Disputatio XVIII

De Lege Dei

Praeside D. JOHANNE POLYANDRO
Respondente ARNOLDO SCHOMANTIO

Thesis I Quanta homo in peccatum prolapsus, virium liberi arbitrii* laboret defectione, quantaque ejus sit miseria, ex lege Dei cognosci potest.

Lex Latinis sic dicta, quod publice legi soleat, a Graecis νόμος appellatur, quod suum cuique tribuat, ab Hebraeis יָרָה, id est, doctrina, quod nos de voluntate* Dei nostroque erga ipsum ac proximum* nostrum officio doceat.

In Sacra Scriptura lex diversis significationibus* accipitur, primum pro quolibet Dei institutione, Ps. 1, 2. et 19, 8.


Secundo speciatim sumitur, aut pro lege morali, ut Luc. 10, 26., aut pro ceremoniali, ut Luc. 2, 22., aut pro forensi, ut Joh. 19, 7.

Tertio per metonymiam subjecti* accipitur pro libris Mosis doctrinam legis complectentibus, ut Luc. 24, 44.

Quarto sumitur synecdochice, pro omnibus libris Veteris Testamenti, ut Joh. 10, 34.
Concerning the Law of God

President: Johannes Polyander
Respondent: Arnoldus Schoemantius

It is from the law of God that one can learn how much man, after the fall into sin, suffers from the failure of the powers of his free choice,* and how great his misery is.

The law, called lex by the Latins because it used to be read [legi] publicly, is called nomos by the Greeks because it renders [nemein] to each his due, and Torah by the Hebrews, that is, instruction, because it instructs [yarah] us about the will* of God and our duty towards him and our neighbor.*

In Holy Scripture “law” is used with different meanings,* and firstly for anything that has been instituted by God (Psalm 1:2, and 19:8).

Hence the word* “law” is applied to the teaching of the New as well as the Old Testament (Isaiah 2:3; Jeremiah 31:33; Romans 3:27).

Secondly, the word is used with particular meaning for moral law (as in Luke 10:26), ceremonial law (as in Luke 2:22), or forensic law (as in John 19:7).2

Thirdly, as a metonym of the subject,* it is used for the books of Moses that contain the teaching of the law, as in Luke 24:44.

Fourthly, it is used by synecdoche for all the books of the Old Testament, as in John 10:34.

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1 Born ca. 1599 and coming from Tiel, Arnoldus Schoemantius matriculated on 19 February 1619 in law. He was ordained in Ingen in 1623. He was admonished by the classis Tiel for indecent behaviour several times, but was restored in the ministry after showing repentance. He retired in 1666. It seems unlikely that Schoemantius lived until 1699, as Van Lieburg, Repertorium 221, suggests. See Du Rieu, Album studiosorum, 139, Van Lieburg, Repertorium, 221. See Menno Potjer, “Machtsverhoudingen in de classis Tiel,” Bijdragen en Mededelingen van Gelre, Vereeniging tot Beoefening van Geldersche Geschiedenis, Oudheidkunde, en Recht 90–91 (1999): 67–93, esp. 68–69, 93 n. 52.

2 The distinction of the moral, ceremonial, and political or forensic sides of the law was common in Reformed orthodoxy. Cf. Theodore Beza, Lex Dei, moralis, ceremonialis et politica, ex libris Mosis excerpta & in certas classes distributa (Genève: Pierre de Saint-André, 1577). In spt18.32 the word ‘political’ is used instead of ‘forensic’; in this context they are synonymous. The tripartition occurs as early as Thomas Aquinas, who divides all precepts of the Old Law into these three categories: Summa theologiae, 1/2.99.4–5. The distinction is reiterated in thesis 33 below, and then elaborated in theses 34 to 51.