

BETWEEN GROTIUS AND COCCEIUS: THE 'THEOLOGIA
PROPHETICA' OF CAMPEGIUS VITRINGA (1659–1722)

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Introduction

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries Christianity came under heavy attack from a growing group of sceptics and atheists. These enemies of the 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. If it could be proven that both miracles and prophecies were of no use in the defence of the truth of Christianity, the divine authority of Scripture would be called into question and thus the foundations of Christianity itself would be shaken. This attack called forth a strong reaction from all kinds of theologians, enlightened as well as pietist, who made the apologetic validity of miracles and prophecies a hotly debated subject in the age of the (early) Enlightenment. It is well-known that in England a vehement debate on these apologetic proofs occurred in the first half of the eighteenth century. It is less known that in the Dutch Republic the same subject was being discussed already some time earlier, in the last decades of the seventeenth century. In this discussion Grotius' hermeneutical method concerning the biblical prophecies was one of the main issues.

In England the discussion actually started when Newton's successor at Cambridge William Whiston (1667–1752) delivered the Boyle Lectures in 1707 on the interpretation of scriptural prophecies, in which he stated that a prophecy could only have one meaning; he rejected the typological interpretation.¹ In the 1720s Whiston's publications on this subject provoked a reaction from the eminent deist – or rather, speculative atheist – the lawyer Anthony Collins (1676–1729), "the Goliath of Freethinking." Collins' views implied that the argument from prophecy as proof of the Christian religion did not have any validity. This argument was only valid if the prophecy was interpreted in an allegorical sense, but he obviously regarded

¹ WILLIAM WHISTON, *The Accomplishment of Scripture Prophecies*, Cambridge 1708. In 1722 Whiston published his *Essay Towards Restoring the True Text of the Old Testament*, which caused Collins to publish his *Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons*, 1724.

such an allegorical interpretation as absurd. He would have agreed wholeheartedly with the observation that "if we should once allow this typical or allegorical way of explaining Scripture, one might prove the history of Guy of Warwick out of the first chapters of Genesis."² Collins' publications, entitled *Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion* (1724) and *The Scheme of Literal Prophecy considered* (1727), called forth a stream of reactions. His attack on the prophecies was regarded as an assault on Christian belief as such.

Collins was well aware of the fact that he did not stand alone in his battle. There was one scholar in particular to whom he could appeal as a prominent supporter, Hugo Grotius, "the most Judicious of Interpreters," as Collins called him.³ In his *Scheme of Literal Prophecy Considered* Collins devoted a whole chapter to the defence of Grotius. Collins' own position with regard to the interpretation of the prophecies was inspired by the views of Grotius as well as other Dutch Arminians such as Simon Episcopius and Jean Le Clerc.⁴ Whether or not Collins had interpreted Grotius' observations accurately – Le Clerc expressed his doubts on that point – one thing was obvious: Grotius' ideas about the biblical prophecies could be most appropriately used in the enlightened assault upon scriptural authority and so challenge the traditional beliefs of Christianity.

It was precisely this use which could be made of Grotius that long rendered him so unpopular in the eyes of the orthodox divines. He, the author of the famous apologetic treatise *De veritate religionis christianae*, was considered one of those Christians who attempted to undermine Christianity from within the Church itself. He was ranged among the enemies of the Christian religion together with men such as Hobbes and Spinoza, who had also launched an attack against prophets and prophecies, the first in his *Leviathan* (1651), the latter in his *Tractatus theologico-politicus* (1670). At any rate, Grotius' disrespect for the prophetic word found no favour with the

² W. NICHOLLS, *Conference with a Theist*, London 1698, III, p. 19 (quoted by JAMES O'HIGGINS S.J., *Anthony Collins. The Man and his Works*, The Hague 1970, p. 160).

³ *Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons*, p. 42. For Anthony Collins, see O'HIGGINS, *Anthony Collins* (see note 2). See also H.W. FREI, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative. A Study in 18th and 19th Century Hermeneutics*, 1974, pp. 66–85; DAVID BERMAN, *A History of Atheism in Britain: from Hobbes to Russell*, London – New York 1988, ch. 3, pp. 70–92. On the deist debate in England, see G.V. LECHLER, *Geschichte des Englischen Deismus*, Stuttgart – Tübingen 1841; HENNING GRAF REVENTLOW, *Bibelautorität und Geist der Moderne. Die Bedeutung des Bibelverständnisses für die geistesgeschichtliche und politische Entwicklung in England von der Reformation bis zur Aufklärung* [Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte, 30], Göttingen 1980, pp. 363–65, p. 609 n. 119 (= *The Authority of the Bible and the Rise of the Modern World*, London 1984).

⁴ O'HIGGINS, *Anthony Collins*, p. 156.

orthodox defenders of the Christian faith and so Grotius became a popular target in the apologetic literature of the age, Protestant as well as Roman Catholic.⁵ It would be wrong, however, to view the judgement on Grotius as completely negative. Some theologians showed a certain open-mindedness towards Grotius' line of thinking. These included the Dutch theologian Campegius Vitranga.

Campegius Vitranga (1659–1722)

Campegius Vitranga was professor of oriental languages, theology and church history at Franeker university (Friesland) from 1680 until his death in 1722.⁶ At the time Franeker's theological faculty bore a liberal stamp, occasioned by its open-mindedness towards Cocceian and Cartesian theology. Vitranga was no exception: he adhered to a moderate complex of Cocceian and Cartesian tenets. He was known for his vast scholarship that went hand in hand with a deep piety and an irenic mind. As a disciple of Johannes Cocceius Vitranga was an exponent of the federal theology, which possessed elements similar to Grotius' ideas on natural law. Belonging to the so-called 'serious' or pietistic Cocceians, he showed great interest in practical theology, mysticism, quietism and asceticism. Through his works, which were translated into various languages,

⁵ For a Roman Catholic attack on Grotius' views on the prophecies, see for example JEAN-FRANÇOIS BALTUS S.J., *Défense des prophéties*, I-III, 1737. A Dutch translation appeared in Leiden in 1747 (*Verdediging der profeteetsien van den kristelyken godtsdienst ... tegen twee vermaarde mannen, Hugo Grotius en Richard Simon*) with a preface by the Leiden professor of theology Joan van den Honert, a fervent student of the 'theologia prophetica.'

⁶ For Campegius Vitranga, see W.F.C.J. VAN HEEL, *Campegius Vitranga Sr. als godgeleerde beschouwd*, diss. Utrecht, 's-Gravenhage 1865; CHR. SEPP, *Johannes Stinstra en zijn tijd I*, Amsterdam 1865, pp. 39–44; HERMAN BAUCH, *Die Lehre vom Wirken des Heiligen Geistes im Frühpietismus*, Hamburg 1974; *Biografisch Lexikon voor de Geschiedenis van het Nederlandse Protestantisme III*, Kampen 1988, pp. 379–82 (K.M. WITTEVEEN); J. VAN SLUIS, *Herman Alexander Röell*, diss. Groningen, Ljouwert/Leeuwarden [1988], passim; K.M. WITTEVEEN, "Campegius Vitranga und die prophetische Theologie," in HEIKO A. OBERMAN et al. (edd.), *Reformiertes Erbe. Festschrift für Gottfried W. Locher zu seinem 80. Geburtstag*, Band II [= Zwingliana XIX/2], Zürich 1992 [= 1993], pp. 343–59. See also H.W.M. VAN DE SANDT, *Joan Alberti. Een Nederlandse theoloog en classicus in de achttiende eeuw*, diss. Utrecht 1984, passim. On Franeker theological faculty, see J. VAN DEN BERG, "Theologiebeoefening te Franeker en te Leiden in de achttiende eeuw," *It Beaken* 47 (1985), pp. 181–91 (= "Theology in Leiden and Franeker in the eighteenth century," in *Festschrift J. van den Berg* (forthcoming)). Twice Vitranga was appointed professor in Utrecht, but he never left Franeker: in 1698 his nomination as successor to his former teacher Herman Witsius was vetoed by stadtholder-king William III on account of his Cocceian-Cartesian ideas; in 1702 Vitranga himself refused to accept the appointment. Vitranga's son, like his father named Campegius (1693–1723), was also professor at Franeker.

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and his many students from the Dutch Republic as well as from abroad (Hungary, Poland, France, Germany, Scotland), Vitringa's influence made itself felt for a long time, lasting well into the nineteenth century. Above all his eschatological ideas were influential among such famous pietists as Philipp Jakob Spener, August Hermann Francke, and Johann Albrecht Bengel. His dogmatic work, entitled *Aphorismi quibus fundamenta S. Theologiae comprehenduntur*, was reprinted several times. His *Commentarius in librum prophetiarum Jesaiae*⁷ was highly praised by contemporary and later exegetes. So was his commentary on the Book of Revelation, entitled *Anacrisis Apocalypsis Joannis Apostoli*.⁸ Vitringa was especially known for his exegetical achievements. He had acquired a great familiarity with philology, history, geology, archeology, and Jewish antiquities. Furthermore he was a prophetic theologian par excellence. Prophetic exegesis was most important to him, as is apparent from the long commentaries just mentioned as well as his methodological treatise, entitled *Typus doctrinae propheticae*.⁹ Vitringa lends himself particularly well as an illustration of the open-mindedness of orthodox divines towards the Grotian line of prophetic thinking. In his prophetic theology he attempted to steer a middle course between the concepts of the two scholars who had formulated the main prophetic systems of his day: Hugo Grotius and Johannes Cocceius. In his own 'studium propheticum' Vitringa tried to connect the Grotian and Cocceian systems.

⁷ *Commentarius in librum prophetiarum Jesaiae, quo sensus orationis ejus sedulo investigatur, in veras visorum interpretandorum hypotheses inquiruntur, et ex iisdem facta interpretatio antiquae historiae monumentis confirmatur atque illustratur.* The first volume was published in Leeuwarden in 1714; second edition 1724. The second volume was published in 1720; reprinted with the first volume in 1724. Other editions: Herborn 1721; Basel 1732. A Dutch translation appeared in Leeuwarden in 1739; a German translation in Halle in 1739 (preface by Johann Lorenz von Mosheim). On the merits of this commentary, see ALBERT SCHULTENS, *Laudatio funebris in memoriam Campegi Vitringae*, in CAMPEGIUS VITRINGA, *Commentarius ... Jesaiae I*, Leeuwarden 1724, pp. 1-31, esp. pp. 19-20: "immortale illud in Jesaiam monumentum, opere magnifico conditum, perennibusque literis incisum velut, ac sempiternae gloriae dedicatum. Quicquid ab ingenio humano proficisci potest, huc congestum est et effusum." See also LUDWIG DIESTEL, *Geschichte des Alten Testaments in der christlichen Kirche*, Jena 1869, pp. 436-38; HANS JOACHIM KRAUS, *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments*, 3. erw. Aufl., Neukirchen - Vluyn 1982, pp. 91-92.

⁸ First edition Franeker 1705; second, enlarged edition Amsterdam 1719; third edition Wittenberg 1721. A Dutch translation: Amsterdam 1728 (date of Vitringa's preface: 9 March 1719); the preface to this translation is an elaborated version of the Latin one.

⁹ *Typus doctrinae propheticae, in quo de prophetis et prophetiis agitur, hujusque scientiae praecepta traduntur.* First edition: Franeker 1708. Usually together with his *Hypothyposis Historiae et Chronologiae sacrae a M.C. usque ad finem saec. I*, Franeker 1708; second edition: Leeuwarden 1716; third edition: Leeuwarden 1722.

Hugo Grotius and Johannes Cocceius on Scriptural Prophecies

As a well-known seventeenth-century saying went: "Cocceius found Christ everywhere in Scripture, while Grotius found Him practically nowhere."¹⁰ This saying was inspired by their different views on the interpretation of the biblical prophecies. Hugo Grotius stressed the almost immediate fulfilment of the prophecies, advocating the so-called preterist view. This implied that he did not generally interpret the prophecies as referring to Christ; he thus believed that Isaiah 53 referred to Jeremiah instead of Christ. He parted company with current opinion of his day in his conviction that the Old Testament prophecies dealt first and foremost with the people of Israel. 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. In his annotations on the Book of Revelation Grotius saw the fulfilment of those apocalyptic visions in the days of the pagan Roman empire; a line of thinking which differed greatly from current Protestant interpretation of the Apocalypse. Grotius' exposition of the prophecies was not fully preterist: his interpretation was obviously not free from historicist elements.¹¹

The most influential prophetic system of the (early) Enlightenment was Cocceianism. It stemmed from the German theologian and orientalist Johannes Cocceius, who, after having been professor of oriental languages and theology at Franeker, taught at Leiden

¹⁰ Thus RICHARD SIMON, *Histoire critique des principaux commentateurs du Nouveau Testament*, 1693, p. 764: "On dit de lui (Cocceius) qu'il trouvait partout le Messie et que Grotius tout au contraire, qu'il combat ordinairement, ne le trouvoit presque en aucun endroit." Cf. J.F. BUDDAEUS, *Isagoge historico theologica* II, Lipsiae 1730, p. 1508: "Passim celebratur illud quorundam judicium: Grotium nusquam in sacris litteris invenire Christum, Cocceium ubique."

¹¹ See DAVID BRADY, *The Contribution of British Writers between 1560 and 1830 to the Interpretation of Revelation 13.16-18* [Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese, 27], Tübingen 1983, p. 168, and passim. For Grotius' exegetical ideas, see A. KUENEN, "Hugo de Groot als uitlegger van het Oude Verbond," in *Verlagen en Mededeelingen der Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, afd. Letterkunde, 2e reeks*, 12 (1883), pp. 301-32 (= "Hugo Grotius als Ausleger des Alten Testaments," in ABRAHAM KUENEN, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen zur biblischen Wissenschaft*, Freiburg i.B. - Leipzig 1894, pp. 161-85); H.J. DE JONGE, "Hugo Grotius: exégète du Nouveau Testament," in *The World of Hugo Grotius (1583-1645). Proceedings of the International Colloquium ... Rotterdam 6-9 April 1983*, Amsterdam - Maarssen 1984, pp. 97-115; HENNING GRAF REVENTLOW, "L'exégèse de Hugo Grotius," in JEAN-ROBERT ARMOGATHE, *Le Grand Siècle et la Bible* [= Bible de Tous les Temps 6], Paris 1989, pp. 141-55; J.P. HEERING, *Hugo de Groot als apologet van de christelijke godsdienst*, diss. Leiden, 's-Gravenhage 1992.

University from 1650 till his death in 1669.¹² During his Franeker professorship Cocceius got involved in a debate with Grotius on the latter's interpretation of Antichrist. Grotius was of the opinion – which was quite unusual among Protestants at the time – that Antichrist should not be identified with the pope. In his *De antichristo* (1641) and other works Cocceius defended the current Protestant viewpoint. Cocceius wanted to be a biblical theologian; unlike his colleague from Utrecht, Gisbertus Voetius, he said farewell to the use of Aristotelian scholasticism in theology. Theology and philosophy each had their own field and we should not read Scripture with philosophical concepts in mind: "... necesse est, ut, qui ad Scripturarum disciplinam accedit, non habeat praejudicatam, quam ex sua Philosophia acceperit, sapientiae opinionem; sed, ut puer, se a Scriptura doceri exspectat."¹³ Yet among his followers many felt themselves attracted to philosophical studies, in particular to the novel philosophy of René Descartes. They even went so far as to formulate a kind of Cartesian theology, which, together with prophetic theology, would give rise to vehement quarrels in the Dutch Reformed Church in the early Enlightenment.¹⁴

Cocceius' basic hermeneutical principle was expressed in the following – and often misquoted – maxim: "Significatio sumenda est non ex aliqua potestate singulorum verborum, aut phraseos alicujus, aut enunciationis alicujus, sed ex tota compage sermonis... Id ergo significant verba, quod possunt significare in integra oratione, sic ut omnino inter se convenient, ut appareat Deum sapienter ac apte ad docendum esse locutum."¹⁵ Moreover, Scripture was seen by him as a harmonious system. On the basis of this important concept of

¹² For Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669), see GOTTLÖB SCHRENK, *Gottesreich und Bund im älteren Protestantismus, vornehmlich bei Johannes Coccejus*, Gütersloh 1923 [= Basel 1985]; HEINER FAULENBACH, *Weg und Ziel der Erkenntnis Christi. Eine Untersuchung zur Theologie des Johannes Coccejus* [= Beiträge zur Geschichte und Lehre der Reformierten Kirche, 36], Neukirchen – Vluyn 1973; W.J. VAN ASSELT, *Amicitia Dei. Een onderzoek naar de structuur van de theologie van Johannes Coccejus (1603–1669)*, diss. Utrecht, Ede 1988.

¹³ See JOHANNES COCCEIUS, *Commentarius in Epistolam ad Philippenses*, 1669, Praefatio, p. 7. Cf. RICHARD SIMON on Cocceius: "Toute son occupation etoit le simple texte de la Bible, sur lequel il meditoit sans cesse" (*Histoire critique des principaux commentateurs du Nouveau Testament*, p. 764).

¹⁴ See ERNESTINE VAN DER WALL, "Scepticism and Orthodoxy in the early Dutch Enlightenment," in R.H. POPKIN – A.J. VANDERJAGT (edd.), *Scepticism and Irreligion in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* [= Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, 37], Leiden 1993, pp. 121–49; ERNESTINE VAN DER WALL, "Profetie en providentie. De coccejanen en de vroege Verlichting," in P. BANGE et al. (edd.), *Kerk en Verlichting. Voordrachten gehouden op het Windesheim Symposium te Windesheim op 18 november 1990*, Zwolle 1991, pp. 29–37.

¹⁵ See JOHANNES COCCEIUS, *Commentarius in Epistolam ad Romanos*, 1665, Praefatio.

scriptural harmony Cocceius discovered the same subject everywhere in the Bible, and especially in the prophecies: Christ and His Kingdom. The Bible became a prolonged prophecy of the history of the Christian Church; prophecy and history were closely linked. Thus Cocceius developed a dynamic theology of history: God's Kingdom gradually came to be revealed in the course of the centuries. History was divided into seven periods – the number seven being most important to Cocceius –, and he believed that the seventh and last period, the millennium, was imminent. Thanks to his prophetic theology, eschatological thinking with a light millenarian flavour gained admittance into the world of Reformed orthodoxy. Thus in the Dutch Republic a similar development occurred to what happened elsewhere in Europe: while at first millenarian thinking was mainly found among religious dissidents, this special form of eschatology became more or less respectable in orthodox circles in the latter half of the seventeenth century.¹⁶

Following in the footsteps of Cocceius, albeit in an independent way, his disciples developed, and intensely pursued, a specific genre, the 'theologia prophetica.'¹⁷ Prophetic theology was concerned with the interpretation of the prophecies and so with biblical exegesis. Its students were no enthusiasts or fanatics who believed in new revelations to be disclosed in their own time – Vitringa himself emphasized this in the preface to his commentary on Isaiah –, but they occupied themselves with the scholarly study of the prophecies. They tried to formulate general rules for explaining the prophecies and wrote lengthy theoretical and methodological expositions on the topic. Typology (or, as their opponents liked to name it, "typomania"), allegory, emblematic theology: all were used in their hermeneutics. Prophetic theology was so popular because it bore witness to God's providence in history and so to His existence: the 'theologia prophetica' was intended as an apologetic instrument to show unbelievers that there was a God who, moreover, ruled history. Besides, prophetic evidence showed that the Bible was of divine origin. Time and again, until the end of the eighteenth century, this apologetic motive of prophetic theology was expressed by the adherents of the 'studium propheticum.' Prophetic theology soon be-

¹⁶ See ERNESTINE VAN DER WALL, "Antichrist Stormed": The Glorious Revolution and the Dutch Prophetic Tradition," in DALE HOAK – MORDECHAI FEINGOLD (edd.), *The World of William and Mary: Politics, Commerce, Ideas and Culture. Essays commemorating the Tercentenary of the Glorious Revolution*, California (forthcoming).

¹⁷ On prophetic theology, see GRETE MÖLLER, "Föderalismus und Geschichtsbeachtung im XVII. und XVIII. Jahrhundert," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 50 (1931), pp. 393–440.

came as popular as that other beloved apologetic weapon: physico-theology. Just as physicotheology appealed to God's work in nature, so prophetic theology appealed to His work in history. Both were meant to contribute to the refutation of sceptics and atheists.

For most divines in the (early) Enlightenment the choice between the preterist approach of Grotius and the historicist method of Cocceius was not a difficult one: there was a strong predilection for the latter. Campegius Vitringa was no exception to the rule. Though he often praised Grotius' philological achievements (as well as those of Erasmus) and seriously tried to connect Grotius' hermeneutics with those of Cocceius, he undoubtedly preferred the Cocceian view of history. Nevertheless he wanted to curb the typological extravagances of Cocceian exegesis. In this he surely followed in the footsteps of his teacher Herman Witsius.¹⁸ Cocceian exegetes often lost themselves in intricate typological expositions in order to show the harmony of the Old and New Testament and its central theme: Christ and his Kingdom. Campegius Vitringa did not advocate such an extreme typological method. He had read Grotius and although he did not approve of Grotius' method in general, we get the impression that some of his exegetical notions were formulated with Grotius in mind. In what way did Vitringa use Grotius as a guide?

Being convinced of the absolute necessity of the 'studium propheticum' for theology as a whole Vitringa, like so many prophetic theologians, liked to write about the methodological aspects of prophetic theology. Thus he devoted his *Typus doctrinae propheticae* to this 'science,' in which prophecy and history were closely linked: "*Historia enim ut est gestarum, sic prophetia rerum gerendarum narratio. Historia lucem foeneratur prophetiae; prophetia praevertit, et implementum nacta, vicissim illustrat ac confirmat historiam.*" What is a prophecy? "*Prophetia est praedictio casus aut eventus contingentis futuri temporis ex revelatione divina, eaque immediate excepta.*"¹⁹ He strongly emphasizes that a prophecy deals with contingent matters and events: "*Cum enim casus omnes aut eventus rerum vel necessarij sint, qui a physicis et necessariis causis secundum naturae legem atque ordinem pendent; ... vel contingentes, qui necessariam causam habere non intelliguntur, ut sunt hominum volitiones et*

¹⁸ For Herman Witsius (1636-1708), see J. VAN GENDEREN, *Herman Witsius*, diss. Utrecht, 's-Gravenhage 1953. For Witsius' views on Cocceian exegesis, see esp. VAN GENDEREN, *Herman Witsius*, pp. 116-23.

¹⁹ See *Typus doctrinae propheticae*, Praefatio, p. **3. (Quotations are from the edition Leeuwarden 1722).

actiones liberae, earumque consequentia, posterius hoc est prophetiarum verum ac proprium objectum."²⁰ He felt that in Grotius' preterist interpretation this element of contingency was more or less absent. To sum up: "Latius tamen recte dixeris, prophetiam esse scientiam, declarationem, interpretationem ejus quod sciri nequit nisi ex revelatione divina."²¹

We may detect something of a Grotian approach in his rules for the correct interpretation of the prophetic word. The first thing that we have to do when we interpret a prophecy, Vitringa says, is to determine its subject. Does the prophet speak about himself or about other people? Does he talk about things of his own time or of the future? And does he talk about these things in a literal, grammatical sense or in a mystical, figurative one?²² In other words, we need to be well informed about the historical context and the specific style of the various prophets. An exegete ought therefore to be a good historian; a requirement that was eminently fulfilled by Vitringa himself. If a subject in the prophecy has been given a proper name, then we should distinguish between three possible senses in order to determine the meaning of this subject: a grammatical meaning, a mystical one, or a mixture of the two.

Vitringa states that we should never deviate from the literal sense, if everything in the text agrees with such a literal meaning. Time and again he appeals to this 'canon certus et magni usus.' This rule reminds us of Grotius' insistence upon the literal sense. Vitringa, however, does not refer to Grotius, but to a theologian from Saumur, Etienne Gausson, whose *De ratione studii theologicici* (1670) enjoyed a certain popularity well into the eighteenth century.²³ Vitringa maintains that we can only start looking for a mystical meaning if the attributes in the text do not agree with the name of the subject. He adds that if a subject can be interpreted in a mixed sense, both literal and mystical, it will still be more correct to look first for the literal sense, and next for the spiritual meaning.

²⁰ See *Typus doctrinae propheticae*, p. 2.

²¹ See *Typus doctrinae propheticae*, p. 2.

²² See for this and the following, *Typus doctrinae propheticae*, pp. 175 ff.

²³ See *Typus doctrinae propheticae*, p. 176, where a passage is quoted from Gausson's dissertation. For Etienne Gausson (?-1675), see C.G. JÖCHER, *Allgemeines Gelehrtenlexicon* II, Leipzig 1750, p. 889; E. and E. HAAG, *La France protestante* IV (1853), pp. 235-36. Gausson became professor of theology in Saumur in 1665. In 1670 he published *Quatuor dissertationes theologicae*, among them *De ratione studii theologicici*. Other editions: Utrecht 1675 and 1678; Amsterdam 1697; Cassel 1697; Leiden 1698; Frankfurt 1707; Halle 1727 (preface by J.J. Rambach); Leiden 1792. Gausson was highly praised by the Cocceian-Cartesian professor of theology at Utrecht Franciscus Burman as well as by August Hermann Francke.

One example may suffice here: the predictions about the state of the Jewish people after their return from the Babylonian exile refer to their situation in Israel at that time; however, these prophecies obviously bear such an elevated character that we cannot but assume that they also refer to the 'beneficia gratiae' of the New Testament. Criticism of Grotius' views is implied in this rule, since in the eyes of his opponents he had not respected the grandness of such predictions sufficiently with his denial of the mystical, elevated sense of biblical prophecies.

Commentarius in librum prophetiarum Jesaiae

These few theoretical notions give an idea of what Vitringa thought of Grotius' exegesis. For his judgement of Grotius, however, we do not need to browse through his works, but we can turn to the preface of his famous commentary on Isaiah in which he pays ample attention to Grotius' – and Cocceius' – method of interpretation. Vitringa first deals with the exegete's object of determining the grammatical sense of the text and points to the great use of the Masoretic, punctuated version. Yet there are, and will always remain, differences of opinion between interpreters of Isaiah, Jewish exegetes included. Vitringa has used the older Jewish commentators; he pays his particular respects to Abn Ezra and Kimchi. He warns, however, against relying too much upon the Jewish testimonies and ascribing too much to the Jews (as some Christians do), since they are sworn enemies of Christianity. The Christian religion and its proof are based on unshakable grounds and do not need the support of the Jews.²⁴

In his survey of the different methods of interpretation in Christian history Vitringa first deals with the allegorical method of Origen and others in the early Church (Victorinus of Pettau, Eusebius of Caesarea, Cyrillus, Theodoretus, Procopius), who completely ignored the literal sense and interpreted the prophecies as only referring to a distant future: the coming of the Messiah and his Kingdom. Fortunately Jerome knew how to distinguish between the allegorical and the literal interpretation of the prophecies and most medieval and reformation commentators had followed him. Some exegetes, seeing this neglect of the literal meaning, had wanted however to interpret the prophecies in a more historical way as referring to events in the times of the prophets themselves (the Protes-

²⁴ See *Commentarius ... Jesaiae* I, Praefatio, p. 5.

tants Pellican, Calvin, Johannes Brentz, and Piscator; and the Roman Catholic expositors Estius, Sanctius and Tirinus).²⁵

He then comes to Grotius who, as Vitringa observes, has adopted a new method which up till then no Christian exegete had used: "Hugo Grotius, praeclari nominis viri, et in universum de literis immortaliter meritis, cum ne in hac quidem sibi satisfeceret methodo, viam ingressus est novam, hactenus a nemine interpretum Christianorum calcatam, minus tritam, quam existimavit se iis maxime esse persuasurum, qui mysteria sublimiora in doctrinam religionis, et in ipso quoque verbo prophetico, gravantur."²⁶ Vitringa summarizes Grotius' hypothesis – which, as he emphatically points out, has been received with great indignation – that the prophecies generally refer to the Jewish people and the pagan nations of the prophets' own time. According to Grotius there is nothing to be found in Isaiah about the Messiah – or Jesus Christ and His Kingdom – "nisi ex sensu mystico et allegorico." Vitringa calls Grotius' way of thinking a novel method, because, he says, he does not know of any such interpretation having been advanced before Grotius' time; apparently Vitringa still clung to the idea that novelty implied heterodoxy. He points out that the medieval Jewish exegetes Abn Ezra and Moses Hacohen seem to have had similar ideas, but both of them deviated from the traditional Jewish line of thinking. In his famous review of the first volume of the commentary on Isaiah Jean Le Clerc observed that the controversy between some modern theologians and Grotius was not about whether there were two senses in Scripture – this was a common opinion – but whether various Old Testament prophecies which refer to Christ might have had a literal accomplishment less sublime and less precise before having been fulfilled more perfectly in Christ. Grotius answered this question in the affirmative, the others denied it.²⁷

Vitringa next reviews Cocceius' line of analysis, showing how Cocceius interprets not in an allegorical but in a historical way the mysterious names in the prophecies as predicting the events of Jewish or Christian history.²⁸ So Cocceius has generally only agreed

²⁵ See *Commentarius ... Jesaiae* I, Praefatio, pp. 7–9.

²⁶ See for this and the following *Commentarius ... Jesaiae* I, Praefatio, p. 9.

²⁷ JEAN LE CLERC, *Bibliothèque choisie* 27/2 (1713), art. 3, pp. 378–423 (p. 390). He adds that Grotius' ideas are not as novel as is often assumed, referring to the Amsterdam professor of Hebrew and Greek Guilelmus Surenhusius (whose Βίβλος καταλλαγῆς appeared in Amsterdam in 1713), and to Simon de Muis' explication of Psalm 22 which resembles the one by Grotius. "La pensée de Grotius, touchant le double sens des prophéties, n'est pas nouvelle, et les plus outrez allégoristes ont reconnu un double sens." (p. 390).

²⁸ See *Commentarius ... Jesaiae* I, Praefatio, pp. 9–10.

with the literal, historical sense, being convinced that the prophecies speak directly about the Jews or the Romans. Vitranga remarks that in his time there are three different groups of exegetes: some who follow Grotius, others who follow Cocceius, and others again who want to steer a middle course between them. These exegetes of the 'via media,' among which Vitranga clearly reckons himself, acknowledge the historical sense of the prophecies on the one hand, while on the other they are aware of the fact that Christ and His Kingdom are the main subject of the prophecies. So when they find the attributes and characteristics of Christ and His Kingdom in a prophecy, they do not avert their eyes – as Grotius does, Vitranga seems to imply –, but they like to show that Christ is the figure referred to.²⁹

In his opinion Grotius' hermeneutical method is not in accordance with the honour and truth of the Christian religion.³⁰ His main objection to Grotius is that, according to his hypothesis, Christ may not be found in the prophetic word in a direct and grammatical way. Grotius leads the reader away from Christ, even when Christ is clearly referred to. The fact that he prefers to interpret Isaiah 53 as referring to Jeremiah must be the result of shame: "Pudor, non ratio, virum doctum ad hanc sententiam compulsisse videtur." It looks to Vitranga as if a certain heresy of Marcion has been revived according to which the Messiah of the prophets was other than our Jesus.³¹ He points to a recent commentary on Isaiah by Samuel White; White's method of interpreting the prophecies echoes Grotius', but he is more liberal than Grotius, interpreting the last part of Isaiah 52 and the whole of Isaiah 53 as referring in a direct and grammatical sense to Christ.³² If Grotius' hypothesis is correct, how should we interpret the sayings by the apostles that our Messiah was the one prophesied by the Old Testament prophets (John 1.46; Acts 10.43; Acts 3.24; 1 Peter 10.11; Luke 24.27; Acts 18.28)? Did not Christ himself refer to the Old Testament prophecies, as well as to those in Isaiah? Have Christ and his apostles interpreted the prophetic word in a sense other than the interpreters of later times?

²⁹ See *Commentarius ... Jesaiae* I, Praefatio, p. 10.

³⁰ See *Commentarius ... Jesaiae* I, Praefatio, p. 10: "Grotianam hypothesisin, et in ea fundatam methodum, cum honore et veritate sanctissimae religionis nostrae, aut cum auctoritate Christi Jesu et Apostolorum ejus, conciliari posse, aegre admiserim."

³¹ See *Commentarius ... Jesaiae* I, Praefatio, p. 11.

³² See *Commentarius ... Jesaiae* I, Praefatio, p. 11. It seems that Vitranga knew of Samuel White's commentary only through the review given by Le Clerc in the *Bibliothèque choisie* 23/2 (1711), art. 4.

Admittedly Grotius knows of a 'sensus sublimior,' but he pays so little attention to it and, if he does, talks about it in such a cold manner that it does not seem to play any particular role in his exegesis.³³ Other exegetes who belong to Grotius' party maintain that the mystical sense may only be found in those texts which are to be interpreted in such a manner according to the New Testament. The Remonstrant theologian Philippus van Limborch had expressed himself in this vein.³⁴ Moreover, as Le Clerc had pointed out, a recent British work contended that the apostles had accommodated themselves to the understanding of the Jews of their times when they talked about the mystical sense.³⁵ O we poor Christians, Vitranga exclaims, if we accept this thesis no proof whatsoever of the truth of our religion on the basis of the prophetic scriptures can be adduced against the Jews. Evidence of the truth of the Christian faith should be based upon general, rational principles. Only such a proof can be advanced against the Jews and other disbelievers. Belief in divine inspiration or the authority of the apostles cannot be its basis, since the Jews do not accept any of these arguments. All evidence concerning Christ out of the prophetic scriptures should be based on these two theses: 1) that the prophets prophesy about a certain lofty person more eminent than David, Solomon etc., that is the Messiah; and 2) that these eminent characteristics can be applied to Christ in every detail. This evidence is rational, understandable, being founded on general principles which cannot be made stronger by any inspiration or authority.³⁶

Though sharply criticizing Grotius' exegesis, Vitranga, however, is not inclined to adopt the Cocceian line of analysis in detail. He cannot agree with the way in which Cocceius and his disciples interpret the biblical prophecies as only referring to events in Christian history. He again emphasizes the need of correct rules of interpretation; rules which common sense shows us to be valid. The interpretation of Scripture is a matter of 'demonstratio': "Nullus enim

³³ See *Commentarius ... Jesaiae* I, Praefatio, p. 12. Le Clerc adduces arguments to show that Grotius talks about this 'sensus sublimior' in several places, for example in his famous annotations on Matthew 1.22; Psalm 22.1; and in the fifth book of his *De veritate* (see *Bibliothèque choisie* 1713, pp. 389-90).

³⁴ See *Commentarius ... Jesaiae* I, Praefatio, p. 12, where Vitranga refers to Van Limborch's preface to his *Commentarius in Acta Apostolorum et in Epistolas ad Romanos et ad Hebraeos*, Rotterdam 1711. This preface contains a long passage in which Van Limborch attacks Cocceian prophetic theology, without mentioning any name. Vitranga seems to have known Van Limborch's commentary only through the review in Le Clerc, *Bibliothèque choisie* 23 (1711), which did not refer to the anti-Cocceian passages.

³⁵ See *Commentarius ... Jesaiae* I, Praefatio, p. 12.

³⁶ See *Commentarius ... Jesaiae* I, Praefatio, pp. 12-14.

sensus Scripturae S. me doctiorem et scientiorem facit, cujus veritas ex suis principiis demonstrari nequeat."³⁷ Without demonstration any science will remain vague and uncertain.

The first among the certain rules of interpretation is not to deviate from the primary, grammatical sense without any serious or necessary reason, that is "nisi *subjectis illis aptentur attributa, quae secundum primum et proprium sensum iis non conveniunt.*"³⁸ Only if this is the case does reason allow us to look further and to think of an analogous subject. Similarly, and this the second rule, it is common sense that prescribes us to look for the fulfilment of a prophecy in its own time rather than in distant days. If a prophecy can be said to have been accomplished perfectly in the time closest to the prophet, then we need not look for another accomplishment. But if it is only imperfectly fulfilled in a time close to the prophet's days, then common sense again orders the exegete to look for a beginning of the fulfilment in the days close to those of the prophet and to seek for a more perfect accomplishment in later times. "Ab his canonibus si discesseris, omnis interpretatio prophetica vaga redditur, incerta, arbitraria, fluxae fidei ac dubiae, nemini demonstrabilis, infirmarum ac credularum mentium ludibrium."³⁹

With these basic hermeneutical rules Vitranga wants to show Cocceian exegetes that they often unnecessarily interpret the prophecies as referring to later times. Some exegetes, such as Jean de Labadie and Jacob Alting, have even only seen the fulfilment of the prophecies in the end of days. Cocceius had shown more moderation in that respect. Vitranga himself does not want to set limits on the hopes of the Church. Why should we expect less than God has promised us? And He has promised us a glorious future. So, Vitranga confesses, I belong to those – and some resent that – who expect greater things to happen in the future than the Church has seen hitherto.⁴⁰

³⁷ See *Commentarius ... Jesaiae I*, Praefatio, p. 16.

³⁸ See *Commentarius ... Jesaiae I*, Praefatio, p. 16. Cf. p. 18: "si subjecta orationis proprium et literalem admitterent sensum, absque gravi ratione et necessitate ad mysticum non transii..." See also *Commentarius ... Jesaiae II*, Praefatio, pp. 6–7, where Vitranga stresses the importance of the 'scopus' of the text: "At Scripturas propheticas, secundum primum et proximum earundem scopum, grammaticae et historice interpretari, ad veram et perfectiorem intelligentiam plus olei et temporis poscit, et majoris operae res est. (...) Scopus enim orationis, iudicio praetensus, omnes administrat interpretis cogitationes."

³⁹ See *Commentarius ... Jesaiae I*, Praefatio, p. 16.

⁴⁰ See *Commentarius ... Jesaiae I*, Praefatio, pp. 17–18.

Anacrisis Apocalypsios Joannis Apostoli

These 'greater things' were dealt with in his commentary on the Apocalypse, which was published several years before his commentary on Isaiah. Vitrिंगa himself saw no difference between his ideas in his *Anacrisis Apocalypsios* and his commentary on Isaiah.⁴¹ First of all he refuted the eschatological ideas of Grotius, who adhered to a novel way of interpreting the Apocalypse. In this he was "the Choragus and leads the Dance (a Dance which has made those of the Court of Rome no little sport)."⁴² A Roman Catholic scholar who had followed Grotius' preterist interpretation was Jacques Bénigne Bossuet, Bishop of Meaux. In 1690 Bossuet had published his *L'Apocalypse avec une explication*. and it is this work that Vitrिंगa seeks to refute in addition to Grotius. According to Vitrिंगa Bossuet's interpretation, although in a Grotian vein, was preferable to Grotius' exegesis of the Book of Revelation.⁴³

In the *Anacrisis Apocalypsios* we find a thorough theoretical exposition of the interpretation of the prophecies. Again he emphasizes that the most important matter is the formulation of correct rules of interpretation or of 'hypotheses' as he calls them. These hypotheses are the key to the Bible (Luke 11.52): if we use the right hypotheses, we will have no difficulty in acceding to the inner rooms of Scripture. With regard to the prophecies in the Book of Revelation Vitrिंगa maintains that he has been more intensely engaged in finding the correct hypotheses than any of his predecessors, with the exception of Joseph Mede, who has devised the best method of interpreting the Apocalypse, though his hypotheses may not be without their faults.⁴⁴ It is Vitrिंगa's firm conviction that there will never be any agreement among the interpreters of Revelation so

⁴¹ *Anacrisis Apocalypsios Joannis Apostoli, qua in veras interpretandae eius hypotheses diligenter inquiruntur et ex eisdem interpretatio facta, certis historicarum monumentis confirmatur atque illustratur. Tum quoque quae Meldensis Praesul Bossuetus hujus libri commentario supposit, et exegetico Protestantium systemati in visis de bestia ac Babylone mystica objecit, sedulo examinatur.* Quotations are from the second edition, Amsterdam 1719. For other editions, see note 8. For Vitrिंगa's judgement on both his commentaries, see the preface to the second volume of the commentary on Isaiah. Albert Schultens said of the *Anacrisis Apocalypsios* that it was the "praelusio ac praecursio" of the commentary on Isaiah (*Laudatio funebris*, p. 20). For Le Clerc's laudatory review of Vitrिंगa's commentary on Revelation, see *Bibliothèque choisie* 6 (1705), pp. 334-41.

⁴² Thus John Worthington in the "General Preface" to his edition of *The Works of the pious and profoundly-learned Joseph Mede*, London 1672.

⁴³ On Bossuet and Grotius, see J.A.G. TANS, *Bossuet en Hollande*, diss. Nijmegen, Maastricht 1949, pp. 12-51.

⁴⁴ See JOSEPH MEDE, *Clavis apocalyptica*, 1627. Vitrिंगa was well informed about British writers on the Apocalypse, among them Francis Potter, Hugh Broughton, Patrick Forbes, Thomas Burnet.

long as they differ about the rules for explaining this book.⁴⁵ For example, if it is certain that John received his prophecies some years after the destruction of Jerusalem under Domitian, we will thus not be easily persuaded by Grotius that Revelation 6.12 is a prophecy about the downfall of the Jewish Republic.

One of the main causes to give rise to disagreement among interpreters is the abundance of remarkable events in history which resemble one another and so make the expositors uncertain about what event has been prophesied. It is not so much the obscurity of the mysterious biblical images that bewilders us as the richness of historical events. An intensive knowledge of history is therefore an absolute requirement for interpreting the prophecies correctly, Vitranga concludes.

The duty of an exegete is twofold. First he has to choose proper, that is sure or probable hypotheses. Secondly, he has to prove the certainty or probability of those hypotheses. In doing so the exegete will save the reader a lot of time, since we need not read all commentaries on Revelation extensively but need only check the hypotheses of the commentators. Vitranga mentions three principles for choosing the correct hypotheses. (1) It is most important to pay attention to the marks of the prophecy itself which show its intention. (2) Reason teaches us to distinguish between probable and less probable matters, while it also shows us that the prophecies should be interpreted in a particular sense; otherwise it would not have been necessary to give this prophecy to the Church. And (3) we should compare the visions of Revelation with the prophecies of the Old Testament as well as with several parts of the prophecy itself, which elucidate one another since they refer to the same period.⁴⁶

Vitranga points out that with regard to Revelation this prophecy is so full of varied emblematic figures that common sense urges us not to look for an interpretation that sees the accomplishment of the prophecies of Revelation in the time shortly after John, since such an interpretation would detract from the dignity and glory of these prophecies. Yet Grotius had taken this stance by interpreting them as being fulfilled in the times of Nero and Domitian. Since, however, only a few events occurred in those times which might be compared with the glorious vision in the Apocalypse, Grotius is often obliged to resort to tiny details, explaining matters which are great in the prophecies by historical events of little or no importance. Was the persecution by Domitian such a remarkable matter

⁴⁵ See *Anacrisis Apocalypsis*, Praefatio, p. ***2^v.

⁴⁶ See *Anacrisis Apocalypsis*, Praefatio, p. ***3^v-[4^v].

that the Holy Spirit had to devote six chapters to this event, while according to Grotius' literal explanation this persecution did not even last 42 months? No rational man will welcome such a manner of interpretation as it is not in accordance with the dignity of the prophecies. Obviously for Vitringa the hermeneutical principle of dignity is most important. He notes that at times he has been angry with Grotius because the latter did so much to detract from the lustre of the prophecies. But he estimates his learning highly and was indignant when he saw that some commentators grabbed every opportunity not only to refute Grotius but also to slander him.⁴⁷

Referring to Rev. 4.1, which says that only those things which will happen *afterwards* will be revealed to John, and to Rev. 22.12, which says that we have to wait for the glorious future of the Lord, Vitringa contends that according to reason it is probable that the Apocalypse contains a perfect prophecy which does not only refer to the churches in Asia, but also to the universal Catholic Church until the end of time. One of his main objections to Grotius, Bossuet and other preterist interpreters is that they remove consolation from the faithful: the general aim of Revelation, as of other prophecies, is to teach the Church about the changes in history and the signs of those changes. Knowing that its history of persecutions will one day come to a close, it will not abandon hope but look forward to the glorious end of history as determined by God.⁴⁸

The Key to the Apocalypse: the Prophecy about the Beast

The key to the Book of Revelation is to be found in the correct interpretation of the prophecy about the beast. The Holy Spirit has devoted six chapters to the origin, reign, signs and downfall of the beast. If we can determine the true meaning of the prophecy about the seven-headed beast, we will have the key to the most important rooms of the whole prophecy. The appearance of the beast occurs in the days of the sixth trumpet. The marks of the beast are so various and remarkable that they cannot be applied to many kingdoms in the world. The king is expressly mentioned, Rome (Rev. 17.3). There are two ways of interpreting Revelation: 1) the beast is the pagan Roman empire; 2) the beast is anti-Christianity with Rome as its head. So it is a sure hypothesis that the beast is the Roman empire with its governors, whether pagan or Christian.

⁴⁷ See *Anacrisis Apocalypsios*, Praefatio, p. [***5v].

⁴⁸ See *Anacrisis Apocalypsios*, p. [***5r-***5v].

There are many expositors, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, who maintain that the seven-headed beast refers to the pagan, idolatrous Roman empire. As a prominent representative of this opinion Vitranga mentions the Spanish Jesuit Luis de Alcazar. He then proceeds to expound Grotius' suggestion that both beasts refer to the time of Domitian, its seven heads being seven Roman emperors before Domitian. The hypotheses of Alcazar and Grotius are in themselves not unfounded, Vitranga admits, since the pagan empire has been a cruel beast. But is it possible to concord the marks of the beast as well as other circumstances of this prophecy with their view? If so, the interpretation of the beast as pagan Rome, and not as Christian Rome, should be preferred. It must be noted that Vitranga repeatedly says that he would rather side with Grotius and Bossuet than with the common Protestant interpretation. He would rather interpret the beast as pagan Rome than as Christian Rome, since it is a horrifying thought that the Christian Church should have been transformed into such a cruel beast as the one depicted in Revelation 13.⁴⁹

Moreover, he hesitates to point to the faults of the Church of Rome, since the Reformed churches have also deviated from their first perfection and have often been unnecessarily driven apart by their polemics. He thinks it is hypocritical not to mention the sins of the Protestant churches, while exposing the faults of the Roman Catholic Church in sharp terms. He has therefore searched for another interpretation of the beast, such as the one advanced by Grotius and Bossuet. Bossuet's hypothesis is much more probable than Grotius's, since the persecution by Diocletian (which lasted ten years) shows more characteristics in agreement with the prophecy than Domitian's persecution. Grotius imagined that Revelation was a letter written to the Christians of that time: John warned the churches of Asia of the disasters that would befall them shortly.⁵⁰ If Grotius had given up that hypothesis, he would have been more fortunate in explaining the Apocalypse.

Vitranga thinks that any follower of Grotius will confess this after he has compared his views with those of Bossuet. To his regret, however, Vitranga has to admit that Bossuet's interpretation cannot

⁴⁹ See *Anacrisis Apocalypsis*, p. ****2^v. For Luis de Alcazar, whose name only occurs in the Dutch version of the 'Praefatio,' see BRADY, *The Contribution of British Writers*, passim. Only in passing does Vitranga mention (in the Dutch version) the futurist interpretation of Franciscus Ribera, Cornelis a Lapide and other Roman Catholic expositors; their interpretation that Rome as depicted in Revelation has not yet appeared in history is rejected by him as absurd.

⁵⁰ See *Anacrisis Apocalypsis*, p. [****2^r].

explain the mysteries of previous and subsequent prophecies in Revelation and so has to be discarded too. Vitringa thus feels himself forced by the text to resort to the current Protestant, anti-papal exegesis of Revelation 13.

The Millennium

In his exposition of Revelation 20 Vitringa goes his own way, following neither Grotius nor Cocceius. He declares that this passage is the most difficult in the Book of Revelation. Among the expositors of this chapter he mentions Pierre Yvon, whose interpretation of Gog and Magog is similar to his own. Vitringa refers to Scaliger's opinion that, like Calvin, one should refrain from writing a commentary on the Apocalypse. However, it is wrong to mention Calvin in this respect, Vitringa says; the Genevan reformer must have had his own good reasons not to do so. He furthermore quotes Episcopius, who says that these prophecies are deliberately mysterious so that people might be prompted to investigate them.⁵¹ According to Vitringa there are two systems of interpretation with regard to Revelation 20: some (Grotius and Hammond) see the beginning of the millennium with Constantine the Great and its end with the appearance of the Turks. Others (Vitringa) are firmly convinced that the millennial reign will follow upon the downfall of the beast. Here he parts company with Cocceius, who – like Grotius and Hammond, Forbes and Brightman – clung to the idea that the millennium was a matter of the past and had started with Constantine. Others (Augustine and all medieval commentators) think that it started earlier, with the era of the Christian Church. The presupposition of all these expositors is that in Revelation 20 a new story begins. Yet this is surely not the case, as Vitringa sets out to prove. He acknowledges the success of the Church since Constantine, but, as he points out, only three hundred years after Constantine Mohammed appeared. If such a monstrous thing could happen in a time in which Satan was bound, what would happen when Satan was let loose? Grotius had been aware of the difficulties involved in his solution of a past millennium; the Turk could not be Gog and Magog; where was the fire that had to destroy them? Grotius had obviously expected that judgement, even four centuries later.

So the millennial reign has to begin after the downfall of the beast. Revelation 20.4 makes it abundantly clear that this prophecy has to take place after the reign of the beast has collapsed. More-

⁵¹ See *Anacrisis Apocalypsis*, p. [****4v].

over, the characteristics of the antichristian reign of the beast and those of the millennium are so different that they cannot exist simultaneously. Satan will be bound during those thousand years. This vision agrees with the vision in Daniel 7.9-10, as Mede had observed correctly. According to Vitringa the millennium refers to a long period of peace and well-being of the Church upon earth. God will not let the Kingdom of His Son on earth remain imperfect. Would the beast reign supreme and not Jesus Christ? Let nobody think that these ideas are novel and heterodox. Vitringa points to scholarly and pious men who embraced this millenarian view after the Reformation, such as Franciscus Lambertus, Carolus Gallus, Alfonsus Conradus Mantuanus, Caesius Pannonius, Jacobus Brocardus, and Albertus Leoninus; he also mentions later expositors such as Pierre de Launay, Joseph Mede, Matthieu Cottière and Thomas Burnet. The church fathers too had embraced this idea. It had also been the hope of the Jewish church. Yet we should not follow the 'chiliasts' in believing that the Temple in Jerusalem will be rebuilt and the Levitical cult restored; that the face of the earth will be transformed by fire and will be renewed, bringing forth many fruits without the aid of man. Neither should we believe that Christ will personally and visibly reign upon earth during the millennium: Christ's millennial reign will be a purely spiritual one. Still, Vitringa acknowledges that the Jews will be converted; he hopes that the malediction will be taken away from Canaan and that Jerusalem will be rebuilt. So Vitringa proves himself to be an exponent of the moderate millenarianism that characterized Dutch reformed orthodoxy in the early eighteenth century.

Conclusion

In the eighteenth century prophetic theology flourished in the Dutch Republic as it did elsewhere in Europe. The Book of Revelation enjoyed a great popularity and academic theologians immersed themselves in its interpretation. A host of publications on prophetic theology came from the press, advocating the expediency of the 'studium propheticum' for theology in general. Prophetic theology was deemed an effective weapon in the apologetic battle against the rising tide of unbelief as expressed by scholars such as Hobbes, Spinoza, and Collins.

On the continent Cocceius' influence was long to be felt; prominent pietists claimed to have been inspired by his insights. Yet Grotius' line of analysis gradually gained ground. This is illustrated by

Vitringa's exegetical notions. Like his teacher Witsius he chose to side with Cocceius, probably for the same reason, namely that it was less damnable to think we can find Christ where He may not be than to refuse to see Him when he shows Himself in full clarity. The first is proof of love of Christ, the other of slowness to believe.⁵² Although Vitringa stands firmly in the line of Cocceius, he shows his independence, like most disciples of Cocceius, by formulating a prophetic theology of his own in which he appears to have incorporated Grotian ideas.

We may ask whether Vitringa ever succeeded in harmonizing the hermeneutics of Grotius and Cocceius. At times it seems as if the two systems run parallel in his own prophetic theology without actually growing into a whole. Like Witsius again, Vitringa has been described as "ein Zwei-Seelen-Mensch."⁵³ He strove for a synthesis. We may wonder, however, whether Le Clerc did not hit the mark when he observed that Grotius might have subscribed to Vitringa's hermeneutical rules, implying that Vitringa's position showed more affinity with his own than might appear at first glance. It could well be that Cocceius' insistence upon the 'sensus litteralis' was closer to Grotius' stand than Cocceian theologians assumed.

Vitringa's famous disciple, Herman Venema, his successor in Franeker, is another illustration of the affinity between the Grotian and Cocceian way of thinking. Venema incorporated Grotius' ideas in his own prophetic theology, while clinging to a Cocceian framework.⁵⁴ He is regarded as a typical representative of the moderate Dutch Enlightenment. It is perhaps an indication of the moderate character of the Dutch Enlightenment that Grotius' exegetical position never fully won the day. As is apparent from the seemingly unending stream of literature on biblical prophecies in the Enlightenment, Grotius had not put an end to the 'theologia prophetica' and its important role in Christian apologetics.

⁵² See VAN GENDEREN, *Herman Witsius*, pp. 122-23.

⁵³ See BAUCH, *Die Lehre vom Wirken des Heiligen Geistes*, p. 24. Cf. CHR. SEPP, *Het godgeleerd onderwijs in Nederland gedurende de 16e en 17e eeuw II*, Leiden 1874, p. 302, who contends that Vitringa did not succeed in achieving a unity between the hermeneutics of Grotius and Cocceius. J.C. DE BRUÏNE, *Herman Venema. Een Nederlandse theoloog in de tijd der Verlichting*, diss. Groningen, Franeker [1973], pp. 43-46, sees Vitringa's position as closer to Cocceius' than to Grotius' system, though he is more moderate than Cocceius.

⁵⁴ For Herman Venema (1697-1787), see J.C. DE BRUÏNE, *Herman Venema* (see note 53).