

and cannot be done may be decided with prudence." You can easily find these rules among the new casuists, or force them to admit them, to uphold the case and conclusion to which they are committed.

### Part VI<sup>51</sup>

... I might be able to add some more fallacies . . . but other matters require that this [article] be brought to an end. I advise our students to read [Daniel] Dyke. . . .

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## CONCERNING "PRECISION,"

IN INTERPRETATION OF QUESTIONS

94, 113, AND 115 OF THE [HEIDELBERG] CATECHISM.<sup>52</sup>

"Precision" is one of the dispositions for good works, which we expound more fully in the ordinary course on the *loci*. I think it proper for me to offer, in this essay, to our students (1) the positive presentation; (2) the apologetic discussion of its necessity.

1. The word *præcisitas* ["precision"] among philosophers and scholastics

51. Part VI, about twelve pages in the Latin, on "sophistic hidden fallacies," has been omitted except for a few characteristic lines from near the end.

52. These questions read as follows:

Q. 94. What does God require in the first commandment?

That, on peril of my soul's salvation, I avoid and flee all idolatry, sorcery, enchantments, invocation of saints or of other creatures; and that I rightly acknowledge the only true God, trust in him alone, with all humility and patience expect all good from him only, and love, fear, and honor him with my whole heart; so as rather to renounce all creatures than do the least thing against his will.

Q. 113. What is required in the tenth commandment?

That not even the least inclination or thought against any of God's commandments ever enter into our heart; but that, with our whole heart, we continually hate all sin, and take pleasure in all righteousness.

Q. 115. Why, then, doth God so strictly enjoin upon us the ten commandments, since in this life no one can keep them?

First, that all our life long we may learn more and more to know our sinful nature, and so the more earnestly seek forgiveness of sins and righteousness in Christ; secondly, that we may continually strive and beg from God the grace of the Holy Ghost, so as to become more and more changed into the image of God, till we attain finally to full perfection after this life.

tics means the first abstraction and mental separation of some matters from others. Thus they say that a given term may be taken specifically and properly, strictly, rigorously, absolutely, as it is, in contrast to loosely, popularly, improperly, etc. But these meanings are not the ones used here. . . .

In matters of ethics and [religious] practice, it means that which is ἀκριβής, exact or as it should be, whether it refers to men acting, or to recommending actions to conscience, and making them binding, or to the actual action and deeds of men, and guidance of this action by teaching and law and laying it upon conscience. The word occurs in Ephesians 5:15: "Look carefully [ἀκριβῶς] how you walk," and here the basis of this discussion may be set. The Vulgate renders this *caute*, Erasmus used *cumspecte*; Beza approved of both but rendered it *solertier*, that is, done with the most thorough consideration. . . . Synonyms are *exactum* and *severum*, which occur in the Catechism, Question 115, where the Dutch translation uses the adverb *shepseijck*. . . . In order not to fall into errors of ambiguity, it must be noted that in common usage and among practical writers, the word "precision" is sometimes used in a bad sense and is understood of that which comes from an individual's own personality, that is, from nature and environment and not from sanctification, and so follows from his personal taste, or is undertaken out of presumption, arrogance, stubbornness, and love of argument; sometimes the word is used in a good sense and is understood of that which results from the true force and nature of piety, and which should participate in it and accompany it. We are now discussing the latter. These two meanings ought to be carefully noted. . . .

ii. We define "precision" as the exact or perfect human action conforming to the law of God as taught by God, and genuinely accepted, intended, and desired by believers. For an exposition of this definition, note: (1) With regard to "exact" or "perfect," there is a triple requirement for our perfect keeping [of the law], which is extensive and intensive, with relation to its parts, duration, and grades. (2) As to "conforming to the law as taught by God," this distinguishes it from all will-worship, superstition, and hypocrisy, whether Pharisaic, papist, monastic, Donatist, or Anabaptist. (3) As for "by believers," this distinguishes it from all diligence, zeal, superficiality, hatred, and perverse strife on the part of pagans, Jews, or Mohammedans, in and through their pseudo-observance. (4) As for "accepted, intended, and desired by believers," this distinguishes precision formally or subjectively considered from that which

is objectively so called. It is the same distinction as the metaphysicians make between objective and formal concept, or theologians between objective and subjective assurance of faith, or between the objective and the formal moral goodness of human actions, or the objective and the formal *summum bonum* or blessedness. In respect to the first [precision] is complete and perfect, like the law of God itself, according to Psalm 19:7 collated with Psalm 119 and Romans 7:12. In the second sense it has only begun, in so far as the faithful really accept it, and acknowledge that they are obliged to follow it, by the authority of the divine law, and therefore desire, intend, propose, seek, and strive for it "sincerely and without pretense" (Catechism Q. 114) even though this acceptance, this acknowledgment, this desire, this purpose, this intention, this effort, this striving are not complete or absolutely perfect (1 Cor. 13:9-10; Phil. 3:12), albeit in some sense, comparatively, perfection is attributed to it (Phil. 3:15; Heb. 5:14). We use the word "precision" sometimes in the first, sometimes in the second, and sometimes in both meanings. (5) For a fuller understanding of the definition, both the subject and the object of precision must be considered.

The subject generally is a person who is truly a believer, and converted; this is the sole subject of observance, piety, and any saving good work; or it is [a person] who pleases God and has been accepted by him for salvation according to Hebrews 11:6: "Without faith it is impossible to please him" (see also Rom. 14:23 and Acts 15:9). What judgment should be made concerning the works of unbelievers (here understood as "general faith,"<sup>53</sup> among the old theologians Augustine taught rightly, and among the moderns, G. H. Voss, and among papists, Cornelius Jansen. We see a need for a special, applied faith, without which one is dead in sin, besides general faith. We dispute on the necessity of this faith against the papists, as do all writers on the necessity of faith and justification.

The first subject in rank, and the exemplar for the rest, is the servant [minister] of the word,<sup>54</sup> the governor and director of the house of the Lord and of all the sons of the prophets, set apart for sacred studies and service. Such men are the light of the world, and the salt of the earth; it behooves them to show in themselves the same spiritual power which they teach and advocate for others. Concerning this I have written elsewhere,

53. On non-saving faith, see Wollebius, Book I, Chapter XXIX, Section (1), in this volume.

54. The official Dutch Reformed designation for a "clergyman."

in my work *De Politica Ecclesiastica* ["Ecclesiastical Polity"], in the parts dealing with the duty of ministers, and of candidates in theology. . . . The subject by which [the duties of precision are performed] is a reborn mind, will, and conscience (Mt. 5:8, "Blessed are the pure in heart," collated with Tit. 1:15). . . .

The object [of precision] is the practice of piety or obedience according to all the parts, actions, grades, and circumstances that God's word requires. Therefore, the following are to be directed in precision: (1) our thought and faith in all concerns of religion (Lk. 8:18; Phil. 1:9-10); (2) our observance of all things, both natural and legislated, pertaining to the worship of God, adding nothing, taking away nothing, leaving out nothing; (3) observance of all things which are necessary for the practice of love and justice toward our neighbor, and toward ourselves; (4) observance of all things which pertain to our particular vocation; (5) resulting from this, control of thought, word, action, and behavior in this world, in the presence both of those who are within and those who are without [the church] (1 Cor. 10:31-32). . . .

III. The first basis and efficient cause [of this precision] is God, who is himself purity, holiness, and perfection, who loves *ἀκρίβεια* and purity, and wants his children to be like him (1 Jn. 3:23; 1 Pet. 1:15-16; Mt. 5:48).<sup>55</sup> The secondary [efficient cause] is the word of God, which is the unique, sole norm of precision. Therefore its form is agreement with the law. If one transgresses the law, this can no more be approved than the substitution of superstitium for religion. See Psalm 119:1,2,6, and in its entirety, collated with Psalm 19:8-9. [This relation to the word of God] is similar to that between a work of architecture and the builder's plan. The perfection consists in conformity to the plan, and consequently to the rules of the art, and the levels, plumb lines, etc. In order to discuss the minor causes, for the sake of better teaching, I shall divide them into those that supply motivation, and those that direct action.

In the first class are: (1) love, fear, and honor for God, which can be deduced and explained from his various names; (2) hope, and the desire for eternal salvation, which only reach the goal by the narrow

55. The basis of Christian ethics is strictly in God, not in man. The statement about God's character is orthodox, although orthodoxy often emphasized "metaphysical" qualities more than moral ones (see Wollebius, Book I, Chapter I, esp. Section 3), Def. 3, Prop. v, subhead 5). Orthodox treatments of ethics were often expositions of the decalogue on the basis of obedience to God's will rather than, as here, imitation of his character (Wollebius, Book II, Chapter I; also Turretin, *Loci XI* and *XVII*, not translated). Note Voetius's transition from character to will to law.

road and gate (Mt. 7:13, with Mt. 11:12; 1 Jn. 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:3 collated with 1:13-15); (3) tranquility of conscience, freedom, and blessedness, and the glory of believers, begun in labor and sorrow in the midst of this troublesome life (Acts 24:15-16; 2 Cor. 11:27-29, with 6:4-11). . . .

[Causes that direct action] are (1) spiritual concern (Ps. 119:59; Eph. 5:15, on which texts Preston has written a splendid commentary); (2) careful and frequent examination of conscience . . . ; (3) memory (Rev. 2:5; Heb. 12:5; Ps. 119:61, on which Nathanael Coole has written an English work on preservation from sin); (4) constant meditation on the divine word, and the application of it to our daily lives, in order to see whether we are following it or not (Ps. 119:6,31). . . .

To the means of furthering precision add the overcoming or avoiding of the obstacles, for there are such: (1) various prejudices such as that this precision is superstitious, or at least useless and unnecessary; that it is a heavy burden on the spirit; that is adiaphoristic . . . ; (2) evil examples; the example of the majority of Christians, present or past; (3) the imitation of the crowd . . . ; (4) lack of steadfastness because of fear of the hatred or scorn of man. . . .

iv. The adjuncts of precision include some that are necessary, or are its conditions; some that are concomitant and consequent; and some that are signs.

The necessary adjuncts are: (1) That one have regard for the whole law and all its individual parts, small parts, and *minutiae* (if one may speak this way), right up to the beginning, in habit [*motus primo primus*],<sup>56</sup> of the least thought, word, gesture, including the smallest case of conscience and the consequences and circumstances of deeds, and so in everything conform as exactly as possible to this most perfect norm, neither leaving out one jot of good nor admitting or committing any form of evil (Ps. 119:104, with Mt. 5:19-20 and then the whole chapter to verse 48: "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your father in heaven . . ."). (2) That every bit of evil left undone, and of good done, be in the highest degree with and from the immediate intention of obeying and the ultimate intention of glorifying God, with the whole heart and all the powers, with wholeheartedness and joy, with fear and trembling, with the highest fervor (Ps. 71:8, 34:2, 119:14; Phil. 2:12; Rom. 12:11; Mt. 5:16, with 22:37, and Ps. 119:10). (3) That one do this always, without ceasing (Ps. 119:12,44; 2 Cor. 5:9, with Ps. 71:8). This must be extended to all moments and varying occasions, in times

<sup>56</sup> See note 14.

of adversity and of prosperity, of difficulty and of ease, corrupt and less corrupt; times marked by special evil customs and those not so marked, times of solitude and of companionship, youth and age. See the interpreters of Ephesians 5:15. (4) That this be done fully, without watering-down, delay, or exception (Ps. 119:60; Heb. 3:7,13; 1 Cor. 7:29).

These are the necessary adjuncts considered absolutely. Considered relatively, or from some special point of view, they are (1) relative to the person of the believer, that he may be endowed with all spiritual gifts, goods, and graces, and so put on the panoply of the whole divine image, with each and every part, so that nothing is lacking. For as the law is (according to the universal teaching of the schools) one bond, the image of God is another. If faith which apprehends and brings assurance, or courage and fortitude that lead to action, or prudence that directs it, or knowledge that enlightens it, or the spiritual eye that points out the road among the shadows, is lacking, then one cannot be "precise." (See commentaries on Jas. 2:10 and 2 Pet. 1:5-8.) (2) [These adjuncts may also be considered] relatively to the action, so that all that accompanies it, or is involved in it, or surrounds it, may be "precise" . . . (3) [They may be considered] relative to the neighbor (1 Pet. 2:12; 1 Cor. 10; Phil. 4:8; Col. 4:5-6).

v. The concomitant and consequent adjuncts are: (1) Spiritual power in the work of the Lord, whence [believers] are said to walk the road of God's commandments. The more strictly and fully their works agree with and conform to the norm of the divine law, the more easily they are performed, and with less holding back and less unpleasantness (Mt. 11:29-30; Is. 40:31). (2) A multitude of good works, for "precision" causes the believers to "abound." (On this "abounding," see Phil. 1:9, 1 Cor. 15:58, 2 Pet. 1:8.) (3) Spiritual freedom, which by the constraint of Christ's love, and the words and deeds of the Lord, or yoke of Christ (2 Cor. 5:14), grows greater all the time; hence the law is called the law of liberty, or royal law (Jas. 2:8-12). On the other hand, when the chains of love and Christ's yoke are relaxed, a false and carnal freedom intrudes and grows; that is, man is held by the yoke of bondage. (4) Spiritual peace, for peace is the tranquility of having things as they should be. Therefore, if our works are rightly ordered according to the norm and measure of the divine law, well obeyed, peace cannot fail to "guard our hearts and minds in Christ" (Phil. 4:7). On the other hand, all inward anxiety and worry is a direct consequence of the relaxing or absence of "precision." (5) External condemnation, mockery, insults, and aliena-

tion from the world and from false brethren; indeed, from lukewarm brethren and the mass of Christians. So formerly, in popery, not only did carnal clerics fail to seek or perform their spiritual responsibilities, but also they persecuted those who walked in the spirit. . . . Cicero shows how hateful outstanding virtue was to the pagans, by the examples of Aristides and Hermodorus (*Tusculum Disputations* 5:36 [106]). . . .

vi. The adjuncts that are signs by which a true, genuine "precision" can be distinguished from a false, Pharisaic one are (1) that the believers seek it first and foremost in their own behavior, and after that in the behavior of others, both in private and in the fellowship of the church. To this, the popular saying, "Reformation begins with one's self," applies. (2) That one easily forgives and takes an understanding attitude, if there seems to be, anywhere, a departure from "precision" (Gal. 6:1). That one can and will be compassionate to those who are less firm and exact in knowledge of faith and in observance (Heb. 5:2). (3) That one gives less emphasis to external actions, formalities, and public rites, and more to his heart and its inward motives, and to sincere intentions (Mt. 23:25-26). (4) That the more one advances in "precision," the humbler he becomes, and so the more he depends on God, and turns to him (Ps. 119:116-117, 123), and the less he calls the attention of others to himself, when God's glory does not call for it (Mt. 23:5,28). In fact, it can be said that he conceals himself, and is hidden, for the more he is known to the Lord the more he tries to be unknown to the world. Just as the most precious treasures, the rarest jewels, are usually kept out of sight, and not exposed to the eyes of everyone, so it is with the abundance of virtue or precise piety. See the commentaries on Psalm 83:4. (5) By the external means of the word one depends religiously on God in all his actions, religious, secular, private, or public, and humbly seeks God's will and submits to his revealed word (Ps. 119:5,6,11,31). (6) Always and everywhere one is bound to God, in all God's laws, in all cases and affairs, public or private, in all actions, open or secret, before God and men (Acts 24:16: "I always take pains to have a clear conscience").

We shall now add some special effects by which spiritual precision makes itself felt. (1) One does not accept uncritically every teaching, whether newness, eloquence, subtlety, an extraordinary revelation, age, common agreement, or the example of the majority gives it specious commendation, but one examines everything (1 Thess. 5:21), tests the spirits (1 Jn. 4:1-2), and carefully looks into every matter and compares it to the word of God, after the example of the [Jews of] Beroea (Acts

17:10-11). Thus it is that one is not carried about by every wind of doctrine (Eph. 4:14) . . . (2) In public worship, one reforms and purges everything, even ceremonies, ecclesiastical acts, organization, and polity, down to the smallest example and occasion for evil, following the procedure of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:3-6), and Josiah (2 Kings 22, with 23:13), who removed even the high places. . . . (3) [Precision also requires] the reformation of life and manners, private and public, down to the smallest claim of the flesh, the least breath of popular corruption, and the glory of the world, even scandal and the appearance of evil in matters that are adiaphoristic, especially those that seem to suggest evil (Jude 23 with 1 Thess. 5:22-23; 1 Cor. 9:15,19,27, 10:29,32-33). This means especially that one considers spiritually, and stays away from, those activities which common and easygoing Christians do not consider wrong. . . . Such activities include gambling, wagers on future events, . . . and, in connection with the seventh commandment, dramas, dancing, vain adornment of the hair, luxury in dress, and the like. . . . (4) The establishment, observance, and sincere use of both private fraternal correction and admonition, and ecclesiastical censure and discipline. . . . (5) The establishment, upholding, and teaching to others of all exercises of piety, [for use] in churches, families, organizations, and when by oneself. The manner in which this is done is the subject of ascetic theology.

vii. Precision may be divided (1) in accordance with the various aspects of religion, into that which deals with knowledge or faith, and that which deals with practice. The first is the subject for discussion in debates and consultations on freedom of prophesying, moderation, syncretism, or union of divided churches, concerning which we have given the outline of our concepts to our students in guidance and writing that we judge expedient and safe. The foundation was laid in the disputation *De Articulis Fundamentalibus* ["Concerning Fundamental Articles"], on which everything else must be based.<sup>57</sup> (2) It may also be divided, so far as its object is concerned, into that which we hold concerning ourselves and our own actions, and that which we hold concerning the life and actions of others, especially those who have been entrusted to our care. (3) It may also be divided, so far as subject is concerned, into responsi-

<sup>57</sup> SD II, 511-38 (not translated). On "fundamental articles," see Schmidt in Rouse and Neill, *History of the Ecumenical Movement* (Philadelphia, 1954), 75ff.; O. Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte des Protestantismus* (Göttingen, 1926), IV, 240ff.; Roland Bainton, *The Travail of Religious Liberty* (Philadelphia, 1951). (F. Turretin, Locus I, Question XIV, not translated.)

bilities common to all Christians and the special, exemplary, ruling, fore-running (so to speak) responsibility of the ministers of the word and elders, who, in a special sense, are called the light and salt of the world (Mt. 5:13). And the "precision" of ministers concerns first of all themselves and their families, then members of their congregation and any who hear them, then neighboring churches with which they have dealings either individually or through synod or classis, and finally those who are outside the church, if they are able to come to those with guidance or help, after the example of Luther, Bucer, Melancthon, Calvin, Beza, Martyr, etc., whose letters and pastoral counsels should be read. Anyone who reverses this order, or who advocates or demands precision for others, often with great impotunity, in classis or synod, and emphasizing *minutiae* and ritual forms, while his own life, family, or church is simply an uncultivated field, should be called, not a zealot or precisionist, but a meddler, busybody, Pharisee, Diotrefes [3 Jn. 9], who is everywhere and is busy everywhere, except at home.

VIII. The contradictions to precision are:

(1) Excess; superstition and will-worship, such as that of pagans, Jews, Mohammedans, papists, etc. See commentaries on Matthew 15 and 23, and Colossians 2, and our disputations on superstition, benedictions, festivals, church buildings,<sup>58</sup> etc.

(2) Another excess is the spirit of constant doubt [*scrupulositas*] and unwholesome imagination. What barriers unnecessary scruples are to the practice of piety and precision, and consequently how they are a whole heaven distant from the true precision required by God's law, may be seen in the work of Ames and of Bresser the Jesuit.

(3) A denial of precisionism on the other side is lukewarmness, moderation, indifference, laxity. It may be a matter of intention or of extension. On the first, see the commentators on Revelation 3:15-16, such as Perkins. . . . The second is a matter either of theory, or of practice in which great sins are treated as little, and small ones as nothing. Theoretical laxity is furthered by lax casuists, as the papists are in many matters, to pass by the others for a moment. Molinaeus made an exposure of them. . . . Perkins, Ames, Rivet, Danaeus, and Udeman, of whom the last wrote in the vernacular, should be used with him. . . .

(4) Greatly opposed to ["precision"] is anti-precision, or bitter accusations, calumnies, and hostile attacks on those who commend and further this doctrine and practice. Here is to be classed what has been

<sup>58</sup>. The bulk of SD III, not translated.

written and done in England and Scotland for many years, especially since William Laud became archbishop, against the pious and those who want a true and full reformation or purity, those most anxious for piety, of whom the world was not worthy. . . . These vicious tactics were not unknown in our Netherlands, in connection with doctrine and discipline, at the time of the Remonstrant struggles. . . . The same happened in connection with the strict reformation of conduct and the full practice of piety, with this same name "Precisionist," and "Sabbatarian," "Zealot," "hypocrite," "long-nose," "kill-joy," "double (or rigid) reformer," "church of the saints," "misanthrope," etc. . . .

(5) Further, there is a repudiation of precision in all moral faults and acts not in harmony with any part of God's word, which may be either public and social or private and individual, and may be either mainly speculative or mainly practical. A public fault of this kind occurs when anyone justifies or works for a sect or schism under pretext of purity or precision, as has been done by Pharisees, Donatists, Cathari or Novatians, monks, Anabaptists, Brownists, and others. Private faults occur:<sup>59</sup>

(a) When anyone clings inflexibly and exactly to his own preconceived notions, and to any practice of religious living or formalities of piety except [those taught by] the word of God, especially if he is quarrelsome, regards others as profane, and separates himself from them (Is. 65:5, Jude 19).

(b) When anyone, swollen with spiritual pride, holds himself to be superior and unique, by the performance of carnal and foolish, or useless and impossible, practices. This may properly be called the vice of *curiositas*, defined thus by Gerson: "The vice by which, when a person has neglected useful matters, he turns to less useful ones, or to those which are impossible or harmful for him." *Singularitas* he calls "the vice by which a person who has neglected useful matters, turns to those which are not his concern." He adds, "Neither is free from desire for self-exaltation; *curiositas*, that one may know other things than he needs to, *singularitas*, that he may be superior to others."

(c) When anyone constantly, wholeheartedly, and rigidly insists upon matters which are of no value, or of small moment, affecting formalities, titles, and points of worldly vanity, carnal glory, and one's own reputation or convenience, to the point that he becomes lukewarm, if not cold, in God's work.

(d) When anyone begins to concern himself over others, and to ex-

<sup>59</sup>. The lettering of sections a-h, in the Latin, is faulty.

amine strictly and to criticize the words and deeds of a neighbor, especially in achievements of piety (meanwhile being easygoing toward himself and his associates), and locates perfection and purity in this. . . .

(e) When anyone, in an unwholesome, superstitious way, so clings to his own methods, manner, custom, form, and procedure, his own knowledge, spiritual discipline, service, and actions, and is so satisfied with them that he wants to force all others into the same pattern, and dares condemn, or at least separate from, all who do not observe the same procedure. . . . John the Baptist and Christ did not follow the same procedure. . . . Romans 14 may be applied here.

(f) When anyone tries by himself alone to vindicate the common faith, piety, and concerns of the church, as if he had a spiritual monopoly, in which he wishes to be and be seen. This is contrary to 1 Corinthians 14:5 and Philipians 1:18.

(g) When someone is very careful to hold on to, and defend, his laxity, so that he fears everything that is safe, and distrusts anything that does not conform to his laxity or formal piety, so that he gets involved with evil, and undertakes various schemes and devices by which he leads Nathaniels and Nazarenes away from strict piety, or confuses them.

(h) When anyone does the right thing exactly and mechanically, to gain the approval of men.

This completes the positive presentation. Practical and homiletical method can easily be applied to it. Motives are to be found in the efficient causes which arouse action, and in the adjuncts and effects; means, in the efficient causes that direct action. Only let me emphasize . . . that the religious man often leaves undone that which the law permits, or does more than is required, to be preserved more surely from sin, and to be that much further from any occasion for evil. I will add this testimony and argument *ad hominem* from Grotius, who was acceptable to the Remonstrants . . . [and] unsympathetic toward Precisionism. The words are from his notes on 2 Corinthians 11:24: "Forty stripes would have been legal, for Deuteronomy 25:3 provides it. . . . They were wise to seek to remain within the number. . . . Nor does this go against what is forbidden in Deuteronomy 4:2 ["You shall not add to the word"], for to add to the law is to do what the law forbids, and to take away from it is to fail to do what it requires." . . . The Grotius who here praises the Jews is in conflict with the Grotius who, in his attacks on our reformation, goes beyond the responsibilities of the healer. . . .

ix. Now comes the apologetic section, where we take up the question whether all believers are obliged to follow this "precision."

*First argument:* Ephesians 5:15 collated with the texts in which separation, freedom from the world, and spiritual elevation or excellence on the part of believers in the practice of piety is taught (for instance, Tit. 2:14; Jn. 15:19; 1 Pet. 2:9,11; Jer. 2:3; Rom. 12:2; Eph. 5:11; 2 Cor. 6:17, 7:1-2).

*Second argument:* We ought to seek perfection in the parts, grades, and duration [of the law], and this is required of every individual (Phil. 3:15-17; Mt. 5:48; Ps. 119:8,128; 1 Thess. 5:10).

*Third argument:* We ought to be diligent, and abound in the works of the Lord (2 Cor. 5:9; 1 Cor. 15:58).

*Fourth argument:* The way is hard, and the gate is narrow (Mt. 7:13).

*Fifth argument:* The kingdom of heaven suffers violence (Mt. 11:12), and the righteous are saved with difficulty (1 Pet. 4:18). On this, see the commentaries and the meditations of preachers.

*Sixth argument:* We ought to follow the commandments of God wholeheartedly and altogether (Ps. 119:4, with Deut. 6:5).

*Seventh argument:* The love of Christ controls us (2 Cor. 5:14).

*Eighth argument:* We ought to be aglow and zealous (Rom. 12:11; Rev. 3:2,15; Gal. 4:17); see the sermons on zeal by Perkins, Ward, Baines. . . .

*Ninth argument:* We ought to abstain from every form of evil (1 Thess. 5:22, with Jude 23). This is compared to the chastity of virgins (Song 1:4, with 2 Cor. 11:2).

*Tenth argument:* The faithful are few, the truly pious are exceptions, a little flock [Lk. 12:32], so that they are a people set apart, they walk alone, they form a different and uplifted community, that can be seen and recognized by all (Is. 61:9). And this in fact is a sign, they shall be sought by the eyes, ears, hatred, and scorn of all (Is. 8:18; Jer. 20:7).

*Eleventh argument:* Individual and special gifts of grace are given and made evident, and the weight of glory is prepared individually for each (1 Tim. 1; 2 Cor. 4).

*Twelfth argument:* The example of Christ and the saints, among them Noah, Lot, Jeremiah, and Paul.

*Thirteenth argument:* The opposite and evil example of the worldly and carnal, who are the opposite of precise in their own affairs, and in relations with others; they go their own way in arts, in sciences, in wealth,

in honor, in worldliness and honor at home and everywhere, and too often the faithful are drawn after them. Now if they are conspicuous in these vain affairs that are destined to perish, how much more should the faithful be conspicuous in the affairs of the heavenly kingdom? (1 Cor. 9:25; see the notes of Beza and other commentators.)

*Fourteenth argument:* The consensus and practice of antiquity. Concerning the practice of the faithful in the primitive church, especially the martyrs and confessors, church history is the witness. For their opinion and conclusion, see Augustine on Psalm 90 and 93, Chrysostom's twenty-second homily on Genesis and fifteenth homily to the people of Antioch, Augustine's sixty-fourth sermon. Among papists, read Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ* in its entirety, and John Lanspergius [Landsberg] the Carthusian's *Pharetra de Divini Amoris*, where, in a "letter from Christ to a faithful soul," many excellent things about being different are said. "In conversation, show a countenance not externally sad or disturbed, but calm, lest your conversation be unwelcome to others. Avoid peculiarities in connection with ceremonies or works, and unnecessary devotional signs in the presence of others. Then, whatever is necessary for your soul, whatever your station in life and your Christian profession requires, whatever is necessary for obtaining virtue or avoiding vice, in that do not be afraid to be different; when others do not agree with you, if they neglect their own salvation, all the more bear humbly and patiently their derision and persecution, for the sake of your salvation, for the sake of goodness, and finally, in order to please me [Christ]." We shall give no selections from Augustine, Chrysostom, and à Kempis; we prefer that these readily available writers be read at your convenience. Among our theologians [Robert] Bolton's *Walk with God* is to be read first, then Daniel Dyke, Preston, [William] Teelingius . . . , and his brother Ewald. . . .

x. The objections and exceptions against "precision" and the practice of exact piety in private or in public will be briefly noted, with replies.

*First objection:* If everything must be done with such care and exactness, conscience will always hesitate in doubt, and never be tranquil.

*Reply:* Those who practice religion must distinguish between the precision that is scrupulosity and superstition, and the precision and integrity that are required by God's word. If anyone means the first, he goes beyond the limits; no one approves of this except the Pharisaic, papal-monastic, or deluded spirit. If one means the second, the objection has no foundation. Further, we must point out that carnal and spiritual

security must be distinguished. The first is the companion of laxity; the second, of true precision and integrity.

*Second objection:* [Precision] destroys Christian freedom, and places shackles on the judgment or rulership of conscience.

*Reply:* This cannot be done by the precision required in the word of God; to say that it can is to state a contradiction. Our exact and sound theology of Christian freedom, the adiaphora, scandal, the obligations of the divine law, and the practice of conscience should be consulted.

*Third objection:* This strict observance, and precision beyond what others do, suggests hypocrisy.

*Reply:* The word of God cannot teach hypocrisy, which is the quintessence and culmination of all sins (Ps. 119:2-6). But we may say that immorality and looseness in life is and suggests hypocrisy (Mt. 24:51). . . .

*Fourth objection:* To elevate oneself above one's brethren, and to cling to one's peculiarities, is a case of pride and disdain of others, and therefore interferes with their light, and brings them into contempt.

*Reply:* To desire to obey all the commandments of God is the supreme humility. No true believer intends or should intend contempt for his brethren by his piety *per se*.

If this [contempt for brethren] takes place, it is altogether *per accidens*. The true good in questions of religion ought not to be overlooked or blamed because of the weakness or fault of another, and consequently on account of something *per accidens*, even if this takes place (Phil. 3:15-17; Gal. 6:1-7).

*Fifth objection:* Such a rule for walking so exactly and completely is not given in the word of God.

*Reply:* . . . We shall reply in one sentence: In our preceding theses it has been proved [that there is such a rule].

*Sixth objection:* [What the precisionists require] is impossible.

*Reply:* See Preston on Ephesians 5:15. We reply that it is our duty, and that is enough, to oblige both preachers to teach it, and members of the congregation to acknowledge their obligation and work at it; and when they see that they cannot perform it, to think and act as the [Heidelberg] Catechism soundly teaches, on the basis of Scripture, in Question 115.<sup>60</sup>

60. The question and its answer are printed at the head of this section of the chapter ("Concerning Precision"). One of the standing differences between Reformed and Roman ethics is of course the teaching of Reformed theology that even the redeemed cannot do what God requires (Wollebius, Book II, Chapter I, Section (1), Propositions xi-xii).

*Seventh objection:* It is not useful to the commonwealth.

*Reply:* . . . As if the safety of the commonwealth depended on Christians living in [carnal] security, indulging themselves in sin, and making laws contrary to the law of God!

*Eighth objection:* Although it is useful and possible, it is not necessary. *Reply:* That it is necessary at least with the necessity of the commandment, I believe no sane person denies. This is what our catechism teaches in Question 115, with which the reader should compare Question 113, on the tenth commandment. This commandment must be obeyed, although neither it nor any other commandment, or any good work, is really possible, in the sense that the catechism teaches in Questions 60, 62, 114, 115.

*Ninth objection:* One [who adopts the precisionist point of view] seems to assume that he is wiser than the majority, and than others in the congregation.

*Reply:* See Bolton . . . Augustine on Psalms 90 and 93, and Chrysostom's twenty-second and twenty-third homilies on Genesis. The replies that Reformed theologians have made to papists, and to those who uphold the hierarchy and the ceremonies in England, may be applied by analogy to this case.

*Tenth objection:* Precision makes men introspective and even absurd, and is contrary to prudence.

*Reply:* If this happens to anyone, it is *per accidens*. Who would want to relegate all meditation on the Scripture, concern and sensitivity of conscience, Christian watchfulness, devotion, and application, and even concern for everyday wisdom, to the Garamantes?<sup>61</sup> Prudence, which does not neglect the necessary care of the physical constitution and powers of the body, is found among them. But Christian prudence must be said to be elsewhere.

*Eleventh objection:* We ought to be all things to all men (1 Cor. 9:22).

*Reply:* See commentaries on this text, and apologetic writings against the libertines, Nicodemites, and indifferentists, all of whom misuse it in attacks on the external profession of religion.

*Twelfth objection:* "Be not righteous overmuch" (Eccles. 7:16).

*Reply:* This can legitimately be interpreted as meaning that we are not to judge too strictly concerning the deeds and condition of others whom we see to be afflicted by God. Several Dutch and English commentators explain it thus by collation with verse 15. The "overmuch"

61. The southernmost nation known to classical geography (Herodotus IV.183).

shows that those vices which men, by error or catachresis, call virtues, "too religious," "too conscientious," "too generous," are meant. . . .<sup>62</sup>

*Thirteenth objection:* [Precision] seems to suggest the ancient Cathari and the modern sect of Anabaptists, and the asceticism and superstition of monks.

*Reply:* There is nothing that it suggests less. Let the decision be made rightly, and by comparison [of teachings]. We are opposed to the pontifical religion or superstition, which tries to vilify the true Reformed faith by the hated name of "Puritan," rightly "Catharist." . . . Other words often occur in satires and the words of profane men . . . : "opinionated," "foolish-wise," "long-nosed," "supercilious," "spiritually proud," "Pharisees," "more righteous" or "perfectionists," "hypocrites," "Diotrephists," "themselves-aloners" (a word often used, as by Grotius . . . perhaps in allusion to Job 12:2), "gnat-strainers. . . ."

*Fourteenth objection:* It suggests Brownism, Independency, and other precisionist-fanatical sects.

*Reply:* The sound of words without meaning or sense. What does the practice of, and zeal for, piety according to the word of God have in common with the opinions of Brownists and Independents about the external government of the church? Where and when have Reformed [theologians] in England and Scotland, or anywhere in the world, condemned the effort for whole and exact piety and righteousness as Brownism? Let the Brownist opinions, as explained and refuted by Reformed teachers generally, or by some synod or classis, or by one orthodox theologian, be set forth and compared with this doctrine of precision, and a sound conclusion drawn.

*Fifteenth objection:* This preaching and demanding of a strict and precise law is contrary to goodness, moderation, equity, easing, release [from legal burdens], and evangelical freedom, under the New Testament.

*Reply:* This is the antinomian sophistry, which we shall do away with by using a common distinction. Not an easing, but a complete remission and freedom from the law through grace is given by the gospel, if one considers its demand for absolute and perfect obedience, with the attached promise of salvation and warning of a curse. But this remission is denied, if one considers it from the standpoint of guidance of life, and

62. About a page, consisting of exegetical and other references to the problem of "excess virtue," especially as connected with the text in question, has been omitted. Among the authors incidentally mentioned is Voetius's contemporary Cocceius, whose interest in Biblical theology is well known. There are references to Aquinas (1-11.LV.14) and Augustine (*De Lib. Arbitrio* 2).



our obligation to a perfection of gratitude and an excellence of new obedience. Nor was the law made less in any part or degree after the fall, or after Moses, or after the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, under the New Testament. . . .

x. Having settled the major controversies, we add these problems:

*First [problem]:* Whether any sect or confession in Christendom today advocates "precision" as well as does the Reformed church?

*Reply: Negative,* especially by comparison with papists and Remonstrants. . . . The papists disclose this sufficiently in connection with the whole decalogue, as has been shown by Gomarus, Molinaeus, Rivet, Thunnius, Danhauwer, and ourselves. . . . As for the Remonstrants, the minutes of the convention of Rotterdam (1624) declare that moderation and toleration are proper in their fellowship, from which those acquainted with their affairs can easily learn that their religion does not agree with Precisionism, but rather with laxity and anti-Precisionism. . . . In the true Remonstrant theology and in some bitter writings of Episcopius this is clear enough. As to particular sins against particular commandments of the decalogue . . . they have not yet specifically declared themselves. . . . How precise the Socinians, whom [Remonstrants] often like to follow, are, can easily be seen from their own writings, collated with those of their antagonists, especially Maccovius.

*Second [problem]:* Whether the Remonstrant book of family devotions by Edward Poppius, entitled "The Narrow Gate,"<sup>63</sup> really teaches Precisionism and the narrow way.

*Reply: Negative.* . . .

*Third [problem]:* Whether precision should be discussed in theology, and whether our catechism mentions it in Questions 123, 124, and 125 on the act signified, and in Question 115 on the act truly performed through the whole decalogue, and especially the tenth commandment.

*Reply: Affirmative.*

*Fourth [problem]:* Whether the first reformers, and the first Reformed churches, especially in France, Holland, etc., wanted, desired, and sought precision in the matter of reformation in doctrine, polity, discipline, ceremonies, and morals for the reborn on every occasion, although they were not always able to secure it.

*Reply: Affirmative.* This is proved by their first ecclesiastical constitu-

tions, the practice and decrees of synods, and the leading writers. . . . The general consent and practice of our [Dutch] churches teaches the same thing. . . .

*Fifth [problem]:* Whether, therefore, all Reformed [people], or anyone who teaches, upholds, and advocates precision on the basis of Scripture, professes or boasts that he is precise and perfect, superior to others.

*Reply:* When we defend precision and the perfect assurance of faith, in spite of every doubt, the papists sarcastically reply that we speak boastfully of our perfect assurance, never of our doubts; the Reformed [theologians] reply that there is a difference between the legitimacy or usefulness of this assurance and the actual possession of it; that assurance must be distinguished as objective and subjective, and as evident or inherent; that it is one thing that this knowledge be rightfully ours in part, and in desire . . . and another that it be complete. In a similar way, when you apply this by analogy to precision in religious living and in any particular good work, you will find that the smoke which has been spread about will vanish.

*Sixth [problem]:* Whether precision and separation destroy Christian humility, compassion, and equity.

*Reply:* By no means, but they necessarily include them. For, walking with precision and exactness, one sees clearly that one is far from the precision that one intends and desires, and so one gives that much more attention to oneself and one's precision, that one may eventually be called a spiritual man and perfect, in Scriptural manner, and consequently often displays a precise and exact walk which bears the burdens of others (Gal. 6:1-2). This is the gentle and lowly example of Christ (Mt. 11:29), who readily forgives (Eph. 4:32), and can be compassionate to the ignorant and erring (Heb. 5:2), and the example of Paul and of all the mature (Phil. 3:15). I hope . . . that anyone who complains of Calvin's rigor will read his *De Vitandis Superstitionibus* [CR XXXIV, 628ff.], and *Excusatio ad Nicodemitas* [CR XXXIV, 589ff.] . . . , and the sermon on Psalm 16. . . . Add to these his letters, especially to Cranmer, Knox, and the German theologians, and his life as described by Beza, with the writings of Rivet against Sylvesterus and against Hugo Grotius, and you will much more readily avoid the shouting against too much precision and rigor which Erasmus and Cassander and men like them, the followers of the theologians of doubt, pseudo-Nicodemites, syncrysts, opponents of discipline, Richard Montague, William Laud and the

63. See, in this volume, *Disputation on Practical Theology*, I.1.

Laudians in England, Coornhert and the semi-libertines, indifferentists, Remonstrants, neo-Arians and Photinians, Castellio, Grotius, who took the papal side,<sup>64</sup> and others, some lukewarm, some cold, stir up as they exert themselves on behalf of this world or of their wisdom.

64. Grotius had died in the preceding year. The "orthodox" asserted that he had become a Roman Catholic, as the Remonstrant Peter Bertijs had done, and as the Laudian "Arminians" in England seemed, to the "orthodox," to be on the point of doing.

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