fundamental aspect of the Christian faith, the atonement of Christ. This is not merely a rendition of something said by the people; the implication of Wittich's argument is that God Himself is lying about a central doctrine in this passage, a heinous presumption to make. Furthermore, Van Mastricht notes the significance of the title used for God in this passage. He is not called "Christ" (*Christus*), but "Lord" (*herus*), and claims that this "name nowhere, (that I know of) denotes Christ."⁵⁵ Van Mastricht argues that the work of Christ (directly related to His office) referenced in this passage as

⁵⁵ nomine nullibi, (quod sciam), Christus designator.

“purchased”, does not refer to His atoning work as Mediator. Rather, it refers to His office as sovereign Lord, meaning thus that although these false teachers were indeed liberated by Him, the liberation to which the text refers is non-salvific. This is further evidenced by the absence of any textual mention that they were purchased by His blood or that they were liberated from the bondage of sin or the devil; the verse states only that they were purchased. To Van Mastricht, the true meaning of the passage is that God liberated them from ignorance through the external call of the gospel, whereby they were externally called unto the Church, even though their hearts were not internally changed. He closes his argument by appealing to Gomarus as support for his exposition.

4.5 Conclusion

Van Mastricht’s response to Wittich is characterized by a clear affirmation of the truthfulness of the Holy Spirit in His inspiration of the passages of Scripture. He rejects every attempt of Wittich to prove that the Spirit accommodates absolute truths regarding moral and practical matters to the false opinions of His audience. The Spirit proceeds in the inspiration of Scripture completely unaffected by false opinions and consistently conveys absolute truths in His most infallible revelation to man.

The following chapter will consist of a comparative study of the theological and philosophical principles underlying the dispute between the two authors, giving rise to their differing exegeses.

CHAPTER 5

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE THEOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL PRINCIPLES CONCERNING THE ISSUES ADDRESSED IN THE TWO SOURCES

5.1 Introduction

In the first chapter, the sources relevant to the current study were placed within their appropriate historical context of seventeenth century Dutch high orthodoxy. Their works should be viewed as part of the corpus of post-Reformation Dutch theology, a movement referred to as Reformed scholasticism, which is methodologically in continuity with late medieval scholasticism which was in turn based on Aristotelian realism but also simultaneously in theological continuity with the Reformation.

5.2 The Nature of the Dispute

The dispute under discussion is essentially theological in nature, and therefore both authors were influenced by differing epistemological and theological principles and presuppositions which led them to their respective positions, and which also inevitably guided them in their vastly differing interpretations of the very same biblical texts. The purpose of this chapter is to identify the theological and philosophical principles underlying the two disputations, and to note how they differ. With the dispute having both a theological and philosophical nature in which Cartesianism and orthodox Reformed Christianity are the two positions contrasted, the first question pertains to epistemology. This author is of the view that the effect Cartesianism has had on philosophy and theology pertains to epistemology more than anything else. It is also this author's view that epistemology is the core of the dispute at hand and needs to be considered thoroughly if any useful understanding of the dispute is to be

achieved. This chapter will explain in what ways the epistemological views that influenced the two authors differ. Many have claimed that the Reformation itself changed theological epistemology radically from what it had been during the Middle Ages and, by shifting authority away from the Church and Tradition, paved the way for self-determined rationalism. Saintes, Lecky and Robertson all held this view, as explained in the second chapter (Muller 1987:88-89). Hurst, on the other hand, does not blame the Reformation itself for the great epistemological shift that later would become known as the Enlightenment, but the Reformed orthodoxy which followed on the Reformation. Weber also has accused Reformed orthodoxy itself of being the origin of modern rationalism. Weber argues that, by not viewing natural knowledge of God as a threat to revealed knowledge of God, and by virtue of endless logical demonstration, Reformed orthodoxy shifted revealed knowledge of God into the epistemological bounds of natural reason (Muller 1987:90). Whichever of these views are supported, it is clear that the epistemological issue lies at the heart of this dispute.

Historically, the dispute between Wittich and Van Mastricht of the early 1650s must be seen in light of the controversy between Descartes himself and one of the greatest Dutch Reformed scholastics, Voetius. The dissertation of Wittich was, after all, written as a direct result of his encounter with the refutations of Clauberg and Andreae (who taught at Herbron and Groningen respectively) of Voetius's pupils Schoock and Du Bois (Frijhoff 2004:310). While Van Mastricht decidedly sided with Voetius, Wittich was seen to be a champion of the Cartesian Accommodation Theory among the Dutch Reformed scholastics (*Ibid*). Wittich also explains his understanding and application of the theory early on in his dissertation (1:V):

We, according to what is right to be done by all Christians, acknowledge with the greatest reverence the authority of Scripture, and we submit to it most willingly, by firmly believing that salvation

is of God and the divine knowledge therein sufficiently grasped, "so that the man of God can be complete, fully furnished for every good work."¹ Concerning the rest we have a firm persuasion that Scripture very often speaks about natural matters, as is clear, in such a way as if it is not precise philosophical observation, or to such an extent that knowledge of natural philosophy cannot be drawn from there.²

Muller points out that there is indeed merit in dividing seventeenth century Reformed scholasticism into two phases. The first phase was the polemical codification, where Voetius played a major role in developing polemical systems against all adversaries. The second phase, during the last forty years of that century, was marked by the creation of a new theological synthesis - gathering into a systematic whole all the results of Protestant doctrinal codification, exposition, polemics and exegesis (Muller 1987:37). Furthermore, in order to understand Descartes correctly, it is essential to take note of Voetius's thought, since Descartes fiercely debated his philosophy with him as one of his major adversaries during his lifetime (Bac 2010:215). When studying their differences, however, it is important to remember Descartes's desire to become in no way involved in theological or religious debates as he explains in a letter to Mersenne in 1630 (Bac 2010:219). He made this claim despite realizing the enormous implications his philosophical principles would have on theological orthodoxy. As Goudriaan (1999:175) informs us:

Im Discours de la Mèthode hat Descartes als ersten Grundsatz einer provisorischen Moral formuliert, das er die Religion, in der er erzogen worden ist, standig beibehalten wolle, auch während er sich von zweifelhaften Meinungen entledige.

¹ He quotes II Tim. 3:17.

² Nos, prout aequum est fieri ab omni Christiano, Scripturae auctoritatem summa cum reverentia suscipimus, libentissime nos ei subjicientes, firmiter credendo, salutem de Deo et divinis notitiam in ea sufficienter esse comprehensam, ut homo Dei possit esse perfectus ad omne bonum opus instructus. De caetero firmiter sumus persuasi, Scripturam saepissime de rebus naturalibus loqui, ut apparent, non uti sunt, si ἀκριβειαν Philosophicam spectes, adeoque non posse ex cognitionem Philosophiae Naturalis hauriri.

Goudriaan (1999:3) quotes Jonathan Israel as saying that Voetius was "zugleich der wichtigste Wortfuhrer sowohl der Calvinistische Ortodoxie als auch der Aristotelischen Philosophie seiner Zeit in den bitteren Kontroversen der Jahre 1640 und 1650". Shortly before the two dissertations of Wittich and Van Mastricht, Voetius published his *Disputationes Theologicae Selectae* in 1648, addressing the same epistemological issues that underlie the dispute at hand (Goudriaan 1999:6).

The essence of the debate is concerned with the way by which man comes unto the knowledge of God and what the nature of this knowledge is. Voetius, along with the other Reformed orthodox, maintained Areopagita's three traditional ways to come unto the knowledge of God (the viae *eminentiae*, *causalitatis* and *negativa*), while Descartes invented the *via moderna* with his first three meditations (Goudriaan 1999:5-7): (1) all beliefs which contain even the slightest doubt should be cast aside; (2) even if one's experience is an illusion, *ego cogito ergo sum*; (3) man has an idea and sense of God, of which he himself cannot be the cause, therefore God undoubtedly exists (Anderson 1999). Voetius, however, argued that true human knowledge can proceed from empirical reality and the principle of non-contradiction, as they are both guaranteed by God's faithfulness. This is contrary of course, to Descartes's *via moderna*, with its presupposition that God is potentially a deceiver, and it is corollary that all true knowledge can only come by means of hyperbolical doubt. Voetius argues that accepting the Cartesian epistemological foundation would undermine not only the reliability of God's revelation (both natural and special), but also intersubjective dialogue and all attempts at a universal science (Beck 2001:208). Descartes, in his desire to rid himself of all prejudices to arrive at indubitable knowledge, was fundamentally rooted in what can rightly be described as a foundationalist epistemology, in which some beliefs, being immediately evident to man or his senses, are properly basic and form the foundations of any rational noetic

structure. The epistemic component of self-evident propositions is that they are known independently of any other propositions. If I know X not on the basis of any other truth, but independently of any other knowledge, it is a properly basic proposition. Apart from this epistemic component there is also a phenomenological component, i.e. that there is a luminous glow or aura accompanying any self-evident proposition when it is brought to mind for consideration. Descartes called this 'clarity and distinctness.' The effect of this luminous glow is an inevitable and strong inclination on the part of the mind to accept it as true. Some of these self-evident propositions might include, for example, the proposition $2 + 1 = 3$ or the fact that redness is distinct from greenness. Descartes believed that, in order for a noetic structure to be rational, the basic propositions must be completely indubitable (Plantinga 1983:56-58).

The Reformed orthodox generally took a very different approach toward their theory of knowledge and its acquisition. The father of Reformed theology, John Calvin, believed that God has implanted man with such an innate tendency to believe in Him that man is naturally aware of the existence of a deity. This *sensus divinitatis* is a remnant of the image of God in fallen man, and although greatly suppressed, still present in all men. Calvin argues that had it not been for sin in the world, all men would believe in God with the same spontaneity that we believe ourselves or other people to exist, for example. If man is to come unto a pure knowledge of God, free from doubt, Calvin argues that man ought to place his trust of conviction in the secret testimony of the Holy Spirit, a higher source of authority than human reason. His argument rests on the principle that even if one were to rationally come unto knowledge of God by a proper and defensible noetic structure, one would still be subject to correction once an opponent has come up with a good and reasonable counter-argument to the initial proposition (Plantinga 1983:64-67). The Reformed objection to the natural theology set forth by Descartes is based on tension concerning the certainty of God's existence. Where

Cartesianism makes God the conclusion of a syllogism, Scripture speaks with authority, holding God's existence as a presupposition. Man essentially has an epistemic duty to believe in God as properly basic. It radically differs from Descartes's natural theology in that it asserts that rational argument and proofs cannot form the foundation of man's confidence in God (Plantinga 1983:71-73). Van Mastricht (1654:1:2.2) also maintains this epistemic approach when he writes early on in his dissertation:

And that in case of no principle can it be more solid and certain and able to build upon knowledge, than of the Holy Scripture. And consequently, whatever is conveyed with it, is to be received just as if it were true, and whatever conflicts with it, disapproved as being false.³

5.3 Two Views on God's Omnipotence

This epistemological controversy gave birth to two opposing views regarding God's omnipotence. Descartes argued that God cannot be omnipotent in His essence without being it in His power as well (Goudriaan 1999:85). Descartes's epistemological certainty was ultimately secured by metaphysical explorations, although his extrapolations on divine existence and the nature of the soul were intended to secure the truthfulness of distinct and clear ideas. Because he believed in an omnipotent God who freely created eternal truths, the issue of divine will and knowledge was at the heart of Descartes' metaphysics. Descartes denied the existence of substantial forms, which in effect made the divine will the absolute cause of everything. Voetius thus rejected Cartesianism arguing that by its denial of all substantial forms, it failed to properly explain divine concurrence with creation, i.e. the purpose behind God's particular design and government of the

³ Adeoque nulli principio, Solidiorem et certiore posse superstrui scientiam, quam scripturae sacrae. Et consequenter quicquid cum ea convenit, illud tanquam verum, esse recipiendum, quod contra cum ea pugnat, ut falsum esse reprobandum.

universe. (Bac 2010: 212-213). The Cartesian view would allow God to act contrary to His revealed nature, while the Voetian view emphasized the necessary consistency of Divine self-revelation (both special and natural) with God's exercise of His omnipotent power. The Cartesian view is founded largely on the nominalist distinction between God's *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata*, which initially arose out of Abelard and Roselin's opposition to Aristotelian realism in the twelfth century. They denied the existence of universals outside of the human mind. Their position became known as nominalism because they reduced universals to mere *nomina*, or names (Gillespie 1995:13-14). Aquinas, along with the other late-medieval scholastics, affirmed that God was both absolutely omnipotent and absolutely rational. They believed that God's *potentia ordinata* constrained God from acting absolutely freely, but bound Him to act according to His nature. William Ockham affirmed that true omnipotence meant the supremacy of the *potentia absoluta* over the *potentia ordinata*, and thus rejected all attempts to reconcile theology with philosophy, affirming the supremacy of the former over the latter (Gillespie 1995:14-16). This, ironically, is quite contradictory to what Descartes attempted with his *mathesis universalis* (Gillespie 1995:34). The reason for these contrasting views is that, although both Ockham and Descartes presupposed an omnipotent God whose incomprehensible form is just as terrifying as it is to be adored, Ockhamism emphasized man's insignificance against the greatness of God, while Cartesianism sought liberation and enlightenment from the bondage of the dark and mysterious omnipotent God (Gillespie 1995: 11, 24).

Despite both adhering to a high view of omnipotence, an important distinction can be made between the Nominalist view of omnipotence and that of the Reformers. For example Calvin (1863) writes in his *Institutes* I.7.5:

[T]here is no use in absurdly disputing concerning the power of God in opposition to his truth; and therefore there is no ground for

caviling, when it is said that the thing cannot be, which the Scriptures declare will never be.

In *Institutes* I.17.1 Calvin explains the value of the Biblical doctrine of Divine Providence. In this section Calvin shows *Providentia Dei* to be all-encompassing, i.e. an exercise of God's absolute omnipotence, but thereafter notes that the purpose with which God exercises His omnipotence in providence is to show forth his special care for his entire creation, but in particular His church. In the same section he also finds it necessary to add that

although the paternal favour and beneficence, as well as the judicial severity of God, is often conspicuous in the whole course of his Providence, yet occasionally as the causes of events are concealed, the thought is apt to rise, that human affairs are whirled about by the blind impulse of Fortune, or our carnal nature inclines us to speak if God were amusing himself by tossing men up and down like balls.

Likewise, the Belgic Confession (1619) in article 13 on God's providence teaches that God "leads and governs [all things] according to His holy will, in such a way that nothing happens in this world without his orderly arrangement," but in the same article adds that "this doctrine gives us unspeakable comfort since it teaches us that nothing can happen to us by chance but only by the arrangement of our gracious heavenly Father." In contrast to the nominalist notion of a dark and mysterious omnipotent God, Calvinism emphasizes God's fatherly love for creation and his Church in particular, as a primary motivation when exercising His omnipotent power.

It is clear that the Reformers' successors, the Reformed scholastics, also viewed the omnipotent will in the divine Agent quite differently from their opponents, the Remonstrants. While the latter saw 'will' primarily in terms of its ability to choose, the Reformed emphasized that desire underlies

volition. Freedom was seen as self-determination, that is, God's freedom lies in the fact that He alone is the absolute *παντοκράτωρ* (a word derived from the Greek stems *πας* and *κρατεο*, meaning "all-governing"). Contingency may be supposed within this scheme, but this definition of freedom is compatible with necessity and only excludes coercion. Descartes, well aware of the two opposing views of divine freedom, affirms both spontaneity (self-assertion) and indifference (ability to choose) with regard to omnipotence (Bac 2010: 227-228). Bac (2010: 228) explains:

The most consistent reconstruction [of Descartes' view] is to say that outwardly, with respect to all things, God has indifference and an open choice between real alternatives. Inwardly, with respect to his own will, God has no power to the contrary, but spontaneously chooses what is best.

Following Voetius, Van Mastricht affirmed the absolute dependence of both all possibilities and all truths on God's will (Goudriaan 1999: 130). Van Mastricht (1:1) writes that no true knowledge can be completely separated from the knowledge of God's revealed will:

Thus Theology, expressed in the Holy Scripture, that all other knowledge, in so far as it leads to the ultimate end, and which is so much more in relation to *scientia subalternans* is the right teaching, because their conclusions, as [it is] approved by the testimony of the first truth, as it infallibly presupposes the truth, and correctly prescribes these [truths] to other sciences as principles in such a way that whatever is objected to, that that rightly be rejected as false. Therefore, although rightly established through authority, that true and characteristic principles should be accepted, it is however not in such a manner, that all other principles even of changing

knowledge and conclusions are immediately rejected as spurious and false principles.⁴

5.4 Knowledge and Doubt in Cartesianism

Knowledge and doubt are mutually exclusive in Cartesian thought; all articles of knowledge must be held with certainty. However, doubt is necessary for the mind to come unto true and pure knowledge, as it is doubt that sets the standards of certainty. Since the main end of Descartes's universal science is the understanding of nature for the purpose of mastering it, doubt is not an end in itself in Cartesian thought, as it is with Socrates or Montaigne; he aims not at aporetic or theoretical wisdom, but at practical knowledge. Before man can master nature, he must become his own master by liberating himself from all deception and bondages that God could have possibly created. Doubt serves this purpose. As Gillespie (1995:43-44) describes it:

The will as doubt is able to free man from these illusions and establish the foundations for true judgment and thus free action. Doubt is not judgment but a decision that no judgment can be made with certainty, that a question remains which makes it impossible either to affirm or to deny the case in question. Doubt thus is the recognition of the absence of the inner light that reveals the truth as the truth.

It must always be kept in mind, however, that since everything is ostensibly dubitable, this path may, in fact, never lead to certainty, but at least serves the purpose of liberating man from both the possibly deceiving Creator and His creation. Danie Goosen observes that this Cartesian desire for practical knowledge over theoretical knowledge has had a significant impact on the academic sphere and modern universities.

⁴ Theologia enim, in Sacra Scriptura comprehensa, omnes alias scientias, quoad summum finem dirigens, adeoque sub alternans scientiae atenus recte dicta, quoniam conclusiones suas, utpote primae veritatis testi monio comprobatae, ut infallibiliter veras praesupponit, aliis scientiis eas ut principia recte praescribit, ita ut quicquid repugnet, ut falsum recte rejiciatur.

The Cartesian emphasis on the practical at the cost of the theoretical value of knowledge has prepared the way for a radical shift in ontological focus and a philosophy where reality and being are almost always reduced to the lowest common denominator (Goosen 2011:1-3).

Goosen furthermore explains that this ontological plummeting has a dramatic effect on one's understanding of the relationship between theory and practice. It does away with theory as a guide in man's search for *sapientiae* ("wisdom"), while the practical is reduced to nothing but a pragmatic, utilitarian, power-driven tool in order to control man's reality (Goosen 2011:1).

With his second meditation, Descartes had freed himself and his will from deception, but he was in a void, having scattered the universe and rendered himself unable to believe anything. He persevered on the path of doubt, determined to continue until he found something that he could indubitably believe or until he could indubitably conclude that everything is doubtful. Descartes then arrived at his fundamental principle, which, as Gillespie (1995: 44-45) rightly points out, could not be understood in a syllogistic way:

Given his rejection of syllogistic logic, it seems unlikely that he would ground his thought on a syllogism. If we reject the syllogistic interpretation, however, we must find an alternative interpretation for the principle. Descartes' assertion that it is based on a simple act of mental vision suggests that it is an intuition (AT 7:140-141; CSM2:200). He asserts, however, that intuition and the simple things made available by intuition cannot be the basis for truth. Indeed, it was the rejection of intuition that set him on the path of doubt ... The simple things are known immediately, but the principle only as a result of reasoning. Descartes' fundamental principle is not the conclusion of a syllogism or an intuition but a judgment and thus an act of the will.

Cartesian philosophy moves from doubt (Meditation I) to the acknowledgment of the doubter's own existence (Meditation II) to the acknowledgment of the existence of God (Meditation III). Doubt and *cogito* are thus the fundamental steps to the knowledge of God, which necessarily precedes any certain knowledge of the divinity, as the latter cannot be separated from the first two. Therefore, according to Descartes, the knowledge of God fundamentally rests upon knowledge of oneself, which becomes the prime point of departure for obtaining any knowledge about God (Goudriaan 1999:171-173).

In the fourth meditation, Descartes argues that whatever one clearly and distinctly perceive or understand is true — not just in the case of ideas but of real things in the world representing those ideas. In his fifth meditation, Descartes contends for a simplistic view of the existence of a supreme God, arguing that existence cannot in reality be separated from essence in the Supreme Being. Descartes, implicitly relying on the traditional distinction between essence and existence argues:

But if the mere fact that I can produce from my thought the idea of something entails that everything which I clearly and distinctly perceive to belong to that thing really does belong to it, is not this a possible basis for another argument to prove the existence of God? Certainly, the idea of God, or a supremely perfect being, is one that I find within me just as surely as the idea of any shape or number. And my understanding that it belongs to his nature that he always exists is no less clear and distinct than is the case when I prove of any shape or number that some property belongs to its nature. (AT 7:65; CSM 2:45).

Descartes here takes a distinctly conceptualist approach. He differs from the traditional approach, however, in that he extends the rational distinction between *essence* and *existence* to God but then goes on to say that essence and existence are merely rationally distinct, not distinct in

reality. He further affirms that there are different grades of existence, thereby concluding that unlike creation, God is rationally distinct from His *necessary* existence, while creation is rationally distinct from its *possible* existence (Nolan 2011). By doing this, however, he has denied God to be the *esse intensivum* which He is in traditionalist thought.

In Cartesian philosophy, knowledge becomes purely a medium for power by which reality can be brought under the dominion of man. Whereas in traditionalist thought, knowledge is teleologically directed at the highest good, the modernist sees freedom in the liberation of oneself from any teleological purpose in order to become part of the non-teleological tumble of energies (Goosen 2011:6-8). Van Mastricht decidedly takes a stand against this Cartesian view of knowledge, especially when applied to special revelation (1654 1:7.8):

He [Wittich] continues:

Therefore, God does speak with the people, but He senses not with him (but with Descartes and other wise men) and so voluntarily composes what He prescribes to men that should be done through logic.

Response 1: The logic of nobody, perhaps by chance the Cartesian [logic] prescribes to speak falsely to the sense and satisfaction of another. 2. If it did prescribe it, this would however not therefore immediately agree with the Holy Spirit, who teaches the truth infallibly and without any respect of persons, as indeed about the Pharisees and Christ in Matt. 22.⁵

Descartes's conceptualism enables him to make claims about God's essence prior to begging the question of His existence. The way Descartes

⁵ Pergit, loquitur igitur Deus cum vulgo (sed non cum eo (sed cum Carthesio et similibus sapientibus) sensit, et ita sponte facit, quod hominibus logica faciendum praescribit. Resp 1: Nulli logica, nisi forte Carthesiana, praescribit loqui falsum, ad sensum et placitum alterius. 2. Si praescriberet, non tamen hoc ideo statim Spiritui Sancto conveniret, qui veritatem infallibiter docet, absque ullo respectu personarum, ut de Christo vere Pharisaei Matt. 22.

applies it here, however, being at odds with Aristotelian realism, has led some scholars to argue that Descartes is here committed to a form of Platonic realism (Nolan 2011). Descartes not only emphasizes that essence and existence are only conceptual, but goes as far as to say that existence is necessarily contained in the concept of a thing; consequently necessary perfect existence is contained in the concept of a supremely perfect being. Descartes uses the distinction between contingent or possible existence on the one hand, and necessary existence on the other to account for the theological difference between a supreme God and His creatures. God exists ontologically independent, while creation has a dependent existence. For Descartes, therefore, the relation between essence and existence is not any different in God than in His creation. It is simply the grade of existence that differs and it is the grade of God's existence that makes Him unique. He explains that

the existence of a triangle should not be compared with the existence of God, since the relation between existence and essence is manifestly quite different in the case of God from what it is in the case of the triangle. God is his own existence, but this is not true of the triangle (AT 7:383; CSM 2:263).

However, Johannes Caterus⁶ adds:

even if it is granted that a supremely perfect being carries the implication of existence by virtue of its very title, it still does not follow that the existence in question is anything actual in the real world; all that follows is that the concept of existence is inseparably linked to the concept of a supreme being. So you cannot infer that the existence of God is anything actual unless you suppose that the supreme being actually exists; for then it will actually contain all

⁶ Johan de Kater (1590-1655) was a Catholic priest and theologian at Alkmaar, the Netherlands. He was requested to write objections to Descartes' *Meditations*, having been sent copies prior to its publication. Descartes would later publish de Kater's objections along with his response (Ariew, 2006:51).

perfections, including the perfection of real existence (cited in Nolan 2011).

In response, Descartes explains that the principle of clear and distinct perception is indeed an attempt to bridge the inferential gap between thought and reality. Nolan explains:

For Descartes one does not have to build existence into the idea of something if that idea is clear and distinct; existence is already included in every clear and distinct idea. But it does not follow that the thing represented by such an idea actually exists, except in the case of God. We cannot produce ontological arguments for finite things for the simple reason that the clear and distinct ideas of them contain merely dependent existence. Actual existence is demanded only by the idea of God, which uniquely contains independent existence.

Because he accepts that certain ideas can be clearly and distinctly perceived while others cannot merely be taken as a brute fact, Descartes has often been charged with dogmatism. He does, however, have principled reasoning whereby he accepts that everyone has the same set of innate ideas. After having determined that God is not an absolute deceiver, he establishes in the third meditation that God, out of benevolence, implanted the same set of innate ideas in all finite minds (Nolan 2011).

Descartes doubts the existence of creation, as it is only verifiable via the senses, which are themselves dubitable. As we receive the message of Scripture through the senses, it becomes dubitable thereby. The implications of Descartes's radical doubt is that even the existence of Scripture is not absolutely certain. As we might also be deceived concerning our observation and experience of creation around us, the scriptural teaching that God and His attributes can be known through it (Romans 1:19-20) is also to be denied. Furthermore, and probably the

most directly relevant implication of this hyperbolic doubt for our current study, is the fact that this doubt is obviously cast upon the content of the Scriptures. When the content of Scripture contradicts indubitable philosophical knowledge, the latter is to be preferred in favour of the former. Descartes reconciles this with Christianity by saying that although hyperbolic doubt now philosophically trumps Scripture, the practical value of Scripture for religious exercises should still remain intact. This attempt to reconcile the implications of his first meditation with fundamental principles of the Christian religion forms the logical foundation for his formulation of the Accommodation Theory, i.e. that God, for didactic reasons and without malicious intent, can bring forth *verbale aliquod mendacium* ("verbal lies") through the Scriptures (Goudriaan 1999:174-177). Wittich, Cartesianism's chief proponent among the Reformed Scholastics, relies upon this theory to describe his work as a *Dissertationis de usu et abusu Scripturae in Philosophia Naturali*, whereby he intends to show that the Bible cannot be used as a source for natural physics and philosophy. The Cartesian sentiment that knowledge is to be obtained for the sake of liberation from deception and doubt and for the establishment one's own lordship, is also found in this statement in the first chapter of Wittich's dissertation (1:VI):

Whether we prove irresistibly with the clearest arguments what faith will do, we hope for an attentive reader and who will consider the case without being influenced and without prejudice. Therefore we first undertake to show that Scripture very often speaks according to the opinion of men. When that has been proved, another conclusion, just as some or other following logically, will easily follow.⁷

⁷ Utrumque evincemus argumentis evidentissimis, quae fidem factura esse speramus lectori attento, et rem fine affectibus et praejudiciis pensiculanti. Prius igitur demonstrare aggredimur, quod Scriptura saepissime loquatur secundum opinionem vulgi, quo evicto altera Conclusio tanquam Consectarium aliquod facile sequetur.

5.5 Wittich's Purpose with *Dissertationes Duae*

Wittich's chief purpose for writing his dissertations is to demonstrate that Copernicus's theory is compatible with divine revelation. Evidence of this is his contention that Cartesianism really is the true foundation for Copernican cosmology (Vermij 2002: 146). Copernicus's cosmology had previously encountered problems gaining acceptance because it was seen by some to counter generally accepted truths concerning the universe. It was because of Cartesianism that heliocentrism not only became acceptable, but also dominant. Descartes's argument that mathematical reasoning should be man's guide to the truth could just as well have been formulated with the Copernican debate in mind. The fact that Descartes regarded nature as uniform implied that the universe was both without a centre and endless (Vermij 2002: 138-139). Descartes furthermore rejected the Aristotelian absolute distinction between motion and rest. He favoured a relativistic definition in which motion could only be defined with respect to something else. An object's motion was now to be defined in terms of its immediate surroundings – thus, a drifting ship on a swiftly flowing river would be defined to be at rest. Therefore, even though the earth revolves around the sun, it is, properly speaking, still at rest. The most probable reason Descartes formulated the issue like this was to weaken religious arguments against the Copernican system (Vermij 2002: 141-142). Right at the beginning of his second treatise, Wittich explains the intended purpose with these words: "the disposition and ordering of the whole universe and of its original bodies and defends the sentiment of the noble Descartes about the real and quiet movement of the earth".⁸

The Reformed scholastics were largely capable of keeping Cartesianism at bay until the debate concerning Copernicus and the Bible was brought to the head by Wittich, whereby Cartesianism entered the very heart of theology itself. Wittich openly connected Copernicanism and Cartesianism,

⁸ *Dispositionem et Ordinem totius universi et principalium eius corporum tradit, sententiamque Nobilissimi Cartesii, de vera Quietude et Vero motu Terra defendit.*

not only casting doubt upon texts concerning the motion of the sun (e.g. Joshua 10:12) but also instigating debate concerning Scripture's authority in relation to Cartesian philosophy. Wittich claimed that the attacks on Cartesianism were merely deceptions of the devil, the enemy of truth (Vermij 2002: 256-258). The Bible, he argued, could not be used as a source for natural philosophy, whose only true source can be the light of reason. In his first treatise, Wittich specifically argued that when addressing moral and practical matters, Scripture speaks according to the opinion of the people of the time and context in which it was written, and not according to the objective truth. He explains in Chapter 1:VII of his dissertation:

However we ought to establish, what it is, that comes into question, so that we correctly understand the limits, and so that some place of a false claim not be allowed. Therefore, when we say that the Scriptures most often speak about natural matters, it should be known that it does so according to the opinion of the common people, not according to the accurate truth of the matter, and that 1. it is called the *opinion of the common people*, not in that sense, as if the whole people follow the perception of the leaders and external appearance, and this does not even often happen through those who desire to be more wise above the common people, but that the name arises from the more powerful or from the multitude, such an opinion is also understood which is founded upon the opinions of appearances and prejudices, however it happens and who hold to it, whether the name is obtained from an educated man, or whether it applies to the lower ranks.⁹

⁹ Constituere autem hic nos oportet, quid sit illud; quod venit in quaestionem, ut terminos rite intellegamus, ne locus aliquis concedatur calumniae. Itaque, quan dodicimus Scripturam saepissime loqui de rebus naturalibus, secundum opinionem vulgi, non secundum accuratam rei veritatem, sciendum est, 1. Vulgi opinionem vocari, non eosensu, quasi tantum vulgus sequatur sensuum ductum et apparentiam externam, ac si hoc non etiam saepe fiat abiliis, qui supra vulgus sapere cupiunt; sed denominationem fieri a potiori sive multitudine, et intellegi opinionem talem, quae fundata est super apparentiis sensuum et praejudiciis, quicumque etiam sit, qui eam teneat, sive nomen eruditi mereatur, sive ad inferiorem censum pertineat.

Vermij (2002: 258) also observes:

Wittichus added some considerations of his own. In his third chapter, he undertook to demonstrate his thesis in a large number of places where the Bible, speaking on practice and morals, apparently spoke “according to the opinion of the people in deviation from the truth.” Especially this third chapter would arouse the indignation of the Voetians.

In devaluating the claims of Scripture regarding natural matters to the prejudiced opinion of ancient people, Wittich also decidedly broke with the Christian scholarly tradition of *physica sacra*, the philosophical approach where scholarly work in the fields of physics, medicine, politics and law were weaved together with biblical exegesis. One of the most influential proponents of this tradition in the Calvinist camp was the sixteenth-century French jurist and theologian, Lambert Daneau. He explained that this tradition is rooted in the conviction that while human reason and senses are valuable in the study of natural matters, they can never have a higher authority than the most infallible divine revelation of Holy Scripture:

Truly there is not only one means of defining and determining all the parts thereof [natural philosophy]. For those things which in this art and knowledge we learn from God’s Word, are most sure and most true, as grounded upon a most certain foundation, so that whosoever contradicts it, we must deal no further with him, but as it is said, give him over. But whatsoever other things are recited touching natural philosophy, they are not so sure and firm, because they are only established by man’s sense and reason: two things which are not undoubted and most assured (*ακινητα*) grounds. (1602:48)¹⁰

¹⁰ Certe in omnibus ipsius [physicae cognitionis] partibus, non est una et eadem definiendi, et statuendi ratio. Nam que in hac arte et cognitione ex Dei verbo discimus et haurimus, illa sunt

However, he continues to say that this by no means devaluates reason and the senses in the study of natural matters; on the contrary, they are very necessary:

Because God has not given those two parts of judgment (*κριτηρια*) unto men in vain, namely the reason of the mind and the sense of the body, as we are taught in Job 12:12 and 34:3: the judgment of both which, although not most certain in all things, and sufficiently subtile, is not always lying nor deceived with regard to all things. So that all matters, which are established on its basis, ought not to be condemned as altogether vain and false. (*ibid*)¹¹

Wittich's first dissertation, and in particular also this third chapter to which Vermij refers, are the focus of the current study. For the sake of context, though, note also that he devotes his second of the two dissertations to explaining the Copernican-Cartesian world system, and to answering several objections, both philosophical and scriptural, from his adversaries (Vermij 2002: 258).

The effect of Wittich's publication was to put Copernican physics on the agenda of Reformed scholasticism. Apart from Van Mastricht, Jacob Du Bois reacted primarily to Wittich's first dissertation with his work *Veritas et autoritas sacra* in 1655, in which the Cartesian foundation of Wittich's work was the main target. His main critique can be summarized as the accusation that the Cartesians are simply refusing to subject themselves to divine authority. He thus argues that Cartesians like Wittich are disciples not of Christ but of Descartes (Vermij 2002:259-260). Another prominent opponent of Wittich was Jacob Revius (1586-1658), a Dutch Reformed minister and Calvinist poet, who was a renowned life-long

certissima et verissima quia certissimo innituntur fundamento, cui qui contradicit, ille ad agnatos, ut dicitur, erit nobis relegandus. Que autem preter Dei verbum de rebus Physicis afferuntur, illa iam non sunt tam sixa, et firma, quia humanae rationis vel sensus iudicio tantum confirmantur: quae duo non sunt inconcussa, et ακινητα sulcimenta.

¹¹ Quia non frustra Deus haec duo κριτηρια dedit hominibus, animi scilicet rationem, et sensum corporis, ut docetur Iob 12:12; 34:3 cuius utriusque iudicium, si non in omnibus certissimum est, et satis perspicax, non est tamen semper mendax et falsum in omnibus. Itaque tanquam omnino vana et falsa damnari non debet et tractatio quae iis duobus erit subnixa erit confirmata.

defender of the theology of Dordt against the Remonstrants and Cartesians (Buitendijk 1980:3). He published a response to Wittich's second dissertation in 1655. The title of his work was even called *Anti-Wittichus*, wherein he launched an attack on Wittich's cosmological views (Vermij 2002:260). At the theological faculty in Utrecht, several responses against Wittich were given, one of which was by a student, Arnoldus Niepoort, who defended a two-part disputation "on the authority and truth of Holy Scriptures in Philosophical matters;" during the same time Johannes Beusechum defended his treatise "on the infallible truthfulness of the natural things that are revealed throughout Holy Scriptures" (Vermij 2002: 261). A fourth treatise by Henricus Troy (1633-1715) entitled *A philosophical-theological investigation, whether N.N. has proved, by way of some theses and hypothesis, so firm the rest of the sun and the twofold motion of the earth, that Holy Scripture, stating the opposite, should be taken as speaking to the erroneous opinion of the common people* was directed at Wittich's advocacy of the Accommodation Theory (*ibid*). Niepoort argued that while the Church has always emphasized the superiority of the Bible to the Koran or Talmud with regard to secular knowledge, Wittich now invalidated this claim. He also contended that while Wittich accuses others of harbouring prejudices, he failed to see his own. Furthermore he emphasized the exegetical principle that Scripture interprets itself. Beusechum principally occupied himself with a defense of Mosaic physics, claiming that while the Scriptures are indeed silent on many matters, everything that it does state is true. While Niepoort and Beusechum limited their discussions to purely theological issues, Troy engaged in philosophy itself as his main subject. He investigated Wittich's mathematical proof of the motion of the earth and then attempted to disprove his thesis. While Wittich's argument is purely Cartesian, Troy grounds himself in Aristotelian philosophy. In his conclusion, he even remarked that according to Wittich, Descartes seems to have written Scripture. Wittich would eventually write a response to these four dissertations in 1655, wherein he would claim that even though

his disputations were not in need of a separate defense, he would use the opportunity to elaborate on his own view (Vermij 2002: 262-263).

5.6 Van Mastricht's Response: *Vindicae Veritatis*

Van Mastricht's response to Wittich in his *Vindicae Veritatis* on the other hand, sets forth the argument that Cartesianism, by virtue of hyperbolic doubt, first brings people to skepticism *en route* to atheism - and in order to do that, the authority of the Bible needs to be attacked. He therefore turned the tables upon Wittich's claim that the attacks on Cartesianism were based on deceptions from the devil (Vermij 2002: 260). In contrast to the Cartesian doubt which he accused Wittich of advocating, he writes (1655: 1:2.2) that "I have therefore safely said that the light of reason exists nowhere more perfectly, than in Scripture."¹² His response was primarily concerned with the defense of the orthodox Reformed belief in Scripture's supreme authority in the midst of the epistemological challenges posed by Cartesianism, particularly as it applied to the exegesis of those passages where Wittich made use of the Accommodation Theory. For Van Mastricht, Wittich's Cartesianism elevates reason above the instrumental function which it rightly occupies in the understanding of theological truths, but the resident principle (*habitus*) in man upon which theology must ultimately rest, is always faith (Neele 2009:110-111).

5.7 Conclusion

Wittich's application of the Accommodation Theory to his understanding of Scripture is clearly rooted in Cartesian philosophical presuppositions. His Cartesian separation of natural philosophy and theology, and the consequent break from the tradition of *physica sacra*, enabled him to understand the Scripture in a way that was revolutionary within Reformed circles at the time. Van Mastricht objected to Wittich's Cartesian presuppositions, which he viewed as fundamentally at odds with the

¹² Ego quidem lumen rationis perfectius existere nullibi, quam in scriptura, tuto dixerim.

Calvinist understanding of the authority of Scripture and the relationship between natural philosophy and theology.

The next chapter will focus on the exposition of the effects these differing presuppositions had on the two authors' exegesis, as evident from their interpretation of passages from Scripture.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

Having outlined the epistemological foundations of the two Reformed scholastic authors, this thesis will now be concluded by explaining the significance and impact of the dispute on Reformed theology.

6.2 The Authority of Divine Revelation

The epistemic means of acquiring knowledge of God and the authority of those means are most central to the seventeenth century dialogue between Cartesianism and Reformed Orthodoxy and in particular to the dispute between Wittich and Van Mastricht.

Scripture presupposes its own authority. The Pentateuch begins, for example, with a simple affirmation of an act of God in history (Genesis 1:1). The existence of God is not something Scripture arrives at syllogistically, but is proposed as the basic premise of all thought and reason. Scripture speaks of those who foster the thought that God might not exist as foolish (Psalm 14:1). Scripture, given with the intention of being a revelation both of God's character and will, presupposes not only its own authority (II Timothy 3:16), but also the knowability of God through his creation (Psalm 24:1-2).

Goudriaan (1999:4) notes that traditional orthodox Christianity, courtesy of Areopagita, acknowledges three *viae* whereby man, as a philosophical being, comes unto intuitive knowledge of God, namely the *via causalitatis*, *via eminentiae* and *via negativa*. All three proceed from created things. These means of acquiring knowledge of God, however, all lead to an insufficient and incomplete knowledge, as they transmit knowledge of God through His general revelation, which can never point people to Christ.

6.3 Wittich's Promotion of the Accommodation Theory

Descartes approaches the matter radically different with his *via moderna*. The cosmos is insufficient revelation of the existence of God and therefore clear, distinct and adequate knowledge of God can come only through *cogitatio*. This epistemological principle, as well as Descartes's allowance for divine deception, forms the basis of Descartes's philosophy concerning the knowledge of God (Goudriaan 1999:5-6). The acceptance of these epistemological premises would naturally impact one's interpretation of Scripture. This is what has led to the so-called Accommodation Theory, which Descartes formulated only after concluding from his second meditation that, while God is not an absolute malicious deceiver, He still at times might have spoken falsely in the Scripture, in which case natural reason is necessary to liberate man from the potential deception of an omnipotent God (Goudriaan 1999:177). This seems to have been an attractive exegetical principle for Wittich in light his desire to put to rest the confusion that might have arisen among the faithful from the apparent contradiction between Scripture and Copernican physics (Vermij 2002:146). The implications of such a logical contradiction would be, naturally, to reject one of the two and embrace the other. With his defense of the Accommodation Theory, Wittich attempted to prove that one does not have to accept the periphery of Scripture as absolutely true in order to accept its core message, and thus one does not have to choose between Scripture and Copernicanism.

In the first chapter of his treatise, Wittich's first affirmative statement regarding the authority of Scripture can be found in paragraph V, where he claims to believe that Scripture, when making claims about God or soteriology, indeed speaks accurately. He follows this up by a claim most certainly based on the Cartesian philosophy of the knowledge of God: that philosophical knowledge of natural matters can be gained from natural reason, both independent of and even contradictory to Scripture. This is in contradistinction to Descartes, who merely advocated for keeping

religion intact, not so much because it was actually epistemologically defensible, but more because he regarded it as a practically valuable belief-system for mankind to retain (Goudriaan 1999:176). Wittich advocated both a sincere acceptance of the doctrines of Christianity and the conclusions of Copernican physics. This position of his becomes evident early on in Wittich's treatise and is very important to note as it decidedly separates Wittich from true Cartesianism. Wittich's position is not strictly Cartesian in essence, although his exegesis bears witness of a distinctly Cartesian stamp. By casting hyperbolic doubt upon the content of Scripture, Wittich has - perhaps unintentionally - subordinated Scripture as revelation to natural reason, i.e. given man the authoritative judgment over the content of Scripture. This puts him very much at odds with the Voetians of his time, such as Van Mastricht. The modern reader might object to this as too harsh a judgment on Wittich, especially given his claim in 1.VIII. There he writes that the Holy Spirit, who inspired the Scripture, despite accommodating His speech to the erroneous formulas of the common people of the time, does not make the opinions His, but merely does so on pragmatic grounds - as it were, as a means of rhetoric in order to serve a greater purpose.

It becomes clear that within Wittich's thought, however, there is a dualistic tension between man's relation with creation and his relation with God - a dualism of grace and nature, if you will. This is brought about by his Accommodation Theory, which tries to reconcile orthodox Reformed exegesis with Cartesian epistemology. We find this dualistic sentiment in various places in Wittich's treatise, e.g. his first paragraph of Chapter 3, where he states that if he could show several examples where the Scripture speaks of moral matters according to the erroneous opinion of its readers, how much more lawful would it be for the Spirit to do so with regard to natural matters. When one considers this sentiment in view of his affirmation of his acceptance of the absolute authority of Scripture regarding soteriological matters or matters pertaining to God's essence, it

does show that he regards the natural and moral as subordinate to the spiritual sphere. Nolan (2011) points out that Descartes's strictly conceptual view of the relation between essence and existence, shows that he adhered to a form of Platonic Realism. An acceptance of this ontological basis of Cartesianism is what enables Wittich to hold to this dualism, which also serves as an implicit, yet core presupposition for his dissertation. Therein he argued that matters pertaining to the material realm hold an inferior position to the spiritual in Scripture, and are consequently irrelevant to the truth claims of the revelation in Scripture as given by God the Holy Spirit (1.V).

Another clear Cartesian stamp on Wittich's theology in this regard can be seen in his understanding of the effect of the Fall of man. Although Wittich never explicitly mentions his position in terms of the Fall in these chapters, one can derive something in this regard from his statement in Chapter 1.V, where he quotes II Timothy 3:17 to show man's incompleteness regarding the sufficient and true knowledge of God's will. He emphasizes the necessity of special revelation, without submitting to the authority of Scripture on what it teaches concerning moral matters.

6.4 Van Mastricht's Response based on Total Depravity

Van Mastricht clearly regards Wittich's enquiry as relevant and compliments him on his initiative to establish the foundations of true and pure knowledge (1.1). However, he undoubtedly views these Cartesian elements of Wittich's exegetical approach as dangerous and unorthodox – primarily because of his epistemological disagreement with Wittich on the absolute foundation of true knowledge. It is evident that Van Mastricht regards theology as the queen of the sciences, maintaining its chief source, Scripture, should have principal authority over all other sources and conclusions of scientific investigation (1.2). Van Mastricht refers to the knowledge of God as the ultimate end, and therefore immediately distances himself from Cartesianism by acknowledging God as the *esse*

intensivum. Van Mastricht's approach is distinctly Reformed, in that it begins with God and regards true knowledge of Him as the highest form thereof. Epistemologically, Van Mastricht presupposes God as truthful and ultimate and, since Scripture is God's revelation of Himself (I Peter 1:21), all other knowledge is subordinate to it. Here we find the fundamental difference between the Voetians and the Cartesians, and the very reason why Van Mastricht views a compromise between Cartesian and Reformed epistemology as fundamentally untenable. Whereas God and His truthfulness are presupposed in the latter, Descartes only determined after various meditations that God is not absolutely deceptive. Wittich relinquished this fundamental presupposition in favour of Descartes's meditations, thereby rejecting the *physica sacra* for a strict separation of theology and natural philosophy. From here arises Wittich's suspicion of subjective sense experience and untruthful prejudice in the Scriptures. These are elements of Cartesian doubt.

Van Mastricht's response rightly asks the question: what standard does Wittich use to determine truth? This epistemological issue makes the dispute over what might appear to be mostly trivial passages of Scripture to be so vital. The critical import of the dispute stems from the implications of the epistemological presuppositions adopted by the authors. Van Mastricht alludes to this issue in 1.2.2, where he refers to the Fall of man as the reason why the light of reason cannot be accepted above the infallible truth claims of Scripture. On this point the epistemological *via* taken by Van Mastricht should be duly noted: he refers to the Fall of man and original sin as grounds for his claim that the true light of reason, originally implanted in man, is now depraved and distorted. The record of the Fall of man and its implications on his nature is only contained in Scripture (e.g. Genesis 3; 8:21; Job 15:14; Psalm 51:5; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:10-19; 5:12; 6:23; Ephesians 2:2-3 etc.). While it is certainly possible to come to the knowledge that man is morally fallible from empirical observation or through hyperbolic doubt,

the fact that man had a higher state at his creation, from which he fell, cannot be known apart from Scripture. Thus, in making this claim, Van Mastricht accepts Scripture's supreme authority above man's reason, currently cultivated only within a depraved state from which it cannot escape. Man's reason therefore cannot make the objective judgments concerning reality that Scripture can, being inspired by the Holy Spirit. Van Mastricht is basically asserting that what Wittich sees as the clear light of healthy reason is neither clear nor healthy. Van Mastricht's understanding of the effects of the Fall is that it affects man's knowledge of both supernatural and natural matters. Wittich agrees with the doctrine of Total Depravity regarding the first point, but not the second. While he confesses that Scripture is indeed necessary for any sensible understanding of God and the *via salutis*, and is infallible in this regard, he does not think this applies to his knowledge of natural or moral matters.

Since this dispute involves the doctrine of Total Depravity within the historical context of early high Dutch Reformed scholasticism, a period shortly after the confessional codification of early Reformed orthodoxy, one must look to the *Iudicium synodi nationalis* (Canons of the Synod of Dordt - 1618/19), as it is one of the primary codifications of the theological system of early Reformed orthodoxy, which these high Reformed scholastics further developed (Muller 1987:37-38). The first article of Canon III/IV states that man, prior to the Fall, "was furnished in his mind with a true and salutary knowledge of his Creator and things spiritual."¹ Bearing this doctrinal statement of the synod in mind, one can understand why Wittich could have argued to be within the framework of Reformed theology by acknowledging man's depravity only with regard to the spiritual and not natural or even moral matters. In fact, in the same Canon, article 4 reads:

¹ vera et salutari sui Creatoris et rerum spiritualium notitia in mente.

There is, to be sure, a certain light of nature remaining in man after the fall, by virtue of which he retains some notions about God, natural things, and the difference between what is moral and immoral, and demonstrates a certain eagerness for virtue and for good outward behavior.²

In light of the first article and this first statement of article 4, when taken out of context, it would seem that Wittich was actually completely in line with the theologians at Dordt. However, the next statement has very significant theological implications for our current study:

But this light of nature is far from enabling man to come to a saving knowledge of God and conversion to Him - so far, in fact, that man does not use it rightly even in matters of nature and society. Instead, in various ways he completely distorts this light, whatever its precise character, and suppresses it in unrighteousness.³

Van Mastricht echoes this in his Dissertation 1.2.2, where he claims that man, due to the fall, was not only completely depraved concerning the saving knowledge of God and also gravely wounded with regard to his knowledge of natural and moral matters, a sentiment in total agreement with Canon III/IV.4. This confessional position is in stark contrast with Wittich's claim in 1.II. Here, right at the beginning of his work, in establishing the premises of his argument, he moves syllogistically from the endowment of the light of reason in man at the point of creation to the proposition that the contemporary study of natural (and even moral) matters should be allowed to proceed freely on that grounds, thereby completely ignoring any effect the Fall might have had on this light of reason. He concludes this paragraph with a phrase showing his incorporation of Cartesian epistemology within his own system, noting

² Residuum quidem est post lapsum in homine lumen aliquod naturæ, cujus beneficio ille notitias quasdam de Deo, de rebus naturalibus, de discrimine honestorum et turpium retinet, et aliquod virtutis ac disciplinæ externæ studium ostendit.

³ sed tantum abest, ut hoc naturæ lumine ad salutarem Dei cognitionem pervenire, et ad eum se convertere possit, ut ne quidem eo in naturalibus ac civilibus recte utatur, quinimo quaecumque id demum sit, id totum variis modis contaminet, atque in injustitia detineat.

why this study should proceed on the grounds of natural reason: so that “we should be able to avoid falling into error.”⁴ Wittich sees Divine Revelation as something willing to adapt to the ancients’ limited understanding, but this adaption becomes insufficient once man develops a more sophisticated understanding of reality. Van Mastricht, while recognizing the purpose of revelation as something accommodated to depraved humans and their limited understanding,⁵ recognizes that this very depraved state should hinder man from arrogantly casting doubt upon Divine Revelation, since this would amount to a rejection of an infallible revelation on the merits of a fallible doubt. This seems to be, theologically, the major disagreement between Wittich and Van Mastricht. Consequently, instead of focusing solely on the different epistemological systems, as would be demanded when analyzing the differences between Voetius and Descartes, Wittich’s incorporation of Cartesianism into a broadly Reformed theological system necessitates our study to have a theological focus. That is why the present author analyses the two authors’ differing premises in the light of the Canons of Dordt. The implication of the structure of Wittich’s Chapter 1 paragraph II as it pertains to Wittich’s optimism with regard to man’s reason, implies a theological break from the Dutch Reformed orthodox in the line of Gomarus and Voetius. The significance of this theological break, which emerges at the very beginning of a historical-grammatical study of Scripture (Genesis 3), is significant with regard to Van Mastricht and Wittich’s different readings of the various scriptural texts as discussed in chapters 5 and 3 of their respective dissertations.

Contrary to Wittich, Van Mastricht (in agreement with the synod of Dordt) holds to a holistic view of original sin and the Fall in which the whole cosmos is affected. This is in line with the Mosaic narrative of Genesis 3:14-21, which clearly points to the cosmological effect of the curse brought about by the Fall.

⁴ nobis queamus cavere, ne in errores incidamus.

⁵ This is in agreement with Calvin’s view of Divine Accommodation (see section 2.6).

In conclusion: The nature of the inspiration and authority of Scripture as a special revelation of God, in particular because it concerns the epistemological foundation upon which the Church of the Reformation was built, is always by necessity a primary concern for Reformed theology. Petrus Van Mastricht's refutation of Christoph Wittich's application of the Accommodation Theory is a prime example of the 17th century Dutch Reformed struggle against modernism, at least in regards to its epistemological foundations in Cartesianism. An essential Cartesian point of departure is that true knowledge rests within man himself and is not something strictly revealed by an ultimate divine authority and a Spirit of truth. According to this supposition man must liberate himself from the "bondage" which divine revelation places upon him by rationally arriving at liberating and useful knowledge. To Van Mastricht it is evident that in his *Dissertationes Duae*, Wittich, although by no means a pure Cartesian, compromises the traditional Calvinist point of departure: that man's chief end is the search for knowledge for the sake of virtuously serving God (Westminster Larger Catechism Q&A 1, 2).

SUMMARY

The significance of the dispute between the two 17th century Dutch Reformed Scholastics, Christoph Wittich and Petrus van Mastricht, within the theological and philosophical context of Post-Reformation Protestant Scholastic Theology can scarcely be overestimated. The issue of the authority of Scripture, itself the epistemological standard upon which the Reformation was built, is at the very core of the dispute. From the historical context of their dispute as well as the philosophical presuppositions with which they approach the issue at hand, one can glean the differing philosophical lines of thought present in the exegetical approaches of the two respective authors. An epistemological battle regarding the foundation and nature of true knowledge is at the heart of this dispute. Cartesianism gained increasing popularity in 17th century Dutch academic circles, and René Descartes's *Accommodation Theory*, i.e. his attempt to reconcile his epistemological methodology of liberation from deception via hyperbolic doubt with Divine Revelation, plays a central role in Wittich's dealings with Scripture. Wittich's acceptance of this element of Cartesian epistemology should be seen in light of his desire to reconcile Copernican physics with the revelation of the Holy Scripture. Van Mastricht on the other hand, responds with an attempt to prove that the application of the Accommodation Theory in the field of Biblical exegesis, particularly with regard to passages where moral and practical matters are addressed, is heresy, since he regards Wittich's approach is fundamentally rooted in the presupposition that human reason is not fallen and enslaved to sin as Reformed Theology has historically taught, and that this forms the premises from which Wittich understands its ability to function perfectly well without the need of being redeemed and sanctified first. The net effect of these differing philosophical and theological presuppositions is that the authors' respective interpretations of the same Biblical texts radically differ, as

what Wittich constantly sees as the Holy Spirit's accommodation of absolute truths to the beliefs of the original audience to whom the books of the canon were addressed, is viewed by Van Mastricht as the mere rendering of absolute truths by the Holy Spirit within the particular historical and social context in which they were written. Therefore Van Mastricht views Wittich's application of Cartesianism to the exegesis of Scripture via the Accommodation Theory to be at odds with the historic Calvinist doctrine of Divine Accommodation in special revelation. Van Mastricht defends Scripture's absolute authority in the midst of potential skepticism caused by an incorporation of Cartesianism into Reformed Theology.

Key Terms:

Reformed Scholasticism; Cartesianism; Authority of Scripture; Divine Revelation; Accommodation Theory; Rationalism; Modernism; Dutch Reformed Theology; Biblical Exegesis

OPSOMMING

Die betekenis van die dispuut tussen die twee 17e eeuse Nederlandse Gereformeerde Skolastici, Christoph Wittich en Petrus van Mastricht, binne die teologiese en filosofiese konteks van Post-Reformasie Protestantse Skolastiese Teologie kan beswaarlik oorskat word. Die kwessie aangaande die gesag van die Skrif, wat self die epistemologiese standaard was waarop die Reformasie gebou is, is die ware kern van die dispuut. Vanuit die historiese konteks van hul dispuut, sowel as die filosofiese vooronderstellings waarmee hulle die betrokke kwessie benader, kan die filosofiese denkyne in die eksegetiese benaderings van die twee onderskeie outeurs gekontrueer word. Die kern van die dispuut is 'n epistemologiese stryd aangaande die grondslag en aard van ware kennis. Cartesianisme het gedurende die 17e eeu toenemend gewild geraak binne akademiese kringe in Nederland en René Descartes se Akkommodasieteorie, i.e. sy poging om sy epistemologiese metodologie van bevryding van misleiding via hiperboliese twyfel met die goddelike openbaring te versoen, speel 'n sentrale rol in Wittich se hantering van die Skrif. Wittich se aanvaarding van hierdie element van Cartesiese epistemologie moet gesien word in die lig van sy begeerte om Copernicaanse fisika met die openbaring van die Heilige Skrif te versoen. Aan die ander kant reageer Van Mastricht met 'n poging om te bewys dat die toepassing van die Akkommodasieteorie op die eksegeese van die Skrif, veral in verband met tekste waar morele en praktiese kwessies bespreek word, 'n dwaalleer is, aangesien hy Wittich se benadering beskou as fundamenteel begrond in die vooronderstelling dat die menslike rede nie gevalle en verslaaf aan die sonde is soos Gereformeerde teologie histories geleer het nie. Dit vorm die basis waarop Wittich die rede beskou as perfek funksionierend sonder om eers verlos en geheilig te word. Die netto effek van hierdie filosofiese en teologiese voorveronderstellings is dat die outeurs se onderskeie interpretasies van dieselfde Bybelse tekste radikaal

verskil, aangesien dit wat Wittich deurlopend beskou as die Heilige Gees se akkommodering van absolute waarhede met die oortuigings van die oorspronklike gehoor aan wie die boeke van die kanon gerig is, sien Van Maastricht dit as die blote weergee van absolute waarhede deur die Heilige Gees binne die besonderse historiese en maatskaplike konteks waarbinne dit neergeskryf is. Daarom beskou Van Masticht Wittich se toepassing van Cartesianisme op die eksegeese van die Skrif via die Teorie van Akkommodasie as teenstrydig met die historiese Calvinistiese leer van Goddelike Akkommodasie in die besondere openbaring. Van Maastricht verdedig die Skrif se absolute gesag te midde van potensiële skeptisisme veroorsaak deur 'n inkorporering van Cartesianisme in Gereformeerde Teologie.

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