



THE RIGHT USE OF
PHILOSOPHY
AND
SCHOLASTICISM

JOHANNES HOORNBEECK

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**Extracted from the Front Matter of Johannes Hoornbeeck's
Institutes of Theology**

Johannes Hoornbeeck

Monergism Books

The following translation was generated using AI in 2026. The pagination in this edition is not the same as in the Latin original. Those using the text for scholarly purposes should consult the original Latin edition.

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Contents

1. Editor's Note.
2. Dedication to Johannes Derraroutius.
3. To the Students of Sacred Theology.

Editor's Note.

Johannes Hoornbeeck's *Institutes of Theology* is mostly a sourcebook of quotations from other Reformed divines. We used Copilot to generate a translation of the dedication and preface, which are original to Hoornbeeck. Copilot, judging its own work, says, "the translation of the dedication and preface ... is both accurate and faithful to the original intent, style, and substance of Johannes Hoornbeeck's work. It preserves the theological, historical, and rhetorical nuances that are central to the text." Grok, offering an independent judgement, states, "this is a reliable, high-quality scholarly translation suitable for serious study of Reformed Orthodoxy. It effectively conveys Hoornbeeck's voice as a compiler who honours predecessors, promotes unity, and guides students in orderly, pious theological training. If you are using it for research, it can be trusted with confidence".

After an extensive review, ChatGPT concluded it was highly suitable for a general audience. Regarding the translation's theological accuracy, ChatGPT made the following comment: "The most important test is whether the translation misrepresents doctrinal content. It does not." It rated

the translation's theological accuracy, historical reliability, rhetorical faithfulness, and accessibility as "High." Despite the caution, "It should not be treated as a critical scholarly edition," it also added, the translation "does not mislead or distort." Those conducting academic historical research should consult the Latin original. We have produced this translation for members of the general Christian public with an interest in Reformed Scholastic theology.

In the preface, Hoornbeeck addresses important matters relating to theological method, the use of philosophy, and the appropriation of Medieval Scholasticism, subjects which are highly relevant to the study of Reformed Orthodoxy today. Modern Reformed Christians debate the place of philosophy in theology and the extent to which we should follow Medieval theologians such as Thomas Aquinas. Hoornbeeck provides us with a balanced approach to these topics, arguing for critical engagement with the Schoolmen without enslaving ourselves to them or to philosophy itself.

Dedication to Johannes Derraroutius.

To the Most Reverend and Most Illustrious Man, Master Johannes Derraroutius of Haarlem, Most excellent and most prudent Pastor of the Church of Leiden, Johannes Hoornbeeck sends greetings.

When I bring and present to you, Reverend Sir, this little work of mine, in which there is nothing except my own arrangement and summaries, imagine that I am introducing to you a senate of men most distinguished in the Church. For I know how highly you esteem their doctrine and piety, and I confess that I owe them no less. Indeed, the memory of those whose labour and diligence God was pleased to use in gathering the Church for His Son, in instructing the souls of men in the highest and heavenly matters, in rescuing them from Satan and bringing them to Himself and to salvation — such a memory can never fail to be most delightful. And since you have always held such men in great honour, you also know some of them personally, and have revered them as your teachers.

Thus, it seems as though former times return, and you yourself revive, and with the sweetness of your earlier age and studies renewed, you seem to

receive those whom, when you were a boy, you heard as old men, now approaching you again in your own old age. And all of us who are witnesses of your long and singular kindness, and of your venerable eloquence, will with one voice agree with me that these Fathers, once enrolled, ought to go to no one else, nor be summoned to anyone else, than to you.

For you — with the integrity of mind and judgment that is yours, with your admirable learning and prudence, with your truly pastoral kindness toward all — determine most rightly what is owed to each; and since different men excel in different matters, you have long since attained this, that by the unanimous vote of all you are called, as you are the foremost, so also the wisest of our order.

We have often listened to you speaking — in the Church, in the Senate, both privately and publicly — with great attention and delight; nor do we doubt that what Cicero records of C. Caelius applies to you: that in every conversation you speak wisely.

Now, having become emeritus — and this more by your right and advantage than by ours — because, unlike Domitius Afer in Quintilian, you preferred to cease rather than to fail, though you alone complain of yourself, nevertheless you still assist us with your counsel, and by your gracious and useful recollection of former things, and even by your presence, whenever you leave your villa and the village from which once you came to the city, and to which now again you have returned from here. And with great honour, it seems to contend with the city in your regard. You do not speak of late matters — for that seemed unlawful to you — but you set them aside, and from time to time return to us, lest you appear to have laid aside your care for us.

Thus, remember, as a wise man, to bring to an end

sadness and the labours of life.

Yet you have not chosen leisure except for the sake of business: your mind in this retirement — if at other times it was not attentive — is now kindled and inflamed toward studies, especially theological and historical. For as you, throughout the whole course of your life, in youth and in mature age, have given to others an example worthy of a theologian, so now, in placing the final seal upon your life, you teach by what method old age ought to adorn and complete a life nobly lived.

You hold from Jerome that something must always be done, lest the Devil ever find us idle; and especially that in the last moment the supreme Judge may find His servant so living. For this alone is truly to have lived: thus, at last to die; and he dies no less blessedly than peacefully who has lived in this way.

He has held such a course of life as to attain such an end. And now, the nearer you consider yourself to the goal, the more fortunate you are—having happily completed the time of your ministry and warfare—that it is now granted you to live for yourself; and, after the example of the great Caesar, to set aside a space between the business of this life and the day of death, in which, as though placed on the border between the two, you may be nourished and carried upward not by meditation on death, but—as Christian philosophy teaches—by meditation and foretaste of life, that life which is eternal and heavenly; until at last you are crowned with the most perfect crown for all ages.

Meanwhile, as long as it pleases the supreme Arbiter of life and of our affairs that you remain among human things—or rather, though heavenly, yet still among men—we rejoice for ourselves in your example and your happiness: that you pass your age neither in idleness nor in difficulty,

burdened by no inconvenience, but even now think upon those things which are judged most conducive to your own benefit and tranquillity, and to that of others. This is plainly according to the judgment and almost the aphorism of the great Orator: “For the aged, bodily labours ought to be diminished, but the exercises of the mind even increased. And care must be taken that they assist their friends, the young, and especially the commonwealth, as much as possible by counsel and prudence. Nothing is more to be avoided by old age than surrendering itself to languor and sloth.”

These duties, which he prescribed, you have wished to express to the very letter, and far better and more holily, so that your life might not be idle, nor your philosophy merely in words, but that to the very end you might shine before all with both doctrine and example. For this is to do and teach these things, that you may be accounted great in the kingdom of heaven.

But lest perhaps now you lack something to do, receive, if you please, this book of Theological Institutes, which I humbly bring and offer to you. Because it is collected from the best authors, I think it will not be displeasing to you. For since all things have been so well and so fully said by earlier writers that rarely have later ones said them better, and since none at all can avoid using their spoils—whose honour certainly must not be diminished—I judged it better, while silently guiding our students to the reading of the most approved authors and pointing out the teachers from whom they may best be instructed on each subject, to let those authors speak, rather than to repeat the same things again in some new form, and to present the same body of doctrine to the eyes of students in another—whether better, I doubt—garb.

For nearly the same things are said by those who follow, if not said worse; nor do I think that for the sake of one or another argument, or a new style or

method, the whole treatise ought to be rewoven from the beginning, and the minds of our students overwhelmed with a superfluous abundance of books. Nor is there any less room left for perfecting one's own thoughts and matters, if anyone is permitted to say something better than the earlier writers.

It is no light matter to write not a new book, but one worthy of a new reading. For if—what we have heard Melanchthon used to say—the three most difficult labours of all are those of the teacher, the ruler, and the one who gives birth; then he who, besides teaching and ruling, also brings forth books not to be regretted, nor unworthy of the age, must surely be thought to undertake no light work.

Therefore, I have judged it not unfitting to present now the well-spoken things of others, and those which have stood the test of time and the consent of all good men. At least in this way, I shall show myself a reverent admirer of the Fathers and in agreement with them. I also show how truly those whom I have brought together agree among themselves in the chief heads and foundations of religion, so that, whether they will or not, those who are so near and so greatly united in the principal matters cannot greatly disagree in the rest, provided that the reasoning is exactly drawn from the given points, and that from any point we proceed in a straight line to any other.

In this, some work still remains to be done — honourable work, and in my judgment not very difficult, if the matters themselves be considered apart from the heat of passions and parties. I am persuaded that this can be done conveniently even in the commonly agitated problems, and I am prepared, according to the measure of my ability, to show it, if that be undertaken. This endeavour can be disapproved by no one except by him who is ignorant of the stratagems of the Devil — “the depths of his

method” — namely, that he diligently strives, once divisions have been sown among brethren, to turn their hands and weapons from attacking the common enemy of errors and vices against one another, where he will have no triumphs.

Never indeed will there be such agreement among all that different persons will not enjoy different opinions; yet care must be taken that these do not pass into new contentions and factions. And questions of this kind, wherever they arise, must not be agitated by disputation alone, but, that being held, it must be considered further whether, if possible, some composition or reconciliation (συμβιβασμός) may be made. But in this, I think many have commonly erred, that they have wished rather to contend about such matters than to reconcile. I prefer reconciliation, and I think that among those who profess the same religion, disputation on any matters ought to be carried on only for the sake of that lovely concord of the Church, or at least not with a mind alien from it.

Unless perhaps the wide domain of Catholic Theology does not contain enough good things to satisfy us, and we must cling to the borders or very tips of the boundaries, merely to vex and weary our wit beyond measure and use, and to think beyond what ought to be thought, and not to think unto sober-mindedness, each according as God has distributed to him a measure of faith. Tertullian has said excellently that “after the Gospel there is no need of curiosity”, and Augustine, “The Christian can answer to many things; this one, I do not know.” If we are wise, we theologians will act according to conscience rather than contention; and as Basil has aptly said, “By excess of tension the middle is torn, and you are carried toward the opposite.” If this be observed, the matter is safe, and in teaching and acting

together — all of us who build in the temple of God — there will be a happy harmony, outside the clamour of hammers and iron.

In both of these things, prudence is exercised, and that *ἐπιεικής* (the fairness or gentleness) which the Apostle wishes to be known to all, together with a steadfast defence of the truth and a pious moderation of mind, which indeed, like other things, is sometimes, though not always, to be approved. “Speaking the truth in love.” Ambrose says: “If the end of virtues is the greatest, which looks to the profit of many, moderation is almost the most beautiful of all; it does not offend even those whom it condemns, and those whom it has condemned it is accustomed to make worthy of absolution. Finally, it alone has propagated the Church sought by the blood of the Lord, being the imitator of heavenly kindness and of the redemption of all, tempering with a wholesome end what human ears can bear, and what minds do not shrink from nor fear.”

For he who strives to correct the vices of human weakness ought to bear that weakness upon his own shoulders, as it were, not to cast it away. For that, the evangelical shepherd is read to have carried the weary sheep, not to have thrown it aside. And Solomon says, “Be not overly righteous.” For righteousness ought to be tempered by moderation. For how will he offer himself to you to be healed, whom you drive away by disdain, who thinks he will be an object of contempt, not of compassion, to his physician? Therefore, the Lord Jesus had compassion on us, that He might call us to Himself, not drive us away. He came gentle, He came humble. Finally, He says, “Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.” Therefore, the Lord refreshes; He does not exclude nor cast out.

Ambrose has these things in Book I, On Repentance, chapter 1 — namely concerning penitents and those weak in faith — teaching with what mildness of mind one ought to act. Here, the use of true moderation is necessary and salutary. Without it, no government can stand, nor any discipline, whether in the Church or in the State.

This was excellently signified to Gebhard Truchsess, the most excellent Archbishop of Cologne, by John, Duke of Zweibrücken, in the year 1584, in these verses which Aitzinger records in his history:

If you stretch the sails too much, the ship sinks.

But if you loosen the sails again, it is safer.

God hates excessively violent impulses;

Citizens hate them too; moderation is more pleasing.

Nor does it seem to me that a certain Roman Catholic author — Ludovicus Blosius, whom I am not ashamed to name — spoke with good sense when he said: “When you calmly pronounce the truth, if you accomplish nothing, then afterwards leave each man to his own judgment, and committing all things to God, preserve yourself in peace. For it is better, by yielding at the right time, to consult for the quiet of your own conscience, than by disputing and shouting unseasonably to disturb and confound your inner self.” Very true, and well said.

Nothing must be omitted in consulting and acting, by which you may show yourself a faithful and upright steward of truth and integrity; but when you have done all, and the words of the wise have been uttered and received with tranquillity, the outcome must be left to the higher providence, as though the whole matter were not in our dominion — we who are only ministers in God’s affairs, and are carried along with them at His will, having committed to Him both the cause and ourselves.

And from this depends that true ἐντελέχεια — both of things and of ourselves — under God. The greatest judgment and wisdom of a man shines forth in giving his opinion. With this gravity befitting the order, imagine yourself now hearing the men whom I here set before you — not certain Platonic philosophers, who represent the ancient things of their sect, nor sophists of the schools, but grave, learned, celebrated theologians, venerable for age and virtue, whom you may calmly hear and learn from as they discuss in a semicircle.

I remember that once, among us, there arose a conversation about the national assembly of Reformed theologians at Frankfurt in the last century, in the year 1577, to which there came delegates from everywhere — from France, England, Poland, Hungary, and our own Netherlands. Present were most distinguished men: Ursinus, Zanchius, Tossanus, Junius, Threcius, Languetus, Dathenus, and others. And the matter was discussed of writing a confession of uniform faith in the name of all the Churches. The task was assigned to Ursinus and Zanchius; its examination to Gualther and Beza. And it had already been written and sent to the Swiss, but the work was interrupted because of various affairs that intervened.

But now, imagine that in the far corner of Holland where you dwell, the same men and others are summoned, and that they publish a confession of the common faith; and that you, as though presiding in an assembly, old in ministry and labours, if you wish, hear them; and I will reverently take down and record their words with my pen. Nor will you regret hearing them, as they set forth and confirm that kind of doctrine in which you were nourished from childhood, in which from early youth you were a candidate and an initiate, which you have hitherto preferred both in speech and in life,

and in which you desire to die, and to receive the reward — indeed of your fidelity, but purely of divine grace and liberality.

They report of John Knox, the celebrated Reformer of the Scottish Churches, that throughout his life he was often tempted by the Devil — as happens everywhere to the most pious — the Devil setting before him the mass of his sins and his unworthiness, that he might despair of God's mercy. But at the very end of his life, by a contrary assault, the Devil insinuated and magnified his excellent deeds and virtues so repeatedly that with his mind disturbed, he was almost drawn into it, that he should look back upon his merits and rest his whole soul upon them. But, by the grace of God, he was delivered even from this assault, and, neither attributing more to himself because of the good things he had done, nor attributing less to grace because of his faults, he entered the harbour of salvation — the righteous scarcely, yet happily.

These brief and sure lessons — that such temptations are to be avoided both throughout life and especially at life's end, and that one must always rest in the grace of God alone, living and dying — these you have always taught. And so we hold it as certain that you will also triumph, leaving to the Church and to us — who rejoice in this — the memory that we had you, our beloved elder, as a colleague among other excellent men, and that through your prudence we all became more learned, and through your example of candour, wisdom, and — which is the summit of all things — integrity, an example immortal and almost divine.

Thus, may God bless you, and may He bless us through you, and may He command that we be faithful unto the end and eternally happy. Farewell, venerable old man, and never cease to love your fellow townsman — as

indeed you do. Written at Leiden, on the Kalends of February, in the year
1658.

To the Students of Sacred Theology.

In the University of Leiden.

How much depends in studies — as in all other matters — upon beginning well, and then observing the genuine order of proceeding, my most excellent and dearest pupils, it is not easy for anyone to say; certainly no one knows it better than those (and they are many) who have several times laboured here in vain, shifted their boundaries, and miserably lamented the troublesome loss of their toil and time. Hence also they inquire into no secret of study with greater anxiety and solicitude than how they may at last discover, as if by a divine rod, that vein which is no less useful than necessary for their studies. For if, as the saying goes, “He who has begun well has half the work,” then he who knows and observes the right order holds the force of the whole, and almost the sum. Method is a divine thing, and in all matters — whether to be investigated, learned, or taught — the admirable and most certain success of the whole undertaking depends upon it.

Many, at any time, arise who, the neglect and carelessness of this one thing drives to despair of the outcome of their studies and to throw down their arms; and they never reap that fruit of their labours which was due to them. Others, by contrast, reach great things by a shorter path — easier because more certain. For order makes all things shorter. As Horace says: “This is the virtue of order.” For those who, according to the Gospel parable, do not put their hand to the work before they have first gone to counsel — whether and how the tower is to be built, or the war undertaken — who do not rashly and without thought seize and handle everything, or more than is convenient, but weigh each thing in its order before they undertake it.

Now I intend to speak to you about this order, and to mark out the camp in which you are to dwell. You, according to the old formula, must see whether you are ready for war. You know, of course, that the sacred ministry is called “warfare” in Scripture, when its years of service are appointed, after which one is to be discharged. And Timothy is called by the Apostle “a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” A most worthy commendation of the man of God, by which he is at the same time reminded of his duty. For here are good works as well as good warfare. “He who desires the episcopate,” says the Ethiopian version printed in London, “desires to become a Pope” (according to the style of the ancients, who at first acknowledged bishop and presbyter as the same, and later pope and bishop). “He desires a good work” (1 Tim. 3:1). But the mind must be prepared by studies for these offices and for that honour (Heb. 5:4).

There are two chief heads of our study: Certain things belonging to general education (*paideia*), which must be attended to beforehand. Certain things belonging to theological education itself, whether perpetual or

temporary. For I come now to sketch for you, as on a tablet, the whole course of theological labour.

Before all things, the mind must be tinged and adorned with certain preliminary exercises, so that it may be prepared for higher things, according to the Hebrew proverb:

התקן עצמך בפרוזדור כדי שתכנס לטרקלין

Prepare yourself in the vestibule, that you may enter the banquet hall.

For no one at the first leap rushes into the sanctuary itself; but in the outer court, among the *συνισαμθύες* [those being initiated], he is first purified and initiated by lighter exercises and cares, by which he is advanced to more solid things — to be a participant in mysteries in the future, a Levite before a priest. As others say in different words but with the same sense: “He who prepares on the eve of the Sabbath eats on the Sabbath.”

These preliminary exercises are three: First, *Letters*, especially the three sacred languages Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, at least so far that each sacred text may be understood in its own language without an interpreter, and its reading becomes common and familiar.

Second, *Philosophy*, especially Logic and Metaphysics, for forming and strengthening the intellect in the investigation and examination of the most difficult matters, and also because of adversaries, without which you cannot do.

Third, *Catechetics*, which has various grades and classes. For the future student of theology, the highest grade is understood — that he may not be ignorant even of the common topics of religion, nor bring to theological study less knowledge than some layman who has no thought of aspiring to the degree which the student seeks.

It is astonishing how much hindrance arises everywhere from this cause: that students come to theology unprepared by the reading of Scripture and by catechesis. The former causes them not to know the most common and first elements of religion — the ἀρχαί [first principle] and the λόγος Χριστοῦ [the word of Christ]; the latter, that they cannot defend or confirm any of these things. And yet these must be learned at some time; but because they are not learned in their proper place — that is, in the vestibule — they burden the learner with great trouble, and while others advance happily, he sticks and stumbles continually in the beginnings. And so, it is not unfair that he pays the penalty for neglecting order at the outset.

Now, in the study of theology itself — when the little boat is committed to this sea with full sails — some things are perpetual, others occasional, varying with the age and grade of study.

The perpetual things are never to be omitted, but from start to finish to be observed religiously and diligently, by all, in every place and time. These are three:

First, the continual reading of Scripture. Second, fitting meditation, and holy and unwearied prayer to God for obtaining His blessing upon all things. These are the arms and exercises that must never be laid aside; from them there must never be a holiday, nor must the mind ever be wholly relaxed from them. Rather, it becomes us to be always occupied with them throughout the whole course of life, of study, and of ministry.

For just as in sacred and saving knowledge we must always make progress — for we know in part and we prophesy in part — so to this end God supplies us with His Word, from which we may draw what is wholesome and divine. This Word, as it is the instrument of reading and hearing — and “hearing through the Word of God” — is committed to the

mind, impressed upon it, and nourished by serious meditation. To these is added — indeed, precedes them — fervent prayer, that God may sanctify us in His truth, for His Word is truth.

Reading without meditation is fruitless; meditation without reading is even harmful — like the stomach attempting to digest without food. But pious prayer makes both reading and meditation wholesome and profitable. And here is the food of the soul; here are the true, because spiritual and divine, delights; here is the genuine and perpetual work of the theologian.

Other studies vary according to time: first, the study of Theological Institutes; then controversies; next, the practical; finally, the historical. These are the stages of your labours, the classes, as it were, in which you will move — first according to the necessity of your studies, then according to the inclination of your mind.

We have spoken elsewhere of controversies, and have divided them into three orders: those with unbelievers, with heretics, and with schismatics. Practical theology is twofold: the life, which teaches general practice (treated in Practical Theology), and the cases of conscience, particular cases relating to various heads and duties of religion. Then comes the polity or government of the Church, which teaches how the Church is to be well governed.

Lastly, history is occupied with the reading of the Fathers, that is, the ancient theologians; or with ecclesiastical annals, which compose the history of events from their writings and those of others, just as the writings of the Fathers are consulted chiefly for the faith of the learned and trustworthy.

Now see what you must do, in what order, and by what steps you must proceed. For this is the sum of the work, whose foundations are laid in the

academic course, but which is cultivated and perfected throughout the whole of life. At least you see the goal at which you must aim, lest you labour in vain, or, through empty self-love, too easily think you have done enough and reached the goal when you have scarcely finished the beginnings.

Art is long; wisdom longer — especially that true wisdom which is ours. Life is short, but to one who arranges it well, it affords much room. Order is the mother of disposition; invention is its father; and wisdom, born of both, “reaches from end to end mightily and disposes all things sweetly.”

Moreover, that you may run these fields or courses more happily, besides the public lectures there are private instructions and colleges serving each part of study — not to hinder the public, nor to draw the waters of the fountains into private cisterns and shut them up, but to be nothing other than guides, the more familiar because private, and suited to the capacity of individuals. These do not interrupt other studies, but assist them, and make the mind more ready and eager to perform and frequent the duties of each order, and to read, consult, and thoroughly peruse the authors and writings of every class.

Therefore, they are more necessary for beginners than for the advanced, not that anyone should cling to them alone, as a snail to its shell. Whether it be the Scriptural college, for cultivating both sacred languages and the reading of the Word of God itself — that one may once for all learn how it ought to be read, understood, and what should be observed in reading; or the college of Institutes, in which alone — as is the bad custom of many — it is not right to be detained, since there only the positive and common things are taught, with only the chief heads of controversies indicated, not treated. Hence, one must strive to the next stage, namely the elenctic

treatment of controversies, whether the general, against all errors in general, or the special, in order against each. Then the Homiletic college, for forming and delivering sermons; and the Practical; and if one aims higher, the Historical, according to the order of studies above described.

Some things are such that it is useful to have laid their foundations and tasted them in the schools; others must not be lightly touched, for they are necessary everywhere to the theologian's office.

Nor do I wish the philosophical-theological exercises to be omitted or neglected by those approaching theology. For although philosophy is often abused — from which the Apostle found it necessary to warn us: “See that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit” (Col. 2:8) — yet both the ancients and the moderns, by their example and use, have shown that its right use is of great help, not only in all other sciences, arts, and the whole life of man, but also in theological doctrine.

Here, as in all things, there are limits, beyond which or short of which it is not right to stand. He who measures matters of faith by the principles of philosophy, who thinks its rules hold in theology as in nature, or who uses its acuteness, subtleties, and distinctions for barren and cold speculation, for contention and vain glory — such a man, by understanding, comes to understand nothing. Meanwhile, he who does not think the mind ought to be adorned by philosophy as the tongue is by literature, who does not wish the inner speech of the mind, as well as the outward speech of the mouth, to be directed and polished by art, or who thinks something sounds ill merely because it comes from philosophy — such a man seems to me no less in error.

For although philosophy does not have the same rule, dignity, or necessity as theology, yet in forming and expressing concepts, in penetrating the

subtleties of things and questions, in refuting the evasions of adversaries, it greatly helps not to be entirely without it. We require a moderate use of philosophy in theological matters; we entirely forbid its dominion.

Luther said aptly in his *Disputation on the Simplicity of God and the Trinity of Persons*: “When dialectic argues that something does not square with its rules, we must say to it, ‘Let the woman keep silence in the Church.’” The Fathers use a similar image of Hagar the handmaid, who is commanded to be cast out of the house when she behaves too wantonly and wishes to rule her mistress at her own pleasure.

When philosophy rises too imperiously against theology, seeks a dictatorship, or tries to confine the most august truth within its own bars and rules, it must be expelled; and where it tends toward contention, it must be modestly avoided. For truth, wherever it is, has this first: that it is chaste; then that it is peaceable (James 3:17). But that which has bitter zeal and strife may be called “wisdom,” but it is earthly, sensual, and demonic, says the Apostle.

Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* Book 7, says that those who are “puffed up by the opinion of empty wisdom” (ὕπὸ δόξοσοφίας ἐπηρμένοι), “are always quarrelling, plainly showing that they care more to appear philosophers than to be philosophical.” Certainly, to quarrel is not philosophical, still less Christian.

With Erasmus I would say (Book 2 of his letters, to Bovillus): “Philosophy must be a pestilent thing indeed if it makes men such as these. It is ineffective and watery if it does not change them.” And in *The Ciceronian*, how elegantly near the end: “We see that such pests, not yet entirely extinct, are continually plotting a resurgence — under one disguise the old heresies, under another Judaism, under another paganism.” Thus,

some years ago, factions began to arise in Italy — the Platonists and the Peripatetics. Away with these names of dissension; let us rather inculcate those things which in studies, in religion, and in all of life foster and nourish mutual goodwill.

There is enough to do and to teach outside these barren party-studies and battles. But these vices belong not to the art or the science, but to the men who abuse it to their own and others' ruin. Hence, that mark has sometimes been branded upon philosophers, as though they did not agree very well with Christianity. Tertullian, in *The Apology*: “How is the philosopher so like the Christian? In learning? In fame? In life? In words and deeds? In building up and tearing down? In being a friend and an enemy of error? In interpolating and expressing truth? in stealing it and guarding it? Truth is older than all, if I am not mistaken?”

Whatever secular literature or discipline there is, if it is held too far from religion and applauds itself too much, or if it intrudes too importunately into religion, it sins in both ways. The Gentiles, alien from the true knowledge and worship of God, erred when they placed their chief or only happiness in philosophy. Christians err when they wish to support or adorn the Christian faith more than is fitting with the same instrument. For whatever belongs to human reason or science must be applied to the mysteries of theology moderately and prudently, and must be subjected to Christ, and, as the Apostle says, must first be “made foolish.”

Luther, in the Disputation held at Heidelberg in 1518: “He who wishes to philosophise in Aristotle without danger must first be well made a fool in Christ.” The fault of the Schoolmen — those commonly so called — was that they mixed philosophy with Scripture more than was right, Aristotle with Christ; indeed, to some of them Aristotle seemed almost a god. Luther,

who knew them well, said candidly in his writings against Henry, King of England, and in another against Catharinus: “I now plainly see that a pure Thomist is a true ass, whether he be Italian or German.” And Melanchthon, in his Apology for Luther against the Parisians of the Sorbonne: “You will find Christ more quickly among craftsmen than in this sort of thing.”

Another fault of the same men was that they abused their acuteness on idle, vain, and curious questions — not seeking what was necessary or profitable, but thorny matters fruitful only in disputations; so that from many questions you could scarcely extract one grain of good fruit, or from a great heap one conclusion of weight.

This even the Roman Catholics themselves have long since seen, and some among them, of more upright mind, have openly rebuked it. Hence, [they have written] whole books: Christopher de Capite Fontium, *On the Necessary Correction of Scholastic Doctrine*; Ludovicus Carbajal, *On Restored Theology*; and another of his, *Theological Sentences*, rivalling the title of the Master of the Sentences [Peter Lombard] — books not to be despised, whose author professes on the very title-page that he has laboured to recall theology to its true and living sources and to purge it from sophistry and barbarism. I need not bring forward others of the same judgment from the midst of the Papacy; some may be seen in Johann Gerhard’s excellent work against the Papists, *The Catholic Confession*, Book 1, Part 2, Chapter 15.

Meanwhile, although we chastise their superfluous curiosity, and although neither Alexander of Hales is to be our “Irrefragable Doctor,” nor Thomas the “Angelic,” nor Bonaventure the “Seraphic,” nor Henry of Ghent the “Solemn Doctor,” nor John Duns Scotus the “Subtle,” nor Giles of Rome the “Most Well-Founded,” nor Francis Mayro the “Illuminated,” nor John

Bacon the “Resolute Doctor,” yet they are not all of equal or of no value — especially the first writings, upon which the rest comment, whether the *Sentences* or the *Summa*, which are to be preferred to all others.

In these, if one works with judgment, no small fruit often arises — both for sharpening the intellect and for accustoming oneself to disputation where needed, and for cutting into matters deeply, examining them, and especially for beating adversaries with their own weapons and refuting subtlety with a better and truer subtlety. For those who dispute most sharply among the enemies of truth and the Church — the Jesuits and others who incline toward Pelagianism — all came armed from this school. To understand them and to refute them more successfully, it is necessary not to be wholly a stranger to these writings; indeed, to hurl back at them darts from their own workshop, and to use against them the very things which others in the same school sometimes use, is no fault.

The same holds for the Scholastic with the Rabbinic and Talmudic literature: in the latter, how many and how great are the blemishes, the foulnesses, the trifles! And yet it has some use — perhaps for convincing the Jews or illustrating the antiquities of the Hebrews. So also in Scholasticism, I confess there are trifles enough — not indeed the fables for which they assigned a place and lectures elsewhere — but many foolish and insane questions. Yet even from that dung some gold may be gathered, and use made of it either for deeper investigation of difficult matters, or for convenient and significant explanation, in native and proper terms.

Our theologians and Reformers knew this well, who were not ashamed to have pondered a sound and chastened Scholasticism and to employ it in their writings. Look at Franciscus Junius — a man more versed in every kind of learning than can be said, and most skilled in Scholastic theology

and disputation. Danaeus published a splendid commentary on the Master of the Sentences. Trelcatius the Younger wrote an excellent theological institute in a thoroughly Scholastic manner, adding to each chapter in the ἀναπόδεικτος [indemonstrable first principles] section, the necessary distinctions appropriate to the place. What shall I say of Gomarus, Rivetus, Spanhemius? — not to mention others among your own countrymen, who show in their writings and disputations what place they gave to Scholasticism.

And who disputed more frequently and sharply against that kind of men than Calvin, the greatest of all theologians? And he, in his *Institutes*, that admirable and divine work, fulfilled the well-known verse of Paulus Thurius:

“After the apostolic writings, since the time of Christ,
No age has produced a book equal to this.”

He says, in that book, that he also borrows certain things from the Scholastics, and he commends what they have said well and explained well. Book 1, chapter 16, where he treats the difficult and much-debated question in the Schools concerning the reconciliation of God’s providence with the contingency of second causes, he says—not rashly—that for a proper explanation of the matter, the distinctions discovered in the Schools concerning necessity *secundum quid* [in a certain respect] and absolute necessity, and likewise of the consequent and the consequence, are useful.

A little earlier, he had indicated the necessity of employing distinctions: “Since the slowness of our mind sinks far beneath the height of God’s providence, a distinction must be applied to lift it up.” Elsewhere, on the same subject, he says: “The distinction has prevailed in the Schools which enumerates a threefold liberty: the first from necessity, the second from sin,

the third from misery. This distinction I gladly accept, except that in that place necessity is wrongly confused with coercion.” He notes this in the margin on Lombard, Book 1, Distinction 25. And in Book 4, chapter 17: “There is a well-worn distinction in the Schools which I am not ashamed to repeat: although the whole Christ is everywhere, yet not everything that is in Him is everywhere. And would that the Scholastics themselves had properly weighed the force of this statement,” etc. Anyone who reads him carefully can easily produce other passages of the same kind from the same author.

Melanchthon, after the *Theological Commonplaces*, added definitions of many names or terms and distinctions which are used in the Church. And Zanchi, when he answers for Calvin on the question concerning Christ as αὐτόθεος [God of himself], by means of a distinction necessary in this argument between Christ as God, or the Son of God, and the person, says: ‘You see, brother, how much it matters to distinguish everything accurately.’ Epistle 1.

Meanwhile, we proscribe vain and frivolous distinctions, and those whose very sound is dreadful and unknown—never heard even by the girded Cethegi—together with all the φλυαρία babbling and trifles of either philosophy or scholasticism. But the true, manly kind, made to assist and promote the higher faculties and sciences, such as, given the common lot of human affairs, scarcely ever is or will be such that it does not need further perfecting—this we approve, embrace, and commend. How greatly it contributes to studies and how necessary it is, learn both from other things and from the Bernese theologian Benedict Aretius, in his *Theological Problems*, among which is the 149th place: “That philosophy is not to be neglected by one who is devoted to piety.”

But once thus equipped, and having completed, so far as shall seem suitable, the preliminary exercises, one must attack Theology itself with the whole force of the mind, beginning with the *Institutes*; and the best things must be learned immediately and at the outset. There must be no halting, nor any interruption at all; for just as in matters of war it has always harmed those who were prepared to delay, so the same thing happens here. Therefore, the work must soon be taken in hand, and one must always press forward, and firmly keep in mind and emulate that saying of the supreme Commander: μηδὲν ἀναβαλλόμε (“make no delay”).

A very careful choice must be made at the beginning, both of the subjects you treat and of the *Institutes* by which the mind is first imbued: because not only, as I warned at the threshold, does very much depend upon the beginning and the order—so that from this the whole course and success of the subsequent work almost hangs—but also because youth, distracted by the abundance of various *Institutes*, becomes uncertain to which it should commit itself. Not that these differ so greatly in substance, but because the happiness of one’s studies almost always turns upon the choice of teachers. And yet all of them have something by which they may commend themselves, and in each you will observe certain things worthy of praise; for divine generosity has so wisely and providently distributed its gifts and its affairs that not all things fall to all people, nor do any fall to each individual.

Considering this seriously within myself, and seeing no necessity to write new *Institutes* different from the earlier ones—especially since I observed that my predecessors had spoken everything quite successfully and abundantly, so that the same things are almost repeated by those who follow, only with the method and style varied, and often, indeed, less

happily than by those who went before—I judged that labour should be spared, and that the whole web should not be rewoven from the beginning merely because one or two things might perhaps be thought capable of being said differently or better; nor should the minds of the young be wearied daily with new Institutes, when there exists so great a supply of both ancient and recent ones.

Rather, having paid due honour to each for what they have well said, it seemed best to select the best things from the best authors, and to transcribe from them what later writers had borrowed from their predecessors, and to gather from the most celebrated authors those things which excelled in the accuracy of their conceptions (ἀκριβεία), in the elegance of their expression, and in the abundance of their material. And I wished to confine myself within the rules and limits of the Institutes, and not to present everything that had been said or could be said on each topic—which would have grown to an immense size—but only so much as beginners, and those to be first dipped in the Institutes, needed to know, learning these things from those very authors themselves.

It is enough if they firmly grasp the Didactic part, its confirmation through the arguments of Scripture, and at least the first nomenclature of the controversies raised by adversaries on each head. It is certain that I have not aimed at brevity; nor, on the other hand—something very contrary to my nature—have I sought prolixity, which I have always judged should be avoided in writing, and that something should always be left to the reader's meditation. But epitomes I judge to be plagues for beginners and for those seeking a full understanding of the matter, and I absolutely forbid them. For they impose upon the mind, as though the acquisition of knowledge were a brief and easy thing, since it is contained in a small booklet; and they

constrict the mind at the outset, when in its first apprehension it ought to be expanded and led forth into a new and hitherto unknown and open field of things. Afterwards, once matters have been properly mastered and comprehended, the mind then contracts itself, and, like the pupil of the eye when a new and stronger light is admitted, compresses itself and makes for itself a summary of the things it has perceived. Therefore, summaries have their place at the end, not at the beginning. But those who, on the contrary, accustom themselves always, or at the beginning, to epitomes, indeed make for themselves by this compendium the greatest loss.

Therefore, in the true and full Institutes for acquiring the sciences—when the mind is, of course, mature enough to receive them—it is better to be instructed more copiously than more sparingly, so that something may abound rather than be lacking, and that the mind may be attracted by the variety of things rather than repelled by their scarcity. Meanwhile, those first elements must not overflow with superfluities, and this will be evident if there is nothing that you can conveniently remove.

Next, as I have already warned, I require in a Candidate of Theology, when he approaches the Institutes, that he come prepared with Catechetical knowledge: for he ought at least to be on a level with the common people, and must not be forced in the Academy to learn those things which others learn in the Church; but where they end, from there he who aspires to be their teacher must proceed to further things. And thus, once advanced to the Institutes, he will experience progress that is easy and greatly to be desired.

Therefore, I do not deny that what I have accomplished in this work is small—unless you consider it a great thing that, from various authors, I have selected those things which I judged most necessary and useful to know, always prefacing them with our own aphorisms. But I have also

attempted, in this way and by this example, to invite you to the reading of the authors themselves. For with them you will find the subject they treat explained more fully; and I certainly wish that you approach them, handle them, and make them familiar to yourselves—especially the more ancient writers, whom God employed for the reformation of His Church, and who therefore will be held in singular honour and veneration by posterity.

I will not say—though no one should be ashamed to say it—how greatly the rest have been helped by the first heroes, and how they everywhere follow them, not only in their themes but often even in their very words. I would at least have wished—since it would be easy for me to name them—that those who copy out many things word for word from their predecessors and publish them in books under their own name had also named and praised those whose calf had ploughed so well for them. For one should never be ashamed to name the teachers through whom we have made progress, and whose footsteps we follow step by step. And not without reason is this noted in Rhodiginus, the celebrated writer on antiquities and various readings. This is what the German Varro of his age, Johannes Gerhard, censures in Vossius, *On the Origin of Idolatry*, book III, chapter 84: that he was unwilling to record the names of the authors whose reflections he nevertheless transcribed; “from whom he drew these things,” he says, “he does not add.” How easy it would have been to have written the name of Athenes! Indeed, this happened everywhere with Rhodiginus, that, having concealed the writers from whom he had drawn his material, no one but he himself was cited as the witness. And this habit of hiding the sources from which they draw is quite familiar to certain eminent men of our own age.”

But I, determining to act otherwise—both in my other writings and especially in this one—have set down the names of each author, so that you may not be ignorant of whom you ought to esteem and consult; and from them you may seek both the explanation of Scripture and of theological matters, as well as the judgment of the chief Doctors of our Church on each topic. The authority of Doctors is indeed in no way to be equated with divine authority; yet after the latter, ecclesiastical authority has some weight, and is not lightly to be departed from—never, when it is supported by the Word of God.

To this end the first Reformer of the preceding century, Zwingli—whose name others vainly attach to us, as though we were sworn to him—wrote wisely and prudently in his *Commentary on True and False Religion* to Francis, King of the Gauls, in volume II of his works: “Let no one judge thus of us, that because Zwingli has said something, he thinks it must be followed—if indeed there are any who are so sworn to the words of a man, though I think there are few or none. On the other hand, let him not reject what he sees drawn from the fountains of the secrets of God merely because the one who produced it is a humble author. For I see errors committed in both directions.”

We shall think that things go well with the Church when we follow the example and doctrine of that man and of others like him, drawn from the Word of God; and when, removing ill-omened novelties—not only new-sounding words (καινοφωνίαι) but also new doctrines (καινοδιδασκαλίαι)—we preserve in religion and discipline alike the pattern of sound words, expressed in Scripture, handed down by the Doctors of the ancient and following Church, long since vindicated from superstition and errors,

subscribed with the abundant blood of martyrs, publicly acknowledged, and faithfully committed to future grandchildren and posterity.

It is no new or unusual thing to present the sum of a subject treated by various authors in their own words, and to introduce them speaking in order. This has long been done with happy success in books of secular literature—editions of Suetonius, Curtius, Terence, Plautus, Virgil, and others—furnished with various notes and observations of both ancient and modern scholars. Similar chains (Catenae) of ancient expositors exist on the sacred books of the Old and New Testaments. Among the Reformed, Augustine Marlorat followed the same method in his *Thesaurus of Expositions* from our theologians on the New Testament and on Genesis and Isaiah; among the English, Andrew Willet; and long ago among us, Baldwin Walaeus and Antonius Filer in their commentary on the Gospels.

Following their example, seeing that there already exist enough Theological Institutions or Commonplaces, I judged that my labour should be spent in weaving together some entire body from the most excellent theologians, which, as far as could be done, would fully and conveniently present each subject—and those things omitted by some but said by others—in the very words of the authors themselves, or at least indicate them. I have heard that the English theologians are now considering a similar Syntagma of Practical Theology, gathered from their chief authors. A splendid specimen was long ago given in the locus on Faith by our distinguished theologian and friend, Caspar Streso.

From these, as from a summary of the thoughts of others up to this point, one may soon see, as on a tablet, what has been done thus far, and what, if anything, may be added to what has been handed down. Therefore, for forming the Institutions which we now present to you, we have brought

together from here and there in the Church the celebrated and foremost men: the prudent Huldrych Zwingli—whom I place first, because he was earlier in the work of Reformation, and also purer; then the candid Melanchthon; the profoundly judicious Calvin; the solid Martyr; his colleague and fellow Italian, Hieronymus Zanchi; Wolfgang Musculus; Nicholas Hemmingius; Zacharias Ursinus; the venerable Genevan theologians, Beza and Faius; Georg Sohn; the ornament of our faculty in the Academy, Franciscus Junius; Johann Piscator; Benedict Aretius; Guilielmus Bucanus; Lucas Trelcatius the Younger; Amandus Polanus; David Pareus; Franciscus Gomarus; the Leiden professors—Polyander, Rivetus, Walaeus, Thysius—from the *Synopsis of Purer Theology*; Henricus Alting; Guilielmus Ames; Johann Maccovius; Friedrich Spanheim; Gisbertus Voetius; Samuel Maresius; and Marcus Friedrich Wendelin.

We hear them all—however distant in place and age—speaking with one accord (ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό) the mighty works of God. Here Luther agrees with Zwingli, Calvin and Melanchthon; nor do Pareus and Piscator disagree, nor Gomarus with Alting, nor Alting with Ames and Maccovius, by their own example, teach that all other things must be subordinated to the common edification of the Church, and that those whom one faith so well unites, and the same heaven above them, ought to be joined in the same spirit and in communion. Nor did pious posterity unite and venerate less those ancients: Chrysostom, though he had a dispute with Theophilus concerning the episcopate of Constantinople, and with Epiphanius concerning the writings and doctrine of Origen; Cyril and John of Antioch, who contended among themselves about the condemnation of Nestorius; Jerome disputing with Augustine about the dissimulation of Peter, and with Rufinus about Origen; whether Eastern theologians—otherwise upright and

orthodox in all other respects—or Western ones, although not infrequently differing from one another, yet, as far as concerns us, it is not fitting that we be lovers of strife, as Eusebius records concerning Polycarp and Anicetus, who were not entirely in agreement in the celebration of Easter.

We have cited Zwingli with the mark ZUING.; Luther as LUTH.; Melancthon as MELANTH.; Calvin as CALV.; Martyr as MART.; Zanchi as ZANCH.; Musculus as MUSC.; the Genevan theologians as GENEV.; Sohn as SOHN.; Junius as JUN.; Piscator as PISC.; Aretius as ARET.; Bucanus as BUC.; Trelcatius as TRELC.; Polanus as POL.; Pareus as PARE.; Gomarus as GOM.; the Leiden Professors as PROF.; Walaeus as WAL.; Alting as ALT.; Ames as AMES.; Maccovius as MACC.; Spanheim as SPANH.; Voetius as VOET.; Maresius as MARES.; Wendelin as WEND.

Not that there are not many more whom I might equally have consulted—and perhaps ought to have consulted—for I could not summon all into my council; but because I judged these sufficient, leaving to readers the liberty of adding from any others whatever persons or things they please. Therefore, I have touched upon all, or at least the chief, subjects that are debated throughout the whole of theology, so that you may note under each topic whatever matters or authors you observe to be relevant while reading.

For it is useful, in reading good authors, to mark at once whatever is worthy of note and to record it in one's *Adversaria*—that is, in the commonplaces which each student (for I speak to students) should form for himself, or append to the Institutions he uses. Hear Melancthon about himself, in the Preface to the *Theological Commonplaces*: “For this domestic use I first arranged these loci for myself; and when I saw that in these turbulent times some explanation was sometimes needed, I added here and there certain descriptions or divisions.”

And Rodolph Gualther, in the Preface to the *Commonplaces* of Peter Martyr—not composed by Martyr himself, but collected from his various commentaries on Scripture by Robert Masson, minister of the French Church in London—says: “There is no compendium more certain and fruitful for true and solid learning than that each person should gather for himself commentaries on the commonplaces, and whatever occurs in reading, or even in conversations and disputations, worthy of remembrance, should note under its proper title. This is required by common necessity, since no mortal is so endowed with genius that he can retain in memory everything he hears or reads, so that it never slips away.”

Whatever may be the case with others more advanced, and who have already gained a name among the learned, this advice at least ought not to displease the younger and beginners, especially since it is urged and exemplified by the greatest men. Erasmus, in *The Method of True Theology*: “What I am now about to say, I do not know whether it will bring the greatest benefit; it is this: that you either arrange for yourself, or receive from someone else, certain theological commonplaces, into which you may sort everything you read, as into certain little nests, so that it may be easier, whenever you wish, to bring forth or store away what you desire—for example (to note the matter by way of illustration): concerning faith, concerning fasting, concerning bearing with impious magistrates, concerning avoiding the offense of the simple, concerning the study of Holy Scripture, concerning piety toward parents, etc.”

To the same purpose tends his excellent little book on the method of study and of reading authors, where, among other things, he says: “Let one range through every kind of writer, so as to read the best first, yet so as to leave none untasted, even if the author is not very good. And that he may do this

with greater fruit, let him beforehand have certain loci and orders and formulas prepared for this purpose, so that whatever anywhere occurs worthy of note, he may assign it to its own order.” Erasmus himself had compiled *Adversaria*, which, shown to him in manuscript at Basel in the house of Amorbach, Thuanus mentions in the history of his life.

What we have now done in forging these Institutions, Melanchthon long ago thought of and desired, as is clear from his *Theological Commonplaces*, where in the Preface of the year 1543 he explains: “I have often wished that others, who excel in learning and judgment, would, by shared counsel and compared opinions concerning the matters themselves and the forms of speaking, compose some such work with weighty authority, which would in order embrace the chief subjects of ecclesiastical doctrine. I would say that this matter ought to be the concern of pious and wise princes, especially in such confusion of the times.”

What he expected in vain from a synod of living men, we have done by consulting their writings and presenting selections of their doctrines. Yet we have not run through all their books for this purpose, but only those Institutions, Commonplaces, Disputations, and similar treatises which they published with the intention of comprehending the sum of religion. For this reason, also—without neglect or prejudice toward anyone—we have passed over certain celebrated and learned writers who did not devote themselves so directly to this argument. For we each take up and treat different subjects; nor is it reasonable that all should be occupied with one thing, nor would all accomplish everything with equal success. In this, we must acknowledge the wisdom of God, who, as He bestows various gifts upon His own, so He supplies them with diverse studies and labours, according to the measure of gifts and even of ages.

You have now the plan of the present work, which I judged necessary to set forth to you, that you may derive the greater use from it. And may He grant that you reap from it the fruit which I hope for; and it will be yours to strive for it. May He grant this, according to His infinite goodness, to whom all our studies, labours, life, and whatever we possess or are able to accomplish, are devoted in service—counting it His highest benefit toward us that it is permitted us to serve Him, both by the common lot of Christians and, beyond that, by a singular and most holy calling. May He therefore most abundantly bless you, and after you have diligently applied yourselves to your studies, make you faithful to Himself throughout your whole life, zealous and worthy labourers in whatever place you shall ever obtain.