This present issue of the *Dutch Review of Church History* brings together papers by European and American church historians presented during a colloquium at Utrecht University on June 6, 2001. All of them have in common that, in one way or another, they have contributed to the development of new directions in the research of scholasticism, in its medieval, Reformation and post-Reformation forms. One of the reasons for organising this colloquium was to present the book *Reformation and Scholasticism* edited by Eef Dekker and the present writer. A second, more important, reason was to introduce the results of the new research on scholasticism — which some call ‘the new school approach’ — to a broader public. Let me explain this. For the adherents of this approach, it has always been a curious phenomenon that the post-Reformation period of Protestant theology is one of the least known in the history of Christian thought and, at the same time a period in the interpretation of which there are many hidden agendas. Post-Reformation theology is usually presented as a highly obscure period characterised by the return of medieval dialectic and Aristotelian logic to the Protestant classroom and, therefore a distortion or perversion of Reformation theology. For too long, this theology has been the victim of the attempt of modern theologians to claim the Reformers as forerunners of modernity. Time and again the theology of the post-Reformation period is read exclusively in the light of modern issues and not on its own terms and in the light of its own concern and context.

**Central research themes**

Recent studies on Protestant scholasticism can be characterised as attempting to develop a new understanding of Protestant theology in the

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1 Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker (eds.), *Reformation and Scholasticism. An Ecumenical Enterprise* (Grand Rapids, 2001).
post-Reformation period, usually indicated by the term ‘scholasticism’. The term ‘Reformed and Lutheran orthodoxy’ is also sometimes used to place it in historical perspective, by referring to the period of institutionalisation and codification following the Reformation. The theology of this period is partly the result of a theological interpretation of the Reformation within particular, confessionally determined bounds. This theology was taught in the new Protestant academies and universities with the help of the so-called scholastic method, which involved drawing on medieval models. It is no simple matter to give a final definition of the term scholasticism. In fact, ‘scholasticism’ is a collective noun denoting all scholarly research and instruction carried out according to a certain method, which involves the use of a recurring system of concepts, distinctions, proposition analyses, argumentative strategies and methods of disputation.2

The most important of the theses put forward by the new research is that the term ‘scholasticism’ refers primarily to a method, rather than any definite doctrinal content. Medieval and Protestant scholasticism are distinct from other forms of theology in their methods of disputation and their argumentative strategies.

Historians have given this type of Protestant theology a very bad press. It was called a ‘dry’, ‘rigid’, ‘dead’ orthodoxy, which conceived of metaphysical systems with a kind of speculative lust, elevated the doctrine of predestination to a ‘central dogma’, and forced the Christian message into the cast of Aristotelian philosophy.3 This orthodoxy was further labelled, in turn, ‘biblicist’, ‘rationalist’ and ‘philosophical’. The result of these slurs was that Protestant scholasticism came to be interpreted in terms of a theory of decline. Thus, more than 150 years of the history of Protestant theology was consigned to the museum of historical curiosities that are no longer worth studying, of use only to conservative Protestants for the sake of legitimising their own dogmatic positions.

However, in recent decades the study of Protestant scholasticism has received a new lease on life. It has developed rapidly from an almost entirely neglected terrain to a broad and well-defined field of research.

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