

Alleged Rationalism: Francis Turretin on Reason

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Introduction

Scholarship on Reformed orthodoxy or scholasticism has often stated that the older dogmatics was dominated by reason. In this view, the supposedly inherent rationalism of the scholastic method brought about a distortion of the Reformers' doctrine. In his much-cited study of Amyraut, Brian Armstrong claimed that Protestant scholasticism employed "reason in religious matters, so that reason assumes at least equal standing with faith in theology, thus jettisoning some of the authority of revelation."¹ Walter Kickel described Theodore Beza as having engineered the "substitution of a rational system of final causation for Christocentrism."² An approach such as this is characteristic also of the work of Alan Clifford, who writes that Owen's theology "was governed more by Aristotelian than by Scriptural considerations. In his discussion of the atonement and justification, his resort to Aristotle only confused the issue by creating self-contradictory conceptual illusions."³

Jack Rogers and Donald McKim have argued in a similar vein about Turretin. Specifically, they have argued that there is an inherent connection between scholasticism, Aristotelianism, and rationalism characteristic of Turretin's thought that distinguishes it from the theology of the Reformation and yields a discontinuity between Turretin's thought and that of the Reformers.⁴

¹Brian G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth Century France* (Madison, 1969), 32; cf. Hans Emil Weber, *Reformation, Orthodoxie und Rationalismus* (Gutersloh, 1951), I/2, 274-77; Ernst Bizer, *Frühorthodoxie und Rationalismus* (Zürich, 1963), passim.

²Walter Kickel, *Vernunft und Offenbarung bei Theodore Beza: Zum Problem des Verhältnisses von Theologie, Philosophie und Staat* (Neukirchen, 1967), 167.

³Alan C. Clifford, *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology 1640-1790 An Evaluation* (Oxford, 1990), 98, 129, 243. See the critique of this approach in Carl Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids and Carlisle, 1997); Sebastian Rehnman, "Theologia Tradita: A Study in the Prolegomenous Discourse of John Owen (1616-1683)" (D.Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 1997), passim.

⁴Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco, 1979). Their view has been countered, among others, by Martin I.

Given the significant developments in recent scholarship that have yielded reappraisals of the impact of rationalism on Reformed orthodoxy and of the implications of the scholastic method for theological content, there is ground for reexamining these claims concerning Reformed orthodoxy in general and Turretin in particular.⁵

First it ought to briefly be noted that the weight of modern scholarship denies the claim that rationalism is inherent in scholasticism.⁶ In regard to Thomas Aquinas it has been well said that the

principle of confining theological argument to scripture as the source and norm of truth. . . is expressed as a formal and methodological principle, particularly throughout the important discussion of sacred doctrine which comes at the beginning of the *Summa theologiae*.⁷

A historically informed view cannot maintain the claim that scholasticism, whether mediaeval or Renaissance, is rationalistic. Also rationalist philosophy in the seventeenth century should be clearly distinguished.⁸

Klauber, "The Use of Philosophy in the Theology of Johannes Maccovius (1578-1644)," *CTJ* 30 (1995): 376-91; Richard A. Muller, "Scholasticism Protestant and Catholic: François Turretin on the Object and Principles of Theology" *CH* 55 (1986): 193-205; also, John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: a Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

⁵See the survey of recent studies in Willem J. van Asselt et. al., *Inleiding in de Gereformeerde Scholastiek* (Zoetermeer, 1998); also see *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment*, ed. Carl Trueman and R. Scott Clark (Carlisle, 1999); and Willem J. Van Asselt and Eef Dekker, eds., *Reformation and Scholasticism: an Ecumenical Enterprise* (Grand Rapids, 2001).

⁶E.g. M. D. Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century: Essays on New Theological Perspectives in the Latin West*, trans. and ed. Jerome Taylor and Lester K. Little (Chicago, 1968), esp. 270-309; G. R. Evans, *Old Arts and New Theology: The Beginnings of Theology as Academic Discipline* (Oxford, 1980); idem, *The Language and Logic of the Bible* (Cambridge, 1984); idem, *The Language and Logic of the Bible: The Road to Reformation* (Cambridge, 1985); idem *Philosophy and Theology in the Middle Ages* (London, 1993); Étienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London, 1955); Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, 2d. ed. (Oxford, 1952).

⁷Per Erik Persson, *Sacra Doctrina: Reason and Revelation in Aquinas*, trans. Ross MacKenzie (Oxford, 1970), 86; cf. Joseph C. McLelland, "Peter Martyr Vermigli: Scholastic or Humanist?" in *Peter Martyr Vermigli and Italian Reform*, ed. Joseph C. McLelland (Waterloo, Ontario, 1980), 142.

⁸John A. Trentman, "Scholasticism in the Seventeenth Century" in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Norman Kretzman, Anthony Kenny, Jan Pinborg (Cambridge, 1982), 818-37; Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena to Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1987), passim; idem, *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids, 1991), passim; idem, "Scholasticism Protestant and Catholic"; idem "Vera Philosophia cum sacra Theologia nusquam pugnat: Keckermann on Philosophy, theology, and the Problem of Double Truth" *SCJ* 15 (1984): 341-54; John Patrick Donnelly, *Calvinism and Scholasticism in Vermigli's Doctrine of Man and Grace* (Leiden, 1972); idem "Italian Influences in the Development of Calvinist Scholasticism," *SCJ* 7 (April 1976): 81-101; idem "Calvinist Thomism," *Viator* 7 (1976): 441-55; John E. Platt, *Reformed Thought and Scholasticism: The Arguments for the Existence of God in Dutch Theology, 1575-1650* (Leiden, 1982); Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism: A Study of Theological Prolegomena*, 2 vols. (London, 1970-72); Robert Scharlemann, *Thomas Aquinas and John Gerhard: Theological Controversy and Construction in Medieval and Protestant Scholasticism* (New Haven, 1964).

Second, a continuity between Calvin and later Reformed theologians on reason and the noetic effects of sin has been identified by several recent scholars.⁹ The antischolastic and sometimes even anti-intellectual stance of the first generation of Protestant theologians did not mean that they were entirely independent of reason and philosophy¹⁰ but should rather be seen within the nominalist background of the radical diastasis between philosophical or metaphysical arguments and theological arguments.¹¹ First, philosophy, in the sense of the mediaeval university system and the *trivium*, was one of the presuppositions of the works of the Reformers. There was no opposition to grammar, dialectics, and rhetoric. Second, there was an affirmation of classical philosophy and of academic theological procedures. Luther wrote: "I read the Scholastics with judgment, not with closed eyes. . . . I do not reject everything they have advanced, neither do I approve of everything."¹² Luther's polarized attitude to Aristotle was changed through Melancthon's influence so that later in his life he would distinguish between the use and abuse of philosophy.¹³ Moreover, Melancthon endorsed classicism and Aristotelianism already in his first academic address in 1517,¹⁴ and in this, as in other matters, he exercised a far-reaching impact on the Reformed tradition.¹⁵ Moreover, the discursive form of

⁹E.g. John F. H. New, *Anglican and Puritan: The Basis of Their Opposition, 1558-1640* (London, 1964), 8-9; Muller, *PRRD*, I, passim.

¹⁰Contra e.g., Clifford, *Atonement and Justification*, 95; John Dillenberger, *Protestant Thought and Natural Science* (New York, 1960), passim; Basil Hall, "Biblical Scholarship: Editions and Commentaries" in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, 3 vols., ed. S. L. Greenslade (Cambridge, 1963-70), III.77.

¹¹Cf. Heiko A. Oberman *The Harvest of Medieval Thought: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), 32-42; William J. Courtenay "Nominalism and Late Medieval Religion," in *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion*, ed. Charles Trinkhaus and Heiko A. Oberman (Leiden, 1974), 45-46.

¹²Luther to Staupitz: "Ego Scholasticos cum iudicio, non clausis oculis lego . . . Non rejicio omnia eorum, sed nec omnia probo." *Works*, I. (De Wette's edition), quoted in William G. T. Shedd, *A History of Christian Doctrine*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1865), I.91. For more on Luther's relationship to scholasticism see Leif Grane "Luther and Scholasticism," in *Luther and Learning*, ed. Marilyn J. Harran (Selinsgrove, 1985).

¹³Sigfried Wollgast, *Philosophie in Deutschland zwischen Reformation und Aufklärung 1550-1650* (Berlin, 1983), 130.

¹⁴Philip Melancthon, "*De artibus liberalibus oratio*," in *Opera quae supersunt omnia*, 28 vols., ed. C. G. Bretschneider (Brunswick, 1834-60), vol. XI, cols. 5-14; cf. idem *De corrigendis adolescentiae studiis*, *ibid.*, cols. 15-25. The author is indebted to Mr. Per Landgren for these references. Cf. E. E. Flack, "Introduction," in *The Loci Communes of Philip Melancthon*, translation of the 1521 edition Charles Leander Hill (Boston, 1944), 21-23; Günter Frank, "Die theologische Philosophie Melancthons (1497-1560): Ein Plädoyer zur Rehabilitierung des Humanisten und Reformators," *Kerygma und Dogma* 42 (1996): 22-36.

¹⁵Cf. Muller, *PRRD*, I.67; Donnelly, *Calvinism and Scholasticism*, 9; Katherine Park, "The Organic Soul," in *Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. Schmitt, et al. (Cambridge, 1988), 479; Sachiko Kusukawa, *The Transformation of Natural Philosophy: The Case of Philip Melancthon* (Cambridge, 1995), 174, 207-08.

Calvin's *Institutio* must not be confused with the absence of philosophical influence. It may be that there is no adherence to one school of philosophy in it, but a closer look reveals the eclectic character of Calvin's philosophical viewpoint. His interest in classical thought was that of the humanist, who critically and pragmatically selected passages from classical philosophy for his own purposes, sometimes complementary sometimes contradictory, and his acceptance and assimilation of classical philosophy was the traditional Christian modification. Moreover, although Calvin's references to scholasticism are largely polemical, he had an interest in and was influenced by mediaeval scholasticism¹⁶ and regarded some distinctions "not recklessly invented in the schools."¹⁷ Furthermore, in the development and institutionalization of the Reformed faith the Western eclectic philosophical tradition became more explicit and systematic, something that was present already in Peter Martyr Vermigli and Wolfgang Musculus and later in Theodore Beza and Hieronymus Zanchius. Vermigli, who was a mature Reformed theologian even before Calvin was converted, and later Zanchius, brought all the merits of Paduan Aristotelianism and a critical Thomist scholasticism to the cause of the Reformation. The antithetical statements found in early Reformed theology toward scholasticism and classical philosophy should therefore be seen as polarized statements caused by the polemical context. Evans writes: "The objection Luther and Melancthon, and to a lesser extent Calvin, were making was primarily to the misuse and especially

¹⁶Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy*; Roy W. Battenhouse, "The Doctrine of Man in Calvin and in Renaissance Platonism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 9 (1948): 447-71; Ford Lewis Battles and André Malan Hugo, "Introduction" in *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia* (Leiden, 1969), 125-33; Alexandre Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, trans. David Foxgrover and Wade Provo (Philadelphia, 1987), 168-78; François Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet (London, 1963), 126-29; Irena Backus, "'Aristotelianism' in Some of Calvin's and Beza's Expository and Exegetical Writings on the Doctrine of the Trinity, with Particular Reference to the Terms 'Ousia' and 'Hypostasis'" in *Histoire de l'exégèse au XVI-siècle*, ed. Oliver Fatio and Pierre Fraenkel (Geneva, 1978), 351-60; Heiko A. Oberman, "The 'Extra' Dimension in Calvin's Theology," in *The Dawn of the Reformation*, 251-57; Alister McGrath, "John Calvin and Late Medieval Thought: A Study in Late Medieval Influences upon Calvin's Theological Development," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 77 (1986): 58-78; idem, *Calvin*, 35, 38; Christopher B. Kaiser "Calvin's Understanding of Aristotelian Natural Philosophy: Its Extent and Possible Origin," in *Calviniana*, 77-92; Joseph C. McLelland, "Calvin and Philosophy," *Canadian Journal of Theology* 11 (1965): 42-53; A. N. S. Lane, "Calvin's Use of the Fathers and the Medievals," *CTJ* 16 (1981): 149-205; idem, *Calvin and Bernard of Clairvaux* (Princeton, 1996); Heiko A. Oberman "Initia Calvinii," *Mededelingen* 54 (1991): 111-47.

¹⁷John Calvin, *Institutio Christianae religionis* (Geneva, 1559), in *Ioannis Calvinii Opera Selecta*, ed. Peter Barth and Wilhelm Niesel (Munich, 1926-62), I.xvi.9: "Unde iterum videmus non temere in scholis inventas fuisse distinctiones"; cf. the translation, John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia, 1960). Note the use of scholastic terms and concepts such as *causality* (II.xvii.1,2; III.xi.7; III.xii.4, 7, 9, 10; III.xiv.5,17,21; III.xxiii.2,4,8; III.xxiv.12; IV.xv.6), *substance* (I.xiii; III.xxv.8; IV.xiv.16; IV.xvii.11), the *soul* (I.xv), *accidental properties* (II.xi.5), *simple and absolute necessity* (II.xii.1), *genus and specie* (IV.x.5), *matter and sign* (IV.xiv.15).

the trivialization of the arts of argument. Their value when properly used is not really in question.”¹⁸

It should at the same time be recognised that the earliest Protestants have a more hesitant approach to philosophy than their mediaeval and contemporary Roman theologians, and here lies part of their contribution and distinctiveness,¹⁹ for although Luther, Melancthon, and Calvin were not engaged in formal apologetics, as Dulles argues, “their discussions of the relations between faith and reason made notable contributions to the future of apologetics . . . In Luther’s eyes the problem of faith and reason was not so much a matter of epistemology as of soteriology.”²⁰ The noetical effects of sin were believed to have consequences on the enterprise of theology, and this insight was preserved by later Lutheran and Reformed theologians.

Third, such sweeping statements that the seventeenth-century followers of the first generations of Reformed theologians were rationalistic distortionists need to be substantiated. In the following, I will therefore attempt to evaluate the Reformed orthodox position on the role of reason and philosophy in theology. We are fortunate in that its representatives formally treated this subject. The question on the role of reason in theology was important in relation to the disagreements on the Lord’s Supper, and, consequently, attention was drawn early to this question. Some, of course, dealt with the issue more extensively than others—such as Johannes Braunius who has some clear reflections on this topic in his *Doctrina foederum*²¹ and John Prideaux who devoted the lecture *De usu logices in theologicis* to this issue,²² but the best statement is probably found in the orthodox synopsist Francis Turretin.²³ An outline of the Reformed scholastic view of reason and philosophy is highly desirable because it is often misun-

¹⁸G. R. Evans, *The Problems of Authority in the Reformation Debates* (Cambridge, 1992), 87; cf. B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Reason: A Study in the Theology of Luther* (Oxford, 1962), 139; Joseph C. McLelland, “Calvin and Philosophy,” *Canadian Journal of Theology* 11 (1965): 43.

¹⁹Lambert Daneau, *Physica Christiana* 2d. ed. (Geneva, 1579) is noteworthy for its scrupulous establishing of natural philosophy on Scripture and not on independent reason. The tone of the work is aptly expressed in the title of the translation by Thomas Twyne: *The Wonderful Workmanship of the World* (London, 1578). Cf. Daneau, *Physices Christianae pars altera* (Geneva, 1580); Oliver Fatio, *Méthode et théologie: Lambert Daneau et les débuts de la scholastique réformée* (Geneva, 1976), 177-89.

²⁰Avery Dulles, *A History of Apologetics* (London, 1971), 113.

²¹Johannes Braunius, *Doctrina foederum, sive systema theologiae didacticae & elencticae* 2d enl. ed. (Amsterdam, 1702), I.i.15-22.

²²John Prideaux, *De usu logices in Theologicis in Viginti-duae lectiones de totidem religionis capitibus* (Oxford, 1648). A more popular treatment of this subject in the face of Socinianism is found in Herman Witsius, *An Essay on the Use and Abuse of Reason in Matters of Religion*, trans. John Carter (Norwich, 1795).

²³Francis Turretin, *Institutio theologiae elencticae*, 3 vols. (Geneva, 1679-85), I.viii-xiii; idem, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3 vols., trans. George Musgrave Giger and ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg, Pa., 1992-97).

derstood and even misrepresented. This article therefore outlines the Reformed scholastic view of reason and philosophy primarily from Francis Turretin²⁴ and argues that Reformation and post-Reformation theology stands in continuity with the Christian tradition in the use of dialectics.²⁵

The Reformed Scholastic *Via Media*

Summarily stated, Reformed orthodoxy limits the use of reason in a highly sophisticated way, and this limited use is itself highly sophisticated. To begin with, the Reformed scholastic self-understanding is that its view of reason is equally distant from two extremes:

The orthodox occupy a middle ground. They do not confound theology with sound philosophy as the parts of a whole; nor do they set them against each other as contraries, but subordinate and compound them as subordinates which are not at variance with, but mutually assist each other. Philo Judaeus and, after him, the fathers appropriately illustrated this by the allegory of Sarah and Hagar—the mistress and the servant. Theology rules over philosophy, and this latter acts as a handmaid to and subserves the former. They acknowledge that it has many and various uses in theology which must be accurately distinguished from its many abuses.²⁶

²⁴For discussions of reason in Reformed scholasticism see Klauber, “The Use of Philosophy in the Theology of Johannes Maccovius”; Muller, *PRRD*, I.231-49; idem “*Vera Philosophia*,” 341-65; Evans, *Problems of Authority*, 86-112. A less successful overview is John Morgan, *Godly Learning: Puritan Attitudes Towards Reason, Learning, and Education* (Cambridge, 1986), 41-59.

²⁵E.g. Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*; idem *De Trinitate*, in *Patrologiae*, ed. Jacques Paul Migne, ed., Series Latina, 222 vols. (Paris, 1857-87), vol. XLII, I.i; II.i-ii; XV.viii-xi; Hilary of Poitiers, *De trinitate*, *PL*.38, I.xv,xviii-xx; II.iii,iv; III.v-viii,xxv-xxvi; VII.i-iii; X.i-iii; idem, *On the Trinity*, trans. E. W. Watson and L. Pullan, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Second Series (Edinburgh and Grand Rapids, 1952), vol IX; Boëthius, *The Theological Tractates and The Consolation of Philosophy*, Latin text and English translation H. F. Stewart and R. K. Rand (London, 1936); Erigena, *Periphyseon, de divisione natura*, 4 vols. trans. I. P. Sheldon-Williams and John J. O’Meara (Dublin, 1968-95); Anselm *Proslogion*, cap. 1-2, in *S. Anselmi Opera omnia*, 6 vols., ed. F. S. Schmitt (Edinburgh, 1941-46), I.97-102; idem *De grammatico*, *ibid*, 141-68; idem *Cur Deus homo*, *ibid.*, II.50; cf. Jasper Hopkins *A New Interpretative Translation of St. Anselm’s Monologion and Proslogion* (Minneapolis, 1986); D. P. Henry, *The De Grammatico of St. Anselm* (Indiana, 1964); I. U. Dalferth, “*Fides quarens intellectum*: Theologie als Kunst der Argumentation in Anselms *Proslogion*,” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 81 (1984): 54-105; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* (Rome, 1948), q.1, a.1,5, ad 2: “tanquam inferioribus et ancillis.” idem, *Sententiae*, prolog, 1, 1: “ista scientia imperat omnibus aliis scientiis tanquam principalis. . . ipsa utitur in obsequium sui omnibus aliis scientiis quasi vassallis”; Persson, *Sacra Doctrina*, 230-33; cf. p 74 ff. For the prototype of the influential bifurcation of “faith” and “reason” see Plato, *Symposion*, trans. W. R. M. Lamb (London, 1925), 204b; Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics*, translation H. Rackham (London, 1934), VI.vi.1.

²⁶Turretin, *Institutio*, I.xiii.2: “Orthodoxi medium tenent: Non confundunt Theologiam cum sana Philosophia tanquam partes totius, nec opponunt ut contrarias, sed subordinant & componunt ut subordinatas, quae non repugnent sibi, sed subserviant, quod Philo Judaeus, & ex eo Patres apposite declararunt per allegoriam Sarae & Agarae, Domine & Servae, ut Theologia dominetur Philosophiae, & haec ei ancilletur & subserviat. Fatentur varium & multiplicem ejus esse in Theologia usum, sed quia multiplex ejus *abusu* sit accurate discernendus.”

This view of the middle ground made Reformed theologians criticize two errors—that of excess and that of defect. Thus, they believed themselves to have opponents on two sides.

Those who err on the side of excess are primarily Socinians and Arminians but also some of the church fathers and the Papist scholastics generally.²⁷ The error of excessive use of philosophy confuses philosophy with theology, and philosophical opinions are incorporated into Christian doctrine. There is also the apologetical motive of bringing the pagans over to Christianity by a mixture of philosophical and theological doctrines. Moreover, Roman scholasticism “depends more upon the reasonings of Aristotle and other philosophers than upon the testimonies of the prophets and apostles.”²⁸ Nonetheless, the most important opponents guilty of the excessive use of reason were perhaps the Socinians, who, according to Turretin, made reason and philosophy into the principle of faith and the interpreter of Scripture.²⁹

The second error is that of the defective use of reason and philosophy. Owen once wrote: “There can be but little reason in the words that men make use of reason to plead against reason itself.”³⁰ This error is represented by all the enthusiasts and fanatics of the Christian tradition, but in addition, Anabaptists, Lutherans, and Papists err in defect as well.³¹ Prideaux and Braunius compare them with the Arians who did not want certain words.³² The defective use consists in the entire exclusion of the judgment of contradiction in matters of faith and in a tendency to misrepresent the use of reason. Reformed theologians disagree with Lutherans partly because of the latter’s underestimation of reason and partly by predicating a proper and limited denotation of reason.³³ Although Reformed theologians recognized that reason, which educes consequences, is

²⁷Ibid., I.viii.2; I.ix.1; I.xiii.1; John Owen, “The Doctrine of the Trinity,” in *The Works of John Owen*, 24 vols., ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh, 1850-55; Edinburgh, 1965), II, passim; idem *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, XII, passim. Owen agreed with the general Reformed scholastic view—which will be argued in this article—of the subordinate and instrumental use of logic in theology in most of his writings, although he did not treat the subject formally to the same extent. However, in *Theologoumena pantodapa* the limited use of reason is virtually discarded. All senses of reason are reduced to that of abusive reason finding expression in technicalities and obscurantism. I discuss this problem extensively in “*Theologia Tradita*,” ch. 5.

²⁸Turretin, *Institutio*, I.xiii.1: “quae magis nititur rationibus Aristotelis & aliorum Philosophorum, quam testimoniis Prophetarum & Apostolorum.”

²⁹Ibid., I.xiii.1; cf. Owen, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, II, passim.

³⁰Owen, *Animadversions on Fiat Lux*, XIV.73.

³¹Turretin, *Institutio*, I.viii.2; I.ix.1; I.x.1; I.xii.1; I.xi.2; I.xiii.1; Owen, *The Reason of Faith*, IV.86; cf. idem, *Animadversions on Fiat Lux*, XIV.74; idem, *Vindication Animadversions*, XIV.411-26; idem, *The Chamber of Imagery in the Church of Rome Laid Open*, VIII.563.

³²Braunius, *Doctrina foederum*, I.1.16, 17; Prideaux, *De usu logices in Theologicis*, 219.

³³Turretin, *Institutio*, I.x.1.

fallible, it is a fallacy of accident to argue that it is therefore always fallible. There are circumstances in which it does not apply, and the use of consequences is only allowed to a sound and rightly constituted intellect that is freed from the prejudices that stand in the way of right thinking.³⁴

The Meaning of Reason

The subject matter, then, of reason and philosophy in theology is handled first by the definition of terms. Reformed scholasticism allows for several distinct uses of the word *reason*, something that several of its contemporary scholarly critics do not. Human reason is first taken subjectively, and, in this sense, it is “that faculty of the rational soul by which man understands and judges between intelligible things presented to him.”³⁵ It is the modality of understanding. Objectively speaking, reason is the natural light, the inferior epistemological causality by which human beings learn of God and divine things. Further senses are distinguished. “Again, reason can be viewed in two aspects: either as sound and whole before the fall or as corrupt and blind after it.”³⁶ Furthermore, reason may be considered either in the concrete or in the abstract.³⁷ Finally, reason is considered as enlightened by the Holy Spirit through the Word,³⁸ by which Turretin designates judgment “proceeding from the light and influence of the Holy Spirit.”³⁹ Because reason can be enlightened by the Holy Spirit through the Word, the judgment of contradiction should be regarded as divine, although subjective.⁴⁰ Prideaux, Owen, and Baxter make similar distinctions.⁴¹ Any understanding of Reformed scholasticism must grant these senses.

In this connection, we may consider another fallacy of much scholarship on post-Reformation theology, which concerns the casual use of the term *rationalism*. That this term is inappropriate is clear already from what has been said above. It is, moreover, based on a view of the doctrine of the perfection of Scripture that Protestants did not hold but on which the accusation of rationalism is based. It is often tacitly supposed that the Protestant view of Scripture implied strict adherence to the very words of Scripture, for Reformed scholas-

³⁴Ibid., I.xii.13.

³⁵Ibid., I.viii.1: “pro facultate animae rationalis qua homo intelligit & dijudicat intelligibila sibi oblata.”

³⁶Ibid., I.viii.1: “Illa vero iterum spectari potest bifariam, vel ut *sana* & integra ante lapsum, vel ut *corrupta* & coeca post illum.”

³⁷Ibid., I.ix.10.

³⁸Ibid., I.x.3.

³⁹Ibid., I.x.5: “quod ex luce & affecta Spiritus Sancti promitur.”

⁴⁰Ibid., I.x.5.

⁴¹Richard Baxter, *Methodus theologiae* (London, 1681), 17; Prideaux *De usu logices in Theologicis*, 228; e.g., Owen, *Theologoumena*, XVII. I.iii.1; I.iv.3; 458, 459.

tics are thought to be inconsistent with their own or the Reformers' view of Scripture by their extensive use of dialectics. Partee, for example, argues that the phrase "good and necessary consequences" in the Westminster Confession of Faith is "unCalvinian" because it places Scripture and deductions from it on the same level.⁴² Turretin, however, argues that the perfection of Scripture implies only the exclusion of traditions, and that the doctrine of the perfection of Scripture is inclusive of consequences.⁴³ Moreover, Calvin thought that teaching "drawn from Scripture" was "wholly divine."⁴⁴ Reformed theologians consequently argue that the sufficiency and perfection of Scripture consists in its clear announcement of the positive and affirmative articles of faith because these only are the proper objects of belief. Scripture contains, on the other hand, only the general principles by which the falsity of heresies can be shown,⁴⁵ and, therefore, "besides the express word of God, evident and necessary consequences are admissible in theology."⁴⁶ From this notion, Reformed scholastics came to view things to be in Scripture in two ways: *kata lexin*, expressly and in so many words, or *kata dianoian*, implicitly and as to the sense.⁴⁷ Therefore, it needs to be said that it is wrong to designate the simple presence of reasoning, logic, or consequences in the writings of Reformed theologians as rationalistic. Such an accusation only reveals a less sophisticated view of reason (sometimes a fideistic view) on the part of the accuser than Reformed orthodoxy itself possessed and a failure to grasp both the Reformed view of Scripture and the nature of deduction.

The Role of Reason in Theology

For our part we rejoice in this, that we dare avow the religion which we profess to be *highly rational*, and that the *most mysterious articles* of it are proposed unto our belief on grounds of the most unquestionable reason, and such as cannot be rejected without a contradiction to the most sovereign dictates of that intellectual nature wherewith of God we are endued.⁴⁸

What role is then allowed to reason by Reformed scholasticism? Judgment is only allowed to sound and renewed reason in the abstract.⁴⁹ Even the Lutheran Johann Gerhard argues that Paul does not condemn philosophy in Colossians 2:8

⁴²Charles Partee, "Calvin, Calvinism, and Rationality," in *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition*, ed. Hart, et al, 15 n.13.

⁴³Turretin *Institutio*, I.xii.2.

⁴⁴Calvin, *Institutio*, IV.x.30: "ex Scriptura desumptae, adeoque prorsus divinae sint."

⁴⁵Turretin, *Institutio*, I.xii.6-7.

⁴⁶Ibid., I.xii.8: "An praeter expressum Dei Verbum Consequenter evidentes & necessariae in Theologia admittendae sint."

⁴⁷Ibid., I.xii.3; cf. I.xii.35.

⁴⁸Owen, *Vindication of Animadversions*, XIV.357; cf. idem, *Pneumatologia*, III.125.

⁴⁹Prideaux, *De usu logices in Theologicis*, 228; Turretin, *Institutio*, I.x.12.

in the abstract but in the concrete, seductive, and abusive senses.⁵⁰ Rather, reason and nature are, according to Turretin, perfected by the Word and by grace.⁵¹ We note here a modified Thomism, for provided that the boundaries and limitations are preserved distinct and intact,⁵² there is a harmonious relationship between faith and reason, nature and grace, and natural and supernatural revelation as they all have God as their ultimate source.⁵³ Supernatural truths conform to natural truths, and, therefore, erroneous opinions can be opposed by reason.⁵⁴

This concept of reason gives Reformed scholasticism a potential to promulgate a clearly defined and demarcated use of logical or heuristic structure in theology. First, the judgment of contradiction is only allowed to restored and enlightened reason in matters of faith,⁵⁵ a view that is a clear recognition of the noetic consequences of the Fall and that stands in continuity with the Reformation.⁵⁶ Second, the principles from which renewed reason forms its judgments are not natural axioms but supernatural, so that the principles of the judgment of contradiction must be based on the Word of God.⁵⁷ That reason is not allowed to judge from natural, or from corrupt principles, is also a clear recognition of the principle of *sola scriptura*. Turretin's third and final limitation reads:

The rule by which reason directed and strengthened in tracing and applying the truths of Scripture is the rule of just consequence impressed upon the rational creature by God. This rule is not the rule of the truth itself (which is the word of God alone and the first normal truth), but only the rule of consequence by the assistance of which we may know and discern with greater certainty what follows from a truth and what does not.⁵⁸

These limitations are all based on a view that the effects of the fall upon reason was ethical rather than ontic in character. Constitutionally or structurally man

⁵⁰Johann Gerhard, *Methodus studii theologicci* (Jena, 1620), 92. It would appear from Evans *Old Arts and New Theology*, 64, and Kusukawa, *The Transformation of Natural Philosophy*, 45, 65-69, 206-07, that Col. 2:8 is the *locus classicus* on the use of philosophy in theology. Cf. Calvin *ad loca*; Owen, *Theologoumena*, XVII.458: "Interpres plerique omnes sentiunt, non usum philosophiae, sed abusum eo loci [Col. 2:8] perstringere apostolum. At vero utrum philosophiae cum theologia mistura ad usum ejus pertineat, an ad abusum potius, non eadem omnium est sententia."

⁵¹Turretin, *Institutio*, I.ix.3, 5, 15; I.xiii.3.

⁵²Ibid., I.xiii.7,14.

⁵³Ibid., I.xiii.3,10; cf. I.ix.11.

⁵⁴Ibid., I.ix.16.

⁵⁵Ibid., I.x.1.

⁵⁶E.g. Calvin, *Institutio*, I.iv.1-2; II.ii.12.

⁵⁷Turretin, *Institutio*, I.x.1.

⁵⁸Ibid., I.x.1,6: "*Norma* qua dirigitur & firmatur ratio in eruenda & applicanda veritate e Scriptura, sunt regulae bonae consequentiae a Deo Creaturae rationali inditae. *Norma* autem ista non est *Norma veritatis* ipsius, quae est solum Dei Verbum & primi veritas normalis, sed *Norma tantum consequentiae*, cujus interventu certius cognoscitur & discernitur quid sequatur ex vero, quid non."

remains what he was before the fall, but there is a definite directional, ethical difference in opposition to God. Given the limited use of renewed reason, the judgment of reason in matters of faith is therefore never allowed to become the rule of faith or of divine power and the mind is only allowed to judge from the canon of Scripture what may be called possible or impossible.⁵⁹

This limited view of the use of reason in theology can be summarized in the words of *instrument* and *submission*. Coccejus says: "Reason serves theology and does not rule over it."⁶⁰ The instrumental use is also stressed by Turretin and Prideaux.⁶¹ Braunius even makes a distinction between *instrumentum* and *ancilla*, in order to stress the subordinate use. He allows the term *instrumentum* but not *ancilla* to right reason and philosophy, for faith has its own proper principles and cannot enjoin any science.⁶² According to Turretin:

We must observe the distinction between an instrument of faith and the foundation of faith. It is one thing to introduce something to be believed and another to educe what may be understood and explained from the words; not by forcing a sense on a passage, but by unfolding that which seems involved. Reason is the instrument which the believer uses, but it is not the foundation and principle upon which faith rests.⁶³

Braunius similarly states that reason is not the principle of faith but simply the instrument of faith,⁶⁴ as Scripture is the only and most certain principle of theology.⁶⁵ Reason holds a ministerial and organic relationship to theology, not a principal and despotic one, and therefore it is said that theology presides and philosophy is in subjection to it.⁶⁶

Reason and its principles are used as mere instruments of knowledge in theological investigations, and because reason is not made into the foundation and principle of faith, philosophy is not mixed with theology.⁶⁷ Faith simply borrows from reason and strengthens its own content.⁶⁸ Braunius presents a pictorial

⁵⁹Ibid., I.x.14-15.

⁶⁰Johannes Coccejus, *Aphorismi per universam theologiam breviores*, in *Opera omnia*, 10 vols. (Amsterdam, 1701), VII.§ 20: "Ratio subservit Theologiae non imperat." Cf. §21.

⁶¹Turretin, *Institutio*, I.xii.14-15, 25, 33; Prideaux, *De usu logices in Theologicis*, 222-23.

⁶²Braunius, *Doctrina foederum*, I.i.20.

⁶³Turretin, *Institutio*, I.viii.7: "Aliud est *instrumentum fidei*; Aliud *fidei fundamentum*. Aliud inferre aliquid credendum; Aliud efferre quid ex dictis sit intelligendum & explicandum, non textui aliquid imponendo, sed exponendo quod involutum videbatur: *Ratio est instrumentum* quo utitur fidelis, sed non est fundamentum & principium quo fides nitatur"; cf. I.xii.35.

⁶⁴Braunius, *Doctrina foederum*, I.i.19.

⁶⁵Ibid., I.i.22; I.ii.1.

⁶⁶Turretin, *Institutio*, I.viii.6; cf. I.viii.24; I.ix.15. Cf. Gerhard *Methodus*, 93.

⁶⁷Turretin, *Institutio*, I.ix.17.

⁶⁸Ibid., I.ix.5.

argument: “Reason itself therefore is in theological matters as an instrument and as the eye of the mind, which sees and observes the revealed truths in the word of God: but revelation is as a scale to weigh something, or as an ell to measure land.”⁶⁹ In words that sounds like a maxim, Turretin says: “Faith apprehends the consequent; reason the consequence.”⁷⁰ Likewise, Prideaux argues that propositions of faith are dictated to us in Holy Scripture or divine revelation. “However, right reason apprehends the truth of conclusions and discriminates in itself between what the consequence is or what the consequence is not, or what is repugnant to it.”⁷¹ With these formulations, Reformed scholastics stress the functional instrument reason constitutes, and Scripture remains the cognitive foundation and provides the content of belief. A logical or heuristic structure is simply elicited by consequences. “The consequence, as to its materiality, is founded upon the word; as to its formality, upon reason.”⁷²

The instrumental use of reason places it under certain limitations or conditions. The judgment of discretion is granted to reason on three conditions: that it is not regarded as necessary to theology, that Scripture always is considered as the primary rule, and that reason does not judge concerning things beyond and above it.⁷³ Similarly the judgment of contradiction is granted to reason on three conditions: reason must presuppose the self-attesting revelation, must take up an organic and ministerial role, and must allow Scripture to be its own interpreter.⁷⁴ (Turretin can even give scriptural proof for such a role for reason.⁷⁵) The same is true for consequential reasoning where at least one of the premises of an argument must be contained mediately or immediately in the words of Scripture, where the inference must be materially necessary and evident, and where both conclusion and premises be evident on account of our assent.⁷⁶ It is clear from these conditions that the primacy of Scripture is carefully preserved so that reason is heard, as Turretin says, when it is obedient to and judges from Christ and the gospel.⁷⁷ Scripture provides the cognitive

⁶⁹Braunius, *Doctrina foederum*, I.i.19: “Habet ergo *ratio* se, in rebus Theologicis, ut *instrumentum*, & tanquam *oculus* mentis, qui veritates in verbo Dei revelatas videt & animadvertit: *Revelatio* autem ut *pondus*, in ponderanda re aliqua, aut ut *ulna* in mensuranda tela.”

⁷⁰Turretin, *Institutio*, I.xii.14: “Consequens deprehendit fides, Consequentiam Ratio.”

⁷¹Prideaux, *De usu logices in Theologicis*, 226: “At veritatem *connexionum* apprehendit *recta ratio*, & per se dijudicat, quid consequens, vel non consequens, aut *repugnans*.”

⁷²Turretin, *Institutio*, I.xii.14: “Consequentia quoad to; *materiale* fundatur in Verbo, quoad *formale* in Ratione.”

⁷³Ibid., I.ix.3; I.x.2-3.

⁷⁴Ibid., I.x.3.

⁷⁵Ibid., I.x.4.

⁷⁶Ibid., I.xii.19.

⁷⁷Ibid., I.x.7.

content, and, because there is continuity and agreement between Scripture and logic, the latter can be enhanced for the exposition of the former. The logical structure is, though, at every step limited by revelation.

The conditional and instrumental use of reason is, moreover, brought out by a normative technique for identifying premises and conclusions. Fundamental to Turretin's contention is the distinction between the truth of propositions and the truth of conclusions.⁷⁸ It is of somewhat less importance to Prideaux,⁷⁹ but both attribute it to Augustine.⁸⁰ This distinction means that sound reason, though not corrupt reason, is allowed to judge the truth of connections and contradictions, but it cannot judge of the truth of supernatural propositions.⁸¹ Reason judges direct and formal contradictions as well as such that are indirect and implied (deduced by necessary consequence).⁸² Turretin develops this distinction between the truth of propositions and the truth of conclusions in conjunction with the duality of nature and grace and reason and faith, such that in theology the truth of propositions comes from the superior order and the truth of conclusions from the inferior. The principles of doctrines and of the truth of propositions are thus drawn from Scripture, and, because the truth of propositions is more important, it is made into the premises or foundations of arguments. The judgment of reason is consequently only based on scriptural propositions, and, in this way, doctrines of faith and practice legitimately are proved by consequences drawn from Scripture. "Hence the conclusion of the argument will be theological because the principle of the doctrines is such."⁸³ However, it is simultaneously recognized that the latter is only mediately from Scripture.⁸⁴

If these various layers of distinctions are kept, there is a place for reason in theology. Turretin points to a manifold use of reason in theology, such as, for example, illumination, comparison, inference, and argumentation.⁸⁵ To the use of reason belongs likewise the knowledge of affirmation, the negation of propositions, and the law of contradiction.⁸⁶ In addition, the agency of sound and enlightened reason assists, establishes, and illumines true faith.⁸⁷ There

⁷⁸E.g. *ibid.*, I.ix.3; I.xii.4, 26.

⁷⁹Prideaux, *De usu logices in Theologicis*, 226.

⁸⁰Turretin, *Institutio*, I.viii.11; I.xii.4; Prideaux, *De usu logices in Theologicis*, 226. Cf. Augustine *De doctrina christiana*, ed. and trans., R. P. H. Green (Oxford, 1995), II.32, 50.

⁸¹Turretin, *Institutio*, I.x.8.

⁸²*Ibid.*, I.x.9.

⁸³*Ibid.*, I.xii.26: "Unde conclusio argumenti Theologica erit, quia principium dogmatum tale est."

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, I.xii.28.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, I.viii.3; I.ix.7.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, I.x.4.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, I.xii.17.

are furthermore four general uses of philosophy: convincing and preparing unbelievers for Christianity, providing a testimony of consent in things known by nature, giving clarification and distinction, and preparing the mind by an inferior science for a higher science.⁸⁸ Reason is always and everywhere the instrument through which we can be drawn to faith. Reason can also be the medium with regard to presupposed articles.⁸⁹ Finally, it is useful in opposing errors, for the judgment of contradiction is necessary to repel heretics.⁹⁰

We may end the discussion on the instrumental use of reason with one of Turretin's conclusions: "Thus reason enlightened by the Holy Spirit through the word is able to consider and to judge from the word (according to the rules of good and necessary consequence) how the parts of a doctrine cohere, and what may or may not follow from them."⁹¹ It is reason that is sound and enlightened by the Spirit, says Braunius, that is allowed in theology. Only in this sense will reason accept things that are above but not contrary to itself.⁹²

The Abuse of Reason

These considerations govern the discussion on the abuse of reason, which we shall examine briefly. The abuse occurs when reason becomes principal and despotic, in relation to which Turretin gives six proofs as to why reason is not the first principle of faith and doctrine: (1) it is depraved, (2) faith belongs to a different sphere or order, (3) faith relies upon Scripture, (4) the Holy Spirit directs us to the Word, (5) religion would otherwise be natural, and, finally, (6) mind an abuse follows by means of excess. Turretin lists four abuses of philosophy. (1) when the things of the inferior order of philosophy are transferred to the superior order of theology (in this case a change to a different genus takes place); (2) when false dogmas are assumed and introduced into theology from philosophy; (3) when the servant philosophy usurps the office of master in the articles of faith; and, he recalls Ockham's razor, (4) when "more new distinctions and phrases than necessary are introduced from philosophy into theology under which (oftentimes) new and dangerous errors lie concealed."⁹⁴

⁸⁸Ibid., I.xiii.5.

⁸⁹Ibid., I.viii.4.

⁹⁰Ibid., I.x.4.

⁹¹Ibid., I.x.3: "Atque ita Rationem a Spiritu Sancto illuminatam per Verbum, ex ipsomet Verbo juxta regulas bonae & necessariae consequentiae posse considerare & judicare, quomodo partes doctrinae inter se cohaereant, & quid ex illis sequatur, quid non."

⁹²Braunius *Doctrina foederum*, I.i.18.

⁹³Turretin *Institutio*, I.viii.5.

⁹⁴Ibid., I.xiii.6: "Quum novi termini & phrases e Philosophia in Theologiam inferuntur citra necessitatem, sub quibus nova saepe & periculosa latent dogmata." Similarly Owen, *Theologoumena pantodapa*, XVII. I.xiii.8.

A proper view and limited use of reason is thus liberating to theology according to Reformed scholasticism. Such doctrines as the Trinity and the Incarnation are beyond and above reason,⁹⁵ but transubstantiation and ubiquity are not incomprehensible—just logically impossible and the result of a defective use of reason. The concepts of transubstantiation and ubiquity are not properly composed and therefore are repugnant to reason,⁹⁶ for, although the mysteries of the faith are above and beyond reason and reason does not have absolute and unlimited judgment of decision in this sphere, it is allowed to judge the contradiction of propositions “when bound and limited by the word and must always be proved by it (1 Thess. 5:21; 1 Jn. 4:1).”⁹⁷ It is therefore the calling of reason to expose error.

Conclusion

From this survey, it is very clear how inaccurate it is to describe Reformed scholasticism as rationalism or deductivism. It is always sound reason in the abstract and under the authority and primacy of Scripture that is allowed to have an instrumental function in theology. Scholasticism, for all its obnoxious character to the contemporary mind, whether mediaeval or Renaissance, had a complete arsenal for dealing with nonsensical formulations, invalid arguments, inconsistent positions, and unsound implications. Reformed scholasticism presented in general a healthy and subordinate use of reason that can provide stimulation in our time and age. It would appear that modern theology suffers from an antiabstractionist and subjective hangover from its father, Schleiermacher, and it would perhaps be helpful to engage with scholasticism on the issue of reason in theology. It is not suggested that the Reformed scholastic scheme can be uncritically imported into contemporary theology—particularly since there have been great advances in logic during this century—but there appears to be a great need for logical thinking today when invalid and unsound arguments abound in theological literature and are accepted as profound formulations. Even Barth noted: “Not merely the most important but also the most relevant and beautiful problems in dogmatics begin at the very point where the fable of ‘unprofitable scholasticism’ and the slogan about the ‘Greek thinking of all the Fathers’ persuade us that we ought to stop.”⁹⁸

⁹⁵Turretin, *Institutio*, Lix.3.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, Lix.9.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, I.x.2: “quod limitatum est & alligatum Verbo, & quod ex eo semper probandum est 1 Thes. 5.21. 1 Joan. 4.1.”

⁹⁸Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1, 2d ed., xiv. For a recent discussion of logic in Christian theology see, for example, Paul Helm, “The Role of Logic in Biblical Interpretation,” in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids, 1984), 841-58.