

## READING TURRETIN: SOME OBSERVATIONS ON FRANCIS TURRETIN'S *INSTITUTES OF ELENCTIC THEOLOGY*

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### Introduction

FRANCIS TURRETIN'S *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*<sup>1</sup> has enjoyed increasing attention since its publication in English in the 1990s. This massive work of Reformed scholastic theology extends to nearly 1800 pages in the Latin edition of 1847; and over 2,040 pages in the published English edition. By any estimation, Turretin's elenctic theology is a notable achievement in defense of the Reformed confessional consensus, including the canons presented at the international synod of Dordrecht (1618-19). Turretin was an extremely erudite theologian. James T. Dennison Jr., the editor of the English translation of Turretin's *Institutes*, has observed that Turretin "extracted more than 3,200 quotations from classic, patristic, medieval, Jewish, Socinian, Lutheran, Arminian, Anabaptist and Reformed authors." Since his *Institutes* is an "elenctic theology"—that is, he offers instruction in an elenctic mode ("elenctic" is from the Greek word ἐλεγχος, which means to expose error)—one might surmise that Turretin's polemical focus inevitably misshapes the views of opponents. In fact, his elenctic theology bears the trait of being quite fair to

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1. Turretin's *Institutio* first appeared in Geneva in successive volumes in 1679, 1682, and 1685 (reprinted 1680-1688; then mildly corrected and enlarged in 1682-1688); soon thereafter it was republished by the same publisher in the years 1688, 1689, and 1690. In 1696, the *Institutio* were published in three volumes, including for the first time Benedict Pictet's "Funeral Oration." It also includes Melchior Leydekker's "Encomium Operis" (or laudatory commendation of Turretin's works), as well as two odes to the author—one by Leydekker and another by Adrianus Reeland. A fourth volume was also added to this set, containing Turretin's *Disputationes*. This four-volume edition represented an *Opera*. The *Institutio* were printed again in Utrecht in 1701, and another printing in 1734, with a fourth volume added, once more containing Turretin's *Disputationes*. Turretin's *Institutio* would not be published again until a century later, in Edinburgh and New York, in 1847, with the fourth volume of *Disputationes* appearing in 1848. This edition has been reprinted as recently as 2010 (Nabu Press, Charleston, South Carolina). The three volumes appeared in English in 1992, 1994, and 1997 by P&R Publishing. On the publishing history of the *Institutes* and an introduction to this work, see James T. Dennison, Jr., in volume 3 of the English translation; also see J. Mark Beach, "Turretin's *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*," in *The Oxford Handbook of Reformed Theology*, eds. Michael Allen and Scott Swain (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

theological adversaries as he presents Christian instruction by refuting error. His *Institutes* is justly regarded as a preeminent work in Reformed dogmatical theology, so much so that it was early on commandeered in order to form a Reformed compendium.<sup>2</sup>

In what follows our aim is to comment on some features of Turretin's *Institutes* which put on display his approach to the theological enterprise by setting forth his theological method in the scholastic mode (which distinguishes it from other—and modern—genres of theological literature), and introduce readers to some advantages of its scholastic vocabulary.<sup>3</sup> Our aim is to help readers of Turretin's *Institutes* navigate their way through these materials with more discernment and an improved sense of the whole.

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2. This compendium (or short summary of doctrine) was produced by Leonard Rijssen (van Rijssen, Riissenius) (1636?-1700?), and was entitled *Summa theologiae didactico-elencticae, ex theologorum nostrorum, praecipuè vero ex Francisci Turretini: Institutionibus Theologicis ita aucta & illustrata ...*[A Summary of Didactic-Elenctic Theology, augmented and elucidated from our theologians, but especially from Francis Turretin's Theological *Institutes*], being first published in Berne in 1690, then at Berne in 1703, and finally at Frankfurt and Leipzig in 1731. As the title suggests, it aimed to be chiefly dependent upon Turretin. In 1695 this same work, apparently under a revised title, was published in Amsterdam: *Francisci Turretini SS Theologiae Doctoris & Professoris Compendium theologiae didactico-elencticae: ex theologorum nostrorum institutionibus theologicis auctum & illustratum*; and under that title it was reproduced several times at Franeker, 1702 and 1703, and at Leiden, Amsterdam, and Utrecht, 1731. Meanwhile, Rijssen also published a summary of doctrine in Edinburgh in 1692, under the title *Summa theologiae elencticae completa. Et didacticae quantum sufficit*, which seems to have been reproduced in Cluj in 1701. This last mentioned work, in comparison with the 1695 Amsterdam title, is the same in outline and format, including the name and number of the eighteen *loci* that comprise it, but it is much abbreviated from the longer Amsterdam version. Thus, Rijssen produced at least two versions of his compendium of doctrine, the Edinburgh/Cluj edition being much shorter than the other edition, and, interestingly, not bearing Turretin's name in the title. Heinrich Heppé, in his *Reformed Dogmatics*, quotes from the 1695 Amsterdam edition of this work, not the abbreviated 1692 Edinburgh edition.

3. Regarding the period of Reformed Scholasticism, see Herman J. Selderhuis, ed., *A Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013); and Jordan J. Ballor, David S. Sytsma, and Jason Zuidema, eds., *Church and School in Early Modern Protestantism: Studies in Honor of Richard A. Muller on the Maturation of a Theological Tradition* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013). For definitions of Reformed scholasticism, with analysis of its methodology, see Willem J. van Asselt, et al., *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, foreword by Richard A. Muller, trans. Albert Gootjes (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011); Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), especially pp. 3-102; idem, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 4 vols. (vol. 1, 2nd ed.) (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), I:27-84; Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker, eds., *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001); Carl R. Trueman and R.S. Clark, eds., *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Carlisle, Cumbria, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 1999).

To appreciate a work like Turretin's *Institutes* requires, then, more than acknowledging that it is a specimen of Reformed scholastic theology or that it defends Reformed confessional (Dortian) orthodoxy. Becoming oriented to the specific method Turretin employs, as he defines, sifts, and assesses theological controversy—indeed, as he teaches in the elenctic mode—enables readers more profitably to use or otherwise dispute these materials as they are understood in their historical context. Thus, whether one is new to this sort of theological literature or otherwise turned-off in attempts to cope with writing of this type (perhaps bogged down in its scholastic vocabulary), our comments on Turretin's *Institutes* aim to enable a better grasp of its content and specific purpose by elucidating its method and presenting an illustration of its technical terminology. This is not to say that one must agree with Turretin in his theological conclusions.

In what follows, we present, first, a brief analysis of Turretin's method in the elenctic mode, both describing its distinct parts and setting forth an illustration of that method in practice. Second, we demonstrate how Turretin's scholastic vocabulary can be advantageous to theological formulation and exposition by examining an example of his use of technical terms in addressing a specific doctrinal issue.

## 1. Turretin's Method Described and Illustrated

Turretin's presentation of the theological controversies of theology unfolds under twenty topics. The order in which the material is treated is fairly standard for a Reformed theological work of this era, except that Turretin wrote with an elenctic aim. As we embark upon an examination of Turretin's method, it should be noted that his *Institutes* travels the path of the medieval *Summas*, and their use of *quaestiones* in order to expound theological topics.<sup>4</sup> As such, Turretin's work is purposefully a textbook of Christian doctrine, deliberately using points of controversy in order to teach the topics of theology, and utilizing disputation and polemics for the defense and clarification of the Reformed position on these topics. To do this, he employed a well-ordered method for handling the theological *loci*—a method that gives order and structure all the way through his exposition of the various topics of theology

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4. See Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, I:202-203, "Other genres of scholastic writing are *Loci communes*, doctrinal digressions that arose from exegetical commentaries and that later were compiled in a more or less coherent order. There also were manuals based on catechetical or undergraduate instruction; these were called *Compendia*, *Medullae*, or *Systemata*; and treatises modeled on the great medieval examples of the method of the scholastic 'question' (*quaestio*)." Also see van Asselt et al., *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, 158f.; and the discussion of genres of scholastic writing in "Introduction" to *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae* [1625], vol. 1, Disputations 1-23, eds. Willem J. van Asselt, William den Boer, and Riemer A. Faber, trans. Riemer A. Faber (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2015), 3-5.

### 1.1. The Method Described

Typically, as part of this scholastic method, Turretin treats the topics of theology under a series of one or more questions. While he does not always use the form of questions in order to address every sub-topic or specific point of doctrine, his content always presupposes the question-structure. Topics therefore unfurl (usually) in five parts: (1) “question,” (2) “general remarks and naming of antagonists,” (3) “state of the question,” (4) “proof,” and (5) “reply to objections.” In his arrangement of topics, then, specific *loci* are treated within a fixed format. In this way, he carefully expounds the question or questions under debate so that specific characteristics of a given topic can be carefully examined and specific conclusions attained. Consequently, Turretin subdivides each of the twenty topics covered in his *Institutes* into what he judges to be the required distinct questions.

In order to better follow Turretin’s approach to a given topic, we will analyze further his general methodological approach, which we outlined above under five headings:

1. *The Question (quaestio)* or questions, followed by either an affirmative or negative reply. Here Turretin carefully formulates the question to be disputed, which forms the topic of discussion. The question usually draws either a negative or an affirmative reply, but sometimes meets with the response, “We distinguish.”
2. *General introductory remarks* following the question. These remarks take up the subject under discussion, and can consist of a paragraph or two but sometimes are much extended. Turretin thus typically begins by naming specific adversaries or antagonists, designating who they are and what they teach regarding the doctrine in question. When adversaries are not specified, he will, nonetheless, concisely define the teaching being disputed and record where there is disagreement. It is not uncommon in setting forth the view of his opponents for Turretin to analyze their respective views at some length, only to follow this analysis by addressing the question or questions at issue.
3. *Statement of the question (status quaestionis)*. Here Turretin clarifies precisely what is in dispute, often stating what the question does not concern or is not about, but rather what it does concern or is about. It is critical to pay attention to this section, for many theological questions require careful definition. Turretin, then, in proceeding to demarcate the question or questions in dispute, clarifies the precise point debated and what therefore needs to be examined with care. In unmasking both what the question is and what the question is not, he seeks to clear up misunderstandings in order to create common ground of agreement (what is not under debate), with the goal of seeing where the crux of disagreement is to be found (what is under debate). To be noted as well

is that Turretin sometimes circumscribes the orthodox view by positing two extreme views, referring to those who err either in excess or in defect.

4. *Proofs of Turretin's staked out position (probatio)*. Here Turretin lays out his arguments in support of his view and in rebuttal of the view he opposes. Often both exegetical and theological arguments are employed here. Turretin, therefore, expounds and elucidates his own staked out position, presenting positive arguments that explain and bolster his view, though this is often done in light of an adversary's position. This section, depending on the topic, can be brief or quite lengthy. Turretin's positive presentation of materials at this point can, thus, be a succinct paragraph or protracted over numerous pages
5. *Sources of explanation/solution (fontes solutionum)*. Usually this section offers further Scriptural arguments for the view he is defending, answering objections, and often it seeks to clarify issues further or explores the additional implications surrounding the doctrine in dispute as it makes reply to counter-arguments. This refutation of counter-arguments (often translated as "sources of solution" or "sources of explanation"), occasionally includes a brief summary of Turretin's own views. It should be noted, however, that Turretin does not usually, at this point, state the counter-arguments of opponents explicitly; rather, he mostly handles these objections as suppositions (perhaps the reader has thought of an objection or has heard of objections), which Turretin then rebuts. As "sources" of solution, Turretin is also pointing readers to the sort of arguments and materials that can be consulted in order to explore further the answer to a controversy.<sup>5</sup>

## 1.2. The Method Illustrated

In order to illustrate how Turretin's method functions in practice, we examine his treatment of a specific theological topic, looking at his analysis of whether God has a conditional will. We will also briefly look at a particular feature of Turretin's treatment of the efficacy of the sacraments.

### 1.2.1. *Is God's Will and Decree Conditional?*

For our principal example of how Turretin employs his method in his elenctic theology, we look at his treatment of whether God has a conditional will. This also has bearing on the nature of necessity relative to the divine decree.

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5. See Muller, "Ad fontes argumentorum: The Sources of Reformed Theology in the Seventeenth Century," in *After Calvin*, 47-62.

For Turretin, some issues relating to the divine decree persist into his discussion of God's will." He asks, "*Can there be attributed to God any conditional will, or universal purpose of pitying the whole human race fallen in sin, of destinating Christ as Mediator to each and all, and any of calling them all to a saving participation of his benefits?*" In back of this issue is whether we may properly distinguish an *antecedent* and a *consequent* will in God. Turretin notes that the Lutherans affirm this distinction whereas the Reformed deny it (IV.Q.17).<sup>6</sup>

True to his method, in handling this question, Turretin moves to his introductory or summary remarks, presenting the distinct views that form the discussion. He first presents the Lutheran view of the divine will, wherein they employ the distinction between God's antecedent and consequent will. The former, the antecedent will, refers, concretely, to God's eternal purpose to save all people lost in sin through faith in Christ, for God's mercy (it is maintained) is universal; Christ's merit is also universal; and the ministry of the Word, with divine calling accompanying that Word, is likewise universal. The latter, God's consequent will, refers to "God's eternal purpose to save believers and damn unbelievers." Hence, that some (and not all) persons are saved arises from the persons themselves, not from God. That is, some refuse to believe and be saved (IV.Q.17.ii).

From here Turretin notes how the Arminians agree with the Lutherans on this question but go further when they insist on "four decrees subordinate to each other," namely that (1) Christ is given for the whole human race; (2) salvation is bestowed on believers and damnation comes to unbelievers; (3) there are sufficient means supplied for the salvation of all persons; (4) particular persons who believe are saved while those who do not are damned. The idea is that God's grace is universal under the first three of these divine decrees, for Christ is the Mediator available to all and bestows upon all the means sufficient for salvation (IV.Q.17.iii).

This brings Turretin to describe how the Reformed are not wholly united on this question. He presents the Amyraldian construal of the divine decree, which states that in the divine decree God purposed that Christ would die for all persons, atoning for the sins of everyone, so that all may be saved provided they believe—in this the Amyraldians agree with the Arminians. However, according to the Amyraldians, God also decreed to elect some, not all, persons from the totality of the human race and bestow faith upon them with the intention of leading them infallibly to salvation, and so infallibly bringing them to faith in order to secure with certainty their salvation—in this the Amyraldians differ with the Arminians. Thus, the former decree is general in scope but the latter decree is particular in scope (IV.Q.17.iv; also see III.Q.16.iii-iv).

Finally, Turretin sets forth the received Reformed opinion, which states that within the divine decree God "willed to have mercy not upon all, but only upon some certain persons of the human race (fallen into sin and death)." In addition, God

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6. For further background and elaboration on the propriety of this and related distinctions, see Topic III.Q.16. Note: references to Turretin's *Institutes* are by topic, followed by the question within that topic, followed by the paragraph number under that question. Thus, III.Q.16.1 refers to topic three, question sixteen, first paragraph.

“decided to raise them from the fall and bring them to salvation (others being left in their original corruption).” Besides, God, in order to ground his mercy unto them, secured the satisfaction of his justice by ordaining Christ as Mediator for them, who satisfies divine justice and obtains salvation for them as their “surety and head.” Finally, in tracing out how we may best conceive of God’s decree relative to divine grace and its scope, Turretin observes that “through the efficacy of the Spirit working faith,” God applies the work of salvation Christ acquired for them (IV.Q.17.v).

We discover already at this point in the topic under debate, that technical language forms the issue at hand. In other words, the topic is one inherited from the theological tradition, which of course can be either ignored or engaged. Once more, true to his method, Turretin is careful to outline the distinct position of various opponents, which then positions him to depict accurately the *status quaestionis*.

Thus (arriving at the third part of his method), under “the state of the question,” Turretin mentions five issues that do not pertain to the question at hand regarding a conditional decree in God. (1) The question is not whether all persons are predestinated to salvation regardless of faith or unbelief (all parties reject this); nor (2) is the question whether God has “a general love and philanthropy” toward all persons as his creatures, granting them “various temporal benefits” (all parties agree that God possesses such love). Instead, the question centers on “the special and saving love” of God, with its salvific benefits as willed by God. This love of God is particular and for the elect alone, argues Turretin, not universal. (3) The question is also not whether God commands and approves of faith as the way of salvation for all or that the gospel commands all people to believe and be saved if they desire salvation (again, all parties agree that God, with the gospel, approves of salvation of all in the way of faith and if they so will). Instead, the question is whether it is proper to deduce from God’s approval of faith as the way of salvation a universal will of God, so that he purposefully intends the salvation of all people, decreeing that Christ should come in order to achieve that aim. The Reformed argue that the issue in question concerns God’s will of good pleasure, not his will of approbation (IV.Q.17.viii). (4) The question is not whether God intends the salvation of each and every individual person “by a certain absolute decree,” for if this were so, all parties agree that all people would be saved infallibly, which cannot bear the testimony of Scripture (IV.Q.17.vi-ix). Rather “the question is whether by a certain conditional decree (and most serious will), God determined to give salvation to each and every one under the condition of faith.” It is this idea which is embraced by the Amyraldians. Says Turretin: a conditional will in God to this purpose “necessarily admits a conditional decree in him” (IV.Q.17.ix). And (5) the question is not about the universal scope of Christ’s redemptive work or of divine calling. The question, rather, is about the universal scope of divine mercy and grace pertaining to God’s intention to save. With this clarification the question is bundled as follows:

[W]hether there is in God a general decree; whether it is called a counsel or purpose or a conditional will by which God truly and earnestly intended to have mercy unto salvation upon each and every one (not by giving faith, but

by sending Christ for each and every one and calling all to salvation under the condition of faith and repentance). The patrons of universal grace maintain this; we deny it. (IV.Q.17.x)

Here we see how Turretin has judiciously circumscribed the perimeters of debate on this question. It is fruitless to accuse or refute one another about matters concerning which there is no disagreement. However, before Turretin moves on to his own positive exposition of his staked out position, he first shores up the distance that stands between the standard Dortian view of this matter and the Amyraldians, for no matter the discrepancy that exists at this point, Turretin notes that “among our men” (he means both those who adhere to Dort and those who follow Amyraut) “the foundation of faith thus far remains safe on both sides.” Amyraldians, with Dort, affirm (1) the universal corruption and depravity of all people, and so likewise affirm that no one can emerge from his inability to believe “without the efficacious grace of God.” (2) They affirm that divine election is particular, God choosing persons from that common misery, passing by others, leaving them in their misery (3) They affirm efficacious grace, that grace by which God implants faith in us, and as such it is a gift of God from eternity and granted to them alone in time for their salvation. (4) Amyraldians also affirm that the gospel alone, being the Spirit’s instrument, is used by him to produce in us faith that looks to Christ alone for salvation. In all these ways, the Amyraldians join those who adhere to Dort in defending against Pelagian and Semi-Pelagian errors (IV.Q.17.xi).

From here we arrive at the fourth part of Turretin’s analysis of this topic. In the matter whether there is a conditional will in God, which argues that God wills to save all persons *on condition of* their faith and repentance (God having given Christ for procuring salvation for all), Turretin now presents his arguments to disprove the idea of a universal mercy of God and to show its particular scope. Without examining his arguments in detail, we note that he offers seven reasons to support his opinion.

First, there is no conditional decree in God, offering a universal salvation, inasmuch as God does not will what he has not willed, namely the salvation of all persons, as the decree of reprobation demonstrates. Second, the love of God vis-à-vis Jacob and Esau is in fact elective versus non-elective or rejecting, and if God earnestly willed the salvation of Esau he would have also willed the means to that end. Third, a conditional will in God for salvation must include sovereign effectuation of the condition necessary for salvation. Again, this is not the case for those who are not elect. Fourth, if God willed the salvation of all, then all would be saved (which is false) or otherwise God’s will can be defeated (which is absurd), since not all are saved. Fifth, since God has not called all persons to faith and salvation by his Word, this demonstrates that he has not decreed the salvation of all. Sixth, the mother-promise in paradise concerning the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, given after the fall, shows that the promise of salvation was never universal. And seventh, the notion of a conditional decree of God, wanting to save all, yet such being fruitless and frustrated, depicts God in a biblically repugnant manner (IV.Q17.xiv-xxviii).



Finally, last in his analysis, Turretin arrives at his *fontes solutionum*. He handles various counter-arguments to his staked-out position concerning this topic, beginning with John 3:16 (“For God so loved the world ...”), a passage he considers in great exegetical and theological detail (IV.Q.17.xxix-xxxii). Next he takes up Ezekiel 33:11 (“[God] has no pleasure in the death of the wicked ...”) and 1 Tim. 2:4 (“God will have all men to be saved ...”), and similarly 2 Peter 3:9 (“God is ... not willing that any should perish ...”). These passages are similarly treated at length. Turretin appeals to Calvin in this discussion (to whom the Amyraldians also appeal) in order to bolster his arguments against them (IV.Q.17.xxxviii-xxxix). Lastly, in this section Turretin considers an array of so-called theological conundrums that are alleged to follow if the call of the gospel is universal in scope while God’s decree to save is not (IV.Q.17.xl-xlviii).

### 1.2.2. *Differentiating and Avoiding Extremes*

As we briefly noted above, it is not uncommon for Turretin, under the “state of the question,” to enunciate the orthodox position by differentiating two extremes: those who err in excess and those who err in defect. An example of this trait is well set forth in the doctrine of the efficacy of the sacraments (Topic XIX, Question 8)—that is, do the sacraments work grace so physically that they effect and contain it *ex opere operato*? In response to this question the Socinians err in defect by reducing the sacraments to “only external badges” of a profession of faith, such that the sacraments are “bare signs” and “mere figures”; God does not confer or seal grace through them (XIX.Q.8.i). Meanwhile, the Roman Catholics err in excess by exalting the sacraments to be “vehicles and vessels containing grace,” making them “physical” or “real and instrumental causes” which “effect and confer grace *ex opere operato*” (XIX.Q.8.ii). Over against these respective errors of defect and excess Turretin presents the Reformed orthodox position. In this case, the Reformed maintain that the sacraments do not effect grace physically, as if they possessed an inherent power of grace; rather, their power is moral and hyperphysical—that is, “they are signs and seals which in their lawful use hold forth and seal grace to believers (God by the power of the Holy Spirit truly performing and fulfilling in them whatever he promises and figures by the signs).” In other words, a twofold efficacy is advocated: a moral and objective efficacy, which depicts (signifies and seals) outwardly to the mind the saving promises of God, and a covenantal efficacy, sealing his covenantal promises inwardly to believers, conferring the very blessings promised to them subjectively. Thus, objectively, in the display of physical elements of the sacraments, grace is morally exhibited to the human subject; subjectively, God confers this very grace “really” (*realiter*) to the believing soul (XIX.Q.8.v). This subtlety reveals Turretin’s effort to capture the teaching of Scripture accurately, and further illustrates Turretin’s method at work.

### 1.3. Observations

Some final remarks concerning Turretin's method merit mention as well, namely, that he persistently aims to rest his stated view on the foundation of Scripture, with the goal of grounding his position on biblical arguments—though, when relevant, he will also make use, to varying degrees, of patristic, medieval, and other Reformed authors.<sup>7</sup> It is noteworthy that while Turretin periodically mentions Reformed authors, he commonly avoids dependence on them to argue his position. In addition, although Turretin serves up an *elenctic* theology, he eschews angry polemics in treating disputed points of doctrine, especially with fellow Reformed writers. Perhaps, given the precarious nature of the Reformed churches in France, he judged it unhelpful to the Reformed movement to engage other Reformed thinkers, with whom he disagreed on a given point, in a denunciatory manner lest he aid and abet Roman Catholic antagonists.

## 2. Turretin's Scholastic Vocabulary

Having examined Turretin's method, our next observation on reading Turretin's *Institutes* focuses on his use of scholastic vocabulary. Nowhere do readers seem to falter more in reading Turretin's three volumes (and Protestant scholastic writings in general) than in contending with its technical, scholastic language. It is certainly not our purpose to offer a mini-synopsis of definitions for this terminology (there are other resources for that),<sup>8</sup> but we do well to consider what advantages such terminology brings to the theological enterprise—that is, how it can lend aid not only in theological polemics but also in positive theological formulation, at least for this genre of theological writing.

### 2.1. Issues surrounding Non-Biblical Terminology

Before we look at an example of the serviceability of scholastic terminology, we recognize that this language is rooted in the Aristotelian philosophical tradition, very broadly conceived. Some might consider this *prima facie* objectionable. Why allow a biblically foreign set of words and thought-forms to shape (and corrupt) Christian theology? We offer three observations.

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7. See the work of E. P. Meijering, *Reformierte scholastic und patristische theologie: die Bedeutung des vaterbeweises in der Institutio theologiae elencticae F. Turretini* (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1991).

8 For this purpose, see Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Sources* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985). Also see his prefatory remarks and the list of sources for further reading, 7-15. An important work for this purpose, too, is *Scholastic Discourse: Johannes Maccovius (1588-1644) on Theological and Philosophical Distinctions and Rules*, trans. Willem J. van Asselt, Michael D. Bell, Gert van den Brink, and Rein Ferwerda (Apeldoorn: Instituut voor Reformatieonderzoek, 2009), which is a translation of Maccovius's *Distinctiones et Regulae Theologicae ac Philosophicae* (Amsterdam, 1656).

First, all theology works with and rests upon elementary philosophical categories and assumptions—whether it be Platonic/neo-Platonic, Aristotelian, Kantian, Hegelian, realist, idealist, or some amalgam of philosophical assumptions, etc. More recently, theologians have employed “speech-act” theory and Wittgensteinian “language-game” analysis in seeking to capture Scriptural teaching. Intentionally to acknowledge and analyze philosophical assumptions, and in turn to reshape and reorient those categories of thought to serve Christian belief is, if nothing else, methodologically honest and properly self-reflective. The scholastic writers were self-aware in this regard. In addition, they rejected outright huge swaths of Aristotle’s philosophy. Consequently, even if one wishes to cast off this significantly revised, “Christianized” Aristotelian apparatus of terms in its varied forms (Thomistic, Scotistic, nominalistic), it is necessary to discern what philosophical perspective is taking its place. That is, what philosophical commitments (with the vocabulary that defines it) are being embraced and for what reasons? This is not to declare illegitimate or to cut off such a project, but it is to acknowledge that it is an arduous undertaking which will still have to reckon with the history of Christian doctrine cast in the more traditional language and definition of terms. (That is no small task.) Moreover, it is also to affirm that the scholastic tradition, multiple in its trajectories of thought, is self-aware of what it is doing—recasting aspects of Aristotle’s thinking, adapting it to Christian beliefs and commitments—in order to articulate biblical teaching synthetically in pursuing the theological task.<sup>9</sup>

Second, in view of the above, we need to remember that during the age of Protestant scholasticism, it was not uncommon for elementary works of “logic” to introduce theological students to these fundamental philosophical categories of thought, wherein the basics of sound reasoning, the rudiments of ontology, and conceptual distinctions, were presented. We might call them philosophical primers—a bit unlike modern textbooks on logic. They put forth the rudiments of reasoning that enabled theological students to enter the field of (scholastic) theology with discernment—that is, with an understanding of its working vocabulary and ontological categories, each of which gave definition to theological concepts and shaped ideas.<sup>10</sup>

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9. For a discussion of scholastic distinction and philosophical ideas in relation to Reformed scholasticism, see “Translators’ Introduction,” in *Scholastic Discourse: Johannes Maccovius (1588-1644) on Theological and Philosophical Distinctions and Rules*, 18-38. Also see, Martin I. Klauber, “The Use of Philosophy in the Theology of Johannes Maccovius (1578-1644),” *Calvin Theological Journal* 30 (1995): 376-91; cf. Muller, “*Ad fontes argumentorum*,” in *After Calvin*, 55-56.

10. Several examples are Thomas Spencer, *Art of Logick* (London: 1628); Pierre du Moulin, *The Elements of Logick*, trans. Nathanael De-Lawne (London: 1624); Zachary Coke, *The Art of Logick*, 2nd ed. (London: 1657); John Newton, *An Introduction to the Art of Logick* (London: 1671). Johannes Maccovius’s work on theological and philosophical distinctions applied such works specifically to theology. See his *Scholastic Discourse: Johannes Maccovius (1588-1644) on Theological and Philosophical Distinctions and Rules*. Mention should also be made of the Ramist logic of Petrus Ramus, *The Art of Logick. Gathered out of Aristotle, and set in due forme...* (London: 1626).

Third, while it is true that such philosophical categories are not derived from the Bible, the serviceability of such technical terminology was potently exhibited already at the First Council of Constantinople in 381 (that is, in the *Nicæno-Constantinopolitan Creed*), with the words: “being of one substance with the Father” (Greek, ὁμοούσιον τῷ πατρὶ; Latin, *consubstantialem Patri*). This technical term, using the “substance” language of the Greek thought-world, exposed Arian errors in a manner that quoting Scripture was unable to do. Indeed, *homoousian* was used out of necessity, for that term offered a path for discerning the teaching of Scripture—merely to repeat Scriptural words or phrases was not going to bring the church to clarity on the disputed issue.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, technical language became part-and-parcel of orthodox trinitarianism.

## 2.2. Scholastic Terminology Illustrated: God’s Decree and the Nature of Necessity

Having addressed a particular concern surrounding the use of scholastic terminology, we proceed to present an example of how Turretin employs technical vocabulary in his theology. While scholastic distinctions can be daunting upon first encountering them, they serve to untangle theological knots.

We briefly examine how Turretin speaks of “necessity” in relation to God’s decree, and how this relates also to human free will (see Topic IV.Q.4.ii-xi). Although this is a rather intricate discussion, the conceptual distinctions that scholastic theology presents in analyzing the idea of necessity enables readers to circumscribe the concept and perceive its layers of meaning.

The question that elicits this discussion is whether the divine decree necessitates future things. Turretin answers in the affirmative, but he wishes to note carefully the layers of meaning that can be applied to the word “necessity” (IV.Q.4.i). Turretin first notes that a thing is said to be necessary (i.e., it cannot be otherwise or what is not able not to be) in a twofold sense: (1) in God, and (2) in things themselves. We may outline his discussion as follows:

1. Necessity *in God* admits a twofold distinction:

- (a) A necessity in God *absolutely*, such as, for example: God is necessarily incorruptible; and its opposite is likewise impossible, that God is corruptible. According to an absolute necessity of his nature, God is incorruptible. This necessity, then, is founded on God’s immutable nature, for he cannot deny his nature or, in the words of Scripture, he cannot deny himself. The opposite of absolute necessity is simply impossible for God (IV.Q.4.ii).

What is in mind here is that this sort of necessity refers to God’s internal works (*opera ad intra*). Inasmuch as it is also called simple necessity, and is indicative

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11. For an analysis of this point, see John Courtney Murray, *The Problem of God: Yesterday and Today* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1964), 31-60, 66-76.

of something being necessary such that the opposite of it is contradictory, it applies to God, for God's existence is an absolute necessity (it cannot *not* be); or, in other words, given that he is self-existent, his nonexistence is a contradiction; for God is a necessary being.<sup>12</sup>

- (b) A necessity in God *hypothetically*: that is, hypothetical necessity in God arises from the hypothesis of the divine decree, which is God's eternal will and therefore his will as decree must necessarily take effect. This sort of necessity in God is founded on God's immutable will. It can be further distinguished between:
- (i) an immutability from God's immutable decree; and
  - (ii) an infallibility from God's infallible foreknowledge (IV.Q.4.ii).

Hypothetical necessity, then, refers to God's external works (*opera ad extra*) and indicates a conditional necessity. Relative to God himself, the decree is not necessary but free, for it is not necessary that God decree what he decrees. But given that God freely wills his decree, he doesn't un-will it but eternally wills it, i.e., he remains faithful to his own plan and purpose.<sup>13</sup> For clarity, relative to God's immutable decree and his infallible foreknowledge, the necessity involved here is necessity of the consequence, which imposes no (absolute) necessity on the thing itself.

2. Necessity *in things themselves*. This sort of necessity likewise may be distinguished into various kinds:
- (a) A necessity in things themselves in the sense of "physical and internal necessity on the part of second causes which are so determined to one thing that they cannot act otherwise." For example, fire has the physical and internal necessity of burning (IV.Q.4.ii).

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12. Muller, *Dictionary*, s.v. *necessitas absoluta*. Also see, *Scholastic Discourse: Johannes Maccovius (1588-1644) on Theological and Philosophical Distinctions and Rules*: (Translators' introduction, 28-29); VIII, 3-4; IX, 5-8, 12. For a fuller discussion, see Willem J. van Asselt, J. Martin Bac, and Roelf T. te Velde, eds., "Introduction," in *Reformed Thought on Freedom: the Concept of Free Choice in Early Modern Reformed Theology*, Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought, ed. Richard A. Muller (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 15-49; and James E. Bruce, *Rights in the Law: The Importance of God's Free Choices in the Thought of Francis Turretin*, Reformed Historical Theology, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 32-33, 57-68, 81-88, 118-121, 126-127. Also see Turretin, *Institutes*, Topic X.Q.2.i-xvii, where he carefully treats necessity in relation to human free will.

13. See Muller, *Dictionary*, s.v. *necessitas consequentiæ*.

- (b) A necessity in things themselves in the sense of a necessity of coercion or compulsion, which arises “from an external principle acting violently” (forcefully, causally) on something else (IV.Q.4.ii).

This, then, is “a necessity imposed on a thing, an agent, or an event by an external cause not in accord with the will of the thing or agent on which it is imposed.”<sup>14</sup> This is necessity that comes from an external cause that forces someone or something, i.e., compels or coerces.

- (c) A necessity in things themselves in the sense of a “hypothetical necessity of the event or dependence through which a thing, although naturally mutable and contingent,” cannot but be, due to its dependence on God’s decree (which cannot be changed) and on God’s foreknowledge (which cannot be deceived or mistaken) (IV.Q.4.ii).

This is hypothetical necessity relative to *the things* God decrees. As noted above, this sort of necessity is also called necessity of the consequence (*necessitas consequentiae*). It is “a necessity brought about or conditioned by a previous contingent act or event so that the necessity itself arises out of contingent circumstance; thus, conditional necessity.... [T]he conditions that create the necessity are themselves a matter of contingency and are therefore only hypothetically or suppositionally the ground or reason for a necessity.” This sort of necessity is all around us, and “occurs continually in the finite order....”<sup>15</sup>

Turretin explains that the question about necessity relative to God’s decree and human free choice does not concern necessity understood in the sense of

- 1(a): a necessity *in God* absolutely.
- 2(a): a necessity *in things themselves* as physical or internal necessity.
- 2(b): a necessity *in things themselves* as a necessity of coercion, i.e., an external, coercive cause on a person.

Rather, the question pertains to

- 1(b): a necessity *in God* hypothetically.

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14. Muller, *Dictionary*, s.v. *necessitas coactionis*.

15. Muller, *Dictionary*, s.v. *necessitas consequentiae*. For a modern philosophical commentary on the meaning and implications of these distinctions, including the distinction between “necessity of the consequence” and “necessity of the consequent,” and how the Reformed united a hypothetical necessity with contingency, see van Asselt, et al., “Introduction,” in *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, 35-39. Also see the soon to be published work of Richard A. Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice: Freedom, Contingency, and Necessity in Early Modern Reformed Thought* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic & Brazos Press, forthcoming).

2(c): a necessity *in things themselves* as hypothetical necessity of events dependent on the divine decree (IV.Q.4.iii).

The necessity to be affirmed here, relative to God's decree and human free choice, is *not* that of a physical necessity or a necessity of coercion (compulsion), for that sort of necessity takes away liberty and contingency. Instead, Turretin affirms a hypothetical and consequential necessity which concerns *the certainty* of the event and the futuration (i.e., the future coming to be) of the decree of God.

We see, then, that *the certainty* here spoken of does not arise from second causes, which are extrinsic to and dependent upon the immutability of God's decree, that is [1(b)i]. Rather, the divine decree so determines the futuration of the event(s) as not to change the nature of things, but permits *necessary things to act necessarily and free things to act freely*. God's decree takes away contingency in relation to *the first cause*, but it does not take away contingency in relation to secondary causes, since God's decree which predetermines also orders the mode or manner of futuration.<sup>16</sup> This means that things which have necessary causes happen necessarily and things which have contingent causes happen contingently. "Therefore the effect may properly be called both necessary and contingent at the same time, but in different respects (κατ' ἄλλο καὶ ἄλλο): the former on the part of God and relative to the decree; the latter on the part of the thing and relative to second and proximate causes which might be disposed differently" (IV.Q.4.vi).<sup>17</sup> Turretin continues:

The necessity of the decree indeed takes away the liberty of independence and the irresponsibility (τὸ ἀνυπεύθυνον) and uncontrol (ἀδέσποτον) of the creature because it so depends upon the first cause that it can neither be nor move without it. But this does not take away the liberty of spontaneity and indifference because the necessity is only hypothetical (ensuring the certainty of the event, but not taking away the nature and properties of second causes). Hence we may rightly say, "Adam sinned necessarily and freely": the former with respect to the decree and the futuration of the thing; the latter with respect to his will and as to the mode. For no matter what the necessity of the decree, still Adam sinned voluntarily and consequently most freely (IV.Q.4.viii).

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16. Cf. The Westminster Confession of Faith, chapters 3.1 and 5.2.

17 There has been extended discussion of Turretin's understanding of necessity in recent scholarship. See Paul Helm, "Jonathan Edwards and the Parting of the Ways?" in *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 4, no. 1 (2014): 42-60; Richard Muller, "Jonathan Edwards and Francis Turretin on Necessity, Contingency, and Freedom of the Will," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 4, no. 3 (2014): 266-285; Paul Helm, "Turretin and Edwards Once More," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 4, no. 3 (2014): 286-296). Also see Paul Helm, "Synchronic Contingency in Reformed Scholasticism: A Note of Caution," *Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift* (2003): 207-222; A. J. Beck and A. Vos, *Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift* (2003): "Conceptual Patterns Related to Reformed Scholasticism," 223-233; Paul Helm, *Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift* (2003): "Synchronic Contingency Again," 234-239; and Richard Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice*, part III.

The necessity that arises from God's decree, being extrinsic and hypothetical, is consistent with the liberty of human beings, for they act most freely on their part, though the effect is necessary on the part of God (IV.Q.4.ix). Thus, while all things may be said to be necessary from God's decree, this does not mean that God is the author of sin since the decree is not the physical cause of sin nor its ethical cause. The decree only secures the futurity of sin—sin, then, does not issue from the decree as its cause. The decree of God does not achieve sin or evil or act as an agent that produces it. The decree merely secures, in a permissive and directive way, the certainty of the event; it does not cause it, for things are ordered either according to necessity, or contingency, or from freedom (IV.Q.4.x). Adam's sin is not according to necessity but is contingent and arises from an act of human freedom. The divine "decree does not take away the liberty and choice in acting," nor does it hinder the most free exercise of acts of choice (IV.Q.4.xi).

Clarifying the meaning of necessity, as Turretin's Reformed scholastic theology seeks to do, clears away confusion.

[T]he distinction between absolute necessity (*simpliciter: necessitas consequentis*) and relative necessity (*secundum quid: necessitas consequentiae*) [i.e., between the necessity of the *consequent* and the necessity of the *consequence*] enabled the Reformed scholastics to point out how necessity and contingency/freedom are in certain respects compatible instead of squarely contradictory.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, whereas Remonstrants sought to narrow the field to either libertarianism or determinism (and it seems that some Reformed writers unwittingly opt for philosophical determinism or necessitarianism), in fact the Reformed scholastic writers, Turretin included, rejected these options as simplistic and inaccurate, for hypothetical necessity or necessity of the consequence is wholly consistent with contingency and is able to accommodate and enable human free agency.<sup>19</sup> In short, it is critical not to confuse necessity, conceived in specific respects, with certainty. We should note that Turretin also explores the meaning and implications of necessity in connection with his treatment of free will (Topic X.Q.1-4). We forego an analysis of this material inasmuch as it has been aptly treated by others.<sup>20</sup>

Although we have examined a narrow topic to illustrate Turretin's use of scholastic terminology, his *Institutes* brim with this vocabulary; and it must be

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18. van Asselt, et al., "Introduction," in *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, 38; see Muller, *Divine Will and Human Choice*, chapters 5 and 6.

19. van Asselt, et al., "Introduction," in *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, 39. Also see Richard A. Muller, "Grace, Election, and Contingent Choice: Arminius's Gambit and the Reformed Response," in *The Grace of God, the Bondage of the Will*, vol. 2, eds. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 251-78; and Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 299-309.

20. See van Asselt, et al., *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, 159-163; van Asselt, et al., *Reformed Thought on Freedom*, 173-200.



mastered in order to grasp and adjudicate the potency of his argumentation. As indicated earlier, resources are at hand to enable readers to grasp this vocabulary and to think in terms of its definitions. (See footnotes 8 and 10.)

## Conclusion

In light of the two topics we addressed above, we offer some closing comments in addition to the earlier observations presented above.

Turretin's method entails that the topics of theology will be treated in an elenctic manner, which means positive instruction issues forth in the way of controverting heresies or other theological views judged to be injurious to the faith. This does not affect, as such, the ordering of topics in his *Institutes*. In exploring these topics, however, Turretin deliberately seeks to defend received creedal Christianity and, specifically, the Reformed confessional consensus. Thus, Turretin uses error as a foil for expounding Christian truth. This is theology in the *elenctic* mode. Although the ordering of topics is standard, the manner in which the topics are expounded has a decidedly polemical cast. Moreover, the section entitled "sources of solution" or "sources of explanation" (*fontes solutionum*) present short replies to objections but also suggest "sources" (*fontes*) that may be explored at much greater length and fullness.

It is also worth noting that the method Turretin employs as he approaches theological subjects has several benefits and, perhaps, one potential drawback. An important benefit of this method is that in Turretin's hands it reliably delineates and seeks to safeguard the Reformed position while uncovering and contesting the errors of theological rivals. Another benefit is that this method clears away issues that are not being contested; the position of opponents need not be uselessly and unfairly caricatured. Furthermore, this method lends itself to a more fulsome perspective of the theological landscape, for one is exposed to a variety of theological opinion.

Yet, even with these benefits there is one possible drawback, namely that, given this method, doctrinal theology runs the danger of being driven too much by a polemical agenda rather than by the positive teaching of Scripture—or, at least, this method opens itself to that threat. From a contemporary, global perspective, in which the practitioners of Christian theology face many non-Christian points of view (and even open hostility to Christian belief), Turretin's elenctic theology is, not surprisingly, rather dated in its basic orientation. An elenctic theology in modern guise would need to contend more directly with the creedal claims of other religions and a panoply of atheistic declarations and the presuppositions in back of them. Nonetheless, Turretin's theology provides contemporary readers with a thorough theological education in both the important scriptural materials that present Christian doctrines and the key historical figures and viewpoints that have driven theological discussion through the centuries. For his part, Turretin, consistent with his commitment to the Scripture principle for theology, sought to remain faithful to biblical teaching, grounding his scriptural labors in the Reformed exegetical tradition. Much modern theology cannot match a key strength of Turretin's approach to the enterprise of theology precisely because of the method he utilizes, for under

each topic Turretin states rival opinion fairly and offers an aptly detailed sketch of the theological contours that shapes a theological question.

Turning next to Turretin's use of scholastic vocabulary, we have seen that this technical language does not make the theological task easier. In presenting Turretin's treatment of necessity in relation to God's decree, we do not meet with a simplified theology. Scholastic method applied to theology does not necessarily render theological questions obvious or uncomplicated. But it does bring clarity to controverted issues and unmasks misapprehensions and untidy thinking. It also unmasks various layers of equivocation that creep into theological formulation otherwise undetected. We further note that the employment of this sort of vocabulary fits a certain genre of theological literature. It is not suited for sermons, for example, and in fact a cursory review of Turretin's printed sermons reveals that this technical language is not used. However, in an effort (1) to untie theological knots, given the deliverances of Scripture; (2) to distinguish well, so that words are not unknowingly being used in an equivocal and therefore undiscerning manner; and (3) to expose theological error (whether it be through verbal carelessness or conceptual sloppiness), scholastic language, with its tight distinctions and technical definitions, arguably may play a legitimate role in the theological enterprise.

This brings us to a final comment. Even if one negatively evaluates Turretin's theology because it pursues theology in an elenctic mode (following a strict methodology and immersed in technical terminology), in presenting these observations our aim has been to enable readers to make their way more profitably through Turretin's *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*. His three-volume work remains one of the leading specimens of Reformed scholastic theology in the early modern era.