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**Johann Gerhard (1582–1637) and the
Conceptualization of *Theologia* at the
Threshold of the »Age of Orthodoxy«
The Making of the Theologian**

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Table of Contents

Preface	11
About this Book	18
Introduction	21
1. Background	21
1.1 Age of Orthodoxy.....	21
1.2 Johann Gerhard	22
2. Statement of Problem.....	24
2.1 Need for Microhistories	24
2.2 Need for Correctives	26
3. Statement of Purpose & Research Questions	27
4. Methodology	28
4.1 Research Method & Validation.....	28
4.2 Research Steps.....	31
4.3 Source Selection	32
4.4 Terminology.....	33
5. Review of Relevant Secondary Literature	33
6. Structure	35
I <i>Habitus</i> in the Historical Context of the Reformation	36
1. Introduction.....	36
2. <i>Habitus</i> in its Melancthonian Aristotelian Framework	38
2.1 Definition of <i>Habitus</i>	39
2.2 Kinds of <i>Habitus</i>	42
2.3 Interconnectedness of the <i>Habitus</i>	45
3. Reformation Concern over the Concept of <i>Habitus</i>	50
3.1 Pre-Reformation: Augustine and Aquinas	51
3.2 Reformation: Martin Luther	53
4. Conclusion.....	58
II <i>Gerhard's</i> Use of <i>Habitus</i>	59
1. Introduction.....	59
2. Contemporary Context	59
2.1 Reintroduction of <i>Habitus</i> into Lutheran Theology.....	60

2.2	Inter-Lutheran Conflict over the Idea of <i>Theologia as Habitus</i>	65
3.	Literary Context.....	71
3.1	Use of <i>Habitus</i> Outside of the <i>Prooemium</i>	71
3.2	Use of <i>Habitus</i> in the <i>Prooemium</i>	77
4.	Conclusions and Implications.....	80
III	<i>Theologia as Habitus Theosdotos</i>	83
1.	Introduction.....	83
2.	Gerhard's Qualified Use of <i>Habitus</i>	83
2.1	Objections to Aristotle's <i>Habitus</i>	83
2.2	Renovation of <i>Habitus</i>	86
3.	Gerhard's Theory of Cognition	89
3.1	Aristotelian Background	89
3.2	Interpretation of Scripture: Doctrine of Illumination	93
4.	The Rahtmann Debate: Scripture as Means of Grace.....	104
5.	Conclusion.....	110
IV	<i>Theologia as Practica</i>	112
1.	Introduction.....	112
2.	Understanding ' <i>Theologia as Practica</i> ' in Context.....	112
2.1	Seventeenth Century versus Contemporary Views of 'Practical'	112
2.2	The Conundrum of <i>Theologia</i> as a Practical Discipline	115
3.	Gerhard's Concept of <i>Practica</i>	117
3.1	Gerhard's Delimitations of <i>Theologia as Practica</i>	117
3.2	The Aim of <i>Theologia</i> that is mostly <i>Practica</i> : θεοσέβεια (<i>Pietas</i>)	120
3.3	Understanding Gerhard's Concept of <i>Pietas</i>	124
3.4	Gerhard's Concept of <i>Practica</i> : <i>Auto-praxis</i> or <i>Allo-praxis</i> ?.....	128
4.	The Efficacy of the Word and <i>Theologia as Practica</i>	138
5.	Conclusion.....	145
V	Defining <i>Theologia</i>	147
1.	Introduction.....	147
2.	Situating Gerhard's Definition.....	148
3.	Analyzing Gerhard's Definition	152
3.1	' <i>Theologia</i> ... est habitus θεόσδοτος per verbum a Spiritu sanctu homini collatus'	154

3.2	‘... quo non solum in divinorum mysteriorum cognitione per mentis illuminationem instruitur’	161
3.3	‘... ut quae intelligit in affectum cordis et executionem operis salutariter traducat’	167
3.4	‘... sed etiam aptus et expeditus redditur ... informandi ... vindicandi’	184
3.5	‘... ut homines fide vera et bonis operibus rutilantes ad regnum ... perducantur.’	189
4.	Conclusion.....	191
VI	Implementation of <i>Theologia</i>	193
1.	Introduction.....	193
2.	Overview of the <i>Methodus</i>	196
3.	Preface.....	197
3.1	Definition of <i>Theologia</i> in the <i>Methodus</i>	197
3.2	Definition of <i>Theologiae Studium</i>	199
4.	Requisites of Theological Study	204
4.1	Use of Luther’s <i>Trias</i>	205
4.2	Daily Duty of Devout Prayer.....	207
4.3	Obligation of Right Intention	209
4.4	Sincere Pursuit of Piety	211
5.	Course of Theological Study	213
6.	<i>Coronis de Tentatione</i>	219
6.1	<i>Tentatio</i> as the Necessary ‘Transfer’	220
6.2	<i>Tentatio</i> as ‘Self-Application’ of <i>Theologia</i>	223
7.	Conclusion.....	226
	Conclusion	228
	Zusammenfassung (Summary)	234
	List of Figures	241
	Reference List	242
	Primary Sources (Original Manuscripts and Translations).....	242
	Secondary Sources	246

Indices	254
Index of Names	254
Index of Places	255
Index of (selected) Subjects	255

Preface

This study was born out of the classroom, from nearly two decades of engaging students from many different parts of the world in what has come to be called ‘theological education.’ Of course, that experience gave rise to the endless search for more effective ways of educating students theologically. And that, in turn, has led to participation in the wider conversation about theological education in general. Indeed, Edward Farley ([1983] 2001:3) was right some three and half decades ago when he quipped, ‘Complaints about theological education are as old as theological education itself.’ While the plethora of literature on the *methodus studii theologici* in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and on the *encyclopedia theologica* of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries attest to the truth of this statement, there seems to be a growing foreboding sense of aimlessness and groundlessness in today’s theological education that surpasses that of years past.

As church historian Richard Muller (1991:20) pointed out already two and half decades ago, despite the profusion of theological education systems being employed both at home and abroad, the contemporary problem continues of a ‘certain intellectual and spiritual distance between dogmatic system and Christian piety or the Christian pulpit.’ The modern dichotomy between theory and practice, inadvertently and somewhat ironically initiated by the eighteenth century Pietists (Farley [1983] 2001:61, see also pp. 49–72; cf. Muller 2003:120–121) and exacerbated and conventionalized by the Deweyan Pragmatism of the United States, continues to be the center of conversations about theological education. Consequently, the study of theology is often reduced to the acquisition of mere professional skills or, to a lesser extent, the cultivation of mere personal spirituality. In both cases, such a narrowing of the theological endeavor renders the knowledge component of *theologia* virtually irrelevant. Of course, the opposite is at times also the case whereby the learning of theological knowledge is divorced from personal spirituality and professional practice.

In the search to regain some semblance of bearing for the future, many scholars are looking backwards into the past (e.g., Farley [1983] 2001; Muller 1991; Hütter 2000) – not because of some desire to anachronistically relive the past, but because understanding where we have trod may help us plot a way forward. Such a venture is not risk free. The tendency to imitate an idealized past in the search for direction in the present has often led to shallow, cursory solutions (e.g., adjusting the list of courses, increasing required field work, changing teaching methods). As important as these solutions may be for addressing immediate problems and particular contexts, they are, after all is said and done, exactly that – responses to immediate problems and particular contexts, and therefore inherently fleeting and temporary. Ironically, as Farley ([1983] 2001:3–6) has pointed out, these problems are actually only surface symptoms of what may be a much deeper underlying prob-

lem only to be found at the level of presuppositions upon which theological education is built.

In pondering the many and varied presuppositional influences on theological education, it seems that one stands out above them all – the concept of ‘theology’ itself. How does our understanding of the very concept of theology shape our approach to theological education? After all, the question of how to study theology is steeped in that seemingly simple, yet surprisingly evasive, question: What is theology in the first place?

This study, then, is not primarily about theological education, per se, but is an attempt to get at that fundamentally important question about the nature of theology. Of course, in doing so, it is also about theological education because any investigation into the *nature* of theology necessarily leads one to ponder how one might appropriate or *study* that theology. In other words, the question regarding theology can never be separated from the question of how the theologian is made¹ – hence the title of this book. It is also the underlying reason for the last chapter.

That question about the nature of theology has been answered in a surprisingly wide variety of ways over the ages and, consequently, has led to significantly different approaches to carrying out the theological task. A study such as this could pick up the history of that rather elusive term *theologia* at nearly any point in the two thousand year history of the Christian Church. There have been times throughout that history, however, when the debate over the nature of theology has surfaced more so than at other times. For example, in the first few centuries after the Church’s birth, Augustine delved into the nature of the theological task in his *De doctrina christiana*. Some eight hundred years later, Thomas Aquinas addressed the same topic in his magnum opus, the *Summa theologica*, reflecting and further provoking throughout the late Middle Ages a lengthy debate over the true nature of theology. That same debate was again picked up by Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians in the seventeenth century, that period of time that has been dubbed rather disparagingly the ‘Age of Orthodoxy.’ And the list could go on.

This study focuses on this ‘Age of Orthodoxy’ and hones in on one influential theologian within the Lutheran confession of faith. One of the reasons, as will become clear below, is that Johann Gerhard (1582–1637) is somewhat of a transitional figure within Christianity and especially within Lutheranism. His service as ecclesiastical superintendent and then university professor of theology during the first decades of the seventeenth century was during a time of transition in the theological culture of German Lutheranism, occasioned by the reintroduction of Aristotelian thought into the theological conversation of that time. In fact, it was that very Aristotelian thought that formed the framework for and enabled an ongoing conver-

1 I first encountered this idea in a short article on theological education according to Martin Luther: ‘*Oratio, Meditatio, Tentatio*: What Makes a Theologian?’ (Kleinig 2002). That it has shaped the title of this book reveals Gerhard’s keen desire to follow in Luther’s footsteps on this very topic.

sation directly addressing the very question that lies at the heart of this study: What is theology?

In one way or another, that conversation revolved around the relation between theology and piety (i.e., personal spirituality including faith and the life lived in faith). Is the study of theology essentially the same as the pursuit of piety or are they two separate endeavors? In other words, what does theology have to do with faith? This is an ever relevant question, as evidenced by the current debate over whether the university should offer courses in 'religious studies' or 'theology.' During Gerhard's time, no one was even remotely suggesting a course of studies like one might find in the 'religious studies' departments of some universities today. Regardless, while there were some who nearly equated theology and piety (e.g., Johann Arndt), there were others who viewed them as distinctly separate endeavors (e.g., Georg Calixt). Most fell in between these extremes, with some leaning more toward the former and others more toward the latter.

This question and the conversation it occasioned were accompanied by other trends within Lutheranism. One of those trends, which has been documented by recent research (see, e.g., Schorn-Schütte 1996, 2000, and the series of essays treating this topic in Dixon & Schorn-Schütte 2003), was the increasing professionalization of the clergy, which naturally coincided with a rise in the theological education level of pastors. There was a necessary correlation between the two. The increasing education of the Lutheran (and Protestant) clergy was due in great part to the fact that pastors were now chiefly responsible for the interpretation of Scripture and the preaching of that Word, rather than focused on the mere facilitation of prescribed rituals (Dixon & Schorn-Schütte 2003:11). So, although it did vary from one territory to the next, a university education with at least some time spent in the post-graduate theology faculty was increasingly common among the clergy as more and more congregations sought better educated pastors.

It is understandable within this context that the concept of theology would also undergo a parallel shift toward increasingly being viewed as an academic discipline within the academy or university setting. Although certainly none of those involved in the conversation would offhandedly dismiss faith as unimportant when studying theology, treating theology as an academic discipline did call into question its relation to faith and piety. Of course, the 'shift' or 'transition' referred to here was far from an abrupt change in direction. It was gradual and more a matter of emphasis than outright assertion. Yet one can detect that emphasis through subtle changes in the way that one spoke about theology. For instance, since other university disciplines were often classified as *habitus* per Aristotle's intellectual virtues, identifying theology as a *habitus* clearly indicated that it, too, was an academic discipline. Another clear indication was the orientation of theology's practical goal. Was theology a matter of personally 'coming' to faith or a matter of 'leading' others to faith? Although subtle, the latter way of talking about theology revealed a more professionalized view of theology that was also more academically inclined. Of course,

shifts throughout history often bring about tension and eventual conflict and this shift was no different. Some feared greatly that viewing theology as a university academic discipline would inevitably drive a wedge between it and faith and piety. And they protested adamantly.

Johann Gerhard and his thoughts about theology are situated squarely in the middle of this shift and the controversies it occasioned. He is, thus, a very transitional figure. His response to the central question of this book reveals a theologian who is pulled in two directions, sensitive to the past, but also attentive to the future, and he incorporates both ways of understanding theology into his own concept of it and into his advice regarding its study. This book seeks to offer a more nuanced understanding of Gerhard's transitional concept of theology that includes in a rather innovative way both the intellect and the will and to investigate its connection to other important aspects of the theologian's life, such as faith, piety, theological study, and pastoral ministry.

As we explore these themes, a few caveats are worth heeding. One of my underlying concerns in this study has been to call into question what I consider are inaccurate and unfair caricatures of the theologians of the so-called 'Age of Orthodoxy' and to promote a more accurate interpretation of what these theologians were about. Surely the responsive nature of Gerhard's statements on theology belies the caricature of seventeenth century theologians as sterile and uncreative. It is also worth clarifying, however, that the 'shift' as talked about in this study and to which Gerhard responds does not at all refer to the supposed shift from the vibrant and creative theology of Luther to the allegedly dull and unresponsive theology of those later theologians who followed the reformer, whether it be Gerhard or others. In the century after Luther, theological treatises, admittedly quite voluminous at times, were an accepted and helpful way of conversing about theological topics that were held to be of the utmost importance. These treatises must be considered alongside works of other genres of literature, often devotional in nature, that reflect a deep concern for personal piety and pastoral care. Even the theological treatises reflect a serious desire to heed what had been inherited from their theological forebears while creatively interacting with contemporary political, social, and ecclesiastical issues (see, e.g., the series of essays in Friedrich, Salatowsky, & Schorn-Schütte 2017).

Moreover, the shift from a personally oriented to a more professionally oriented definition of theology (from *auto-praxis* to *allo-praxis*) should not be interpreted as a shift from a practically oriented theology to one of ivory towers and lofty ideas that had little to do with the common person. This lingering misconception has discolored the 'Age of Orthodoxy' in less than accurate ways, as an increasing number of scholars are beginning to recognize. What may lie behind this misconception is the persistent idea, so very common in contemporary thought, that Christianity (and all religions) falls in the domain of personal feelings and is therefore

devoid of any substantive knowledge and information.² Such a view of Christian theology would find no place for it in the university curriculum. Within this mindset, it becomes very difficult to understand how treatises on doctrinal knowledge could be considered in any way practical.

The historical reality is that Lutheran theologians, in contrast to some theologians of other confessions, were almost all agreed that theology was a practical endeavor. In other words, they agreed that one did not study theology purely for the sake of attaining theological knowledge, but one attained that knowledge for a practical purpose. The aforementioned shift was in regard to the *orientation* of that practical purpose as expressed in their definitions of theology, that is, from one practical purpose (salvation of oneself) to another (salvation of others). Of course, those before the shift were very much concerned with pastoral care just as those after the shift were concerned with personal piety. Luther, whose own concept of theology was decidedly *auto*-oriented, was very attentive to the question of pastoral care. In fact, his concern for the salvation of his parishioners at Wittenberg seems to have been one of the underlying motivations for the *95 Theses*, the very spark that set off the entire Reformation.

Nonetheless, the ideal (e.g., definitions of theology) ought not to be so readily separated from the actual (pastoral and church practice). The gradual shift in emphasis in the conceptualizations of theology throughout the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is not insignificant. Many feared the practical repercussions that this shift would bring about in the long-term when it came to church practice and pastoral formation. Not only did their resistance to this shift give rise to serious controversies but their concerns were later picked up by forerunners of the Pietist movement (Friedrich 2004:314–115). Moreover, in important ways these doctrinal statements give us a glimpse into how theologians perceived themselves, their task, and their place within the larger society (cf. Nieten 2006:3, 8). As mentioned earlier, they reflect and contributed to actual social changes and movements, such as the emergence of the clergy as a professional class. The *actual* impact and effect that these statements of the *ideal* had within their historical setting render a close analysis of their content all the more valuable (see Appold 2004:7–8). Hence, more fully understanding Johann Gerhard's carefully crafted statements about the nature of theology provides a helpful complement to existing and future studies on the early modern Protestant clergy.

Of course, one would hope that any historical study such as this goes beyond merely clarifying and elucidating historical facts or even amending certain misconstructions of Gerhard's thinking, important as both of those are. Surely there are benefits for the present and future as well. Indeed, one of the underlying implications is that a study such as this provides what the prominent historian John Lewis Gaddis

2 See *The Idea of a University* (Newman 1907) for an excellent discussion and defense of theology as knowledge in response to contemporary views to the contrary.

(2002:4) has called an ‘expanded horizon’ for those currently involved in the theological education endeavor. The grinding daily routine and pressing academic responsibilities tempt the theological educator to focus on immediate experiences in striving to understand the predicament of and possible solutions for the study of theology. The problem is that such direct experience is always severely limited. As mentioned earlier, it very seldom leads to deep understanding and, thereby, to enduring solutions. One needs to step back, to regain perspective, and to take a new look from afar. History provides this occasion because it ‘lifts us above the familiar to let us experience vicariously what we can’t experience directly: a wider view’ (Gaddis 2002:5).

Although this study has focused rather narrowly on the thinking of one individual in the seventeenth century and delved deeply into only one aspect of his theology, precisely by doing so it attempts to provide such a ‘wider view.’ It invites the theologian and the theological educator to venture beyond the limited experience of the present theological education situation and to delve into the unfamiliar landscape of the past – specifically into the thinking of Johann Gerhard who, as senior theology professor at Jena, also faced equally important and pressing questions about theological education. One of those was that deceptively simple, yet enduring, question: What is theology in the first place? The extent to which Gerhard has perhaps offered a way forward in the midst of today’s current conversation regarding the relation between doctrine, faith, personal spirituality, and professional practice in what has come to be known as ‘theological education’ is a question for the reader. It is, at least, worth pondering.

In any case, through Gerhard the theological educator of today is introduced to the theological thinking of another epoch. Horizons are expanded and presuppositions challenged about how theological education could, or perhaps even should, be done. Far from irrelevant and archaic, the research presented here constitutes in many ways a plea for continued dialogue with the theologians (and, therefore, theological educators) of an oft forgotten age as we ponder together how one goes about ‘making’ the theologian.

Undertaking a study such as this is never a solitary venture, despite what the title page might indicate. I am so very well aware of this. To express the depth of my gratitude to the full breadth of people involved is certainly far beyond the scope of this short preface. Nonetheless, at least a few words are in order

In some ways this book bridges three continents. It is the revised version of a study accepted as a doctoral dissertation by the Theology Faculty of the University of Pretoria in South Africa. Although I started it on the African continent, the vast majority of the research and writing took place in the United States. Prof. Dr. Werner Klän, rector of the *Lutherische Theologische Hochschule* in Oberursel, Germany, was kind enough to serve as my doctoral supervisor and, afterwards, as the editor for the book series in which this book now appears. From our first informal conversations in South Africa to the final revisions of the dissertation and now the

book, his endless encouragement and support have been indispensable. Likewise, my former professor and current mentor, Prof. Dr. Robert Kolb was and continues to be a valuable source of advice and encouragement, as well as a seemingly endless source of knowledge and wisdom when it comes to early modern Lutheranism.

Two individuals have worked tirelessly to ‘unlock’ the German and Latin writings of early modern theologians such as Johann Gerhard for those of us Anglophones. Many thanks go to both of them: Elmer Hohle and the late Richard Dinda. Their gracious and eager willingness to offer advice regarding particularly difficult Latin texts, to help with translations, and to share unpublished manuscripts made the perusal of original sources all the more feasible.

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My deepest heartfelt gratitude goes to my dear wife, Susan, who patiently and lovingly put up with an absent and preoccupied husband for many a long night and yet remained a stalwart source of encouragement and inspiration. The many sacrifices she has made on my behalf have not gone unnoticed. Similarly, I would like to thank my children, Samuel, Abigail, Caleb, Jesse, and Eliana, for their patient understanding of a father whose time has often been more preoccupied with a man from four hundred years ago and less engaged with them in the here and now.

Finally, I am sure Johann Gerhard would join me in saying: *Soli Deo Gloria!*

Indices

Index of Names

- Alsted, Johann Heinrich 61, 119
Aquinas, Thomas 12, 41, 44, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 55, 78, 83, 99, 115, 117, 118, 141, 149, 151, 194
Aristotle 13, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 52, 54, 55, 58, 61, 64, 71, 73, 78, 83, 84, 85, 87, 89, 94, 95, 98, 100, 101, 107, 110, 117, 119, 120, 154, 158
Arndt, Johann 13, 23, 133, 134, 148, 149, 163, 208, 209, 231
Arnold, Gottfried 26, 124
Augustine 12, 51, 52, 53, 54, 64, 71, 84, 85, 96, 207, 209
Bellamine, Roberto 71, 72, 74, 171
Bernard of Clairvaux 221
Calixt, Georg 13, 33, 34, 38, 60, 66, 69, 70, 76, 85, 101, 108, 145, 148, 149, 175, 187, 205, 210
Calov, Abraham 29, 35, 36, 37, 56, 60, 61, 76, 86, 88, 118, 130, 148, 150, 151, 160, 165, 167, 187
Chemnitz, Martin 22, 23, 64, 116, 209, 220
Chytraeus, David 133, 206
Cramer, Andreas 63, 67, 68, 69, 70, 81, 82, 85, 100, 119, 137, 145, 148, 149, 163, 167, 175, 178, 180, 208, 209, 230
Descartes, René 91
Evenius, Sigismund 64, 66, 67, 68, 81, 137, 145, 148, 158, 178, 230
Gadamer, Hans-Georg 29
Gerson, Jean 120, 121, 129, 133, 183, 184, 211
Gutke, Georg 64, 68
Hafenreffer, Matthias 36, 133, 206, 217, 218, 223, 225
Hofmann, Daniel 35, 60, 65, 66, 67, 70, 81, 148, 175
Hollaz, David 19, 36
Kant, Immanuel 91, 92, 102, 141
Keckermann, Bartholomäus 60, 63, 67, 118, 119, 136
König, Johann 149, 151, 165
Kotzebue, Johannes 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 81, 137, 145, 148, 178, 230
Luther, Martin 12, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 31, 34, 35, 36, 38, 39, 50, 51, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 64, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 77, 80, 81, 82, 90, 92, 102, 103, 115, 116, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 135, 137, 138, 139, 140, 143, 148, 150, 159, 160, 161, 163, 184, 193, 194, 196, 197, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 223, 227, 228
Maria, Anna 178, 182
Martini, Cornelius 60, 61, 64, 65, 66, 68, 69, 85, 90, 94, 95, 149, 158
Martini, Jakob 65, 66
Meisner, Balthasar 31, 34, 36, 60, 63, 67, 68, 69, 70, 74, 75, 78, 83, 87, 88, 110, 118, 119, 136, 137, 145, 148, 150, 152, 187, 193, 198
Melanchthon, Philipp 18, 19, 26, 31, 35, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 56, 58, 59, 61, 62, 73, 74, 75, 76, 81, 83, 86, 101, 115, 116, 126, 139, 148, 154, 160, 161, 168, 170, 174, 182, 183, 216, 217
Mentzer, Balthasar 24, 60, 63, 67, 78, 135
Mosheim, Johann Lorenz von 24, 205
Plato 40, 85, 89, 99
Quenstedt, Andreas 36, 110, 118, 150, 165
Rahtmann, Hermann 90, 92, 93, 96, 97, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 110, 140, 142, 143, 144, 148, 155, 163, 171, 195
Ramus, Petrus 61, 62
Scaliger, Julius Caesar 93, 94, 95, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 154, 173
Schilling, Wencel 66
Schleiermacher, Friedrich 25, 92, 102
Semler, Johann Salomo 24, 34, 92, 173, 206
Sophia, Dorothy 178, 182
Spener, Philipp Jakob 27, 34, 124, 137, 206

Timpler, Clemens 61, 63, 79, 157, 158, 170

Zabarella, Jacob 39, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 67,
79, 94, 98, 118, 119, 148, 154, 156, 157,
161

Index of Places

Coburg 24, 96, 128

Danzig 104

Heldburg 24, 128, 203

Helmstedt 60, 65, 66, 68, 69, 70, 76, 81

Jena 16, 23, 24, 28, 36, 70, 78, 87, 88, 92,
94, 96, 105, 128, 133, 150, 193, 194

Leipzig 104, 143

Magdeburg 18, 66, 67, 68, 70, 79, 81, 85,
100, 119, 137, 145, 148, 178

Quedlinburg 23, 67, 69, 70, 178

Wittenberg 15, 17, 18, 19, 23, 34, 38, 45,
54, 57, 63, 65, 66, 68, 69, 70, 75, 78,
148, 193, 205

Index of (selected) Subjects

academization (of theology) 79, 81, 83,
228

actualization of the habitus 69, 161, 162,
163, 166, 167, 168, 170, 188, 190,
201, 212, 215, 222

adaequatio (alignment) 97, 99, 100, 101,
106, 110, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159,
163, 164, 166, 170, 191, 207

affectus cordis (affection of the heart)
118, 182, 190

allo-praxis (allo-orientation) 14, 68, 121,
128, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135,
136, 137, 138, 141, 149, 165, 166,
182, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190,
191, 194, 198, 200, 212, 213, 223,
226

auto-praxis (auto-orientation) 14, 15,
128, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135,
136, 137, 138, 165, 166, 167, 182,
184, 186, 187, 188, 190, 192, 194,
200, 212, 213, 222, 223, 226

category(ies), Aristotle's 26, 33, 37, 41,
42, 55, 72, 73, 79, 83, 91, 116, 119,
138, 139, 148, 159, 160

clerical/professional paradigm 114, 134,
165, 215

cognition 34, 50, 61, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93,
94, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 108,
154, 169, *See also* intellection

doctrina, theology as 62, 84, 86, 115,
122, 132, 133, 136, 138, 147, 152,
157, 173, 174, 189, 190, 197, 198,
217

faith-knowledge *See* notitia

faith-praxis 35, 65, 67, 137, 138, 148,
149, 163, 175, 178, 179, 182, 183,
189, 190, 191, 192, 208, 219, 226,
228, 230, 231, *See also* pietas

fides infusa 72

fiducia (fiducial trust) 43, 46, 47, 66, 74,
76, 80, 81, 126, 127, 128, 160, 168,
169, 172, 174, 175, 177, 179, 180,
181, 182, 183, 187, 188, 190, 191,
192, 199, 201, 202, 203, 204, 209,
210, 212, 213, 226, 230

forma (form) 42, 74, 90, 91, 92, 104,
154, 155, 174

formal cause 42, 126, 127, 128, 209

good works 18, 30, 51, 54, 57, 72, 120,
121, 122, 123, 125, 126, 127, 128,
132, 134, 137, 138, 139, 143, 144,
145, 148, 166, 168, 172, 179, 181,

- 182, 188, 190, 191, 201, 209, 210,
212, 213, 226
- habitus
- Aquinas on 51, 52, 53
 - as the mind's suitability 154, 156, 157,
158, 187, 191, 215, 230
 - Augustine on 51
 - caritatis (of love) 57
 - definition of 39, 40, 41
 - development of 41
 - fidei (of faith) 46, 47, 56, 72, 73, 74,
75, 76, 81, 82, 83, 150, 158, 159,
160, 161, 165
 - God-given *See* theosdotos
 - gratiae (of grace) 55
 - kinds of 42
 - Luther on 54, 55, 56, 57
 - mixtus 69, 119, 168
 - nature of 41
 - of the intellect (intellectual virtues)
43, 81, 83, 115, 150
 - ars 45, 47, 48, 63, 117, 166
 - intellectus 44, 47, 63
 - prudentia 45, 47, 48, 49, 63, 115,
117, 118, 119, 166
 - sapientia 44, 47, 63, 80, 84, 85,
115, 117, 158, 166
 - scientia 44, 47, 63, 83, 166
 - of the will (moral virtues) 43, 81
 - practicus *See* practica
- habitus controversy/dispute 35, 65, 68,
69, 70, 79, 81, 100, 119, 148, 150,
178, 230
- illumination 33, 35, 64, 85, 88, 93, 96,
99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105,
106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 142, 145,
147, 152, 154, 155, 157, 158, 161,
162, 169, 170, 171, 176, 188, 191,
199, 201, 207, 211, 217
- infused (virtue/habitus) 46, 52, 53, 54,
55, 71, 72, 76, 140
- inner word 92, 103, 104, 105, 108, 110,
170, *See also* res signata
- intellection (intellective process) 94, 96,
99, 154, *See also* cognition
- intellectus agens 64, 94, 95, 98, 99, 154,
155, 157, 158
- intellectus possibilis 94, 95, 98, 154,
155, 157
- law and gospel 143, 144, 222
- materia (material) 42, 74, 90, 91, 92,
98, 104, 154, 155, 174
- meditatio (meditation, deep study of
Scripture) 12, 24, 36, 108, 129, 137,
139, 159, 163, 196, 204, 205, 206,
210, 213, 214, 216, 217, 218, 219,
220, 221
- mysteria, divine 96, 99, 100, 101, 103,
104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 110, 147,
155, 156, 158, 162, 163, 164, 166,
167, 170, 176, 183, 184, 185, 187,
191, 197, 198, 199, 201, 202, 207,
208, 212, 213, 215, 217, 219, 221,
222, 225, 230
- notitia (faith-knowledge) 76, 80, 128,
160, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172,
174, 175, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181,
182, 183, 187, 190, 191, 192, 198,
201, 202, 203, 204, 208, 212, 218,
226, 230
- oratio (prayer) 12, 24, 36, 129, 137,
139, 159, 163, 196, 205, 206, 207,
208, 209, 213, 219
- outer word 104, 105, 143, *See also*
signum
- perducere 66, 70, 130, 135, 136, 147,
150, 167, 168, 186, 189, *See also* allo-
praxis
- pervenire 66, 70, 130, 136, 205, *See*
also auto-praxis
- phenomenological 32, 173, 182, 193,
226, 227
- philosophy 23, 26, 38, 46, 56, 59, 61,
63, 64, 65, 66, 73, 75, 76, 79, 86, 87,
88, 90, 99, 100, 118, 122, 141, 149,
152, 158, 161, 163, 173, 177, 193,
196, 204, 214, 215
- pietas (piety) 24, 27, 28, 34, 115, 120,
123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 133,
134, 135, 142, 145, 149, 161, 167,
168, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182,
188, 190, 191, 192, 199, 211, 212,
213, 226, 230

- practica (practical), theology as 28, 32, 35, 48, 64, 69, 70, 78, 79, 82, 85, 112, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 120, 121, 122, 123, 128, 129, 130, 132, 134, 135, 137, 138, 139, 142, 145, 147, 150, 177, 183, 222, 225, 226, 231, 232
- professional paradigm *See* clerical paradigm
- quality, Aristotle's category of 34, 35, 39, 41, 42, 52, 54, 55, 56, 57, 72, 73, 74, 79, 128, 160, 161, 170, 183, 203, 204, 213
- Rahtmann controversy/debate 96, 97, 104, 106, 140
- regula fidei (rule of faith) 159, 171, 172, 217
- renovatio (renewal) 127, 183, 204, 212
- requisita (requisites) of theological study 196, 204, 205, 206, 207, 209, 210, 211, 213, 214, 215, 222, 223, 227
- res signata (meaning and intention) 91, 92, 104, 105, 109, 110, 140, 142, 164
- ruminatio 120, 184, 218
- secularization (of theology) 81, 88, 228
- signum (material word) 92, 104, 110, 140, 142, 143
- sola fide 56, 57, 68, 72
- sola gratia 71, 77
- sola scriptura 155
- studium (theological study) 33, 134, 158, 194, 199, 200, 201, 204, 206, 208, 209, 210, 213, 215, 216, 218, 219, 221, 222, 224, 226, 227
- tentatio (trial, temptation) 12, 24, 36, 129, 137, 139, 159, 163, 196, 197, 205, 206, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 225, 226
- theologia non renatorum 66, 67, 68, 69, 137, 148, 167, 183, 198, 230, 232
- theological study *See* studium
- theological virtues/habitus, Aquinas' 46, 52
- theory-practice dichotomy/dualism 113, 141, 148
- Theosdotos (θεόσδοτος, God-given), theology as 28, 32, 34, 35, 37, 60, 69, 82, 83, 86, 87, 88, 93, 97, 100, 101, 104, 106, 108, 110, 111, 112, 117, 118, 119, 136, 137, 139, 145, 147, 151, 154, 156, 157, 158, 159, 161, 162, 163, 165, 166, 168, 170, 171, 175, 182, 191, 193, 194, 195, 201, 207, 226, 228, 232
- three-fold definition of faith 47, 148, 160, 168, 172, 173, 178, 179, 183, 202
- traducat (transfer from "head to heart") 49, 120, 121, 128, 147, 167, 168, 172, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 199, 201, 212, 213, 215, 218, 220, 222, 226
- transfer *See* traducat
- trias, Luther's 24, 35, 36, 137, 159, 163, 193, 205, 206, 207, 215, 218, 219, 220, 227
- unio spiritualis (spiritual union) 160, 183, 203, 204, 227
- vita passiva (receptive life) 24, 53, 72, 129, 137, 139