

Aristotle and the Trinity: The Case of Johann Hasler in Strasbourg 1574-1575

By

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Research on the history of religious dissidence in the sixteenth century has shown a wide matrix of relations going well beyond the influence of such recognized leaders as Schwenckfeld, Castellio or Sozzini.¹ It is in this light that particular case studies, such as that of the controversy raised in Strasbourg following the submission of a thesis on the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle by a medical student from Bern, can prove revealing. Already suspect on account of an earlier association with Adam Neuser and the Antitrinitarian group at Heidelberg, the twenty-six year old Johann Hasler here came to be unwittingly involved in an ongoing row between the representatives of the church and the academy. According to the pastors his views on the natural knowledge of God constituted a threat to the very basis of the evangelical tradition and he was obliged to make a formal recantation before leaving the city at the end of 1575. Granted that Hasler was a thinker of no great eminence, whose work soon came to be hedged in complete obscurity, the affair yet serves to highlight many of the problems of an inquiring spirit in the nascent age of orthodoxy. Indeed, it may be seen as a paradigm of the complex relation between personal conflict and intellectual dissent that was to prove an enduring feature of the period.

¹ A bibliographical survey of this work is provided by Roland Crahay in *Les Dissidents du XVI^e siècle entre l'Humanisme et le Catholicisme: actes du colloque de Strasbourg (5-6 février 1982)*, ed. M. Lienhard, (Baden-Baden, 1983), 15-34.

Although a comprehensive analysis of Hasler's subsequent career as a medical astrologer was published in the journal *Gesnerus* almost twenty years ago, the principal source for his early life and work remains the study undertaken just after the First World War by Eduard Bähler, a work which was largely based on the surviving correspondence to be found in Bern and Zurich.² It is true that the interesting events surrounding his period of residence in Strasbourg are here recorded at some length, but there was little attempt to place the matter in its historical context. Nor was the extensive documentation that can be found in the *Archives du Chapitre de St. Thomas* then available to the author. While a part of these sources has been noted in more recent papers by Stephen Nelson and André Séguenny, they have never been the subject of a detailed analysis.³ Here again the impression is given that Hasler had only himself to blame for the row that led to his imprisonment and eventual departure from the town. In both studies it is simply assumed that his views on the Trinity were openly heterodox and thus liable to condemnation by the authorities in church and school. In short no account has ever been provided as to the content of his work.

The problem is really that there was no clear definition as to what constituted a denial of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity; the Arian heresy being too convenient as a term of abuse to maintain any real precision of meaning. The fact that this accusation was constantly to dog Hasler's career is hardly sufficient ground for taking the case as proven. As will become apparent, the debate in Strasbourg was never even directly concerned with this issue, though it did show up important differences within the evangelical camp about the relation of natural theology to the doctrine of God. An attempt to explain the background and course of these events should thus help to clarify both the nature of Hasler's own conviction and the way in which such problems came to

² E. Bähler: 'Der bernische Antitrinitarier Johann Hasler und seine Vorgänger d'Aliod, Gribaldi und Gentilis,' *Neues Berner Taschenbuch* 27 (1922), 38-92. See also F. Hasler and M-L. Portmann: 'Johannes Hasler (1548-16?), Arzt, Theologe und Iatrophilosoph,' *Gesnerus* 26 (1969), 164-88, for certain corrections of detail.

³ These documents are mentioned in S. Nelson: 'De quelques cas d'épicureisme strasbourgeois,' *Croyants et sceptiques au XVI^e siècle*, ed. M. Lienhard (Strasbourg, 1981), 101, and subsequently discussed in A. Séguenny: 'Les Anti-Trinitaires Polonais en relation avec Strasbourg aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles,' *Les contacts religieux franco-polonais du Moyen-Age à nos jours*, ed. Y.-M. Hilaire (Paris, 1985), 136-41.

be perceived in the aftermath of the scandal that had threatened to undermine the credibility of the reformed party in Heidelberg. Such would constitute a valid contribution to one of the more intriguing aspects of the intellectual debate engendered by the reform.

I

Born in Oberdiesbach within the reformed territory of Bern towards the end of 1548, Hasler was sent to the municipal school at the age of eleven. Evidently gifted, for a time he himself was commissioned as preceptor to the third class before being sent to continue his studies at the university of Basel.⁴ It was after his return to the city that discussion broke out over the affair of Valentin Gentili, who was arrested and beheaded in the summer of 1566 on a charge of having denied the divinity of Christ. That Hasler took an interest in the case is clear from an apologetic statement drawn up after his final dismissal from Bern in 1591.⁵ Here he recorded having attended Benedict Aretin's parallel course of lectures on the Gospel of John, as well as the ensuing disputations against Gentili. Seen as a potentially valuable addition to the pastoral corps, he was then provided with a full stipendium from the school authorities to take up the study of theology at Heidelberg, which under the direction of the Elector Frederick III had already become the main intellectual center of the reformed church within the Empire.

Hasler and his fellow students were supplied with a personal recommendation to the then pastor of St. Peter's, Adam Neuser, who had narrowly been passed over for the chair

⁴ See the letter of recommendation from Benedict Aretin to Theodor Zwinger, 3 July 1565, reproduced in J. H. Graf: *Geschichte der Mathematik und der Naturwissenschaften in bernischen Landen I* (Bern, 1888), 47-8.

⁵ *De sacrosancta trinitate confiessio apologetica*, 8 July 1591, Archives du Chapitre de St. Thomas (A.S.T.) 354/48, 419^r-22^r. A copy of an abridged version, which was published earlier that year at Mulhouse, can be found in the Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg.

of dogmatic theology several years before.⁶ A convinced opponent of the group which sought to impose the Genevan order of discipline, Neuser still stood in high regard with the churches of Zurich and Bern. It was not until the summer of 1570 that a more serious dimension to the controversy was uncovered. It was then that a secret correspondence between a number of leading members of the Palatine church and the heterodox doctor of medicine Georg Biandrata, who had taken refuge in Transylvania in the wake of the Gentili affair, was brought to the attention of the Emperor Maximilian during a meeting of the diet in Speyer. Although this documentation has not survived, it would seem that Adam Neuser and Johann Sylvan, who at the time was superintendent of the church at Ladenburg, sought to find refuge in a more tolerant atmosphere where they could explore the possibility of religious dialogue with the Turk.⁷ The very fact that such ideas were being entertained by senior members of the church was a matter of some embarrassment to the government and the Elector ordered the immediate arrest and interrogation of the two men, together with the group of their friends who were a party to the plan.

Although Neuser, who would seem to have been mainly responsible for the project, was able to evade capture after being tipped off by two colleagues in the Arts Faculty, the luckless Sylvan was obliged to supply a full account of the affair under torture. It was as a result of this statement that the young Hasler came to be implicated. Possibly at the instigation of one of the preachers at home, Johann Fädmingen, the man who was destined to succeed Johann Haller to the post of Antistes, he had drawn up a copy of a manuscript by Sylvan, whose unreserved attack on the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity came to provide the ground for his condemnation and execution some two years later. It

⁶ *Ibid.*, 420^f. On Neuser see the still valuable account provided in G. E. Lessing's *Beiträge zur Geschichte und Literatur aus den Schätzen der Herzoglichen Bibliothek zu Wolfenbüttel* (Braunschweig, 1774), as well as O. Thelemann: 'Neuser und die Antitrinitarier in der Kurpfalz,' *Evangelisch-reformierte Kirchenzeitung* 20 (1870), 238-55 and 334-46.

⁷ The extant sources are reproduced in B.G. Struve: *Ausführlicher Bericht von der pfälzischen Kirchengemeinde* (Frankfurt, 1721), 214-37, while additional historical material has been made available in H. Rott: 'Neue Quellen für eine Aktenrevision des Prozesses gegen Sylvan und seine Genossen,' *Neues Archiv für die Geschichte der Stadt Heidelberg und der rheinischen Pfalz* 8 (1910), 184-259 and 9 (1911), 1-70. The best account of the affair remains that by C. Horn: 'Johann Sylvan und die Anfänge des Heidelberger Antitrinitarismus,' *Neue Heidelberger Jahrbücher* 17 (1913), 219-3 10.

was only thanks to the intervention of the Bernese Council, who pointed out in response to a letter from Frederick advising them of what had happened that "Hasler undertook the transcription of such a blasphemous tract out of simple curiosity and otherwise had nothing in common with the authors", that the young man was dismissed from the university with no more than a caution.⁸ Even so, on his return he was required to make a full statement about his relations with the dissident group, as well as presenting a written condemnation of their views, a copy of which was then sent to the Elector. For all that Hasler sought to make light of his role in the scandal, it should not be forgotten that it came close to marking the end of his academic career. Denied the customary testimony from the authorities in Heidelberg, where he had already been studying for some four years, there was little he himself could do to counter the suspicion of the clergy.⁹ As far as Haller was concerned, the city must avoid at all costs the danger of a repetition of the Gentili affair, even if this meant abandoning their brightest and most capable student.

At the time it was decided that Hasler should be allowed to travel no further than the reformed cantons of the Swiss Confederation, where it would be possible to keep both his company and movements under close surveillance. It was only his undoubted ability as a scholar, together with the influence of his patron Niklaus von Diesbach, who was an active member of the board of Scholarchs, that secured the reversal of this decision the following year. After one semester at Lausanne, Hasler thus returned to Germany in April 1571 to matriculate at the university of Leipzig, where he was able to enjoy a considerable freedom in the organization of his study program. Thanks to his humanist training he gained easy access to the circle of affluent young Polish students, one of whom, the Baron Jan Lescinski, invited him to return across the Elbe as companion and tutor for a period of some eighteen months. The immediate reaction of Haller and his

⁸ Since "Hasler sich uß einfaltten fürwitz zum abschryben sollichen lasterlichen büchllins begeben, und sonst im verstand der sacht, kein gemeinschaftt mitt dem Auctore gehept, so pitten wir sie welle inn ledig verschaffen, unnd angents zu unns heim verschicken, damitt wir mitt ime hierumb wyther der gepür noch handeln," 26 August 1570, Staatsarchiv Bern AA 111 32, Deutsch Missiven-Buch EE 1200.

⁹ Johann Haller to Heinrich Bullinger, 1 October 1570, Staatsarchiv Zurich (S.A. Z.) E II 371 b, 1233^{r/v}. That Hasler continued to look for a reference from the authorities in Heidelberg is evident from a subsequent letter from Thomas Erastus to Bullinger, S. A. Z. E II 361, 47^{r/v}, which contains a critical report on the young man's character.

colleagues in Bern was to assume that the young man had finally decided to make good his escape and join Biandrata in Transylvania. Yet it is by no means clear that he ever seriously contemplated such a move. Indeed, during a visit to the Protestant academy at Krakow, he went to great lengths to persuade the Rector Christoph Thetius as to his genuine adherence to the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, while at the same time complaining of the constant harassment experienced at the hands of the clergy. For all that the ministers were inclined to dismiss this as the result of dissimulation, it was by no means easy to prove the point. In the end Haller decided to write to the young man in confidence, explaining the reasons for their mistrust and pointing out that if he were really sincere in his beliefs then he should accept their attitude as prompted by the good of the church.¹⁰ This would seem to have been the last occasion on which they were prepared to grant Hasler the benefit of the doubt.

Be that as it may, no sooner had Hasler returned to Leipzig that he wrote to inform his patrons in Bern of his decision to abandon theology in favor of medicine. One reason for this change was clearly the influence of the controversial philosopher from Lucca, Simon Simonius, who was presently engaged as personal physician to Duke August of Saxony.¹¹ A former pupil of Cardanus, he had taught at both Paris and Geneva before resigning from the latter following a bitter row with members of the company of pastors. During a brief sojourn at Heidelberg he had established close contact with the dissident group in and around the university. Although Simonius had left to take up his court appointment prior to the outbreak of the scandal, contemporaries had little doubt as to his involvement in the affair. Above all, it was his reputation for maintaining the Averroist tradition of the Paduan school, a principle which relied on the marked disjuncture between reason and faith, that gave the authorities cause for concern.¹² As was evident from the Italian's open praise for Biandrata, Hasler could hardly have moved

¹⁰ Haller to Bullinger, 31 August 1574, S. A. Z. E II 370 a, 508^{r/v}.

¹¹ On the personality of this man and for further references see the study by A. Dufour: 'Simonius entre le Catholicisme et le Protestantisme,' *Les Dissidents du XVI^e siècle*, 155-162.

¹² On the background see A. Stella: *Dell'anabattismo al socinanesimo nel cinquecento veneto* (Padua, 1967), 39-61. As far as I am aware there is no detailed account of the impact of this movement within the Empire.

into more dangerous circles and it came as little surprise when one of his compatriots began to send disturbing reports back to the authorities in Bern. Although much of this evidence was purely circumstantial, when Gabriel Blauner, the student in question, eventually obtained one of Hasler's letters describing those responsible for the execution of Gentili as "pfaffos carnifices," it was felt that the time had come to act.¹³ Despite the continued opposition of Fädmingen, the other ministers were able to secure a decision by the Scholarchs requiring that their protégé break off any further contact with Simonius and prepare to leave.

Pending a settlement of the religious wars in France, which for the moment ruled out any prospect of a trip to Paris, it was suggested that Wittenberg would provide the most suitable venue for the completion of his studies in medicine. Yet Hasler was by no means disposed to comply with this injunction and several further months were to elapse before he could be induced to abandon Leipzig. Aside from his close relationship with Simonius, whom the young man had come to regard with little short of adulation, he was by now also employed as a private tutor. It was only when offered the more attractive prospect of acting as mentor to two scions of the Polish nobility during their studies in Germany and Italy that he decided to move. The fame of the Strasbourg Academy and its Rector Johann Sturm, who enjoyed a high reputation in Poland, made the city on the Ill the natural point of departure for such an enterprise.¹⁴ It should here be noted that the recently appointed professor of medicine Andreas Planer was a strong advocate of the Aristotelian revival, who had earlier studied under the Tübingen philosopher Jacob Schegk. Even so the tradition of peripatetic studies was notably weak and it had not been possible to establish lectures on the *Organon* on a regular basis. For the time being the course on logic had been entrusted to Ludwig Havenreuter, a young man who was

¹³ See Haller's report on the young man, a copy of which he sent to Bullinger, S.A. Z. E II 370a, 550^{f/v}.

¹⁴ See H. de Chelminska: 'Sturm et la Pologne', *Humanisme en Alsace, Actes du Congrès Guillaume Budé à Strasbourg* (Paris, 1939), 52-63. Haller noted in a letter to Bullinger, 20 August 1574, S. A. Z. E II 370 a, 509^f- 10^f: "Mich nimpt aber wunder was er zu Straßburg thun well, so er in Medicina studieren soll."

himself still *in statu pupillari*.¹⁵ Since Hasler now sought to gain some teaching experience in his own right, here was an excellent opportunity to make his name. Such was certainly the intention when he and his pupils arrived in the Rhineland city in the late summer of 1574.

Yet Strasbourg was also the scene of a bitter conflict between church and school, the origins of which went back to the 1550s, when the young Swabian pastor Johann Marbach sought to reestablish the church after the chaos brought about by the Augsburg Interim.¹⁶ Aware of the need to maintain unity in doctrine, he tried to make the teaching of the *Confessio Augustana* binding throughout the school. The result of this policy was that in 1556 Peter Martyr Vermigli, the most distinguished member of the theological faculty, resigned to accept an alternative calling in Zurich. More serious, however, was the row with one of the latter's disciples, Girolamo Zanchi, who at the time was responsible for lecturing on the Old Testament. In 1561 differences between the two men finally gave rise to a prolonged controversy, which was only settled some two years later through the intervention of the Duke of Württemberg. The resulting *Formula of Consensus*, which eventually forced the departure of Zanchi, was designed to establish a *modus vivendi* between church and school; it confirmed the position of Strasbourg within the moderate Lutheran camp.

Still there were also a series of pedagogic and jurisdictional problems over which Sturm and Marbach continued to be divided. When the school was raised to the status of an Academy by imperial rescript in 1566, the rector drew up a revised curriculum to accommodate the change. Yet in the opinion of Marbach this new program was no more than "a Platonic idea", an idealized model of humanist learning which would actually

¹⁵ On the peripatetic tradition in Strasbourg see A. Schindling: *Humanistische Hochschule und freie Reichsstadt: Gymnasium und Akademie in Straßburg 1538-1621* (Wiesbaden, 1977), 236-52.

¹⁶ For a summary analysis of Marbach's work see B. Vogler: 'L'affirmation de l'orthodoxie luthérienne', *Strasbourg au Coeur Religieux du XVI^e siècle*, ed. G. Livet and F. Rapp (Strasbourg, 1977), 595-602. A useful account of the period as a whole is provided by L. J. Abray: *The People's Reformation: magistrates, clergy and people in Strasbourg, 1500-1598* (New York, 1985).

discourage the main object of the school, namely the training of a competent ministry.¹⁷ It was only by maintaining control over the seminary and its students that the pastors felt able to guarantee this objective. The administration became impossible when another row broke out late in 1571 and representatives of the civil authority had to intervene. The ensuing discussions resulted in what appeared as a total victory for Sturm and his colleagues, whose program of reform was duly implemented. Already deprived of his post as perpetual Dean, Marbach was told in November 1573 to avoid any further interference in the affairs of the seminary, which was to be left in charge of the Rector and the board of inspectors. Moreover, the Magistrate made known the following January that Marbach had never officially been accorded the title of superintendent of the church and so his authority was limited to presiding over the weekly meetings of the pastoral convent.

At the time none of this had any direct bearing on Hasler. Shortly after his arrival in Strasbourg he sought permission from Planer, who had then succeeded to the now annual post of Dean, to take his master's degree and thus gain the right to teach on his own account.¹⁸ He set about the work immediately and in the course of three days drew up a collection of theses on the natural knowledge of God as contained in the twelfth book of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Aside from a number of minor corrections, Planer gave this work his whole-hearted approval and accepted that a revised form could be presented for examination before the faculty. Anxious to dispel any rumors concerning his associations in Leipzig, Hasler then added a number of supplementary theses designed to demonstrate the conformity between philosophy and the claims of revealed religion. After further discussions with the Dean on 23 October, he was given a fortnight to prepare for the

¹⁷ See Marbach's *Ursachen worumb Johann Strumii furhaben zur zerrütung der Schulen, Kirchen und Regiments dienen werde*, 26 April 1572, A.S.T. 63/1, where his concern for the training of ordinands is strongly emphasized. The conflict is examined by W. Sohm: *Die Schule Johann Sturms und die Kirche Straßburgs in ihrem gegenseitigen Verhältnis* (Munich, 1912), 236-74.

¹⁸ On what follows see the long account of the affair provided by Hasler in a letter to the Magistrate in Bern, 20 September 1575, Staatsarchiv Bern, Unnütz Papiere 56/69, 1121-35, of which Stephen Nelson kindly supplied me with a transcription. Further details can be found in the introduction to his long apology addressed to the school authorities, A.S.T. 354/38, 245^r-53^r.

formal defense of his work, during which time the manuscript was to be left with the examining board. Although it is clear that one of the inspectors, Theophilus Goll, had certain reservations about the theological character of the work, when the time arrived it was approved without dissent. Three days later, however, on 8 November he was called to a further meeting and asked to subscribe to both the Nicean and Athanasian Creed before proceeding to take his degree. At the same time, Goll, who was closely associated with the Lutheran pastors, sought clarification of his views on a whole range of issues then dividing the two wings of the evangelical movement. Thus was suggested an implicit connection between the reformed teaching and the development of heterodox views on the doctrine of God.

All this was clearly embarrassing to Hasler, who pointed out in his reply that “I was unwilling to be held as suspect in this town on such fatuous grounds”.¹⁹ Despite receiving his degree four days later, the expectation that he would be called to present his work in the form of a public disputation came to nothing. When he eventually managed to raise the matter with Planer at the beginning of December, he was fobbed off with a variety of excuses and generally given the impression that the faculty would prefer that the matter be carried no further. It was at about this time that Hasler received a further offer of employment with the family of a leading noble on condition that he could supply satisfactory evidence of his adherence to the orthodox faith. Since he had nothing else available for publication, he decided to commission the printer Nicholas Wyriot to produce a hundred copies of his work for private distribution under the revised title *Aphorismi Thetici Aristotelei*.²⁰ It would appear that he was genuinely unaware that this constituted a breach of academic privilege, since in theory all manuscripts had first to be referred to the censor. The problem, however, was made rather worse by the fact that Wyriot began to sell additional copies on his own behalf with the result that the matter was soon brought to the attention of the clergy. It was at this point that a

¹⁹ “Nolle me amplius in hac urbe tam levibus ex causis de Religione suspectam haberi,” *ibid.*, 250^v.

²⁰ *Aphorismi Thetici Aristotelei, prapicuas libri λ primæ philosophicæ, demonstrationes, cum de naturalibus, tum etiam de Deo, brevissime complexi* (Strasbourg, 1575). The sole copy of this work I have been able to trace was that sent to Hasler's former preceptor Stephen Concenius, which can be found in the Stadt- und Universitätsbibliothek Bern.

complaint was made to the Dean asking whether Hasler's views on the natural knowledge of God reflected the position of the Academy as a whole. While it is clear that Planer had a certain sympathy with the young man, he was certainly not prepared to take sides against the church authorities and ordered the confiscation of the thirty remaining copies of the treatise. A petition from a number of the students that Hasler should be invited to provide a series of conferences on peripatetic philosophy was likewise refused in an effort to avoid controversy.²¹

Up until then the affair had remained largely internal to the Academy. About seven weeks later, however, a further dispute arose as a result of a sermon delivered in the cathedral on the evening of Cantate Sunday.²² Taking his text from the Epistle of James, Nicholas Florus, the pastor of Ste. Aurélie, launched into an attack on the Calvinist doctrine of predestination and warned the congregation that this would destroy any sense of moral responsibility by rendering God as the author of sin. Afterwards Hasler and his two pupils visited the pastor at home to ask for further clarification and evidence from the writings of Calvin that could justify the point. Despite his affected innocence, it seems clear that the real purpose of the interview was to embarrass Florus in the presence of witnesses. So much was evident in his reply to a letter from the pastor the following day, when Hasler dismissed criticisms of the reformed position as based on ignorance and suggested that the pastor might profit more from reading Calvin than condemning him. Such an attack on the integrity and competence of the ministry could hardly go unanswered.

Now this was precisely the situation that the school authorities had sought to avoid, since any suggestion that they gave harbor to reformed sentiment was bound to compromise their claim to exercise control over the Seminary. This time the clergy

²¹ A.S.T. 354/38, 252^v-3^f. In his subsequent report to the authorities in Bern it is suggested that objections were raised by "etlichen der rechten philosophiei vnerfahrenen, einfaltigen theologen, welchen decanus vnd visitatores nicht wol etwas zugegen reden oder thun dürffen," Staatsarchiv Bern, Unnütz Papiere 56/69, 1125.

²² Ibid., 1126-7. On what follows see also Marbach's *Bericht von Hasleri Disputatio und langer Apologia*, A.S.T. 354/37, 216^{v/v}.

complained directly to the Scholarchs, the governing body of the Academy, who called for the preparation of a full report on the affair. In a reply dated 11 May Planer and his colleagues pointed out that nobody could be obliged in conscience to support the official teaching of the church, though this was not to say that they were prepared to tolerate any overt criticism of the pastors.²³ Meanwhile Johann Pappus, an ardent supporter of Marbach who had recently been named as successor to the post of Dean, sought to explain to the young man their reasons for rejecting the teaching of Calvin as unacceptable. Although there was no intention of allowing any form of debate on the issues concerned, it was agreed that he should be given the opportunity of defending his views in writing.²⁴ After private discussions which lasted for over two hours, Planer recognized that he would not be able to persuade Hasler either to abandon or to modify the tone of his work and accordingly suggested he should ignore the invitation in the hope that the matter might simply be forgotten.

Yet the pastors, who had looked for an unconditional apology for the slight done to one of their members were not so easily satisfied. No sooner had Pappus taken over his official functions during the month of June than Hasler was given one week in which to present a reply to a series of propositions derived from his thesis.²⁵ The claim that philosophy should be used to moderate religion and that this presented a solution to the problem of the divine responsibility for evil was seen to be redolent of the reformed position. At the same time the question was also raised as to whether Aristotle could have recognized the grace of God, the mediation of Christ and the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, points which were certainly implied in Hasler's work. This was not just an academic debate concerned with the interpretation of passages from the work of the Stagirite. In the view of the pastors each one of these points was to place in doubt the

²³ *Bedencken Decani et Visitorum Academiae in causa Hasleri*, A.S.T. 354/39, 396^r-7^v.

²⁴ *Bericht von Hasleri Disputatio*, A.S.T. 354/37, 219^r-20^r, where it is noted that the statement was to have been "mher nicht als ein retraction vnd bessere erklärung seiner gefassten opinio vnd meinung, one alles ferner antasten vnd usrichten der hieigen kirchen vnd schulen."

²⁵ "Wie ich nun mit meinen studiis medicinae behafft ... mit vorhabner erklärung etwas verzöch, und alleweil D. Pappus decanus ward, ward ich erstlich durch den pedell hart vermant ... vnd bald darauff gar hochlich für den herren scholarchen verclagt ... als wan ich gar keine erklärung schreiben wolte oder könnte," Staatsarchiv Bern, Unnütz Papiere 56/69, 1128.

necessity of divine revelation and the sole sufficiency of Scripture as the dogmatic basis of the church.

Contrary to the wishes of the Academy, the reply which Hasler presented on 25 June, a document some three hundred pages in length, contained a forthright defense of his earlier work.²⁶ After a brief account of the events leading up to the publication of the *Aphorismi*, a situation in which he clearly saw himself as the aggrieved party, Hasler turned to answer the criticism of his adversaries. On none of the issues raised did he accept that his position was at variance with the received teaching of the evangelical tradition. Although it was clear that the real reason for the present discord was his personal conflict with Florus, the underlying problem was the failure of many of his critics to comprehend even the most basic rules of grammar and dialectic. This challenging note was further emphasized by the fact that Hasler claimed the support of Jacob Schegk in Tübingen, as well as leading members of the university at Heidelberg. Determined to avoid any escalation of the affair, the school authorities took the simple option of referring the matter to the Magistrate. The question was duly raised at a meeting of the General Council on Saturday, 13 August, when the Scholarchs were ordered to place Hasler in detention until further investigations had been made.²⁷ In the meantime Marbach and his colleagues in the Kirchenkonvent were to be asked for their opinion on Hasler's defense, as well as for some comment on the broader theological implications. As far as the civil authority was concerned the issue was quite clear cut; it could only bring the town into disrepute if a member of the school was allowed to impugn the character of the clergy.

Events now started to move rather more quickly. The written reply of the pastors, which had been prepared by Marbach himself, was presented to the Council the following Wednesday. It is interesting to note that the autograph copy of this document is to be found amongst the pieces relating to the ongoing row with Sturm and his

²⁶ *Declaratio dictorum quorundam in Aphorismis Theticis Aristotelis*, A.S.T. 354/38, 245^f-395^v.

²⁷ Archives Municipales de Strasbourg, Ratsprotokoll 1575, 479^{t/v}.

colleagues, since it was evidently designed with this context in mind.²⁸ Underlying their critique of Hasler's work was the assumption that the origins of the problem were to be found in the rationalizing tendency inherent within the reformed approach to theology, something which despite every effort over the previous decade continued to exercise an influence within the Academy. It was for this reason that the affair constituted a threat to the Church as a whole and revealed the need for constant vigilance on the part of the pastoral corps. In the light of the recent controversy, the implication that the clergy should be entrusted with a greater degree of oversight hardly required to be drawn.

After receipt of this submission, the Council ordered that Hasler be moved to the municipal prison, where he was to be interrogated by Pappus in the presence of one of the Scholarchs, Arbogast Rechberger, and the lawyer Paul Hochfelder.²⁹ Satisfied that the work had not been done in collaboration, the commission then proposed a form of retraction as the most obvious solution to the predicament. At length convinced that philosophical argument was no proof against “thick walls and strong locks”, Hasler agreed to this proposal and drew up a statement, which was duly read at the next meeting of the Council on 20 August.³⁰ While insisting that he had never been guilty of the Arian heresy, he withdrew any suggestion that natural reason could lead to a saving knowledge of the divine, together with the offensive claim that philosophy should be used to moderate the interpretation of Scripture. At the same time, he apologized for having described the pastors as “unlearned sophists”, something which had never been intended as an insult to the town. On presentation of sealed copies of this retraction the following Monday he duly obtained his release from prison.³¹

²⁸ A.S.T. 65/8, 110^r-51^v. A further copy of the *Bericht von Hasleri Disputatio* can be found in the *Varia Ecclesiastica* IV, A.S.T. 169, 479^r-88^v.

²⁹ Ratsprotokoll 1575, 490^v-1^v. See also the list of questions put to Hasler, A.S.T. 354/40, 398^r-400^v, together with the eventual report of the commission, A.S.T. 72/10, 62^r-3^v.

³⁰ “Weil ich dan nicht der hoffnung, mit philosophischen argumenten dike mauren vnd starke schlößer zu bewegen, hab ich in den gezänk ... meinen widersächern recht vnd gewonnen gegeben”, Staatsarchiv Bern, Unnütz Papiere 56/69, 1129-30. See also the letters of Hasler to Rechberger and the Academy, A.S.T. 354/44-45, 408^r-14^v.

³¹ The two sealed copies of the retraction in Latin and German can be found at A.S.T. 354/46-47. Bähler states without evidence that Hasler had already spend some five weeks in prison, which Séguenny extends to four months in order to emphasize the importance of the affair.

Here effectively the story of Hasler's residence in Strasbourg comes to an end. Not only has any hopes of advancing his career been dashed, but his patrons in Bern were further embarrassed at this latest clash with authority. Only a long statement of apology was able to forestall the suspension of his grant pending return to Switzerland. After awaiting the recovery of one of his pupils from a severe bout of fever, the party left to matriculate at Freiburg in December. It was here that Hasler was able to take his doctorate in medicine the following year.³² In the meantime, the row over the control of the Strasbourg Academy had finally been settled by means of a compromise signed by both sides on New Year's Eve. While guaranteeing the independence of the school from pastoral interference, it was conceded that Marbach had the right to continue with the direct supervision of the ordinands. The maintenance of doctrinal orthodoxy was in future to be assured through a closer cooperation between the separate institutions of church and school.³³

II

How then should the case of Hasler be assessed? Did the views expressed in his work represent a genuine threat to the established church or was the affair no more than a convenient occasion for the preachers to reassert their influence within the school? Posed in these terms the question does not allow for a direct reply. There can be no doubt as to the importance of the political dimension, which was provided by the constant tension between church and school. The reluctance of the Academy to become engaged in any aspect of theological controversy was born of a long experience in dealing with Marbach, who was disposed to interpret all such matters as points of confessional

³² The collection of laudatory verses published by his friends to mark the occasion, of which a copy has been bound with the *Aphorismi* in the Stadtbibliothek Bern, provides a valuable source of information of Hasler's early life. It has not previously been noted that the contributors to this work included Jacob Suter, one of the pastors arrested with Sylvan who had subsequently converted to Catholicism.

³³ The relevant documentation can be found at A.S.T. 65/9 a-f.

principle on which he was assured of gaining the support of the civil authority. It is this which explains the refusal to allow Hasler to defend his work in the form of a public disputation, which had been his declared intention since arriving in the town. Angered at what was felt to be an injustice, he himself precipitated the intervention of the Magistrate through the publication of the *Aphorismi* and his subsequent attack on the clergy. In such circumstances there was little that could be said in his defense and the condemnation of the work by the pastors was really a matter of form. This very fact has prevented any attempt to come to terms with the complex of issues raised by the affair.

It must be admitted that the intellectual background to Hasler's work remains somewhat obscure, a point to which Anton Schindling has drawn attention in his excellent study on the development of the Strasbourg Academy.³⁴ While granted that both the thesis and its long defense were entirely his own composition, this does not mean that the singular ideas advanced in the work were simply the young man's invention.³⁵ A philosophical account of the doctrine of God had been attempted since the time of Boethius and much support for the case could be drawn from the mine of scholastic theology. Yet if Hasler was clearly indebted to Aquinas, it should be noted that the latter rejected any attempt to establish a metaphysical basis for the Trinity. Here was a fundamental difference to which Pappus sought to draw his attention during the interrogation in prison. The scholastic argument had been developed within the context of divine revelation, where the use of philosophy was limited to the confirmation of doctrine already derived from the reading of Scripture. Hasler's most controversial claim was that religion should be moderated according to the precepts of reason as outlined in the work of Aristotle. As far as the pastors were concerned, this was tantamount to denying the sufficiency of revelation as the proper basis for our knowledge of God.

Without a proper grounding in philosophy many of the difficult problems of theology would simply remain at the level of paradox. The bulk of Hasler's training over the

³⁴ *Humanistische Hochschule und freie Reichsstadt*, 365-6.

³⁵ On this point Hasler noted: "Quam ob rem, nullis consultis interpretibus, hæc omnia meo ingenio adiciēbam, planeque omnis nova putabam", *Declaratio in Aphorismis Theticis Aristotelis*, A.S.T. 354/38, 249^{r/v}.

previous eight years had been in the logical tradition of the Renaissance; indeed, he freely admitted that the texts with which he was most familiar were those contained in the *Organon*.³⁶ It was generally agreed that the study of grammar and dialectic was essential to the proper understanding of religion since theology would otherwise cease to be a form of rational discourse. Precisely this point had been emphasized more than twenty years earlier during the course of Zanchi's lectures on the Physics, his text of which was still in use within the Strasbourg Academy.³⁷ An example of this was the discussion raised by the appendix supplied to the forty-eighth aphorism, which had been taken to suggest that God was responsible for sin.³⁸ It was only with reference to the Thomist definition of God as *actus purus*, a conception which he had clearly borrowed from Aristotle, that divine causality could be understood without offense to piety. Underlying this claim was the reformed teaching on *Deus ex lex*, the idea that the absolute spontaneity of God was to place Him out with the bounds of moral judgment. Hasler's purpose was simply to deny that there was any logical inconsequence involved in a proposition he had derived from the Topics that God could do evil.

Yet it was his interest in natural philosophy, which would seem to have dated from the time of his association with Simonius in Leipzig, that proved crucial to the development of Hasler's ideas. Aside from Zanchi's introduction to the Physics, to which reference has already been made, Hasler made use of similar commentaries by Jacob Schegk and Georg Liebler, both of which had been delivered in the Tübingen school.³⁹ Here it was argued that in addition to grammar and dialectic a knowledge of natural philosophy was appropriate to the proper evaluation of theology. Although there was no sense in which this could be taken as a substitute for revelation, a point on which Liebler was

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 296^r.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 262^r-3^r. On these lectures see my article 'Girolamo Zanchi: Portrait of a Reformed Theologian and his Work', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 15 (1984), 189-90.

³⁸ "Quin verbi POSSE distinctione animadversa: IIX, Phys. 4 iis quæ adhuc dicta sunt; nihil obstat illud, Deum, uno excepto, omnia posse: VI. Nicomach. 2. etiam prave agere. IV, Top. 5."

³⁹ The commentary of Schegk, *In octo Physicorum sive de auditione physica libros Aristotelis*, had been published, together with another treatise on the soul, by Herwagen of Basel in 1548. Hasler cited from the 1561 edition of Lieblers' *Epitome philosophicæ naturalis, ex Aristotelis ... libris excepta*, which was also printed in Basel.

particularly emphatic, the discussion of physical properties and relations had a clear relevance to the interpretation of Scripture. Recognizing that philosophy and theology were based on two fundamentally different principles, the latter of which was derived from authority rather than experience, it was yet important to show that these did not stand in conflict. Hasler here rejected the idea of the twofold verity associated with the Averroist school; even if religious claims might transcend, they could not contradict the evident truths of experience.

The *Metaphysics*, however, was in an entirely different category, since it purported to define the first principles of matter rather than its properties. Given the humanist preoccupation with rhetorical logic, a tradition to which Johann Sturm had greatly contributed, it is hardly surprising that little interest was shown in this work. Even so, its relevance to theology had been defended by such figures as Juan Luis Vives and the Roman poet, Marcus Antonius Flaminus, whose paraphrase had been published in Paris in 1547. Of more direct bearing was the group of Paduan trained philosophers about the court of Henri II, to whose importance in the development of rationalist thought Henri Busson has drawn attention.⁴⁰ In defending his thesis Hasler referred to the writings to Joachim Périon, the forceful critic of the Ramist system, and the medical doctor Jean Fernel, whose works had recently been reprinted in Frankfurt. Yet the most notable authorities were Simomus' Italian mentors, Girolamo Cardanus and the late Regius Professor Francisco Vicomercatus, from whose commentary on *Metaphysics* XII Hasler had derived the proposition that a knowledge of Aristotle was “ad moderandam religionem utilissimum”.⁴¹ This is the first clear evidence of the influence of this group on the development of dissident opinion within the Empire.

This should not be taken to suggest that Hasler was the first to present the *Metaphysics* as a suitable buttress to the evangelical faith. It was in the context of the row over the

⁴⁰ *Le rationalisme dans la littérature française de la Renaissance (1533-1601)* (Paris², 1957), 191-229.

⁴¹ The unacknowledged citation from the *Commentarii in eam partem duodecimi libri metaphysicorum Aristotelis, in qua de Deo disseritur* (Paris, 1551) appears on the very first page of his thesis. A comprehensive list of Hasler's sources can be found in the *Declaratio in Aphorismis Theticis Aristotelis*, A.S.T. 354/38, 365^v-7^v.

mode of Christ's presence in the eucharist, a controversy which centered round the doctrine of ubiquity as outlined by the Tübingen school, that a renewed interest in the work became apparent. As early as 1565 Schegk had supplied a metaphysical grounding for the disputed claims of Johann Brenz about the *communicatio idiomatum*, whereby the properties of the two natures of Christ were seen as interchangeable by virtue of the hypostatic union. The following year he undertook a more ambitious project of defending the doctrine of the Trinity along similar lines. Here reference was made to the threefold distinction within the divine mens as providing the form of Christian teaching. Turning to the *Metaphysics* XII, he insisted that "the Son is that mind and intellect, produced by God the Father, whom Scripture calls the Logos".⁴² Far from exacerbating the conflict between reason and revelation as was the case with the Paduan trained philosophers, according to Schegk a sound knowledge of Aristotle was a sure defense against the Arian challenge.

As was to be expected, the appearance of this work provoked a considerable reaction within the reformed camp. Still one of the leading apologists for the Palatine settlement, Thomas Erastus tried to get round the problem by suggesting that Schegk's understanding of the hypostatic union in fact agreed with the reformed position and in no way justified the idea of a real communication of properties between the two natures. Yet the most searching criticism had been advanced by Simonius at the time when he was still working in Geneva.⁴³ While he strongly defended the *Metaphysics* against the well-known criticism of Ramus, he added that this could only be brought into disrepute if applied to the discussion of theology, which was a branch of knowledge assessable only to faith. Moreover, Schegk's interpretation of Aristotle could do no more than

⁴² "Filius est mens & intellectus, productus a Deo Patre, quem scriptura appellat λόγον." He then went on to add: "Hoc loco opus nobis est summo quodam & erudissimo Philosopho, qui intelligat in secretis a materia rebus idem & unum prorsus est, INTELLIGERE ipsum, INTELLECTUM & INTELLIGIBILE", *Contra Antitrinitarios negantes Patrem, Filium & Spiritum S. vnum numero & essentia esse Deum* (Tübingen, 1566), 41.

⁴³ The most comprehensive attack can be found in the *Antischegkianus* of 1571, though the main outlines of Simonius' case are contained in two earlier works, *Declaratio eorum, quæ in libello Iacobi Scheckii de una persona & duabus naturis Christi nonnullis obscuriora sunt visa* (Geneva, 1566) and *Interpretatio eorum quæ continentur in præfatione Simonii Declaratio* (Geneva, 1567). The use of the *Metaphysics* to justify the doctrine of the Trinity was dismissed in the latter work as absurd.

demonstrate the logical coherence of the trinitarian conception of God, but this was not the same as the essential Trinity as defined in the Creed. One of the Sorbonne theologians, Gilbert Genebrard, was later to extend this argument by accusing Schegk of maintaining the Sabellian heresy, the idea that the Trinity was an accidental form which did not reveal the full nature of God.

The Tübingen doctor had replied with a number of works in his defense, culminating in the massive *Antisimonius Apologeticus* of 1573.⁴⁴ Here he took the Italian to task over a series of issues arising out of the *Metaphysics*. The fundamental problem was that in common with Ramus he failed to recognize any form of analogy other than that of mathematical logic. Yet the proper subject of metaphysical inquiry was the unity of being which arose out of the relation between God and the world. It was on account of this *analogia entis* that Schegk was able to supply an ontological dimension to his work.⁴⁵ Just as the divine property of ubiquity was really transferred to the humanity of Christ in the context of the eucharist, so the threefold structure of mind as defined by Aristotle was an analogue of the true nature of God. This use of ontology was certainly out of step with the main stream of protestant thought, though it was to play an important part in the theological debates of the following century.

There is no doubt that this treatise provided the model for Hasler's own presentation of the doctrine of God and it was cited at a number of places in his defense. He would certainly have been aware of the controversy while still in Leipzig and for all his debt to Simonius probably regarded the dissertation as a means of distancing himself from the reputation of this former mentor. Although it is not clear whether the matter ever came to Schegk's attention and there is certainly no record of his reaction to the thesis, the close association of Planer with the Tübingen school should have been sufficient to ensure that such a discussion of the *Metaphysics* would receive a sympathetic hearing within the academy. Moreover, it was difficult to see how the pastors could condemn the work

⁴⁴ *Antisimonius, quo refelluntur supra trecentos errores Simonii, eiusdem Schegkii Apologeticus, oppositus calumnie Genebrardi, qua Schegkium in quodam scripto iniquissime Sabellianismi accusat* (Tübingen, 1573).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 14-148.

without at least implicitly criticizing one of the major champions of the Lutheran cause. Since he was determined to establish not only the orthodoxy of his views on the Trinity but also his suitability for academic preferment, it is easy enough to understand how Hasler came to approach the subject in this manner.

As far as Hasler was concerned, the basis of the natural knowledge of God was the idea of "absolute simplicity", that which constituted the defining characteristic of the Prime Mover. It was starting from this concept, which was clearly apparent in the *Metaphysics* XII, that he had been able to derive the more controversial claims contained in his thesis. Given that the divine essence allowed for no composition, but was simple and all-embracing, so it could be subject to no external stimulus: God's activity was thus always "in se, per se ac propter se".⁴⁶ Yet once this truth had been grasped, it made no sense to ascribe any temporal or spiritual benefits to human endeavor. In particular, the reward of ultimate felicity in heaven could only be the result of God's good pleasure and had nothing whatsoever to do with merit. Although Hasler stopped short of arguing that Aristotle had recognized the principle of justification by grace alone, in the context it required little imagination to draw this conclusion.

The other central aspect of protestant teaching was the mediating role accorded to Christ, whose life and work had established the sole possibility of reconciliation between God and man. Here Hasler was much more circumspect and strongly denied ever having ascribed such a view to the Stagirite. What he did suggest in the *Aphorismi* and went on to explain at some length in his subsequent defense was that any such reconciliation between the Creator and creation was itself a work internal to the divinity. It thus pertained to the office of mediator that it could only be accomplished by one who was

⁴⁶ "In se tamen, per se ac propter se, cuncta intelligit, cuncta agit: ut pariter sit omniscia & omnipotens. A. Metaph. 2. 1, Coel. 9". Aphorismus LXVII. It was in the two Porismata appended to this statement that Hasler developed the analysis here presented.

himself a part of the Godhead.⁴⁷ In so far as Aristotle was able to follow the logic of his own argument, so the form in which redemption would take place could readily be deduced from his work. Even if he did not possess the special illumination that enabled the patriarchs of the Old Testament to perceive in faith the person of Christ, the underlying doctrine of God was fully in accord with revealed truth. Once again the exercise of natural reason was seen as a compliment rather than an obstacle to the Christian faith.

It was against this background that Hasler turned to examine the problem of the Trinity. This was to pose a serious difficulty, since the philosophical doctrine of God contained within the idea of absolute simplicity could be none other than a form of strict monotheism. The crucial point was to show the logical necessity for a triune conception and here he turned to the *Organon* for support. "One who teaches the divine essence to be one and undivided according to the first mode outlined in I Topics 6 and that the same consists of three distinct subsistences in the sense of the second mode can be said to have believed and worshipped the Divine Majesty as Trinity in Unity".⁴⁸ Unfortunately Aristotle had not referred to differing hypostases in his treatment of the Prime Mover and so Hasler was obliged to develop a further syllogism equating the recognition of separate properties with a real distinction in being.⁴⁹ As far as the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity was concerned this was clearly the weak point of the argument since it lay open to the accusation of defending a kind of modalism.

⁴⁷ "Quicquid Deus unquam fecit, facit, aut facturus est, id propter se unum et solum facit. Nunc Deus omnia fecit, facit, facturus est propter et per Christum. Christus igitur, est ille ipse Deus altissimus", *Declaratio in Aphorismis Theticis Aristotelis*, A.S.T. 354/38, 294^v.

⁴⁸ "Si quis ita de simplicissima una numero, (I Top. 6 primo modo) essentia Divina docet, ut eadem tribus numero (secundo modo I Top. 6) distinctis ὑφισαμέηοις tradat: is Divinae Maiestatis Trinitatem in Unitate credit atque colit. Aristoteles ita docuit. Aristoteles igitur istud de Divina Maiestate credidit, eamque ita coluit", *ibid.*, 306^f.

⁴⁹ "Quisquis unam eandemque essentiam simplicissimam tribus tamen πρὸς τι, atque adeo contrariis proprietatibus differentem et credidit et demonstravit: hic perfecto ita de simplicissima una numero essentia divina docet, ut eandem tribus numero distinctis ὑφισαμέηοις tradat", *ibid.*, 306^v.

Here Hasler followed the example of Schegk in taking the relationship between intellect, intelligence and understanding as an analogue for the doctrine of God. While the three aspects of mind were integrally related in all forms of rational being, it was only in the case of the Prime Mover that this could logically be described in terms of the first mode of necessary connection, where the predicate pertained to the definition of the subject. Since only the divine mens possessed absolute simplicity, so it was here alone that its threefold structure formed an essential unity. Hasler was thus able to argue that “these three distinct subsistences described by Aristotle as intellect, intelligence and understanding correspond to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as outlined in the Scriptures”.⁵⁰ One way of explaining this relationship was as the principle, the end and the means of mental activity and this provided a perfectly adequate account of the working of the Trinity “ad intra”. As a complement to this analysis a series of both patristic and contemporary authorities were cited on the functional identity of each member of the Trinity. The most obvious conclusion to draw from this analysis was that the philosophical account of the deity served to supply both form and sense to the Christian doctrine of God.

Yet it should be noted that this was a conjectural presentation of the views of Aristotle, one designed to show the extent to which by logical inference they could be made to support the truths contained in Holy Writ, and it was never suggested that it rendered the latter unnecessary. Indeed Hasler was quite prepared to admit that without a prior knowledge of the Church's teaching, his interpretation of the work of Aristotle was far from evident. Even so, given that salvation consisted in the knowledge of God, so the question was bound to be raised as to whether the Stagirite and other pagan philosophers might thus have qualified for redemption. It appeared that God revealed himself to the generations of man with differing degrees of clarity. Since the time of Christ the preaching of the Gospel had opened the way of salvation to those who were in a position to hear and heed; but this did not exclude those to whom it had never been announced. The

⁵⁰ “Hæc tria distincta *ύφισαμέηα* Intellectum, Intelligentia et Intelligens ab Aristotele vocatæ Deo Patri, Filio et Sancto Spiritui, Divinis scripturis traditis, respondeant”, *ibid.*, 320^f.

judgment of charity was thus bound to conclude that Aristotle had come to share with the patriarchs of the Old Testament the celestial vision of the Trinity concerning whose mystery they had gained but an inkling during this life.

III

There is no doubt that Hasler undertook the thesis to give the lie to the constant suspicion that dogged his career since his days in Heidelberg. So much was recognized even by his most ardent critics. Forwarding a copy of the *Aphorismi* to Heinrich Bullinger, Haller noted that “it tries to prove that Aristotle held correct views on the unity and trinity of God: in reality he wishes to purge himself, so we might believe he holds the right opinions”.⁵¹ Yet it is not necessary to assume that the work was simply compiled tongue in cheek. Like his mentor Simonius, Hasler certainly approached questions of dogma with a degree of skepticism, but was nonetheless capable of developing and defending a consequent argument. Having decided to justify his position in line with established orthodoxy, it would seem he was genuinely surprised to discover that his work had become the source of controversy. While conscious of differences with the Lutheran pastors over the doctrine of the eucharist, any suggestion that he was guilty of the Arian heresy or sought in any way to qualify the divinity of Christ was patently absurd -- such was the very reverse of his intention. Moreover, he had gone to considerable lengths to distance himself from the Averroist teaching on the twofold nature of truth, a position which could only serve to undermine the credibility of the faith. It was a measure of confidence in the integrity of his own stance that the long statement to the school authorities ended on a note of protest rather than apology; unless some fault could be found with the work, Hasler felt justified in repeating his request for a public disputation and the opportunity to defend his views before those of recognized learning and impartiality.⁵²

⁵¹ “Conatur ex Aristotele probare ilium recte sensisse de unitate et trinitate Dei: vult ita seipsum purgare, ut credamus ilium quoque recte sentire”, 21 April 1575, S.A.Z. EII 370 a, 516^v.

⁵² *Declaratio in Aphorismis Theticis Aristotelis*, A.S.T. 354/38, 394^r-5^v.

Unfortunately for Hasler the debate in Strasbourg was never really concerned with these questions and there is no suggestion in any of the documents that the problem of Arianism was ever seriously raised. It was rather the relation between natural and revealed theology that the pastors saw as being crucial. In no sense did Marbach seek to deny the importance of grammar and dialectic as a propædeutic to theological inquiry; indeed, it was bluntly emphasized that many of Hasler's problems were the result of his "horrible, obscure and complex manner of speech".⁵³ Yet the real issues could not be approached through the analysis of philosophical texts. The claim that Aristotle might have possessed a saving knowledge of God was not alone suspect on account of its novelty, but was a priori impossible "since it can easily be demonstrated from Holy Scripture that without the preaching of the Gospel, about which Aristotle knew nothing, no natural man in the entire world can comprehend the high secret of the true and eternal divine essence were he as perceptive and learned as a hundred Aristotles".⁵⁴ The important factor was not the intellectual perception of God as such, but rather the way in which that knowledge was obtained. Grace was made available by God through the ministry of Word and Sacrament in the absence of which a saving faith was impossible.

It was on this basis that Marbach turned to consider the problem of the twofold knowledge of God. Here it was the characteristic distinction between Law and Gospel, the point on which "the whole of Christendom is grounded and all that is therein taught and preached", that was seen to provide the key.⁵⁵ It is true that the former, which testified to God's work in the creation and governance of the world, had been inscribed in the heart of man from the beginning and was thus in measure accessible to human reason. As a result of the Fall, however, the philosopher could attain no more than "a tiny

⁵³ *Bericht von Hasleri Disputatio*, A.S.T. 354/37, 224^f.

⁵⁴ "Weil aus heiliger gottlicher schriftt, mit sattem gutten grundt kan dargethan vnd bewisen werden, daß ohne der predig des H. Evangelii, von deren Aristoteles nicht gewüst, keinem naturlichen menschen uff dem ganzen erdboden dises hoche geheimnus, des wahren ewigen Gottlichen wesens, bekant ist vnd werdem mag, wan er schon sinnreicher vnd gelerter wer als hundert Aristoteles", *ibid.*, 217^v.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 230^f.

spark” of such knowledge through the process of reflection. The limits of natural perception had been revealed in the Decalogue, an awareness of which served to render man inexcusable but could never accomplish his redemption. The theology of grace was a secret disclosed only in the Gospel. Since the teaching on the Trinity and the mediation of Christ both fell within this category, so it was quite spurious to suggest that Aristotle could have recognized and worshipped the true nature of God. This was only possible through the Incarnation and the continuing witness to the life and work of Christ.

It was the failure to grasp the significance of this dialectic that gave rise to the other errors and contradictions contained in Hasler's defense. In no way was it possible to discern the principle of justification by grace alone on the basis of the Law. Natural man tended to believe in salvation through works, a point which was underscored by the subsequent claim to the effect that “God requires of no man more than has been conceded to him in terms of ability and Perception”.⁵⁶ It was evident Hasler saw the value of the Gospel as limited to providing a clearer expression of that which was already known through the light of reason; it served only to awaken the dulled senses from a kind of spiritual sleep. It was likewise for this reason that he failed to perceive the fallacy in suggesting that the Gospel applied only to those to whom it was preached, a claim which allowed for the fact that Aristotle was as likely to be in a state of grace as any of the saints of the church. To accept this position would be to undermine the whole of the evangelical faith.

This was a similar critique to that which Marbach had developed in response to the reformed party since the time of the Zanchi controversy some fifteen years earlier. In attempting to subsume the Old Testament within the covenant of grace, Calvin and the Swiss theologians had destroyed the proper balance between Law and Gospel and

⁵⁶ Non videlicet Deum plus a quoquam exigere, quam ei virium concesserit et notitiæ”, *Declaratio in Aphorismis Theticis Aristotelis*, A.S.T. 354/38, 375^v. Commenting on this thesis Marbach noted: “Das ist die brulle dadurch Haslerus siehet, vnd ihn verfuert, dass er den Pharisäern gleich halt vnd achtet, daß Gott in seinem Gesetz mer nicht als die usserliche disciplin vnd zucht erfordere, welches des verdampften Pelagii ketzerei gewesen ist”, *Ibid.*, 238^v-9^f.

succeeded only in transforming Christ into “a second Moses”.⁵⁷ This had also far-reaching consequences for the doctrine of God, since the transcendent logos could easily assimilate the attributes of philosophical monotheism as defined by Aristotle. Such an approach had earlier been used to justify controversial points of doctrine such as the limited atonement and the indefectibility of grace in the elect. Hasler's insistence that there was a sense in which God could legitimately be regarded as the author of sin was but an example of the way in which this common method worked to distort the evident meaning of Scripture.⁵⁸ According to Marbach this was to undermine the centrality of Christ as the “object of faith”, the only valid point of departure for theological reflection. In starting with the hidden mystery of God rather than the Incarnation, the reformed stood in danger of limiting Christ within the categories of reason, at which point it made little difference whether they continued to argue for an orthodox doctrine of the Trinity.

The course of the Arian scandal in the Palatinate lent much weight to this line of argument, which was soon developed by Jacob Andreae and his colleagues into a standard critique of the reformed party.⁵⁹ It was in response to such claims that the theology faculty at Heidelberg had recently published a long confession on the related issues of Christology and the doctrine of God, the orthodoxy of which could hardly be impugned. Here Zacharias Ursinus, the author of the Heidelberg Catechism, went to great lengths to disprove any connection between the reformed teaching and the emergence of Arian views.⁶⁰ In the meantime, his colleague Girolamo Zanchi had established a reputation as the champion of Palatine orthodoxy following the publication

⁵⁷ “Was ist aber dise alles anders dan us Christo unserm herren ein newen Gesetz geber und andern Mosem machen, vnd das seligmachend Evangelium in das Gesetz zu verwandeln”, *Ibid.*, 240^v.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 242^{r/v}.

⁵⁹ It would seem that Andreae first developed this thesis in his *Widerlegung der Predicanten Antwort zu Zurich auff Herrn Johann Brentzen Testament* (Tübingen, 1574), 109-20, where there is a clear juxtaposition between the reformed teaching and that of the Koran.

⁶⁰ *Bekanntnuß der Theologen zu Heidelberg von dem einigen waren Gott in dreyen Personen ... sampt angehengtem beweiß daß auß ihrer Lehre keine verleugnung der waren Gottheit Christi folge* (Heidelberg, 1574). A Latin translation of this confession can be found in Ursinus' *Opera Theologica* (Heidelberg, 1612) II, 379-438.

of his major work *De Tribus Elohim* in 1572.⁶¹ Himself trained in the school of Padua and a bitter antagonist of Simonius, the Italian exile was well aware that the radical disjuncture between reason and faith as proclaimed by the Averroists could only undermine the credibility of the church's teaching. Determined to counter this threat, he had thus set about the preparation of a four-part summa of reformed theology, a work which in conception owed much to the scholastic tradition in its effort to achieve the harmonization of reason and faith. It would thus seem that Hasler had every reason to be optimistic in sending a copy of the *Aphorismi* to the faculty in Heidelberg to obtain the judgment of the reformed theologians.

In this respect, however, the young man was to be severely disappointed. It was Zanchi's letter in reply to this request for support at the end of June 1575 that proved a major factor in bringing about his eventual recantation.⁶² For all that he recognized Hasler's sincerity, the Heidelberg professor was unable to approve his thesis without considerable reservations. Quite succinctly he drew the distinction between the use of philosophy to confirm true doctrine, as was evident in the work of the Fathers and the scholastic tradition, and the claim that it might itself supply the form of Christian belief. The dogmatic basis of the Church was derived from Scripture alone and this did not require the exercise of metaphysical speculation to be rendered intelligible to men. Revealed truth should be explained through the comparison of relevant texts and according to the *analogia fidei* rather than in terms of philosophical inquiry. Hasler's contention that the corpus of Aristotle should be used to moderate religion was to deny the importance of revelation by reducing theology to a branch of human reason.

Further difficulties were raised in looking at the problem of evil, a subject that had long exercised Zanchi's own mind. While granting that the Thomist conception of God as 'actus purus' was the appropriate point of departure for coming to terms with the

⁶¹ The importance of this book has been emphasized by A. Rotondo: *Studi e ricerche di storia ereticale italiana del cinquecento* (Turin, 1974), 101-6. For further information see Burchill, 'Girolamo Zanchi', 199-203.

⁶² This letter of 28 June 1575 is reproduced in *Epistolarum Zanchii libri duo* (Hanau, 1609) 188-91. Contemporary copies can be found in A.S.T. 354/42-43.

problem, since this served to confirm His sovereignty over the Law, it was yet emphasized that the divine responsibility for evil was by no means a proper deduction. The real cause of evil within the world was sin, which itself resulted from the incapacity of the human will to follow the precepts of the Law. It simply made no sense to ascribe such a failing to one who possessed no passive qualities.⁶³ Indeed, as divine providence always worked to the good, so it was really impious to speak of God as the author of sin. Zanchi realized that the difference here was one of terminology rather than substance; while the sovereign causality of God was not in question, it was still a perversion of language to bracket the problem of evil within this context.

Turning then to the main issue as to whether Aristotle could have recognized the Trinity, the Italian was equally stringent in his criticism. He certainly commended the ingenuity of Hasler in explaining the *Metaphysics*, but went on to note that “you are here attributing to Aristotle something that as far as I can see never entered his head”.⁶⁴ The analogy with the threefold structure of mind was inadequate to explain the mystery of the Trinity since it failed to account for any real distinction between the persons. “My advice concerning God and matters divine is that we should never presume to affirm anything unless it is revealed to us by the Prophets and Apostles in Holy Writ and from this high road let us decline neither to the right nor to the left”.⁶⁵ What really mattered was that a saving knowledge of God presupposed the reception of grace. Did Hasler seriously imagine that the Stagirite had been directly inspired through the Spirit, when even the Apostle Paul had denied having such knowledge prior to his encounter with the risen Lord? It is true that Zanchi did not deny the possibility of such knowledge, but he clearly regarded any speculation on the point as a complete waste of time. The study of

⁶³ “In Deo nullam esse passivam potentiam, certum est ex ipsa etiam Philosophia, cum Deus purissimus sit actus. Verum, quomodo cum hoc congruit, Deum posse male facere, cum male facere impotentiae potius sit, quam potentiae”, *ibid.*, 188-9.

⁶⁴ “Tu quidem acumen ingenii ostendis; sed ea tribuis Aristoteli, quae meo quidem iudicio nunquam ei venerunt in mentem”, *ibid.*, 189.

⁶⁵ “Meum itaque consilium est, ut de Deo, rebusque divinis nihil audeamus affirmare, nisi quatenus revelatum nobis fuit in sacris literis, per Prophetas et Apostolos: ab ipsis neque ad dexteram, neque ad sinistram, vel latum dignatum declinantes”, *ibid.*, 190. On these questions see O. Gründler: *Die Gotteslehre Zanchis und ihre Bedeutung für seine Lehre von der Prädestination* (Neukirchen, 1965), 28-48.

philosophy was of great value to the Church, but only when kept within its proper confines.

Yet despite their apparent agreement in rejecting the conclusions of Hasler's thesis, there was here an important difference between Marbach and Zanchi which should be noted by way of conclusion. Recognizing the need for philosophy as a means of defending the rationality of the faith, the reformed theologian allowed for no radical disjuncture between the two; the revelation in Christ provided an essential complement to the vestigial knowledge of the divine as contained in the natural law. As far as the pastors were concerned any such accommodation was unthinkable. At the very end of his statement Marbach noted that unless action were taken "so much place will soon be provided for philosophy that it will take over the chairs of theology and start to govern the Church from the pulpit".⁶⁶ While this rejection of the *Metaphysics* was fully in accord with the teaching of Luther, in the light of subsequent developments within the evangelical tradition, it may be felt that here was the voice of a Cassandra. The majority of the following generation was to pursue the direction outlined by Schegk and witnessed precisely the revival of metaphysical speculation that Marbach had sought to avoid. It was little consolation that this change took place in the context of a dogmatic which remained firmly grounded in the action and work of Christ.⁶⁷

Thus, for all that the case of Hasler was in itself of little importance, it yet threw into perspective a number of points of more general interest. The debate over the Trinity only came into its own in the wake of the Heidelberg scandal, when it gave a new dimension to questions that had long been seen to divide the two wings of the evangelical movement. Here one was less concerned with the status of the Nicene Creed than with establishing the proper basis of dogmatics. In particular, it was felt that the reformed approach to the doctrine of God so radically displaced the role of Christ as to prepare the

⁶⁶ "Wie balt aber der philosophiei so vil eingerumpt wird, das sie in der schulen die Theologische Cathedram, vnd in der kirchen die kanzel, anfacht zue moderiren", *Bericht von Hasleri Disputatio*, A.S.T. 354/37, 243^v.

⁶⁷ On these developments see W. Sparr: *Wiederkehr der Metaphysik: die ontologische Frage in der lutherischen Theologie des ftühen 17.Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart, 1976).

way for Unitarianism. It was this common assumption on the part of the pastors and not the detail and derivation of Hasler's ideas that lay behind his brief spell of imprisonment. Even granted that earlier attacks on Calvin's own orthodoxy had rather missed the mark, the evidence of this affair shows why many of those of the next generation were to retain their suspicions with regard to his successors.

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APPENDIX

In the following extract from the *Declaratio in Aphorismis Theticis Aristotelis*, A.S.T. 354/38, 360^r-363^r, Hasler presents a summary of the philosophical doctrine of God in the form of thirty-four theses taken from the *Metaphysics* XII, 6-10. Although the disputed questions are not here discussed, it provides valuable insight into a view of the deity that came to be widely shared within the reformed tradition. It was the impersonal aspect of the Prime Mover to which Hasler's critics most strongly objected. Certainly these theses make no allowance for the Incarnation, the point of departure for the evangelical understanding of the doctrine of God.

Iste igitur primus Motor (de quo libro 12. *Metaph.*) nominibus et attributis inter cetera, describitur iis quæ, hactenus explicata, hic ordine recensebo.

12. *Metaph.* cap. 6.

1. MOTOR ILLE, est Substantia, tam per Accidens, quam per se omnino immobilis.
2. Nunquam ociosa:
3. Purus actus, sui semper similis:
4. Ab omni materia soluta, et incorporea:
5. Non simul mortis et vitæ causa: sed vitæ quidem proxima, mortis remota, utriusque prima:

Cap. 7.

6. Omnes alias causas posteriores, tam interitus quam incoluminatis, suis quasque ordinibus, conservans atque sustenans:
7. Sola sibi sufficiens, nullo egens externo:
8. Propter quam de NULLA ALIA essentia prestabiliore cogitandum est:
9. Universi Mundi autor et conservatrix prima, a qua pendent omnia:
10. Qua sublata, nihil reliquum ex tota hac rerum natura persistere aut esse posset:

11. Nihil cum defatigatione: omnia sine omni labore, mera bonitate sua et pulchritudine movens et conservans:
12. Supremi Cæli Motorem supremum in officio retinens, mera sui cōtemplatione illius iucundissima:
13. Omnia agens necessario, nec tamen a quoquam agendum incitata:
14. In gaudio ineffabili constituta, infinitæ ac sapientiæ, semper vigilans, sentiens, intelligens, atque adeo spe iucundissima ac pulcherrima recordatione fruens iugiter:
15. Intelligens et cognoscens ad sui delectationem quæque optima et præstantissima in extra se vel coacta vel ullo modo seipsa:
16. DEUS IPSE (O ΕΕΟΣ) admirabilis, et longe maxime admirandus:
17. Ipsa VITA, vita Beatissima et Æterna:
18. VIVENS Æternam beatissimum, id est Deus, ipsa vita et æternitas:
19. Principium et scaturigo uberrima, omnium rerum semina in se continens:
20. INVIsibilis, et nullo externo sensu perceptibilis:
21. Omnis magnitudinis corporeæ expers, indivisibilis et simplex: INFINItæ potestatis et Omnipotens:
22. IMMUTABILIS, nullique obnoxia passioni, qua Nemo ei Æqualis:

Cap. 8.

23. Cui ad minium 55. ordines mentium beatarum obediant atque ministrent, sola eius bonitate allectæ:
24. Natura et numero Unica atque sola:
25. NUMEN Divinum, nulli homini nullique animali similis:

Cap. 9.

26. Qua nihil uspiam Divinius aut præstantius, nihil excellentius:
27. Nunquam dormitans aut ociosa, ideoque semper Veneranda:
28. Nihil extra se, tanquam melius dignius aut præstantius intelligens vel agnoscens:
29. Quæ, quocunque intelligendo oblectatur: eo nihil uspiam excellentius cogitari potest:

30. Nulla alia re, nisi seipsa sola, ad bene beateque vivendum indigens, eaque ratione scipsam solam intelligens, ut sit eadem SUI ipsius intelligentia et sapientia:
31. Neque ex parte, qua vel Intellectum, vel Intelligentia, vel Intelligens sui ipsius est, sed omnibus tribus proprietatibus ex æquo beatissima:
32. Immo, in qua neque compositum quicquam esse possit, nec quæ partem post partem, sed seipsam totam tota intelligat:
33. Atque ita in omnia SECULA ab omni Æternitate per seipsam beatissima:

Cap. 10.

34. In qua totius Mundi salus incolumitas et conservatio (ceum in sapientissimo Duce exercitus) requiescit, quæque omnia a maximis usque minutissima regit atque tuetur divina sua providentia.

Haec pariter omnia, Motori primo attributa, de alio quam VERO DEO exponere blasphemum dicet nostra pia religio. Aliter de Aristotelis mente existimandi nulla causa est, cum quia nomine IPSE DEUS cum aliquoties aperte nominat.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Nachdem er seine Magisterarbeit über die natürliche Erkenntnis Gottes, wie sie im 12. Buch von Aristoteles *Metaphysik* skizziert ist, publiziert hatte, geriet der Berner Medizinstudent Johann Hasler mit den Straßburger Geistlichen in Konflikt, er wurde gefangengesetzt, und man forderte von ihm einen förmlichen Widerruf. Praktisch kann, die Angelegenheit nur auf dem Hintergrund der permanenten Spannungen zwischen Kirche und Schule verstanden werden. Mitglieder des Kirchenkonvents versuchten, wieder Einfluß auf die Ausbildung der Ordinanden zu gewinnen. Die gängige Annahme, Hasler habe sich des Arianismus schuldig gemacht, kann nicht bewiesen werden. Seine Interpretation des Aristoteles aber, die formuliert war, um Ansichten der Kirche zu stützen, so etwa die Erlösung durch die Gnade allein, die Fürsprache Christi, und die Doktrin der Trinität, wurde als Ausdruck der rationalisierenden Richtung innerhalb der reformierten Tradition aufgefaßt. Obwohl das Werk auch von dem führenden calvinistischen Theologen Girolamo Zanchi kritisiert wurde, lenkte die Debatte doch die Aufmerksamkeit auf die Unterschiede in der Beurteilung von Vernunft und Offenbarung zwischen den beiden Flügeln der evangelischen Bewegung. Auf dem Hintergrund des nicht lange zurückliegenden Skandals in Heidelberg kann die Betroffenheit der lutheranischen Geistlichen gut verstanden werden. Dennoch war ihr Versuch, die Folgen dieser philosophischen Reflexion zu begrenzen, zum Scheitern verurteilt, wie die Neubelebung der *Metaphysik* in der kommenden Generation beweist.

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