For the purpose of the present volume, Scylla and Charybdis represent contradictory external pressures on the conscience of scholars, namely, the consolidating confessional churches and their demands for allegiance. In his *Enchiridion militis Christiani* (1503), Erasmus addresses different impulses within each person, namely the balance between trusting in ourselves and trusting in God. Here, a middle road between Scylla and Charybdis has to be steered, Scylla being not to adopt an overbold and somewhat careless attitude by trusting in God’s grace, Charybdis not to become completely dispirited by the hardships of war and give up one’s courage together with one’s arms.\(^1\) In September 2006, a symposium in Wittenberg contrasted Luther and Erasmus with regard to their position on the issue of free will and grace. It appeared that Erasmus’ own deeply learned realization of the ambivalences of texts, and also of Scripture, led him to distrust Luther’s claim that all the truth could be revealed to men and plainly told to mankind. In his preface to *De libero arbitrio* he argued that not all truths, or all learned debates about them, must be discussed in front of the common people. In *Hyperaspistes* he argued that problems that perhaps not even theologians were able to solve should not become the topic of popular debate.\(^2\)

We will see in the course of this paper that Christoph Besold (1577–1638) had not identical, but similar grounds for distrusting the controversial theologians of his day and the pinning down of every alleged

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detail of faith in ‘confessions’, leaving no place for varying ways to put a problem or alternative answers. In being confronted by ‘orthodox’ theologians of his day and place, in Lutheran Tübingen during the Thirty years war, in a letter of 1626 Besold rather sided with the Church Fathers and their errors then with his own contemporaries. However, that did not mean to eschew the Lutheran Church, as he stressed in the very same letter.

Erasmus’ skeptical loyalty to the Church of Rome was not good enough for Tridentine Catholicism, and he quickly became a counter icon to the Jesuits as the kind of dangerous mind that needed to be controlled or stamped out. With Besold, we move on a full century and are able to review how doubts about confessional orthodoxy of his day could affect someone who, raised Lutheran, became Lutheran Tübingen’s foremost legal scholar, seven times chancellor of the university, the main public commentator on the issue of the restitution of Lutheran Wuerttemberg’s church properties to Catholic monasteries and who, in the course of his life and experiences, converted to Catholicism, went to Jesuit Ingolstadt and radically changed his argument concerning conscience, its protection, and the rights and role of the Church of Rome and the Emperor. Moreover, we will also see to what extent his religious doubts and changes influenced his theory-building. His example may be particularly interesting in that, while his scholarship and erudition was widely admired and led him to a critical examination of the confessional orthodox clergy of his time, a hundred years after Erasmus this led not only to his conversion from Lutheranism to Roman Catholicism, but to an almost Jesuit account in behalf of the Church of Rome in the Empire.3

His example thus allows us to probe into various arguments on the relationship between humanism and confessionalisation. Historians have both argued in favour of the coherence of the later sixteenth and seventeenth century use of classical texts and the arguments derived from them and of the disintegration of Humanism as a movement of scholars with shared goals. Around 1500, one major goal is often understood to be the reform of education by teaching the Latin language and literature in an uncorrupted version. Fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century humanists are believed not only to have shared this goal, with their letters and their networks, they also constituted a group of their own,

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3 See Christoph Besold, *Synopsis Politicae Doctrinae* (Amsterdam 1643).