One of the most skillful defenses of scholastic theology against the biting criticisms of Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (c. 1467–1536) was undertaken by someone who lacked university training in theology and whose fame at the time rested on his status as a prince of the Holy Roman Empire, distinguished diplomat, and noted patron of humanists and artists. This champion was Alberto III Pio de Savoia (1475–1531), prince of the county of Carpi (near Modena in northern Italy), who was offended by many statements he read in Erasmus’ writings and who was drawn into a literary exchange with him due to the Dutchman’s claims that Pio had misrepresented his views. Among the topics of contention was Erasmus’ disparagement of scholastic theologians and their method, as well as his call to replace their style of theology with one based on the Bible and church fathers. While praising the biblical humanism of Erasmus for its ability to inspire piety, Pio claimed that it was a rude form of theology that needed to be supplemented by the divinely-inspired scholastic method that allowed one to clarify doctrine, resolve doubt, and refute error. Most scholastic theologians were deserving of praise and not of condemnation. Pio made his arguments in two published works, in the *Responsio accurata et paraenetica* (1529), written as an answer to a letter from Erasmus, and in the *Tres et viginti libri in locos lucubrationum variarum* (1531) published posthumously.

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1 Among the works that survey this debate, see Myron P. Gilmore, “Erasmus and Alberto Pio, Prince of Carpi,” in Theodore K. Rabb and Jerrold E. Seigel, eds., *Action and Conviction in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Memory of E.H. Harbison* (Princeton, 1969), pp. 299–318; Erika Rummel, *Erasmus and His Catholic Critics* (Nieuwkoop, 1989), pp. 115–26; and Nelson H. Minnich, “Introduction,” in CWE 84, pp. xv–cxli. The full titles of Pio’s two works are: *Alberti Pii Carporum Comitis illustrissimi ad Erasmi Roterdami expostulationem responsio accurata et paraenetica, Martini Lutheri et asseclarum eius haeresim vesaran magnis argumentis et justis rationibus confutans* (Paris, 1529)—hereafter cited as *Responsio paraenetica*—and *Alberti Pii Carporum Comitis illustrissimi et viri longe doctissimi, praeter praefationem et operis conclusionem, tres et viginti libri in locos lucubrationum variarum D. Erasmi Roterdami, quos censet ab eo re cogoscessos et retractandos* (Paris, 1531)—hereafter cited as *XXIII libri*. The author is grateful to Dr. Daniel J. Sheerin for having made available to him a draft of his translation of the two sections of the *XXIII libri* (fols. 76r–79vN and 172v–176vV) in which Pio treated directly the question of scholastic theology. He is also grateful
If most of Pio’s time over the years was spent in administering his principedom and in the diplomatic service of Gianfrancesco Gonzaga of Mantua (1506–07), Louis XII of France (1507–11), Maximilian I of the Holy Roman Empire (1511–19), and Francis I of France (1523–27), he nonetheless found time for the study of classical letters, philosophy, and theology. His uncle Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–94) had laid out for him a course of studies that included a solid grounding in the Latin and Greek languages and literature. Among his personal tutors were the distinguished humanists Aldo Manuzio (1449–1515), Triphon Bisanti (d. 1540), and Marcus Musurus (1470–1517). A contemporary claimed that so assiduously did Pio dedicate himself to the study of letters both as a youth and in his later years that few in all of Italy could compare to him regarding eloquence of speech. Pio’s skill in writing a Ciceronic style of Latin was even praised by Erasmus as being superior to that of the noted humanist Girolamo Aleandro (1480–1542).

Pio also mastered Aristotelian philosophy under the tutelage of Pietro Pomponazzi (1462–1525), Juan de Montesdoca, and Andrea Barrus (perhaps the Augustinian Baura). He studied the scholastic theologies of Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus under such distinguished theologians as the Franciscan Graziano da Brescia and the as yet unidentified hermit Valerio. So skillful did he become in the scholastic method that he would debate both publicly and privately some of the most difficult questions. But as time went on, he became more interested in Sacred Scripture and the writings of the church fathers, especially those of Augustine and Jerome. The young Spanish humanist and philosopher Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1490–1573), who resided in Pio’s

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