

TENSIONS IN CALVIN'S VIEW OF FAITH:
UNEXAMINED ASSUMPTIONS IN R. T. KENDALL'S
CALVIN AND ENGLISH CALVINISM TO 1649

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As a reaction to the works-righteousness that the Reformers saw in Catholic sacerdotalism, the Reformation watchword *sola fide* represented a needed turn to the object—that is, to God's word of promise. On the other hand the Reformers' reaction to the *ex opere operatum* objectivity of the Catholic sacraments represented a necessary turn to the subject—in this case, to man's faith. Various Reformation theologies worked out different solutions to the tension between God's grace and man's faith.

In a recent book R. T. Kendall tries to demonstrate that Calvin had an objective view of man's assurance of salvation, while most of his followers held a more subjective view of assurance. He also claims that Calvin's doctrine of faith and assurance is based on an atonement by Jesus that is universal.¹ Kendall believes that the universal nature of the atonement for Calvin has not been acknowledged by the majority of those calling themselves Calvinists. Fortunately this paper does not have to adjudicate such a controversial claim, one that Kendall himself merely assumes.² For this paper, as well as for Kendall, the interest lies elsewhere—that is, in Calvin's view of faith, especially his view of the temporary faith of the reprobate.

Kendall implicitly assumes that Calvin's descriptions of faith are consistent, even monolithic. "What stands out in these descriptions is the given, intellectual, passive, and assuring nature of faith. What is absent is a need for gathering faith, voluntarism, faith as man's act, and faith that must await experimental knowledge to verify its presence."³ The latter description, according to Kendall, is exactly what the doctrine of faith became for the later Calvinists, beginning with Beza and finally epitomized in the Westminster Confession.

Kendall's fourfold distinction will provide the outline for our examination of Calvin's view of faith. This paper will attempt to demonstrate that

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¹ This is worked out differently by Calvin than by traditional Arminians, as Calvin separates Christ's atonement from God's eternal election. The atonement is rendered effectual only after Christ's ascension to heaven to intercede for the elect; R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1979) 16.

² For a summary of the argument stimulated by Kendall's book see R. Nicole, "John Calvin's View of the Extent of the Atonement," *WTJ* 47 (Fall 1985) 197-225.

³ Kendall, *Calvin* 19.

Calvin himself was largely responsible for any later confusion among his followers. Although Kendall is primarily correct in his analysis, he simplifies Calvin in order to lay the blame, so to speak, on later Calvinists. This paper will occasionally try to supplement Calvin's view of faith with insights drawn from Martin Luther's statements on faith. The passive view of faith that Kendall wants to assume is Calvin's seems to be more fully represented by Luther's view of faith.

I. THE GIVENNESS OF FAITH

Calvin's premier definition of faith is in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*: "a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (3.2.7).⁴ For completeness we should add Calvin's statement that this knowledge is "perceived from his [God's] Word" (3.2.6).

Although the definition above does not state explicitly that faith itself is a gift of God, there can be no question that such was Calvin's view. Faith is said to be "received from God's mercy" (3.2.15) and to be "instilled in our minds" (3.2.19). But Calvin preferred to say that knowledge or illumination is given to us by God. In Calvin's discussions on justification by faith in his *Institutes*, *Commentaries* and *Treatises* there are scores of statements that justification is a gift, but in the same contexts there are few direct statements that the faith by which we are justified is also a gift.⁵ Yet Calvin clearly rejected any notion that human beings could contribute anything to their own justification in God's sight. "Justifying faith," so far from being a work, Calvin "restricts to a gratuitous promise of divine favour."⁶ In his Genevan catechism, for example, we do find an explicit statement that "Scripture teaches that [faith] is a special gift of God."⁷

Faith as a gift is also shown by Calvin's insistence that repentance must follow faith (3.3.1-2) and not the other way around, as is commonly taught by many of Calvin's descendants in modern evangelicalism. In order to repent, Calvin said, we must first have faith. Calvin equated repentance and regeneration (3.3.8), claiming that both were God's gift (3.3.21). Indeed the necessity to have the Holy Spirit in order to have faith also supports the

⁴ Since many editions of Calvin's *Institutes* have been published, references to it will be identified parenthetically only by book, chapter and section numbers. Unless noted otherwise, the quotes in this paper were taken from J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. J. R. McNeill, Library of Christian Classics, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), vols. 21-22.

⁵ Contrast with this Lutheran writings in which numerous examples can be found. To cite one example from Martin Luther himself, and one each from a 1530 and a 1577 Lutheran confession. Faith is "bestowed on our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (M. Luther, "The Large Catechism," *The Book of Concord* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959] 415), the Holy Spirit "produces faith" ("The Augsburg Confession," *Concord* 31) and actually "creates true faith" ("Formula of Concord," *Concord* 627).

⁶ J. Calvin, "Reply to Sadolet," *Calvin Theological Treatises* (ed. J. K. S. Reid, Library of Christian Classics, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954) 22:235.

⁷ J. Calvin, "Catechism of the Church in Geneva," *Treatises* 105.

idea of faith as a gift. "Wherever Christ is not, there is no righteousness, and indeed no faith; for faith cannot lay hold of Christ for righteousness without the Spirit of sanctification."⁸

Calvin's definition of faith as "a firm and certain knowledge . . . revealed to our minds and sealed by the Holy Spirit" also shows the "givenness" of faith. Indeed one of Calvin's most characteristic ways of describing faith is as a persuasion, assurance, or confidence. The Genevan catechism called it "a sure persuasion."⁹ Again, "it is God alone who enlightens our minds to perceive his truth . . . seals it on our hearts . . . confirms our conscience. . . . [It is a] full and firm assurance."¹⁰ "To separate faith from confidence would be an attempt to take away heat and light from the sun," he wrote in his commentary on Eph 3:12.¹¹ Noting faith as evidence in his commentary on Heb 11:1, he approved of Augustine's translation of it as "conviction" but preferred "demonstration." In fact Calvin believed that faith "leaves no room for doubt."¹²

This "feeling of full assurance" (3.2.15) is brought about by the Word. Man's "heart" is "aroused to faith" by the Word, specifically the "promise of grace, which can testify to us that the Father is merciful" (3.2.7). Faith renders the believer's "conscience calm and peaceful before God's judgment" (3.2.16). Yet the Word is never divorced from the Holy Spirit. Calvin believed that the inner "testimony of the Holy Spirit" (3.1.1) to our spirits is a real experience or feeling. Thus "where the mind has attained [faith] it does not comprehend what it feels" (3.2.14). We believers "feel his Spirit dwelling in us."¹³ This feeling is not an emotional thing, however. It is a kind of knowledge that we did not have beforehand.

In other words, for Calvin faith is actually experienced and not just a doctrine that we infer from Scripture. Faith is a real thing that God actually gives to man—such that it changes man's mind, giving man personal assurance of God's mercy. Kendall calls this a "direct act of faith" as opposed to a "reflex" faith that depends on inference from events to be truly known.¹⁴ Calvin never distinguished faith and assurance.

But Kendall wants to emphasize Calvin's view of faith as a knowledge of assurance while downplaying Calvin's view of faith as a feeling of assurance.

II. FAITH AS KNOWLEDGE

T. H. L. Parker has pointed out that the Church fathers usually distinguished the concepts of faith and knowledge while observing that faith leads to knowledge. (One may add that this distinction was basically true

⁸ Calvin, "Reply" 236

⁹ Calvin, "Catechism" 105

¹⁰ Calvin, "Reply" 244

¹¹ J. Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948–1950), 45 vols

¹² Calvin, "Reply" 244

¹³ Calvin, "Catechism" 134

¹⁴ Kendall, *Calvin* 28

for Luther as well.) In contrast, Calvin "binds faith and knowledge in an even closer connection." First of all, he "inter-relates" the two concepts in "a sort of mutual precedence and generation." *Notitia* produces faith, and faith produces *cognitio*. But more importantly Calvin makes faith "itself the knowledge of God."¹⁵ As we saw, Calvin defined faith as a "knowledge of God's benevolence . . . revealed to our minds."

Kendall describes Calvin's faith as intellectual because he wants to stress that it involves the mind rather than the will of man.¹⁶ For Calvin, faith as knowledge necessarily involves the mind. This involvement is not optional. He said that "faith consists in the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ" (3.2.3) and that we can only have Christ "clothed with his gospel" (3.2.6). In his commentary on Hos 6:6-7 Calvin affirmed that "the knowledge of God is required as necessary to faith."

In other words, faith must know some details (though Calvin would not use that terminology), and those details are found in the Scriptures. There is "a permanent relationship between faith and the Word," and the Word "is the basis whereby faith is supported; if it turns away from the Word, it falls" (3.2.6). Faith must involve the mind, because knowledge of God and Jesus Christ can only be found in the Word of God. Ignorance, even pious ignorance, is incompatible with true faith (3.2.2).

Although faith involves the mind, it is not only intellectual knowledge of facts. For the primary knowledge required for true faith is the firm conviction, "perceived from his Word," that God is merciful to us. Mere knowledge of God's existence or even of his will in judgment is not enough for faith. "We need the promise of grace . . . that God is merciful" (3.2.7). But even this promise must not be an abstract fact. True faith demands more than that. Following Luther, Calvin emphasized that true faith means believing that God is merciful "to me." This is a relational knowledge. "The knowledge of God, then, [is] far from being a purely intellectual knowledge unrelated to trust, reverence and love."¹⁷

The equation of faith and knowledge meant not only that faith is a kind of knowledge for Calvin but also that the knowledge of God is actually a faith-knowledge—that is, it is not obtained like other knowledge. Calvin explicitly wrote: "When we call faith 'knowledge' we do not mean . . . human sense perception." Faith is "far above" common perception (3.2.14). The believer receives "new eyes, as it were" from the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ "In other words, the knowledge of God is not a common act of cognition but the unique act of faith."¹⁹

We see then that Calvin's two main definitions of faith are closely related. Calvin is not interested in mere knowledge of facts about God, true

¹⁵ T H L Parker, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (rev ed, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959) 102-103

¹⁶ Kendall, *Calvin* 19

¹⁷ Parker, *Calvin's Doctrine* 107

¹⁸ Parker translates Calvin's *Institutes* (3.2.34) thus: "The 1960 Westminster edition translates it as 'new keenness'"

¹⁹ Parker, *Calvin's Doctrine* 109

though they may be. He is interested in faith in God, which as faith must necessarily involve God giving us not only new knowledge about his mercy in Jesus Christ but also a firm and certain assurance of its application to me at the same time—thus his comment that “the knowledge of faith consists in assurance rather than in comprehension,” for the mind “feels” what “it does not comprehend” (3.2.14).

Kendall wants to argue that for Calvin this knowledge of God's mercy to me not only is objective but is external—found solely in God's Word of promise—and decidedly not in an internal experience of the Spirit. While approving the rejection by John Cotton of earlier Calvinists' attempts to deduce our election on the basis of faith's effects, Kendall is disappointed that Cotton settled for a subjective reception of assurance.²⁰ Kendall believes that Calvin's own view is objectively and externally grounded in the Scriptural promise that Christ died for everyone.

But even if Calvin did believe in a universal atonement, no one (including Kendall) contests that he firmly held to particular election. It is not at all clear, then, why the concept is so important to Kendall. He apparently feels that grounding the atonement universally will in some way ground each individual's election in the external promise of the Word. But just such a grounding is a Lutheran idea and not one compatible with double predestination.²¹ For Calvin, there simply is no connection between the Word and any individual except via the Holy Spirit, who is given only to the elect (3.2.34–36).

Furthermore even a universal atonement (divorced from an election that is particular) does not negate numerous passages in Calvin's writings supporting just what Kendall is denying—that is, a subjective assurance of God's mercy, if by subjective an internal persuasion or feeling of assurance is meant. Calvin constantly affirmed “the secret testimony of the Spirit” (1.7.4). As if speaking against Kendall's very point, Calvin insisted that knowledge of the objective Word of promise must be accompanied by “the inward testimony of the Spirit” in order “to persuade us.” Indeed he calls this “a feeling . . . of heavenly revelation” and says, “I speak of nothing other than what each believer experiences within himself” (1.7.5).

Note that this knowledge is not a mere emotion but a real experience. One is reminded of Schleiermacher's concept of “immediate self-consciousness” or “awareness.” Although Schleiermacher also called it “feeling” he did not mean a mere emotion any more than Calvin did.²² Calvin of course believed that this experience—a kind of “transcendental knowledge”²³—had

²⁰ Kendall, *Calvin* 183

²¹ “Formula of Concord” insists that the “call of God which takes place through the preaching of the Word” is not “a deception.” It explicitly repudiated any distinction between an outward call and an inward one and affirmed that the Spirit “is present and efficacious and active” wherever and whenever the Word “is proclaimed.” The Spirit “wants to work efficaciously through the Word” even in those who “persistently resist the Holy Spirit” (*Concord* 621–623). This is indeed the objective, external ground of personal salvation that Kendall is seeking.

²² A. I. C. Heron, *A Century of Protestant Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980) 25

²³ Parker, *Calvin's Doctrine* 113

more actual content in it than did Schleiermacher. And Calvin also believed such persuasion to be supernaturally given. Not merely a natural consciousness nor derived from mere human reason, it is received as a gift from God through the Holy Spirit in order that we might receive Christ.

III. PASSIVE FAITH?

The very concept of "receiving Christ" has a modern evangelical ring to it. But for the early Reformers it did not carry the voluntaristic flavor that it carries today. Kendall sharply contrasts Calvin's view of faith as "intellectual" and "passive" with the later Calvinists' "voluntaristic" and "active" faith.²⁴ He is concerned to show that Calvin was misinterpreted by later Calvinists when they began to emphasize faith more as a matter of the will than of the understanding.

Kendall demonstrates effectively that later Calvinists defined faith more as "apprehending or applying" Christ than as "persuasion, assurance, or apprehension"²⁵—more as actively receiving Christ than passively obtaining knowledge of mercy in Christ. In fact Kendall describes an almost continuous spectrum: from the one end, where Calvin's view of faith as identical with assurance of salvation (a knowledge in the mind), through Beza's view of faith as apprehending salvation through sanctification, through Perkins' view of faith as persuasion in man's conscience that one is saved, all the way to Ames' limiting of salvation to the active faith of doing (in repentance) at the other end.

We need not pause to question whether the continuum is actually there. But the sharp distinction, even between Ames and Calvin at opposite ends of the spectrum, is certainly questionable. Here Kendall reveals that he is reading Calvin selectively. It may be true that Calvin can be contrasted with Beza, Perkins, and many later Calvinists over the matter of assurance for doubting church members. But it is hard to believe that such brilliant disciples of Calvin, far closer to his own day than we, could have dreamed up an activist aspect to faith and arbitrarily foisted it onto Calvin without anyone noticing until recently. Even before looking at the evidence it is much more credible to propose that Calvin himself actually held views that could be interpreted as the later Calvinists did.

Even Ames' emphasis on faith as acknowledging more than as knowledge²⁶ is mirrored at times in Calvin's statements. In his commentary on Eph 2:8; 3:17, Calvin said that by faith we "acknowledge" Christ's death, "accept" the offer of grace, "possess and enjoy him as our Savior." Faith is "a warm embrace of Christ." By faith Paul means "the exercise" of our "conscience," Calvin wrote in his commentary on Gal 3:6. Indeed faith can even be described by Calvin as a "hard struggle . . . to persuade" oneself that God is faithful (3.2.15).

²⁴ Kendall, *Calvin* 19.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 62.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 158.

It is true, however, that Calvin also viewed faith as a passive reception. Even though faith "does" wonderful things, "conveys into our souls the life of Christ" and "makes us partakers of everything which it finds in Christ," it is not the "efficient, but only the formal cause" of these things.²⁷ Though faith is "the instrument by which we receive Christ" and is "a cause of our justification," it is "merely an instrumental cause."²⁸ "Properly speaking, God alone justifies" (3.11.7). Though faith is an "exercise" it is an exercise in trust, "relying on God alone."²⁹ The fact that faith is a gift also implies that faith is passive. Yet Calvin never lost sight of the wonderful activity of faith.

B. A. Gerrish has disparaged what he calls "diagonal comparisons" between Calvin and Luther, pointing out that the complexity of both men's thought makes it possible to find almost any utterance by one mirrored in the writings of the other.³⁰ His point was confirmed time and again during my research for this paper. In spite of this, Gerrish recognizes that true differences in emphasis between Calvin and Luther may be important. The main point for this paper is not that Calvin and Luther differed greatly but that Calvin and his own followers did not differ so sharply as Kendall maintains. Calvin was closer to his followers than Kendall has been willing to acknowledge.

It does not matter greatly whether Kendall has "oversimplified" the views of Calvin's followers, as Harper maintains in his brief review of Kendall's book.³¹ What does matter is that Kendall has oversimplified Calvin himself, removing the very complexity in his thought that resulted in the later confusion. Whatever one thinks about Bouwsma's biography of Calvin, he does document opposing tendencies, and even contradictions, in Calvin's thought.³²

Luther's views would have provided Kendall with a clearer example of a thoroughly "passive" faith. Calvin rarely if ever uses the term, while Luther frequently does so. As early as "The Heidelberg Disputation" we find Luther noting (with uncharacteristic approval) a view of Aristotle that "the soul is passive . . . active only in receiving something." Later in "The Babylonian Captivity" Luther stated that "personal faith" must be thought of not in "an active sense" but "in the passive sense."³³ And Luther wrote that in salvation "man is simply passive; he does nothing." Man only "yields passively to God's speaking."³⁴

²⁷ Calvin, *Commentaries*, Gal 2 20, Gen 15 6

²⁸ Calvin, *Commentaries*, Rom 3 22, Gal 3 6

²⁹ Calvin, *Commentaries*, Gal 3 11

³⁰ B. A. Gerrish, "John Calvin on Luther," *Interpreters of Luther Essays in Honor of Wilhelm Pauck* (ed. J. Pelkan, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968) 87

³¹ G. W. Harper, "Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649: A Review Article," *Calvin Theological Journal* 20 (November 1985) 259

³² W. J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford University, 1988)

³³ M. Luther, "The Heidelberg Disputation" and "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (ed. T. Lull, Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989) 48, 305

³⁴ M. Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Westwood: Revell, 1957) 187, 311. Also note the distinction between "active capacity" and "passive capacity" in points 14 and 15 in "The Heidelberg

Calvin's and Luther's different emphases on the passivity of faith were large enough to result in distinct views on the sacraments. Luther limited the means of grace to the Word and sacraments, never listing faith as one of them. Calvin in his commentary on John 3:16 actually called faith such a "means," even asserting that it is faith itself that "quickens" us. Faith is not only an "instrument" but also a "source" for grace as well (4.17.6). Once Calvin even described faith as "the bond of our union with Christ," though he normally equated that bond with the Holy Spirit.³⁵

Luther's purely passive faith is shown most clearly in his view of infant baptism. Consistent with his view of adult baptism he suggested that infants also have faith—given by God and passively received.³⁶ In contrast, Calvin claimed that infants are "baptized into future repentance and faith" (4.16.20). While "adults are engrafted by faith . . . the children of the godly are born sons of the Church," Calvin said in his commentary on Acts 8:36–37. Faith requires the "age and ability to understand," and without this "discernment of faith" no one is "baptized by His Spirit" even though they are baptized in water as infants.

We can see the greater passivity of faith for Luther than for Calvin in the Lord's supper as well. For Luther, the objective character of the sacrament for unbelievers—they also receive the body of Christ—demonstrates the clear absence of any active role for faith during the sacrament.³⁷ Calvin, on the other hand, did not emphasize Christ's words of institution. He emphasized our personal faith in the Lord's supper, even making it the "source" for our partaking of Christ's body and blood (4.17.6). The sacraments only become actual channels of grace through faith. Thus faith is more active for Calvin. It is not so much the positive presence of unbelief (as in Luther's writings) as it is the absence of faith (for Calvin) that separates the matter of the sacrament from the sign, preventing unbelievers from receiving Christ's body (4.14.15). Faith's activity is also evident in Calvin's definition of the sacraments as the "attestation of our piety toward him and before men" (4.17.1).³⁸

Disputation" as well as Luther's use of the terms "pure passive" and "mere passive" elsewhere to describe man in the conversion process (quoted in "Formula of Concord," *Concord* n 6, 538). Later Lutherans took these statements of Luther on man's passivity in conversion and made them the linchpin of their rejection of double predestination. Thus man is totally passive toward salvation, which is effected totally by God himself (ibid 472, 538). Faced with God's call, man can either cease any activity aimed at one's own salvation and allow God to work, or man can actively resist the working of the Holy Spirit (ibid 537, 556). After conversion, though, the believer's will is free to actively cooperate with God in the performance of good works (ibid 534, 538–539).

³⁵ J Calvin, "Best Method for Concord," *Treatises* 330

³⁶ M Luther, "Rebaptism," *Theological Writings* 253 ff

³⁷ M Luther, "The Smalcald Articles," *Concord* 311

³⁸ Although the grace we receive through faith is primarily objective, the sacraments have a self-reflective or subjective side for Calvin as well. They can be "exercises which make us more certain of the trustworthiness of God's Word" (4.14.6)

IV. ASSURANCE VERSUS TEMPORARY FAITH

We now come to the last of the four aspects of Calvin's faith that Kendall claims were radically altered by his followers: the assuring nature of faith. While Kendall is certainly correct that Calvin would have repudiated a view of faith "that must *await* experimental knowledge to verify its presence,"³⁹ such a view tends to caricature the later Calvinists' desire to simply confirm their election, not their faith.

The problem began, Kendall readily admits, with Calvin himself—primarily from Calvin's view of "temporary faith" in the reprobate. This teaching sprang from Calvin's observation of apparent believers falling away from the truth. They cannot be truly elect, Calvin inferred. To explain their previous faith and assurance, Calvin tried to distinguish true from false faith. Remember that for Calvin faith is a knowledge or feeling of assurance given directly by God. But "experience shows that the reprobate are sometimes affected by almost the same feeling as the elect, so that even in their own judgment they do not in any way differ from the elect." Rather than attributing this feeling to self-deception, Calvin was willing to call it the "lower working of the Spirit" whereby "the Lord . . . steals into their minds" to allow a taste of his goodness (3.2.11).

This aspect of Calvin's thought was indeed disastrous for any doctrine of assurance that relied on the inner testimony of the Spirit. Kendall admits that this was pastorally insensitive. Calvin's followers began wondering how they could know that the assurance they possessed was not of the "false" variety, especially if those with false faith are not even wrong "to believe that God is merciful toward them," since God "only manifests to them his [real] mercy" for a short time (3.2.11). How, then, is one to know?

Calvin attempted to answer that question, and Kendall believes that each point clearly distinguished Calvin from his later followers.⁴⁰ First, Calvin never separated faith from assurance, Kendall says. Yet while it is true that Calvin identified faith and assurance (see above), we must admit that at times Calvin did separate election from assurance not only for those elect who yet persist in unbelief but also for the already believing soul who is doubting. For an example see his commentary on Jonah 2:4. The problem was compounded by Calvin's frequent insistence that faith "leaves no room for doubts" or that a "trembling, hesitating, doubting conscience, will always be a sure evidence of unbelief."⁴¹

Second, Kendall affirms that for Calvin the "assurance of our election" (3.24.5) is found in God, not in ourselves. Again the statement is true as it stands, but it does not differ significantly from the concept of "grace alone." Calvin denied works as the ground for our election (3.22.3), insisting that faith is not even a condition meriting election (3.24.3). Yet the very passage

³⁹ Kendall, *Calvin* 19.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 25.

⁴¹ The first is from Calvin's "Reply," *Treatises* 244, and the second is from *Commentaries*, Eph 3:12.

in which Calvin made an attempt to ground the assurance of election in "Christ" and "God's call" (3.24.4-6) is followed immediately by Calvin's important distinction between God's general but ineffectual "outward" call and God's special "inward" call only to the elect.⁴² Again Calvin felt compelled to comment on the temporary faith of the reprobate, observing that "sometimes [God] also causes those whom he illumines only for a time to partake" of this special call, only to "strike them with even greater blindness" afterward (3.24.8). Is this assurance any better?

Furthermore Calvin did not overlook the value of signs for one's election. Although he at one point did repudiate man's attempts "by his own strength . . . to break into the inner recesses of divine wisdom" to discover one's own election (3.24.4), elsewhere he explained that "reason itself" teaches believers "to climb higher and to examine into the secret energy of the Spirit" to find out why everyone does not accept the gospel (3.1.1). Bouwsma has noted that "unlike Luther, Calvin, in dealing with his uncertainties, sought—at least at times—for proof and evidence."⁴³

And Calvin's works are filled with suggestions for just such evidence. Though the believer should not look to "the merit of works," Calvin did "not forbid him from undergirding and strengthening his faith by signs of the divine benevolence toward him" (3.14.18). Faith may even look to itself, since "confidence" will always accompany faith. Thus doubt and hesitation are "evidence" of unbelief, while a "firm, steady faith" will "prove" itself. Rahab "produced the certificate of her election" by submitting to God's rule and gave "evidence of her faith" by believing God's promise to the Israelites.⁴⁴

Third, Kendall correctly notes that Calvin did not "urge men to make their calling and election sure to themselves."⁴⁵ The key word here is "make." Calvin never based God's gracious election on man's efforts. Kendall wants to add, however, that Calvin also rejected the idea of a deduction of election through the fruits of faith—that Calvin denied entirely what has been called the "practical syllogism." Surprisingly Kendall then quotes Calvin's view in his commentary on 2 Pet 2:10 that this verse encourages us to "make proof" of our calling "by godly living" and that our election is to be "confirmed . . . by a good conscience and an upright life." Kendall does not seem to notice that these statements seem to contradict his very point.⁴⁶

⁴² Regarding Calvin's statements that God's call is evidence of God's individual mercy, V A Shepherd frequently points out the actual as well as logical inconsistencies in these statements, V A Shepherd, *The Nature and Function of Faith in the Theology of John Calvin* (National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion Dissertation Series 2, Macon Mercer University, 1983) 75, 98, 91, 123

⁴³ Bouwsma, *John Calvin* 101

⁴⁴ Calvin, *Commentaries*, Eph 3 12, Josh 2 11

⁴⁵ Kendall, *Calvin* 25

⁴⁶ Kendall also insists that Calvin does not link 2 Pet 2 10 to the conscience "in terms of deducing assurance of salvation" (ibid 25) But Calvin's argument was against "making one's calling and election sure" on the ground of one's good conscience, not against confirming one's election from the effects of faith Elsewhere Calvin used the term "conscience" in just this way The Spirit's "sure testimony confirms our conscience This is that full and firm assurance commended by Paul" (Calvin, "Reply" 244)

At the very least, one is forced to ask why Kendall criticizes Calvin's followers so roundly for thinking that the source for their deductive syllogism was in Calvin himself. Part of the answer lies in Kendall misunderstanding the intent of two passages in the *Institutes*, where Calvin stated that "if you contemplate yourself, that is sure damnation" (3.2.24) and then explicitly rejected the scholastic "moral conjecture" (3.2.38). But both of these sections were rejecting the attempt to ground salvation upon one's own works, not the attempt to confirm that salvation has already been freely given because of the fruits it has produced. Elsewhere Calvin explicitly urged believers to obedience in order "to confirm the adoption that they have received as sons" (3.6.1). Indeed "the grace of good works . . . shows that the Spirit of adoption has been given to us" (3.14.18). If this is not deductive reasoning, then what is?

Furthermore it was not just Calvin's followers who suggested that the concept of a temporary faith in the reprobate might raise questions for the assurance of the elect. Calvin himself did so in his very first discussion of the subject. "In the meantime," he wrote, "believers are taught to examine themselves carefully and humbly, lest the confidence of the flesh creep in and replace assurance of faith" (3.2.11–12). Finding the distinction between true and false faith a difficult one to define, Calvin then proposed perseverance as a mark of true faith. But waiting till the end of life is hardly comforting to the presently doubting believer, however explanatory to the mind of the outside observer.

Calvin seems to have sensed this. He quickly went on to affirm that "the chief hinge on which faith turns" is not that the "promises of mercy" remain "outside ourselves" but that assurance is given "in us"—that is, the "confidence" that "renders the conscience calm and peaceful" (3.2.16). In his commentary on Isa 12:2, Calvin said that "confidence proceeds from faith, as an effect from its cause," and then proceeded to use that fact in the very syllogistic way that Kendall considers foreign to Calvin. "Let us therefore know that we have made good progress in faith, when we have been endued with such confidence as this Prophet describes."

V. CONCLUSION

"Westminster theology is thus haunted with inconsistencies," Kendall wrote in the conclusion to his book, also declaring that "Westminster theology, then, represents a substantial departure from the thought of John Calvin."⁴⁷ It is the latter statement that must be challenged and qualified. While Kendall may have done an excellent job clarifying the theological drift of Calvin's followers, he did not begin with the actual complexity of Calvin's thought. Some would put it stronger: Calvin is not simply complex, but inconsistent. Bouwsma, for example, identifies "two Calvins, coexisting uncomfortably within the same historical personage."⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Kendall, *Calvin* 212

⁴⁸ Bouwsma, *John Calvin* 230 Also see Shepherd's conclusions to his dissertation (see n 42 *supra*)

The purpose of this paper has not been to show where, or even to prove that, Calvin is inconsistent. I have tried to demonstrate that Calvin himself is the source for the English Calvinists' doctrine of assurance. True, they may have modified the concepts they took from Calvin, even to the point of inconsistency among themselves at times. But they did not need to consciously depart from Calvin's thoughts to use his concepts in their own ways.

Thus (1) while Calvin believed that faith is given by God, he did talk at times of faith as our responsibility. (2) He clearly defined faith as a kind of knowledge, but he also described it as a feeling of assurance. (3) Yes, faith was passive in all the important Reformation distinctives. But it was more active, and more like the faith of the later Calvinists, than Kendall is willing to admit. Finally, (4) while Calvin surely did not require empirical deduction from the effects of faith and the Spirit, he certainly believed in the utility of such inferential reasoning for the doubting believer.

Kendall accurately points out that the deductive reasoning of later Calvinists had become a basis of election, not just a confirmation of it. The active response of the individual was made primary, rather than the promise of God. And he is certainly correct that the need for a kind of rational argument looks foreign to many statements of Calvin. Is there a better alternative than the "practical syllogism" for assurance of election?

William Abraham thinks there is. He notes that even Jonathan Edwards concentrated on a deductive argument based on the marks of election in the "religious affections" of the regenerated elect.⁴⁹ Thus Edwards, like the Calvinists described by Kendall, ignored that element in Calvin that held assurance to be a feeling or knowledge simply given by the Spirit, not inferred by man's reasoning.

Abraham believes reliance on inference alone is not only inadequate for assurance but also unnecessary. He suggests that the

obvious thing to do is to move in a Wesleyan direction on the issue of assurance. There is no reason Calvinists need sacrifice any of their basic doctrines if they incorporate into their account of assurance the appeal to the direct, immediate perception of God's graciousness to the individual.⁵⁰

Indeed, however much Calvin's and Wesley's views of faith may have differed, were not their views on assurance somewhat similar?

Yes, Calvin rejected private revelation by the Spirit to individuals, but he seems to have made an exception for the knowledge of God's mercy given to the elect. And yes, Calvin explicitly united all illumination by the Spirit to the Word, which Wesley has been accused of not doing (probably unfairly). But such qualifications only show the fruitfulness of Abraham's suggestion. Has an element in Calvin been neglected that should never have been lost in rationalistic Protestant orthodoxy?

⁴⁹ W. J. Abraham, "Predestination and Assurance," *The Grace of God, The Will of Man* (ed. C. H. Pinnock; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989) 238.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 239.