

THE ROLE OF REASON IN THEOLOGY ACCORDING TO CAMPEGIUS VITRINGA'S PERSPECTIVE.

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ABSTRACT

The role of reason in theological reflection has been answered in a balanced way by Reformed theology. Far from prefiguring it as a foundation, reason has occupied a more serving role under this tradition. The aim of this article, other than introducing the Reformed theologian and exegete Campegius Vitringa to Brazilian readers, is to investigate the role of reason in the thought of Campegius Vitringa. By acknowledging that reason has a restricted and secondary role in theological activity, Vitringa aims to establish the place of reason in theological discourse in a way that appropriately answers what Scripture itself alludes to, without undermining its virtues.

KEYWORDS

Campegius Vitringa. Reformed Theology. *Nadere Reformatie*. Reason. Scripture.

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1 PUTTING CAMPEGIUS VITRINGA IN CONTEXT

1.1 *Campegius Vitringa's life and context*

Campegius Vitringa is among the most well-known biblical scholars of the eighteenth century (VITRINGA, 2018, p. 20 and TELFER, 2020, p. 172). One of the best interpretations on the book of the prophet Isaiah ever written bears his name (TELFER, 2016, p. 12). He was born on May 16, 1659, in the northern Dutch province of Friesland and died in Franeker on March 31, 1722 (VITRINGA, 1835, p. 153-76). He attended the universities of Franeker (1675-1678) and Leiden (1678-1679) for his academic training. He worked as a professor at the University of Franeker his entire life (GOUDRIAAN, 2013, p. 451).

To have a better understanding of Vitringa, it is imperative to place his life and environment inside the *Nadere Reformatie* movement which emerged in Holland in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries (TELFER, 2016, p. 163-165). Fundamentally, the *Nadere Reformatie* or Dutch Second Reformation (BEEKE, 1993, p. 301),² as some prefer to identify, was a spiritual movement that aimed to help Christians live out the

² A fuller account of the theological and intellectual context surrounding this movement can be found in the article “*The Dutch Second Reformation (Nadere Reformatie)*,” (BEEKE, 1993, 301FF). Another name for the *Nadere Reformatie* is the Dutch Second or Further Reformation. (BEEKE and PEDERSON, 2006)

Christian piety found in the Bible in a real and authentic way in God's world.

“Alongside the Dutch contribution to Reformed theology was a British-inspired rejuvenation of practical piety, called the *Nadere Reformatie* (i.e. further reformation), that infused among the churches a sense of purpose and commitment to godliness like that which had characterized Puritanism at turn of the seventeenth century. Willem Teellinck (1579–1629), the leader of this movement, had studied law in England, admired the zeal he witnessed in Puritan churches, and sought to model the Dutch churches after the Puritans, especially in the matter of Sabbath observance, by prohibiting recreation and business on Sundays.” (HART, 2013, p. 79)

Most likely, the phrase *Nadere Reformatie* was coined for the first time to refer to a movement that supported a reformation that was actually put into practice (VOS, 2013, p. 121). The idea under the identification stated is a church being referred to as a reforming church rather than a reformed one (BEEKE, 2003, p. 7). He advocated for an ongoing reformation along with others. Today, the Latin label *Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* still seizes and express the essence of the idea perfectly, that is, a church that is reformed must stay reformed.³ In English, ‘further’ refers to a reformation that has been carried out (BEEKE, 1993, p. 300). Many

³ This term has received more attention in recent years. Its application can have an antiquated connotation when its meaning is not understood. Its goal has been to draw attention to a consistent perspective about the Scriptures and tradition in general. (MULLER, 2011, 30)

believed that only a portion of the Reformation had actually occurred. Although there were already obvious indications of the same endeavor at the end of the sixteenth century, the movement gained particular significance during the great Synod of Dordrecht (1618–19) (BEEKE, 1993, p. 298-299). The doctrine was established at Dort as expression of the catholic foundations of the church (GODFREY, 2011, p. 260). However, a truly Christian life was necessary for the existence of the cleansed teaching; else, the orthodoxy would die (BEEKE, 1993, p. 308ff). Doctrine and life, theory and practice, faith and experience, orthodoxy and inspiredness, all of them, must always go hand in hand (BEEKE, 1993, p. 317). If these realities are kept apart, each becomes poorer (TELFER, 2020, p. 163-165). As Charles Telfer have suggested Vitringa was immersed in the spirituality and concern for a living religion that characterized the *Nadere Reformatie*.⁴ (TELFER, 2016, p. 218) In this way, it is first possible to draw the short and concise conclusion that Vitringa's environment influenced all of his works throughout his life, including those with an exegetical orientation as well as those with a more theological and pastoral orientation. (VITRINGA, 2018, p. 13)

Over the years a large body of scholarly works aims to portray Vitringa as a superb exegete. (CHILDS, 1999, P. 90)

⁴ An important piece of information added to this fact is what Richard A. Muller has pointed out. Muller has connected Campegius Vitringa's life under the influence of *Nadere Reformatie*. This movement has shaped Vitringa life and theology. (MULLER, 2003, pgs. 32, 81, 83)

Campegius Vitringa's exegetical writings were a large portion of his academic career, but he also wrote a significant work in theology called *Doctrina christianae religionis per aforismos summamim descripta* (The Teaching of the Christian Religion Summarily Described by Aphorism). (VITRINGA, 1785, p. 198) Vitringa wrote the work with his pupils in mind, and it was improved and expanded upon over time. (TELFER, 2016, p. 198) But up until now, scholars haven't given this work much thought.⁵ Vitringa's theological thought as expressed in *Doctrina christianae religionis* still remains practically untouched.

1.2 Literature Review

Vitringa's prominence is also linked to his friendship with the well-known federal theologian Johannes Cocceius. (CHILDS, 1999, p. 90) But Vitringa foreshadows himself as one of Cocceius's more moderate adherents in eschewing an interpretation overly preoccupied with allegorical conjecture. Hugo Grotius's influence may have contributed to Vitringa's equilibrium (VAN DER WALL, 1994, p. 198-202). Grotius recognized no trace of Christ in the Bible, but Cocceius had a tendency to see him everywhere. (WALL, 1994, p. 198-199)

⁵ There is an exception that must be made to this statement, Charles K. Telfer works on Vitringa's method, and he gives a particular attention to chapter II of *Doctrina Christianae Religionis*, in addition to providing the entire translation of this chapter in his book. (TELFER, 2016, p. 83-84)

In his piece on Vitringa, Brevard Childs emphasizes how Vitringa's outstanding work providing commentary on the book of Isaiah has garnered the attention of academics. There are over seven hundred pages in this work. (CHILDS, 1999, p. 90-91) Childs claims that Vitringa considered himself to be a theologian working for the church, and that his divine calling was to provide the church with knowledge that accurately represented what the Lord had revealed. (CHILDS, 1999, p. 90) Childs adds that Vitringa's exegetical approach in this endeavor was to determine the *sensus genuinus*, or in this case, the text's literal meaning. Childs emphasizes that Vitringa did not ignore the *mystice* aspect in his quest for the literal meaning. In order to begin examining whether the prophecy itself permits a methodology that can account for future events, Vitringa begins by interpreting the biblical text in its most literal sense, and if there is room the *mystice* sense can be applied. (CHILDS, 1999, p. 91) In the context of biblical exegesis, Child's observations are incredibly valid.

Ernestine van der Wall in her article on the prophetic theology of Campegius Vitringa evaluates how the 18th century launched serious attacks on the validity of the Holy Scriptures. (WALL, 1994, p. 195-197) Within this scenario produced by the Enlightenment, the motto was that both prophecies and miracles no longer served as proof of the veracity of Christianity.⁶ In some

⁶ "In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries Christianity came under heavy attack from a growing group of sceptics and atheistic. These enemies of the

European intellectual environments, the question of how trustworthy the Scriptures were was becoming increasingly popular. (WALL, 1994, p. 195)

In England through the deist Anthony Collins, skepticism regarding the validity of prophecies was extremely cultivated and defended. (WALL, 1994, p. 195) In the Netherlands this discussion began a little earlier with Hugo Grotius' more literalist method as a point of discussion. (WALL, 1994, p. 195)

Faced with this negative view of the value of the prophecy, Wall highlights Vitringa's genius. (WALL, 1994, p. 197-198) Although Vitringa was a disciple of Johannes Cocceius, Vitringa in his prophetic theology, according to Well, "attempted to steer a middle course between the concepts of the two scholars who had formulated the main prophetic systems of his days: Hugo Grotius and Johannes Cocceius." (WALL, 1994, p. 198) Wall opportunely emphasizes that Cocceius' system was the most influential in the Dutch theological context at that time. (WALL, 1994, p. 199)

Cocceius' method was to demonstrate that the Scriptures have an internal harmony (WALL, 1994, p. 200-201), in this sense Cocceius discovered that the Scriptures have the same subject in all prophecies, Christ and his Kingdom. (WALL, 1994, p. 201) He sought to demonstrate this by dividing it into seven periods and

Christian faith contributed to the growth of irreligion by directing their attack against the divine authority of the Bible. One of their main weapons was to show that the two traditional proofs of the Christian faith, miracles, and prophecies, had no validity whatsoever." (WALL, 1994, p. 195)

applying a more typological reading to the prophecies. (WALL, 1994, p. 200-201) On the opposite side was Grotius, and as a preterist, he emphasized the predictions' nearly instantaneous fulfillment. (WALL, 1994, p. 199 and 202) For him, the predictions were primarily about Israel, but they also permitted a secondary interpretation, a *sensus sublimior* or *sensus mysticus*, which might allude to Christ;⁷ the literal interpretation, however, was preferred to Israel. (WALL, 1994, p. 199)

Vitringa tried a '*via media*' between Cocceius and Grotius (WALL, 1994, p. 206), he did not advocate an extreme typological method like Cocceius. (WALL, 1994, p. 202) In this instance, Vitringa interpreted prophecy as an instantaneous, literally understood forecast of a contingent fact or event in the future based on divine revelation. Wall claims that Vitringa aims to show that we can only look for the mystical interpretation if the text is, in fact, pointing to the same thing.⁸ If the passage does, in fact, refer to the same subject, Vitringa is aware that the interpreter may interpret it as literal or mystical simultaneously. Finally, according to Wall, Vitringa comprehends that prophetic theology is one that looks for

⁷ "Besides the literal, primary sense of the text, Grotius nevertheless allowed for a secondary meaning, a '*sensus sublimior*' or '*sensus mysticus*,' which referred to Christ. This '*sensus mysticus*,' however, would always remain the secondary meaning, the '*sensus primarius*' being the literal, Israel-oriented one." (WALL, 1994, 199).

⁸ "We must never depart from the literal meaning of the subject mentioned in its own appropriated name, if all or its principal attributes square with the subject of the prophecy – an unerring canon and of great use." (VITRINGA, 1835, 157)

the spiritual meaning (Cocceius) after first seeking the literal meaning (Grotius).⁹

Charles K. Telfer's primary goal is to analyze and evaluate Campegius Vitringa's exegetical approach. (TELFER, 2016, p. 17) In identifying and presenting Vitringa's exegetical approach for the modern day, Telfer's book *Wrestling with Isaiah: the exegetical Methodology of Campegius Vitringa* is his primary endeavor. Telfer presents a thorough overview of the literature on Vitringa; his extensive bibliography includes nearly all recently published publications on the subject. (TELFER, 2016, p. 43ff) Initially, Telfer's primary discussion is about the consistency of Vitringa's exegetical approach. Despite citing *Doctrina Christiananae Religionis*, Telfer's main concern is with chapter 2, *De scriptura sancta*, and the possible connection between this chapter and his exegetical method applied to the book of Isaiah and the potential relationship between this chapter and the way he saw the book of Isaiah.

As we have seen so far in our literature review about Vitringa, the authors are more concerned with dealing with Vitringa's exegetical effort and result than his theological thought expressed in *Doctrina christiana religionis*. The goal of this work consists of filling the gap in the academic community concerning

⁹ "If the attributes by no means agree with the subject expressed by its own name in the prophecy, we must think of *another parallel or corresponding subject*, which is mystically called by this name on account of the agreement between the type and antitype." (VITRINGA, 1835, 157) (WALL, 1994, 203).

Campegius Vitringa's theological ideas. In order to do this in the light of Vitringa's formation and context, we intend to analyse his theological thought, as expressed in the first chapter of the *Doctrina christiana religionis*.

The question to be introduced and answered in this paper is: *What part does reason play in the theological reflection of Vitringa?* In other words, can the exercise of reason in theological activity be something that elevates it to a foundation, or is its activity subsidiary and instrumental? How does Vitringa explain and develop this idea of the role of reason in the activity of theological study and reflection? To undertake this task satisfactorily, we will commence by scrutinizing the initial chapter of Vitringa's work *Doctrina christiana religionis*, identifying and highlighting the role of reason within theological discourse.

2 INTRODUCTORY ANALYSES

2.1 *Reason and Revelation and the principle of theology*

Every science derives its definitions from a set of guiding principles according to Vitringa.¹⁰ In light of this, Vitringa attempts to clarify from the outset of his work that it is a requirement of every

¹⁰ “Ad tav Prolegovmena cujusque Scientiae, rite atque ordine tractandae, pertinet, tum ipsius illus Rei, sive Scientiae, de quâ agitur, definitionem tradere; tum principia indicare, ex quibus solida illius intelligentia hauriri possit.” (VITRINGA, 1785, I:1)

science to define the theoretical framework upon which the scientific investigation is based before delving into the nature of the science itself. (VITRINGA, 1785, I:1) The science that aims to investigate supernatural phenomena or topics connected to religious doctrines is called theology. (VITRINGA, 1785, I:2)

In Vitringa's view, in order for humans to contemplate the existence of a divine entity, they must possess certain rational qualities.¹¹ The principle of theological science is the possibility of God being known and also the human capacity to be able to know him, without these two realities there would be no way for theological science to exist according to Vitringa. (VITRINGA, 1785, I:16) To know God, reason must turn in a contemplative attitude toward his nature, attributes, plans, and works.¹² Vitringa demonstrates the impact of the *Nadere Reformatie* movement on the value and promotion of a holy life where knowledge and practice go hand in hand in his own work. (TELFER, 2020, p. 173)¹³ As the heir of this movement, Vitrina is attempting to make the case that

¹¹ In this regard, Vitringa is cautious when quoting Romans 1.19 because, in his view, all people possess this capacity for reason. There are no social groups on the planet where these rationality-related qualities are absent. What is known about God is captured regardless of the ethnic context in which each person may live. (VITRINGA, 1785, I:3,4)

¹² "*Ratio cuique homini, ad eam attendenti, objicit cogitationem de Deo ad novhsin prudentem considerationem amplissimorum & pulcherrimorum Dei Operum; sive ea in Nobis, Ps. 149:14,15,16; Act. 17:25,28. Sive in Mundo universo contemplemur. Rom. 1.20; Ps. 19.1; Is. 40.26; Job 12.7-10.*" (VITRINGA, 1785, I:17)

¹³ The same influence of *Nadere Reformatie* can be seen on William Ames. (VLIET, 2013).

theology and the proper worship of God are intimately intertwined. Theology's goal is to prepare people for worship and service.¹⁴ To engage in this contemplative practice that inspires wonder and reverence, mind and heart must be joined. The most profound form of worship that anyone can engage in is knowing God.

God made himself known to humanity in order to make it clear that it is his responsibility to serve and worship him as Lord and God. The intentionality of revelation and human capacity to receive, comprehend, and react to it are complementary in Vitringa's views (VITRINGA, 1785, I:13). For Vitringa, theology is therefore "the doctrine by which mankind, even in their miserable state due to sin, is instructed concerning God, His ways, and true worship, for certain comfort in this life (Romans 15:4) and complete salvation in the future (John 20:31)." (VITRINGA, 1785, I:16)

Vitringa makes this assumption, which is why he wishes to highlight the theological tenets before providing a definition. In this sense, the theological milieu in which Vitringa lived is typified by his initial attempt to offer the basis upon which he will build his definitions. Any definition of what is brought about must take theological principles into consideration (MULLER, 2003, p. 86). Muller goes on to say that the prolegomena always deal with issues

¹⁴ "*Omnis enim qualiscunque dissertativo de Deo, vel de ipso instituitur Deo, ejusque Operibus, & qui inde nascuntur, variis ad hominem respectibus, vel de Officiis hominis erga Deum, quae Deus ab ipso exigit, tanquam sua h. e. sibi debita, Mich. 6.8. Matt. 22.21. unde Theologia distinguitur in Theoreticam & Praticam.*" (VITRINGA, 1785, I:13)

that are constant and must always have an impact on the doctrinal statement. (MULLER, 2003, p. 86) Prolegomena in the theological field is surrounded by questions related to the human capacity to know divine things: if God can be seen as an object of study; if human beings can trust in their sense and language; and if the language can bear or translate the divine attributes. (MULLER, 2003, p. 86)

To put it succinctly, prolegomena attempt to address two basic and straightforward questions: what is theology and is it really able to be stated and embraced? (MULLER, 2003, p. 86) It is part of the prolegomena of any science to identify its foundations before going on to justify its arguments. These foundations are the principles (*principia*) on which the study is built. For Vitringa, as mentioned above, the two principles where the possibilities of doing theology lie are revelation and reason. Both are means given by God to his creation so that his creatures, created in his image and likeness, can respond in service and worship. (VITRINGA, 1785, I:17 and 20)

2.2 The problem of human reason

One point to take into consideration at this point is the effect of sin on the human mind or reason. Vitringa clearly seeks to look not only theologically at the current situation of man and woman

after the fall, but also exegetically. (GOUDRIAAN, 2013, p. 30)¹⁵ To do this, he follows the same path as Paul in his presentation of the human condition under sin.¹⁶ Vitringa's theological insight demonstrates the influence that John Calvin had on a whole generation of theologians from the Reformed tradition, where the literal meaning was the first thing to be sought. (TELFER, 2016, p. 210ff)¹⁷ However, unlike Calvin, Vitringa also seeks the mystical or spiritual meaning of a passage. (TELFER, 2016, p. 211-212) The fall of the human being into sin, due to his voluntary and active disobedience, brought about a transformation in the human condition of perceiving the reality that surrounds him.

We must love nothing among all the things of this world (food, drink, proper pleasures) so vehemently that, if necessary, we could not separate ourselves from it except with great bitterness of spirit. And we must use all things temperately and under the government of sanctified reason so that it is obvious that we have been freed from slavery to corruption and transported into the state of the liberty of the sons of God (John 8:36; Rom. 8:21–22). (VITRINGA, 2018, p. 90)

¹⁵ “Atheism is the worst and most serious of all faces. It is an offense against the clear light of reason and in effect changes light into darkness and darkness into light.” (VITRINGA, 2018, p. 83)

¹⁶ “*Quo sensu Paulus ait Eph. 2.12. Gentiles olim destitutos fuisse spe, certissimo caetero qui verae Religionis fructu.*” (VITRINGA, 1785, I:44)

¹⁷ John Calvin, in his Commentaries on the Epistle to the Ephesians commenting the verse three of the chapter 2, says: “To fulfil these desires, is to live according to the guidance of our natural disposition and of our mind. *The flesh* means here the disposition, or, what is called, the inclination of the nature; and the next expression means what proceeds from the mind. Now, *the mind* includes reason, such as it exists in men by nature.” (CALVIN, 1984, 3:2)

Vitringa takes this into account very seriously and decisively. Although he recognizes that this idea and notion of the existence of God has not completely disappeared from creation, and in this case mainly from the human being, the state of sin entered by man and woman has produced real distortions in this perception of the divine and the purpose of all things, reason needs to be sanctified. (VITRINGA, 1785, I:41; VITRINGA, 2018, p. 81) Under this situation of depravity, or deprivation of justice, man is not in a position to think or elaborate anything about heavenly things with perfection.¹⁸ Various discussions can be established about God and things related to divine matters, some of which are even false and erroneous, circumscribed by theological aspects, but false due to the presence of sin in the mind. In a stricter and more precise sense, Vitringa defines sound and true theology as the doctrine by which humanity, even in its miserable state as a result of sin, must elaborate and learn from God's gracious intervention, His ways, and true worship in order to receive certain consolation in this life (Romans 15:4) and complete salvation in the hereafter (John 20:31), which can only occur via the gracious revelation.¹⁹

¹⁸ “*Quae cum turbaverit primum rerum ordinem: sola Ratio, hoc rerum statu, homini, viam felicitatis aeternae, monstrare nequit.*” (VITRINGA, 1785, I:45). A similar approach can be seen Vitringa book's *The Spiritual Life*. (VITRINGA, 2018, p. 84)

¹⁹ “*Voluntas enim & modus, servandi hominem miserum, Divini sunt arbitrii, de quo nihil, nisi per revelationem gratiosam, homini liquere potest.*” In: Vitringa, *Doctrina christianae religionis*, I, 42.

In this sense, Vitranga then makes a point of discussing the Pelagian error that it would be enough to rely on one's own human abilities to achieve such knowledge. (VITRINGA, 1785, I:43) The Scriptures are contrary to Pelagian assertions. (VITRINGA, 1875, I:43) Man in a situation of misery brought on by sin cannot rely on the powers of his own flesh to approach God and know him according to the honor and holiness deserved by God. (VITRINGA, 1785, I:42)

However, the basis of all worship of God and knowledge is provided or offered by God himself to his creation. (VITRINGA, 1785, I:33) It is up to human beings created in the divine image to recognize this need and respond accordingly. In the many relationships that these human beings have with God, we find the answer to this divinely instituted vocation. The answer to this worship is cognitively elaborated theology.²⁰ It so happens that all human beings lack the Divine perfection disposed and present in them before the Fall. Justice and righteousness, the fruit of the state of purity in which they lived, have been lost. Although there was a fall, the dependence of the lower beings on God remains, the same dependence as before, and it would still be necessary for them to give

²⁰ “*Etiam si enim hic non excludam, sumam Divinae perfectionis Excellentiam, quae entia omnia inferiora, ratione praedita, obligat ad eum magnificandum, & admirandum; quin & celebrandum ac glorificandum: si tamen ea separari posset ab entium inferiorum dependentia à Deo, hactenus ea non obligaret ad gratiarum actionem, obsequium, & amorem Dei, quae verae Religionis magnam faciunt partem.*” In. Vitranga, *Doctrina christiana religionis*, I, 34.

thanks, obey God and love Him - acts that constitute a significant part of true religion. (VITRINGA, 1785, I:34) However, even if I exclude nothing here, I will accept the excellence of Divine perfection, which obliges all lower beings endowed with reason to magnify and admire Him rather than be celebrated and glorified. In other words, even if I omit nothing, I shall acknowledge the supremacy of Divine perfection, which compels all lesser creatures gifted with reason to exalt and reverence Him instead of attempting to rejoice and be exalted. (VITRINGA, 1785, I:33,34)

3 PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT AND CONCLUSION

3.1 Reason's Instrumental Function

We can conclude this presentation with the following assessment, Vitringa belongs to a different context where Reformed orthodoxy wanted to set a limit to reason. His period is identified as the latter phase of high Protestant orthodoxy,²¹ and as Richard A. Muller rightly points out, this period is characterized by a search for different philosophical models. (MULLER, 2003, p. 32) Rationalization and the attempt to intellectualize theological systems

²¹ "He lived and wrote during what we now call the latter phase of high Protestant orthodoxy." (TELFER, 2020, p. 172) Richard A. Muller has brought a clear definition of the phases of what became known as Reformed Orthodoxy. His contribution has been invaluable for those who want to know more about the theological environment of this period. (MULLER, 2003)

was the trend of his time, which Vitranga had to oppose with balance. (MULLER, 2003, 1:140-146)²² While Vitranga acknowledges reason as a principle, he does not do so in the Enlightenment-sponsored rationalist sense because, in his view, God is the true cause of everything.²³ Vitranga continues by stating that while reason plays a role in the theological process, that role is instrumental because reason serves as a vehicle through which the force of God's revelation shines, arousing conscience to the reality of God's existence. (VITRANGA, 1785, I:18,19)

Vitranga was one of the theologians of that era who was interested in the most recent findings from the critical analysis of the Bible. (MULLER, 2003, p. 139) However, in no way does this mean a conceptual shift in Vitranga's theological thought and practice that compromises him as a representative of Reformed orthodoxy, because the role of reason is instrumental and not source of theology. To see this more clearly, it is necessary to understand that for Vitranga, human reason is primarily the rational capacity that human beings possess, given by God, to intelligibly understand the things around them and to make judgments that can qualify what is the object of rational exercise. (VITRANGA, 1785, I:18,19) The

²² Michael Horton, as mentioned by Telfer, highlights the balance in the group of Protestant scholastic theologians who did not succumb to high criticism. (HORTON, 2011, 164)

²³ "1. *Objectum theologiae, ex principiis, modo demonstrates, cognoscendum, est Deus, Ens Spirituale, absolutissimae perfectionis, ad summam felicitatem sibi sufficiens, & omnium aliorum Entium Causa Libera.*" (VITRANGA, 1785, I:24)

knowledge of God, according to Vitranga, which is subjectively acquired by human reason in its exercise of study and meditation on Revelation, although it stems from rational exercise, does not have its primary source in reason itself, since supernatural revelation is the place from which all real conclusions about God and his Being are fully drawn.²⁴ This gives rise to the instrumental aspect of reason in Vitranga's conception.

Thus, he states:

And furthermore, since a truth may lie hidden within a truth, and the logical consequence of a truth must be truth, there is no doubt that by the instrument of reason, the consequences (logical outworkings) of the interpretation/meaning (sensus) of a Scripture previously interpreted and known are of the same certainty as those ideas (meanings) which are immediately apparent to us [as being the correct] meaning of Scripture. [This is put forth] against the Wallenburg Brethren. Matt 22:28; Gal 3:8-11. (TELFER, 2020, Appendix 1, 71)

²⁴ “*Necessaria itaque fuit revelatio aliqua praeternaturalis, ceu aliud quoddam doctrinae theologicae principium, si Deus ab homine peccatore ad suam gloriam cognosci, & quaeri velit, ut homo in novam spem erigatur.*” (VITRINGA, 1785, I:48) Gisbertus Voetius has a similar approach concerning this topic that can show how Vitranga was relying in the solid orthodoxy that he was surrounded. “We presuppose that there really is such a thing as human reasons, and that it is correctly called the receiving subject of faith, as well as the instrument and principle [3] (as they say) that elicits faith and factual knowledge, for it alone, and not some other lower faculty common to man and animal, has the capacity for faith. This reason is so to say the principle that draws conclusion (*principium quod*) from the only, infallible principle of the Scriptures, and so by means of simple apprehension, of composition, of division, and of discursive reasoning it achieves the understanding of what is revealed supernaturally or spiritually.” (ASSELT, 2011, Appendix 2)

Vitringa seeks to establish the place of reason in theological discourse in a way that adequately addresses what Scripture itself points to, not minimizing its merits, but recognizing that its function is limited and subsidiary in theological exercise. Vitringa, as Willem J. van Asselt has stated, “balanced on the border between an orthodoxy view of Scripture and enlightened Scripture criticism that attempted to integrate the new insights of Scripture criticism into Reformed Protestantism.” (ASSELT, 2011, p. 175)

3.2 Vitringa’s interaction with his historical era

Finally, it is possible to deduce that the presence of the concept of reason in Vitringa’s thought is more a product of his intention to dialog with his historical period, without meaning that reason occupies the same fundamental level as Scripture as a source of theology. This position allows us to say that he remains the true heir and representative of the Reformed orthodoxy. We need to see Campegius as a faithful son of his context and tradition, but also someone who seeks to develop Reformed thought beyond what he has received, so what should be highlighted it is Campegius as a devout follower of his environment and customs, but also as someone who aspires to advance Reformed ideas beyond what he has been taught.

In my opinion, a modest attempt has been made thus far to fulfill the gap in scholarly discourse surrounding the examination of

Campegius Vitringa's theological ideas. Not limited to his exegetical work, Vitringa's contributions can also be applied to the theological domain. Stressing the importance of reason in theological work as instrument is merely a development, not a break from the dominant orthodoxy.

This is an attempt to bridge the void in the academic literature concerning Vitringa's theological ideas. There is plenty that can be created and accomplished. Several points can be made that will require further discussion: 1. To what extent was Vitringa influenced by the Enlightenment of his era? 2. Were there other facets of his theological ideas and work that his surroundings had an impact on?

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RESUMO

O papel da razão na reflexão teológica tem sido respondido de forma equilibrada pela teologia reformada. Longe de concebê-la como um fundamento, a razão tem ocupado um papel mais de servidão sob essa tradição. O objetivo deste artigo, além de apresentar o teólogo e exegeta reformado Campegius Vitringa aos leitores brasileiros, é investigar o papel da razão no pensamento de Campegius Vitringa. Ao reconhecer que a razão possui um papel restrito e secundário na atividade teológica, Vitringa busca estabelecer o lugar da razão no discurso teológico de uma maneira que responda adequadamente ao que a própria Escritura alude, sem comprometer suas virtudes.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Campegius Vitringa. Teologia Reformada. Nadere Reformatie. Razão. Escritura.