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Minimal Faith and Irenic Ideals in Seventeenth-Century Scholarly Circles

*Hugo Grotius as a Guardian of Isaac Casaubon's Legacy**

Henk Nellen

Huygens Institute, The Hague, The Netherlands

henk.nellen@huygens.knaw.nl

Abstract

This article shows how the Dutch humanist Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), inspired by his friend Isaac Casaubon, sought to introduce a procedure for mitigating strife in the Christian church. He proclaimed a division between a set of self-evident, universally accepted key tenets, to be endorsed by all believers, and a larger number of secondary, not completely certain articles of faith, which were to be left open for friendly debate. The doctrine of the Trinity belonged to the second category; it should be treated in a careful, detached way, in words that did not go beyond the terminology of the Bible. However, defenders of this irenic stance laid themselves open to severe criticism: the example of the conservative Lutheran theologian Abraham Calovius illustrates how they were censured for giving up divinely inspired truth for a chimerical unionist ideal which cajoled them into reintroducing the early Christian heresy of Arianism, now called Socinianism.

Keywords

minimal faith – secularisation – Socinianism – exegesis – seventeenth-century intellectual life – Grotius – Casaubon

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1 Introduction

I have long been fully convinced that the unbridled human urge to penetrate into God's secret counsels and to go even beyond those counsels that eternal wisdom has revealed in Scripture, is one of the most serious evils of our age.¹

ISAAC CASAUBON to HUGO GROTIUS, 6 May 1614

In the letter quoted above, Isaac Casaubon berated his fellow Christians for their deep-rooted habit of quarrelling endlessly about abstruse theological matters. This diatribe was occasioned by the internal struggles in the Dutch Republic during the Truce with Spain (1609–1621). In those years debates on predestination, grace, and free will divided the Reformed Church and even threatened to seriously disrupt public life. A couple of years before writing his letter, the Huguenot Casaubon had personally experienced the negative impact of religious troubles. Compelled to leave his fatherland and seek refuge in England, he devoted the last years of his life to solving the problem of continuously erupting religious discord and strife. His views were a great inspiration to the Dutch statesman and jurist Hugo Grotius, as well as other scholars who saw the propagation of minimal religion as the only viable way to overcome the problems caused by religious conflict. Their efforts might be seen as a symptom of secularisation, a concept that is taken here as a deliberate attempt to narrow down the Christian faith to a set of essential articles that might readily be endorsed by all reasonable believers. In addition to that primary set of articles, these thinkers envisaged a broad area for secondary articles subject to open but peaceful discussion and the exchange of ideas. The discourse on the tenets of faith, even the essential ones, could only thrive if a platform for prudent and restrained debate were created. In this way the disclosure of religious truth would not fail to engender mutual respect, toleration, and—eventually—a peaceful society.²

1 "Mihi quidem dudum persuasissimum est, gravissima saeculi nostri mala esse, immoderatam hominum cupiditatem penetrandi in arcana Dei consilia, etiam ultra ea, quae aeterna sapientia nobis revelavit in Scripturis." See *Briefwisseling van Hugo Grotius*, eds. P.C. Molhuysen et al., 17 vols. (The Hague, 1928–2001), accessible through <http://grotius.huygens.knaw.nl/years>, hereafter cited as *BW*, vol. 1, no. 335.

2 For the discussion on irenicism and the fundamental articles of faith, see the still instructive work of Otto Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte des Protestantismus*, 4 vols. (Leipzig, 1908–1927), 4 (*Orthodoxie und Synkretismus in der altprotestantischen Theologie*): 231–342, and Wilfried

Much ink has been spilled on defining secularisation. In what follows we will argue that the best way to come to grips with this phenomenon is to describe how it took shape in the mental world of broad-minded scholars such as Isaac Casaubon, Hugo Grotius, Edward Herbert of Cherbury, and Marin Mersenne. In their circle Christian dividedness, for example on the dogma of the Trinity, was taken as an incentive to join in a counterpoint dialogue and embark on a quest for unity, against the vested interests of the established churches. The pivotal figure is Hugo Grotius, who attempted to show that the negative consequences of internal strife in the Christian community imposed the need for unity. For a clearer view of the general religious context in which he prepared his irenic programme it is important to draw attention to the growing dissatisfaction with the biblical and patristic foundation of the Trinity felt among scholars of his kind. Their criticism, based on a thorough knowledge of (Oriental) linguistics and history, questioned this foundation and, what is more, highlighted the troublesome articulation of Trinitarian doctrine in the early Church. Seventeenth-century researchers who delved into the writings of the Church Fathers showed that they had endorsed all kinds of doctrinal interpretation that had led them away from what was seen as orthodoxy in later times. In the process of undermining the Bible and Tradition as a sound basis for establishing the doctrine of the Trinity, the arch-heretic Faustus Socinus and his followers played a crucial role. Consequently, Christian orthodoxy felt itself driven into a corner. How to prevent Socinianism from undermining the historical defence of the Trinity, how to close the door to Christological heresies that had once disturbed early Church life? While Reformed theologians often denied a consensus among the Fathers and contrasted their sometimes even heterodox Trinitarian teachings with the self-evident biblical message, Roman Catholic authors accepted patristic heterogeneity and reasoned its consequences away by assuming that truth had become apparent in the course of time as the Church, guided by the Holy Ghost, managed to pinpoint dogma in an unequivocal way, for example in the Council of Nicaea (325 CE).³

My description of Grotius's participation in the debates does not go into all aspects of his irenic programme. By marking the importance of Casaubon's legacy I neglect other role models, for example the Roman Catholic theologian Georg Cassander. I have opted for Casaubon, because it was only at the end of

Joest, 'Fundamentalartikel,' in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, eds. Gerhard Krause et al., 36 vols. (Berlin, 1977–2007), 11: 727–732.

3 Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, *Apokalypse und Philologie. Wissensgeschichten und Weltentwürfe der Frühen Neuzeit* (Göttingen, 2007), pp. 53–121.

his life that Grotius decided to involve Roman Catholicism in his enterprise by taking Cassander's notes on the *Confessio Augustana* as a starting point. Although Grotius never excluded Rome from his unification plans, he initially aimed at inner-Protestant rapprochement, inspired as he was by the example Casaubon had set.⁴

2 *De rebus sacris et ecclesiasticis exercitationes*

In 1614 Isaac Casaubon published his *De rebus sacris et ecclesiasticis exercitationes*, a quarto edition of more than 800 pages.⁵ In this work, dedicated to James I of England, the author refuted the *Annales ecclesiastici a Christo nato ad annum 1198* (12 vols., Rome 1588–1607), written by an eminent Roman Catholic apologist, the Oratorian Cesare Baronius. In his turn Baronius, promoted to cardinal in 1596, had written a refutation of a famous apologetic work of Lutheran origin, the *Centuriae Magdeburgenses* (13 vols., Basel 1559–1574). Although Casaubon did not conceal his admiration for Baronius's gigantic achievement, the tone of his book was vehemently polemical. Not without irony, he referred to the long incubation time of the *Annales*. This voluminous work had taken thirty years to gestate before Baronius, guided by the superior of his order, Philip Neri, felt sufficiently confident to offer it for publication. This was certainly a long time considering that an elephant needed ten years to reproduce (Preface, p. [4* 4v]).⁶

4 See for Grotius's irenic development G.H.M. Posthumus Meyjes, 'Hugo Grotius as an Irenicist,' in *The world of Hugo Grotius (1583–1645). Proceedings of the International Colloquium ... Rotterdam 6–9 April 1983* (Amsterdam, 1984), pp. 43–63, and Henk Nellen, *Hugo Grotius, A Lifelong Struggle for Peace in Church and State* (Leiden, 2014).

5 *De rebus sacris et ecclesiasticis exercitationes XVI. Ad Cardinalis Baronii Prolegomena in Annales et primam eorum partem, de Domini nostri Iesu Christi nativitate, vita, passione, assumptione ...* (London, 1614). The most recent study of Casaubon's controversy with Baronius is by Anthony Grafton and Joanna Weinberg, *"I have always loved the Holy Tongue": Isaac Casaubon, the Jews, and a Forgotten Chapter in Renaissance Scholarship* (Cambridge, Mass., 2011). See also, for a description of the polemical context, François Laplanche, 'A propos d'Isaac Casaubon: La controverse confessionnelle et la naissance de l'histoire,' *History of European Ideas* 9 (1988), 405–422, and Jean Jehasse, *La renaissance de la critique. L'essor de l'Humanisme érudit de 1560 à 1614* (Paris, 2002), pp. 410–412.

6 "Annos igitur, non decem, quo spatio temporis elephantorum partus eduntur, sed ter decem, ei studio sub Nerii ductu operam navasse, priusquam aliquid ederet."

Under the aegis of King James⁷ Casaubon professed his willingness to advance peace among Christians. In his refutation of Baronius's work, however, he did not mince his words, as if aggressive behaviour were likely to further reconciliation. Giving free reign to his indignation at Baronius's distortions of ecclesiastical history, he remained keenly aware of those whose support and protection he was enjoying. His exaltation of the Church of England and its head, James, was so extreme that it precluded any chance of compromise whatsoever. Paradoxically, he paved the way for a treatment of sacral history as practised by one of his admirers, the Dutch scholar Hugo Grotius, who at that time was involved in attempts to mitigate the religious controversy surrounding the doctrine of predestination that ravaged the Dutch Republic. Casaubon's treatment of much debated mysteries such as the Lord's Supper (transubstantiation) and the Trinity is important in this respect. In the following it will be made clear that Casaubon's intellectual legacy had a twofold influence on Grotius. The Dutch scholar endorsed the necessity of an unbiased treatment of historical sources, and what is more important yet, he also acknowledged that such an approach would lay the basis for procedures to reduce belief to a set of essentials on which all Christians could agree. Casaubon's *Exercitationes* stimulated Grotius in his attempts to develop a blueprint for a Christianity of peace.⁸

The polemical strategy applied in the *Exercitationes* has to be judged against the backdrop of confessional disputes around 1600. Casaubon saw the course taken by history as the meandering itinerary of revealed truth constantly struggling to maintain itself. This view of history led him to stress four main points. First, Casaubon took the early Christian church as a reference point. He revered the early church as it had evolved from a clandestine and repressed conglomerate of scattered communities into a vital, state-protected and constantly expanding organisation that reached its zenith during the fourth and fifth centuries, even though it was in this very period that the first signs of decay were becoming visible (p. 7*^{irv}, Prolegomena). The writings of the church fathers living during the first four ecumenical councils could provide all the essential tenets of faith necessary for salvation, in so far as they were selected according

7 W.B. Patterson, *King James VI and I and the Reunion of Christendom* (Cambridge, Eng., 1997), pp. 136–139.

8 On Casaubon and Grotius see G.H.M. Posthumus Meyjes, 'Twee vrienden, Isaac Casaubon en Hugo de Groot,' in *Voorbeeldige vriendschap. Vrienden en vriendinnen in theologie en cultuur* (Groningen, 1993), pp. 37–46; Jean-Louis Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian Antiquity. The Construction of a Confessional Identity in the 17th Century* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 139–154.

to the famous canon of Vincent of Lérins. In this way it was possible to identify all those tenets of faith necessary for salvation that had been acclaimed as such since the days of the Apostles. Casaubon had Vincent's famous rule in mind: "... in the Catholic Church itself, all possible care must be taken to maintain that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all" ("In ipsa ... Catholica Ecclesia magnopere curandum est ut id teneamus quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est").⁹

In the second place, Casaubon tried to justify his own stance in the debate by asserting that, far from breaking with the early church, the Reformation meant a true continuation of the doctrines, rites and ecclesiastical organisation of the first five centuries. Repeatedly he emphasised the disparaging connotations attached to novelty or innovation in the fields of dogma, ritual, and ecclesiastical organisation (p. [1*3r]).¹⁰ What was new was to be rejected for this reason alone. If doctrines were new, they could not but deviate from the faith as it had been preached by Christ and his disciples. For every heresy is a renewal regarding faith, "omnis enim haeresis novatio est circa fidem" (p. [3*4r]). In order to overcome religious discord and strife, Casaubon advocated a return to the church of the first centuries, an ideal that he supposed to have been realised nowhere better than in the Church of England (p. [6*4r]).¹¹ The Roman Catholic view of the Eucharist, with the associated doctrines of transubstantiation and concomitance, the sacrament of auricular confession, purgatory, the invocation of the saints, the worship of sculptures, the ban on services in the vernacular, and the repression of an independent reading of the Bible, all these doctrines and misapprehensions resulted from medieval accretions not

9 Vincent of Lérins, *Commonitorium* 1.2. Cf. *Isaaci Casauboni ad epistolam illustr. et reverendiss. Cardinalis Perronii Responsio* (London, 1612), pp. 39–42.

10 "Sive Annalium replicare memoriam, Tua Majestas voluerit, sive ad haec nostra tempora oculos referre, inveniet profecto, non gladios, non equuleos, non flammam, non ungulas, non craticulas, non 'theriomachias,' aliave ulla priscae crudelitatis instrumenta Ecclesiae tantum unquam nocuisse, quantum ei nocuerunt, hinc novarum opinionum auctores, illinc praeposteri Antiquitatis 'pseudoonumou' defensores" (If your Majesty would like to go through the history records (cf. Cicero, *Pro Sulla* 27) or direct his attention to our own age, he surely cannot but conclude that it has not so much been swords, wooden racks, flames, claws, iron grates, fighting with wild beasts, or any other instruments of ancient cruelty that have ever done damage to the church, as on the one hand authors of new opinions and on the other ludicrous defenders of a counterfeit antiquity).

11 Cf. Isaac Casaubon, *Epistolae, insertis ad easdem responsionibus*, ed. Th.J. ab Almeloveen (Rotterdam, 1709), 1: 550–551, to J.A. de Thou, Non. Decemb. 1613, and p. 558, to G.M. Linschheim, a.d. III Eid. April. 1614.

confirmed in the Bible (p. 4*2r and [5*4r]). It was wrong to introduce anything new, and thus to become guilty of deviating from the contents of the Bible. Chrysostom and other fathers of the church had warned that nothing new should be introduced after Christ had revealed the rules of faith. In his epitaph for Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus had identified true belief as piety proclaimed in Scripture (“*pietatem Scripturis comprehensam*”), while denouncing the heresy of Arianism as a novelty that was alien to it.¹² Casaubon then referred to the three widely acclaimed criteria of Vincent of Lérins: “*tres regulae Vincentii Lirinensis, quae iam in ore sunt omnibus*,” of which the first was: “*Quod fuit a principio*” (p. 4*1v),¹³ and “*ubique*” and “*semper*” the other two.¹⁴

Thirdly, in order to construct a solid basis for proving that the Reformed faith was completely in accordance with the rules of faith prevailing in the primitive church, Casaubon pleaded for a sound historical approach to ecclesiastical sources. It was on this point, he said, that his adversary Baronius had failed utterly. His command of the Greek and Hebrew languages showed glaring errors, his omnivorous ambition to peruse all available sources prevented him from critical sifting (p. [4*4v], 5*1r; 7*2v),¹⁵ but the most important objection levelled at this historian was that he allowed his ideological prejudices to misinterpret his sources, resulting in his rigid defence of papal supremacy. As

12 Gregory of Nazianzus, *In laudem Athanasii* (Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* 35: 1124). Migne, *Patrologia Graeca* and *Patrologia Latina*, accessible through the Internet: <http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/>, hereafter cited as *PG* and *PL*.

13 Casaubon then continues: “*Haec, et similia his sexcenta, quae in Scripturis et Patrum monumentis in eam sententiam passim leguntur, si diligenter apud se, uti par erat, expendere inimici Reformationis, quam eius auctoribus novitatem obiiciunt, eam in sinu suo reperirent ...*” (If the Reformation’s enemies diligently—as they ought to do—examine these principles and six hundred other ones similar to these which can be found in this sense in the Scriptures and in the monuments of the fathers, they would encounter the novelty for which they reproach the authors of the Reformation in their own fold). See also p. [1*3r], where the author asked the rhetorical question: “*... quae Vetustas contra Veritatem stare potest, quum sit extra omne dubium, id verius esse, quod prius; id prius, quod a principio? Itaque haereses non minus arguit novitas, quam revincit Veritas.*” (... which antiquity is as good as the truth, since it is beyond any doubt that what is earlier is truer, and what has existed from the beginning is earlier. In this way novelty argues against heresies, no less than truth conquers them).

14 Cf. *Casauboni ad epistolam illustr. et reverendiss. Cardinalis Perronii Responsio* (see above, n. 9), p. 40, cited in Christian Thorsten Callisen, ‘Georg Calixtus, Isaac Casaubon, and the Consensus of Antiquity,’ *Journal of the History of Ideas* 73 (2012), 1–21, there 19.

15 Anthony Grafton and Joanna Weinberg, “*I have always loved the Holy Tongue*” (see above, n. 5), pp. 169 and 183.

a matter of fact, Casaubon suggested, it was the papacy itself that should be blamed for the incredibly distorted image depicted in the *Annales*. Claiming infallibility and supremacy as Peter's successor, the pope would have dismissed a true history as liable to censure by the Inquisition (p. 6*1r).

In the fourth place, as a true Huguenot inspired by fervent French Gallicans like Jacques-Auguste de Thou, Casaubon used his preface to blame the papacy for abusing its dominant position in sacral as well as in worldly matters. Not only were the popes guilty of introducing all kinds of doctrinal innovations uncorroborated by the text of the Bible or by the earliest traditions of the church, they also constantly interfered with the worldly powers of kings and princes. While accepting the episcopal structure of the Church of England, Casaubon ardently opposed the prerogatives claimed by the papacy, for example that of standing aloof from any decisions made by church councils; such pretensions resulted from an obdurate distortion of Peter's position as *primus inter pares* among the apostles. Fortunately, James had courageously withstood Rome's aspirations, unlike many emperors, kings, and princes (p. 2*2v, [2*3r]). In the *Exercitationes* the papacy's primacy in sacral and worldly matters was firmly denied. Biblical texts did not justify the supremacy of the Bishop of Rome over Christianity *ex iure divino* (see also pp. 419–424). Casaubon argued for a firm negation of papal claims in ecclesiastical and political matters. National governments had to defend their sovereignty by contravening Rome's tyrannical aspirations (p. 3*1v–3*2r). The way in which the papacy had always interfered in national politics surfaced in the unrestrained behaviour of the Jesuits and was most of all exemplified by the murder of King Henry IV. Casaubon mentioned this event as a disaster that had affected him personally, in that he—otherwise unable to live without books—had given up his studies for some time (p. 6*2v).¹⁶ Although Baronius had not openly provoked his co-religionists to commit such an atrocious crime, he had certainly prepared the

16 “Inter haec rebus humanis Henricus Magnus est exemptus, et unius parricidae scelere aeternum detestando, nutantibus Galliarum fati, omnium Gallorum fortunae in periculum praesentissimum sunt adductae; mihi quidem tam inopinatus, tamque immanis casus, tantum rerum praesentium, ipsiusque adeo vitae fastidium attulit, ut qui nullam sine literis vitalem vitam hactenus credideram, libris tunc temporis renuntiarem.” (Meanwhile Henry the Great was snatched away from human affairs, and while France's fates faltered the fortune of all Frenchmen was drawn into the most acute danger through the crime, forever to be detested, of one murderer. For me, such an unsuspected and monstrous event made me disgust all things present and even life itself, so much so that at the time I abandoned all books, although up to then I had always thought that a life without reading would be unbearable).

ground for it (p. A3v). Time and again Casaubon showed his predilection for an Erastian view of politics: to check the aspirations of the papacy, control of the church by the state was called for.

The author of the *Exercitationes* attacked the papacy for having betrayed the faith of the primitive church and for subjecting worldly powers to tyranny. Casaubon stood for the faith founded by Christ, preached by the apostles, propagated by the ancient church and defended by the doctors of the church: "... fides cuius auctor solus Christus, apostoli praecones, vetus ecclesia propagatrix, prisci illius doctores defensores" (p. [3*4v]). Casaubon proposed abolishing Roman Catholic fabrications and adherence to the belief as handed down by Christ once and for all: "... fides quae semel fuit tradita" (Jude 3). Nonetheless Casaubon said he preferred treading a middle path. He criticized Baronius, but he claimed to do so in a lenient way.¹⁷ Although the sources Baronius had traced in Roman archives were inaccessible to a Transalpine Protestant, Casaubon was sure that his opponent's apologetic motivation had led him to misjudge and distort the historical facts.¹⁸ In the sixteenth *Exercitatio* Casaubon went into the customs of the primitive church, the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist, in particular, in some depth. He allowed himself lengthy digressions, for example on the 27 names that had been bestowed on the Eucharist.¹⁹ In a historical treatment of the sources he established the affinity between pagan and Christian rites. It was on this similarity that the apostles and church fathers based their strategy to win pagans over to Christianity, by adopting rituals that pagans observed. Casaubon went into the initiation customs, and noted a distinction between believers who wanted to convert to the Christian belief and those who had once forsaken it by lapsing into sin and now considered a return. He described the stages that the first category of believers had to go through. Then, he shifted to the second category and permitted himself a jibe at the expense of theologians who passed beyond the boundaries set by Scripture for developing dogmatic niceties that they strove to impose on their fellow believers. "Regard-

17 Casaubon, *Epistolae* (see above, n. 11), 1: 481, to D. Hoeschel, VI Eid. Aug. 1612.

18 The doctrine of transubstantiation was unknown to the ancients. It was a concept that had been introduced only recently. According to Casaubon, Baronio feigned to have come across the word in a manuscript of a Gospel, "in aliquo evangelista, quem nobis Transalpinis, quibus non patet Vaticana, nondum videre contigit" (*Exercitationes* [see above, n. 5], p. [5*4rv]).

19 Cf. p. A4v of the letter to the reader: for this *Exercitatio* he had originally written three disputations, successively on the names given to the Eucharist, on the transubstantiation and on the kind of Christian sacrifice ("de genere sacrificii Christianorum"). The last two were rather long and had not been published "propter typographi festinationem."

ing those believers who had fallen into sin, discipline was quite severe and very admirable. Without doubt God will be pleased to see his creatures exerting themselves to restore this discipline, rather than carrying on disputes irrespective of Scripture and violently persecuting all those unwilling to accept their opinions, a procedure which is today regarded as the highest form of piety" (p. 552).²⁰

According to Casaubon many rites in the primitive church were derived from customs of pagan origin, in which mysteries played an important role. Consequently, Christian rites were also imbued with an atmosphere of confidentiality and secrecy. This "Arkandisziplin"²¹ pertained primarily to the sacraments, which were often described as mysteries. As a rule, mysteries were kept secret, not only from outsiders, but even for converts who were being instructed for initiation. But Casaubon drew attention to an important difference. Christians had no qualms about making clear that the offerings of the table represented God. The "res significatae," Christ's body and blood, might thus be disclosed, but the ritual of performing the sacraments and the way this performance affected the symbols belonged to the things that were carefully kept hidden (pp. 559–566, esp. 559–561). For Casaubon the Trinity did not belong to these mysteries, but in the next passage he admitted that prudence had led church leaders to eschew all too great an openness in this respect too. Casaubon advocated the idea of observing the terminology of the Bible, when for example treating the delicate subject of the Trinity. He pointed out that even after the Nicene creed had been promulgated, the church refrained from mentioning enigmatic concepts featuring in the creed, like "trinitas" and "homoousios," in order not to upset the weak. After citing both words in capitals, he referred to church father Basil, *Ascetica, De fide* 224²² and concluded with an impassioned exclamation: "O pietatem veram et sinceram! O viros, vere 'theoforous,' vere Dei plenos!" (p. 563).²³

20 "Circa lapsos disciplina fuit admodum severa, et prorsus admiranda, cui revocandae in usum operam impendisse, res futura sit Deo gratior absque dubio, quam de fidei dogmatis subtiliter disputare extra Scripturas, et omnes dissentientes ferro et flamma persequi, in quo hodie summus pietatis apex ponitur."

21 Douglas Powell, 'Arkandisziplin,' in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* (see above, n. 2), 4: 1–8, and Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine. On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago, 1990), pp. 55–62.

22 PG 31: 677, in Casaubon's translation: "Parcentes uti nominibus illis, quae non extant in divina scriptura ipsis dictionibus" (Refusing to use those terms that are not extant in Scripture in the same wording).

23 "Oh, true and sincere piety! Oh, men truly bearing God!" See also Kristine Louise Haugen,

Evidently, Casaubon endorsed Basil's cautiousness, as he feared for the disruptive impact of dogmatic strife on the body politic. On p. 564 he once more referred to contemporary theologians who engaged in vehement debates on questions of predestination. "Today many theologians show a very different mind-set: never will they admit to having acquitted themselves sufficiently well of their task, unless they disclose the most noble secrets of God's wisdom to anybody from the filthiest scum of the people, meanwhile failing to observe even in the smallest degree 'how high are the matters of our teaching.' Hence the widespread custom of disputes currently being held on predestination, on God's eternal doctrine on damnation, and on similar mysteries, even among uneducated people and craftsmen sitting in the shade of their pergolas."²⁴ The somewhat abstruse reference to craftsmen points the reader to Plinius's fable on Apelles. Having positioned himself behind his paintings at the back of his workshop ("pergula"), Apelles overheard the comment of a shoemaker who criticised the painter for the clumsy way in which he had painted the strings in a shoe. Obliging, Apelles altered the painting, but when the same shoemaker criticised the leg, he refused to comply with his remarks a second time: let the cobbler stick to his last.²⁵ In this way the veiled reference to Pliny's story served to show that it is wrong to confront the man in the street with the intricacies of theological debate. Of course, Casaubon had in mind the political developments in the United Provinces, where the growing controversies between Arminians and Gomarists were permeating all layers of society, paralysing public life and administration to the extent that even King James felt obliged to interfere.²⁶

'Transformations of the Trinity Doctrine in English Scholarship. From the History of Beliefs to the History of Texts,' *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 3 (2001), 149–168, there 152–153.

24 "Hodie longe alia mens est multorum theologorum, qui officio suo nunquam satis fideliter se defunctos putant, nisi gravissima quaeque arcana sapientiae Dei cuius ex ima populi faece exposuerint, nihil quicquam reveriti 'to hupsooma toon didaskomenooon.' Hinc illae nonnullis in locis de praedestinatione, de aeterno Dei ad damnationem decreto et similibus mysteriis, etiam inter rudes literarum et sedentes in pergulis suis artifices, agitari solitae quaestiones." See for the Greek citation Cyrillus Hierosolimitanus, *Catechetical Lectures*, Procatechesis 12 (PG 33: 353).

25 Plinius, *Naturalis Historia* 35.84–85.

26 Casaubon's diatribe is quoted in Paulus Colomesius, *Theologorum presbyterianorum icon, ex protestantium scriptis ad vivum expressa* (n.p., 1682), pp. 25–26, under the heading "Gravissima quaeque arcana sapientiae Dei [theologi] cuius e populo product" (The theologians confront any and all the people with the most burdensome secrets of divine wisdom).

The preface to the *Exercitationes* contained a similar reference to the Trinity (p. [5*4v]) and in this case, too, the reader's attention was immediately drawn to the passage, because the words were printed in Greek capitals: "trias" and "homouosios." Casaubon discussed Baronius's view of transubstantiation. Obviously, Casaubon thought this concept was new, but Baronius presented it as if it had always belonged to the doctrinal body of the church. Casaubon drew a parallel with other new concepts denoting the Trinity, and then pointed out that church fathers like Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus had always eschewed these terms, despite the fact that they had been approved and accredited in the Council of Nicene on the basis of careful exegesis of the Bible. Nevertheless, the fathers were loath to adopt these terms, for the only reason that they did not feature in the Bible literally. The place in Gregory is not exactly indicated, but as far as Basil is concerned, Casaubon referred to *Ascetica, de Fide* 224 again.²⁷

Casaubon stressed how fairly he had treated his adversary. It was ecclesiastical peace that he aimed at, which is why he was prepared to even reproach representatives of the Reformed religion for their extremism. The personal notes he took when reading Baronius suggest that he was playing with the idea of using a subsequent volume of his *Exercitationes* to take the Puritans to task for their fierce opposition to an episcopal hierarchy.²⁸ Such a middle position must have been very attractive to Hugo Grotius, who did not hesitate to accede to the request of the author, and write a prefatory poem for inclusion in the *Exercitationes*. In this poem he underscored the need for a return to a kind of religious life that had characterised the primitive church, that is to say a belief that was not contaminated by obstinacy, greed, and self-interest. The established churches of his day hindered a return to traditional faith, mainly by indulging in the lust for worldly power (Roman Catholicism) or in an all too fervent reformism (Reformation). The poem reads as a manifesto introducing the reader to Grotius's religious programme, which sought to create a broadly based church by chopping off extremist tendencies.²⁹ The poem was impor-

27 See, for Casaubon's study of Basil the Great, Anthony Grafton, 'Protestant versus Prophet: Isaac Casaubon on Hermes Trismegistus,' in Anthony Grafton, *Defenders of the Text. The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science, 1450-1800* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), pp. 146-147. See also Hélène Parenty, *Isaac Casaubon helléniste. Des studia humanitatis à la philologie* (Geneva, 2009), pp. 93-96.

28 Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian Antiquity* (see above, n. 8), pp. 146-147.

29 *Exercitationes* (see above, n. 5), p. [A5v-A6r] and M. van Oosterhout, *Hugo Grotius' Occasional Poetry, 1608-1645* (Nijmegen: PhD Radboud University, 2009), pp. 96-101: "Annales docti nimium servire Baroni ..."

tant to Grotius, because many years later he recalled that the text had not been included in his *Poemata collecta* of 1617.³⁰ Had he dropped it out of fear that its virulent irenic tendency would only exacerbate the Truce controversies? Here it is important to note that Grotius's poem promoted and sharpened a dichotomy that Casaubon had for good reasons shied away from. Although the French scholar disliked the austere Calvinists and Puritans for neglecting and violating the customs of the ancient church,³¹ he wisely avoided airing his scruples and limited himself to reproving the papacy.

3 Controversies during the Truce: Casaubon's Legacy

The presentation copy of the *Exercitationes*, sent to Grotius immediately after publication,³² is preserved in the Vatican Library. It contains a dedication in the author's handwriting: "Viro amplissimo D. Hugoni Grotio." The copy bears traces of intensive reading, with underlined passages, marginal annotations and some remarks on the last flyleaf.³³ Grotius's admiration becomes apparent in the letter in which he thanked the author for his gift.³⁴ He recalled a quotation Casaubon had taken from Basil, who condemned man's unbridled inclination to deviate from the middle path, out of mere stubbornness. These words, in a letter to the philosopher Maximus of Ephesus, were written to criticize Dionysius of Alexandria for assiduously repressing Sabellianism—so much so that he fell into the error of disseminating Arianism.³⁵ In seventeenth-century

30 *BW* 2, no. 996, to W. de Groot, 1 August 1625; other references to the poem in *BW* 2, no. 1036, to W. de Groot, 4 December 1625, and *BW* 7, no. 3627, to M. Bernegger, 6 June 1638.

31 Mark Pattison, *Isaac Casaubon, 1559–1614* (Oxford, 1892), pp. 219–226, cited in Patterson, *King James VI and I* (see above, n. 7), p. 128, n. 21.

32 Cf. Casaubon, *Epistolae* (see above, n. 11), 1: 555, Casaubon to D. Heinsius, Eid. Mart. 1614: "vix enim dies sunt elapsi quatuor aut quinque, ex quo ultimum folium est impressum." "Nearly four or five days have gone by since the last leaf was printed," but Casaubon had already entrusted an intermediary with presentation copies for Daniel Heinsius, Grotius, and the orientalist Thomas Erpenius.

33 Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, shelf number R.I. iii. 255. See Folke Dovring, 'Nouvelles recherches sur la bibliothèque de Grotius en Suède et en Italie,' in *Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen*, Nieuwe reeks, deel 14, afdeling Letterkunde (Amsterdam, 1951), no. 10, pp. 331–339, there p. 336 no. 6.

34 *BW* 1, no. 334, 4 May 1614, in which letter Grotius confirmed the receipt of the book out of the hands of Erpenius.

35 Basil, *Epistolarum Classis* 1, Epistola 9.2 (*PG* 32:269). Casaubon referred three times to Basil's expression in the *Exercitationes* (see above, n. 5), pp. [4*4r], 373, and 513–514.

polemics, Arianism was denounced as a heresy anticipating Socinianism, a doctrine that denied Christ's divinity. Grotius subscribed to Basil's rejection of human contentiousness, an evil that had existed since time immemorial, but now believers generally indulged in it, even to the extent that it was equated with great honesty.³⁶ Grotius was happy to conclude that the *Exercitationes* attested to a totally different mentality. Out of tune with the combative spirit of his age, Casaubon only showed modesty, equity, frankness and prudence. The last virtue became apparent in the author's determined objective to keep in mind where and when he was living. This meant that he sometimes brought up no other ideas than he ought to, whereas at other times he remained silent where he could have spoken.³⁷ Even before receiving this letter, Casaubon confirmed his sympathy with Grotius's endeavour to mitigate religious struggles in the Republic: he expressly referred his friend to the passage on p. 564, cited above, in which he had criticized theologians who caused turmoil because of futile differences of opinion on predestination. He considered this attitude to be among the most serious evils of his time. In discussing theological problems the best thing to do was to stick to the lessons of the Bible.³⁸

Just like Casaubon, Grotius fostered the myth of the genuine, pristine faith of the first centuries. This overestimation of early Christianity is not easy to explain. Apparently Grotius adhered to the idea that there had always been unanimity on important issues such as the Trinity, the Eucharist, grace, free will and predestination during the first three centuries of the Christian church, owing to a general desire to abstain from precise doctrinal definitions and to settle all points in ecumenical councils or (in the case of minor councils) by way of an adequate exchange of opinions. Only after that period did unrestrained discussion come to prevail over reticence in reducing faith to sharp definitions. Many trivial theological problems now became the subject of bitter controversy. Grotius coupled the period of bloom during the first three or four centuries with the decay that followed upon the anti-Pelagian polemics waged by Augustine at the end of the fourth century.³⁹ Like many irenic writers, he

36 "... familiare quidem omnibus saeculis malum, sed nostro ita ablandiens, ut in magna honesti parte ponatur ..."

37 "... respexisse te video ubi et quando viveres, non ut alia diceres quam quae oportebat, sed ut quaedam quae dici poterant omitteres."

38 *BW* 1, no. 335, from Casaubon, dated on 6 May 1614, but according to the autograph, preserved in The Hague, Royal Library, 76 D 22, written on 26 April (VI Kal. Maias) 1614. Cf. the quotation above this article and Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian Antiquity* (see above, n. 8), pp. 65 and 146, n. 322.

39 Cf. H. Grotius, *Opera omnia theologica, in tres tomos divisa. Ante quidem per partes, nunc*

saw faith as a limited set of logically deducible and morally acceptable articles which he assumed to have been practised in the early church. He highlighted what Christians had in common and was inclined to relegate dogmatic differences to the mental periphery. Possibly his irenic stance enticed him to put forward a biased reading of the church fathers, in whose writings he first and foremost recognised the apologetic tendencies meant to emphasise the unity of the flock they guided. An additional explanation might be that he failed to withstand the urge to create a myth of unity for propagandistic reasons, just as he had contributed to the Batavian myth in order to endorse the revolt against the King of Spain by “inventing” an independent people that was associated with, but not subjected to, the Roman empire.⁴⁰ The myth of the early Christian church incorporated the constant efflorescence of sects and separatist movements, but these could be explained away, as Casaubon had also suggested, by comparing them to the chaff that, once blown in the wind, would leave behind the wheat of the genuine, pure faith.⁴¹

Shortly after the publication of the *Exercitationes*, on 1/11 July 1614, Casaubon died. Grotius was sent a medical report, together with a picture of the infected bladder that had caused the scholar's death. Grotius regretted the loss of an important companion whom he kept referring to in his correspondence as a shining example.⁴² From then on he had to proceed alone on the slippery path towards the pacification of the Christian churches. Every now and then, he profited from the scholarly legacy of his friend. He must have consulted the *Exercitationes* for fleshing out the testimonial apparatus that was added to the *Decretum pro pace ecclesiarum* (1614),⁴³ a decree for tolerance proclaimed by the

autem coniunctim et accuratius edita ... (Amsterdam, 1679; repr. Stuttgart and Bad Cannstatt, 1972), hereafter cited as *OTh*, 3: 703 B 21–29, and H. Grotius, *De imperio summarum potestatum circa sacra*, ed. Harm-Jan van Dam [Studies in the History of Christian Thought 102] (Leiden, 2001), chapter 6.9 (pp. 308–312 and 728–730). Just like his friend Gerardus Joannes Vossius, Grotius identified the hardening in the views of the authoritative church father Augustine, resulting from his anti-Pelagian polemics, as a pivotal point, after which internal strife began greatly to affect church life. See Arnoud S.Q. Visser, *Reading Augustine in the Reformation: the Flexibility of Intellectual Authority in Europe, 1500–1620* (New York, 2011), pp. 111–113 and 131–133.

40 H. Grotius, *The Antiquity of the Batavian Republic, with the Notes by Petrus Scriverius*, ed. Jan Waszink [Bibliotheca Latinitatis Novae 3] (Assen, 2000), Introduction.

41 Casaubon, *Exercitationes* (see above, n. 5), p. [1*3v].

42 See for example *BW* 11, no. 4599; *BW* 12, no. 5074; *BW* 13, no. 5808.

43 *OTh* 3: 144 B 26–145 A 27, ‘Isaacus Casaubonus in praefatione Animadversionum ad Baronium,’ taken from *Exercitationes* (see above, n. 5), pp. 3*1v–3*2v, quotation on the secular (royal) power as tutor of the Church.

States of Holland to stop the dogmatic strife within the area of their jurisdiction, as well as for *De imperio* on the relationship between State and Church, finished in 1617, and only posthumously published in 1647.⁴⁴ In the *Decretum* Grotius also refers to another work of his friend Casaubon that was closely related to the book against Baronius, the *Casauboni ad epistolam Perronii Responsio*. Grotius mentioned the irenic rule-of-thumb that was defended in this letter: the three symbols, the four ecumenical councils and the basic religious tenets that were necessary for acquiring salvation and had prevailed in the first four centuries of the Christian era, sufficed for all believers to be called truly Catholic.⁴⁵ In *De imperio*, chapter 8.6, Grotius dwells on the government's task to mend schisms resulting from quarrels on "inutiles quaestiones." He cites a list of witnesses, among them Basil the Great, *De fide* and *Adversus Eunomium*.⁴⁶ Just like Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil had refused to apply terms like "homoousios," because they did not occur in Scripture literally, "parcentes, ait Basilius, uti nominibus quae non exstant in Scripturis totidem litteris." Grotius's initial source might have been the *Exercitationes*, praefatio, pp. [5*4v] and 563.⁴⁷

In Grotius's view, one of the doctrines that called for a careful and delicate treatment was the Trinity. This already becomes clear in his youthful work *Meletius*, a posthumously published theological treatise completed in 1611. Here he acknowledged that the human mind faced great difficulties in penetrating the secrets of the Trinity. He considered the Trinity to be a doctrine which man was unable to discover ("reperire") himself, but once it was revealed to him, it was easy to agree on it by comparing it with a triune concept like the sun, for example, which consists of the celestial body, its light, and its glow.⁴⁸ In the

44 See Grotius, *De imperio*, ed. H.-J. van Dam (see above, n. 39), especially pp. 124 and 640.

45 *OTh* 3: 173 A; see *Isaaci Casauboni ad epistolam illustr. et reverendiss. Cardinalis Perronii Responsio* (see above, n. 9), p. 9. See also H. Grotius, *Ordinum Hollandiae ac Westfrisiae pietas*, ed. Edwin Rabbie [Studies in the history of Christian Thought 66] (Leiden, 1995), pp. 169–171, section 90, for a telling quotation from this source. For establishing peace, King James embraced the distinction between essentials and non-essentials. The first category comprised what the Scriptures expressly enjoin us to believe or to do, or what the ancient church had derived as necessary consequences from Scripture. Disagreement on which articles belonged to the second category should not be allowed to stand in the way of reunification of the Christian churches.

46 *De fide* 1 (PG 31: 377C) and *Adversus Eunomium* 1.5 (PG 29: 516D–517A).

47 Grotius, *De imperio*, ed. H.-J. van Dam (see above, n. 39), pp. 380–382 and 771. The other references to Casaubon's *Exercitationes* in *De imperio* are less important for the scope of this article.

48 See for this *Meletius sive de iis quae inter Christianos conveniunt epistola*, ed. G.H.M. Posthumus Meyjes [Studies in the History of Christian Thought 40] (Leiden, 1988), p. 81, sections

Meletius Grotius put forward the Trinity as an essential element of the Christian faith, but he relegated the article to the domain of the “principles,” that is the decrees or tenets which he deemed to be subservient to the ethical precepts, all of which centred on the duty of charity. In his day, he said, Christians resorted to quarrels about dogma, precisely because they wanted to avoid living according to the rules of charity and self-sacrifice that were the core of faith: “over dogmas we fight with others, while the battle over ethical rules takes place in ourselves.” In the high-flown epilogue to the work he stimulated his fellow-Christians to show tolerance as far as dogma was concerned.⁴⁹ Grotius’s later works, like his *De iure belli ac pacis* (1625), *De veritate* (1627), and the annotations on the Bible (1641–1650), are also important for describing the development he went through. These works all served to offer solutions to the religious and political problems caused by religious discord and strife. Obviously, it was Casaubon’s irenic programme arguing for a return to the primitive church that attracted Grotius most, for it was the study of its religious life that helped in assessing the essential doctrines on which all believers had to focus. The two friends also agreed on the necessity of a strong state power to keep the rebellious clergy in check.

4 A Peacemaker in Exile

This is not the place to give a detailed overview of an eventful career. Suffice it to say that in the following years Grotius had direct experience of the disturbances that shook the Dutch Reformed Church. As the most prominent intellectual leader of the Oldenbarnevelt regime, he preached tolerance on the basis of a comprehensive church capable of playing host to all kinds of Protestant believers, but despite his efforts he soon found the government’s ecclesiastical policies ending in utter failure. In a harrowing trial he was convicted to life imprisonment and confiscation of his possessions, including his library. In the inventory of his books, drawn up in 1619, the *Exercitationes* is missing, perhaps because one of his friends had borrowed it before the owner was arrested; it is also possible that the book had been stashed away because the preliminary poem was thought too controversial. In 1621, after a spectacular escape from

22–23. See also, for the general context, Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols., 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, 2003), 4 (*The Trinity of God*): especially 143–167.

49 Grotius, *Meletius*, ed. G.H.M. Posthumus Meyjes (see above, n. 48), pp. 101–102, sections 89–91: “... de decretis pugnamus cum aliis, de praeceptis nobiscum.”

prison, Grotius settled in France. He decided to reanimate his old ideas and to present them in new clothes.

In the first years of his exile Grotius befriended the diplomat-statesman Edward Herbert of Cherbury.⁵⁰ Both scholars developed a minimalist definition of the Christian religion. Grotius's argument in favour of a minimal religion, already roughly adumbrated in the *Meletius* and presented in a more elaborate form in *De iure belli ac pacis* (1625), was aimed at preventing wars fuelled by doctrinal differences. If religion was involved, violence and war were unjustified except in two well described cases: it was lawful for a sovereign to declare war in order to counter outright atheism or to punish freethinkers who overtly denied that God was taking care of this world (a conviction that was practically tantamount to atheism).⁵¹ This scheme implied that polytheism, denial of the creation of the universe by proposing its eternity, and cults that prescribed the worship of stars, ghosts, magical statues, holy animals, and other tangible objects did not justify war, according to Grotius.⁵² The same moderate approach was to be applied in the case of rejection of such less evident Christian doctrines as the Trinity. The motives behind this line of thought are clear. Unlike speculations on the Trinity, the notions of a Supreme Being's existence and its involvement in worldly affairs warranted members of society having a sound moral basis. For this very reason religion could be said to prevent society from falling into immorality and chaos on a large scale. Religion was the cement of society.⁵³

What is important is that Grotius, like his friend Herbert of Cherbury, distinguished between two cognitive domains characterised by their own degree of certainty. The essential tenets of religion were naturally given and could be demonstrated by logical reasoning or comparative historical research. In addition to these essentials, other doctrines had to be inferred from divine

50 D.A. Pailin, 'Herbert von Cherbury,' in *Die Philosophie des 17. Jahrhunderts*, 4 vols., eds. Jean-Pierre Schobinger and Helmut Holzhey [Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie] (Basel, 1988–2001), 3 (*England*): 224–239, and D.A. Pailin, 'Edward Herbert, First Baron Herbert of Cherbury and First Baron Herbert of Castle Island (1582?–1648), Diplomat and Philosopher,' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* 26 (Oxford, 2004), pp. 663–669. See for the following also Henk Nellen, 'Minimal Religion, Deism and Socinianism: on Grotius' Motives for Writing *De veritate*,' *Grotiana*, New series 33 (2012), 25–57.

51 H. Grotius, *De iure belli ac pacis libri tres ...*, ed. P.C. Molhuysen (Leiden, 1919), hereafter cited as *DIBP*, 2.20.44–51 (pp. 397–409), esp. 2.20.46.1 (p. 401).

52 *DIBP* 2.20.47.2–4 (pp. 403–404).

53 *DIBP* 2.20.44.3 (p. 398): "Plutarchus ... [religionem vocat] coagulum omnis societatis et fundamentum legislationis." Cf. Plutarch, *Moralia, Adversus Coloten* 1125 E.

revelation. To be sure, the doctrines of the latter category were probable to a very high degree, but the status of probability would always remain attached to them. Believers were prevented from ascertaining whether these doctrines were absolutely true by the unreliability of human reason, mental inertia, tradition, biased education, and stubbornness. Lack of certainty obliged people to abstain from coercion and violence when attempting to spread their religious convictions throughout the world.

Grotius's argument on religion-driven war was embedded in a liberal theory of punishment as a means of enforcing the observance of natural law. Any breach of natural law, for example the taking of someone's life or property, justified war provided that an appeal to the judiciary was impossible, for example on the open seas or when a conflict arose between states that did not acknowledge a common judge. Grotius coupled natural law to natural religion. He allowed the authorities to take recourse to violence whenever gross impiety jeopardised the observance of natural law as the basis for the life of a prosperous community. Therefore heresiarchs who were driven by worldly gain or lust for power and who initiated religious turmoil with disruptive effects on society deserved to be countered with a firm hand. The same applied to cults that imposed the spilling of innocent blood. On the other hand, dissenting opinions on revealed dogmas such as the Trinity never justified violence. Therefore, Grotius's system implied the civil tolerance of Socinianism. By way of many citations he demonstrated that church fathers like Augustine and Salvian had argued for tolerance towards Arianism, a heresy that strongly resembled Socinianism. Of course, a liberal attitude like this provoked criticism in an era of increasing confessionalisation. Before long, Grotius was accused of favouring Socinianism. Although *De iure belli ac pacis* was thought to betray an inclination towards this heresy,⁵⁴ he developed his ideas further in *De veritate*.

In its embryonic state *De veritate* had circulated as a Dutch poem, *Bewijs van den waren godsdienst*. In 1627 it reappeared as a Latin prose tract which was enlarged with substantive scholarly annotations in one of its subsequent editions (Paris: Cramoisy, 1640).⁵⁵ The book was presented as a means for merchants and seamen who travelled the wide world of pagans, Muslims, and Jews

54 See also Christoph A. Stumpf, *The Grotian Theology of International Law. Hugo Grotius and the Moral Foundations of International Relations* [Religion and Society 44] (Berlin, 2006), pp. 51–68, especially pp. 66–68.

55 Jan Paul Heering, *Hugo Grotius as Apologist for the Christian Religion: A Study of his Work De veritate religionis Christianae (1640)* [Studies in the History of Christian Traditions 111] (Leiden, 2004), pp. 1–46.

to spread the Christian religion outside Europe. Missionary zeal seems an obvious incentive for a nation that earned its living largely by overseas trade. But it is far more probable that Grotius intended his treatise to pacify, tone down, and defuse the internal struggles that raged within Christianity itself, in flagrant contrast with the precepts of Christ. Grotius adopted an approach that shows remarkable parallels to the line of reasoning in *De iure belli ac pacis*. Again, and now even more outspokenly, he emphasised the distinction between natural religion, consisting of a few rational tenets that could be derived from *a priori* and *a posteriori* reasoning, and many secondary, revealed articles of faith. Grotius neglected the traditional topics of apologetics: doctrines like the Trinity did not fit into his scheme, which focussed on defending Christianity on purely rational and historical grounds, thus persuading compulsive disbelievers or genuine heathens to take up the Bible and ascertain for themselves that the Holy Book revealed a creed that was superior to all others. After the general necessity of religion had been proved on *a priori* and *a posteriori* grounds, Grotius demonstrated the superiority of Christian ethics, which encompassed a gamut of virtues that could be reduced to the Golden Rule: "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." An age-old church history marked by a continuous succession of internal struggles did not detract from the superiority of the Christian faith, according to Grotius. Until now the Christian world had been torn apart by all kinds of doctrinal quarrels, but the peace-breakers never questioned the Golden Rule.⁵⁶

In Grotius's view, the testimonies that had been recorded in the New Testament guaranteed its reliability above all other revelations,⁵⁷ but there was no method to achieve absolute certainty. This mitigated scepticism or "epistemic humility"⁵⁸ did not imply that Grotius valued the Bible less. On the contrary,

56 See *De veritate* 2.16 (*OTh* 3: 44).

57 The basic Christian doctrines were rationally based and historically attested by authors such as Luke. If historians trusted Tacitus and Suetonius, why not an author who declared he had recorded every word from eyewitnesses? Cf. *De veritate* 3.5 (*OTh* 3: 51 A 25–36): "... Si Tacito et Suetonio credimus de iis quae multo ante eos natos contigerunt, quod eorum diligenti inquisitioni confidamus, quanto huic scriptori aequius est credi, qui se omnia ab ipsis qui inspexerant hausisse dicat?" (If we rely on Tacitus and Suetonius for their reports on events that happened long before their birth, only because we place confidence in their assiduous research, how much more equitable will it be to believe this author, who declares he has obtained all his information from eyewitnesses?).

58 Cf. Marc Somos, *Secularisation and the Leiden Circle* (Leiden, 2011), Index and pp. 383–437, especially pp. 399, 404, 408, 414, 431, etc. This colourful and finely brushed picture of secularising tendencies in the Leiden scholarly community is impressive. Although I fully

after 1621, he constantly worked on a comprehensive commentary that he considered to be his main scholarly enterprise. In the first part, the *Annotationes in libros evangeliorum* (Amsterdam: Bleau, 1641), Grotius tried to come to grips with religious life in the primitive church. Ultimately, his exegesis aimed to present the primitive faith as a conglomerate of mainly moral admonitions, in which love for one's neighbour was central. His theological programme, with unity among Christian believers as its aim, was largely based on philological methods. His text-critical approach, combined with historical contextualisation, yielded results that aroused intensive debate. Grotius tried to give historical explanations, but by doing so detracted from the results of traditional hermeneutics. The doctrine of the Trinity fell victim to his exegesis, because he emphasised the literal, historical sense of many a passage that hitherto had served to underpin the Trinity allegorically. Consequently, the annotations on the Gospels did not fail to strengthen the suspicions of Socinianism that had cropped up earlier, after the publication of *De iure belli ac pacis* and *De veritate*.⁵⁹

5 Epistolary Self-Defence

How did Grotius react? It is important to note that the primary response to his works, emanating from his inner circle, is difficult to gauge. Conversations instantly diffuse and perish in the air; and it is only now and then that scholarly correspondence hints at the exchange of ideas in a confidential atmosphere. But letters themselves might be considered pieces of conversation between intimates who were barred from direct personal intercourse by geographical separation. What do we learn from Grotius's correspondence, as opposed to the information in his official publications? There are several letters in which he defends himself by developing a cogent strategy to counter accusations of Socinianism. First and foremost, he proclaimed that he was strictly orthodox in accepting Christ as a necessary intermediary between God and fallen mankind. But at the same time he stressed the necessity of moderating all doctrinal discussions on the Trinity. The best thing to do when treating the doctrine was

agree on Grotius's crucial role in the secularising approach embraced by Leiden alumni such as Daniel Heinsius and Petrus Cunaeus, I have reservations about assessing the scholar's hermeneutic method in terms of the wilful downgrading of the Bible's authority.

59 Heering, *Hugo Grotius as Apologist for the Christian Religion* (see above, n. 55), pp. 199–218, and below, at note 89.

to observe the terminology of the Bible and refrain from subtle distinctions that were only going to arouse the anger of other exegetes.⁶⁰

In his correspondence Grotius repeatedly expatiated on the subject without changing his convictions.⁶¹ In an early letter of 12 April 1620 to his brother Willem⁶² he explained why he had only lightly touched on the doctrine of the Trinity in his *Bewijs van den waren godsdiens*, the Dutch sacral poem that would later be transformed into the Latin prose tract *De veritate*. After all, pagans who were unacquainted with the Trinity would not be won over to conversion by introducing them to this abstruse theological matter. Apologetic writers were wasting time and effort (“operam ludunt”), if they tried to base the doctrine on anything but Scripture. But after the truth of Scripture had been ascertained with reasonable and historical arguments, this particular doctrine could be considered to have been convincingly proposed as well. Intent on refuting all arguments against the Christian faith, Grotius felt obliged to mention doctrines like the Trinity in his poem every now and then, but instead of presenting these doctrines as certainties, he merely wanted to point out that there was no reason to repudiate the Christian faith because of them.⁶³

Time and again Grotius stressed the danger of getting caught up in the intricacies of the Trinity. He did so when he replied to a letter from his brother Willem that accompanied a shipment of two books, a collection of letters by his former teacher Joseph Scaliger, edited by the Leiden scholar Daniel Heinsius, and the *Aristarchus sacer* by the same Heinsius, a commentary on Nonnus's paraphrase of the Gospel by John (both works were published in Leiden in 1627).⁶⁴ At the time, Grotius was estranged from his former friend, but that was not the only reason for rejecting the *Aristarchus*. Regrettably, its author had indulged in hair-splitting (“upsalofronein”) on the doctrine of the Trinity, thus becoming entangled in all kinds of contrarities. Grotius quotes Basil's

60 This cautious approach brings Grotius in line with Protestant authors like John Calvin. See Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (see above, n. 48), 4: 65–70. Cf. *ibid.*, 150 and 153.

61 See *BW* 1, no. 375, to G.J. Vossius, 11 October 1614; *BW* 2, no. 600, to Willem de Groot, 12 April 1620; *BW* 3, no. 1156, to W. de Groot, 10 July 1627, and especially *BW* 4, nos. 1502 en 1503, to N. van Reigersberch and J. Wtenbogaert, 16 May 1630. See also *BW* 10, no. 3971, to S. Johnson, 12 February 1639 and *BW* 10, no. 4113, to N. van Reigersberch, 14 May 1639.

62 *BW* 2, no. 600, dated 12 April 1620.

63 The Trinity is referred to in *De veritate* 5.7 (*OTh* 3: 74–75), and especially in 5.21–22 (*OTh* 3: 86–88).

64 *BW* 3, no. 1156, 10 July 1627.

Adversus Eunomium 1.5, a text that also features in Casaubon's *Exercitationes*.⁶⁵ On 16 May 1630 Grotius addressed letters to his brother-in-law Nicolaes van Reigersberch and to the Remonstrant preacher Johannes Wtenbogaert,⁶⁶ in which he dwelled on recent accusations of Socinianism, provoked by the text of the Arminian or Remonstrant Confession, the *Confessio sive declaratio sententiae pastorum, qui in foederato Belgio Remonstrantes vocantur, super praecipuis articulis religionis Christianae* (1622).⁶⁷ Grotius argued that the Remonstrant Brotherhood, by way of their spokesman Simon Episcopius, had settled this matter in a satisfactory way. The letter to Reigersberch explained in great detail how the doctrine of the Trinity had spawned quarrels time and again. It had been ingenuously spun out by medieval scholastics, but already in an earlier stage the church fathers Athanasius, Basil, and Gregory of Nazianzus had advocated reticence, convinced as they were that the human mind was not capable of penetrating this mystery.⁶⁸ Every theologian who tried to do so only evoked aggressive and debatable counterarguments on the part of his enemies. Jerome had objected to adopting the concept "hypostasis" for designating the persons of the Trinity, but others had refused to agree with him on this point. Luther abhorred the term "Trinitas," on the grounds that it resembled "Triplicitas," which smacked of polytheism. The Roman Catholics denounced him for this, to the annoyance of the Lutherans, who nonetheless allied themselves with the Roman Catholics in order to accuse Calvin of Arianism because he had declared that God the Father was the fountain of the deity ("deitatis fons").⁶⁹ Accusations of Nestorianism and Eutychianism reverberated all over

65 See for Grotius's quotations in *BW* 3, no. 1156: *Adversus Eunomium* 1.5 (215); 2.6 (242) and 7 (243) (*PG* 29: 516–517 and 583–586). Cf. Casaubon, *Exercitationes* (see above, n. 5), p. 378, with a reference to *Adversus Eunomium* 1.5 (215) (*PG* 29: 516–517).

66 *BW* 4, nos. 1502 and 1503.

67 Cf. The Hague, Royal Library, shelf number 946 F 23:3 and 392 H 27. A Dutch translation saw the light shortly before: The Hague, Royal Library, Pamfl. 3266; in chapter 3.4 ("Van de H. Drie-eenicheydt") it is noted that it was better to discuss this subject in words that had already been used by the Holy Ghost himself. Basil is not mentioned.

68 Athanasius, *Epistola de Synodis Arimini in Italia* (*PG* 26: 741, uncertain identification of Grotius' source); Basil the Great, *Ascetica, De fide* 224 (*PG* 31: 677), and *Adversus Eunomium*, 1.5 (215); 2.6 (242) and 7 (243) (*PG* 29: 516–517 and 584–585); Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oratio* 31.8 (*PG* 36: 142). Some of these sources can also be found in Casaubon's *Exercitationes*. Cf. above, notes 22 and 65.

69 Calvin's expression "fons deitatis" provoked accusations of subordinationism, as if he ascribed an ontological priority to the Father in the Godhead. See Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (see above, n. 48), 4: 324–326, and *The Calvin Handbook*, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis (Grand Rapids, 2009), p. 253.

the place. It was no surprise then that the catalogues of the Frankfurt book fairs were filled with polemical writings such as *Calvinus Judaizans*, *Calvinus Arrianizans*, etc. Grotius also quoted extensively from a recently published work by the sixth-century author Facundus, Bishop of Hermiane, who stated that every term from outside the Scriptures, for example "theotokos," had caused strife, not least because of the unrestrained zeal with which the combatants entered the arena.⁷⁰ The history of the church teemed with controversies, as was easy to illustrate with many examples. At the same time, Grotius proclaimed his orthodoxy on this matter. He referred to the works he had published and concluded that he had always stuck to the faith of the primitive church. His intention was to go on doing so.

In this letter Grotius defines his position by stating that he wanted to follow Vincent of Lérins, whose famous canon instructed the Christian community to endorse what had been believed always, everywhere by everyone. In Grotius's view this meant that he embraced the doctrines that had prevailed during the first three centuries of the church, when unanimity had reigned as far as grace, free will, and predestination were concerned. This statement differs from the letter to the reader in the *Exercitationes* (p. 7*1rv), where Casaubon describes the first three centuries as a period of infancy and innocence, and limits the church in its prime, "flos ipse ecclesiae," to the age of Constantine the Great and the two subsequent centuries. Since in his later life Augustine took to severe opinions on grace and free will, Grotius assumed that the church ceased flourishing around 400 CE.⁷¹ On the other hand we must conclude that Grotius, like Casaubon, regretted seeing how theologians and exegetes stepped outside the confines determined by biblical terminology. In accordance with sound Protestant standards he considered the Bible to be the first guide in such abstruse dogmatic controversies. Grotius's references to church fathers like Basil the Great reveal that he had studied these sources thoroughly by about 1630.⁷²

70 *Facundi episcopi Hermianensis ... pro defensione trium capitulorum concilii Chalcedonensis libri XII*, ed. Jacques Sirmond (Paris, 1629), p. 337.

71 See *OTh* 3: 703 B 4–705 A 2, with a description of Augustine's doctrines of grace versus those of the fathers from the first three centuries. See also *OTh* 3: 721 B 29–722 A 28 and 727 A 12–727 B 11.

72 See also *Isaaci Casauboni ad epistolam illustr. et reverendiss. Cardinalis Perronii Responsio* (see above, n. 9), pp. 39–41: here Casaubon states that the period of decay set in after the death of Constantine the Great (†361).

6 Mersenne's Circle

Grotius's ideas, like those of Edward Herbert of Cherbury, tallied with the intellectual atmosphere of the circle around Marin Mersenne. This can be shown by highlighting the activities of the triumvirate Mersenne, Cherbury, and Grotius. In 1624 Cherbury had published his own *De veritate*, a book that earned the author a certain fame, not so much because of his complicated epistemic theories on the cognitive powers of the human mind, as because he introduced a system of minimal religion, containing a set of basic principles that could be endorsed by every reasonable believer. Later, in 1639, Mersenne translated the book into French, while he stimulated Grotius to bring out a new edition of his *De veritate*.⁷³

The strategy these scholars adhered to was based on a simple idea: if there were less dogmatic controversy, it would cease to ignite and feed political discord and war. To lower tensions, the best thing to do was to adhere to the distinction between essentials and non-essentials as the hinge on which civil tolerance depended. The essentials stood above reasonable doubt and would not elicit any controversy. The articles of the second category were open to discussion, because they were not self-evident or rationally demonstrable; they had to be derived from supernatural revelation. Grotius, Mersenne, and Cherbury agreed on the necessity of such a programme in view of the religious troubles of the time. They were also anxious not to challenge State and Church authorities with their controversial ideas. Grotius hesitated for many years and did not embark on his crusade for unifying the Christian churches until his diplomatic career in Sweden's service had reached a dead end; Cherbury limited the copy run of his publications in order to prevent his ideas from spreading outside his circle of intimates.⁷⁴ In a similar way, Mersenne hesitated to air his personal convictions, but his circumspection did not prevent him from constantly turning to his correspondents in an attempt to provoke reactions from different angles of the confessional field: Socinians, Roman Catholics, Calvinists, and Lutherans were all exhorted to express their views in informative letters. He regarded the matter as a project, much as the diffusion of the Cartesian or Galilean world-view.

73 *Correspondance du P. Marin Mersenne, religieux minime*, eds. Cornelis de Waard et al., 17 vols. (Paris, 1932–1988), hereafter cited as Mersenne, *Correspondance* 8: 476–478, Mersenne to Cherbury, 7 August 1639; *BW* 10, no. 4256, from Mersenne, 14 August [1639].

74 R.W. Serjeantson, 'Herbert of Cherbury before Deism: The Early Reception of the *De veritate*,' *The Seventeenth Century* 16 (2001), 217–238, there 218.

Undoubtedly the three scholars were well aware that the authorities deemed unbridled sectarianism contrary to the interests of the body politic. Grotius proposed a solution to this problem. As a confessed Erastian, i.e. a fervent advocate of strong state power, he acknowledged the dangers ensuing from tolerance to heretical movements like Socinianism, but in order to solve the incompatibility between religious diversity and the ideal of a unified, coherent state, he argued for a comprehensive church as a sanctuary where a broad range of believers would feel at home, where practical piety prevailed and where intricate theological dogmas had lost their primordial importance. Guarded from scrutiny by ordinary people, these dogmas were left for all those experts who were willing to discuss them in a peaceful way. Grotius offered a latitudinarian view of faith that went hand in hand with a strong emphasis on government control of religious life.⁷⁵

Not only Grotius, but also Herbert of Cherbury and Mersenne recommended the reduction of faith to a set of core tenets as a viable path towards a peaceful society. The correspondence of Mersenne attests constantly to this programme. In an appendix to one of the letters written by Herbert of Cherbury to Mersenne, the editors published a list of common notions and postulates, which are interesting because they made the observance of the scriptural message entirely dependent on reason. The source manuscript of the list is preserved in Cherbury's papers, but the authorship is not certain. The general tenor is rather provocative. Scripture had to be endorsed if, and only if, reason enjoined the believer to do so. As long as the believer obeyed the injunctions of his conscience, he was incapable of committing sin.⁷⁶ Mersenne has been depicted as a representative of the empirical method in science, and rightly so. He abhorred seeing how a vindication of biblical truth was built on facts acquired by unsound empirical methods. In his view, such a procedure would only lead to the biblical message being ridiculed.⁷⁷ In spite of his concern for religion, however, the reliability of the transmission of the Hebrew text is discussed in quite a few places of the correspondence. Mersenne quoted for example the Hebrew version of the first verse of the first Psalm to demonstrate that alteration of the vowel points and spaces between words resulted in a

75 BW 15, no. 6755, to J. Wtenbogaert, 12 March 1644.

76 Mersenne, *Correspondance* 6: 353–367, esp. 361–365, for example 364 no. 13. See also Jean-Robert Armogathe, 'An sit Deus. Les preuves de Dieu chez Marin Mersenne,' in *Les Études Philosophiques* 1994, pp. 161–170.

77 Mersenne, *Harmonie universelle contenant la theorie et la pratique de la musique* (Paris, 1636), 1: 154–155.

completely different meaning of the Hebrew text. He concluded: "From this you might infer that the Bible does not contain anything completely certain. If you separate and accentuate the words to your own liking, you may find a completely different version of the world's creation at the beginning of Genesis."⁷⁸ Mersenne explicitly referred to the fact that a distorted transmission of the Hebrew text would seriously impede exegesis. Such a transmission even implied that it was impossible to establish the truth of the Christian religion beyond doubt. How could an exegete detect the truth if his sources were corrupt?⁷⁹ Textual corruption was one of the thorniest problems of faith.⁸⁰

Mersenne's correspondence is a rich, revealing source. Repeatedly the discord among exegetes in the interpretation of the Bible is mentioned, for example in relation to the Trinity. The self-evidence of the biblical text was an illusion, in view of prevailing differences of opinion that even affected the fundamentals.⁸¹ In the light of this marked lack of agreement, it is interesting to see how Mersenne mobilized his network in order to obtain books, old and new, by Socinian writers. He wanted to examine Socinian exegesis, allegedly to acquire ammunition to refute the sect's doctrines. In fact, however, he was wrestling with the delicate relationship between faith and reason, desperately seeking methods to establish God's existence in a way that would convince all reasonable men. To penetrate the mystery of divine "middle knowledge," as the scholastics had attempted, was a hopeless endeavour that had only resulted in burdening faith with a load of empty distinctions.⁸² Certainly, the attempts to identify common notions like the idea of God's existence offered something to

78 "Hinc tamen vides nil penitus forte certum in bibliis, in quibus pro creatione mundi Geneos initio posito [= posita, sc. creatione positā?], forte possis ipse pro lubitu dictiones separandi et punctuandi sensum omnium alium invenire." (Mersenne, *Correspondance* 14: 208–209, to J. Buxtorf, 20 April 1646; see also 552–553).

79 See *ibid.* 15: 368–369, to J. Buxtorf, 18 August 1647: if the Hebrew text was corrupt, the exegete could not escape the conclusion that "inde nos in religione Christiana nihil certi posse constituere: quales enim rivi si fontes corrupti?" Since Mersenne's handwriting is extremely difficult to read and the text in Mersenne, *Correspondance*, seems to be flawed, I decided to adapt it to the version offered by the recipient of the letter in: J. Buxtorf, *Anticritica seu Vindiciae veritatis Hebraicae* (Basel, 1653), p. 32.

80 Mersenne, *Correspondance* 6: 225–230 (there 226), to A. Rivet, 25 March 1637: "Cette matiere est l'une des plus chatouilleuses de la foy."

81 *Ibid.* 15: 96–103, esp. 97–98, to A. Rivet, 15 February 1647.

82 *Ibid.* 8: 597–598, to A. Rivet, 12 November 1639: "... pour ce qui touche la science moyenne, j'aye desja tant perdu de temps autresfois à lire la chicane de l'Escole là-dessus, que je n'aye pas desormais envie d'y en consommer davantage."

go by.⁸³ But the theological intricacies discussed in the controversies between the Christian confessions troubled Mersenne. He acknowledged the ambiguity of many dogmas which seemed destined to remain concealed behind an impregnable veil.⁸⁴ Therefore, he approached representatives of other creeds, Socinians in the first place, very politely and on an equal footing. He asked them to inform him freely of their view of the issues debated. It was as if he secretly supported their radical rationalisation of religion, while reserving for himself a fideistic position as the only safe refuge. In an attempt to persuade the Socinian Florian Crusius to construct an irrefutable proof of God's existence, he pointed out that this task was not an easy one: his orthodox opponents accepted God's existence as a matter of faith, but although they were Christians, they refused to be convinced of this belief by reason alone.⁸⁵ In the same way as Mersenne, Hugo Grotius and Herbert of Cherbury were open-minded in their approach to the Socinian creed.

What were the results of the debates on all these controversial issues? The three scholars agreed on one main point. Because many contested dogmas could not be proved on strictly rational grounds, it was personal conviction that should prevail in this domain. This meant that believers must accept other believers' deviant convictions. Here we encounter an attitude that I would like to explain as a symptom of secularisation: the relegation of belief to the individual, private domain, where the believer allowed himself to be guided by his own reason and conscience. To be sure, such secularising tendencies occurred only hesitantly and incidentally. At the time, in the first half of the seventeenth century, the debate on the Trinity took place in isolated scholarly circles from which the outside world was carefully excluded. The ideas promoted by Mersenne, Grotius, and Cherbury showed a special view of faith. Since it was impossible to prove that revealed religion was true, believers must abstain from the urge to impose it on others. This prudential self-restraint, based on the relativisation of belief, could not but lead to civic tolerance being embraced.⁸⁶

83 Ibid. 10: 264, to J.A. Comenius, 22 November 1640, with a reference by Mersenne to Herbert's *De veritate*.

84 Ibid. 8: 598, to A. Rivet, 12 November 1639; *ibid.* 9: 131–132, to A. Rivet, 15 February 1640.

85 Ibid. 13: 529–532, to Fl. Crusius, 13 November 1645: "Ipsi tamen credunt per fidem Deum esse: sunt enim Christiani, sed ratione fatentur et affirmant se non posse persuaderi aut convinci." Cf. Pierre Bayle, *Oeuvres diverses*, ed. Elisabeth Labrousse, 5 vols. (repr. Hildesheim, 1965–1982), 3: 943, for a French translation.

86 Eric Nelson, *The Hebrew Republic. Jewish Sources and the Transformation of European Political Thought* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010), pp. 97–107; Anita G. Sherman, 'The Politics of Truth in Herbert of Cherbury,' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 54 (2012), 189–215.

The prominent Calvinist leader André Rivet, a shrewd conservative, was well aware of the implications of the arguments discussed by Mersenne, Grotius, and Cherbury. Transforming belief by placing it on the level of rationality would downgrade it and cause it to lose its meaning.⁸⁷ Without dwelling in detail on later developments, it is safe to say that Grotius was a representative of a group of scholars who, unimpeded by the exigencies of a prominent position inside church or university, were able to develop ideas that later stimulated others like Isaac de la Peyrère and Isaac Vossius to finally cross the boundaries set by orthodoxy and clear the way for the spread of Enlightenment ideas. In order to show that this development met with fierce resistance, we will now turn to a representative of the other camp, the Lutheran theologian Abraham Calovius, who attacked Grotius in the *Biblia Illustrata*. This book yields a rich harvest when it comes to evaluating the reception of the irenic programme prepared by Casaubon, Herbert of Cherbury, Mersenne, and Grotius.

7 Abraham Calovius's anti-Grotian Campaign

As noted above, Mersenne took great interest in Socinianism. He therefore contacted one of its leading representatives, Martinus Ruarus, and asked him to send him some books. Among these books were those written by the German theologian Abraham Calovius, a very prolific author who attacked Socinianism in a long series of works.⁸⁸ Calovius also targeted Grotius for turning his annotations on the Bible into a platform from which he disseminated this abhorrent creed. In this respect he fits perfectly in the general picture of the early reception of Grotius's exegesis. His adversaries searched the annotations for symptoms of Socinianism guided by lists of the biblical passages that were traditionally believed to support the doctrine of the Trinity.⁸⁹

87 Mersenne, *Correspondance* 7: 180–188 (there 181), Rivet to Mersenne, 29 April 1638, quoted in Hans Bots and Pierre Leroy, 'De l'acceptation de la foi au refus des dogmes. Le doute des libertins au XVIIe siècle,' *Dix-septième Siècle* 57 (2005), 731–745 (there 737): "Il est vray que quand l'homme donne trop de lieu à sa raison, tout son travail s'employe à tirer à son sens la revelation. Ces gens [les sociniens] ont pour maxime de contenter la raison humaine en la Religion et ostent la nature de la foy, la convertissans en opinion probable."

88 Mersenne, *Correspondance* 11: 26–27, Ruarus to Ganovius, an unidentified correspondent from Königsberg, 28 January 1642. See also *ibid.*, 11: 62 and 379.

89 André Rivet and even Mersenne acted in this way, but the most notorious example is Claude Sarrau, who used the writings of the orthodox Calvinist Hieronymus Zanchius to locate subversive explanations in Grotius. See *Correspondance intégrale d'André Rivet et*

I limit myself to a very short introduction of Calovius as Grotius's most severe antagonist. Holding the chair of a famous predecessor, Martin Luther, the excitable Lutheran exegete Abraham Calovius (1612–1682), sometimes dubbed the “Pope of Lutheranism,” taught theology at the University of Wittenberg. In the years 1672–1676, he published the *Biblia Illustrata* in five huge volumes, comprising more than 5800 folio pages (Frankfort am Main: Wustius, 1672–1676).⁹⁰ The aim of the book was to refute the Socinianising, Judaising, and Catholicising tendencies in Grotius's exegesis. It must have had a devastating effect on Grotius's *Nachleben* in Germany, the more so because Calovius organised the harsh attacks on his opponent in a carefully prepared campaign. Whether he embarked on the incrimination of Grotius in sermons from the pulpit in Wittenberg's Schlosskirche is unknown, but we do know that he offered his students ready-made parcels of his exegesis to be defended in public disputations. In this way a host of students, all meticulously listed in the preliminary matter of his work, was drawn up in battle array against the arch-heretic Grotius. In accordance with their master's polemical methods, many of these students will have continued the campaign after they had entered positions in church, state, and educational institutions all over northern Germany. Later on, when complete sets of the disputations proved to be extremely rare, Calovius patched the disputations together in his *Biblia Illustrata*.

I will not go into the details of Calovius's campaign. Suffice it to say that he rebutted Grotius's historicising approach to the text. For him, the Song of Songs was a literal description of Christ's love for his church. By the same token, the Psalms and Isaiah's prophecies literally predicted the coming of Christ. For these books of the Bible, Grotius had given a historical explanation that took into account the audience to which they had been addressed at the time. According to Grotius, the Song of Songs was a pagan wedding poem by King Salomon in honour of his Egyptian bride. This historical explanation supported a second, figurative, and less transparent, even largely concealed meaning, alluding to God's love for Israel and Christ's love for his church. And in chapters 52–53, Isaiah described the suffering of his predecessor Jeremiah,

de Claude Sarrau 1641–1650, eds. H. Bots and P. Leroy, 3 vols. [Publication de l'Institut de recherches des relations intellectuelles entre les pays de l'Europe occidentale au XVII^e siècle] (Amsterdam, 1978–1982), 1: 129 and 140, letters dated 28 April (Rivet) and 9 May 1642 (Sarrau).

90 Henk Nellen, 'Bible Commentaries as a Platform for Polemical Debate: Abraham Calovius versus Hugo Grotius,' in *Neo-Latin Commentaries and the Management of Knowledge in the Late Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period (1400–1700)*, eds. Karl Enenkel and Henk Nellen [Suppl. Humanistica Lovaniensia 33] (Leuven, 2013), pp. 445–471.

in a way that only dimly foreshadowed the story of Christ's passion. This focus on the historical meaning of the biblical text had important consequences in another respect, too. To the anger of his opponent, Grotius reduced the list of passages that orthodox theologians traditionally adduced to confirm the Trinitarian doctrine.

In the eyes of Calovius Grotius distorted biblical testimonies and tried to vent his Socinian convictions, not only in his polemical writings, but also and even by preference in his annotations on the Old and New Testaments. "In these latest writings Hugo has so favoured the Socinians that he might be taken for its eminent advocate first and foremost on account of the way in which he distorts the testimonies in the Scriptures and tries subtly to introduce the doctrines of this impious sect. Most easily this can be inferred from his annotations on the Old and New Testaments."⁹¹ And indeed, a list of items in which Grotius was accused of heretical preferences can easily be drawn up by studying Calovius's exegesis. See, for example, the Annotations on Genesis 1,26: "faciamus."⁹² As Grotius had pointed out, it was the custom of the Hebrews to speak of God as of a king; therefore, the plural that was used here, was a majestic plural. Passages such as 1 Kings 12,6, 2 Chronicles 10,9 and 1 Kings 22,20 showed that kings often acted on the basis of advice given by a council and afterwards referred to their decision by using the plural form.⁹³ In this way Grotius invited the reader to conclude that the use of the plural did not corroborate the doctrine of the Trinity. Another convincing proof of Socinian sympathies, according at least to Calovius, was Grotius's annotation on John 20,18 [= 28], where he had dared to state that it was at this very place in the Gospels that the name "God" was first attached to Christ; subsequently it was only used by virtue of habit, according to an expression in Pliny's Epistles (10.96.7), *as if* he were God: "Christo quasi deo." This implied that the Gospels, and even the opening of John, did not refer to Jesus as a divine person, except in a manner of speaking!⁹⁴

91 Abraham Calovius, *Biblia Veteris et Novi Testamenti Illustrata*, 5 tomes in 4 vols. (Frankfort, 1672–1676), 1: 194: "In his [postremis scriptis] enim ita gratificatus est Hugo Socinianis, ut imprimis in pervertendis Scripturae testimoniis insinuandisque sectae impiae dogmatibus pro advocato eiusdem minime postremo habendus videatur. Quod in Annotatis ad Vetus et Novum Testamentum maxime deprehendere licet."

92 *OTh* 1: 1 B 40–43; cf. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (see above, n. 48), 4: 162–163.

93 Abraham Calovius, *Biblia Testamenti Veteris Illustrata* (see above, n. 91), 1: 229–230. See also Aldina M. Yoffie, *Biblical Literalism and Scholarship in Protestant Northern Europe, 1630–1700* (Cambridge, Mass.: PhD Harvard University, 2009), pp. 131–216, especially pp. 145–146.

94 *Biblia Testamenti Veteris Illustrata* (see above, n. 91), 1: 195 and *Biblia Novi Testamenti*

Calovius stated that he would have ample occasion to demonstrate Grotius's Socinian outlook further on in his commentary. And so he did. In the eyes of Calovius it was small wonder that Grotius rejected the famous Johannine comma (1John 5,7–8) as apocryphal. This passage used to be considered to be the most, if not the only explicit articulation of the triune God in the Bible. Against this tradition Grotius had argued that the evidence given by the manuscripts pointed to a later insertion of the comma. Comparison of the Greek text in the Codex Alexandrinus, and Syriac and Arabic versions suggested that Arians and orthodox Catholics had added and removed the text respectively for sheer doctrinal reasons, but according to Grotius one thing was above any doubt: all these interpreters, and even those who accepted the comma as authentic, refused to adduce the text as proof of the ontological unity of the persons in the Trinity. It was a unity not of essence but of consensus that was marked here.⁹⁵ After weighing the evidence offered by the manuscripts, Calovius argued in favour of the authenticity of the passage. He also explained that the comma fitted perfectly into John's argumentation to prove Christ's divine nature.⁹⁶

Calovius clearly saw the dangers of the Grotian outlook. Endorsing the results of text-critical and historical research would inevitably lead to the acceptance of a far-reaching corruption of the biblical text and, consequently, of the traditional articles of faith, both essential and non-essential ones. Therefore, this distinction did not help to defuse the postulates of scepticism, because all articles would be undermined. In fact, it was faith that prohibited Calovius from exploring the consequences of the rational approach philologists like Grotius applied to the Bible. Or should we say that the Lutheran professor wilfully turned a blind eye to these disturbing novelties? He limited himself to an appeal to the sacrosanct status of the Bible and simply stated that the book was divinely inspired from cover to cover as an irrefutable truth. Never would divine Providence allow the Sacred Scriptures to be subjected to any corruption whatsoever.⁹⁷

Illustrata (see above, n. 91), 1: 823–824, referring to *OTh* 2: 571: “Hic primum ea vox [Deus meus] in narratione Evangelica reperitur ab Apostolis Iesu tributa ...”

95 *OTh* 2: 1143 A 10–46; Grantley R. McDonald, *Raising the Ghost of Arius. Erasmus, the Johannine Comma and Religious Difference in Early Modern Europe* (Brussels: PhD Leiden University, 2010), pp. 130–132.

96 *Biblia Novi Testamenti Illustrata* (see above, n. 91), 2: 1663–1668.

97 *Biblia Testamenti Veteris Illustrata* (see above, n. 91), 1: 196B–208B, especially 202.

8 Conclusive Remarks

The story of the irenic programme acclaimed by Casaubon, Grotius, Cherbury, and Mersenne is told mainly on the basis of their letters and commentaries. This is not surprising, because both platforms of expression allowed for an exchange of ideas that was to a large extent free. The letter was characterised by confidentiality, at least in comparison with printed works. The commentary might be described as an attractive safety zone, in which scholars could bring together a great variety of opinions without being blamed for drawing attention to them. In commentaries like Casaubon's *Exercitationes* and Grotius's *Annotationes* a free treatment of sacral texts by discussing variants and suggesting new interpretations was condoned as long as the sacrosanct biblical text remained intact. For this reason both letter and commentary were popular instruments for the introduction of ground-breaking ideas.

Another important conclusion that might be drawn from the above is that a deep abyss separated the worlds of the theologians defending their confession and scholars bent on finding a solution to religion-driven controversies. To be sure, it was philology and history that fuelled the scholarly ambition to study the biblical text, establish a reliable version and derive a message from it. But of much greater weight was the irenic thinkers' aim of preventing confessional strife by reducing faith to a loosely constructed set of moral principles on the basis of a distinction between essential articles and non-essential ones. Whereas the first category was self-evident, it was also clear that the second belonged to a cognitive domain that did not guarantee a comparable, equivalent certainty. As a consequence, the set of essential doctrines helped to drive out the revealed ones and consign them to the private domain of the believer. Furthermore, downgrading the revealed doctrines implied a loss of status for both the Bible and the churches that had involved themselves in the defence of a specific interpretation that suited the dogmatic edifice of their particular denomination. The reproach of undermining traditional faith is the main thrust of the objections levelled against Herbert of Cherbury's philosophy, as described by Christian Korthold in a treatise in which the philosopher features in the company of two other famous "impostors," Hobbes and Spinoza.⁹⁸

Thirdly, the differences in ideological outlook between scholars like Grotius, Mersenne, and Cherbury on the one hand, and the orthodox Lutheran minis-

98 *De tribus impostoribus magnis* (Hamburg, 1680). I consulted the edition Hamburg: Reumannus, 1701, pp. 4–50. See also Serjeantson, 'Herbert of Cherbury before Deism' (see above, note 74), pp. 227–230.

ter Calovius on the other, might be explained to a large extent by pointing at differences in their careers and status. Grotius was a scholar who operated outside the context of fatherland and established church. This eccentric position must have made it easier for him to engage in a controversial struggle against discord and strife. He elaborated his ideas in the confidential atmosphere of private meetings and launched his crusade for church unity only after his diplomatic career had ended in failure. Conversely, as a prominent representative of the Lutheran faith, Calovius defended the interests of his confession in a long, steady, and productive career. His biblical commentaries show that confession-alisation had established sharp boundaries for a wide range of confessions, to the extent that preachers were exclusively intent on defending the domain covered by their own confession. Of course, this task demanded constant vigilance, pastoral care, and a harsh rebuttal of intrusive adversaries. At the same time, however, the public sphere left plenty of room for discussion and polemics. The compartmentalisation of the dogmatic landscape was now deemed an irreversible fact.

As an erudite theologian with a broad command of classical, patristic, and contemporary sources, Calovius was not blind to the merits of his opponent. Every now and then, for example when Grotius attacked John Calvin, he had no qualms about praising him for his ingenious exegetical solutions. On those occasions it was as if even this hard-headed exegete accepted the division of Christendom into countless denominations. It is beyond doubt, however, that he was always intent on supporting the interests of his own creed. He wanted to prevent the Lutheran Church from submerging into the torrid waters muddied by quarrelling confessions. Fighting for this aim, he failed to notice that the real threat was not from Grotius but from Thomas Hobbes and Benedict de Spinoza, whose radical hermeneutics in *Leviathan* (1651) and the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670) would demolish the foundations of the established confessions. It is important to note that scholars like Grotius, Mersenne, and Cherbury cleared the way for the spread of these philosophers' ideas. They were well aware that the Christian churches had to cope with the sceptical challenge.⁹⁹ Of course it is hard to say whether the sceptical movement was a real threat to the established confessions. Like Mersenne, Grotius stated that

99 See for a characterisation of the intellectual milieu in which scholars like Mersenne, Grotius, and Cherbury were active: Lorraine Daston, 'Probability and Evidence,' and Charles Larmore, 'Scepticism,' in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, eds. Daniel Garber and Michael Ayers (Cambridge, 1998), 2: 1108–1144 and 1145–1192.

the French capital teemed with atheists, sceptics, and other kinds of disbelievers.¹⁰⁰ Perhaps these scholars exaggerated the danger from without religion because they clearly felt the threat from within: every self-assured Christian believer sooner or later had to face up to religious doubts and uncertainties. In order to withstand this danger they decided to meet scepticism halfway and embraced a kind of epistemological modesty or mitigated scepticism that was strong enough to suppress internal scruples and even silence the arguments voiced by the declared opponents of the Christian faith.

100 *BW* 4, no. 1416, to J. Wtenbogaert, 6 August 1629: "Van de atheisterie seyt uE. de waerheyt: deselve regneert hyer dapper, Godt betert; 't welck de eenige oorsaecke is, dye mij de compaignie van veele personen allerley stands, dyen ick sulcx bevinde, doet mijden" (What your Honour remarked on atheism, is true: it reigns bravely here, God forbid. For this sole reason I am forced to avoid the company of many people of all kinds who are addicted to it).