

FAITH AND ASSURANCE IN THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM
AND ITS PRIMARY COMPOSERS:
A FRESH LOOK AT THE KENDALL THESIS*

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I. INTRODUCTION

One of the greatest struggles of the theologian and pastor of the sixteenth and seventeenth-century post-Reformation churches lay with the area of personal assurance of faith and its relationship to saving faith. The bulk of current scholarship no longer views this post-Reformation struggle as a faithful outworking of early Reformation principles. With notable exceptions, the post-Reformers are viewed as having injected a cold, systematic scholasticism into the doctrines of faith and assurance, thereby supplanting the warm biblicism of the Reformers.¹

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1. During the 1970s a fresh reevaluation of Protestant orthodoxy along more traditional lines was initiated by the following major works: Jill Raitt, *The Eucharistic Theology of Theodore Beza* (Chambersburg, PA: American Academy of Religion, 1972); W. Robert Godfrey, "Tensions within International Calvinism: The Debate on the Atonement at the Synod of Dort, 1618-1619" (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1974); John S. Bray, *Theodore Beza's Doctrine of Predestination* (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1975); Marvin W. Anderson, *Peter Martyr: A Reformer in Exile* (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1975); John Patrick Donnelly, *Calvinism and Scholasticism in Vermigli's Doctrine of Man and Grace* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976); Olivier Fatio, *Méthode et théologie: Lambert Daneau et les débuts de la scholastique réformée* (Genève: Droz, 1976).

In the 1980s interest in this reappraisal has been sparked especially through the work of Richard A. Muller who has ably shown that late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed documents did not support the theory of a "predestinarian metaphysic" that

This contemporary school of thought is represented in various contexts by R. T. Kendall and others.² According to Kendall, Theodore Beza, and William Perkins are regarded as the culprits who packed and pushed the post-Reformation doctrine of assurance down the slope of experiential³ subjectivity until it snowballed into the Westminster Assembly's betrayal of Calvinism *via* an "apparently unquestioned acceptance of a distinction between faith and assurance, for 'Faith' was one heading in the [Westminster] Confession, and 'Certainty of Salvation' another."⁴ Kendall concludes that the Westminster theology of the 1640s *qualitatively* departed from authentic Calvinism in the doctrine of assurance of faith.⁵

smothered the biblicism of the first-generation Reformers. Rather, Muller argues that although the theologians of the post-Reformation period used a scholastic methodology to clarify the Reformed theological system, they remained in essential agreement with the first generation of Reformed thought in content (*Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988]; *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, volume 1 [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987]. Volumes 2 and 3 are forthcoming.)

For support of Muller's basic reappraisal, but with unique emphases, cf. Donald W. Sinnema, "The Issue of Reprobation at the Synod of Dort (1618-19) in Light of the History of This Doctrine" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of St. Michael's College, 1985); Martin I. Klauber, "The Context and Development of the Views of Jean-Alphonse Turretini (1671-1737) on Religious Authority" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1987); Stephen R. Spencer, "Reformed Scholasticism in Medieval Perspective: Thomas Aquinas and Francis Turretini on the Incarnation" (Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1988); Joel R. Beeke, *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991).

2. R. T. Kendall, "Living the Christian Life in the Teaching of William Perkins and His Followers," *Living the Christian Life* (London: The Westminster Conference, 1974), pp. 45-60; *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); "The Puritan Modification of Calvin's Theology," in *John Calvin*, ed. by W. Stanford Reid (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), pp. 199-214. Scholars with convictions similar to one or more of Kendall's theses include, among others, Brian Armstrong, Karl Barth, John Beardslee, M. Charles Bell, Ernst Bizer, James Daane, Johannes Dantine, Edward Dowey, Otto Gründler, Basil Hall, Philip Holtrop, Walter Kickel, Donald McKim, Jürgen Moltmann, Charles Munson, Wilhelm Niesel, Norman Pettit, Pontien Polman, Jack Rogers, Holmes Rolston III, and Hans Emil Weber.

3. "Experimental" and "experiential" will be used interchangeably, the latter being more readily understood in contemporary thought, but the former more commonly used to describe the "inward life" of the believer by Reformation divines.

4. Kendall, "Puritan Modification," p. 214.

5. Kendall further argues that Calvinism's departure from Calvin regarding assurance of faith bears substantial ramifications for ancillary doctrines as well, including the decrees

Kendall finds significant roots of the supposed departure of Calvinism from Calvin on faith and assurance in three prominent Heidelberg theologians, Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583), Kaspar Olevianus (1536-1587), and Girolamo Zanchius (1516-1590), of which the first two are widely regarded as the primary composers of the Heidelberg Catechism (1563). "The Heidelberg divines," he writes, "have in common with Beza a qualitatively different doctrine of faith from that of John Calvin."⁶ Their doctrine of faith, according to Kendall, is contrary to Calvin, for it grounds assurance in "a good conscience," the practical syllogism, and sanctification. Kendall regards these grounds as a natural outgrowth of espousing limited atonement, federal theology in the motif of the covenants of works and grace, and a fourfold division of faith (historical, temporary, miraculous, and justifying)⁷ — all of which he asserts that Calvin rejects. In concluding his published dissertation, *Calvinism and English Calvinism to 1649*, Kendall summarizes:

Perkins's incorporation of the Heidelberg divines into the Bezan scheme was a good match; Ursinus and these men espoused a teaching that cohered well with Beza's thought, but not Calvin's. That these men retained faith as a persuasion (as well as the doctrine of temporary faith) seems due simply to their failure to be completely emancipated from the venerable Calvin to whom they owed so much. They were too close to their own theological enterprise to have sufficient objectivity to see that they were actually putting new wine into an old wineskin. This wineskin did not burst, however, until Arminius put his finger on Perkins's doctrine of faith. Ames provided a new wineskin for the Beza-Perkins theology, and the Westminster divines adopted a doctrine of faith and assurance which was everything Ames would have endorsed.⁸

In this article I wish to concentrate on only one aspect of the large issue

of God, the covenant of grace, sanctification, atonement, repentance, and the role of the human will in soteriology (cf. *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*).

For review articles opposing Kendall's published dissertation, see William Young, "Calvin and Westminster," *Bulwark* 2 (May-June 1980): 15-18; A. N. S. Lane, *Themelios* 6.1 (September 1980): 29-31; Paul Helm, "Article Review: Calvin, English Calvinism and the Logic of Doctrinal Development," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 34 (1981): 179-85; W. Stanford Reid, *Westminster Theological Journal* 43 (1980): 155-64; George Harper, *Calvin Theological Journal* 20 (1985): 255-62. Cf. Paul Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982).

6. *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*, p. 41. Cf. pp. 38-42, 51, 62n, 63.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 38-41.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 210.

of the relation of the post-Reformation to the Reformers, namely, to provide a fresh look at the Kendall thesis on faith and assurance through the eyes of the Heidelberg Catechism [hereafter: HC] and its primary authors, Ursinus and Olevianus. Contrary to Kendall's simplistic lumping of Heidelberg's divines into one group on faith and assurance in opposition to Calvin, I aim to show that the HC, Ursinus, and Olevianus each display distinctive emphases on assurance. Neither the HC nor its primary authors are qualitatively contradictory to Calvin on faith and assurance, though they do move quantitatively beyond him in certain aspects. That is to say, notwithstanding differences in matters of degree on the doctrines of faith and assurance between Calvin, the HC and its primary authors, there is scant variation in substance.

Prior to turning to this narrow focus of examining the HC and its primary composers on faith and assurance, it ought to be stressed that in the compass of this brief article we do not pretend to offer the last word on this subject. Moreover, the Kendall thesis on the Heidelberg divines should not be isolated from additional secondary sources that provide a number of divergent views. Secondary literature has reached no common consensus on assessing the HC and its composers on faith, assurance, and ancillary doctrines. More study is needed. Questions abound, some of which cannot be fully addressed within our present limits.

For example, is Robert Letham correct in arguing that the HC, "even more emphatically than either Luther or Calvin, maintained that assurance of salvation was a necessary ingredient of saving faith,"⁹ and that Ursinus himself departed significantly from the HC's teaching while Olevianus remained faithful to Calvin and the HC?¹⁰ Is it accurate to state that Olevianus and Ursinus were theologically antithetical on assurance, since, as Letham affirms, Olevianus allowed sanctification no part in relation to assurance in contrast to Ursinus who embraced both the practical and mystical syllogisms as means of assurance?¹¹ Is Letham correct in stating that Ursinus was the first to work out the implications of a bilateral covenant "for faith and assurance in a consistent manner

9. "The Relationship between Saving Faith and Assurance of Salvation" (Th.M. thesis, Westminster Seminary, 1976), p. 26.

10. "Saving Faith and Assurance in Reformed Theology: Zwingli to the Synod of Dort" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Aberdeen, 1979), pp. 179-206. [Hereafter: Letham, "Saving Faith and Assurance."]

11. *Ibid.*, p. 206.

... [such that] the end result ... was to be pietistic subjectivism, introspection and the widespread use of the *sylogismus mysticus*”?¹²

Or is Lyle Bierma more accurate when he posits that sanctification also plays a significant role in assurance for Olevianus since “works are the fruit and thus the measure of faith”?¹³ Is Christopher Burchill correct in distinguishing the concepts of covenant in Ursinus and Bullinger, and arguing against Kendall and Letham that Ursinus’s “understanding of the covenant was essentially testamentary, as a channel for the self-giving grace of God rather than that of a bi-lateral pact as defined by Bullinger”?¹⁴ And when Derk Visser argues beyond Burchill (and contrary to David Weir and others) that Ursinus saw the covenant as essentially “promise of grace,”¹⁵ is it proper to conclude that Ursinus was much less of a federal theologian than most have made him out to be?¹⁶ Is Visser correct in affirming that it is this covenant of promise that in turn provided Ursinus with a solid basis for the personal, assuring comfort that formed the theme of so many of his works, including the HC?¹⁷ Or is J. Wayne Baker correct in stating that while Olevianus is an unambiguous, thorough Calvinist, Ursinus is a “bit of an enigma,” since on the one hand he seems to endorse a conditional, mutual covenant while he simultaneously teaches that “double predestination affords great security and assurance”?¹⁸

Keeping these divergent viewpoints in mind, we now turn to the HC and its primary composers. In doing so, I wish to first compare the views

12. Ibid., pp. 195-96.

13. *The Covenant Theology of Caspar Olevian* (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1980), p. 123.

14. “On the Consolation of a Christian Scholar: Zacharias Ursinus (1534-83) and the Reformation in Heidelberg,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 37, 4 (1986): 581.

15. “The Covenant in Zacharias Ursinus,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 18, 4 (1987): 544.

16. David A. Weir, *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation Thought* [hereafter: *Origins*] (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 110n and chapter 3 on Ursinus’s view of the prelapsarian covenant. Cf. Mark Walter Karlberg, “The Mosaic Covenant and the Concept of Works in Reformed Hermeneutics” (Th.D. dissertation, Westminster Seminary, 1980), pp. 91ff.; Cornelis Graafland, *De zekerheid van het geloof: Een onderzoek naar de geloofbeschouwing van enige vertegenwoordigers van reformatie en nadere reformatie* (Wageningen: H. Veenman & Zonen, 1961), pp. 102-27.

17. Visser, “The Covenant in Zacharias Ursinus,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 18, 4 (1987): 544.

18. *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: The Other Reformed Tradition* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1980), pp. 202-05.

of the HC and Ursinus on faith and assurance for three reasons: first, I adopt the traditional view that Ursinus was *the* major composer of the HC (with Olevianus playing a substantial, secondary role, while both were placed in the context of a larger supervisory committee); secondly, Ursinus has published a renowned commentary on the HC; thirdly, a careful interweaving of the HC with the views of Ursinus will enable us to highlight their different emphases with clarity. This examination of the HC and Ursinus on faith and assurance will be followed by a summary of Olevianus's views.¹⁹

II. THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM²⁰ AND ZACHARIAS URSINUS²¹

At the heart of the HC's understanding of faith and assurance lies its renowned question and answer [hereafter: QA] 21:

What is true faith?

It is not only a certain knowledge whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in his Word, but also a hearty trust which the Holy

19. By comparing the HC and Ursinus's exposition of it, I by no means intend to deny their distinctions, or negate the fact that Ursinus's commenting on the HC arose from his theological lectures and involves more than just an exposition of the HC. Rather, I aim at greater clarity and sharpening of issues.

Various editions of Ursinus's commentaries and lectures on the HC were published posthumously. For this study, Ursinus's *Opera theologica*, 1: 50-332 [hereafter: *Opera*] and *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism* [hereafter: *Commentary on the HC*], translated from the 1616 Ursinus-Pareus edition by George W. Willard, second American edition (Columbus, Ohio: Scott & Bascom, 1852), have been utilized.

Other significant works of Ursinus that bear upon his doctrine of saving faith and assurance include: *Catechesis Maior* (1561; *Opera* 1: 1ff.); *Catechesis Minor* (1562; *Opera* 1: 34ff.); *Loci theologici* (1567; *Opera* 1: 446ff.); *Theses de praecipuis theologiae capitibus* (1557; *Opera* 1: 755ff.); *Apologia Catechismi ecclesiarum et scholarum electoralis Palatinatus* (1563; *Opera* 2: 1ff.); *Censura theologorum quorundam viginorum, de Catechesi electorali Palatina* (1563; *Opera* 2: 58ff.).

20. For this paper, the English quotations from the Heidelberg Catechism are taken from a translation completed under the auspices of the Synod of the German Reformed Church of the U.S. in 1859, published as a Tercentary edition, and subsequently reprinted in a parallel column with the German text of the third edition in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1878), pp. 307-355 [hereafter: *Creeds*]. German, Dutch, and Latin editions of the HC have been consulted but afford little new light on the Catechism's questions dealing with assurance.

21. The best biography of Ursinus in English is Derk Visser, *Zacharias Ursinus: The Reluctant Reformer, His Life and Times* (New York: United Church Press, 1983). Visser has also provided a summary of Ursinus's life, theology, and role in the church in "Zacharias Ursinus," *Shapers of Religious Traditions*, ed. Jill Raitt (New Haven: Yale, 1981), pp. 121-39.

Ghost works in me by the Gospel, that not only to others, but to me also, forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness and salvation, are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits.²²

The HC's definition of faith has lent itself to questions of interpretation in two areas: first, in the construction of "not only . . . but also"; second, in ascertaining the full implications of faith as "heartly trust." Particularly in the Netherlands, where a fondness remains for the HC that is unsurpassed, such matters have been debated at great length. For example, Alexander Comrie spends some 117 pages on Lord's Day 7 (QA 20-23), only to be outstripped by Klaas Schilder who dedicates 261 pages!²³

Concerning the construction of "not only . . . but also," the question arises: Did the HC intend to say that both elements of saving faith mentioned — namely, knowledge and trust — partake of a saving nature? Or did the HC intend this "certain knowledge" to signify only *historical faith* such that though this knowledge must be present in salvation it is not sufficient for salvation?

A. "A CERTAIN KNOWLEDGE" (*EINE GEWISSE ERKENNTNIS*)

Viewing the HC independently, it appears at first that saving, assuring knowledge is intended. The "knowledge" of QA 21 is a sure, convincing, certain knowledge — *eine gewisse Erkenntnis*. Wrestling with the difficulty of adequately expressing this terminology in English, the 1975 Christian Reformed Church translation rendered it by using two nouns: "a knowledge and conviction."²⁴ The implication is that faith involves an assuring, heart knowledge, i.e., something beyond and altogether different from historical faith. Further, QA 65 seems to affirm that faith in its entirety — thus also in its knowledge—is produced by the Holy Spirit in the believer's heart.

On the other hand, the emphasis in QA 21 is on the *herzliches Vertrauen* ("an assured confidence") element, which is singled out as *the* aspect of faith that "the Holy Ghost works by the gospel, in my heart." Hendrikus Berkhof argues that this emphasis and construction marks a notable shift in Reformed thought in which "the two aspects [of *Erkenntnis* and

22. *Creeds* 3: 313.

23. Comrie, *Stellige en Praktikale Verklaaringe van den Heidelbergschen Catechismus* (Amsterdam: N. Byl, 1753; reprint ed., Bameveld: G. J. van Horssen, 1976); Schilder, *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, vol. 3 (Kampen: Kok, 1940).

24. *The Heidelberg Catechism: A New Translation* (Grand Rapids: Board of Publications of the CRC, 1975), p. 10.

Vertrauen] are separated and there is even talk of two kinds of faith: an acceptance as true of the whole content of the Bible on the one hand, and a Spirit-inspired confidence on the other."²⁵ Though Berkhof's claims (and especially his subsequent interpretation of them) are exaggerated, it is safe to say from the emphasis and construction of QA 21 that Ursinus was its probable author and that *he* intended to make a distinction between *non-saving* knowledge and *saving* trust, whether or not it was understood that way by Olevianus and other contemporaries.

In expounding QA 21 in *Commentary on the HC*, Ursinus distinguishes three false forms of faith — historical, temporary, and miraculous — from genuine "justifying faith." All four kinds of faith are the work of the Holy Spirit, but the first three are limited to His *common* work. Often Ursinus does not even mention the Holy Spirit with regard to these three insufficient kinds of faith. He intimates that only justifying faith is His *special* work. Hence it is not surprising that in QA 21 the Holy Spirit is specifically mentioned only in conjunction with saving trust and not in conjunction with non-saving knowledge.

Concerning historical faith, Ursinus writes:

Historical faith is to know and believe that every word of God is true which is divinely delivered and revealed. . . . Historical faith includes nothing more than mere knowledge. . . . Historical faith is sometimes joined with profession, and sometimes not; for men often, whatever may be the causes, profess that truth and religion which they hate. Many also who know the doctrine to be true, still oppose it.²⁶

According to Ursinus, even the devils have historical faith, but they shall all perish.²⁷ Hence justifying faith always contains more than historical faith. Saving faith is the seed of grace that grows in the soil of historical faith. Historical faith — which contains the elements of knowledge and assent²⁸ — is necessary, but without the seed of justifying faith planted in the heart by the Holy Spirit, a sinner remains unsaved and on his way to destruction. Ursinus explains:

25. *Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of the Faith*, trans. by Sierd Woudstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 441.

26. *Commentary on the HC*, pp. 108ff.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

28. For Ursinus, knowledge and assent are synonymous as elements of faith. In the Dutch edition of Ursinus's *Commentary on the HC*, Festus Hommius improperly makes a distinction between knowledge and assent in accord with his own convictions (*Schat-boeck*, p. 73).

. . . the general nature of saving faith consists in knowledge and an assured confidence; for there can be no faith in a doctrine that is wholly unknown. It is proper for us, therefore, to obtain a knowledge of that in which we are to believe, before we exercise faith. . . . The difference, or formal character of saving faith, is the confidence and application which every one makes to himself, of the free remission of sins by and for the sake of Christ. The property, or peculiar character of this faith, is trust and delight in God, on account of this great benefit. The efficient cause of justifying faith is the Holy Ghost. The instrumental cause is the gospel, in which the use of the sacraments is also comprehended. The subject of this faith is the will and heart of man.

Justifying or saving faith differs, therefore, from the other kinds of faith, because it alone is that assured confidence by which we apply unto ourselves the merit of Christ. . . .²⁹

In discounting the saving nature of knowledge in the elements of faith, Ursinus follows Melancthon,³⁰ parting ways both with Olevianus (who never mentions historical faith) and with Calvin. Calvin emphatically affirms against Roman Catholicism's *fides implicita* that also knowledge is a saving dimension of the life of faith.³¹ For Calvin, true knowledge is to receive Christ as He is clothed in the Gospel and offered by the Father; for Ursinus, knowledge *precedes* faith. For Calvin, true knowledge rests upon the Word of God in general and the promise of the grace of God in Christ in particular; hence faith is knowledge that rests on the sure promise of God in Christ.³²

For Calvin, faith is knowledge — saving, supernatural knowledge; for Ursinus, knowledge belongs to the shell, not the kernel, of faith. In fact, in his *Catechismus Maior* Ursinus defines faith without specifically mentioning the element of knowledge.³³ This downgrading of

29. *Commentary on the HC*, pp. 110-11.

30. Cf. QA 21 with Melancthon's definition of faith (*Melancthon on Christian Doctrine, Loci communes* 1555, trans. and ed. by Clyde L. Manschreck [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982], p. 158). This Melancthonian influence on Ursinus's definition of faith in QA 21 is confirmed by M. Gooszen, P. Althaus, O. Ritschl in C. Graafland, *De zekerheid van het geloof*, p. 121. Cf. J. Steven O'Malley, *Pilgrimage of Faith: The Legacy of the Otterbeins* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1973), pp. 18-19.

31. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. by John T. McNeill and trans. by F. L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), Book 3, chapter 3, section 14. (Hereafter: Inst., 3.3.14.)

32. Inst. 3.2.6, 3.2.15.

33. *Catechismus Maior*: "Quid est fides? Resp. Est firmiter assentiri omni verbo Dei nobis

knowledge as an element of faith is reflected in Ursinus's increased tendency to examine the authenticity of faith by looking subjectively into one's own heart rather than objectively toward the promise and Word of God.

Despite the fact that the construction of QA 21 probably adheres closer to the theology of Ursinus than of Calvin, it must be recognized that Lord's Day 7 leaves open the alternate view, namely, that both knowledge and trust are essentially saving elements of faith. A Calvinian definition of faith could quite readily be gathered from QA 21 if the "not only . . . but also" construction is read as two equally essential ingredients of justifying faith. Cornelis Graafland points out that for centuries many preachers have presented Lord's Day 7 to coincide with Calvin rather than Ursinus.³⁴

B. "A HEARTY TRUST" (*EIN HERZLICHES VERTRAUEN*)

Secondly, in the original German of the HC, QA 21 speaks of faith as *ein herzliches Vertrauen*. *Vertrauen* merges the English words, "trust" and "confidence." *Herzliches* signifies wholehearted sincerity. Hence, this phrase has been translated as "a hearty trust,"³⁵ "an assured confidence,"³⁶ and "a deep-rooted assurance."³⁷ This striking emphasis on a "deep-rooted assurance" in QA 21 may have been polemically motivated in part to combat Roman Catholicism's aversion towards advocating assurance and its union with faith. Nevertheless, the HC states clearly in QA 21 that assurance is of the essence of saving faith. The HC authors were obviously intent on linking certainty and assurance with faith in an integral way.

Ursinus also underscores assurance as of the essence of faith by stating that "an assured confidence wrought in the heart" is "peculiar to saving faith."³⁸ At this critical point of regarding assurance as of the essence of faith, the HC and Ursinus are one with Calvin. Calvin repeatedly describes faith as certainty (*certitudo*), a firm conviction (*solida persuasio*),

tradito: et firma fiducia qua singuli statuunt, sibi donatam esse a Deo remissionem peccatorum" (*Opera* 1: 15).

34. "De Geloofskennis in Antwoord 21 van de Heidelbergse Catechismus," *Theologia Reformata* 5 (1963): 24.

35. *Creeds* 3: 313.

36. *The Psalter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), p. 3.

37. *The Heidelberg Catechism: A New Translation*, p. 10.

38. *Commentary on the HC*, p. 113.

assurance (*securitas*), and firm assurance (*solida securitas*).³⁹ For Calvin, faith itself, while it consists of knowledge, is marked by a knowledge of *assurance* rather than mere intellectual apprehension⁴⁰ and is therefore “a sure and secure possession of those things which God has promised us.”⁴¹

C. CALVIN AND CALVINISM

It is at this juncture that Kendall and others argue that the Westminster Assembly deviated *substantially* from Calvin (and the HC) by designating a separate chapter to assurance in the Westminster Confession (i.e., chapter 18). However, as I have shown in greater detail elsewhere,⁴² Kendall chooses to ignore several important factors in his negative assessment of chapter eighteen of the Westminster Confession. Here I will limit myself to summarizing three of these factors.

First, Kendall neglects to state that the Puritans, for the most part, also taught that assurance *organically* belongs to the essence of faith. Though it is true that the Puritans emphasized subjective grounds of assurance more than did Calvin, both Calvin and the Calvinists accented that assurance ultimately rests in the objective promises of God. These objective promises of God flow from the Word to the believer who receives them by Spirit-worked faith.⁴³

Second, when grappling with why the Calvinists stressed the subjective grounds of assurance more than Calvin did, Kendall and many contemporary scholars are ignoring the unique, historical situation in which the first generation Reformers found themselves — embracing the doctrines of grace with unparalleled zeal and moving forward in a special age with special degrees of assurance.⁴⁴ It is only to be historically

39. Inst. 3.2.6, 3.2.16, 3.2.22.

40. Inst. 3.2.14.

41. Inst. 3.2.41.

42. *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation*, chapters 6 and 10.

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 152-57.

44. This point is not to be exaggerated as Calvin was also dealing with many who doubted their salvation, for the Reformed had come out of the Roman Catholic Church where it was largely regarded as presumptuous to claim assurance.

Hence, contrary to Cunningham (*Reformers and Theology of the Reformation*, pp. 110-48), Calvin knew what he was doing in the area of assurance. He did not contradict himself. Cunningham does not see the four following principles which Calvin utilized when he

expected that when subsequent generations would emerge, this zeal and love for the truth would wane. By the time the HC was composed, two concerns were beginning to surface, both of which would become more pronounced in the decades between the HC and the Westminster Confession. First, as John MacLeod notes:

As the flood-tide of spiritual fullness and assurance ebbed, the teachers of the Reformed Church were increasingly called to minister to the questionings of many of their most godly and devoted hearers who could not, they felt, honestly claim that they had the possession of a full assurance of their good estate.⁴⁵

Second, as some second and third generation Protestants, on the other hand, began to take God's grace for granted and no longer lived in the consciousness of its miraculousness, a dangerous attitude cropped up that fostered dead orthodoxy. Mere assent to Scripture truth without a trusting response from the heart began to be regarded as sufficient for salvation by some. Hence it became pastorally essential to vividly define for both godly comfort and earnest admonition the difference between common and saving grace, common and saving convictions, historical and saving faith. The Puritans were only being faithful to their flocks when they labored to lead them into "soundly bottomed assurance" and encouraged them not to rest short of experimental acquaintance with the Lord Jesus Christ in personal, vital union.

Third, Kendall has also downplayed that the seeds for this developing emphasis on experimental assurance lay in Calvin and the magisterial Reformers themselves.⁴⁶ Intermingled with a lofty doctrine of faith, Calvin often repeats these themes: Unbelief dies hard; assurance is often contested by doubt; trust in God is hedged about with fear. Freely he acknowledges that assuring faith is neither retained without severe struggle against unbelief, nor left untined by doubt and anxiety.⁴⁷ In commenting on the behavior of Peter and John as they approached the empty tomb, Calvin affirms that believers may possess faith without

interwove assertions of faith as definable in terms of assurance and yet allowed for the lack of conscious assurance of faith: faith and experience; flesh versus spirit; germ of assurance versus consciousness of faith; and a Trinitarian framework (*ibid.*, pp. 54-72).

45. *Scottish Theology* (reprint ed., London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), p. 28.

46. Cf. Beeke, *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation*, pp. 19-104.

47. Inst. 3.2.4, 3.2.15, 3.2.17, 3.2.20.

being aware of it: "Some seed of faith, therefore, remained in their hearts, but quenched for a time, so that they were not aware of having what they had."⁴⁸ The remarkable fact is not how far Calvin was from his successors on the interrelationship of faith and assurance, but how *qualitatively* close he was to them despite the fact that their respective historical situations demanded *quantitative* distinctions of emphasis. Calvin, the HC, and the Calvinists find their union in this truth: *Assurance is organically united to faith's essence, but it may be possessed without the believer's being conscious of his possession.* Peter Lewis rightly summarizes:

I would like to stress differences in emphases existed among the Reformers and Puritans throughout their times [on several matters related to assurance]. . . . On the one hand, while Calvin maintained that saving faith had within itself confidence and certitude, he also recognized that Christians did often lack assurance and might begin with various and varying degrees of it. On the other hand, those who differed from him in emphasis and expression — and this includes the English Puritans generally — were yet quite prepared to accept that faith had within itself an essential, germinal assurance that might simply pass unrecognized by the holder of it in his reflections upon his state. . . . Thus a bridge always existed uniting the two views.⁴⁹

This bridge between the views of Calvin and the Calvinists will become more apparent vis-à-vis the HC and Ursinus as we consider the three matters the HC presents as inseparable from assurance of faith: the promises of God, the testimony of the Spirit, and the fruits of faith or good works.

D. THE PROMISES OF GOD

In the first place, the HC asserts in QA 22 that the whole of faith as defined in QA 21 is inseparable from *the promises of God* as contained in the gospel:

What is it, then, necessary for a Christian to believe?

All that is promised us in the Gospel, that the articles of our catholic, undoubted Christian faith teach us in sum.⁵⁰

48. *Calvin's Commentaries* on John 20:3 (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), vol. 17, p. 302.

49. In Errol Hulse, *The Believer's Experience* (Haywards Heath, Sussex: Carey Publications, 1977), pp. 128-29.

50. *Creeeds* 3: 314.

Though assurance is not the focus of QA 22, when this answer is conjoined with QAs 52, 57, 58, and 61-63, the HC affirms the historic Reformed doctrine that the believer does not gain assurance by anything he has produced or by looking at himself apart from the saving work of a triune God, but by looking to Christ as He is revealed in the promises of the gospel, so that forgiveness, righteousness, and eternal life all come to him as free gifts of divine grace.⁵¹ In underscoring the Reformation accent that the believer does not qualify himself in any degree for God's gifts or promises, the HC avers that the same promises of the Gospel that lead to Spirit-worked salvation are also sufficient to lead to Spirit-applied assurance.⁵²

This is reinforced in the renowned QA 1 of the HC that has been unjustly charged with being anthropocentric since it is concerned with the comfort of *the believer*. The accent of QA 1, however, is not subjectivism but the believer's personal, solid comfort in a *triune God*.⁵³ Fred Klooster's graphic presentation of QA 1 displays this Trinitarian framework well:

What is your only comfort in life and death?

That I am not my own but belong — body and soul, in life and in death — to my faithful Savior

JESUS CHRIST.

He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood and has set me free from the tyranny of the Devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my

HEAVENLY FATHER.

In fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, [who] by his

HOLY SPIRIT

assures me of eternal life and makes me whole-heartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.⁵⁴

51. Cf. *ibid.* 3: 324ff.

52. The HC uses promises of God, Word of God, the Gospel, and Jesus Christ interchangeably as the object of faith, which is viewed as complementary and not contradictory. Cf. Ursinus, *Commentary on the HC*, p. 155; Letham, "Saving Faith and Assurance," p. 185; Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge*, 1: 330-32.

53. Cf. Hendrikus Berkhof, "The Catechism as an Expression of our Faith," in *Essays*, ed. by Bard Thompson, p. 95.

54. "The Heidelberg Catechism: Origin and History," p. 453.

By setting assurance within a Trinitarian framework, QA 1 does not negate Calvin's Christology. Precisely because of the Theocentricity of QA 1 on comforting assurance (i.e., the faithfulness of Christ, the love of the Father, and the witness of the Spirit), Christocentricity is enhanced. It is Christ who saves and redeems, preserves, and assures the believer. As Hendrikus Berkhof writes:

The Catechism's existential approach does not lead to an impoverishment of the faith, but to a full catholic and Trinitarian display of it. Moreover the Trinitarian approach does not stand here, as in many recent discussions, over against a Christological one, but is, on the contrary, the unfolding of it. We belong to Jesus Christ. His protection is the protection of his Father, and his assurance of eternal life. His guidance in ethical decisions is carried out by him through his Holy Spirit. Further, the whole of this Christocentric-Trinitarian work is not a remote and strange work, but the fulfillment of our deepest personal needs: it is "our only comfort in life and in death."⁵⁵

QA 1 is a prime example of early Reformed orthodoxy confirming the major theme of Richard Muller's dissertation:

The development of early orthodoxy in the Reformed Church of the sixteenth century did not involve the rejection of the Christological focus of the theology of the Reformation . . . [but] led to the development of a Trinitarian-Christological structure capable of governing and enclosing the doctrine of predestination.⁵⁶

The whole of the believer's "only comfort in life and death" is itself rich assurance precisely because it is both Trinitarian and Christological.

Moreover, by focusing on the triune God and His promises as inseparable from personal assurance of faith, the HC effectively ties the knot between divine perseverance and the believer's perseverance, faith, and assurance. The promising Word of God is always first because it is the believer's initiatory and ultimate ground of assurance via living faith (QA 59-61). Faith, however, is never meritorious in itself since it is entrenched in, and not competitive with, *sola gratia* (Q. 60). Faith's object is always Jesus Christ and the promises of the triune God that are "yea and amen" in Him (2 Cor. 1:20). The true believer does not have faith in his faith (QA 61) but faith in

55. *Essays*, ed. by Bard Thompson, p. 95.

56. "Predestination and Christology," pp. iii-iv. Cf. his section on Ursinus, *Christ and the Decree*, pp. 97ff.

Jesus Christ. Paradoxically, it is in the very exclusion of faith's worthiness that the worth of faith is accented:

Why sayest thou that thou art righteous only by faith?

Not that I am acceptable to God on account of the worthiness of my faith; but because only the satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ is my righteousness before God, and I can receive the same and make it my own in no other way than by faith only.⁵⁷

For the HC, the subjective consciousness of faith rests on the objective foundation of Christ's person and work. Since we are all totally depraved and unable to make satisfaction for sin (QA 3-14), we need a God-man Mediator to make atonement and full redemption for us by means of the Gospel made known to us (QA 15-20). Jesus Christ is that only Mediator who has borne God's wrath against sin and who covers our sin and guilt in God's presence (QA 36-37). As a "sure pledge" of our resurrection, He arose from the grave and ascended to obtain divine grace and eternal life, to be our Advocate in the Father's presence, and to send the Holy Spirit as a sure guarantee of our salvation (QA 45-49).

Thus, the objective gospel is infallible because it is God's all-comprehensive and faithful promise in Christ. Nevertheless, the *objective* promise in Jesus Christ must be embraced by faith, for salvation is never *apart* from faith (QA 60-61).⁵⁸ Consequently, *subjective* evidence of salvation must always be based upon and subject to the objective, for such evidence is often mixed with *human* convictions and feelings even when it gazes upon the work of God. In short, all exercises of saving faith apprehend, to some degree, the divine promise in Christ. Hence all assurance of salvation flowing out of the testimony of the Spirit and the fruits of faith inevitably embraces God's Christological, gospel promises as well.

E. THE TESTIMONY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Secondly, the assuring *testimony or witness of the Holy Spirit* is addressed in the HC at several junctures. Most notable are QA 1 ("by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life") and several questions dealing with the sacraments. The Holy Spirit is the creator of assurance.

57. *Creeds* 3: 327 (QA 61).

58. Cf. Gerrit C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Perseverance*, p. 206, and *Faith and Justification*, pp. 188ff.

He creates this *herzliches Vertrauen* of QA 21 in us through the gospel. He works faith as a gift of God by the preaching of the gospel and *confirms* it through our use of the sacraments (QA 65). The Holy Spirit teaches us that the promise is more fully declared and *sealed* by the sacraments (QA 66). By the sacraments the Holy Spirit “*assures* us that our whole salvation stands in the one sacrifice of Christ made for us on the cross” (QA 67, 69, 70). “Through the working of the Holy Ghost” (QA 79) the Lord’s Supper also assures the believer that he partakes “of the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross and all his benefits” (QA 75). Throughout these testimonies of sacramental assurance, the HC repeatedly focuses on God’s objective Word, truth, gospel, promises, and Son, testifying that the internal sealing of the Holy Spirit is rooted in the objective reality of the gospel (QA 65–82).

Not surprisingly, Ursinus also makes frequent mention of the personal testimony of the Spirit as a means for gaining assurance, but does not ground it as habitually in the objective truth of the gospel as the HC does. Frequently, Ursinus connects this testimony with the believer’s conviction that he possesses faith:

[On QA 1:] Assurance is obtained, in the first place, from the testimony of the Holy Spirit working in us true faith, and conversion, bearing witness with our spirits that we are the sons of God, and that these blessings truly pertain to us; because “he is the earnest of our inheritance.”

[On QA 21:] We may know that we have faith, 1. From the testimony of the Holy Ghost, and by the true and unfeigned desire which we have to embrace and receive the benefits which Christ offers unto us. He that believes, is conscious of the existence of his faith.

[On QA 53:] In a word, we may know whether the Holy Ghost dwells in us, by our faith and repentance.⁵⁹

By connecting the inward feeling of possessing faith with the testimony of the Spirit, Ursinus paves the way as shall be observed below for the *syllogismus mysticus*.

F. THE FRUIT OF FAITH

Third, the HC also views *the fruits of faith* or *good works* as assisting in the assurance of our faith. In response to QA 86, “Why must we do good works?”, one of three reasons given is “that we ourselves may be assured

59. *Commentary on the HC*, pp. 19, 114, 285.

of our faith by the fruits thereof."⁶⁰ Here the HC probably draws from the *Catechism* of Leo Jud (1541):

Our election, call to faith and salvation, are known through good works. . . . For as I help my neighbor, do good unto him and love him, so will I thereby be inwardly assured that my faith is true, and not false or imaginary, and that I am a real Christian. . . .⁶¹

In QA 86 the HC affirms the well-known practical syllogism (*syllogismus practicus*) as a valid mode of ascertaining assurance.⁶² QA 86 asserts, as Karl Barth notes, that "it is as I live as an elect man that I am assured of my election."⁶³ The fruits of faith serve as an important asset to assurance, although they are inadequate as an independent testimony for assurance.

Ursinus accentuates the validity of the syllogism more than the HC throughout his *Opera theologica*. He posits that election is known by faith and faith is known by good works.⁶⁴ Election is consoling in the context of good works.⁶⁵ The believer knows he is converted by discovering through self-examination that he is willing to assent and submit to the Word of God.⁶⁶ Indeed, whoever is willing to repent and believe actually does repent and believe.⁶⁷ In turn, true faith and repentance are most visible in the believer's love toward his neighbor.⁶⁸

60. *Creeds* 3: 338.

61. Cited by Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/2 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), p. 335.

62. The practical syllogism was based largely on the believer's *sanctification and good works* as evidenced in practical, daily life. It went something like this. *Major premise*: According to Scripture, only those who possess saving faith and are children of God will reveal fruits of sanctification and good works. *Minor premise*: I cannot deny that by the grace of God I may reveal fruits of sanctification and good works. *Conclusion*: Consequently, I may be assured that I am a partaker of saving faith.

Cf. QA 20-21 and QA 59-61, which also reason syllogistically. Also, cf. Conrad Cherry, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards, A Reappraisal* (Gloucester, MA: Pewter Smith, 1974), p. 152.

63. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/2, pp. 335ff.

64. *Opera* 1: 21.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

66. "Exploremus igitur nos, an huic verbo velimus assentiri & obtemperare" (*ibid.*, 3: 51).

67. "... tamen fides in Christum, & poenitentia est adeo pausibilis omnibus volentibus, & expetentibus eam, ut quicunque serio duntaxat velint credere & converti, iam credant & conversi sint, Deo placeant, & in aeternum non pereant, quantumvis infirmum sit fidei & conversionis initium, modo sit verum, & non simulatum" (*ibid.*, 3: 51).

68. *Ibid.*, 3: 44.

As Letham has pointed out,⁶⁹ Ursinus often goes beyond the practical syllogism to approach the so-called mystical syllogism (*sylogismus mysticus*),⁷⁰ which would come into widespread usage in the seventeenth century.⁷¹ In his *Commentary on the HC*, for example, Ursinus includes the following marks of grace as assuring fruits of faith (most of which lean closer to the mystical than practical syllogism): a firm purpose to believe God and obey all his commandments (four times), true repentance (three times), faith (three times), peace of conscience (two times), an earnest desire of obeying God, a correct knowledge of God, regeneration, comfort in the midst of death, joy in afflictions, a firm purpose to persevere in faith, unutterable groans and fervent prayers, and a sincere profession of Christianity.⁷² From a practical, pastoral perspective, Ursinus even argues on one occasion for the reality of faith from the conflict with doubt: "We may know that we have faith, by the doubts and conflicts which we experience, if we are of the number of the faithful."⁷³

Ursinus's scholastic and pastoral tendencies led him to a heavier use of the syllogisms than was evident in Calvin, the HC itself, or Olevianus. Kendall is probably right in suggesting that Ursinus was the first to use the phrase *sylogismus practicus fidei*.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the seeds of the practical syllogism lay in Calvin and the early Reformers.⁷⁵ Though Calvin was not as dependent on syllogistic reasoning as Ursinus, he did,

69. "Saving Faith and Assurance," p. 191. Letham argues that Ursinus was gradually led into a more pronounced use of the syllogisms as a fruit of his bilateral view of the covenant, but frequently overstates his case (*ibid.*, p. 195).

70. The mystical syllogism was based largely on the believer's *internal exercises and progress in the steps of grace*. It went something like this. *Major premise*: According to Scripture, only those who possess saving faith and are children of God will experience inward fruits of grace and godliness, such that self will decrease and Christ will increase. *Minor premise*: I cannot deny that by the grace of God I may experience inward grace and godliness such that self decreases and Christ increases. *Conclusion*: Consequently, I may be assured that I am a partaker of saving faith. Cf. *Essays*, ed. by Bard Thompson, p. 116.

71. E.g., see *Canons of Dort*, Head I, Article 12.

72. Pp. 19, 114, 285, 324, 466.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

74. *Calvin and English Calvinism*, p. 8n; cf. Letham, "Saving Faith and Assurance," p. 104n.

75. Francois Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of his Religious Thought*, trans. by P. Mairet (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 276. Cf. O'Malley, *Pilgrimage of Faith*, pp. 151-52; Beeke, *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation*, pp. 72-78.

as William Bouwsma points out,⁷⁶ use the Scholastic *quaestio* or direct syllogistic reasoning at times:

Let believers exercise themselves in constant meditation upon the benefits of God, that they may encourage and confirm hope for the future and always ponder in their mind this *syllogism*: God does not forsake the work which His own hands have begun, as the Prophet bears witness (Isa. 64:8). We are the work of his hands. Therefore he will complete what he has begun in us [*italics mine*].⁷⁷

Calvin did allow marks of grace and good works to serve an *a posteriori* role in the cultivation of assurance, but regarded them as an inferior sign or secondary support to God's promises in Christ.⁷⁸

In a profound discussion on the *syllogismus practicus*, Karl Barth rightly states that Calvin linked its legitimacy to the following conditions:

First, the testimony of "works" must not take the first place and assume the role of a crown witness. . . . Secondly, the testimony of "works" must not be separated from faith. . . . And thirdly, the testimony of "works" must not be detached from the self-testimony of Christ, from the promise of the forgiveness of sins, or in general from the objective Word of God. . . .⁷⁹

In sum, Calvin does not deny the *syllogismus practicus* so much as he warns against its misuse. The real issue at stake in the *syllogismus practicus* is not its *presence* in the thought of Calvin and the Calvinists, but the *shape* it takes within their systems and the message it implies for both doctrine and life.⁸⁰

The HC and even Ursinus abide within the framework of these three Calvinian conditions. Kendall exaggerates his case when he implies that a "good conscience" appears to be *the* ground of assurance for Ursinus.⁸¹

76. John Calvin: *A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 102.

77. Calvin's *Commentaries* 21: 120 (on Galatians 4:6).

78. Inst. 3.14.18; 3.24.4; Calvin's *Commentaries* 22: 245-46 (on 1 John 4:17).

79. *Church Dogmatics* II/2, pp. 335-36.

80. Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, p. 25.

81. Calvin and *English Calvinism*, p. 40; cf. pp. 38-41, 62n, 63. Letham exaggeratingly concludes that Ursinus could not have had a *decisive* voice in the composition of the HC since his subjective emphasis in assurance so far outstrips that of the HC ("Saving Faith and Assurance," p. 102n).

He neglects to state that Ursinus also points *extra nos* to the promise and nature of God as the foundation of assurance and comfort.⁸² Moreover, even when pointing to an *a posteriori* assurance, Ursinus has no intention of making the syllogisms independent from a causal structure of salvation that is both Christ-centered and rooted in faith.⁸³ Muller concludes that in Ursinus "the causal order is so defined in terms of Christ and faith that there can be no external determination of assurance."⁸⁴

For both Ursinus and Calvin, the critical point is *faith in Christ*. There are no *essential* differences between their views on assurance though their *emphases* and *methods* vary considerably, no doubt in some measure due to their being in different milieus. For pastoral reasons, Ursinus moves the testimony of the Spirit and the syllogisms to the foreground.⁸⁵ Since doubt-ridden parishioners felt unable to grasp the "high" link of election in the *ordo salutis*, Ursinus encouraged them to glean assurance from the "lower" steps of grace, and then to seek grace to move from there to the higher, i.e., from the *a posteriori* marks of grace to the *a priori* election and promises of God. By placing a heavier accent than Calvin places on the witnessing of the Spirit and the fruits of faith, Ursinus's pastoral intent was to utilize God's saving work to solidify weak believers in their assured grasp of salvation by directing them, in the tradition of Beza, to grab any link in the chain (or *tabula*) of salvation in order to feel "a reassuring tug on all the rest" and thereby be encouraged to "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14).⁸⁶ One thing is certain: If Ursinus did tend to emphasize subjective assurance more than Calvin, he did so within the Trinitarian

82. *Opera* 1: 109; *Commentary on HC*, p. 116. As Visser points out: "The same comfort recurs in the last line of his *Commentary* where he calls God 'not unmindful of his promise.' That comfort was as much the central theme of the *Maior*, *Minor* and *Heidelberg Catechism* as it was the basis of his oft-asserted personal faith" ("The Covenant in Zacharias Ursinus," *SCJ* 18 [1987]: 544).

83. Cf. *Commentary on HC*, pp. 301, 303.

84. Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, p. 109.

85. Here Ursinus is influenced by Beza for whom there are no "inferior signs" of assurance, since all that God does is part of the sure chain of salvation. For Beza and Ursinus, however, this does not threaten Christocentricity since every tug on the links of sanctification and faith leads back to Christ: "Thereby we rise up unto Christ" (*A briefe and pithie summe of Christian faith made in forme of a Confession*, trans. by R[obert] F[yll] [London: Roger Ward, 1639], p. 72). Cf. Graafland, *Zekerheid van het geloof*, p. 69.

86. Cf. Beeke, *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation*, pp. 81-86.

and Christological context of saving faith and out of authentic pastoral concern. In any case, Ursinus firmly maintained the normativity and cardinal nature of assuring faith. Of the certainty of personal faith and salvation he writes in a private letter:

If you mean that we cannot say with certainty that one will be saved, you are right when speaking of others; but with regard to oneself, or one's own conscience and convictions concerning oneself, such a conception is both shocking and blasphemous, and subverts the very foundation of faith. Whoever has taught you such an idea, has instructed you as would a devil, even though he came from heaven. I will say even more; if you are not certain in this world that you are an heir of eternal life, you will not be one after death. From such a fate the Lord deliver you. For faith itself is that certainty which is the beginning of eternal life, which beginning every one must possess in this life who would have it hereafter. If you would remember the meaning of the word *hope*, that it is a certain expectation of eternal life, you would not write to me what causes my hair to stand on end. I would not accept a hundred thousand worlds and be so far away from my Lord as not to know certainly whether I am His or not.⁸⁷

III. KASPAR OLEVIANUS

Finally, a word must be said about the HC's other major contributor, Kaspar Olevianus.⁸⁸ Kendall wrongly treats Ursinus and Olevianus as

87. Otto Thelemann, *An Aid to the Heidelberg Catechism* (Grand Rapids: Douma, 1959), pp. 452-53.

88. Though Olevianus never wrote a commentary on the HC in its entirety, he did compose three works on the Apostles' Creed, utilizing various approaches. The first was largely a catechetical work printed as *Vester Grundt, das ist, die artikel des alten, waren, ungezweifelten christlichen Glaubens* (Heidelberg: Michel Schirat, 1567). The Dutch translation, *De vaste grond*, trans. by W. V. N. (Amsterdam: Gerard Zeylmans, 1579; 2nd ed., 1778), was used for this study. His second approach, *Expositio Symboli Apostolici* [hereafter: *Expositio*] (Francofurti: Andrean Wechelium, 1576), was more prosaic. This edition was translated into Dutch as *Verklaring van de Apostolische Geloofsbelijdenis* [hereafter: *Verklaring*] (Groningen, 1739) and into English as *An Exposition of the Symbol of the Apostles, or rather of the articles of faith*, trans. by John Fielde [hereafter: *Symbol*] (London: H. Middleton, 1581). Finally, Olevianus produced a largely new work in *De substantia foederis gratuite inter Deum et electos* [hereafter: *Substantia*] (Genevae: Eustathius Vignon, 1585), in which he more fully relates the Creed to the covenant. This was translated into Dutch and incorporated in *Twe boeken van het wezen des Genade-Verbondts tussen Godt en de Uitverkorene, ende van de Middelen, door welke dat zelfde Wezen ons medegedeelt wort*, trans. by Obbo Copinga [hereafter: *Genade-Verbondts*] (Groningen, 1739).

varying little in their emphases.⁸⁹ On the other hand, Letham and Graafland exaggerate the differences between Ursinus and Olevianus.⁹⁰ The truth lies between these divergent views. On several points relative to faith and assurance Olevianus is clearly closer to Calvin than Ursinus, while the HC's emphases fall between Olevianus and Ursinus.⁹¹

First, Olevianus is influenced primarily by Calvin in regard to the elements of faith. Olevianus always includes knowledge and assent,⁹² as well as trust, in defining faith:

Faith is to assent vnto God, his will being knowen, in euery worde of his, as to the onely true & omnipotent God, and so to giue glory to God: and not to consider any thing either in ourselues or in any other of his creatures, that seemeth to be against him: and in this worde, to behold as the speciall marke the promise of the Gospel, for that the Father truely offreth himselfe vnto vs in Christ, and through his holy Spirit freely justifieth vs that are engrafted in Christ, and more and more sanctifieth vs, and preserueth vs by the same power, through which Christ was raised from the dead, whereby he hath all things subiect to himselfe, that the hope of euerlasting life being founded in this truth and power, it may be most certaine.⁹³

According to Olevianus, the sinner begins to truly live eternally when knowledge of Christ, assent to Christ, and trust in Christ are imparted by the Holy Spirit.⁹⁴ Knowledge, assent, and trust must all partake of a saving nature. Saving knowledge is the way by which the believer reaches saving assent and thereby submits to the entire Word and will of God from the heart. Hence, also, knowledge must be experimentally

Additionally, Olevianus published commentaries on Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians (edited by Theodore Beza), which reinforce his basic theological views as exemplified in his works on the Apostles' Creed.

89. Calvin and English Calvinism, pp. 38-41.

90. "Saving Faith and Assurance," pp. 180-206; *Zekerheid van het geloof*, pp. 107-28.

91. This conclusion is consistent with Ursinus's major influences being derived from Melancthon and Bullinger, whereas Olevianus was primarily influenced by Calvin. Cf. Graafland, *Zekerheid van het geloof*, pp. 105, 106, 114, 120, 128; Letham, "Saving Faith and Assurance," p. 205.

92. As for *assensus*, Calvin incorporates it into knowledge and trust, whereas Olevianus gives it a distinct place in his definition of faith.

93. *Symbol*, pp. 56-[57] (the second page is erroneously numbered 37); cf. p. 58 for a similar lengthy definition. Also, *Genade-Verbondts*, pp. 205-06; *De vaste grond*, p. 11.

94. *Genade-Verbondts*, p. 282.

realized by the special, enlightening work of the Holy Spirit.⁹⁵ Consequently, Olevianus makes no mention of Ursinus's scholastic presentation of four kinds of faith (as noted above), for historical knowledge is not worthy of the name "faith."

For Olevianus, saving knowledge, assent, and trust are closely interwoven. Believing in God involves knowing, submitting, and trusting. Trusting, however, receives the greatest accent; in fact, Olevianus often uses faith and trust interchangeably.⁹⁶ In this emphasis Olevianus leans closer to Ursinus; nevertheless, in his comprehensive emphasis, which stresses the saving character of each element of faith, he is akin to Calvin.

Second, Olevianus places greater stress on the role of God's promises in assurance than does Ursinus. For example, in expounding the Apostles' Creed, Olevianus asserts that the first "rule which shall helpe both our vnderstanding and faith, in euery article of faith" is to focus on divine promises:

First that a mans minde knowe in euery of the articles not only the history (which knowledge alone is not to saluation, forasmuch as the deuills haue that and doe tremble: Iames 2.) but also that the heart it selfe embrace through true faith *the promise of God*, and the *performance of the promise in Christ and for Christ*, which lyeth hidde in euery of the articles. Acts 13. vers. 32. and the 39. Resolue therefore all y articles into *the promises, or into the performance of them*, & so thou shalt haue in the articles of faith all the kindes of that wonderfull vnion that we haue with the Father, with the sonne Iesus Christ, and with the holy Ghost, which throughout all the Gospell is *promised* and giuen to the beleeuers [italics mine].⁹⁷

This is not to say that Olevianus allows no room for good works and the testimony of the Spirit as legitimate modes of assurance. Good works serve to affirm by the enlightening of the Spirit the genuineness and measure of faith.⁹⁸ They are the inevitable fruit of faith. He quips that it is not possible to convince a person that a statue is alive when it does not move nor that a drunk is sober when he is staggering from wall

95. Ibid., 2.1.29 (p. 468); *De vaste grond*, p. 58.

96. Ibid., pp. 10, 47, 50, 165.

97. *Symbol*, p. 60; cf. *De vaste grond*, p. 12.

98. Cf. *In Epistolam E. Pauli Apostoli ad Galatas notae, ex concionibus Gasparis Oleviani excerptae, & a Theodoro Beza editae* (Geneva: Eustathius Vignon, 1578), on Galatians 5:22, p. 121.

to wall.⁹⁹ In fact, at one juncture in *Vester Grundt* Olevianus sounds much like Beza when he asserts that various means of assurance can serve as stairs to climb to the assurance of election:

In the new birth or renewal of heart there is a threefold effect of Christ to consider, from which we conclude that we are members of Christ through faith.

The first effect of Christ in us is the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit, who "bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God," whereby we can lay aside the bondage to fear and cry out, "Abba, dear Father."

The second effect of Christ in us whereby He regenerates us, is the mortifying of the old self, that is, the corrupt, sinful nature, so that we ourselves become enemies of that nature within, and so that by the grace of the Spirit of Christ it becomes progressively weaker until finally it is removed entirely.

The third effect is the quickening by the Spirit or coming-to-life of the new self, so that by the power of Christ working in us, our minds are inclined from now on to delight to walk in a new life. . . .

Whoever experiences the beginnings of these three effects and wholeheartedly desires to continue in them should have an inner certainty that he has faith and thus also possesses Christ with all His benefits to the point of perfect righteousness and salvation.

Whoever, then, is a believer is also elect, for the Scriptures testify that each and every true believer has been elected from eternity unto eternal life (1 Pet. 1:2; Rom. 8:28, 30; Eph. 1:11, 13). Therefore when you are in the throes of despair about whether you are elect, you must not let your thoughts try to scale the heights of God's decree. You must rather hold on to the Word which promises that all believers have been elected by grace unto eternal life, and that those who hunger and thirst after righteousness are believers. One can then use the three effects of Christ in us like stairs to reach the conclusion that since we have the effect of Christ in us (however weak it may seem to us) we also have the cause of that effect, namely, Christ through faith. And if we have faith, then we are also elect, for faith is given to none but God's elect (Rom. 8).¹⁰⁰

99. "Ex actionibus vitae nostrae facile erit iudicare, quis spiritus nos regat. Quemadmodum si quis mihi persuadere velit statuam vivere, quae tamen neque ambulare neque quicquam movere possit. Aut, quemadmodum si erius, qui ab uno pariete cadat in alterum, mihi persuadere velit, se esse sobrium" (*In Epistolam E. Pauli Apostoli ad Galatas notae*, on Galatians 5:25, p. 127).

100. P. 177. I am indebted to Lyle Bierma for providing a translation of this passage from the original "Schirat edition" of *Vester Grundt*.

Despite this strong affirmation of the *a posteriori* means of assurance, Olevianus most commonly stresses the basis of assurance as *extra nos*. Like Calvin, Olevianus retains a *a posteriori* means of assurance as inferior signs and temporary props for weak faith. Unlike Ursinus, he does not verge on equalizing all means of assurance. Nor does he emphasize the fruits of faith in assurance as much as the HC.

Third, Olevianus has a strong covenantal emphasis in which he distinguishes the covenant's essence from its ministration in order to tie the covenant closely to election for the comfort of God's people.¹⁰¹ Hence, election becomes a ground for assurance.¹⁰² For the sake of Christ and the covenant, Olevianus viewed election as the friend of sinners. As Bierma has ably shown, Olevianus did not emphasize the covenant merely to affirm the unity of the two testaments and thereby argue in support of infant baptism. Rather, he stressed the covenant in the context of God's faithful promises in order "to assure the believer of the security of his salvation."¹⁰³ For Olevianus, the original purpose of God's establishing of the covenant was to assure believers that a permanent and eternal peace had been secured between God and them by grace. How comforting to know that the covenant rests exclusively on the promises of an ever-faithful God and not on the believer's own gifts or graces!¹⁰⁴ By grace, the covenant is fulfilled *for* the believer, not *by* him. The covenant is the fruit of God's saving activity in Christ; indeed, the covenant is assuring because its very essence is God's unconditional giving of Himself in Christ to the unworthy believer.¹⁰⁵

Fourth, it is not surprising that Olevianus's emphasis on God's promises and covenant facilitated a strong accent on assurance as being of the essence of faith. In *Substantia*, after describing how faith is produced in the heart by the Holy Spirit through the proclamation of the gospel, Olevianus discusses the certainty and assurance of faith. The truth of

101. For Olevianus's view of covenant, see Bierma, "Covenant Theology of Caspar Olevian,"; Graafland, *De zekerheid van het geloof*, pp. 115-19; Letham, "Saving Faith and Assurance," pp. 197ff.

102. Cited by *ibid.*, p. 107n: "Certitudo fidei quia fundata est in aeterna Dei electione" (In *Epistolam D. Pauli apostoli ad Ephesios notae, ex concionibus Gasparis Oleviani excerptae, & a Theodoro Beza editae* [Herbornae: Christophori Corvini, 1588], p. 9).

103. Bierma, "Covenant Theology of Caspar Olevian," pp. v, 226-27.

104. "Cum vero foedus a sola promissa Dei erga nos misericordia, nullis autem nostris viribus pendet . . . universa foederis substantia gratuita est" (*Substantia*, p. 15).

105. "Fides igitur Deum ipsum se nobis in Christo in Deum offerentem in promissione Evangelii amplectitur" (*ibid.*, p. 18).

God's promises serves as an anchor for assurance.¹⁰⁶ Assurance is based on Christ and is sealed to the believer's heart by the Holy Spirit. By faith he knows that God is his God and shall never be angry toward him. God shall never altogether strip assurance away from faith.¹⁰⁷

Nevertheless, the believer will have conflicts with doubt. The flesh, the world, and Satan will wage war against him. The believer's faith can often seem to grow weak, but in faith itself there is no doubt. His believing, not his faith, grows weak. Like Calvin, Olevianus distinguishes between *faith* and *believing*. Unbelief and temptations belong to the old nature that faith opposes.¹⁰⁸ The struggling soul who cannot bring saving faith into exercise ought to be especially directed to look to the promises, covenant, and Word of God in Christ Jesus as He is offered in the gospel.¹⁰⁹ Remove this gospel and nothing is left but darkness; consequently, the believer must strive to keep his faith fixed on the proclamation of God's Word of grace.¹¹⁰ His new nature must strive to continually flee in the midst of spiritual warfare to Jesus Christ in whose presence he will again be assured that his sins are forgiven.¹¹¹

Finally, like Calvin, Olevianus stresses the indispensable link between the Word and Spirit of God. The Spirit quickens, enlightens, and sanctifies the believer's understanding and soul through the Word. He seals home the Word with power to his heart, comforts him by means of the Word, and enables him to feel love to God in Christ through the Word. The Holy Spirit uses the Word as a key to unlock the believer's heart, to pour out divine promises within, and to testify to his spirit of his adopted sonship in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:15).¹¹² Like Calvin, Olevianus is a theologian of the Holy Spirit *par excellence*.

IV. CONCLUSION

Though Kendall does effectively show that there are differences between Calvin and the Heidelberg theologians with regard to their con-

106. "Una catena est veritas divinarum promissionum, qua velut anchora fides nititur" (ibid., p. 266).

107. Ibid., p. 258.

108. Ibid., p. 259.

109. *Genade-Verbondts*, pp. 460-61.

110. Ibid., pp. 462-64.

111. Ibid., p. 450.

112. Ibid., pp. 468-72; cf. p. 140 for seven "offices" the Spirit fulfils in the lives of believers.

ceptions of faith and assurance, these differences are largely matters of degree rather than of substance. The HC, Ursinus, and Olevianus each have distinctive emphases on the doctrine of assurance that move *quantitatively* beyond but not *qualitatively* contradictory to Calvin.

The same means of assurance, albeit with varying emphases, are presented by Calvin, the HC, Ursinus, Olevianus, and the Westminster Confession. For the divines of the Westminster Assembly, all three modes of assurance presented in chapter 18.2 of the Confession — faith in God's promises, evidences of grace, and the Spirit's witness — must be pursued to obtain as full a measure of assurance as possible by the grace of God. If any of these means are unduly emphasized at the expense of the others, the whole teaching of assurance becomes imbalanced or even dangerous.

The Reformers and Puritans, for the most part, taught that the believer cannot truly trust the promises without the aid of the Holy Spirit, and that he cannot with any degree of safety look to himself without the enabling enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. At every point in true assurance, the activity of the Spirit of God is absolutely essential. The promises of God, without the application of the Spirit, lead to self-deceit and fruitless lives. Self-examination, without the enlightening of the Spirit, tends to excessive introspection, bondage, and legalism. The witness of the Spirit, divorced from the promises of God and from scriptural self-examination, is prone to reap unbiblical mysticism and excessive emotionalism. For Calvin, the HC, Ursinus, Olevianus, and the Westminster Assembly, these three great strands of assurance belong together.

In the post-Reformation pastoral context, Calvinism fleshed out the doctrine and grounds of assurance with great intensity. The terminology developed, the careful working out of entire treatises on assurance, the pastoral overtones of compassion for the weak in faith, the pressing admonitions and invitations to grow in faith — all of this and much more underscores that the post-Reformation divines relished vital union with Christ. The vast majority of Reformed and Puritan statements on assurance aim to spur the living church forward to make her calling and election sure by looking beyond herself to find everything necessary for time and eternity in the Spirit-applied grace of God in Jesus Christ. The contemporary school of thought, which attributes to the post-Reformers morbid introspection and anthropomorphism, has missed the mark. Though it is true that the Puritans, unlike Calvin, microscopically examined personal, spiritual experience, they largely retained Calvin's ultimate goal of God's glory even in their introspection, for they were

eager to trace the hand of God Triune working in their lives in order to return all glory to the electing Father, redeeming Son, and applying Spirit.¹¹³

113. As J. I. Packer perceptively notes: "We are interested in religious experience, as such, and in man's quest for God, whereas the Puritans were concerned with the God of whom men have experience, and in the manner of His dealings with those whom He draws to Himself. . . . In Puritan autobiography, God is at the centre throughout. He, not the writer, is the focus of interest; the subject of the book is in effect 'God — and me' " ("The Puritan Idea of Communion with God," in *Press Toward the Mark* [Puritan and Reformed Studies Conference, 1961], p. 7).