

## COCCEIUS ANTI-SCHOLASTICUS?

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### I. Introduction

In 1859 at the University of Utrecht the prospective Reformed minister A. van der Flier<sup>1</sup> defended under the presidency of professor H. E. Vinke a doctoral thesis entitled *Specimen historico-theologicum de Johanne Coccejo antischolastico*. Like his colleague G. van Gorkom<sup>2</sup> three years before, he portrayed Johannes Cocceius as an important seventeenth-century theologian, who cleared the way for an *organica et historica expositio Scripturae*. According to Van der Flier, Cocceius' theology was a specimen of the *odium theologiae scholasticae*, although with the reservation that Cocceius had not yet succeeded in developing a pure *theologia biblica*. Van der Flier's thesis was adopted by Christiaan Sepp in his major work on Reformed theology in the Netherlands during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He added, however, that it was not altogether correct to typify Cocceius as a mere *antischolasticus*, because of the fact that Cocceius, like his orthodox opponents such as Gisbertus Voetius and Samuel Maresius, freely used scholastic definitions and distinctions in his dogmatic works.<sup>3</sup> In their biographical dictionary of Protestant theologians in the Netherlands, De Bie and Loosjes agreed with Sepp's proviso; at the same time they underscored the fact that it had been the merit of

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<sup>1</sup> A. van der Flier (1835-1902) was successively a Reformed minister at the villages of Bunschoten (1860), Broek op Langendijk (1863), Zwartsluis (1865), Harlingen (1874), Lienden (1887) and 's-Hertogenbosch (1902) in the Netherlands.

<sup>2</sup> G. van Gorkom, *Specimen theologicum inaugurale de Joanne Coccejo, Sacri codicis interprete* (diss., Rhen. Traj., 1856).

<sup>3</sup> C. Sepp, *Het godgeleerd onderwijs in Nederland gedurende de 16e en 17e eeuw* (Leiden, 1874), 2:62-63; Cf. J. H. Maronier, *Geschiedenis van het Protestantisme van den Munsterschen vrede tot de Fransche revolutie* (Leiden, 1897), 2:9.

Cocceius "to assure exegetical science a prominent place in the study of theology."<sup>4</sup> Cocceius' starting point was not, as with Voetius, the /228/ doctrine of the Reformed church, but the teachings of the Bible.

Notwithstanding the nuances in the judgements of these nineteenth-century authors, the trajectory for later scholarship was settled. Heinrich Heppe,<sup>5</sup> Gottlob Schrenk<sup>6</sup> and Otto Ritschl<sup>7</sup> presented Cocceius' theology as a renaissance of ancient biblical truth. More recent authors like Charles McCoy<sup>8</sup> and Heiner Faulenbach<sup>9</sup> depicted Cocceius as an exegetical expert with a great distaste for metaphysics and scholasticism. Cocceius developed his entire theological system exclusively on the basis of Holy Scripture. Both McCoy and Faulenbach grounded this assertion on the contents of Cocceius' monograph on the Covenant, the *Summa doctrinae de foedere et testamento Dei* (1648), without examining his theology in its entirety. The following remark of Faulenbach may serve as an illustration of this one-sided view of Cocceius' theology and its relationship to Reformed scholasticism:

Damit verwirft er im Gegensatz zu vielen seiner theologischen Zeitgenossen alle Elemente philosophischer und naturwissenschaftlicher Art in der Theologie, weil sie in der Schrift keinen Grund haben . . . Gegenüber der in dogmatischen Lehrformeln erstarrten und mit logischen Mitteln operierenden orthodoxen Dogmatik war dies jedoch in Wirklichkeit eine grosse Neuerung. Coccejus will kein dogmatisches System, für das die Schrift nur Beweisstellen liefert, das die

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<sup>4</sup> J.P. de Bie en J. Loosjes, *Biographisch woordenboek van Protestantsche Godgeleerden in Nederland* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1949), 2:140.

<sup>5</sup> H. Heppe, *Geschichte des Pietismus und der Mystik* (Leiden, 1879), 226.

<sup>6</sup> G. Schrenk, *Gottesreich und Bund im älteren Protestantismus, vornehmlich bei Johannes Coccejus* (Gütersloh, 1923), 14-17.

<sup>7</sup> O. Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte des Protestantismus. Die Reformierte Theologie des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts in ihrer Entstehung und Entwicklung* (Göttingen, 1926), 3 :435: "Die epochemachende Bedeutung von Coccejus liegt nicht allein in seiner Lehre von Gottes Bund und Testament, sondern zugleich in der von ihm begründeten Richtung eines prinzipiell biblizistisch bestimmten Betriebes der Theologie . . . Coccejus ist in seiner ganzen theologischen Haltung nicht mehr durch die scholastischen Methoden belastet gewesen, denen seit mehr als einem halben Jahrhundert alle reformierten Theologen mehr oder weniger Tribut entrichtet oder wenigstens unwillkürliche Zugeständnisse gemacht hatten."

<sup>8</sup> C. S. McCoy, *The Covenant Theology of Johannes Cocceius* (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1956), 90, 236. McCoy, 89. "His theology is drawn from Scripture and represents a rejection of Scholasticism as the source and guide of doctrine. . . Cocceius interpreted the Scriptures without presupposition."

<sup>9</sup> H. Faulenbach, *Weg und Ziel der Erkenntnis Christi. Eine Untersuchung zur Theologie des Johannes Coccejus* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1973 ).

Schrift in eine zweitrangige Position verweist, sondern die Schrift selbst ist für ihn das Lehrgebäude, das mit den in ihr angebotenen Mitteln zu erklären ist.<sup>10</sup>

/229/ To me, however, it seems that scholastic elements are definitely present in Cocceius' writings, especially in his doctrine of God as explained in his main systematic work, the *Summa theologiae ex Scripturis repetita* (1662) and in some parts of his doctrine of covenant.<sup>11</sup> From another perspective, Stephen Strehle<sup>12</sup> and Richard Muller<sup>13</sup> have also pointed out that the description of Cocceius as unique for his time as a representative of an antischolastic and biblical theology is a product of a set of historical and systematic inaccuracies and misunderstandings. Strehle is especially critical of the anti-scholastic interpretation of the federal method of Cocceius. A comparison between the medieval (nominalistic) conceptions of covenant and those of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed theologians suggests far more continuity between medieval scholasticism, Calvinism and federal theology than was assumed by earlier scholarship. In the doctrine of covenant both the medieval and Reformed traditions emphasized the freedom of God's will and operated with a voluntaristic covenant concept (*pactum*), which no doubt influenced Cocceius' conceptualization of this theme.

Muller, in particular, criticizes the anachronistic use of the term "biblical theology" by earlier scholarship. If by this terminology a distinction is made between dogmatics and "biblical exegesis," and this distinction is applied to the theology of Cocceius, then, according to Muller, we are introducing an anachronism. It was not until the eighteenth century that such a distinction was made. The German theologian Johann Philipp Gabler (1753-1826), professor at Altdorf, was the first one to make a distinction between contemporary dogmatics and a historically conceived biblical theology in his inaugural address of 1787. The juxtaposition of "biblical theology" with "scholastic or dogmatic

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<sup>10</sup> Faulenbach, *Weg und Ziel*, 46, 47.

<sup>11</sup> See W.J. van Asselt, *Amicitia Dei. Een onderzoek naar de structuur van de theologie van Johannes Coccejus (1603-1669)*, Ede 1988, 42-44; 74-75. My main thesis, based on the old scholarship on scholasticism, was that the anti-scholastic element was not dominant in Cocceius' theology.

<sup>12</sup> S. Strehle, *Calvinism, Federalism and Scholasticism. A Study of the Reformed Doctrine of Covenant* (Bern-Frankfurt am Main-New York-Paris, 1988), 243-46.

<sup>13</sup> R.A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2 vols. to date (Grand Rapids, 1987-), 1:264-67, 2:117-22; *ibid.*, 2:121: "Cocceius' federalism and biblicism did not produce a 'biblical theology' in the usual sense of the term."

theology that appears in many of the discussions of Cocceius' thought can only be viewed as an anachronistic application of Gabler's distinction. Like his orthodox contemporaries and opponents Cocceius intended to /230/ present a biblically grounded contemporary dogmatics. Therefore, the expression "biblical theology" is not an appropriate way for indicating Cocceian thought.

To this a third point of criticism should be added, which concerns both the use and the evaluation of the term "scholasticism." Almost without exception most of the earlier scholarship is operating with a somewhat diffuse and even negative conception of the historical phenomenon called "scholasticism." It is not always clear what the critics have in mind when they criticize scholasticism: a literary genre or a historical period. In most cases it concerns both phenomena. The negative and even pejorative use of the term also colors opinion on Cocceius' relationship to scholasticism. Therefore, the way in which this relationship is conceived largely depends on the definition of the term scholasticism that is used. In this connection the question could be raised whether Cocceius in his protest against scholasticism had the same phenomenon in mind as the modern opponents of scholasticism, or whether it is possible that the current definition of scholasticism needs revision in order to understand the nature of Cocceius' attack on the scholasticism of his adversaries.

Indeed, when we, like Faulenbach, think of scholasticism in terms of a "rigid," "dry," and "excessively formalized" theology, then it is very easy to have a negative impression of Cocceius' relationship to scholasticism. On the other hand, if we take into account the results of recent research on scholasticism in general, and Reformed scholasticism in particular, then our opinion on Cocceius' relationship to scholasticism needs radical revision. In this article we propose to test the correctness of the traditional view that sees a contrast between scholastic theology of the Reformed orthodox in the seventeenth century and the so-called "biblical theology" of Cocceius. At the same time, this article is intended to be a contribution to the ongoing debate over Reformed scholasticism.

## **II. Previous Research**

It is not my intention to give a complete and chronological survey of all the discussions on Protestant scholasticism that have taken place during the last decades.<sup>14</sup> It suffices to indicate the two major alternatives in /231/ dealing with this problem. One school, epitomized by Brian Armstrong, argued that Reformed scholasticism was a form of speculative thought, which was characterized by a strong emphasis on God's eternal decrees at the cost of biblical preaching of the Gospel. According to Armstrong the Reformed scholastics were primarily rationalists who exchanged Calvin's Christological focus for one based on the divine decrees. The most important feature of Reformed scholasticism was its use of two sources for theological knowledge: faith *and* reason. The extensive use of Aristotelian categories in logical, rationally defensible systems resulted in the fact that reason "assumed at least equal standing with faith." Therefore, Reformed scholasticism was a fatal deviation from the central concerns of the exegetical and theological insights of the Reformers, especially Calvin's. Because Reformed scholastics interpreted the Bible as "a body of propositions" that were once and for all revealed by God, their theology ceased to be a theology of revelation and was characterized by an 'ahistoric and timeless methodology'.<sup>15</sup>

In recent years this approach of Armstrong et al. has come under increasing criticism. Richard Muller has pointed out that Protestant scholasticism was an institutional theology, confessionally in continuity with the insights of the Reformers and doctrinally in continuity with the Christian tradition as a whole. This double continuity must be understood as one example of the way in which Christian intellectual tradition maintained useful forms, methods and doctrinal ideas while at the same time incorporating the advances of exegetical and theological investigation. Muller defines scholasticism as an organizational structure, viz. "the technical and logical approach to theology as a discipline characteristic of theological system from the late twelfth through the

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<sup>14</sup> For a synopsis of the history of scholarship on Reformed Orthodoxy, see the introduction to this collection of essays.

<sup>15</sup> B.G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth-Century France* (Madison-Milwaukee-London, 1969), 32. Armstrong identifies "four more-or-less identifiable tendencies" in Protestant scholasticism (1) A theological approach which asserts religious truth on the basis of deductive ratiocination from given assumptions or principles, thus producing a logically coherent and defensible system of belief, invariably based upon Aristotelian philosophical commitment; (2) In this system reason assumes at least equal standing with faith; (3) The sentiment that the scriptural record contains a unified, rationally comprehensible account; (4) Interest in metaphysical matters, in abstract, speculative thought, particularly with reference to the doctrine of God.

seventeenth century."<sup>16</sup> In a recent article entitled "Calvin and the /232/ Calvinists," Muller sums up ten points, indicating the principal premises of reappraisal which point to where the standard definition of Reformed scholasticism needs to be modified. At the same time these points summarize Muller's criticism on earlier research.<sup>17</sup> For our purpose, the most important four points that he proposes are as follows:

1. Previous research has failed to set the question of continuity and discontinuity between Reformation and later orthodoxy against the background of an examination of continuities and discontinuities running through the history of thought from the Middle Ages into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.
2. Previous research has failed to examine the meaning of the term "scholasticism" as found both in scholarly studies of the Christian tradition prior to the Reformation and in the writings of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Protestant theologians.
3. The way in which the "old school" identified the terms "rationalism" and "scholasticism" must be rejected on historical, philosophical and theological grounds. It is incorrect to confuse the usage of rational argumentation in theology with "rationalism."
4. Previous research did not notice the continuities and discontinuities in the interpretative or exegetical traditions. They must be given equal weight with developments in scholastic method and philosophical usage.

Muller's conclusion is that the hermeneutics of the old school's view on Reformed scholasticism was primarily determined by nineteenth- and twentieth-century theological agendas. In sound historical investigation, these modern agendas cannot be allowed to

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<sup>16</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 1:18, 21-39, 2:3-11 Although Muller's work has fundamentally altered the landscape of scholarship on Protestant scholasticism, he is not the first one to emphasize the continuity between Reformation and Orthodoxy. For an analysis of Muller's thesis, see Martin I. Klauber, "Continuity and Discontinuity in Post-Reformation Reformed Theology. An Evaluation of the Muller Thesis," in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33-34 (1990): 467-75. For new developments in Roman Catholic scholarship on scholasticism, see U.G. Leinsle, *Einführung in die scholastische Theologie* (Paderborn-München-Wien-Zurich, 1995).

<sup>17</sup> R.A. Muller, "Calvin and the Calvinists: Assessing Continuities and Discontinuities between Reformation and Orthodoxy," parts 1 and 2, *CTJ* 30 (1995): 345-75; 31 (1996): 125-60.

play a decisive role. All too often it has happened that one's own theological positions are projected onto the writings of the Reformers, at the same time making their ideas a **/233/** standard for judging the Reformed character of individual orthodox thinkers and treatises. Such "historical" studies only reflect and justify (modern) theological insights. In this article we propose to test these four points of Muller by examining the way in which Cocceius conceived his relationship to scholasticism. The argument will proceed as follows. First, I will discuss Cocceius' own judgment on scholasticism. Second, I will outline some features of his view on the use of reason in theology, and, third, I will attempt to address the issue of exegetical continuity. The last section of this article deals with the question of methodological continuity between medieval, Reformation and post-Reformed thought, especially in the doctrine of God.

### **III. Cocceius' Judgment on Scholasticism**

It is very easy to select from Cocceius' writings numerous passages that reflect a negative judgment on scholasticism. These passages principally express his concern to be a theologian who wants to discover in Scripture the thought-forms and correct language for considering and speaking of the faith of the Church. It is, however, an equally easy matter to compose a fine anthology from his works which reflects his use and mastery of the scholastic method and its tools, such as linguistic, philosophical, and logical analysis.

Therefore, the first thing to do is to explain clearly the content and significance of Cocceius' declamations against "scholastic theology." How should these declamations against the scholastics be explained? Were they directed against the dogmatic content of the scholastic treatises of his contemporaries or did they refer only to the method used by these scholastics? On the basis of Muller's second point — the meaning of the term "scholasticism" as found in the writings of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Protestant theologians themselves — we will now examine the way in which Cocceius defined scholasticism and compare his criticism of this phenomenon with that of his most scholastic opponent, Gisbert Voetius.

In Cocceius' utterances on scholasticism we can distinguish a formal and a material aspect. As far as concerns the material aspect, Cocceius can wield a sharp pen. In his

commentary on Revelation 16:2, he compared scholasticism with "foul and evil sores" that had brought so /234/ much unwholesome division of opinion in the Church.<sup>18</sup> He accused the scholastic theologians of inventing and solving "stupid questions" (*quaestiones stultae*); their disputations can be compared with "the itching eruption of the skin of a sick Church." Referring to 1 Tim. 6:20, a passage in which Timothy is admonished to "avoid the godless chatter and contradiction of what is falsely called knowledge," he wrote that academic disputations, during which all sorts of problems were discussed without there being a single reference to Holy Scripture, were completely reprehensible:

Calvin calls them [disputations] subtleties (*argutias*) with which mankind hunts for idle glory for itself. Danaeus calls them useless disputations. In the same way we entitle those disputations that prevent piety. Such disputations have no spiritual significance and demonstrative force, because they use arguments not supported by the Holy Spirit, even when they seem to defend the truth. Our theologians have very properly observed that this is the case with the scholastic theology of the papists.<sup>19</sup>

From this quotation it appears that Cocceius' declamations against scholasticism were primarily directed against certain extreme forms of scholasticism as found in the writings of medieval schoolmen and Counter-Reformation theologians. Furthermore, it is obvious that it is the content of this scholasticism that is condemned by Cocceius. His main objection to it lies in his presumption that the heresy of semi-pelagianism has ensconced itself in this theology. Even when one finds something good in it, it is always "a tiny nucleus hidden under many layers" or "one corn under much chaff."<sup>20</sup> Cocceius seems to combat only the outgrowths of a specific form of scholasticism characterized by

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<sup>18</sup> J. Cocceius, *Cogitationes de Apocalypsi S. Johannes Theologi*, cap. 16 § 2, *Opera Omnia* V (Amsterdam, 1673): "Adde innumerabilem multitudinem quaestionum ineptarum, & scholasticarum disputationum vitiliginem: non sine familiarum q. haereditaria dissensione, ut Scotistarum et Thomistarum, aliarumque. Fecit hoc ulcus etiam scabiem & rupturam ad tempus quid em in schismate."

<sup>19</sup> J. Cocceius, *Commentarius in Epistulam I ad Timotheum*, cap. 6 § 96, *Opera Omnia*, V (Amsterdam, 1673).

<sup>20</sup> J. Cocceius, *Commentarius in Epistulam I ad Timotheum*, cap. 6 § 96.



ingenious speculations and impious *quaestiones*. The real purpose of theology is to direct man to Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life: /235/

The whole teaching of the Church is in truth nothing else than an exhortation to seek God and his Word (. . .). Therefore, those who teach are those who strive to bring their hearers and the readers of their books to the hearing and reading of the Word of God, and to aid in an understanding of God, each one according to his own method.<sup>21</sup>

The real measure of theology, he writes, is the extent to which it leads men to an understanding and love of God, and persuades them to seek God. For Cocceius, there was nothing wholesome in a "non-existential" theology.

Two remarks are here in order. A question to be answered is whether Cocceius' objection to the contents of Roman Catholic scholasticism also implied a complete rejection of the scholastic method in itself as a useful tool for theological analysis. Second, if this question is answered in the negative then the conclusion can be drawn that it is incorrect to maintain that Cocceius is an enemy of all forms of scholasticism. We shall approach both aspects of the problem in the light of Cocceius' treatment of this subject in the correspondence he conducted with one of his colleagues.

In a letter to Antonius Perizonius,<sup>22</sup> professor in oriental languages at the *gymnasium illustre* in Deventer, he wrote that he had no objection whatsoever to organizing public disputations for students according to the long established academic rules, with a student as *respondens* and the *quaestio* as basic unit of discussion. Perizonius, then, asked for Cocceius' opinion on the use of non-biblical scholastic terminology during such a public disputation. Was it allowed? Cocceius wrote in reply:

. . . I tolerate many [scholastic] terms which I myself do not use. The terms I accept I explain willingly. I prefer to use the language of Holy Scripture and compare

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<sup>21</sup> Preface to the *Summa theologiae ex Scripturis repetita*, 1662, *Opera Omnia* VII (Amsterdam, 1673).

<sup>22</sup> For Antonius Perizonius (1626-1672), see *Biografisch Lexicon voor de Geschiedenis van het Nederlandse Protestantisme* (Kampen, 1983), 2:358-59.

Scripture with Scripture until it appears that what the Church believes to be true or not to be true is in conformity with Holy Scripture.<sup>23</sup>

As is clear from the quotations given, Cocceius did not object to academic disputations and the traditional procedures and techniques that /236/ accompanied these disputations. These procedures were characterized by the medieval technique of a *quaestio disputata* for theological discourse.<sup>24</sup> It indicates a particular method in teaching and writing which concentrates on identifying the order and pattern of argument suitable to technical academic discourse. On the day of the actual dispute an issue was presented in the form of a thesis or a question. The official task of the *respondens* (a student) was to respond to objections that came from the audience, in the order in which they were presented on the point proposed by the professor under whose presidency the disputation took place. The student's task was also to provide arguments contra the objections made by the audience. During the following week, after considering each argument pro and con the professor gave his *determinatio*, or resolution, to the entire question. He offered a formulation of an answer or an elaboration of the thesis with due respect to all known sources of information and to the rules of rational discourse, followed by a full response to all objections. This *quaestio*-technique, or outlines of it, can be easily observed, not only in Cocceius' systematic works such as his *Aphorismi per universam theologiam* and his *Disputationes selectae*, but also in his exegetical works, for example in the diagrams he attached to the publications of his commentaries on Romans and Hebrews.<sup>25</sup>

To be sure, Cocceius did level some criticism against his orthodox colleagues who used the scholastic method in their teaching and writing. With some of them he noticed that their use of scholastic terminology created an artificial language overgrowing and obscuring the language of Scripture. A firm rooting in the language and text of Scripture

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<sup>23</sup> Epistola nr. 122, *Opera Omnia* VI (Amsterdam, 1673), 58.

<sup>24</sup> For a full description of the technique of the *quaestio disputata*, see W.J. van Asselt and E. Dekker, eds., *De scholastieke Voetius. Een luisteroefening aan de hand van Voetius' Disputationes Selectae* (Zoetermeer, 1995), 14-25. Cf. also R.A. Muller, *Scholasticism and Orthodoxy in the Reformed Tradition: An Attempt at Definition* Inaugural Address, delivered in the Calvin Seminary Chapel, 7 September, 1995, 4.

<sup>25</sup> J. Cocceius, "Diagrammata rerum dicendarum in Pauli Epistolam ad Romanos," *Opera Anekdotica*, Tomus Alter (Amsterdam, 1706), 27-196; Cocceius, "Diagrammata quibus summam rerum in Epistolam ad Hebraeos dicendarum," *Opera Anekdotica*, Tomus Alter, 315-431. For the *Aphorismi per universam theologiam (breviores et prolixiores)* and the *Disputationes selectae*, see Cocceius, *Opera Omnia* VI (Amsterdam, 1673).

remained crucial for Cocceius' labors in theology. In a letter from Duisburg, dated 16 August 1656, his cousin Martin Hundius wrote to Cocceius:

You are right in writing that today the words of St. Paul are rather /237/ enigmatic to us, because we are so used to scholastic terminology and have such a delight in it that we turn up our nose at investigating the meaning of the words used by the Holy Spirit in Scripture; that is the reason why we no longer understand so well those who use them.<sup>26</sup>

#### IV. Voetius' Judgment on Scholasticism

In a disputation on scholastic theology (1644), the second of the disputations published in the first volume of his *Disputationes selectae* (1648), Gisbertus Voetius gave a detailed exposition of his view on the scholastic approach to theology by the medieval doctors and their Protestant and Roman Catholic successors in the seventeenth century.<sup>27</sup> In the first part (*pars critica*) of this disputation he made a distinction between a formal or methodological and a material or substantial appreciation of scholasticism. From his remarks in this context the conclusion can be drawn that he accepted scholasticism as a method for theology, but that he rejected it when considered in respect of some of its contents. He argued, that there are many things that can be approved in scholastic method, especially that of Thomas Aquinas. In the course of time the scholastics had developed an arsenal of concepts that enabled them to clarify matters that otherwise would have been incomprehensible. They discussed theological problems *to the point*, without the traditional finery of rhetorical and poetical digressions which obscured more theological discourse than they clarified. However, the roads of Voetius and the

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<sup>26</sup> Epistola nr. 193, *Opera Anekdotica*, Tomus Alter (Amsterdam, 1706), 699.

<sup>27</sup> G. Voetius, "De theologia scholastica," *Disputationes Selectae* I (Utrecht, 1658), 12-19. He distinguishes between scholasticism in a most broad (*latissime*), a broad (*late*), and a strict sense (*stricte*). The reasoned refutation of heretics in the Gospels and the letters of St. Paul, for example, he considered as a form of scholasticism in the most broad sense. Scholasticism in a broad sense was in Voetius' view "everything that took place in the medieval schools," and in this sense, he argues, almost all theology can be called scholastic. Scholasticism in a strict sense refers to "the method of theology that will be found primarily and succinctly in the four books of the *Sententiae*, exposed in more detail by Thomas Aquinas in the three parts of his *Summa theologiae*." According to Voetius, scholasticism in the strict sense included also "later commentators on Lombard and recent authors who wrote commentaries on Thomas Aquinas."

scholastics part when it comes to the content of their scholastic theology. For example, their conception of grace and free will is unacceptable to Voetius. In this respect, Voetius like Cocceius had no good word to say for the medieval and more recent Roman Catholic scholastics. He had no hesitation in saying that scholasticism conceived in /238/ this way was a corrupt theology that led many true believers in the Church astray.

## V. The Use of Reason in Theology

In order to relativize somewhat more the idea of previous research that Cocceius presented a "biblical theology" as opposed to the "scholastic theology" of Voetius, it is instructive to examine the discussions of both theologians on the function of reason and logic in theology. With this issue we touch upon the third point of Muller's criticism of previous research, viz. the identification of scholasticism with "rationalism." As we saw above, one of Muller's criticisms was that the definition of rationalism used by previous scholarship suggested that, for Protestant scholastics, reason and faith, philosophy and revelation, were in fact two equivalent quantities or two separate sources for theological knowledge. Voetius' use of logic had, according to the critics of Reformed scholasticism, a narrowing effect upon the content of Christian theology. In this section, we will attempt to show that this view is not historically credible.

Voetius discussed the problem of faith and reason in a disputation *De ratione humana in rebus fidei* (on human reason in matters of faith),<sup>28</sup> the first of the disputations published in the first volume of his *Disputationes selectae*. Here, he drew a distinction between the use of the term reason (*ratio*) in a proper and improper sense. In its proper sense reason is a natural faculty; it is the human ability to understand things, to formulate propositions and to pass judgments on matters. Used in its improper sense, "reason" indicates "the light of natural knowledge" that Voetius identifies as a common sense (*communis sensus*), given to humankind by God, and therefore a rationality innate in man. In its turn this innate reason must be distinguished from "acquired reason" which is a *habitus* or disposition by which God enables man to cultivate science (*scientia*). This disposition or habitus, Voetius explains, consists in the intellectual ability to collect

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<sup>28</sup> G. Voetius, "De ratione humana in rebus fidei," *Disputationes selectae* 1,1-12.

actual knowledge, to frame concepts and to draw conclusions (*consequentiae*) from principles (*principia*).

Furthermore, reason used in its proper sense can be viewed both in an objective or abstract way and in a concrete or subjective manner. In this last instance one must take into account the status of mankind in salvation history: reason in its natural state before the fall must not only be distinguished from reason in its fallen state but also from reason /239/ restored by grace in redemption. In its fallen state reason is corrupted, but the effect of redemption for man's corrupted reason is a restoration of the ability of reason once again to attain "spiritual insight," although still in an imperfect way. Only in the state of eternal bliss will reason "perfectly shine in the light of God's glory." In academic theology, Voetius continues, reason is always used in a subjective or concrete sense, viz. "reason totally corrupted by the fall but restored by grace, albeit in an imperfect way."<sup>29</sup>

Subsequently, Voetius enumerates nine arguments indicating that human reason can never be a principle or a cognitive foundation of theology and Christian faith.<sup>30</sup> Against the Socinians, he argues that reason cannot be the ultimate norm for religion. Against the Roman Catholics, he argues that reason is, nevertheless, an important instrument for ordering, analysing, and applying the doctrines revealed in Holy Scripture. Anyone who rejects the use of reason in theology is very soon a victim of inconsistencies and absurdities, and tongue-tied in confrontation with heretical opinions. Voetius concludes his disputation by defending an organic use of reason in theology. He compares this

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<sup>29</sup> Voetius, "De ratione humana in rebus fidei," 2: "Nos hic plurimum earn accipimus subjective, ut per lapsum totaliter corrupta est, aut per gratiam liberata est, sed non perfecte."

<sup>30</sup> Voetius, "De ratione humana in rebus fidei," 3: "His praemissis dicimus nullam rationem humanam esse principium quo seu per quod, aut ex quo seu cur credamus, aut fundamentum aut legem, aut normam credendorum ex cuius praescripto iudicemus: atque adeo salsum non esse habendum illud in rebus fidei e.g. *trinitatem, peccatum originate, Christum theanthropon ejusque satisfactionem*, quidquid lumen naturale aut ratio humana ex prioribus & notioribus non capiat, vel quod ad accuratam definitionem, vel quod ad demonstrationem, vel quod ad utrumque." His nine arguments run as follows: (1) the blindness of reason in every unregenerated man; (2) the mysteries of the Christian faith which remain incomprehensible for even regenerate Christians too; (3) knowledge of God's essence and attributes is always inadequate and can only be grasped by way of negation, causality or by the way of eminence; (4) the knowledge of the regenerate is always partial and imperfect; (5) Scripture is the cognitive principle of all religious knowledge; (6) human reason does not precede faith; it does not add new knowledge to faith, and does not give more certainty than faith; (7) in their exposition of the Christian faith, Christ, his prophets and apostles exclusively referred to God's Word; (8) the priority of reason induces absurd conclusions and blurs out the wide difference between nature and grace, philosophy and theology; (9) the theology of the Socinians with its absurd conclusions shows what happens when reason is used as a principle of theology.

organic use of reason in theology with the way in which we use our eyes, our ears and tongue in doing theology. In a *corollarium* in addition to this /240/ disputation, he wrote:

It is lack of love when our theology is ranked with the opinions of the Socinians, as if we had made reason a standard and principle of theology. When we consider reason and logic to be a requirement [for theology] then logic and reason are in no way the foundation, principle and rule of our faith any more than our eyes, ears and tongues are; without them we cannot teach religion, nor defend it against opponents. Therefore, they are means and requisites without which there is no faith or theological knowledge possible. But in no way do we consider them as principles, standards and foundations of theology.<sup>31</sup>

As for Cocceius, he dealt with the problem of faith and reason in his *Aphorismi per universam theologiam* (ca.1650) and in his principal systematic writing *Summa theologiae ex Scripturis repetita* (1662). His account of the role of reason in theology hardly differs from Voetius' explanation of this topic. In his *Aphorismi* he too distinguished a fourfold status for considering reason, the modi of which were determined by salvation history and informed by the ideas of creation, fall, redemption and eternal bliss.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, Cocceius asserts that after the fall human reason was not totally destroyed. Sin did not affect human reason in such away that it was unable to apply the rules of logic. Human reason also played apart in careful reflection on items revealed in Scripture, which, for the reader, were not connected in an obvious way. To be sure, reason is subordinate to faith, but this subordination does not imply that faith destroys reason: it perfects and often surpasses reason.

Here, Cocceius suggests that the use of logic and reason in theology is not a *metabasis eis allo genos*, for no theology can do without some logical thinking. If, however, we assume that reason is the guiding principle of theology, there is a great danger for theologians in using such concepts.<sup>33</sup> In the *Summa theologiae* we come across similar

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<sup>31</sup> Voetius, *De ratione humana*, 12. Voetius refers to three Lutheran theologians (Eckhardus, Stechmannus en Meisnerus), who accused Reformed theology of having Socinian opinions.

<sup>32</sup> J. Cocceius, *Aphorismi prolixiores*, disp. I, 94.

<sup>33</sup> J. Cocceius, *Aphorismi breviores*, disp. 1. § 20, 21 and 24.

remarks. In addition, Cocceius distinguishes between "corrupted" reason and "reason illuminated by the Holy Spirit." Corrupted reason Cocceius describes as a form of pointless logic-chopping without any connection with the Word of God. Cocceius wants to stick to the rule of St. Paul, formulated in 2 /241/ Cor. 10:5, "to take every thought captive to obey Christ." Here Cocceius seems to be led by the intensity of his concern for the knowledge of piety and to reject as "logic-chopping" everything in theology that results in "disinterested" or speculative questions about the nature of God:

Therefore, faith conquers all fruitless reasoning and takes every thought captive to obey Christ. Yet faith does not abolish the sobriety of the intellect and the light of truth known by nature; faith does not exclude reason but gains credit by reason (...) For God does not contradict himself (...) Faith is a reasonable service, a *logikè latreia*, and not an unreasonable one. Therefore, faith does not destroy reason but stimulates it; faith does not confuse reason but gives guidance to reason; it does not infatuate the mind but enlightens it. Faith does not suppress reason but frees it from (...) desire, error, ignorance, superficial judgments, opinions and objections to God's truth, prompted by Satan's devices in which it got entangled, to do the will of God.<sup>34</sup>

In these sentences Cocceius defines reason not primarily in terms of its propositional content (although clearly that is present), but in terms of the religious and moral response that must accompany it. Compared to Voetius' observations on this subject, however, it would be a mistake sharply to contrast Cocceius' approach to the problem of faith and reason with that of Voetius. Both theologians claim that reason and logic in no way determine the content of theology. They are only instrumental tools in theology.

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<sup>34</sup> J. Cocceius, *Summa Theologiae*, cap. 46 § 6: "Igitur fides vincit sane ratiocinationes et omnem rationem captivat in obedientiam Christi, sed tamen mentis sobrietatem et lucem et notam naturaliter veritatem non tollit vel excludit, sed per eam vincit. Nam Deus sibi non est contrarius ... Fides est ... rationalis cultus, non ... ratione carens. Non igitur fides interimit rationem, sed excitat; non intricat, sed dirigit, non excaecat mentem, sed illustrat; non premit, sed liberat: nimirum a cupiditatibus, erroribus, ignorantibus, temerariis iudiciis et opinionibus et obmurmurationibus contra veritatem Dei, tanquam laqueis satanae, quibus innodata erat ad faciendum voluntatem eius, 2 Tim. 2:25, 26."

## VI. The Doctrine of Legitimate Conclusions

Before turning to the most interesting issue in the debate between Muller and the "old school," we should take a brief look at another-point of Muller's criticism. It relates to the issue of exegetical continuity. It has been suggested that Reformed scholastics used scriptural proofs without /242/ exposition within the scholastic systems. They used this technique of citation, it is claimed, in order to vindicate their dogmatic standards.

Scripture was considered by them only as a harness-room for their system. Thus it is claimed, the Reformed scholastics frequently indulged in proof-texting (*dicta probantia*), citing Bible texts apart from their context and apart from any consideration of the results of exegesis. All this is supposed to be in contradistinction to Cocceius who is assumed to pay attention exclusively to biblical exegesis. This idea is an embarrassing example of misrepresentation and can be removed when we realize that there was a longstanding hermeneutical tradition in which both Cocceius and Voetius participated and which originated in the medieval schools, viz. the doctrine of legitimate consequences, i.e. the use of logic to draw doctrinal consequences in matters of faith.

In their arguments to prove legitimate the use of logical conclusions from the text of the Bible both Voetius and Cocceius leveled criticisms on two fronts. In the first place they opposed the claims of the Socinians<sup>35</sup> and the Remonstrants whose ideas were continuous with the opinions of the Socinians. Secondly, they disputed the view of the Roman Catholic Church, particularly the claims of some Counter-Reformation theologians.<sup>36</sup> As we noted earlier, the Bible was for Voetius as well as for /243/

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<sup>35</sup> See Voetius, *Disputationes selectae* I, 1. "De usu rationis humanae in rebus fidei duplex est controversia: Una cum Socinianis eorumque asseclis; alterum neotericis quibusdam Pontificiis." Cf. Cocceius, *Summa theologiae*, cap. 6 § 58: "Altera est fallacia Socinianorum, qui non quidem in docendo & refutando consequentias rejiciunt, sed dicunt, necessaria esse in iis, quae nullam habent controversiam & contradictionem."

<sup>36</sup> Voetius fought against the claims of the Jesuits Gunterus and Verronus in Germany and France. See *Disputationes selectae* I, 5/6: "Accedamus nunc ad novum heureka pontificiorum, qui contendunt a nostris Papisum refutari debere tantum ex expressis scripturae verbis, absque ulla ratiocinatione, discursu, consequentiarum nexu & probatione, atque adeo rejiciunt & remonent a collationibus & disputationibus nobiscum omnem Logicam naturalem, & artificialem, docentem & utentem. Quod inventum primus videtur prodidisse Iesuita Gunterus in colloquio Durlacensi, Anno 1612 non tam habito, quam tentato: perfecerunt Pandoram illam tandem Iesuitae in Gallia inter quos emicuit Verronus, qui nescio quae epinicia editis libris non cecinerit, quae miracula illi non tribuerit." Cocceius combatted the views of two Roman Catholic priests in Westphalia, the Walenburg brothers, Adriaan and Pieter. See Cocceius, *Summa theologiae*, cap. 6 § 75: "Neque pluris est Walenburgiana methodeia, quae hoc satagit, ne ea, quae ex scriptis per necessariam



Cocceius in a direct sense the normative Word of God. From this they concluded that the Bible also had to furnish clear proofs for the Church doctrines which were formulated in later times. Roman Catholics and Socinians both agreed on the point that this was an impossible claim, although the conclusions they drew from this impossibility were very different. Both claimed that Church doctrines were not included in the Bible as well as that it was impossible to deduct these doctrines from the Bible. According to the Roman Catholic theologians, however, the doctrines of the Church did not need to be included in Holy Scripture, because the Church had received from God the unique authority to explain Holy Scripture. According to the Socinians, the Church doctrines could in no way be traced in Holy Scripture and, therefore, must be rejected completely.

With an appeal to the Church Fathers and the medieval doctrine of legitimate consequences in matters of faith,<sup>37</sup> Voetius as well as Cocceius defended the claim that the drawing of logical conclusions from the text of the Bible (*sacra pagina*) had been at all times an integral part of exegetical method. Like the medieval doctors they intended to draw *sacra doctrina* and *sacra theologia* out of the *sacra pagina*.<sup>38</sup> The procedure is as follows: on the basis of a syllogism, logical conclusions can indeed be drawn from a scriptural text, only on the condition that the predicate of the first premise or the major, as well as the subject of the second premise or the minor, include *expressis verbis* scriptural terms. The middle term should also contain words borrowed from Scripture or, at any rate, words that referred to scriptural texts. Voetius offers a series of nine arguments to prove legitimate the use of such syllogisms to draw doctrinal consequences. Cocceius has only two arguments, but these arguments are verbally identical with those in Voetius' disputation. The first argument they have in common notes that Scripture itself uses all kinds of words and terms that express a drawing of conclusions in matters of faith. For example, New Testament verbs like *logizesthai*, *krinein*, *sunkrinein*, *dokimazein*,

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consequentiam conficiuntur, videantur esse revelata ad fidem. Quasi non, quae necessario consequuntur ex scriptis & immediate revelatis, aequipolleant revelatis, & Dei testimonium sint, atque ita fidem obligent & ea accipiantur." Like Voetius he called these Roman Catholic opponents "novi methodistae."

<sup>37</sup> For the origins and the development of this doctrine, see F. Schupp, *Wilhelm von Osmā. De consequentiis. Ueber die Folgerungen. Textkritisch herausgegeben, ubersetzt, eingeleitet und kommentiert* (Hamburg 1991).

<sup>38</sup> See Muller, *PRRD*, 2:522. Muller considers the drawing of logical conclusions as "the final hermeneutical step in the method [of the Protestant exegetes], closely related to the application of the *analogia Scripturae* and the *analogia fidei*."

*dialogesthai* etc. all suppose some sort of /244/ discursive thinking by means of which conclusions are drawn.<sup>39</sup>

Furthermore, both Voetius and Cocceius comment, it is the nature of God 's wisdom that He fully understands the consequences of all that He says and that He wishes people to understand his word to include all that can be gathered from his pronouncements. The best proof of the legitimacy of this practice, however, is given by Christ himself and the apostles, especially St. Paul. While the apostles argued Jesus to be the Messiah by drawing conclusions from the Old Testament, Christ himself refuted the Sadducees by proving the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead as a consequence of the doctrine of the covenant. In his letters to the Romans and Galatians, Paul proved the doctrine of justification and in the first letter to the Corinthians he did the same with the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. Furthermore, he did not refute the philosophers on Mars Hill in Athens without using conclusions drawn from Scripture. To this Voetius added the argument that doctrines are indeed conclusions drawn from Scripture, but in such away that these doctrines are elicited by Scripture itself, because the *principia* of the doctrines are potentially and virtually present in Scripture itself. Denying the legitimacy of drawing logical conclusions from Scripture, Voetius concludes, would imply that there is no way to test and refute contradictions and inconsistencies erroneously drawn from the scriptural text by pagans, atheists, heretics and papists.<sup>40</sup>

Voetius spent more than one page in his disputation on enumerating several passages from the writings of the Church Fathers to prove that all of them applied in their works the rules of some sort of logical argumentation. Beside Gregory of Nazianze, Basil the Great and Athanasius he most frequently quoted Augustine. In this context Voetius referred to Augustine's sentences in Book 11, chapter 34, of the *De doctrina christiana*, to emphasize the difference between the truth of a conclusion and the validity of a conclusion.<sup>41</sup> Logical analysis, he concludes, never shows the truth of statements involved. It never /245/ restricts the content of the statements of an argument. The only

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<sup>39</sup> Voetius, *De ratione humana*, 7, 8. Cf. Cocceius, *Summa theologiae*, cap. 6 § 35.

<sup>40</sup> Voetius, *De ratione humana*, 8,9. Cf. Cocceius, *Summa theologiae*, cap. 6 § 76-80.

<sup>41</sup> Voetius, *Disputationes selectae* I, 9. "Accedunt testimonia patrum, quibus usum principiorum rationibus commendant Nazianz. oratio 6. de Spir. S. ... Vide eundem in *Orat. funebr.* in laudem Basilii Magni. Augustin. *de doct. Christ.* lib. 2. c. 34. Aliud est nosse regulas connexionum, aliud sententiarum veritatem: in illis discitur quod sit consequens, quid repugnans. Consequens, si orator est, homo est. Repugnans, si homo est, quadrupes non est, hic ergo de ipsa connexionione iudicatur."

thing logic can do is to show whether the combination of certain statements is logically consistent.

Voetius' appeal to Augustine is also present in Cocceius. In exactly the same way as Voetius did and using exactly the same examples, Cocceius indicates that the validity of a statement is something other than its truth. For a valid conclusion is one thing, but a true conclusion is still another.<sup>42</sup> From this it can be concluded, that both Cocceius and Voetius were in fundamental agreement on the point that it was impossible to cultivate and to teach theology as a science without the help of the doctrine of legitimate consequences. Referring to Psalm 32:9, Voetius declares that every theologian, who would deny this, looks like a snorting horse trotting through Scripture.<sup>43</sup>

## VII. God's Omnipotence

If there is one characteristic, common to all scholastic theologians from the eleventh century up to and including the seventeenth century and, if there is any recognizable continuity in the history of scholastic theology despite all the lines of fracture, then this one characteristic concerns the methodological exposition of the doctrine of God. Therefore, we now turn to the question whether Cocceius used the scholastic framework and, if so, to what degree he disassociated himself from the content of Reformed scholastic theology. Here we touch upon the first point of Muller, concerning the issue of the continuity between the theology of the Reformers and the medieval schools on the one hand, and the /246/ continuity between the theology of the Reformation and the post-Reformation period, on the other hand.

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<sup>42</sup> Cocceius, *De Potentia sacrae scripturae*, cap. XXII § 27. "Condonent nobis Fratres, quod dubitamus, an satis perciperint, quod Augustinus citatus num. 54 ex 2. de doctr. Christ. cap. 34 intelligat per Regulas connexionum. Neque enim intelligit tantum regulas formandi Syllogismum, quamquam & illas intelligit. Sed intelligit maxime propinquitatem sententiarum & certa principia, ex quibus perspicui potest, sententias inter se, sive veras sive falsas, vere esse connexas ... Haec consequentia sive veritas connexionis non pendet sane a forma ulla syllogistica; sed a rerum propinquitate & necessitudine, &, ut candissimus doctor [Augustinus] loquit, ratione perpetua & divinitus instituta."

<sup>43</sup> Voetius, *Disputationes selectae* I, 10. "Ex absurdis consequentiis primo, quia sequeretur homines *alogoos* se habere circa res divinas absque ratiocinatione" breviter esse tanquam equos & mulos contra Psalm. 32:9. Secundo, non posse non alios erudire, reprehendere, convincere, atque adeo finem illum scripturarum (de quo 2 Timoth. 3.16) obtinere."

In order to make a link I start with the observation that in the seventeenth century all Protestant scholastics, in their composition of the doctrine of God, made an extensive use of the definitions and distinctions developed by the medieval schoolmen. For the purpose of this essay it suffices to concentrate on the doctrine of God's communicable attributes as this enables us to think and speak about the most important aspects of the present issue.

The first thing to note is the fact that Cocceius, at least in his *Summa theologiae*, composes his doctrine of God analogous to the classical scheme that was used by the medieval schools from the time of Aquinas and onwards. First the question is discussed whether God exists (*quod sit*); secondly, the question what God is (*quid sit*) and, thirdly the question who God is (*quis sit*). The first question is answered by an exposition of the proofs for God's existence. The second question concerning the nature of God's essence is discussed by an exposition of God's attributes and, finally, the third question is dealt with by an exposition of the doctrine of Trinity.<sup>44</sup>

The central question for our purpose here concerns the way in which Cocceius deals with the doctrine of the divine attributes. It appears that his discussion of these attributes corresponds substantially to that of his Reformed orthodox contemporaries, for example, the division of the divine attributes in *communicabilia* and *incommunicabilia*. Like Voetius, Cocceius considers God's knowledge, will, and power as the most important *communicabilia* to be discussed and he deals with all the current distinctions in this locus. It is striking, however, how he criticizes each distinction he borrows from the medieval and Reformed tradition by commenting on it with the stereotypical sentence:

I am not sure if this term is sufficiently appropriate for teaching. The words taught by the Holy Spirit are much more suited to inform us. Human terminology is nearly always liable to contest.

Having made this observation Cocceius proceeds to examine the /247/ contents of the terms relating to the matter in question. Strong criticism is leveled against the medieval

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<sup>44</sup> Cocceius, *Summa theologiae*, cap.8 § 1: "Ut doctrina de foedere et testamento Dei (ex quo spes est vitae aeternae, & amor ejus, qui eam spem facit & dat; in quo totius Theologiae apex, consummatio & finis est) tradi possit, necesse est, animum auditoris firmari in ea cogitatione, quod Deus sit."

concept of the *potentia Dei* or the power of God. Like Calvin, Cocceius refuses to explore the concept of God's *potentia absoluta*, but in his treatment of this concept he nevertheless elaborates Calvin's theory on this point.<sup>45</sup> With reference to Christ's prayer in Gethsemane, he writes:

Christ, in his agony in the garden of Gethsemane, intimated that something which is possible in itself, is impossible in respect of certain other grounds and causes: "All things are possible to thee," Mk. 14: 36 and Lk. 22: 42 (...) All things our mind can draft are possible to God. But it is impossible that God's will is not done, nor is his will unwise and unjust. Here we can use the distinction used by the scholastics, that something, which is possible to God in an absolute way, is at the same time impossible when considered and measured by another causal order. However, we must be on our guard against the practice of misusing such expressions as God's absolute and ordained power in order to assert that God by his absolute power can do everything people can think of; as if God's ordained power only depends on his decree and not on his wisdom and on what is becoming to him (...). It is impossible for God, however, to will his glory to be suppressed and obscured (...). Therefore, we reject the idea of an absolute power which disconnects the essence of possible things and their purposefulness.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> For Calvin's position on this point, see D. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (Oxford, 1995), 40-52 (Calvin and the Absolute Power of God). Steinmetz ascertains: "Calvin is unwilling to entertain even a hypothetical separation of God's power from his justice (...). What the scholastics regard as useful experiment in thought, Calvin regards as shocking blasphemy" (49). The difference between the medieval scholastics and Calvin, according to Steinmetz, was that Calvin not only warned against the misuse of the distinction, but that he rejected the distinction in itself. The question arises whether this is a correct interpretation of Calvin. In my view, Calvin only rejected a certain (late) medieval interpretation of the distinction. Calvin never assailed the authentic meaning of the *potentia absoluta*.

<sup>46</sup> Cocceius, *Summa theologiae*, cap. 14 § 6, 7: "Ita Christus in agoniam sua in horto innuit, esse aliquid possibile in se, quod non sit possibile ex certa ratione & causa. Ita enim ad Deum dixit: Omnia tibi possible sunt, Marc. 14:36, Luc. 22:42 (...). Omnia, quae mente concipi possunt, Deo sunt possible. Sed non est possibile, neque ut voluntas Dei non fit; neque ut voluntas Dei non sit sapiens & justa. Possumus hic uti vocabulo Scholasticis usitato, ut aliquid absolute possibile, idemque secundum ordinem & propter causam impossibile dicamus. Cavendum est tamen, ne nomine Potentia absoluta & ordinata abutamur: ut dicamus, omnia Deum facere posse potentia absoluta, quae ab hominibus cogitari possunt: quasi ordinatio potentiae, ut loquuntur, sit a solo decreto, & non pendeat a decentia & sapientia." Cf. cap 10 § 75: "Neque enim agnoscimus potentiam absolutam, quae separet a rerum possibilitium essentia eorum respectum ad finem. Propter hanc potentiam omnia possible sunt, quae Deum & gloriam ejus narrare possunt."

/248/ This is just one of the many instances in which Cocceius confirms his own teaching by quoting from the very heritage of scholastic theology which later interpreters believe he undermined. Although Cocceius admits that God can do more than He actually does, he does assert that God can do nothing that contradicts his honor and wisdom. In using the word "purposefulness" (*finis*) he intends to warn against a power theory that isolates God's power from his wisdom. That is to say, God's absolute power may never be used in such a way that God is supposed to do every possible thing people could conceive of. Like his ordained power, i.e. God's power determined by his decree, God's absolute power must always be related to God's righteousness and wisdom, i.e. the other properties which make up his character. In no way, Cocceius avers, must one allow God's omnipotence to undermine his goodness, righteousness and faithfulness and to relativize the covenant. In his opinion, it were the late medieval, radical nominalistic schoolmen who used the distinction between God's absolute and ordained power to claim that it is factually possible that God can change the established order. They overemphasized divine power, creating an image of God as a capricious agent who cannot be relied upon. Like his orthodox and scholastic Reformed contemporaries Cocceius tried to overcome these serious shortcomings by emphasizing that God's power coincides with his will and that God's will in turn coincides with his goodness, wisdom and righteousness.<sup>47</sup>

When we take only a brief look at Voetius' discussion of the *potentia*-distinction,<sup>48</sup> Cocceius' disquisition fails to impress the reader. Voetius' conceptual apparatus appears to be rather advanced and delicate. That does not alter the fact that both theologians are in complete agreement in their protest against the late medieval *potentia*-distinction. The surprising part of it is that both defend the same points concerning God's absolute power. In the first place, Voetius like Cocceius refutes the /249/ late nominalistic interpretation of God's omnipotence. Even if God could actualize his power in other possible worlds, he does not have the power to act beyond his essential righteousness.<sup>49</sup> Secondly, Voetius

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<sup>47</sup> Cocceius, *Summa theologiae*, cap. 14 § 8. "Ceterum, ut a possibilitate fiat transitus ad rem extantem, necesse est etiam intercedere voluntatem Dei. Quemadmodum dicit Apocalyps. 4. vers. 11 ...: propter voluntatem tuam sunt, & condita sunt. Ex quo etiam intelligitur, id, quod propter voluntatem Dei est, esse Deo theleton. Deus autem non potest velle, ut gloria sua opprimatur, aut extinguatur."

<sup>48</sup> Voetius, *Disputationes selectae* I, 402-9. For a thorough analysis of Voetius' idea of omnipotence, see G. van den Brink, "Gods almacht," in Van Asselt & Dekker, *De scholastieke Voetius*, 69-82.

<sup>49</sup> Voetius, *Disputationes selectae* 1,407: "Probl. I. Quid sentiendum de distinctione illa Lombardi & quorundam antiquorum scholasticorum. *Deus quaedam potest de Potentia, quae non potest de iustitia?*

like Cocceius emphasizes God's will as the point differentiating the absolute power from his ordained power. Thirdly, both Voetius and Cocceius defend the same position which Calvin took on the *potentia*-distinction. As we noted earlier, Calvin's refusal to speak of divine power apart from divine willing did not imply a rejection of God's omnipotence in its authentic meaning.<sup>50</sup> According to Voetius, Calvin's protest against the distinction was in line with Erasmus' remonstrance against the blasphemous disputations of the late medievals in which "they examined endlessly and immoderately what God could do and what He could not do."<sup>51</sup>

Cocceius as well as Voetius, then, kept aloof from the late nominalistic speculations about the *potentia*-distinction and linked up with the stand taken earlier by Thomas Aquinas and by Scotus.<sup>52</sup> These medieval theologians used the distinction between *potentia absoluta* and *ordinata* to emphasize God's freedom, on the one hand, and his faithfulness, on the other hand. God's absolute power indicates that the created order does not coincide with God's possibilities, while God's ordained power indicates that the created order is grounded in the free action of God's will as found in his eternal decree. According to Aquinas it is impossible that God by his absolute power breaks through the order in the work of Creation and through the order in the work of Salvation, once they are established by God's eternal decree. To be sure, the rejection of the late medieval speculations by the Reformers and their successors explains why later Reformed tradition emphasized so much the covenant idea. The roots of covenant theology can already be

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Resp. si iustitia juris divini positivi & revelati intelligitur, utique admittenda est: sin vero de iustitia juris divini naturalis, negamus illum praeter, aut supra, aut contra illam quid posse; quia implicat contradictionem."

<sup>50</sup> Calvin, *Institutio*, III, 23, 2. "Neque tamen commentum ingerimus absolutae potentiae: quod sicuti profanum est, ita merito detestabilis nobis esse debet. Non fingimus Deum ex legem, qui sibi ipsi lex est."

<sup>51</sup> Voetius, *Disputationes selectae* I, 411. "Sed merae stant calumniae. Si quis enim autores inspiciat, videbit illos rationibus, instantiis, et autoritatibus, quas adducant, nihil aliud velle, quam quod Erasmus, qui in notis ad 1 Timoth. 1 (ubi vide) reprehendit periculosas, ineptas, absurdas, temerarias, immo et blasphemias nonnumquam disputationes scholasticorum, quibus sine fine sine modo disquirunt, An Deus hoc vel illud possit."

<sup>52</sup> Van den Brink, "Gods almacht." in: *De scholastieke Voetius*, 72, 80 and 82. Cf. Thomas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 25 art. 5. Hotly debated is the interpretation of W. Courtenay, that Scotus shifted the points and prepared the way for the *potentia*-distinction of later nominalists, who considered the *potentia absoluta* and *ordinata* as two independent power reservoirs or power dispensations. To this view it can be objected that Scotus' emphasis on the *potentia absoluta* does not need to be problematic when it is related to his doctrine of synchronic contingency. In addition, Scotus underlined that the *potentia absoluta* is not allowed to contrast with God's essential attributes. See A. Vos Jaczn., *Johannes Duns Scotus* (Leiden, 1994), 242-45.

found in the early medieval schools. In this connection, it seems to me that it is not incorrect to claim a strong continuity between medieval, reformation and post-reformation theology concerning a key concept in the doctrine of divine attributes.

### **VIII. Conclusion**

Measured by the four Muller points, and considering our review of Cocceius' declarations on scholastic method, it appears to be a misconception to construe a radical difference between the theological method of Cocceius and the scholastic method of his Reformed orthodox contemporaries. The comparison with Voetius, as the most important representative of seventeenth-century Reformed orthodoxy, goes along way towards disproving the claim that "there are differences between Cocceius and the scholastics on most issues in theology" or that "he regarded scholasticism as a method essentially alien to Reformed thought."<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, a close examination of his doctrine of divine attributes in the *Summa theologiae ex scripturis repetita* does not permit us to agree with those interpreters who label his theology as a specimen preeminently of a "biblical" and, therefore, "antischolastic theology."

Therefore, the conclusion seems to be justified that Cocceius' declamations against the scholastic theology use the term in a very strict and narrow sense. It rather concerned certain contents of late medieval scholasticism such as semi-pelagianism and certain forms of seventeenth-century Reformed scholasticism such as prolix and disputative elaborations of theological points which left no room for the development of novel exegetical methods. Cocceius did not attack his scholastic opponents on account of their logically argued theology; rather he contested its function as a standard for judging his orthodoxy. /251/ If, however, by "scholasticism" one indicates "the more general phenomenon of a logically argued theology, resting on traditional distinctions and definitions,"<sup>54</sup> then there is little difference between Cocceius' theology and the theology of his Reformed opponents.

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<sup>53</sup> McCoy, *The Covenant Theology of Johannes Cocceius*, 236.

<sup>54</sup> Muller, *PRRD*, 2:121.



At any rate, Cocceius deserves to be celebrated today primarily for developing new exegetical insights which he attempted to incorporate into the orthodox system of Reformed theology without being hindered by fixed and standardized positions. Only when scholastic method degenerated into some sort of "drilling" and "teaching tricks" instead of being used as a form of logical analysis, scholasticism was the object of his protest. Scriptural language and biblical concepts, he insisted, should not be allowed to lose their original splendor and color. Scripture should tell its own story without being overgrown by a blanket of words and concepts invented by men. In short, Cocceius' conflict with Reformed orthodoxy did not so much concern the interpretation of the classical loci of Reformed dogmatics, but rather his dynamic interpretation of salvation history and his perception of the relationship between Old and New Testament, together with the implications of his view on this relationship for Christian ethics. The question, however, whether Cocceius indeed succeeded in applying his historical-covenantal model to the orthodox Reformed system, is still hotly debated in current Cocceius-research.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> For this debate, see Schrenk, *Gottesreich*, 83 (Anm. 2); McCoy, *The Covenant Theology*, 152, 160; Faulenbach, *Erkenntnis Christi*, 145ff; Van Asselt, *Amicitia Dei*, 26-27.