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# A Trojan horse in the citadel of orthodoxy: Samuel Maresius's critique of Cartesian theology

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## ABSTRACT

As a prominent theologian of Dutch Reformed orthodoxy, Samuel Maresius wrote *De abusu philosophiae cartesianae* (1670) to denounce the dangers of Cartesian theology. Despite its importance in the history of early modern Cartesianism, a crucial question about the work remains to be answered: which aspects of Cartesian theology did Maresius condemn as the most dangerous for Reformed orthodoxy? The present paper answers this question by selecting and analyzing four topics from *De abusu*: (1) freedom and grace, (2) the Trinity, (3) the world system, and (4) the origins of things. It shows that Maresius identified the danger of Cartesian theology as propagating heresies under the guise of benefitting the Reformed Church. He thus feared that Cartesian theology would destroy orthodoxy from within.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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## 1. Introduction

The philosophy of René Descartes (1596–1650) had a great impact across a wide range of academic disciplines in the late seventeenth century. It provoked particularly intense controversies in the field of theology. Remarkably, they took place primarily at Dutch universities. This is largely due to a group of theology professors in the Netherlands who embraced Cartesianism and were thus called ‘Cartesian theologians’. They sought to reconcile Descartes’s philosophy with the orthodox doctrines of the Dutch Reformed Church. The conservative theologians fiercely objected that such reconciliation would inevitably ruin the orthodox faith. Precisely with this argument in hand, Samuel Maresius (1599–1673) made a decisive intervention in 1670 by publishing an anti-Cartesian treatise: *De abusu philosophiae cartesianae* (Groningen).<sup>1</sup>

Maresius had served as a theology professor in Groningen since 1643. Initially, he was not hostile to Cartesianism. He even corresponded amicably with Descartes. As the University’s rector, he was also involved in drafting a document that acknowledged some of Descartes’s doctrines as consistent with the orthodox

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<sup>1</sup>On early modern Dutch Cartesianism in general, see Thijssen-Schoute, *Nederlands cartesianisme*; McGahagan, ‘Cartesianism in the Netherlands’; Verbeek, *Descartes and the Dutch*; Dibon, ‘Der Cartesianismus in den Niederlanden’; Schmaltz, *Early Modern Cartesianisms*. On its theological dimension, see Bizer, ‘Die reformierte Orthodoxie’; Goudriaan, ‘Descartes.’ We use the word ‘orthodox’ to mean the public endorsement of the confessional documents of the Dutch Reformed Church such as the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canon of Dordt.

teaching.<sup>2</sup> It was not until the late 1660s that he began to attack Cartesianism. This was partly because he read Lodewijk Meyer's (1629–1681) *Philosophia S. Scripturae interpres* (1666) and realized the danger of applying Descartes's philosophy to theological matters.<sup>3</sup> But the more decisive reason was that in 1669 he found himself criticized by his former student and now the leading Cartesian theologian Christoph Wittich (1625–1687). Since the 1650s, Wittich had used Maresius's *Collegium theologicum sive systema breve universae theologiae* (Groningen, 1645; hereafter *Systema*) as a textbook in his theology course in Nijmegen. In his lectures, he often made critical comments on the *Systema*, which were transcribed as *Annotationes* and circulated among students in manuscript form. This eventually reached Groningen and infuriated Maresius.<sup>4</sup> He saw it not only as a betrayal by his former disciple, but also as a Cartesian onslaught on orthodoxy. Hence, he set out to defend both himself and the Reformed Church with the publication of *De abusu*. Wittich immediately responded with his *Theologia pacifica* (Leiden, 1671), which in turn provoked numerous objections from conservative theologians. Petrus van Mastricht (1630–1706), for example, composed *Novitatum cartesianarum gangraena* (Amsterdam, 1677), which runs to over 500 pages and offers one of the most comprehensive critiques of Cartesian theology. *De abusu* thus sparked a series of heated debates in the 1670s over the compatibility of Descartes's philosophy with Reformed theology.<sup>5</sup>

Despite its importance in the history of Dutch Cartesianism, *De abusu* has not received its due recognition. Over a century ago, Josef Bohatec dismissed its criticism of Cartesian theology as superficial. Doede Nauta, in his foundational study on Maresius, agreed with Bohatec and argued that *De abusu* offered no principled critique of Descartes's philosophy.<sup>6</sup> The problem with their assessments was that they judged without a detailed analysis of Maresius's text. The situation has not been rectified to this day. Even though scholars have subsequently clarified the historical background behind the composition of *De abusu* and provided excellent overviews of its contents, they still have not produced an in-depth analysis of its argument. Hence, they have not been able to challenge Bohatec's and Nauta's negative evaluations.<sup>7</sup>

The lack of detailed analysis has left one fundamental question about *De abusu* unanswered: Which aspects of Cartesian theology did Maresius find most dangerous? As clearly stated in the preface of the work, he was most concerned that the application of Descartes's philosophy to theology would destroy orthodoxy. But precisely in what way would Cartesian theology clash with the Reformed faith? Did it simply deviate from the authorized doctrines? Or was there something distinctive about the manner of its deviation that should require orthodox theologians to take the utmost precaution? Answering these questions would enable us to identify the most salient aspect of

<sup>2</sup>Bohatec, *Die cartesianische Scholastik*, 151–53; Agostini and Savini, 'Introduzione', 10\*–15\*.

<sup>3</sup>On Maresius's criticism of Meyer's work, see Bordoli, *Ragione e scrittura*, 235–45.

<sup>4</sup>Eberhardt, *Wittich*, 223–27, 274–75.

<sup>5</sup>For an overview of Wittich's *Theologia pacifica* and criticisms of it, see Eberhardt, *Wittich*, 284–313. On Mastricht and his *Gangraena*, see Bizer, 'Die reformierte Orthodoxie,' 357–62; Goudriaan, *Reformed Orthodoxy*, 57–62; Kato, 'Petrus van Mastricht.'

<sup>6</sup>Bohatec, *Die cartesianische Scholastik*, 48; Nauta, *Maresius*, 365.

<sup>7</sup>For a full account of how Maresius came to write *De abusu*, see Eberhardt, *Wittich*, 266–75. For an overview of *De abusu*, see Eberhardt, *Wittich*, 275–84; Agostini and Savini, 'Introduzione,' 18\*–40\*.

Maresius's critique, and thereby help us understand why it was so influential in the subsequent history of Dutch Cartesianism.

To answer these questions, we will analyze in detail Maresius's arguments regarding four topics found in his *De abusu*. They appear consecutively in Sections 28–59 of the book. They concern (1) freedom and grace, (2) the Trinity, (3) the world system, and (4) the origins of things.<sup>8</sup> These issues were highly controversial among the theologians of the time especially in relation to the existing heresies. Therefore, they gave Maresius a good platform to expose dangers of Wittich's theological Cartesianism. Though they occupy only a part of *De abusu* (roughly one-sixth of it), they provide enough information to identify Maresius's overall concern about Cartesian theology.

## 2. Freedom and grace

Maresius begins Section 28 of *De abusu* by quoting Descartes's remark on freedom from the *Principles of Philosophy*, which reads as follows:

[...] we nonetheless experience within us the kind of freedom which enables us always to refrain from believing things which are not completely certain and thoroughly examined. Hence we are able to take precautions against committing *errors* on any occasion.<sup>9</sup>

Maresius interprets 'errors' mentioned in this passage as sins against Descartes's admonition made elsewhere, according to which the errors he talks about are not theological but purely epistemological.<sup>10</sup> Maresius thus takes Descartes to grant freedom from sin not only to prelapsarian Adam and Eve but even to the fallen humans. He condemns this as Pelagian heresy.<sup>11</sup> According to him, Pelagius and his followers aimed at gaining impassibility (ἀπάθεια) and sinlessness (ἀναμαρτησία). They taught that 'humans in this life can reach the state of not suffering bad agitations of passions nor bringing on them any guilt of sin'.<sup>12</sup> Maresius points out that both of these states could be attained with Cartesian freedom because it would bring impassibility by enabling humans to control passions; and sinlessness by allowing them to suspend judgements.<sup>13</sup>

Maresius maintains that Descartes, by making it possible for humans to be sinless, denies the necessity of God's grace, just as the Pelagians once did:

Why would the medicinal grace of Christ be necessary for us to shun heresy and avoid sins, which are most often called 'errors' and 'ignorances' in the Scriptures, if we experience within us the kind of faculty and liberty by which we are able to take precautions against committing sins and errors on any occasion?<sup>14</sup>

<sup>8</sup>To be more precise, Maresius inserted Sections 38 and 39 between his discussions on the Trinity and the world system. In these sections, he argued that Descartes's physiology found in the *Passions of the Soul* was theologically intolerable.

<sup>9</sup>Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, I.6, in AT, 8–1:6; CSM, 1:194 (slightly modified; emphasis added).

<sup>10</sup>Descartes, *Meditations*, AT 7:15.

<sup>11</sup>Maresius, *De abusu*, XXVIII, 17. On the accusation of Pelagianism against Descartes and his followers, see Scribano, *Da Descartes a Spinoza*, 15–23 (especially 20–21 on Maresius); Goudriaan, 'Pelagianism,' 192–99.

<sup>12</sup>Maresius, *Apologia novissima*, III.16, 77: 'Nam primo dicit Pelagium cum suis ἀπάθειαν et ἀναμαρτησίαν docuisse, idest posse hominem in hac vita eo pervenire, ut nec affectuum motus vitiosos patiatur, nec peccati ullius reatum contrahat [...].'

<sup>13</sup>Maresius, *De abusu*, XXIX, 18.

<sup>14</sup>Maresius, *De abusu*, XXIX, 17–8: 'Quid enim opus nobis erit gratia medicinali in Christo, ad vitandas haereses et declinanda peccata, quae in Scripturis appellantur saepissime *errores* et *ignorantiae*, si eam in nobis facultatem et libertatem experimur, qua possimus praecavere ne unquam peccemus vel erremus?'

Maresius bases his argument on his understanding of the original sin and the divine grace. He takes the original sin as consisting in the ignorance of the intellect and the concupiscence of the will. These two corruptions can be healed only by the medicinal grace of Christ, which illuminates the intellect and converts the will.<sup>15</sup> Such a work of grace, however, would become unnecessary due to Cartesian freedom because it allows humans to be sinless and impassible, and thus could enable them to evade the detrimental effects of the original ignorance and concupiscence.

Maresius points out that the Cartesian notion of freedom would be welcomed by the Socinians, Jesuits, and Arminians. According to him, these unorthodox groups shared an erroneous understanding of grace and free choice (*liberum arbitrium*). They claim that human beings, even after receiving the divine grace, still hold the freedom to either accept or reject it. They view grace as something ‘resistible’ (*resistibilis*).<sup>16</sup> For Maresius, Descartes too acknowledges the resistibility of grace by admitting in humans the freedom to suspend judgments at any time. The Reformed orthodox theologians reject this understanding because it would undermine divine omnipotence by making God’s operation dependent on the human will. The Synod of Dort, in fact, condemned the Arminians with the declaration that grace is ‘irresistible’ (*irresistibilis*).<sup>17</sup>

It is no surprise to Maresius that Descartes held a theory similar to the Jesuits’ because he knew nothing about grace and free choice except what he had learned at their school. But Maresius finds it shocking and intolerable that Wittich, the Reformed theologian, supports Descartes’s theory despite its incompatibility with the decision of the Synod of Dort. For Maresius, any attempt of harmonizing the two is as hopeless as trying to ‘squeeze milk out of a bull or plough the shore’.<sup>18</sup> Inevitably, Wittich compromises with the Arminians on the issue of the irresistibility of grace, which is evident in the following passage from his *Annotationes*:

Therefore, the irresistible operation [of grace] is that by which faith and conversion certainly take place in humans. If the Arminians were willing to acknowledge this, we could easily stop using the word ‘irresistible’.<sup>19</sup>

Here is Maresius’s criticism:

At least he [Wittich] openly states that he does not value the *irresistibility* of grace in the process of our conversion so highly. Indeed, he is ready to renounce the word ‘irresistible’ and grant permission not to use the word to those who have so far opposed its usage against our Churches.<sup>20</sup>

Maresius points out that Wittich’s rejection of the irresistibility of grace can ultimately be traced back to Descartes’s understanding of the will. In the *Principles of Philosophy*, Descartes states that ‘desire, aversion, assertion, denial and doubt are various modes of willing’.<sup>21</sup> According to Maresius’s interpretation, Descartes here wrongly regards

<sup>15</sup>Maresius, *Theologiae elencticae nova synopsis*, XI.6, 1:505, 507; Maresius, *Epicrisis theologica*, 174; Maresius, *Systema* (1662), VI.10, 100–01.

<sup>16</sup>Maresius, *Theologiae elencticae nova synopsis*, XIV.4, 2:153.

<sup>17</sup>The Canons of Dort, art. III/IV, rejection 8. On the resistibility of grace, see Stanglin and McCall, *Arminius*, 155–57.

<sup>18</sup>Maresius, *De abusu*, XXX, 19.

<sup>19</sup>Maresius, *Systema* (1673), VIII.55, 435a: ‘Illa ergo irresistibilis operatio in eo consistit quod per eam certo in homine efficiatur fides et conversio: quod si vellent concedere Arminiani, facile illa voce irresistibilis possemus abstinere.’

<sup>20</sup>Maresius, *De abusu*, XXXI, 20: ‘Saltem palam profitetur, se non tanti facere *irresistibilitatem* Gratiae in nostra conversione, quin paratus sit illi renunciare ac ejus gratiam facere ijs qui illam hactenus contra nostras Ecclesias oppugnant.’

<sup>21</sup>Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, I.32, AT8–1, 17; CSM, 1:204.

judgment as volitional activities, a gross deviation from the traditional view that judgment is formed by the intellect, not the will. He thus allows the will to judge independent of the intellect, and hence of the divine grace that illuminates the intellect. He consequently creates the possibility that the will resists grace. Against this, Maresius follows the tradition in considering that the intellect makes judgments, which the will simply follows. The will is therefore 'blind' (*coeca*) and has no power to resist grace.<sup>22</sup>

Maresius warns that Cartesian theologians, with their idiosyncratic understanding of the will, would seriously undermine the Reformed cause:

Just as Vorstius once wanted to talk about God on the basis of Sozzini, there are today those who want to do so on the basis of Descartes. They attribute *judgment* and *assent* to the will and leave nothing to the intellect but a simple understanding devoid of composition, division, and judgement. They in fact make their liberty absolute, independent (even though Luther said that free choice is a name without reality), and ἀυτεξούσιον [unrestrained] in Greek (this term is exactly what Calvin rightly rejected as too arrogant). Consequently, they maintain that the will is determined only by itself and allow no precurrence of God to participate in the process of this determination. Nor do they offer any intelligible distinction between the power and efficacy of divine grace (by which God works in his creatures both to will and to do [of his good pleasure], Philippians 2:13) and his ordinary concurrence through which he works all in all.<sup>23</sup>

Maresius argues that Cartesian theologians reject two important doctrines. First, they deny God's 'precurrence' (*praecursus*). Maresius defines precurrence as the act of God which should precede any action of creatures because they cannot act unless being acted upon by God. It produces even human volition.<sup>24</sup> Maresius accuses the Cartesians of denying this last point because for them the will determines its action by itself without being acted upon by God. Thus, making the human will completely independent, they overthrow the very thing that Luther and Calvin strived to establish.

Second, Cartesian theologians cannot distinguish between God's ordinary concurrence and grace. With his ordinary concurrence, God conserves powers of action in creatures and lets them operate in accordance with their own nature. Through grace, on the other hand, he gives them the power they had not possessed before to do good works.<sup>25</sup> In contrast, Descartes admits in humans the freedom not to sin and thereby allows them to do good works only with their own power, which God preserves by his ordinary concurrence. Consequently, the ordinary concurrence renders grace superfluous and there remains no meaningful distinction between the two. Observing these aberrations in Wittich's *Annotationes*, Maresius laments that his former disciple insists

<sup>22</sup>Maresius, *De abusu*, XXXI, 19–20; Maresius, *Theologiae elencticae nova synopsis*, XIV.4, 2: 153–54; Hampton, 'Sin,' 229–31.

<sup>23</sup>Maresius, *De abusu*, XXXI, 19–20: 'Sed qui hodie volunt θεολογεῖν ex Cartesio, ut quondam Vorstius ex Socino, *judicium* et *assensum* vindicant voluntati, ac nihil aliud relinquunt intellectui, quam simplicem apprehensionem, expertem compositionis et divisionis ac judicij. Quin eo usque libertatem suam alodiale faciant et independentem, dixerit licet Lutherus liberum arbitrium esse titulum sine re, et ἀυτεξούσιον Graecorum, ceu nimis superbum Calvinus merito improbaverit, ut voluntatem a seipsa sola determinari statuant, nullum ad id Dei praecursum admittant, nec ullum discrimen intelligibile proponant inter Gratiae Divinae vim et efficaciam qua operatur in suis et velle et perficere Phil. II. 13. et ordinarium ipsius concursum per quem operatur omnia in omnibus'; Martin Luther, *Assertio omnium articulorum*, XXXVI; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.2.4. Conrad Vorstius (1569–1622) was an Arminian theologian who advocated a theological position similar to that of Fausto Sozzini (1539–1604), the most notorious antitrinitarian of his time. On Vorstius's relation to Socinianism, see Daugirda, *Die Anfänge des Sozinianismus*, 392–402.

<sup>24</sup>Maresius, *Systema* (1662), IV.29, 65. On precurrence, see Beck, 'Will as Master of Its Own Act,' 166.

<sup>25</sup>Maresius, *Sylloge disputationum*, 2: 555–56; Maresius, *Systema* (1662), IV. 29–30, 65–6. On divine concurrence, see Muller, *Divine Will*, 283–310.

on following Descartes and ‘wants to depart as far as possible from the doctrine that all Reformed theologians have accepted so far’.<sup>26</sup>

Lastly, Maresius notes that because Descartes and his followers understand freedom as a capacity to act independent of God, they are unable to reconcile human freedom with divine predestination. Maresius grounds his interpretation on Part I, Articles 40 and 41 of the *Principles of Philosophy*. There Descartes asserts that God leaves human free actions undetermined, but confesses his inability to comprehend how this indetermination could be compatible with the doctrine that God predetermined everything from eternity.<sup>27</sup> Maresius points out that the same difficulty would arise for the Arminian Simon Episcopius (1583–1643), who also regards human freedom as consisting in independence from God. Yet Maresius claims that any Reformed theologian must understand freedom differently. For them, an action is free when it has a free agent as its proximate cause. This condition is still valid even if the same action was so predetermined by God. Maresius’s message is clear: Wittich, though a Reformed theologian, fails to endorse this orthodox view and thus his Cartesianism lapses into the Arminian heresy in making the human will so independent of God that it could resist his grace.<sup>28</sup>

### 3. The Trinity

Maresius begins discussing the Trinity by citing the following passage from *Principles of Philosophy*, Part I, Article 76:

But above all else we must impress on our memory the overriding rule that whatever God has revealed to us must be accepted as more certain than anything else. And although the light of reason may, with the utmost clarity and evidence, appear to suggest something different, we must still put our entire faith in divine authority rather than in our own judgment.<sup>29</sup>

Though this seems to pay a due respect to revelation, Maresius claims that ‘among the Cartesian remarks, nothing is more false or more dangerous than this one, and there is nothing that orthodox theologians must guard against more firmly’.<sup>30</sup> This is because Descartes here allows God’s revelation to contradict our clear and distinct perceptions, so that what is theologically true can be philosophically false, or vice versa. Such a theory of ‘double truth’ has been almost unanimously rejected by the Reformed theologians, including Maresius.<sup>31</sup>

Maresius finds it particularly dangerous that Descartes lists the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity as possibly opposing clear and distinct perceptions.<sup>32</sup> He

<sup>26</sup>Maresius, *De abusu*, XXXI, 20: ‘Et certe talia nonnemo suis inspersit *annotatis ad meum Systema* loco 8. dum vult suis novis Philosophematis insistere, et recedere quantum potest a doctrina hactenus inter omnes Reformatos Theologos recepta [...]’.

<sup>27</sup>Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, I, 40–41, AT 8–1: 20.

<sup>28</sup>Maresius, *De abusu*, XXXII, 20–21. For more on Maresius’s attempt to reconcile God’s predestination and human freedom, see Maresius, *Theologiae elenchcticae nova synopsis*, XIII.6, 2: 45–54; Maresius, *Systema* (1662), II.39, 30; Muller, *Divine Will*, 270–71.

<sup>29</sup>Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, I.76, AT 8–1:39; CSM, 1:221.

<sup>30</sup>Maresius, *De abusu*, XXXIV, 22.

<sup>31</sup>Maresius, *Systema* (1662), I.15, 5. On the rejection of ‘double truth’ in the Reformed tradition, see Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1: 382–87.

<sup>32</sup>Maresius, *De abusu*, XXXIV, 22; Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, I.25, AT 8–1:14. Descartes in fact does not claim that these mysteries can contradict clear and distinct perceptions. He cautiously limits himself to saying that humans may not clearly understand these mysteries.



considers that by doing so Descartes hands out the truth to the ‘enemies’. He identifies those ‘enemies’ in the following passage:

We indeed confess that both of these mysteries are such that our reason cannot ascend to them without revelation. But we deny that what is above reason (*supra rationem*) is against reason (*contra rationem*). We insist that once they are revealed, their credibility can be enhanced through reason. And it can be shown against the Socinians that the mysteries contain nothing contrary to sane and right reason.<sup>33</sup>

Maresius associates Descartes with the antitrinitarian heresy of the period: Socinianism.<sup>34</sup> The Socinians argue that the Bible teaches what is above reason but not what is against reason. They place the Incarnation and the Trinity in the latter category and thus reject them.<sup>35</sup> Against the Socinians, Maresius had contended that the mysteries do not contradict reason but only transcend it, so they should not be denied.<sup>36</sup> Here, he accuses Descartes of agreeing with the Socinians in regarding the mysteries as irrational.

Maresius next tries to establish the rationality of the Trinity by referring to the case of the first human being, Adam:

I will not dwell on this, but as for the Trinity, some learned men claim that its notion belonged to the natural knowledge of God in Adam, or the Trinity was known by him naturally. He knew it from the threefold faculty he found in himself, a faculty which is, as it were, the noble trace of the most holy Trinity, according to whose image he was made. The faculty consists in intellect, will, and memory according to Augustine; or according to Campanella’s primalities, the power of knowing, desiring, and operating, the first of which is the judicative power, the second is the imperative, and the third is the executive.<sup>37</sup>

The fallen humans cannot know God’s triune nature without the revelation, but the pre-lapsed Adam recognized it naturally, i. e. through experiencing his threefold faculty as the trace of the Trinity.

Two historical notes are in order. First, Maresius had already related the triads of Augustine and Tommaso Campanella (1568–1639) to the Trinity. In the 1658 work, he sees an analogy between Augustinian threefold abilities of the soul and the three hypostases of the divine essence. In his 1644 oration, he makes the divine three persons correspond with Campanella’s three powers.<sup>38</sup> His reliance on Campanella extends beyond this; numerous references to the Italian philosopher can be found in his

<sup>33</sup> Maresius, *De abusu*, XXXV, 22: ‘Fatemur equidem utrumque hoc mysterium tale esse, ut nostra ratio seposita revelatione, eousque conscendere nequeat. Sed negamus id esse contra rationem, quod supra illam est; et pertendimus quod posita eorum revelatione, possit per rationem illorum *credibilitas* astrui, et ostendi contra Socinianos nihil illis inesse quod sanae et rectae rationi adversetur.’

<sup>34</sup> On Socinianism in the Netherlands, see Wilbur, *Socinianism and Its Antecedents*, 535–87; Ogonowski, *Socinianism*, 396–401.

<sup>35</sup> On the distinction between *supra rationem* and *contra rationem*, see Salatowsky, *Die Philosophie der Sozinianer*, 130–41; Daugirdas, *Die Anfänge des Sozinianismus*, 129–30, 186–87, 523–25, 532–33; Ogonowski, *Socinianism*, 214–15, 223–26. On the response to the Socinians from the Reformed side on this point, see Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1: 394–96. On conservative theologians’ accusation of Cartesianism as the Socinian heresy, see Scribano, *Da Descartes a Spinoza*, 7–11; Kato and Sakamoto, ‘Between Cartesianism and Orthodoxy,’ 248–49.

<sup>36</sup> Maresius, *Hydra*, I.24, 1:392; V.9, 3:61. On Maresius’s criticism of Socinianism, see Nauta, *Maresius*, 349–52.

<sup>37</sup> Maresius, *De abusu*, XXXV, 22–3: ‘Ne urgeam quod respectu Trinitatis nonnulli Viri Docti statuunt ejus notitiam ad τὸ γνωστὸν Dei naturale pertinuisse in Adamo, sive Trinitatem fuisse ipsi naturaliter notam, etiam ex triplici illa facultate quam in se experiebatur, ceu S. S. Trinitatis, ad cujus imaginem conditus fuerat, nobile vestigium, scilicet intellectu, voluntate et memoria, juxta Augustinum, vel juxta primalitates Campanellae, vi cognoscendi, appetendi, et operandi, quarum prior est judicativa, secunda imperativa, tertia executiva.’

<sup>38</sup> Maresius, *Sapientiae domus et epulum*, sig. A4r; Maresius, *Dissertatio theologica*, 32. On these works, see Nauta, *Maresius*, 216–17, 352. On Campanella’s *primalitates*, see Bonansea, *Campanella*, 138–63.



writings.<sup>39</sup> He was one of few theologians who, along with the Puritan minister Richard Baxter (1615–1691), incorporated Campanella’s metaphysics into Reformed theology.<sup>40</sup>

Second, Maresius’s wording (‘some learned men’) indicates his awareness of the contemporary debates regarding Adam’s knowledge of the Trinity. They took place between the Cartesian theologian Lodewijk Wolzogen (1633–1690) and the Leeuwarden pastor Johannes vander Waeyen (1639–1701), who was at the time a follower of Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676). The conflict broke up by the publication of Lodewijk Meyer’s *Philosophia S. Scripturae interpres* in 1666. Meyer assumes philosophy as the infallible norm in interpreting the Scriptures and demands the philosophical examination of the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>41</sup> Wolzogen expressed his disapproval in his *De Scripturarum interprete* (1668). He accuses Meyer of ‘confusing philosophy with theology in a way to make philosophy the judge of theological matters’.<sup>42</sup> Like many of his contemporary Cartesians, he draws a sharp boundary between the two disciplines and stresses the supra-rational character of the mystery of the Trinity: it cannot be found by reason and still after its revelation, reason cannot grasp it.<sup>43</sup> Even the uncorrupted reason of the pre-lapsed Adam could not recognize God’s triune nature without the revelation.<sup>44</sup> The last point invited Vander Waeyen’s criticism. In his *Pro vera et genuina reformatorum sententia* (1669), he denies Wolzogen’s claim on the ground that it would benefit the Socinians. According to Vander Waeyen, if Adam were unable to rationally grasp the Trinity even in his pre-lapsed state of integrity, the fallen humans, with their corrupt reason, would be all the more unable to understand it. This would only confirm the Socinian conviction that the mystery is irrational.<sup>45</sup> Maresius knew the controversy well. Along with Wittich and other Cartesians, he signed a document in 1669 that dismissed accusations against Wolzogen. He was convinced that Wolzogen’s refutation was particularly effective because it debunks Meyer’s Cartesianism with Cartesian weapons.<sup>46</sup> This, however, was the last time he collaborated with the Cartesians. After that, he always opposed them and in the above-mentioned quote too, he follows Vander Waeyen in admitting Adam’s natural knowledge of the Trinity.

Maresius further supports his case by referring to Plato and the Platonists. According to him, their works bear a clear trace of the trinitarian mystery, which they learned from the books of Moses or the Jewish tradition. For Maresius, the fact that they incorporated it into their writings proves its rationality because they would have rejected it if it were contrary to reason.<sup>47</sup> This also undermines Descartes’s acknowledgement that the mystery could contradict our clear and distinct perceptions. Here, Maresius again criticizes Descartes with the argument that he had previously made against the Socinians. At least

<sup>39</sup>For Maresius’s other references to Campanella’s *primalitates*, see *Systema* (1673), II.45, 89a; IV.7, 141a.

<sup>40</sup>On Baxter’s use of Campanella, see Trueman, ‘A Small Step’; Sytsma, *Baxter*, 134–36. On Campanella’s influence on other reformed theologians, see Mulsow, ‘Sociabilitas’; Lamanna, ‘Campanella in the *Schulmetaphysik*.’

<sup>41</sup>[Meyer], *Philosophia S. Scripturae interpres*, VI, 47–8; Bordoli, *Ragione et scrittura*, 150.

<sup>42</sup>Wolzogen, *De Scripturarum interprete*, II, 264: ‘Lapsus enim in hoc vitium est, qui Philosophiam sic immiscuit Theologiae, ut rerum theologiarum iudex habeatur.’ On this work, see Bordoli, *Ragione et scrittura*, 288–310.

<sup>43</sup>Wolzogen, *De Scripturarum interprete*, I, 31; Bordoli, *Ragione et scrittura*, 302.

<sup>44</sup>Wolzogen, *De Scripturarum interprete*, II, 158.

<sup>45</sup>Vander Waeyen, *Pro vera et genuina reformatorum sententia*, I, 66–7. On this work, Bordoli, *Ragione et scrittura*, 354–66.

<sup>46</sup>See Maresius’s letter defending Wolzogen found in *Lettres sur la vie et sur la mort de Louis de Wolzogue*, 82–87. See also Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 207; Eberhardt, *Wittich*, 265.

<sup>47</sup>Maresius, *De abusu*, XXXV, 23. Maresius considers that the Old Testaments also contain clear indications of the Trinity. See, Maresius, *Systema* (1662), III.44, 48.

from 1652 onward, he had refuted the Socinian denial of the Trinity by appealing to the conformity of Platonists' remarks with the mystery. He learned this conformity primarily from *Annotationes in libros evangeliorum* (Amsterdam, 1641) of Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), whom he regarded generally to be 'not a bad friend of the Socinians', but on this issue faithful to orthodoxy.<sup>48</sup>

Maresius proceeds to warn that if Calvinists like Wittich were to accept Descartes's theory of double truth, they would betray the Reformed Church and in turn benefit Roman Catholicism. Maresius argues that Descartes originally proposed his double truth theory to defend the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. Descartes saw the doctrine incompatible with his philosophy: in transubstantiation Christ's body exists without extension, whereas Cartesian physics does not allow this because it defines the body as extended. The Catholic Descartes feared that such incompatibility might confirm Calvinists' rejection of the doctrine as being irrational. He therefore tried to block any possible use of his philosophy by the Calvinists against his own faith – hence the declaration that mysteries should be accepted even if they appear to contradict reason.<sup>49</sup> Maresius reminds the readers that Descartes's line of argument has recently been employed by the Roman Catholic theologians Antoine Arnauld (1612–1694) and Jacques Nouet (1605–1680): in the debate with the Calvinist pastor Jean Claude (1619–1687), they argued that one should not rely on reason when dealing with the mysteries.<sup>50</sup> Maresius considers that any orthodox theologian, in the face of such adversaries, cannot follow Descartes without jeopardizing the Reformed cause.

Maresius finally points out that Descartes's understanding of God contradicts the doctrine of the Trinity. In the *Principles of Philosophy*, Descartes argues that there are no modes in God.<sup>51</sup> Maresius considers this as going against the Greek fathers who distinguished the divine hypostases in terms of their 'modes of subsistence' (τρόπους υπάρξεως or *modos subsistendi*).<sup>52</sup> Wittich was aware of this contradiction and as a solution introduced a subtle differentiation in his *Annotationes*: 'the modal distinction of the divine persons is not similar to the modal distinction in the created beings, since they are of totally different kinds'.<sup>53</sup> So for him, Descartes only denies that God and the creatures have the same type of modes, but not that God has peculiar modes of his own. In Maresius's view, however, Wittich misrepresents Descartes, who, far from admitting some peculiar modes in God, denies unreservedly any mode in him.<sup>54</sup> Maresius escalates his criticism of Descartes's denial of modal distinctions in Godhead in his *Vindiciae suae dissertationis nuperae* (1670), where he calls a defender of Descartes on this issue a Socinian.<sup>55</sup> For Maresius, after all, Descartes's philosophy not only supports Socinianism

<sup>48</sup>Maresius, *Hydra*, V.9, 3:66. This is followed by a long quotation from Grotius, *Annotationes*, 849–50. On Maresius's criticism of Grotius, see Nauta, *Maresius*, 168–72. On Grotius's *Annotationes*, see Van Miert, *Emancipation*, 133–69.

<sup>49</sup>Maresius, *De abusu*, XXXVI, 23. On reactions to Descartes's explanation of transubstantiation, see Goudriaan, 'Descartes,' 542–543; Schmaltz, *Early Modern Cartesianisms*, 22–35.

<sup>50</sup>Maresius, *De abusu*, XXXVI, 23. On the debate, see Snoeks, *L'Argument de tradition*, 173–234, 279–82.

<sup>51</sup>Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, I.56, AT 8–1:26.

<sup>52</sup>On the use of the term *modus subsistendi* in the Reformed tradition, see Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 4: 182–85.

<sup>53</sup>Maresius, *De abusu*, XXXVII, 24: '[...] modalem personarum divinarum distinctionem non esse similem ei distinctioni modalis, quae obtinet in rebus creatis, cum plane sit alterius generis [...]']

<sup>54</sup>Maresius, *De abusu*, XXXVII, 24.

<sup>55</sup>Maresius, *Vindiciae suae dissertationis nuperae*, XLI, 30. Maresius's adversary in this treatise is the Cartesian philosopher Regnerus van Mansveld (1639–1671). On their controversy, see Nauta, *Maresius*, 363–64; Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 210–12.

with its double truth theory, but also incurs, with the negation of the divine modes, a grave danger of transforming itself into the antitrinitarian heresy.

#### 4. The world system

Maresius has so far criticized Descartes's teachings that he expressly affirms to be true. From Section 41, Maresius focuses on the hypotheses that Descartes admits to be dubious or even false. He is greatly concerned with them because some Cartesians have accepted them as true and consequently undermined the veracity of the Bible. He first takes up Descartes's hypothesis about the world system, which he summarizes as follows:

It is known that he [Descartes] not only rejected, with Copernicus and Tycho, Ptolemy's hypothesis about the movement of the heavens and the sun around the earthly globe, which is the centre of the world, but also abandoned the Copernican hypothesis about the sun as the centre of the world and allotted two types of motions (diurnal and annual) to the earth in its vortex.<sup>56</sup>

Maresius carefully notes that Descartes does not hold this theory as an indubitable truth, but only as a hypothesis that may explain the celestial movements.<sup>57</sup> Maresius regards such a position to be harmless because astronomers often calculate the heavenly motions with hypotheses that do not correspond to reality.<sup>58</sup> However, he criticizes Cartesian theologians who embrace Descartes's hypothesis as true and interpret the Bible accordingly. 'They', he writes, 'have chosen to make Scripture conform to their philosophical concepts, rather than correcting them with it'.<sup>59</sup>

Maresius here has in mind Wittich's works such as *Dissertationes duae* (Amsterdam, 1653) and *Consensus veritatis* (Nijmegen, 1659), which interpret the Bible according to Descartes's assumption regarding the motion of the earth. For Wittich, the primary aim of Scripture is not to give humans natural philosophical knowledge, but the knowledge concerning salvation, which is of interest to everyone, including the uneducated. So the Bible often makes its message accessible to the ordinary people by describing nature not as it really is, but in terms of how it appears to them. This applies to the passages attributing motion to the sun and rest to the earth (e. g. Joshua 10: 12–13, Isaiah 38:8) because the sun *appears* to revolve around the earth. Such passages therefore do not provide a scientific account of nature nor establish that the Bible and Descartes disagree.<sup>60</sup> Against Wittich, Maresius claims that if the Scriptures spoke in accordance with erroneous opinions of the ordinary people, it would be either because the Bible favours their errors or because it could not deliver its message without admitting such errors. In either case, the Word of God would be seriously damaged, which any Reformed theologian must not allow.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>56</sup>Maresius, *De abusu*, XLI, 26: 'Notum est quod circa Systema mundi non solum rejecit cum Copernico et Tychone Ptolomaei hypothesim de motu coeli et Solis circa globum terrae, ceu mundi centrum, verum etiam abjecta Copernicana hypothesi de Sole mundi centro, terrae motum duplicem in suo vortice assignavit, diurnum et annum.'

<sup>57</sup>As textual evidence, Maresius refers to the *Principles of Philosophy*, III.19 and IV.204.

<sup>58</sup>See also Maresius, *Hydra*, I.3, 1:11.

<sup>59</sup>Maresius, *De abusu*, XLII, 27.

<sup>60</sup>Eberhardt, *Wittich*, 125–95, 233–54.

<sup>61</sup>Maresius, *De abusu*, XLIII, 27.

Maresius also points out that the Cartesians undermine the literal meaning of the Bible. In the Old Testament, for example, the sun and the moon are reported to stop at the request of Joshua (Joshua 10: 12–13). Taken literally, this description supposes that the sun moves around the earth, a supposition in conflict with Descartes's theory. Therefore, the Cartesians make a non-literal interpretation, according to which Scripture here reports the event as it appeared to the people of the time; what actually happened was that the earth stopped turning around the sun. Maresius criticizes this interpretation as follows:

According to this vain imagination, Joshua should have beaten the earth and ordered it to take rest and stop its diurnal motion. But he spoke to the sun and the moon, so that they would stop their motion and the sun would keep its light for him while he pursued his enemies until he gained a full victory from them [...].<sup>62</sup>

The Cartesians thus ignore the precise wordings of the Bible and distort its literal sense for their own cause. This, Maresius writes, 'has nothing to do with the pious modesty, through which *God-breathed words* ought to be treated by us mere humans'.<sup>63</sup>

With their claim that the Bible describes how things appeared to the ordinary people, Maresius continues to argue that the Cartesians would legitimize the ancient heresy of docetism, according to which Christ's body was not real but only appeared to be so. In the earlier versions of his *Systema*, Maresius had opposed docetism with the argument that the body's physical reality is clearly taught in the biblical descriptions of Christ eating, drinking, and walking with his body.<sup>64</sup> Here, he fears that Wittich's hermeneutics would allow the docetists to interpret those descriptions as reporting only what Christ appeared to do.<sup>65</sup>

By the same argument, Maresius claims that Wittich's method of biblical interpretation would justify the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation:

Similarly, the Papists will find a place where they could escape from our arguments regarding the Eucharistic controversy. With that argument we reject the transubstantiation because Paul (1 Corinthians 11: 26–28) often calls what is eaten by the faithful at the Holy Supper 'bread'. The Papists would indeed respond that it is said 'bread', because it appears to be a bread, just as the sun is said to rise, set, move, and complete its course. For these things appear to be so for everyone according to the common judgment of the senses, even though in reality they do not.<sup>66</sup>

Maresius had already refuted the teaching of transubstantiation on the basis of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. In Chapter 11 of the letter, the apostle referred to the broken

<sup>62</sup>Maresius, *De abusu*, XLIV, 27: 'Ex illa imaginatione Josua debuisset terram pede pulsare eique mandare ut quiesceret et sisteret suum motum diurnum: Sed alloquutus est Solem et Lunam, ut utriusque motum sisteret, et Sol sibi hostes persequenti lampada teneret donec plenam de illis referret victoriam [...].'. For various interpretations of Joshua 10: 12–3, see Roling, *Physica sacra*, 126–233 (191–193 on Wittich).

<sup>63</sup>Maresius, *De abusu*, XLIV, 27.

<sup>64</sup>Maresius, *Systema* (1662), IX.15, 177.

<sup>65</sup>Maresius, *De abusu*, XLV, 28. Jacobus du Bois (1607–1661) already associated Wittich's position with docetism. See Du Bois, *Veritas et autoritas sacra*, I, 18.

<sup>66</sup>Maresius, *De abusu*, XLV, 28. 'Habebunt item Pontificii quo se expediant ex nostrorum argumento in Controversia Eucharistica, quo ideo rejicimus Transsubstantiationem quod Paulus I. Cor. XI, 26.27.28. saepius id *panem* vocet quod in S. Coena comeditur a fidelibus; respondebunt enim id dici *panem*, quod panis esse videatur, quomodo Sol tibi dicitur oriri, occidere, moveri, cursum suum absolvere, quia sic fieri omnibus ex sensuum communi judicio videtur, licet revera non fiat.'

bread in the Last Supper as ‘bread’, so he must have thought, according to Maresius, that it remained bread even after consecration.<sup>67</sup> Here, Maresius warns that Wittich’s method would enable the Catholics to interpret the passage in question not as speaking of the substance of the bread, but only how it appeared to the senses.

Finally, Maresius escalates his criticism to the point that Wittich’s method of biblical interpretation not only favours Catholicism in sacramental disputes but also disrespects the authority of the Bible even more than the Catholic popes. When Pope Urban VIII (1568–1644) condemned Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) for his theory on the earth’s motion, he gave no other reason than its contradiction to the Bible, saying that ‘as an astronomer I stand with Galileo, but as a pope I reject his opinion’.<sup>68</sup> Maresius judges that insofar as Wittich is unwilling to admit the contradiction and bends the meaning of the Scriptures to fit Descartes’s hypothesis, he lags even behind the Catholics in terms of the reverence for the Word of God.

## 5. Origins of things

Maresius next takes up Descartes’s hypothesis about the origins of things, according to which ‘God at the beginning gave motion to the most subtle matter; from this motion all other things gradually and spontaneously came to exist and acquired the position, mode, and order that they are now witnessed to have’.<sup>69</sup> Maresius approvingly notes that Descartes, while considering this hypothesis as the best way to understand the nature of things, expressly admits it to be contradictory to the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* and therefore to be false.<sup>70</sup> Still Maresius regards the hypothesis to be theologically dangerous:

Here we would rightly doubt whether it is appropriate for a Christian to think up such ‘principles’ about the origins of things [i. e., Descartes’s assumptions of the subtle matter and its constant motion]. Those principles contradict the Word of God and the faith of Christians; and from them the despisers of the Scriptures would get the best opportunity to reject and scorn (*naso adunco suspendendi* [which literally means ‘turn up the nose at’]) the Bible. They would say about Moses in agreement with the profane and pagan philosopher [i. e., Aristotle]: ‘That horned person [i. e., Moses] says much but proves nothing’.<sup>71</sup>

Maresius fears that Descartes’s hypothesis would allow the despisers of the Bible to replace biblical reports of miracles with their rational explanations. They would reject the Mosaic creation account by endorsing, together with Descartes and Aristotle, the view that God did not create matter but only gave motion to it.

As a despiser of the Bible, Maresius may have in mind Isaac La Peyrère (1596–1676). More specifically, he may be concerned with La Peyrère’s interpretation of Deuteronomy 29:4, which reports that the clothes and shoes of the Israelites were not worn out in the desert for forty years. In his *Prae-Adamitae* ([Amsterdam], 1655), La Peyrère interprets

<sup>67</sup> Maresius, *Theologiae elencticae nova synopsis*, XXI.2, 2:627; Maresius, *Systema* (1662), XVIII.72, 463.

<sup>68</sup> Maresius, *De abusu*, XLVII, 29.

<sup>69</sup> Maresius, *De abusu*, XLVIII, 29.

<sup>70</sup> Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, III.45, AT 8–1: 99–100.

<sup>71</sup> Maresius, *De abusu*, XLIX, 30: ‘Hic equidem jure dubitemus num fas fuerit homini Christiano ejusmodi *principia* excogitare de prima rerum origine, quae cum Dei Verbo et fide Christianorum non consentiant, ex quibus contemptores Scripturae eam rejiciendi et naso adunco suspendendi facillimam anam sint arrepturi, et dicturi de Mose cum profano illo Philosopho Gentili, *Multa dicit cornutus iste, sed nihil probat.*’ On the phrase of ‘*Multa dicit iste cornutus, sed nihil probat.*’ see Del Soldato, *Early Modern Aristotle*, 93–100 (95 on Maresius).

this passage to mean not that the Israelites were miraculously able to keep their clothes and shoes unimpaired, but that they had an abundance of supplies and were always able to replace old ones with new ones.<sup>72</sup> Against this interpretation, Maresius, in his *Refutatio fabulae praeadamiticae* (Groningen, 1656), accused La Peyrère of ‘turning up his nose at’ (*naso suspendit adunco*) the biblical description of the miracle, using exactly the same wordings that he would use in *De abusu*.<sup>73</sup>

Maresius condemns Wittich’s position as even more theologically dangerous than that of Descartes because it takes the Cartesian hypothesis to be an indubitable truth and interprets the biblical account of creation accordingly. To show this, Maresius refers to Wittich’s *Annotationes*, where he maintains that God created the world not instantaneously, but successively through motion.<sup>74</sup> Wittich establishes his interpretation with three arguments: (1) If creation had been instantaneous, God would have rested except for that moment. But the Bible teaches that he rested for the first time on the seventh day. Therefore, he must have engaged in creation for six days without interruption. (2) If God could have created the world in an instant, it would be incomprehensible why he took six days for creation. (3) Some steps of creation (e. g. the separation of water from the earth) could not have occurred instantaneously because they involved motion.<sup>75</sup>

Against Wittich, Maresius asserts creation to be instantaneous, not successive, insisting that in the first six days of creation, God completed each day’s work in an instant. He refutes Wittich’s arguments as follows: (1) God’s rest on the seventh day means that he finished creating new kinds of things, not that he worked without any interruption until then. (2) The reason God took six days is by no means incomprehensible. It is simply because he wanted so.<sup>76</sup> (3) Wittich is right in pointing out that the motion of water on the third day which brought about its separation from the earth could not occur for an instant. Yet, God’s creation does not consist in the motion of the water, but in his instantaneous act of raising motion in it.<sup>77</sup>

Maresius turns to Descartes again and criticizes him directly this time, arguing that it was indeed Descartes himself who induced his disciples to interpret the Bible according to his hypothesis. Maresius maintains that Descartes misdirected them in the fifth part of the *Discourse on Method*. There Descartes teaches his readers that no theological problems would arise even if they believe that the world could have been formed as explained in his hypothesis. Here is Descartes’s passage in question:

[. . .] it is certain, and it is an opinion commonly accepted among theologians, that the act by which God now preserves the world is just the same as that by which he created it. So, even if in the beginning God had given the world only the form of a chaos, provided that he established the laws of nature and then lent his concurrence to enable nature to operate as it normally does, we may believe without impugning the miracle of creation that by this means alone all purely material things could in the course of time have come to be just as we now see them.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>72</sup>La Peyrère, *Prae-Adamitae*, IV.6, 175; Oddos, *Isaac de La Peyrère*, 139–40.

<sup>73</sup>Maresius, *Refutatio fabulae praeadamiticae*, preface, xxxvi. On Maresius’s criticism of La Peyrère, see Nauta, *Maresius*, 328–30.

<sup>74</sup>Wittich puts forth this interpretation as a critique of Maresius’s view of creation as instantaneous, which is found in his *Systema* (1662), V.10, 79.

<sup>75</sup>Maresius, *De abusu*, L, 32. On this issue, see Goudriaan, *Reformed Orthodoxy*, 105–13.

<sup>76</sup>Maresius, *De abusu*, LV, 35.

<sup>77</sup>Maresius, *De abusu*, LVI, 36–7.

<sup>78</sup>Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, AT 6:45, CMS 1: 133–34.



Maresius finds three theological problems in this passage. First, Christians must not believe that God could have made the world in a way other than described in Genesis, for this would undermine the authority of Moses. Second, Descartes's hypothesis destroys the miracle of creation. The hypothesis assumes that the primordial chaos would give rise to all kinds of things in the world, hence obviating the need for God to miraculously create them in the first six days. Still worse, Descartes's hypothesis is theoretically untenable because the power to create various kinds of things should have been infinite and unable to reside in the finite chaos.<sup>79</sup> Third, Maresius contends that the Cartesian identification of God's creation and preservation is not certain nor widely accepted by theologians. After noting disagreements among scholastics, he sides with those who distinguish the two.<sup>80</sup> He argues that creation and preservation are different because they have different objects: God created what had not yet existed, whereas he preserves what he had already created. Therefore, preservation does not work without the prior creation, so God could not bring about the universe only with his act of preservation.<sup>81</sup>

Maresius finally argues that Descartes's statement that the world could have been formed as described in his hypothesis has led some of his followers not merely to affirm the act of creation as successive but to interpret the whole creation account in accordance with his hypothesis. Maresius here targets Johannes Amerpoel's *Cartesius mosaizans* (Leeuwarden, 1669), whose subtitle reads 'the evident and easy reconciliation of Descartes's philosophy with the story of creation as told by Moses in the first chapter of Genesis'.<sup>82</sup> Having this work in mind, Maresius writes:

There were once and are still those who try with all their might to reconcile the false hypothesis of Descartes (which he admits to be false and contrary to Moses) with Moses. They try to fabricate novel commentaries on the first chapter of Genesis, and with those commentaries, though they have not been given any permission to do so, they overstep the restrictions placed upon them and teach the inexperienced youth that Descartes's analytical method agrees with Moses's synthetic one. Just as it was said of Philon, 'Either Philon platonizes or Plato philonizes', it might be said that Descartes mosenizes (*Mosaisare*) against his will and contrary to what he claimed, or that Moses cartesianizes (*Cartesianisare*), that is, Moses is unwillingly dragged to Descartes's school to learn from Descartes how he should have described the origins of things.<sup>83</sup>

Maresius is particularly concerned with the Cartesians like Amerpoel who instruct the Dutch university students to harmonize Descartes's cosmogony with the Mosaic creation account. He rejects their attempt as madness; it is as if trying to 'reconcile Belial and Christ, darkness and light'.<sup>84</sup> He considers that the situation got out of hand because those in charge of university administration neglected the decree issued in Holland and West Friesland in 1656. The decree, published in response to the spread of Cartesianism,

<sup>79</sup>Maresius, *De abusu*, LVII, 37.

<sup>80</sup>Maresius here relies on Amico, *Cursus theologicus*, II.11.205, 22.

<sup>81</sup>Maresius, *De abusu*, LVIII, 37–8.

<sup>82</sup>On Amerpoel, see Thijssen-Schoute, *Nederlands Cartesianisme*, 494–495; Bujor, 'Amerpoel.'

<sup>83</sup>Maresius, *De abusu*, LIX, 38–9: 'Non defuerunt nec desunt enim qui omni ope nitantur illam falsam Cartesii hypothesim, quam talem pronunciat et contrariam Mosi, cum Mose conciliare, novaque moliri commentaria in caput primum Geneseos, per quae, licet ad id non auctorati et saltantes extra suum Chorum, imperitae iuventute persuadeant methodum Analyticam Cartesii cum Synthetica Mosis convenire, ut scilicet, prout dictum fuit de Philone, *aut Philo Platonisat aut Plato Philonisat*, ita dicatur, vel Cartesius Mosaisare invitus et contra quam ipse sensit, vel Moses Cartesianisare, id est obtorto collo trahi in Scholam Cartesij, ut ab ipso discat quomodo primam rerum originem describere debuisset.'

<sup>84</sup>Maresius, *De abusu*, LIX, 39.



had forbidden philosophers from interpreting the Bible according to their philosophical principles. Maresius thinks that it is high time to follow the decree to the letter, hoping that it will eradicate the ‘abuse of Cartesian philosophy’ by Wittich and Amerpoel, once and for all.<sup>85</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

The present paper has analyzed in detail Maresius’s critique of Cartesian theology, selecting four topics from his *De abusu*. In all of them, he insists on one crucial point: Descartes’s philosophy could promote heresies against Reformed orthodoxy. He condemns the Cartesian notion of freedom as supporting Pelagianism and Arminianism because it made grace unnecessary and resistable. He accuses Descartes’s alliance with Socinianism in holding the mystery of the Trinity as possibly contradictory to reason and in denying modes of subsistence in God. He blames Wittich’s attempt to interpret the Bible according to Descartes’s hypothesis about the world system, for it would deprive the Calvinists of any means to refute the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. Finally, he denounces the Cartesian explanation regarding the origins of things as agreeing with La Peyrère’s attempt to rationalize miracles described in Scripture.

Only in the light of this overall concern we can understand the significance of the following passage from the preface of *De abusu*. Addressing to ‘all the Reformed Churches of the Dutch Federation’, Maresius writes:

If they [i. e., Cartesian theologians] disagree with you (and indeed they do disagree), why do they want to be considered your allies? The reason is to sell out your cause to your enemies, to make you drink the poison of Pelagianism, Socinianism, and Papism in their new-fangled cup, and to cunningly bring into your city a Trojan horse filled with thousands of errors as soldiers of the devil, so that from there an unquenchable fire breaks out in your citadel, in your sanctuaries, and in your temples and dwellings.<sup>86</sup>

Maresius likens Cartesian theology to the Trojan horse. It pretends to be an ally of the Reformed Church and enters its interior only to unleash heresies. It could destroy orthodoxy from within. To use another expression from the preface, it is a ‘pestilence for the entirety of orthodoxy of the Church’.<sup>87</sup> Maresius thus recognizes the stealthy and deadly nature of Wittich’s Cartesian theology.<sup>88</sup>

Nauta’s and Bohatec’s evaluations must now be revised. Contrary to Nauta’s assessment, Maresius adopts a unified perspective in effectively exposing the danger of Cartesianism. Nor is it appropriate to follow Bohatec in considering his criticism to be superficial. It is by no means a groundless, ad hoc

<sup>85</sup> Maresius, *De abusu*, LIX, 39. On the decree, see Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 28.

<sup>86</sup> Maresius, *De abusu*, preface, sig. \*\*3 r: ‘Si a Vobis dissentiunt, ut revera, cur pro Vestris volunt haberi, nisi ut prodant Vestris hostibus bonam causam, ut venenum Pelagianum, Socinianum, Pontificium, in novo suo poculo Vobis propinent, ut equum Trojanum, mille fartum erroribus ceu Diaboli militibus, subdole in Vestram introducunt civitatem, ex quo prodeat Vestrarum arcium, Vestrarum aedium, Vestrorum Templorum et tectorum ἄσβεστον incendium?’ Kai-Ole Eberhardt has directed our attention to this passage. See Eberhardt, *Wittich*, 278.

<sup>87</sup> Maresius, *De abusu*, preface, sig. \*2 r.

<sup>88</sup> We do not claim that Maresius invented a new argumentation when he associated the doctrines of his opponents with heresies. He simply followed the common method of contemporary theological polemics. We rather argue that he was the first to direct this accusation against Cartesian theology across a wide range of theological issues on the basis of a detailed examination of Descartes’s writings.

denunciation. As this paper has confirmed, Maresius always starts his discussion with quotations from Descartes's writings and draws their theological implications on the doctrinal ground that he has elaborated in other, more systematic treatises (hence we often consulted works such as the *Theologiae elencticae nova synopsis* and *Systema*). In short, *De abusu* was a learned critique of Cartesian theology from a strategically chosen standpoint.

As such, *De abusu* contributed toward integrating Descartes's philosophy with Reformed theology in the following two ways. First, it pressed Wittich to make a systematic exposition of Cartesian theology. In response to Maresius, he had to demonstrate that his theological Cartesianism was compatible with the 'entirety of orthodoxy'. His *Theologia pacifica* therefore discussed an unprecedentedly wide range of theological topics on the basis of Descartes's philosophy. Second, *De abusu* anchored critiques of Cartesian theology within the mainstream of Reformed theology. This was accomplished primarily by Mastricht. He incorporated much of Maresius's arguments into the *Gangraena* and then into his monumental *Theoretical-Practical Theology* (1st ed. Amsterdam, 1682–1687; 2nd ed. Utrecht, 1698), which would continue to be a must-read reference work well into the nineteenth century. He thus made confrontations with Cartesianism a usual business in the subsequent Reformed tradition.<sup>89</sup> In these contrasting ways, Maresius's *De abusu* defined the relationship between Cartesian philosophy and Reformed orthodoxy.

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<sup>89</sup>As one of the standard textbooks of Reformed theology in the nineteenth century, Herman Heppes's *Die Dogmatik der evangelisch-reformierten Kirche* (1861) makes numerous references to Mastricht's *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, often in relation to Cartesian theology, as in Heppes, *Reformed Dogmatics*, V.3, 62, V.36, 99, VI.2, 108. For the reception of Mastricht's *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, see Neele, *Before Jonathan Edwards*, 51–65.

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