



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

## **Autopistia : the self-convincing authority of scripture in reformed theology**

Belt, H. van der

### **Citation**

Belt, H. van der. (2006, October 4). *Autopistia : the self-convincing authority of scripture in reformed theology*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4582>

Version: Corrected Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4582>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

## 2 Calvin's *Institutes*

In this chapter we will trace the development of Calvin's concept of Scripture in the various editions of the *Institutes*. The introductory survey showed that the self-convincing character of Scripture is related to the authority of the church, the evidences for Scripture, and the witness of the Spirit in the hearts of believers. Therefore three questions are of special importance in this context: we are interested how Calvin related Scripture to the authority of the church, we will analyze how he valued the evidences, and finally we will examine his concept of the *testimonium Spiritus sancti*.

In chapter three we will trace the sources that Calvin may have used for αὐτόπιστος and study the occurrences in Calvin's other works.<sup>1</sup> The fact that αὐτόπιστος occurs only eleven times – the quotations are listed below – seems to imply that we should not overemphasize its importance, but the main reason for us to examine the term does not lie in the frequency of its use, but in the intuition that it is a key for the understanding of the Reformed position on Scripture. Although Calvin probably did not introduce the term with the intention of turning it into a theologoumenon, the history of its reception and influence (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) make a careful examination the more interesting. In order to define the term it is important to study the semantic field of the word in Calvin's oeuvre; the rareness of the term makes a detailed discussion of all the passages possible.

### List of the occurrences of αὐτόπιστος in Calvin's works

1. *Defensio sanae et orthodoxae doctrinae* (1543)  
Atqui principia αὐτόπιστα esse oportet: quae res summam claritatem requirit.
2. Commentary on Hebrews 6,18 (1549)  
Ergo sermo Dei certa est veritas, καὶ αὐτόπιστος.
3. *Dedicatio Commentarii in epistolas canonicas* (1551)  
Hoc tamen illis decretum fixumque est ut rationibus omnibus valere iussis αὐτόπιστος sola sit eorum libido.
4. Commentary on 2 Peter 1,19 (1551)  
Caliginem vero exponunt, dum suspendi adhuc haesitant, necdum evangelii doctrina tanquam αὐτόπιστος recipitur.
5. Commentary on John 20,29 (1553)  
Et certe hoc dandum est honoris Deo, ut nobis αὐτόπιστος sit eius veritas.
6. Commentary on Acts 26,26-27 (1554)  
Sensus est igitur, scripturam esse αὐτόπιστον, ut fas non sit homini iudaeo eius auctoritati vel minimum detrudere.
7. *Secunda defensio* (1556)  
Neque enim sacrosancta modo, et αὐτόπιστος nobis est Christi auctoritas, sed ad fraenandos omnes hominum sensus, totamque mundi sapientiam subigendam abunde sufficit.

---

<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to exclude with certainty that no occurrences have been overlooked. To find αὐτόπιστος in Calvin's works, the indexes of Greek words in the CO were used. CO 22, 493, CO 59, 420. The indexes, however, do not cover Calvin's letters. The occurrence of αὐτόπιστος in the *dedicatio* of Calvin's commentary on the catholic epistles was found via the English database. J. Calvin, *The Comprehensive John Calvin Collection*, CD-ROM, Albany 1998. The Latin database of Calvin's works is a very helpful tool, but it is a pity that the search function does not recognize Greek fonts, due to the optical character of the recognition process. J. Calvin, *Calvini Opera database 1.0*, ed. H.J. Selderhuis, Apeldoorn 2005.

8. Lecture on Habakkuk 2,3 (1559)  
Visio ergo ipsa sit vobis satis efficax: sit apud vos ἀυτόπιστος, ut per se habeat fidem verbum Dei, neque examinetur vulgari more, ut scilicet eum mendacii insimulent homines, nisi protinus obtemperet eorum desideriis.
9. *Institutes* 1.7.5 (1559)  
Maneat ergo hoc fixum, quos Spiritus sanctus intus docuit, solide acquiescere in Scriptura, et hanc quidem esse ἀυτόπιστον, neque demonstrationi et rationibus subiici eam fas esse: quam tamen meretur apud nos certitudinem, Spiritus testimonio consequi.
10. *Dilucida explicatio* (1561)  
Agedum quamvis persuadeat se quasi alterum Pythagoram, ἀυτόπιστον esse: quomodo corpus Christi cum pane unum esse vult?
11. *Responsio ad versipellem quendam mediatorem* (1561)  
Sed in eo se prodit turpior nequitia, quod nunc claris scripturae testimoniis exornat, quae prius ἀυτόπιστα esse voluit. Quorsum vero tendit praeclara eius sententia?

## 2.1 The Successive Editions of the *Institutes*

Calvin's main work, the *Institutio Christianae Religionis*, went through several revisions; Calvin worked on the book and its French translations until the end of his life.<sup>2</sup> The final Latin edition, published in 1559, came twenty-three years after the first edition. The first four of the six chapters of this first edition had the structure of a catechism and dealt with the Law, the Apostle's Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Sacraments; while the last two chapters were polemic, dealing with the false sacraments and the liberty of the Christian. The second Latin edition (1539) contained nearly three times as much material. An important addition was the new introduction on the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves and the discussion of Scripture as the source of this twofold knowledge. In this edition, which was translated into French in 1541, Calvin laid the foundation of his concept of Scripture. The Latin edition of 1543 contained only four new chapters and was reprinted in 1545. In the 1550 edition Calvin made large additions to the paragraphs on Scripture. For the first time the chapters were subdivided into paragraphs to assist the readers in dealing with the voluminous text. In 1551 this Latin edition was translated in French. The final Latin edition of 1559 was followed by a third French translation in 1560.<sup>3</sup>

Many studies of Calvin's concept of Scripture or of his thoughts on the *testimonium Spiritus sancti* take their starting point in the final edition of the *Institutes*, without examining the development of Calvin's thoughts.<sup>4</sup> In this study the tensions in the final text are analyzed through a diachronic study of the successive editions of the *Institutes*.

In the first edition of the *Christianae religionis Institutio* (1536) Calvin does not

<sup>2</sup> Although *Institutes* is not a proper translation of *Institutio*, we will follow the general custom of using the plural in English.

<sup>3</sup> W. De Greef, *Johannes Calvijn: zijn werk en geschriften*, Kampen 1989, 179-185.

<sup>4</sup> There are some exceptions, like J. Köstlin, 'Calvin's Institutio, nach Form und Inhalt, in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung,' *Theologische Studien und Kritiken* 41 (1868), 7-62, 410-486. Pannier, *Le témoignage du Saint-Esprit*. S.P. Dee, *Het geloofsbegrip van Calvijn*, Kampen 1918. It is a pity that in some recent studies of the *Institutes* the diachronic approach is not used. S. Jones, for instance, mentions the possibility of "engaging in a type of redaction criticism" but does not explain why she does not use this method. S. Jones, *Calvin and the Rhetoric of Piety*, Louisville 1995, 79, n. 11.

discuss the character of Scripture explicitly. In his explanation of the Law, the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Sacraments, its authority is presupposed, but the question why we accept the Scriptures is not answered. Calvin uses the expression *testimonium Spiritus sancti* only once in a reference to the text of Scripture: "Hezekiah was praised by the testimony of the Holy Spirit because he destroyed the brazen serpent."<sup>5</sup> Scripture itself is the *testimonium* of the Spirit. In 1536 the idea that the acceptance of Scripture depends on the internal or secret witness of the Spirit is implied, but not yet elaborated.<sup>6</sup> The mutual relationship of the Word and the Spirit, so characteristic of Calvin's theology, is already present in this first edition of the *Institutes*. According to Calvin, it is through the work and power of the Spirit that we hear the sacred Word of the gospel and receive it in faith and that we stand firm in that faith.<sup>7</sup>

This mutual relationship is also present in Calvin's concept of the sacraments. In the chapter *De Sacramentis* Calvin says that the Lord illumines our minds by the light of his Holy Spirit and opens our hearts for the Word and sacraments.<sup>8</sup> He also discusses the expression "the water, the blood and the Spirit" from 1 John 5. In the water of baptism and the blood that refers to the Lord's Supper we have a *testimonium* of cleansing and redemption. The sacraments are powerless without the Spirit of God, "but the Spirit, the primary witness (*primarius testis*), makes us certain of that testimony."<sup>9</sup> It is only by the work of the Spirit that we share in the grace of Christ, offered to us in the Word and sacraments.

Our main question in this chapter is how Calvin's thoughts on the self-convincing character of Scripture developed in the successive editions of the *Institutes*. Because Calvin does not use the noun *autopistia*, in this study the Greek adjective *αὐτόπιστος* or the translation 'self-convincing' is used for his position. It is important to study the development of his thoughts because the Greek term *αὐτόπιστος* was not used by Calvin in the *Institutes* until 1559. In that final edition Calvin reasons that no one will deny the credibility of Scripture once it is acknowledged as the Word of God. The question is how you can know this for sure. According to Calvin, this is not by the *consensus* of the church, because the assurance of eternal life may never depend on a mere human decision.<sup>10</sup> But how can we then be persuaded of the authority of Scripture? Calvin

<sup>5</sup> "Sic spiritus sancti testimonio laudatus est Ezechias (2 Reg. 18), quod serpentem aenum exciderit" OS 1, 258. Cf. J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian religion: 1536 edition*, ed. F.L. Battles, London 1986, 206. In the final edition Calvin removed this sentence. Cf. Pannier, *Témoignage du Saint-Esprit*, 77. Dee, *Geloofsbegrip van Calvijn*, 114.

<sup>6</sup> Dee, *Geloofsbegrip van Calvijn*, 114.

<sup>7</sup> OS 1, 85-86. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes 1536*, 58.

<sup>8</sup> OS 1, 121. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes 1536*, 89.

<sup>9</sup> "in aqua et sanguine purgationis et redemptionis habemus testimonium spiritus vero primarius testis huiusmodi testimonii certam nobis fidem facit." OS 1, 126. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes 1536*, 94. Pannier does not mention this quote, but he correctly concludes that the roots of the concept of the *testimonium Spiritus sancti* are already present in the 1536 edition of the *Institutes*. Pannier, *Témoignage du Saint-Esprit*, 77.

<sup>10</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.7.1, OS 3, 65-66. For the quotes from the final edition of the *Institutes* generally the translation F.L. Battles is used, but sometimes an alternative translation is preferred to retain the Latin terms. J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. J.T.

answers that the persuasion of its divine origin is caused by Scripture itself that gives a sense of its own truth, just as light and dark, white and black, sweet and bitter things do.<sup>11</sup> Calvin places the majesty (*maiestas*) of Scripture itself over against the institutional authority of the church. But he does not stop there; after an excursus on a dictum of Augustine, he adds two other elements to complete the picture of the foundation of the authority of Scripture. He says that the authority of Scripture can be proved by arguments (*argumenta*); there are enough evidences (*probationes*) for the divine origin of Scripture to convince even opponents. At the same time he emphasizes that believers are persuaded of the truth of Scripture by the witness (*testimonium*) of the Spirit and that there is no real assurance without this testimony.<sup>12</sup>

In this summary, three elements of Calvin's concept of Scripture come to the surface. The first element is the divine origin of Scripture. It is because of this origin that Scripture gives a sense of its own truth. Calvin uses the word *maiestas* for this element. In the second place, the evidences or *probationes* can prove the divine origin of Scripture. Finally the *testimonium* of the Spirit is necessary for the assurance of believers. There is a tension between these three elements and this may be due to the fact that Calvin changed this section a few times. This tension is the background of the sentence that is cardinal for our study and has been added to the *Institutes* in 1559.

Maneat ergo hoc fixum, quos Spiritus sanctus intus docuit, solide acquiescere in Scriptura, et hanc quidem esse αὐτόπιστον, neque demonstrationi et rationibus subiici eam fas esse; quam tamen meretur apud nos certitudinem, Spiritus testimonio consequi.<sup>13</sup>

The English translation of Battles has:

Let this point therefore stand: that those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught truly rest upon Scripture, and that Scripture indeed is self-authenticated; hence, it is not right to subject it to proof and reasoning. And the certainty it deserves with us, it attains by the testimony of the Spirit.<sup>14</sup>

To understand the meaning of αὐτόπιστος we will have to analyze the term in relation to the three elements of Calvin's concept of the authority of Scripture and against the background of the rejection of the authority of the church.

Calvin developed the concept of the authority of Scripture in three phases: the first discussion of the theme in the second Latin edition (1539), some major additions in the 1550 edition, and the final text in the 1559 edition. The French translations of the *Institutes* are less important for the development of Calvin's concept of the authority of Scripture and the witness of the Spirit, because on this topic they follow the most recent Latin edition in the crucial additions to the text.<sup>15</sup> The translations, however, shed light on the meaning of the Latin text. We will follow Calvin's train of thought in these three editions and look carefully at the relationship between the majesty of Scripture (*maiestas*),

---

McNeill, trans. F.L. Battles [The Library of the Christian Classics, vol 20-21], Philadelphia 1967, xxix-lxxi, xxxiii-xxxviii.

<sup>11</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.7.2, OS 3, 66-67.

<sup>12</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.7.4, OS 3, 68-70.

<sup>13</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.7.5, OS 3, 70.

<sup>14</sup> Calvin, Battles *Institutes*, 80.

<sup>15</sup> The French edition of 1541 of this section of the *Institutes* follows the Latin edition of 1539; the French edition of 1551 follows the Latin edition of 1550 and the French edition of 1560 follows the final Latin edition of 1559. J. Calvin, *Institution de la religion chrestienne*, ed. J.-D Benoit, vol. 1, Paris 1957, 92-115.

the testimony of the Spirit (*testimonium*), and the evidences (*probationes*) that prove the authority of Scripture.

There is a certain danger in speaking of Calvin's concept of the authority of Scripture, because the meaning of the word *authoritas* in his context differs from the later development of the term. Calvin uses the expression *authoritas Scripturae* several times in the paragraphs on this theme.<sup>16</sup> When the expression is translated it should not be forgotten that it refers to the living voice of God (*vox Dei*) that is heard in Scripture; *authoritas* always is or ought to be recognized and accepted authority.<sup>17</sup>

## 2.2 Scripture Gives a Sense of its own Truth (*Institutes* 1539)

Calvin divides the second edition of the *Institutes* into seventeen chapters, the first of which has the title: *De cognitione Dei*. His discussion of the authority of Scripture stands in the context of the knowledge of God.<sup>18</sup> First he discusses the knowledge of God from a *sensus divinitatis* in our hearts that is confirmed by the sparks of God's glory in the universe. He concludes that we are unable to come to the pure and clear knowledge of God in this way, but still all excuse is cut off because the fault of dullness is within us.<sup>19</sup>

This is why God's revelation through his Word is necessary. His works are not sufficient to gain true knowledge of the Creator and therefore he "not merely uses mute teachers but also opens his own holy mouth."<sup>20</sup> Adam, Noah, Abraham, and the other patriarchs penetrated into the inner knowledge (*cognitio interior*) of God illumined by the Word.<sup>21</sup> God not only made himself known to them in different ways – for example by dreams and visions – but he also always made their faith certain, whenever his revelation took place.<sup>22</sup> The verbal revelation of God was written down to prevent the heavenly

---

<sup>16</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.7.1, 1.8.1, *OS* 3, 65, 71.

<sup>17</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.7.1, *OS* 3, 65. *Authoritas* is often connected with *vox Dei*, for instance in Calvin's commentary on Jer. 9,13 "in sola eius voce satis est autoritatis et effectus." *CO* 38,40. It might be interesting to study the meaning of *authoritas* for Calvin in detail, especially because of this connection.

<sup>18</sup> The concept of the *cognitio Dei* is fundamental for Calvin's theology. Calvin was the first theologian of the Reformation who discussed the two sources of the *cognitio Dei*, the knowledge derived from God's works and from God's Word. Köstlin, 'Calvin's Institutio,' 412. For an evaluation of the *duplex cognitio Dei* in Calvin's *Institutes* cf. Dowey, *Knowledge of God*, 41-49. Parker denies that the structure of the *Institutes* depends on the *duplex cognitio*. Parker, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, 1959, 119-121. Cf. R.A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition*, New York [etc.] 2000, 132-134.

<sup>19</sup> *OS* 3, 37, 45, 59.

<sup>20</sup> "non mutis duntaxat magistris Deus utitur, sed os quoque sacrosanctum reserat." *OS* 3, 60-61. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 70. For the references to the editions earlier than 1559 we will not refer to the paragraph numbering of the final edition.

<sup>21</sup> "Sic Adam, sic Noe, sic Abraham et reliqui patres in cognitionem eius interiorem verbo illuminati penetrarunt" *OS* 3, 61. In 1559 *in cognitionem eius interiorem* is replaced by *ad familiarem notitiam* ("intimate knowledge") and the verb *illuminare* is no longer used, probably to avoid confusion with the *illuminatio* of the Spirit. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 70.

<sup>22</sup> "cuius rei Deum indubiam semper fidem fecit, quoties eius revelatione voluit esse locum." *OS* 3, 62. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 71.

*doctrina* from perishing through forgetfulness or error.<sup>23</sup>

Three things are important for the right understanding of the authority of Scripture: Scripture is necessary because we fail to know God from his works, there is a distinction between God's revelation through his Word in speaking to the patriarchs and the writing down of this revelation to save it from corruption, and finally, there is a relationship between God's revelation and the certainty of faith, for God's revelation is performed in a double movement: he reveals himself to the patriarchs and also makes his revelation certain for them.

### 2.2.1 Scripture is not Founded on the Church

After Calvin has explained why God must reveal himself by his Word and why this revelation must be written down, he deals with the relation between the authority of Scripture and the church. If something is acknowledged as the Word of God, no one will dare to deny its credibility.

But while no daily revelations are given from heaven anymore, only the Scriptures remain, wherein it pleased the Lord to consecrate his truth to everlasting remembrance; it must also be noticed how they will justly receive authority among believers and be heard as the own living voices of God.<sup>24</sup>

Just as with the patriarchs there is a double movement in God's revelation. The Scriptures contain God's truth and this truth must obtain authority for believers (*apud fideles*). How can they know that God speaks to them in the Scriptures? According to Catholicism, the Scriptures only have importance because of the *consensus* of the church. According to Calvin, this is a most pernicious error, because it makes the eternal and inviolable truth of God depend on human arbitrariness. This position undermines the certainty of faith. "If this is so, what will happen to miserable consciences that seek solid assurance of eternal life if all the promises with regard to it depend only upon human judgment?"<sup>25</sup> Scripture is not founded on the church, but, on the contrary, the church is founded on the *doctrina* of the prophets and apostles (Eph. 2,20).<sup>26</sup> "Thus, while the church receives and gives its seal of approval to Scripture, it does not thereby make it authentic as if it were doubtful or wavering. But because the church recognizes

---

<sup>23</sup> OS 3, 63. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 72. According to D'Assonville, *doctrina* has a wide range of meanings in Calvin's work and is very tightly connected to Scripture itself. Therefore we avoid the use of the term 'doctrine' in references to Calvin's position and rather use 'concept' or 'position.' In most cases the term *doctrina* in quotes is left un-translated. D'Assonville, *Der Begriff "doctrina"*, 202.

<sup>24</sup> "Sed quoniam non quotidiana e caelis reduntur oracula, Scripturae solae extant quibus visum est Domino suam perpetuae memoriae veritatem consecrare: obiter attingendum est, quo iure eandem apud fideles auctoritatem obtineant, acsi vivae ipsae Dei voces exaudirentur." OS 3, 65 In the final edition of the *Institutes* this sentence has been slightly changed. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 74.

<sup>25</sup> "Atqui si ita est, quid miseris conscientiiis fiet, solidam vitae aeternae securitatem quaerentibus, si quaecunque extant de ea promissiones, solo hominum iudicio fultae, consistent?" OS 3, 66. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 75.

<sup>26</sup> OS 3, 66. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 75. In his commentary on Eph. 2,20 (1548) Calvin does not mention Scripture, but he does say that we can distinguish between the true and false church by the *doctrina* of the apostles and prophets. CO 51, 174.

Scripture to be the truth of its Lord, as a pious duty it unhesitatingly honors it.”<sup>27</sup>

The church, says Calvin, receives and seals Scripture and recognizes it as the truth, but it does not give Scripture its authenticity.<sup>28</sup> For Calvin this is not a theoretical discussion about the relation between the Scripture and the church, because the certainty of faith is at stake and the promises of eternal life may not depend on human authority. The relation between the certainty of faith and the authority of Scripture is essential to understand Calvin’s position. The next question is how we can know for sure that God speaks to us in the Scriptures without the authority of the church.

As to their question – how we can be assured that this has sprung from God unless we have recourse to the decree of the church? – it is as if someone asked: how shall we learn to distinguish light from darkness, white from black, sweet from bitter? Scripture does not give an obscurer sense of its own truth than white and black things do of their color, or sweet and bitter things do of their taste.<sup>29</sup> If we desire to take care for our consciences in the best way, so that they may not waver by continual doubt, we must derive the authority of Scripture from something higher than human reasons, indications, or conjectures. That is from the inner testifying of the Holy Spirit,<sup>30</sup> for although it gains reverence for itself by its own majesty, still it only then really impresses us seriously when it is sealed by the Spirit to our hearts.<sup>31</sup>

It is important to notice several things in this foundational answer. In the 1539 edition of the *Institutes* Calvin says three things in one breath. As the separate references to the critical edition of the *Institutes* in the footnotes show, this coherence is easily lost out of sight in the later editions, because the three parts are separated. In 1550 Calvin places a paragraph between the first two parts of his answer and in 1559 another paragraph between the second and the third part and so Calvin’s original train of thought is interrupted.

What did Calvin exactly say in 1539? In the first place he compares the *sensus* that

---

<sup>27</sup> “Quare dum illam recipit, ac suffragio suo obsignat, non ex dubia aut alioqui nutabunda authenticam reddit: sed quia veritatem esse agnoscit Dei sui, pro pietatis officio, nihil cunctando veneratur.” *OS* 3, 66. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 76.

<sup>28</sup> Calvin uses the adjective *authenticus* only a few times in the *Institutes*. Discussing the inspiration of Scripture he says that the apostles were “sure and authentic scribes of the Holy Spirit and their writings are therefore to be considered oracles of God.” “certi et authentici Spiritus sancti amanuenses: et ideo eorum scripta pro Dei oraculis habenda sunt.” Calvin, *Institutes* 4.8.9, *OS* 5, 141.

<sup>29</sup> “Quod autem rogant, Unde persuadebimur a Deo fluxisse, nisi ad Ecclesiae decretum confugiamus? perinde est acsi quis roget, Unde discemus lucem discernere a tenebris, album a nigro, suave ab amaro? Non enim obscuriorem veritatis suae sensum ultro Scriptura prae se fert, quam coloris sui res albae ac nigrae; saporis, suaves et amarae.” *OS* 3, 67. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 77. Krusche remarks that it is difficult to translate this sentence and that *sensus* should not be understood subjectively as the impression Scripture makes on us but objectively as the expression of its truth. He refers to the French edition of the *Institutes* (1541) Krusche, *Wirken des Heiligen Geistes*, 205-206, n. 417.

<sup>30</sup> “Quamquam si conscientiis optime consultum volumus, ne instabili dubitatione perpetuo vacillent, altius petenda quam ab humanis vel rationibus, vel indiciis, vel coniecturis scripturae autoritas. Nempe ab interiori spiritus sancti testificatione.” *OS* 3, 69. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 78. In the final edition Calvin changes this sentence; the phrase *ab arcano testimonio Spiritus* for example replaces *ab interiori spiritus sancti testificatione*.

<sup>31</sup> “et si enim reverentiam sua sibi ultro maiestate conciliat, tunc tamen demum serio nos afficit, quum per Spiritum obsignata est cordibus nostris.” *OS* 3, 70. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 80.



Scripture gives of its truth with color and flavor. The analogy between faith and taste is common for Calvin; he especially relates this metaphor to the saving work of the Holy Spirit. By faith the mind is able to taste the truth of God.<sup>32</sup> Calvin can say: “God’s grace is tasteless to us, until the Holy Spirit gives it its taste.”<sup>33</sup> The analogy between faith and sight is also very common in Calvin’s works. Light is offered to the blind in vain unless the Spirit of discernment opens the eyes of the mind.<sup>34</sup> Calvin shares the use of these metaphors with many others. Irenaeus compares spiritual knowledge with the tongue that tastes sweet and bitter, the eye that discerns black from white and the ear that knows the difference of the sounds.<sup>35</sup> But because even Scripture compares faith with sight and taste, it is impossible to decide whether Calvin was using a specific extra-biblical source for this metaphor. Calvin’s main point is to show that the authority of Scripture does not depend on an external source. Colors and taste are just there; they can only be seen and tasted. *Veritas* is an intrinsic quality of Scripture; once you taste the divine character of the Scriptures, you do not need the church to safeguard its authority.

In the second part of his answer Calvin discusses the *testimonium* of the Spirit, or rather the *testificatio* of the Spirit, for in 1539 he uses that word instead of *testimonium*. The only way in which our consciences can be liberated from doubt is by the witness of the Spirit. The authority of Scripture may never depend on anything human. The testifying of the Spirit gives certainty regarding the divine origin of Scripture. It is by this internal witness that our mouths are opened to taste and our eyes to see the truth of Scripture. The certainty of faith is at stake; the authority of Scripture is necessary for true assurance.

In the third part of his answer we see that the *maiestas* of Scripture and the *testimonium* of the Spirit are connected very closely. As we have seen before, according to Calvin, a twofold action characterizes God’s revelation; he spoke to the patriarchs and made them certain that it was his voice that they heard. In the same way God speaks to us in Scripture and makes us certain of this fact through the witness of the Spirit. Scripture gains reverence by its own majesty and it is sealed by the Spirit to our hearts. The sense Scripture gives of its truth is the reverence that it wins by its *maiestas*. Scripture has its own majesty; no external ecclesiastical authority can be the foundation of Scripture. Believers sense the majesty of Scripture through the *testificatio* of the Spirit just as they see light and taste sweetness. They do not need any external authority to convince them that they see the light or taste something sweet. But they do need the inner work of the Spirit to open their eyes for this light and their mouth for this sweetness. The believer believes Scripture because God speaks in it, recognizing God’s voice by the testimony of the Spirit. He believes that Scripture is divine because of the *maiestas* of Scripture and through the *testimonium* of the Spirit. If Scripture is like a lens by which the eye of faith sees God’s glory, then *maiestas* and *testimonium* are like

<sup>32</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 3.2.33, OS 4, 44. In his report of his conversion in the *Commentary on the Psalms* he says that he had received some taste of true godliness and was inflamed with an intense desire to make progress. CO 31, 21.

<sup>33</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 3.24.14, OS 4, 426.

<sup>34</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 3.1.4, OS 4, 6.

<sup>35</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 4.38, PG 7:1110. The resemblance is not exact enough to assume that Calvin is quoting Irenaeus and there is no evidence that Calvin had studied Irenaeus at this moment. A.N.S. Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers*, Edinburgh 1999, 76.

the two surfaces of the lens, by which the rays of God's glory are refracted.

The original coherence of *maiestas* and *testimonium* becomes even clearer as Calvin continues:

Therefore, we believe, illumined by his power, neither because of our own nor because of anyone else's judgment that Scripture is from God. We affirm with complete certainty, just as if we behold the glory (*numen*) of God, that Scripture has flowed to us from God's own mouth by the ministry of men. We seek no arguments, or probabilities on which to rest our judgment, but we subject our judgment and intellect to it as to something that is above all doubt.<sup>36</sup>

Here he uses the verb *illuminare* for the work of the Spirit. Through the illumination of the Spirit we behold the glory of God in Scripture. The majesty of Scripture is that it is full of God's presence; "we feel that the undoubted power of the divine *numen* lives and breathes there."<sup>37</sup> Calvin's deepest motive is the assurance of faith that necessarily must rest on God's own authority. Therefore the divine origin of Scripture may never depend on anything else than God himself. In 1539 he closes the discussion of this topic with the remark:

This is a persuasion (*persuasio*) which needs no proofs, this is a knowledge (*notitia*) with which the best proof agrees, the mind rests in it more securely and constantly than in any proof, this finally is a feeling that can only be born of heavenly revelation. I say nothing else than what each believer experiences for himself, though my words fall far short to explain the matter.<sup>38</sup>

In the edition of 1539 Calvin focuses on the authority of Scripture for believers. The resemblance with Calvin's definition of faith is striking. Faith is "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."<sup>39</sup> The certainty of the divine origin of Scripture is a matter of faith and therefore it can only be the result of the Spirit's *testimonium*. Calvin uses the terms *persuasio* and *notitia* in his discourse on faith from the very beginning. Faith is a *notitia* of God's benevolence toward us, founded on a *persuasio* of God's truth.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> "Illius ergo virtute illuminati, iam non aut nostro, aut aliorum iudicio credimus, a Deo esse Scripturam: sed supra humanum iudicium, certo certius constituimus (non secus acsi ipsius Dei numen illic intueremur) hominum ministerio, ab ipsissimo Dei ore ad nos emanasse. Non argumenta, non verisimilitudines quaerimus quibus iudicium nostrum incumbat: sed ut rei extra aestimandi aleam positae, iudicium ingeniumque nostrum subiicimus." OS 3, 70. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 80.

<sup>37</sup> "sed quia non dubiam vim numinis illic sentimus vigere ac spirare." OS 3, 71. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 80.

<sup>38</sup> "Talis ergo est persuasio quae rationes non requirat; talis notitia, cui optima ratio constet, nempe in qua securius constantiusque mens quiescit quam in ullis rationibus; talis denique sensus, qui nisi ex caelesti revelatione nasci nequeat. Non aliud loquor quam quod apud se experitur fidelium unusquisque, nisi quod longe infra iustam rei explicationem verba subsidunt." OS 3, 71. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 80-81.

<sup>39</sup> "Nunc iusta fidei definitio nobis constabit si dicamus esse divinae erga nos benevolentiae firmam certamque cognitionem, quae gratuita in Christo promissionis veritate fundata, per Spiritum sanctum et revelatur mentibus nostris et cordibus obsignatur." OS 4, 16. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 551.

<sup>40</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 3.2.6, OS 4, 15. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.2.12, OS 4, 21-22. Calvin already connects both terms in the first edition of the *Institutes*. OS 1, 69, 94, 174. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes* 1536, 43, 65, 134.

### 2.2.2 Calvin's Reply to Sadoletto

To understand Calvin's rejection of the ultimate authority of the church and his plea for the independency of the Scriptures, we have to take notice of the context in which he wrote. Nothing less than the certainty of faith and the assurance of salvation were at stake, according to Calvin. At the background of the character of Scripture stands the question what will happen to miserable consciences that seek assurance, if the promises of eternal life depend only on human judgment.

The close relationship between the independent authority of Scripture and the certainty of faith can be very well illustrated by two letters written to the people of Geneva. In March 1539 Cardinal Jacopo Sadoletto (1477-1547) wrote a letter to the Small Counsel of Geneva urging them to return to the Catholic Church. Sadoletto was a Renaissance humanist, who intended to convert the enemies of the faith by teaching rather than by force. In his letter he criticized justification by faith and insisted on the importance of works. He threatened the Reformers with "eternal perdition" and invited them to return to the only church that could guide souls concerned for their salvation into a safe harbor.<sup>41</sup> A few quotations will illustrate how Sadoletto emphasized the authority of the church as the foundation for salvation. "This church has regenerated us to God in Christ, has nourished and confirmed us, instructed us what to think, what to believe, wherein to place our hope and also taught us by what way we must tend toward heaven."<sup>42</sup> Those that contradict the church are in great danger of making a fatal error. Our salvation, true life, eternal felicity ought to be above all other things dear to us. In this deep and dreadful sin of false religion no God or anchor will be left to us.<sup>43</sup> Sadoletto confronts the Genevans with the question whether it is better for their salvation to believe what the Catholic Church has approved for more than 1.500 years throughout the whole world, or the innovations introduced by crafty men within the last 25 years. Whoever follows the Catholic Church will not be judged guilty of any error.

First because the church errs not, and even cannot err, since the Holy Spirit constantly guides her public and universal decrees in Councils. Secondly, even if she did err, or could have erred, (this, however, it is impious to say or believe), no such error would be condemned in him who should, with a mind sincere and humble towards God, have followed the faith and authority of his ancestors.<sup>44</sup>

Sadoletto's letter makes clear how important the church was for the certainty of salvation even for a mild and humanistic representative of Catholicism.

In August 1539 Calvin wrote a response to Sadoletto's letter, *Responsio ad*

---

<sup>41</sup> B. Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography*, Grand Rapids [etc.] 2000, 152.

<sup>42</sup> "Haec nos Deo ecclesia in Christo regeneravit, haec nos aluit, confirmavit, instruxit, quid nos sentire, quid credere, in quo spem ponere, qua via in coelum tendere nos oporteat, ipsa eadem edocuit." J. Sadoletto, 'Epistola ad Genevates,' in Calvin, *OS* 1, 441-456, 447. Cf. J. Calvin, J. Sadoletto, *A Reformation Debate: Sadoletto's Letter to the Genevans and Calvin's Reply*, ed. J.C. Olin, New York [1966], 37.

<sup>43</sup> Sadoletto, 'Epistola,' *OS* 1, 449. Cf. Olin, *Reformation Debate*, 39.

<sup>44</sup> "Primum, quia non errat, neque adeo errare potest ecclesia, cuius illa publica et universalia decreta atque concilia spiritus sanctus assidue gubernat. Deinde etiamsi errasset ea aut erraret (quod tamen creditu et memoratu est nefas) nullus huic quidem suus exprobraretur error, qui sincero animo, et propter Deum humili, maiorum fidem suorum et auctoritatem esset prosecutus." Sadoletto, 'Epistola,' *OS* 1, 453. Cf. Olin, *Reformation Debate*, 45.

*Sadoletum*. Calvin lived in Strasbourg at the time, because he had been expelled from Geneva. The authorities of Berne were asked by the Council of Geneva to answer Sadolet's letter and they in turn asked Calvin to write a response. The *Reply to Sadolet* shows the loving heart of the pastor who defends his flock, even after he has been rejected by them.<sup>45</sup> Calvin wrote it in the same month in which he wrote the preface to the 1539 edition of the *Institutes*.<sup>46</sup> It cannot be proved with certainty that Calvin had read Sadolet's letter before writing the final draft of his paragraph on the nature of Scripture, but even if he had not read the letter, the correspondence clearly illustrates the climate in which Calvin wrote and informs us of the way in which his opponents thought. Therefore it is not surprising that his *Reply to Sadolet* shows remarkable resemblances with the 1539 edition of the *Institutes*. It could be interesting to look for other connections also, but in this study we will focus on what he says on the church and on Scripture.

Over against Sadolet's appeal to the self-interest of the Genevans, Calvin emphasizes the glory of God as the only proper goal and aim of the Christian.<sup>47</sup> Self-interest regarding our eternal destination is not a sound motive to discern between truth and error. According to Calvin, God rules us by the scepter of his Word. To this scepter the church must also bow. The church, according to Calvin, is the communion of saints of all times and places, bound together by the *doctrina* and the Spirit of Christ. "With this church we deny that we have any disagreement. On the contrary, since we revere her as our mother, we desire to remain in her bosom."<sup>48</sup>

Calvin blames Sadolet for disconnecting the Spirit from the Word. Sadolet appeals to the authority of the church, as the bearer of the Spirit, but the church must always be tested by Scripture. The Spirit has not been promised to reveal a new doctrine but to impress the truth of the Gospel on our minds. Calvin compares the position of the Catholics with that of the Anabaptists.

We are assailed by two sects, which seem to differ most widely from each other. For what similitude is there in appearance between the Pope and the Anabaptists? And yet, that you may see that Satan never transforms himself so cunningly as not in some measure to betray himself, the principal weapon with which they both assail us is the same. For when they boast extravagantly of the Spirit, the tendency certainly is to sink and bury the Word of God, that they may make room for their own falsehoods.<sup>49</sup>

Calvin says that the Spirit enlightens the church to understand the Word, but that the

<sup>45</sup> A. Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, trans. D. Foxgrover and W. Provo, Philadelphia 1987, 126.

<sup>46</sup> De Greef, *Johannes Calvin*, 141, 182.

<sup>47</sup> J. Calvin, 'Responsio ad Sadoletum,' in Calvin, *OS* 1, 457-489, 463. Cf. Olin, *Reformation Debate*, 58.

<sup>48</sup> "Cum hac esse nobis quidquam dissidii negamus. Quin potius, ut eam reveremur matris loco, ita in sinu eius cupimus permanere." Calvin, 'Responsio,' *OS* 1, 466. Cf. Olin, *Reformation Debate*, 62. The essential criterion of the true church is not antiquity, but the preaching of the Word. Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography*, 155.

<sup>49</sup> "A duabus sectis oppugnamur: quae inter se plurimum videntur habere discriminis. Quid enim papae simile in speciem cum Anabaptistis? Et tamen, ut videas Satanam nunquam tanta versutia se transfigurare, quin aliqua ex parte se prodatur, idem utrique praecipuum telum habent, quo nos fatigant. Spiritum enim quum fastuose iactant, non alio certe tendunt, quam ut oppresso sepulchro Dei verbo locum faciant suis ipsorum mendaciis." Calvin, 'Responsio,' *OS* 1, 465. Cf. Olin, *Reformation Debate*, 61.

Word itself is like the Lydian stone, by which the church has to test all teachings.<sup>50</sup> In other words: Sadoletto appeals to the authority of the church, but makes that authority independent of the Word of God, which is the only true criterion of all its teachings. His fatal error is that he disconnects the Spirit and the Word. “It is no less unreasonable to boast of the Spirit without the Word then it would be absurd to bring forward the Word itself without the Spirit.”<sup>51</sup>

The only sword with which we can fight the devil is the Word of God; he tries to wrest that weapon from us, by causing doubt whether it is the Word of God that we are leaning upon or a mere human word. The Christian faith “must not be founded on human testimony, not propped up by doubtful opinion, not reclined on human authority, but engraved in our hearts by the finger of the living God, so that it is not obliterated by any coloring of error.”<sup>52</sup> Therefore the church cannot be the foundation of Scripture. Only God can make us certain that Scripture is his own Word. “It is God alone who enlightens our minds to perceive his truth, who by his Spirit seals it on our hearts, and by his sure testimony (*testificatio*) to it confirms our conscience.”<sup>53</sup> For believers the certainty of the truth of the Word of God does not rest on human authority. “Their conviction of the truth of the Word of God is so clear and certain that it cannot be overthrown either by men or angels.”<sup>54</sup>

These quotations show a clear similarity with what we have found in the 1539 edition of the *Institutes*. The resemblance stretches further than the content; even the terminology is similar, for example the use of *testificatio* for the witness of the Spirit. Calvin is concerned with the peace of conscience; the truth of the Word of God confirmed by the Spirit to the heart is the only anchor of faith.

### 2.2.3 Secondary Aids

Calvin continues his discourse in the 1539 edition of the *Institutes* with a discussion of the *argumenta* for the authority of Scripture. In our survey of the problems related to the self-convincing character of Scripture, the role of the arguments or evidences of its authority led to the question why these evidences are necessary if Scripture is self-convincing. In this paragraph we will look carefully at the first draft of Calvin’s

<sup>50</sup> Calvin, ‘Responsio,’ *OS* 1, 465-466. Cf. Olin, *Reformation Debate*, 61. “The Lydian stone (a velvet-black variety of jasper) was used in testing the purity of gold.” Calvin, *Battles Institutes*, 1025, n. 20.

<sup>51</sup> “Non minus importunum esse, spiritum iactare sine verbo, quam futurum sit insulum, sine spiritu verbum ipsum obtendere.” Calvin, ‘Responsio,’ *OS* 1, 466. Cf. Olin, *Reformation Debate*, 61.

<sup>52</sup> “Ita sane res habet, fidem christianam non humano testimonio fundatam, non ambigua opinione suffultam, non hominum autoritate subnixam esse oportet, sed digito Dei viventis cordibus nostris insculptam, ut nullis errorum offuciis oblitterari queat.” Calvin, ‘Responsio,’ *OS* 1, 478. Cf. Olin, *Reformation Debate*, 78.

<sup>53</sup> “Deum unum esse, qui mentes nostras ad perspiciendam suam veritatem illuminat, qui eodem illam spiritu cordibus obsignat, qui certa eius testificatione conscientias confirmat.” Calvin, ‘Responsio,’ *OS* 1, 478. Cf. Olin, *Reformation Debate*, 79.

<sup>54</sup> “Verbi autem ipsius certam adeo ac perspicuam iis esse veritatem, ut neque ab hominibus, neque ab angelis labefactari queat.” Calvin, ‘Responsio,’ *OS* 1, 479. Cf. Olin, *Reformation Debate*, 79.

thoughts on this point.

The first thing that Calvin says is: “Unless this certainty, higher and stronger than any human judgment, be present, it will be vain to fortify the authority of Scripture by arguments, to establish it by common agreement of the church, or to confirm it with other helps.”<sup>55</sup> It is immediately clear that the full emphasis still lies on arriving at certainty through the witness of the Spirit. But there is more to be said. Calvin uses the terms *argumentum*, *consensus Ecclesiae*, and *adminiculum*. The word *argumentum* can be translated as ‘proof’ or ‘evidence’; it is a means by which an assertion or a supposition may be made clear.<sup>56</sup> Later on in this edition Calvin uses the synonym *ratio*, but he does not yet use the term *probatio*. Calvin consequently uses the term *consensus Ecclesiae* when he describes his own position on the role of the church regarding Scripture.<sup>57</sup> When he describes the position of his opponents he uses terms like *authoritas*, *iudicio*, *determinatio Ecclesiae*. For Calvin the church follows Scripture and can only give a posterior agreement. Moreover, the term *consensus* emphasizes the universal church of all ages and places and not the institutional church. The agreement of the church is one of the aids; the use of *adminiculum* here shows the proper place of the church, according to Calvin. In the title of the fourth book of the *Institutes* (1559), Calvin calls the church and the sacraments *externa media* or *adminicula* by which God invites us to and keeps us in communion with Christ.<sup>58</sup>

These aids are only useful once we have embraced Scripture by faith. Calvin has different kinds of arguments in mind. First he mentions some arguments related to the content and the form of Scripture. We are confirmed when we ponder “the dispensation of divine wisdom,” “the heavenly character of the *doctrina*,” and “the beautiful agreement of all its parts.”<sup>59</sup> The mysteries of the kingdom of heaven come to us in humble words and this simplicity excites greater reverence for itself than any rhetoric

---

<sup>55</sup> “Haec nisi certitudo adsit quolibet humano iudicio et superior et validior, frustra Scripturae autoritas vel argumentis muniatur, vel Ecclesiae consensu stabiliatur, vel aliis praesidiis confirmabitur; siquidem, nisi hoc iacto fundamento, suspensa semper manet. *OS* 3, 71-72. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 81.

<sup>56</sup> C.T. Lewis and C. Short, eds., *A Latin Dictionary*, Oxford 1879, 159. Calvin uses the term in other contexts as well. We are convinced by *manifesta argumenta* of our injustice. Calvin, *Institutes* 1.1.2, *OS* 3, 32. *Argumentum* can also bear the more neutral meaning of ‘topic’ or ‘subject.’ Calvin, *Institutes* 1.5.10, *OS* 3, 55. Sometimes *argumentum* means ‘way of reasoning.’ Calvin, *Institutes* 2.3.1, *OS* 3, 272.

<sup>57</sup> M. Becht, who studied the use of the term *consensus* extensively, concludes: “Grundlegend für das Verhältnis von Schrift und *consensus ecclesiae* ist die Unterordnung des letzten unter das Wort Gottes, die Calvin mit anderen Reformatoren teilt.” M. Becht, *Pium consensum tueri: Studien zum Begriff “consensus” im Werk von Erasmus von Rotterdam, Philipp Melanchthon und Johannes Calvin* [Reformationsgeschichtliche Studien und Texte, vol. 144], Münster 2000, 513.

<sup>58</sup> *OS* 5, 1.

<sup>59</sup> “Mirum enim quantum confirmationis ex eo accedat, dum intentiore studio reputamus quam ordinata et disposita illic appareat divinae sapientiae dispensatio, quam caelestis ubique et nihil terrenum redolens doctrina, quam pulchra partium omnium inter se consensio.” *OS* 3, 72. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 82.

eloquence. The simplicity of Scripture is an important argument for its authority. The truth always convinces of itself and does not need any “art of words.”<sup>60</sup>

Here the fact that Scripture is convincing is taken as an argument for its authority. Its majesty is one of the arguments for its truth. The truth does not need any support; it has its own power; it is always strong enough to defeat error. Calvin says: “Truth is then protected against all doubt when it is not supported by foreign troops, but when it is able to sustain itself just by itself alone.”<sup>61</sup> This general statement about *veritas* is important for the right understanding of the self-convincing character of Scripture. Calvin does not use the term αὐτόπιστος yet, but the idea that the truth of Scripture is self-convincing is present from the first draft in 1539.<sup>62</sup> Calvin starts with a general statement about the truth and applies that to Scripture. *Veritas* is able to speak for itself; it is axiomatic and does not need support. The persuading power of Scripture becomes clear when it is compared with other writings.

Read Demosthenes or Cicero; read Plato, Aristotle, and others of that tribe. They will, I admit, allure you, delight you, move you, enrapture you in wonderful measure. But betake yourself from them to this sacred reading. Then, in spite of yourself, so deeply will it affect you, so penetrate your heart, so fix itself in your very marrow, that, compared with its deep impression, such vigor as the orators and philosophers have will nearly vanish. Consequently, it is easy to see that the Sacred Scriptures, which so far surpass all gifts and graces of human endeavor, breathe something divine.<sup>63</sup>

We can know that Scripture is true, because it convinces us in an immediate way, without demonstration. For Calvin this fact is one of the arguments for its truth. The truth of Scripture does not need any external support. This makes clear how close the *maiestas* and the *argumenta* are connected in Calvin’s original concept. The fact that Scripture does not need demonstration is one of the arguments for its divine origin. The *maiestas* of Scripture is the reason why believers accept it as God’s own Word and at the same time the fact that they believe it because of its *maiestas* is an *argumentum* for its truth.

Next Calvin discusses the *consensus* of the church. The authority of the church is treated as one of the *adminicula* and not as the principal ground of faith. Notwithstanding the attempts of Satan to overturn and destroy Scripture, it is proved to be invincible. “Its

---

<sup>60</sup> OS 3, 72. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 82. Calvin refers to 1 Cor. 2,4 where Paul says of his preaching that it was not in persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. In his commentary on this text Calvin also says that the Word of the Lord constrains us by its own majesty to obey it. CO 49, 335.

<sup>61</sup> “siquidem ab omni dubitatione vindicatur veritas, ubi non alienis suffulta praesidiis, sola ipsa sibi ad se sustinendam sufficit.” OS 3, 72. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 82.

<sup>62</sup> K. Heim remarks that here “das Princip aufgestellt wird, daß eine von allem Zweifel freie Wahrheit nur auf sich selbst gestützt sein darf.” K. Heim, *Das Gewißheitsproblem in der systematischen Theologie bis zu Schleiermacher*, Leipzig 1911, 273.

<sup>63</sup> “Lege Demosthenem, aut Ciceronem: lege Platonem, Aristotelem, aut alios quosvis ex illa cohorte: mirum in modum, fateor, te allicient, oblectabunt, movebunt, rapiunt: verum inde si ad sacram istam lectionem te conferas, velis nolis ita vivide te afficiet, ita cor tuum penetrabit, ita medullis insidebit, ut prae istius sensus efficacia, vis illa Rhetorum ac Philosophorum prope evanescat; ut promptum sit, perspicere, divinum quiddam spirare sacras Scripturas, quae omnes humanae industriae dotes ac gratias tanto intervallo superent.” OS 3, 72. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 82.

divine origin is established by the fact that, with all human efforts striving against it, it has still of its own power prevailed.”<sup>64</sup> Scripture is dispersed through the whole world, has gained authority by diverse nations, and is confirmed by the blood of martyrs.<sup>65</sup> Calvin does not seek support in the authority of the institutional *ecclesia* but in the *consensus* of the church of all times and places. Instead of founding Scripture on the church, the agreement of the church is a secondary argument for the divine origin of Scripture. The use of *adminicula* underlines the secondary place of the church, according to Calvin.

The main reason why Calvin adds some secondary arguments is to provide extra assistance for believers. This gives him the opportunity to place the agreement of the church in its proper position. The church does not make Scripture authentic, but the fact that it accepts Scripture is an argument for its truth. There are also other arguments but even together they cannot be compared with the *testimonium* of the Spirit and the *maiestas* of Scripture. The *argumenta* or *rationes* may confirm the majesty of Scripture in the hearts of believers; they may even vindicate it against the tricks of its accusers, but they “are not strong enough to provide a firm faith, until the heavenly Father lifts reverence for the Scriptures above all doubt, by revealing his divine glory (*numen*) there.”<sup>66</sup> Calvin does not say that these arguments are received as convincing by unbelievers, but that they convince believers that the tricks of their opponents are false. The full emphasis lies on the *testimonium*. “Therefore Scripture then only will suffice to give a saving knowledge of God when its certainty is founded on the inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>67</sup> The human *testimonia* that confirm it will not be in vain if they follow the first and highest as secondary aids (*secundaria adminicula*).<sup>68</sup> Calvin uses the word *testimonia* here for the secondary arguments and refers to the work of the Spirit as the *praecipuum* and *summum testimonium*. The *testimonium Spiritus sancti* is the first and highest witness for Scripture. The *consensus* of the church and the other arguments follow it.

In 1539 the discussion of the *argumenta* is very short; the divine *maiestas* of Scripture and the *testimonium* of the Spirit together form the foundation of the acceptance of Scripture, the intrinsic qualities of Scripture and the *consensus* of the church are secondary arguments. As we will see, in the final edition of the *Institutes* several *argumenta* are added and the original coherence of Calvin’s thought is obscured.

<sup>64</sup> “Quin magis hoc ipso a Deo esse convincitur, quod reluctantibus humanis omnibus studiis, sua tamen virtute usque emerit.” *OS* 3, 80. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 91.

<sup>65</sup> *OS* 3, 80, 81. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 92.

<sup>66</sup> “Aliae sunt nec paucae nec invalidae rationes, quibus sua Scripturae dignitas ac maiestas non modo asseratur piis pectoribus, sed adversus calumniatorum technas egregie vindicetur: sed quae non satis per se valeant ad firmam illi fidem comparandam, donec eius reverentiam caelestis Pater, suo illic numine patefacto, omni controversia eximit.” *OS* 3, 81. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 92.

<sup>67</sup> “Quare tum vere demum ad salvificam Dei cognitionem Scriptura satisfaciet, ubi interiori Spiritus sancti persuasione fundata fuerit eius certitudo.” *OS* 3, 81. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 92.

<sup>68</sup> “Quae vero ad eam confirmandam humana extant testimonia, sic inania non erunt, si praecipuum illud et summum, velut secundaria nostrae imbecillitatis adminicula subsequantur.” *OS* 3, 81. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 92.



### 2.2.4 Spiritual Libertines

There is a tension between the independency of Scripture as it is acknowledged through the *testimonium* and the secondary aids or arguments that underline the authority of Scripture. One wonders why Calvin mentions these secondary arguments, if the *testimonium* of the Spirit is so decisive. Why is he not content to say that the acceptance of Scripture rests in the internal work of the Spirit who gives believers certainty of its authority by convincing them of its majesty? Calvin hesitates to make Scripture depend on the internal work of the Spirit:

Furthermore, those who, rejecting Scripture, imagine that they have some other way of reaching God, are to be thought of as more under the influence of madness than error. For lately certain giddy men have arisen, who under the pretext of the teaching ministry of the Spirit, proudly reject all reading and laugh at the simplicity of those who, as they express it, still follow the dead and killing letter.<sup>69</sup>

It is hard to tell exactly who Calvin has in mind, but there are a few hints. Calvin's opponents claim that the Spirit guides them immediately to the knowledge of God without Scripture and, according to Calvin, this is not the Spirit promised by Christ to his disciples. His opponents also claim that the Spirit gives them new revelations.<sup>70</sup> They believe that it is unworthy of the Spirit of God, to be subject to Scripture and they appeal to Paul's words "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3,6). Calvin, on the contrary, emphasizes that the Spirit is the author of the Scriptures; this means he can be tested by his own words, because he cannot differ from himself. Paul's words do not apply to Scripture as a whole, but only to the law without Christ.<sup>71</sup> Calvin calls his opponents ἐνθουσιασταὶ and in the final edition (1559) *fanatici*.<sup>72</sup> Elsewhere Calvin also uses the term ἐνθουσιασμοὺς for the secret revelations and inspirations of fanatics.<sup>73</sup>

These opponents must be sought in the circle of the Radical Reformers. This movement consisted of several different fractions that can easily be confused.<sup>74</sup> The Anabaptists generally did not deny the authority of Scripture. Calvin opposed them for their Biblicism, but not for an appeal to the Inner Light.<sup>75</sup> In one of his polemical writings against the Anabaptists, the *Brieve instruction contre les anabaptistes* (1544), Calvin makes a distinction between the Anabaptists and a group that he calls "Libertines." The first "at least accept Holy Scripture, just like we do."<sup>76</sup> The second sect forms a

---

<sup>69</sup> "Porro qui repudiate Scriptura, nescio quam ad Deum penetrandi viam imaginantur, non tam errore teneri quam rabie exagitari putandi sunt. Emerserunt enim nuper vertiginosi quidam, qui Spiritus magisterium fastuosissime obtendentes, lectionem ipsi omnem respuunt, et eorum irrident simplicitatem qui emortuam et occidentem, ut ipsi vocant, literam adhuc consecretantur." *OS* 3, 81-82. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 93.

<sup>70</sup> *OS* 3, 83. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 94.

<sup>71</sup> *OS* 3, 83-84. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 94-95.

<sup>72</sup> *OS* 3, 84, 81. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 96, 93.

<sup>73</sup> "Contra vero plerisque fanaticis sordet externa praedicatio, dum magnifice arcanas revelationes et ἐνθουσιασμοὺς spirant." Commentary on John 15,27, *CO* 47, 354. Cf. Commentary on 2 Tim. 4,13, *CO* 52, 392.

<sup>74</sup> Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography*, 275.

<sup>75</sup> W. Balke, *Calvijn en de doperse radikalen*, Amsterdam 1973, 99, 344.

<sup>76</sup> "Car pour le moins, elle reçoit l'Escriture sainte, comme nous." *CO* 7, 53. Cf. J. Calvin, *Treatises Against the Anabaptists and Against the Libertines*, ed. B.W. Farley, Grand Rapids 1982, 39.

labyrinth of absurd dreams; “this sect bears the name of Libertines. They pretend to be so spiritual, that they regard the holy Word of God no more than fables.”<sup>77</sup> Though Calvin did not make this sharp distinction in 1539, it is probable that he had these “Libertines” or groups with similar ideas in mind in this edition of the *Institutes*. In his tract *Contre la secte phantastique et furieuse des Libertins que se nomment Spirituelz* (1545), Calvin discusses the ideas of the “Spiritual Libertines” (*libertins spirituelz*).<sup>78</sup> He mentions the name of Quintin, who used nicknames for the apostles, calling Paul “Broken Pot,” John “Silly Boy,” Peter “Denier of God,” and Matthew “Usurer.”<sup>79</sup> Calvin was familiar with the ideas of the “Spiritual Libertines” when he wrote the 1539 edition of the *Institutes*, for in 1545 he writes that he had met Quintin ten years earlier.<sup>80</sup> The “Spiritual Libertines” developed an hermeneutic that separated the “letter” from the “Spirit” and propagated a pantheistic and speculative spiritualism.<sup>81</sup>

There is a similarity between *Contre la secte phantastique et furieuse des Libertins que se nomment Spirituelz* and the 1539 edition of the *Institutes*. In both Calvin

<sup>77</sup> “Ceste secte se nomme des Libertins. Et contrefont tant les spirtuelz, qu’ilz ne tiennent conte la sainte parolle de Dieu, non plus que de fables.” CO 7, 53. Cf. Calvin, *Treatises Against Anabaptists and Libertines*, 40. There is a difference between this sect of Radical Reformers and the political opponents of Calvin in Geneva that are also called Libertines. In this study we will consequently call this group “Spiritual Libertines.” Cf. B.W. Farley, ‘Editor’s Introduction,’ in Calvin, *Treatises Against Anabaptists and Libertines*, 161-186, 185. Collins however states that there is a possible relation between the “Libertines” of Geneva and the “Spiritual Libertines.” R.W. Collins, *Calvin and the Libertines of Geneva*, ed. F. D. Blackley, Toronto [1968], 154.

<sup>78</sup> Calvin gave this group the name “Spiritual Libertines.” Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography*, 278. Libertinism was a pejorative term and this makes it difficult to recognize a libertine and thus far it has not been “possible to pinpoint one specific group with their own specific doctrines at which Calvin was aiming when he wrote his *Contre la secte... des libertins*.” M. Van Veen, ‘Introduction,’ in J. Calvin, *Contre la secte phantastique et furieuse des libertins qui se nomment spirituelz*, ed. M. Van Veen [COR IV, vol. 1], Geneva 2005, 9-41, 11. Calvin used heresy stereotypes to describe the libertines. Cf. M. Van Veen, “‘Supporters of the Devil’: Calvin’s Image of the Libertines,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 40 (2005), 21-32, 30.

<sup>79</sup> “Comme en appellant S. Paul, pot cassé: saint Iehan, iosne sottelet, en son picard: saint Pierre renieur de Dieu: saint Matthieu userier.” CO 7, 173. Cf. Calvin, *Treatises Against Anabaptists and Libertines*, 221. Cf. CO 7, 158. Cf. Calvin, *Treatises Against Anabaptists and Libertines*, 197-198. According to W. Niesel, Quintin had such a low esteem for the Apostles “weil sie noch nicht in dem Zeitalter der Vollendung lebten, in dem er selber zu stehen meint.” W. Niesel, ‘Calvin und die Libertiner,’ *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 48 (1929), 58-74, 65. Other names mentioned by Calvin in this treatise are: Coppin, a Fleming and native of Lille, Bertrand of Moulins, Claude Perceval, and Anthony Pocquet. CO 7, 160. Cf. Calvin, *Treatises Against Anabaptists and Libertines*, 200.

<sup>80</sup> CO 7, 160. Cf. Calvin, *Treatises Against Anabaptists and Libertines*, 201. For a summary of the opinions of the “Spiritual Libertines” cf. G.H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 3rd ed., Kirksville 1992, 535-539, 904-912 Williams defines this libertinism as “a predestinarian, speculative Spiritualism,” 909. Cf. Farley, ‘Editor’s Introduction,’ 161-186.

<sup>81</sup> R.C. Gamble ‘Calvin’s Controversies’ in *The Cambridge companion to John Calvin*, ed. D.K. McKim, Cambridge 2004, 188-203, 190. Cf. A. Verhey and R.G. Wilkie, ‘Calvin’s treatise “Against the Libertines”,’ in *Articles on Calvin and Calvinism: A Fourteen-volume Anthology of Scholarly Articles*, vol. 5, ed. R.C. Gamble, New York 1992, 206-219.

discusses the text “the letter kills but the Spirit gives life.” (2 Cor. 3,6). He holds to the “natural” or “simple sense” and is of the opinion that “in this passage the apostle compares the law, separate from Jesus Christ, with the gospel.”<sup>82</sup> In the *Institutes* Calvin says that the apostle Paul contends against the false apostles who commended the law apart from Christ.<sup>83</sup> The Anabaptists and Spiritualists both held to the hermeneutical principle that the letter kills and the Spirit gives life.<sup>84</sup> Calvin’s hermeneutical principle is the unity of Scripture and the Spirit and he explains that the apostle Paul does not refer to Scripture, but to a wrong use of the law.

Calvin accuses the “Spiritual Libertines” of teaching that we should not be content with what is written, but speculate higher and look for new revelations.<sup>85</sup> Calvin answers that the Spirit was not promised in order to forsake Scripture, “but in order to gain its true meaning and thus be satisfied.”<sup>86</sup> Christ does not promise his Spirit to invent new doctrines for his disciples, but to confirm them in the gospel that was preached to them.<sup>87</sup> In the 1539 edition of the *Institutes* he says that the Spirit does not have the task to invent new revelations and lead us away from the Gospel but to seal to our minds the very *doctrina* that is commended by the Gospel.<sup>88</sup>

Calvin stresses the unity between Spirit and Scripture in his tract by referring to three passages: Christ opens the minds of two of his disciples, that they would know the Scriptures (Luke 24); Paul recommends Scripture to Timothy (2 Tim. 3,16) and urges the Thessalonians not to quench the Spirit, immediately adding that they should not despise the prophecies (1 Thess. 5,19-20). Two of these texts are discussed in similar terms in the 1539 edition of the *Institutes*, while the third (1 Tim. 3,16) appears in the final Latin edition of 1559.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>82</sup> “L’Apostre en ce passage là, fait comparaison de la loy, si on la separe de Iesus Christ, avec l’Evangile.” CO 7, 174 “Voila le simple sens de saint Paul.” CO 7, 175. Cf. Calvin, *Treatises Against Anabaptists and Libertines*, 223.

<sup>83</sup> “Satis enim constat Paulum illic adversus pseudoapostolos contendere, qui quidem Legem cirtra Christum commendantes” OS 3, 83. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 95.

<sup>84</sup> Farley, ‘Editor’s Introduction,’ 170. Examples of the emphasis on a spiritual understanding of the Scriptures can also be found in C. Schmidt, *Les Libertins spirituels: traites mystiques écrits dans les années 1547 a 1549*, Bale 1876, 10, 84.

<sup>85</sup> “qu’on ne se arreste pas à ce qui est escrit, pour y aquiescer du tout, mais qu’on specule plus haut, et qu’on cherche revelations nouvelles.” CO 7, 174. Cf. Calvin, *Treatises Against Anabaptists and Libertines*, 222. The Latin verb *acquiescere* (French: *acquiescer*) is very important for the meaning of αὐτόπιστος, as we shall see.

<sup>86</sup> “mais à fin d’avoir la vraye intelligence d’icelle, pour nous en contenter.” CO 7, 175. Cf. Calvin, *Treatises Against Anabaptists and Libertines*, 224.

<sup>87</sup> “Nous voyons qu’il ne promet point à ses Apostres un esprit qui leur forge nouvelles doctrines: mais seulement pour les confirmer en l’Evangile qui leur avoit esté presché.” CO 7, 175. Cf. Calvin, *Treatises Against Anabaptists and Libertines*, 224.

<sup>88</sup> “Non ergo promissi nobis Spiritus officium est, novas et inauditas revelationes confingere, aut novum doctrinae genus procudere, quo a recepta Evangelii doctrina abducamur: sed illam ipsam quae per Evangelium commendatur, doctrinam mentibus nostris obsignare.” OS 3, 83. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 94. Niesel remarks: “Die Übereinstimmung geht mitunter bis auf die Worte.” Niesel, ‘Calvin und die Libertiner,’ 60, n. 2.

<sup>89</sup> CO 7, 175-176 Cf. Calvin, *Treatises Against Anabaptists and Libertines*, 224-225. OS 3, 82, 84. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 93, 96.

These resemblances render it probable that Calvin had the same group in mind in his tract against the “Spiritual Libertines” and in the *Institutes* or at least that both groups had very similar ideas.<sup>90</sup> We do not know if Calvin based his judgment of the “Spiritual Libertines” in 1539 on specific publications; the publications he mentions in his letters and in his tract, are of later date.<sup>91</sup> We do know that in Calvin’s opinion the “Spiritual Libertines” appealed to the Spirit in order to reject the authority of Scripture and to allegorize its proper meaning.<sup>92</sup> In the tract and in the *Institutes* Calvin stresses the unity of the Spirit and Scripture. At the end of the tract he urges his readers to know nothing except what God has revealed to us in Scripture and not to subject the sacred Word of God to our judgments or lusts.<sup>93</sup>

In this edition of the *Institutes* Calvin starts with the rejection of the authority of the church and emphasizes the independent authority of Scripture. Then he mentions certain secondary aids to help believers and confirm them in their faith in Scripture, though he maintains that the inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit is necessary in order to accept Scripture. Finally he deals with the position of the “Spiritual Libertines” rejecting their disconnection of the Spirit and the Word. It is remarkable that Calvin compares the position of the “Spiritual Libertines” and the Catholics in his tract.

Although this sect is certainly different from the papists, inasmuch as it is a hundred times worse and more pernicious, nevertheless both of them together hold this principle in common: to change Scripture into allegories and to long for a better and more perfect wisdom than we find in it.<sup>94</sup>

We have seen the same comparison in Calvin’s *Responsio ad Sadoletam*. Calvin saw a logical connection between both positions, because both separated the Spirit from the Word and claimed the authority of the Spirit to escape the test of the Word.<sup>95</sup>

In the Catholic position the Spirit was institutionalized in the tradition of the church while in the position of the “Spiritual Libertines” the Spirit was deinstitutionalized in the individual experience of the Inner Light. From the Catholic perspective Calvin’s position came close to that of the “Spiritual Libertines”, because of his rejection of the authority of the church. Calvin shows in these paragraphs that his position is different and that, on the contrary, the positions of his Catholic opponents and the representatives of the Radical Reformers are logically connected. His emphasis on the secondary aids to

---

<sup>90</sup> Other passages in the *Institutes* of 1539 are also directed against the “Spiritual Libertines.” Niesel mentions the paragraphs on regeneration and providence. Niesel, ‘Calvin und die Libertiner,’ 60, n. 3, 4. We must keep in mind however, that the publication of the tract *Contre la secte phantastique et furieuse des Libertins que se nomment Spirituelz* was occasioned by specific developments in 1544. In that year Calvin was warned from Strasbourg of a group of “Quintinists.” Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography*, 277.

<sup>91</sup> Niesel, ‘Calvin und die Libertiner,’ 62-63.

<sup>92</sup> CO 7, 158. Cf. Calvin, *Treatises Against Anabaptists and Libertines*, 227-228.

<sup>93</sup> CO 7, 247-248. Cf. Calvin, *Treatises Against Anabaptists and Libertines*, 325.

<sup>94</sup> “Combien que ceste secte soit bien diverse de celle des Papistes, comme elle est cent fois pire et plus pernicieuse: neantmoins tous les deux ont ce principe commun ensemble, de transfigurer l’Ecriture en allegorie, et d’affecter une sagesse meilleure et plus parfaite, que celle que nous y avons.” CO 7, 174. Cf. Calvin, *Treatises Against Anabaptists and Libertines*, 222.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Lane, *John Calvin: Student*, 37. Cf. Calvin’s commentary on John 14,26, where he says that on the one hand the Pope and Mahomet and on the other the Anabaptists and “Libertines” deny that Scripture contains a perfect *doctrina*. CO 47, 335.

help believers, may have been caused by his desire to avoid the position of the Radical Reformers. In the 1539 edition of the *Institutes* the passage on the secondary aids and the discussion with the “Spiritual Libertines” are placed in the same section. Calvin probably needed the *argumenta* to avoid the position of the “Spiritual Libertines.” For them the only authority is that of the Spirit. For Calvin the Scriptures have their own majesty, their axiomatic truth, their heavenly *doctrina*. This is confirmed by the Spirit to our hearts and that confirmation is entirely different from a new spiritual revelation. Scripture is independent of the authority of the church, but the agreement of the church does establish the authority of Scripture for believers as a secondary aid. For Calvin the arguments support the testimony of the Spirit. This support is not essential for the absolute certainty of believers, nor sufficient to convince unbelievers, but it does protect faith in Scripture from depending exclusively on an individual experience of the internal work of the Spirit.

### 2.2.5 Scripture Confirmed by the Spirit

Calvin mentions *argumenta* for the *maiestas* of Scripture next to the *testimonium* of the Spirit in order to place the *consensus* of the church in its proper position. The church does not make Scripture authentic, but the fact that it accepts Scripture is a posterior argument for its truth.<sup>96</sup> We only receive Scripture by means of the church that has handed it over to us. The church is one of the *adminicula* for our faith in the Scriptures. Secondly, when the authority of Scripture is under attack, the arguments confirm the majesty of Scripture in the hearts of believers and vindicate it against the tricks of its accusers. Calvin also needs these arguments to avoid the position of the “Spiritual Libertines.” The testimony of the Spirit may not be disconnected from the majesty of Scripture. The *argumenta* demonstrate that Scripture has a *maiestas* in and of itself although this majesty can never be discerned without the *testimonium*.

In the 1539 edition of the *Institutes* Calvin explains that it is the task of the Spirit to seal the *doctrina* of the gospel in our hearts. The Spirit of God must be distinguished by a most certain mark from Satan, who can appear as an angel of light. If the Spirit is tried by the Word, the Spirit is compared with himself and no one can object to this exam. “He is the author of the Scriptures: he cannot vary and differ from himself. Therefore he must ever remain just as he once revealed himself there.”<sup>97</sup> It is not a contradiction that the Spirit is tested by the Word and that at the same time “the Word itself is not quite certain for us until it be confirmed by the testimony of the Spirit.”<sup>98</sup> Here Calvin uses the phrase *testimonium Spiritus* for the first time in this sense. The verb *confirmare* explains exactly what Calvin means; believers only recognize Scripture as the sure Word of God if the Holy Spirit confirms it in their hearts. The fact that the same Word is the most certain mark of the Spirit agrees with this.

For by a kind of mutual bond the Lord has joined together the certainty of his Word and of his Spirit so that the perfect religion of the Word may abide in our minds when the Spirit, who causes us to contemplate God’s face, shines; and that we in turn may embrace the Spirit with no

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Becht, *Pium consensum tueri*, 516-517.

<sup>97</sup> “Scripturarum author est: varius dissimilisque sibi esse non potest. Qualem igitur se illic semel prodidit, talis perpetuo maneat oportet.” *OS* 3, 83. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 94-95.

<sup>98</sup> “Nec his repugnat quod nuper dictum est, verbum ipsum non valde certum nobis esse nisi Spiritus testimonio confirmetur.” *OS* 3, 84. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 95.

fear of being deceived when we recognize him in his own image, namely, in the Word. So indeed it is.<sup>99</sup>

The Spirit is necessary to acknowledge the Word and the Word is necessary to acknowledge the Spirit. “The Word is the instrument by which the Lord dispenses the illumination of his Spirit to believers.”<sup>100</sup> Illumination is necessary to understand the Word, but Scripture is the Spirit’s instrument for this illumination. The testimony of the Spirit is no extra-scriptural revelation, but it is the means by which Scripture is received as the Word of God.

Thus in the 1539 edition of the *Institutes* Calvin lays the foundation of his concept of the mutual relationship between Word and Spirit. The Spirit is both the author of the Scriptures and the “internal Doctor” that teaches us to believe.<sup>101</sup> He does not teach us new things, but confirms the *doctrina* of the gospel in our hearts. We are assured of the authority of Scripture by the testimony of the Spirit and we can only be assured that the Spirit is teaching us if we test the Spirit by the Word.

### 2.3 The *Maiestas* of Scripture for Unbelievers (*Institutes* 1550)

In the 1550 edition of the *Institutes* Calvin made some additions to the paragraphs on Scripture; the 1543 edition and the nearly identical French translation of 1545 contained no substantial changes in these paragraphs. We will carefully look at the additions in 1550 to follow the development of Calvin’s thought.

#### 2.3.1 The *Testimonium* in the Prolegomena

Calvin discusses Scripture at the beginning of the *Institutes*. This seems to be the most natural place, because Scripture is the principal means for the *cognitio Dei*, the general theme of Calvin’s work. The *testimonium* of the Spirit that is necessary to recognize Scripture, however, properly belongs to the discussion of faith and the work of the Spirit in the chapters on soteriology. Calvin felt some uneasiness about the discussion of Scripture in the “prolegomena” of his work. He does not articulate this in 1539, but in 1550 he concludes his discussion of the *testimonium* of the Spirit with a short remark. “I will not dwell on this subject now, since I shall have the opportunity to discuss the matter elsewhere. Let us then know that the only true faith is that which the Spirit of God seals to our hearts.”<sup>102</sup> Calvin discusses the nature of faith later on in the *Institutes*; here he anticipates his discussion of the work of the Spirit in the chapters on soteriology.

This anticipation probably arises from his desire to lay a solid foundation for his theology. Before discussing the knowledge of the Creator and the knowledge of the

---

<sup>99</sup> “Mutuo enim quodam nexu Dominus verbi spiritusque sui certitudinem inter se copulavit; ut solida verbi religio animis nostris insidat, ubi affulget spiritus qui nos illic Dei faciem contemplari faciat; ut vicissim nullo hallucinationis timore spiritum amplexemur, ubi illum in sua imagine, hoc est in verbo, recognoscimus. Ita est sane.” *OS* 3, 84. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 95.

<sup>100</sup> “verbum esse organum quo Spiritus sui illuminationem fidelibus Dominus dispensat.” *OS* 3, 84. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 96.

<sup>101</sup> Calvin calls the Spirit the *internus doctor* and Christ the *interior magister*, who inwardly draws us to himself through his Spirit. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.1.4, *OS* 4, 5-6.

<sup>102</sup> “Pluribus nunc supersedeo, quoniam hac de re alibi tractandi locus iterum se offeret: tantum nunc sciamus, veram demum esse fidem quam Spiritus Dei cordibus nostris obsignat.” *OS* 3, 71.

Redeemer he first states that we only can know God properly from Scripture. But instead of taking the authority of Scripture for granted, he asks how we can know that Scripture is true and answers this question with his concept of the *testimonium*. In 1539 Calvin inserts this concept as an intermezzo in the opening paragraphs of the *Institutes*, because he is not content unless he hits the solid rock on which he can build his theology.

Scripture as the source of the knowledge of God the Creator, but the *testimonium* on which the acceptance of Scripture depends is the work of God the Redeemer. This evokes a tension in Calvin's theology, for if the authority of Scripture also has a more general range, what is the foundation of the authority of Scripture for those who miss the *testimonium*? This is the tension that Calvin articulates in 1550.

As long as Calvin focuses on the way in which Scripture is accepted through faith, the tension does not disturb the flow of his thought, because the concept of the *testimonium* is simply given in advance. It is more complicated if the question is raised whether the authority of Scripture can also be maintained without the *testimonium*. Calvin did not deal with that question in 1539, but by discussing Scripture in the prolegomena of the *Institutes* he evoked this question. The remark that the *testimonium* in fact belonged elsewhere is an indication that the discussion of the authority of Scripture has become more complicated in this edition. We will trace the complicating factors in the following paragraphs.

Calvin's remark leads to the historical question how the decision to deal with Scripture and with the *testimonium* in the introductory paragraphs of the *Institutes* influenced the later development in Reformed orthodoxy. The remark also leads to the theological question how the discussion of Scripture separate from soteriology and pneumatology influences the concept. What happens if the authority of Scripture is discussed as an introduction to the knowledge of God? This authority or rather the acceptance of this authority seems to presuppose the knowledge of God. We will return to this fundamental question in our systematic theological considerations in the last chapter of this study.

### 2.3.2 Augustine's Dictum

Calvin refers to an often discussed dictum from one of Augustine's anti-Manichean works: *Ego vero Evangelio non crederem, nisi me catholicae Ecclesiae commoveret autoritas*.<sup>103</sup> This remark was often quoted by the Catholics; the Reformers could not ignore it, because they particularly appealed to the theology of Augustine.<sup>104</sup> Luther

<sup>103</sup> "Scio equidem vulgo citari Augustini sententiam, ubi se evangelio crediturum negat nisi Ecclesiae ipsum moveret autoritas." *OS* 3, 67. This is not the only reference to the quote in Calvin's works; we can also find it twice in his *Actes de la journée de Ratisbonne* (1541). *CO* 5, 534, 564. Cf. L. Smits, *Saint Augustin dans l'oeuvre de Jean Calvin*, vol. 2, Assen 1958, 188.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. J. Eck, *Enchiridion locorum communium adversus Lutherum et alios hostes ecclesiae (1525-1543)*, ed. T. Smeling and P. Fraenkel, Münster 1979, 28, 398. J. Cochlaeus *Philippicae I-VII*, ed. R. Keen [Bibliotheca humanistica & reformatrica, vol. 54], Nieuwkoop 1995, 217. For the interpretations of this passage by Luther, Zwingli, and Melanchthon, cf. J.N. Bakhuizen van den Brink, *Traditio in de Reformatie en het Katholicisme in de zestiende eeuw* [Mededeelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandsche Akademie van Wetenschappen, vol. 15.1] Amsterdam 1952, 8-17. Cf. Ganoczy and Scheld, *Hermeneutik Calvins*, 66-67, 77-78. For an extensive discussion of the use of the dictum by seven medieval authors cf. M.J.J.P. De Kroon,

mentioned the quotation at least ten times and also Melanchthon and Bucer discussed it.<sup>105</sup> In the 1550 edition of the *Institutes* the dictum functions as an objection to the independent authority of Scripture. Calvin deals with it immediately after his remark that Scripture gives evidence of its own truth just like white and black things do of their color or sweet and bitter things of their taste. The discussion of Augustine's dictum forms a wedge between the self-convincing character of Scripture and the *testimonium* of the Spirit which immediately followed it in 1539. In 1550 Calvin first discusses Augustine and then says that we have to seek our conviction higher than human reasons or judgments, namely in the inner testification (*testificatio*) of the Holy Spirit.<sup>106</sup> The original connection is easily lost out of sight due to this redaction of the text.

For his exegesis of Augustine Calvin looked at the context in Augustine's *Contra epistolam Manichaei quam vocant fundamenti*. According to Augustine, Mani's *Fundamenti Epistola* opens with: "Mani, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the providence of God the Father."<sup>107</sup> Augustine asks the Manicheans to prove that Mani is an apostle of Jesus Christ. If they want to prove this from the gospel, Augustine asks how they would reply to a person who does not believe the gospel. He adds:

For my part, I would not believe the gospel if I was not moved by the authority of the catholic church. So if I have obeyed them when they told me to believe the gospel, why would I not obey them when they tell me not to believe the Manicheans?<sup>108</sup>

In other words an appeal of the Manicheans to the gospel leads to a contradiction because the church that promotes the gospel rejects the doctrine of the Manicheans.

The Manicheans claimed that they possessed the truth, but wanted people to believe this unconditionally, without proof. They used the gospel to promote faith in Mani, but then Augustine asked them what they would do if someone did not believe the gospel. From this fact Calvin concludes that Augustine is not speaking of the authority of

---

*'Wij geloven in God en in Christus. Niet in de kerk': Wessel Gansfort en Martin Bucer met een woord van Augustinus en een geschrift van Wessel uit de bronnen vertaald en toegelicht*, Kampen 2004, 17-59. He discussed Calvin's explanation of the quote in an article. M.J.J.P. De Kroon, 'Augustinus' Epistula fundamenti in de uitleg van Johannes Calvijn,' in *Sola Gratia: Bron voor de Reformatie en uitdaging voor nu*, ed. A. Van de Beek and W.M. Van Laar, Zoetermeer 2004, 70-86.

<sup>105</sup> H-U. Delius, *Augustin als Quelle Luthers: eine Materialsammlung*, Berlin 1984, 155. Ph. Melanchthon, *Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl*, ed. H. Engelland and R.W. Stupperich, vol. 1, Gütersloh 1951, 326, 339. M. Bucer, *Frühschriften, 1520-1524*, ed. R.W. Stupperich [Martini Bucer Opera, vol. 1.1], Paris 1960, 314. M. Bucer, *Schriften der Jahre 1524-1528*, ed. R.W. Stupperich [Martini Bucer Opera, vol. 1.2], Paris 1962, 100. De Kroon discusses the use of the dictum by Bucer. De Kroon, *Wij geloven in God en in Christus*, 156-159. Calvin must have been familiar with Melanchthon's discussion of the quote in *De ecclesia et de auctoritate verbi Dei*, but Calvin's explanation did not depend on Melanchthon, who made no attempt to interpret the quote from its context. Cf. CO 10b, 432. Cf. P. Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum: The Function of the Patristic Argument in the Theology of Philip Melanchthon*, Geneva 1961, 228, n. 67.

<sup>106</sup> OS 3, 69.

<sup>107</sup> Augustine, *Contra epistolam Manichaei quam vocant fundamenti*, 5. PL 42:176.

<sup>108</sup> "Ego vero Evangelio non crederem, nisi me catholicae Ecclesiae commoveret auctoritas. Quibus ergo obtemperavi dicentibus: Crede Evangelio; cur eis non obtemperem dicentibus mihi: Noli credere Manichaeis?" PL 42:176.



Scripture for believers here, but that he is rhetorically pretending that he is an unbeliever when he says that the authority of the church moved him to faith in the gospel.<sup>109</sup> According to Calvin, Augustine means “that if he were a stranger to the faith, he could not be led to embrace the gospel as the certain truth of God unless constrained by the authority of the church.”<sup>110</sup> Calvin does not follow Luther’s explanation at this point. Luther says that for Augustine the *ecclesia catholica* refers to the community of all Christians and not to the Pope and the bishops; but not that Augustine is speaking of unbelievers.<sup>111</sup>

Whether Calvin’s exegesis is correct or not, this interpretation of Augustine’s dictum has an impact on his concept of Scripture, because Calvin compels himself to discuss the authority of Scripture apart from the testimony of the Spirit. The agreement of the church, which was one of the posterior arguments to confirm the faith of believers in the former edition, now plays a role for unbelievers also. Calvin says that Augustine indicated “that those who are not yet illumined by the Spirit of God, become teachable by reverence for the church, [...] the authority of the church is an introduction through which we are prepared for faith in the gospel.”<sup>112</sup>

Scripture gives believers a sense of its majesty through the testimony of the Spirit in their hearts. The *consensus* of the church is a secondary argument for them. Those who do not have the testimony of the Spirit, miss the true certainty. The authority of the church can help them to start to believe in the majesty of Scripture. The place where Calvin inserted this paragraph is significant; the authority of the church stands between the sense that Scripture gives of its divine majesty and the testimony of the Spirit. The former posterior argument now functions as a preparation (*praeparatio*) for true faith.

At the end of the paragraph Calvin emphasizes that this preparation is not sufficient and recommends Augustine’s *De utilitate credendi*, which says in Calvin’s words that “we should not acquiesce in mere opinion, but should rely on sure and firm truth.”<sup>113</sup> For Calvin there is an essential difference between *veritas* and *opinio*, the church can

<sup>109</sup> OS 3, 67. Cf. Ganoczy and Scheld, *Hermeneutik Calvins*, 96.

<sup>110</sup> “significans se, quum alienus esset a fide, non aliter potuisse adduci ut Evangelium amplecteretur pro certa Dei veritate, quam Ecclesiae autoritate victum.” OS 3, 67.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Luther, *WA* 2, 429-430; *WA* 6, 561, 606; *WA* 10 II, 98. William of Ockham (d. 1347) interpreted the dictum in a similar way in his *Dialogus*, 402, 37-54. Cf. De Kroon, *Wij geloven in God en in Christus*, 16-17. F.L. Battles’s remark that Luther anticipated Calvin’s interpretation of Augustine is not correct, because Luther interpreted the quote in a different way. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 76, n. 6.

<sup>112</sup> “eos qui nondum Spiritu Dei sunt illuminati, Ecclesiae reverentia ad docilitatem induci, [...] atque ita hoc modo Ecclesiae auctoritatem isagogen esse qua ad fidem Evangelii praeparatur.” OS 3, 68. In the final Latin edition of the *Institutes* (1559) Calvin opens the chapter with a new sentence: “Before I go any further, it is worthwhile to say something about the authority of Scripture, not only to prepare our hearts to reverence it, but to banish all doubt.” “non modo animos praeparare ad eius reverentiam, sed omnem dubitationem eximant.” OS 3, 65. For the use of *praeparare* and *praeparatio* cf. Calvin, *Institutes* 2.7.2, OS 3, 329. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.2.5, OS 4, 12. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.3.2, OS 4, 56, and Calvin’s commentary on Isaiah 43, 10 where he says that it is a preparation for faith, when God procures reverence for his Word. CO 37, 88.

<sup>113</sup> “non tamen in opinione acquiescendum esse, sed certa et solida veritate nitendum.” OS 3, 68. Calvin summarizes Augustine’s *De utilitate credendi* in his own words. PL 42:65-92.

bring us no further than a certain opinion, the Spirit can lead us into the truth. Therefore we must seek our conviction in the inner testifying of the Holy Spirit.

There is a double movement in the 1550 edition of the *Institutes*: Calvin broadens the function of the church with respect to Scripture and, at the same time, he finds it necessary to express the insufficiency of the authority of the church more explicitly than before, by writing that the church does not lead to the assurance of faith.<sup>114</sup> The authority of the church has a preparatory function, but it does not have the same persuading power of the inner testimony of the Spirit. Augustine's dictum, or rather Calvin's exegesis, introduces the issue of how unbelievers are to be persuaded. The simple concept that believers know for sure that God speaks to them in Scripture because of its own *maiestas* and through the *testimonium* of the Spirit is broken up and made more complicated by the question how unbelievers are convinced. The authority of the church cannot convince them of the truth of Scripture with the necessary certainty, but it can prepare them to accept Scripture and to acknowledge its majesty. The discussion of this quotation makes us curious about the other additions and leads to the question why Calvin made his original concept more complicated through the introduction of this new element.

### 2.3.3 An Extension of the Secondary Arguments

In 1550 Calvin gives more room to the secondary arguments than in 1539. In the former edition he mentions two aspects: the power of the truth that comes to us in such a plain form that we are convinced by it and the *consensus* of the universal *ecclesia* that confirms Scripture. In this edition he adds three other arguments. A short summary can illustrate the point Calvin makes and show how this differs from the earlier editions.

Calvin makes an appeal to the antiquity of Scripture; according to him, there was no document of any religion that had been written earlier than the time of Moses, who himself traced his message back to the patriarchs.<sup>115</sup> Calvin also mentions the miracles that Moses relates. They are confirmations of the law that he delivered and of the *doctrina* that he published. These miracles must have been true, because Moses related them to the eyewitnesses of the events.<sup>116</sup> Next Calvin discusses the fulfillment of the prophecies; Jacob, for instance, foretold that the tribe of Judah would reign, and Moses foretold the election of the Gentiles into God's covenant.<sup>117</sup> "Is this not plain proof that he spoke by divine inspiration? I omit other predictions, which so clearly breathe the divine revelation that men of sound mind must see they were spoken by God."<sup>118</sup> In the other prophets this is even clearer; Isaiah predicted the fall of Jerusalem and the exile and even mentioned the name of Cyrus more than a hundred years before he was born. This demonstrates plainly that his prophecies are oracles of God and not human

---

<sup>114</sup> In an other addition in 1550 Calvin says that only this is the true faith, which the Spirit of God seals in our hearts. *OS* 3, 71.

<sup>115</sup> *OS* 3, 73-74. Calvin had this conviction in common with the church fathers and with many theologians of his own days.

<sup>116</sup> *OS* 3, 74-75.

<sup>117</sup> *OS* 3, 76.

<sup>118</sup> "an non divino afflatu ipsum locutum esse palam faciunt? Omitto alias praedictiones, quae divinam revelationem ita plane spirant ut sanis hominibus constet Deum esse qui loquitur." *OS* 3, 76.

conjectures.<sup>119</sup> Calvin's use of the verb *demonstrare* indicates that he uses the fulfillment of the prophecies as an argument or proof of the truth of Scripture.<sup>120</sup> According to Calvin, the tongue of Jeremiah must have been guided by the Spirit of God, because he predicted that the exile would take seventy years. "How shameless would it be to say that the authority of the prophets has not been confirmed by such evidences (*documenta*)."<sup>121</sup> The term *documentum* is mostly used by Calvin in the sense of an example that proves or demonstrates the point he is making.<sup>122</sup> Daniel prophesied events that would take place about six hundred years later as if he was writing a history. Then Calvin concludes: "If pious people take these things to heart, they will be amply equipped to restrain the barking of impious people; for this proof (*demonstratio*) is too clear to be open to any cavils."<sup>123</sup>

The question why Calvin extended his arguments for the authority of Scripture becomes the more urgent because of the sharp polemical tone in these paragraphs. "I know what certain rascals bawl out in corners in order to display their keenness in assailing divine truth. They ask who can assure us that Moses and the prophets wrote the books that now bear their names. They even dare question whether there ever was a Moses."<sup>124</sup> It would be interesting to know whom Calvin is referring to here, but it is difficult to trace an exact quotation. Calvin found it necessary to defend Scripture against "the barking of impious people," who dared to deny that Moses ever existed. He used the classical form of polemical rhetoric, challenging or even scolding his opponents.<sup>125</sup> The additional paragraphs do not seem to be directed against the Catholic Church or against Radical Reformers. Against whom did he defend his position so sharply?

Next to these three new arguments Calvin also adds two paragraphs to show how Scripture is preserved by God's providence. He discusses the history of Josiah, who found a copy of the law in the temple and refutes the idea that the burning of the sacred books by Antiochus Epiphanes (1 Macc. 1,56-57) implies that the Scriptures were later falsifications. These histories were apparently used by some to illustrate how uncertain

---

<sup>119</sup> OS 3, 77.

<sup>120</sup> Calvin uses the verb *demonstrare* and the noun *demonstratio* for the first time in the 1550 edition of the *Institutes* in the context of the arguments.

<sup>121</sup> "Cuius impudentiae erit negare talibus documentis sancitam fuisse Prophetarum auctoritatem." OS 3, 77.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. Calvin, *Institutes* 1.3.3, OS 3, 38. Calvin, *Institutes* 1.5.2, OS 3, 46.

<sup>123</sup> "Haec si prope meditata habeant pii homines, ad compescendos impiorum hominum latratus abunde instructi erunt; clarior enim est ista demonstratio quam ut ullis cavillis sit obnoxia." OS 3, 77.

<sup>124</sup> "Scio quid in angulis obstrepant quidam nebulones, ut in oppugnanda Dei veritate acumen ingenii sui ostentent. Quaerunt enim, quis nos certiores fecerit a Mose et Prophetis haec fuisse scripta quae sub eorum nominibus leguntur. Quinetiam quaestionem movere audent fueritne unquam aliquis Moses." OS 3, 77.

<sup>125</sup> S. Jones distinguishes four forms of rhetoric in Calvin: a pedagogical rhetoric for his students, a consolatory rhetoric for the suffering French churches, an apologetic rhetoric for to win humanists and a polemical rhetoric against his opponents. Cf. Jones, *Calvin and the Rhetoric of Piety*, 70-73.

the origin of Scripture was. Calvin turns their argumentation against themselves. Nothing is more appropriate to establish the trustworthiness (*fides*) of Scripture.<sup>126</sup> If all the books were destroyed, where do the copies that we now have come from? It is impossible that they would be invented and accepted so quickly if they were not known before. Again Calvin writes in a strong polemical tone: “What else do these babblers betray than their own more than doggish shamelessness, when they utter the lie that these books are not genuine, while their sacred antiquity is confirmed by the consent of all histories?”<sup>127</sup>

The secondary arguments seem to gain a new function in this edition of the *Institutes*. No longer is their use limited to the confirmation of faith. The arguments are used to make unbelievers inexcusable.<sup>128</sup> Just as the revelation of God in creation and in the human heart are not sufficient to salvation, but still take away all excuses, so the arguments or evidences of the *maiestas* of Scripture silence all opposition, though they are not sufficient to convince opponents with the same certainty as the *testimonium* of the Spirit convinces believers.<sup>129</sup> The *testimonium* is necessary to see and taste the *maiestas* of Scripture, but even without the testimony of the Spirit the barking of impious people is restrained by what Calvin calls *argumenta*, *documenta*, or *demonstrationes*.

Calvin must have had certain opponents in his mind and it is important for us to know who he means by the “impious people,” the “rascals,” and the “babblers.” The “Spiritual Libertines” of 1539 did not question the authority of Scripture, but added the revelations of the Spirit as a second source of the knowledge of God. In 1550 Calvin left the paragraphs regarding the “Spiritual Libertines” completely intact; it is unlikely that the additions to the secondary arguments are directed against them. Shortly before the publication of this edition Calvin was in a debate with skeptical humanists. We will take a look at this context before we discuss how Calvin’s thought further developed.

### 2.3.4 Skeptical Humanists

Two events can illustrate the background of Calvin’s polemical tone in the discussion of the arguments for Scripture in the 1550 edition of the *Institutes*. At the end of 1542 Calvin received a letter from Paris sent by Antoine Fumée, councilor to the Parliament, who answered Calvin’s request for information about the “atheists” in Paris. This group in Paris was probably influenced by the writings of François Rabelais.<sup>130</sup> In his letter Fumée

<sup>126</sup> OS 3, 78.

<sup>127</sup> “Quid ergo aliud quam proterviam suam plusquam caninam produnt isti blaterones, dum supposititios libros esse mentiuntur, quorum sacra vetustas historiarum omnium consensu approbatur?” OS 3, 78.

<sup>128</sup> W. Krusche correctly distinguishes these two meanings of the arguments for the authority of Scripture, calling the first diaconal and the second apologetical. “Die Bedeutung, die CALVIN den rationalen Argumenten beimißt, ist eine doppelte: (a) eine apologetische (Inst I 7, 4.5) und b) eine – wenn man so sagen darf – diakonische (Inst I 8).” Krusche, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes*, 209. It is not correct, however, to connect the one meaning exclusively with *Institutes* 1.7 and the other with *Institutes* 1.8.

<sup>129</sup> Calvin says that the brightness of God’s revelation in creation is more than enough to leave our ingratitude without excuse. Calvin, *Institutes* 1.6.1, OS 3, 60.

<sup>130</sup> J. Bohatec, *Budé und Calvin: Studien zur Gedankenwelt des französischen Frühhumanismus*, Graz, 1950, 221, n. 29.

asserts that unbelievers were numerous in Paris and that they were making converts. They had a hedonistic lifestyle and used as their motto: live, drink, and be merry.<sup>131</sup> He did not call them atheists, but ἄχριστων.<sup>132</sup> They denied the divinity of Christ and trustworthiness of the New Testament and said that Socrates, Plato, and many other philosophers had written works just as divine as and even more divine than the gospel.<sup>133</sup> The divine origin of the Old Testament was also ridiculed. “What? How holy are the Scriptures that are full of such indecent words and songs that are found everywhere in the Song of Songs.”<sup>134</sup> For these skeptics there is no difference between Moses’ appeal to God and the appeal of Numa Pompilius, the mythical second king of Rome, to the nymph Egeria.<sup>135</sup> The letter was relevant for Calvin’s own situation, threatened as he was by a group of political opponents, led by the old bourgeois families of Geneva, who came to be known as the *libertins de Genève*.<sup>136</sup> It is confusing that Calvin also calls them “Libertines,” for they are not the same as the “Spiritual Libertines” of 1539.

The second event occurred a few years after Calvin had received Fumée’s letter when a case of radical skepticism appeared in Geneva. In 1547 Jacques Gruet – a prominent Genevan bourgeois who objected to the growing influence of Calvin – posted a billboard on the pulpit of the cathedral church, threatening the city’s clergy with death. When Gruet’s house was searched, papers were discovered that led to a death-sentence because of high treason and Gruet was beheaded in July of the same year. Calvin was convinced that Gruet was an “atheist”; the records of his trial show that he attacked the books of Moses and maintained that Moses was a man just like others, undermining the authority of his teaching. Gruet further maintained that all laws, divine and human alike, were made by men for their own pleasure.<sup>137</sup> In a letter to Viret Calvin wrote that he was named in some of the papers that were found and that in others he was referred to in such a crude allegory that it was easy to see whom Gruet had in mind. “There were also two pages of Latin in which the whole Scripture was mocked, Christ ridiculed, the immortality of the soul called a fairy story, and the whole of religion pulled to pieces.”<sup>138</sup>

Three years after Gruet’s execution, a manuscript in his handwriting was discovered

<sup>131</sup> A.L. Herminjard, *Correspondance des Reformateurs dans les pays de langue française: 1542-1543*, vol. 8, Geneva 1893, 233. The letter can also be found in *CO* 11, 494.

<sup>132</sup> Herminjard, *Correspondance* 8, 229.

<sup>133</sup> “quòd Socrates, Plato alique permulti philosophi divina pleraque ac etiam dininiora Evangelio scripserunt.” Herminjard, *Correspondance* 8, 230.

<sup>134</sup> “Hui! tam sanctae, inquit, scripturae, quae tot impudicis verbis et cantionibus refertae in *Canti.[co] Canticorum* passim deprehenduntur.” Herminjard, *Correspondance* 8, 230.

<sup>135</sup> Herminjard, *Correspondance* 8, 233. Numa Pompilius was the successor of Romulus. Egeria taught him how to be a good and wise legislator.

<sup>136</sup> M. Gauna, *Upwellings: First Expressions of Unbelief in the Printed Literature of the French Renaissance*, Rutherford (NJ) 1992, 79.

<sup>137</sup> *CO* 12, 565. p. 103. Calvin was convinced that Gruet’s actions were a manifestation of the depravity and corruption which lurked in the city. W.G. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation*, Manchester 1994, 103. On the trial of Gruet cf. Berriot, *Athéismes*, 849- 870.

<sup>138</sup> “Paginae etiam duae compositae latina lingua, ubi ridetur tota scriptura, laceratur Christus, immortalitas animae vocatur somnium et fabula, denique tota religio convellitur.” *CO* 12, 548. Calvin to Viret, July 2, 1547.

in his house. The magistrates of Geneva submitted the document to Calvin, who advised them to destroy these papers. The documents were burnt by the hangman in front of the house of Gruet. Although it is not certain that the document found in May 1550 influenced the text of the *Institutes*, yet it shows that Calvin was confronted with radical skepticism during this period of his life. He summarized the ideas of Gruet in a letter to the magistrates of Geneva. Gruet said that the Prophets were fools, dreamers and fantasists and that the Apostles were rascals and knaves, apostates, dull blockheads, brainless fellows and that the Virgin Mary was a prostitute. The law of God was worthless, the Gospel nothing but falsehood, and the whole of Scripture was false and wicked, having less meaning than the fables of Aesop and containing false doctrine.<sup>139</sup> This illustrates why Calvin defends Scripture with extra secondary arguments and in such a sharp polemical tone in the 1550 edition of the *Institutes*. If his arguments do not convince his opponents, they will serve believers with ammunition against the attacks of these “impious people,” these “rascals,” and “babblers.”

### 2.3.5 *De Scandalis* (1550)

There is another source of information about the skeptical humanists, which can shed light on Calvin’s opponents in the 1550 edition of the *Institutes*. In the same year Calvin published a tract titled *De Scandalis*, on which he had been working for some years and in which he deals with some objections against the Reformation in humanist circles.<sup>140</sup> The first “scandal” is the rejection of the Scriptures because of the popular language and unpolished style.<sup>141</sup> Calvin replies that Scripture is so powerful precisely because it is so plain. “For the living majesty (*maiestas*) of God reveals itself there, so that all who read are forced to sense that it is God himself who speaks, unless Satan robs them of their minds.”<sup>142</sup> No philosophers can be more powerful in persuading us than Scripture with its plain style. God who formed the human tongue, wishes to “stammer” to us and in this way “we discern clearly how much the simple truth of God is able to do of itself.”<sup>143</sup> Calvin refers to the first chapter of the *Institutes* for further information.

Calvin used the same argument in the *Institutes* of 1539, but in *De Scandalis* this argument is not primarily meant to confirm the faith of believers, but to convince those who are offended by the plain style of Scripture. Calvin referred to the *maiestas* of Scripture just as in the 1539 edition of the *Institutes* and does not mention other

<sup>139</sup> CO 13, 569. Calvin to the senate of Geneva, May 1550. According to W. Gericke, this document was published in the seventeenth century as *De tribus impostoribus*. W. Gericke, *Theologie und Kirche im Zeitalter der Aufklärung* [Kirchengeschichte in Einzeldarstellungen, vol. 3.2], Berlin 1989, 28-29. Cf. W. Gericke, *Das Buch “De tribus impostoribus”*, Berlin 1982, 50-59. This idea is rejected by the editor of the critical edition. W. Schröder, ‘Einleitung,’ in: [J.J. Müller], *De imposturis religionum: (de tribus impostoribus): Dokumente*, ed. W. Schröder [Philosophische Clandestina der deutschen Aufklärung, vol. 6.1], Stuttgart 1999, 30-31.

<sup>140</sup> In 1546 he wrote to Farel that he had left off for a time a short treatise (*De Scandalis*) that he had begun, because the style did not flow as freely as he wished. CO 12, 380.

<sup>141</sup> OS 2, 170.

<sup>142</sup> “Viva enim Dei maiestas illic se exerit: ut sentire cogantur quicunque legunt, nisi quorum mentes obstupescit Satan, Deum esse qui sibi loquitur.” OS 2, 171.

<sup>143</sup> “et nos dilucide cernimus, quantum per se valeat simplex DEI veritas.” OS 2, 171.

arguments. This shows that Calvin's opinion has not fundamentally changed. The real change is in the function of the arguments. In 1539 Calvin used them to maintain the authority of Scripture and to avoid the position of the Spiritual Libertines. Now the same argument gains a different character; it serves to prove Scripture to those who doubt.

The skeptical humanists were gaining influence in the circle of the French aristocracy where Calvin sought support. They had a sharp critique of the French Catholic Church in common with Calvin, but they differed fundamentally in their anti-authoritarianism and criticized the Reformation just as sharply as the Catholic Church. This may explain why Calvin's tone is so polemical; he had to distinguish his position from the radical factions in the humanist movement to win the sympathy of the moderate humanists and the support of the French aristocracy.<sup>144</sup> In *De Scandalis* it is his goal to win the moderate humanists for the cause of the Reformation and this desire may also have influenced the tone of the paragraphs on Scripture in the 1550 edition of the *Institutes*.

In the 1550 edition of the *Institutes* Calvin did not mention the names of his opponents, but in *De Scandalis* we find the names of six skeptical humanists whose ideas were becoming influential at that time. Calvin wrote: "It is common knowledge that Agrippa, Villanovanus, Dolet and their like have always proudly rejected the gospel, as if they were so many Cyclops."<sup>145</sup> A little further he writes: "Others, like Rabelais, Deperius and Goveanus, having sampled the gospel, have been struck with the same blindness."<sup>146</sup> These humanists treat the gospel as a comedy and bark against God like dogs.<sup>147</sup> "They pour out the poison of their ungodliness in all directions, so that they fill the world with atheism."<sup>148</sup> They are of the opinion that all religion has its origin in the human brains and "that God exists because people are pleased to believe so."<sup>149</sup> A detailed examination of their writings would stretch too far for this study, but a short impression of these six representatives of radical humanism will serve to color the background of Calvin's polemical tone in 1550.

Henricus Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486-1535) was a court secretary of Charles V; he had pantheistic views and appreciated occult practices.<sup>150</sup> In his commentary on the *Catholic Epistles* (1551) Calvin says that Agrippa "highly praised the eternity of God's Word and at the same time mocked the prophets and apostles and

<sup>144</sup> Cf. Jones, *Calvin and the Rhetoric of Piety*, 126-127. According to J. Bohatec Calvin distinguishes between three kinds of humanists in *De Scandalis*. The second group consists of the skeptics mentioned here. Bohatec, *Budé und Calvin*, 149-150. Cf. Köstlin, 'Calvin's Institutio' 50.

<sup>145</sup> "Agrippam, Villanovanum, Doletum, et similes vulgo notum est tan quam Cyclopos quospiam Evangelium semper fastuose sprevisse." OS 2, 201. Cf. J. Calvin, *Concerning Scandals*, transl. J.W. Fraser, Grand Rapids 1978, 61.

<sup>146</sup> "Alii (ut Rabelaysus, Desperius, et Goveanus) gustato Evangelio, eadem caetitate sunt percussi." OS 2, 201. Cf. Calvin, *Concerning Scandals*, 61.

<sup>147</sup> OS 2, 200. Cf. Calvin, *Concerning Scandals*, 60.

<sup>148</sup> "sed impietatis suae venenum huc illuc profundunt, ut atheismo orbem repleant." OS 2, 202. Cf. Calvin, *Concerning Scandals*, 62.

<sup>149</sup> "Deum esse, quia sic credere libeat." OS 2, 202. Cf. Calvin, *Concerning Scandals*, 62.

<sup>150</sup> Agrippa's opinion of Scripture can be found in two of his major works: *De vanitate*, and *Apologia*. Bohatec, *Budé und Calvin*, 164.

in his deceitful way made the Word of God ridiculous.”<sup>151</sup> Agrippa thought that although the prophets, apostles and evangelists were guided by the Holy Spirit, they could err without intentionally twisting the truth. The Holy Spirit himself did not err; human frailty was the source of error in Scripture.<sup>152</sup> Even great prophets sometimes lost the Spirit of prophecy. Moses promised to lead the Israelites out of Egypt into the Promised Land, but he died before he could do this. The apostles also erred; Peter had to be reproved by Paul. Only Jesus Christ never erred and never lost the Spirit of prophecy. For Agrippa these errors in Scripture formed no problem, because the church had the right to correct them.<sup>153</sup> To prove his opinion Agrippa referred to the quotation from Augustin’s *Contra Epistolam Fundamenti*.<sup>154</sup> It is possible that Calvin’s explanation of the dictum in 1550 was influenced by Agrippa’s appeal to it, but this cannot be proved, because the sentence is quoted very often.

With Villanovanus Calvin probably meant Michael Servetus (1511-1553), who was born at Villanueva in Aragon and dropped his name Michel de Villeneuve or Michael Villanovanus. In 1542 Servetus published an edition of the Bible of Santes Pagnini (1470-1541) under his pseudonym.<sup>155</sup> In the preface and the notes to the *Pagninus Polyglot Bible*, the prime source for his hermeneutics, he proposed that the Bible be understood within its own historical, philological, and philosophical context. Although he did not reject the Scripture explicitly, some of his statements surely could be explained as a rejection of its authority. Servetus implied that the apostles had not made their views clear enough, because they wrote in Greek instead of Hebrew.<sup>156</sup> Calvin could also have referred to a certain Simon De Neufville (c. 1495-1530), the teacher of Dolet at Padua.<sup>157</sup> Little is known of his ideas on Scripture.

<sup>151</sup> “dum verbi Dei aeternitatem magnifice extollit, scurriliter illudit prophetis et apostolis, atque ita oblique verbum Dei subsannat.” Commentary on 1 Peter 1,25. CO 55, 230.

<sup>152</sup> C.G. Nauert Jr., *Agrippa and the Crisis of Renaissance Thought*, Urbana 1965, 192.

<sup>153</sup> Nauert, *Agrippa and the Crisis*, 192.

<sup>154</sup> Bohatec, *Budé und Calvin*, 165.

<sup>155</sup> S. Pagninus, *Biblia sacra ex Santis Pagnini tralatione, sed ad Hebraicæ linguæ amussim nouissime ita recognita, & scholiis illustrata, ut plane noua editio uideri possit*, ed. M. Villanovanus [= M. Servet], Lyon 1542.

<sup>156</sup> J. Friedman, *Michael Servetus: a case study in total heresy* [Travaux d’Humanisme et Renaissance, vol. 163], Geneva 1978, 27-28. Servetus ideas were understood as blasphemous heresy intent upon the destruction of Christian prophesy and God’s holy writ.” J. Friedman, ‘Servetus and the Psalms: The Exegesis of Heresy’, in *Histoire de l’exégèse au XVIe siècle : textes du Colloque international tenu à Genève en 1976*, ed. O. Fatio and P. Fraenkel, [Études de philologie et d’histoire, vol. 34], Geneva 1978, 164-178, 164. Servetus also rejected the messianic interpretation of certain prophecies and psalms. A. Baars, *Om Gods verhevenheid en Zijn nabijheid: De Drie-eenheid bij Calvijn*, Kampen 2004, 157.

<sup>157</sup> According to O. Fatio and C. Rapin, it is impossible to decide between Michael Servetus and Simon de Neufville. J. Calvin, *Des scandales*, ed. O. Fatio and C. Rapin [Textes littéraires français, vol. 323], Geneva 1984, 137, n. 246. Bohatec argues that Simon Villanovanus is meant here, mainly because Calvin uses the name Servet later on in *De Scandalis*. Bohatec, *Budé und Calvin*, 178. “Pro multis unum Serveti exemplum sufficiat.” OS 2, 205. Cf. Calvin, *Concerning Scandals*, 66. The French edition, however, has: “Il y un certain Espagnol nommé Michel Servet qui contrefait le medecin se nommant Villeneuve.” OS 2, 205. Cf. Calvin, *Des scandales*, 148-149.



Etienne Dolet (1509-1546) was a French scholar and printer, who issued from his own press the important *Commentarii linguae Latinae*, which was of great influence on the French Renaissance. He was arrested, convicted of heresy, and executed in Paris, becoming the first martyr of the Renaissance. Calvin's greatest objection to Dolet lay in his denial of the immortality of the soul. Dolet also denied the *perspicuitas* of Scripture and mocked the many Bible commentaries of the Protestants. If Scripture presents clearly what we ought to believe, we do not need a detailed explanation and certainly not the disputes of Erasmus and the Reformers.<sup>158</sup> Dolet probably influenced Jacques Gruet, who met Dolet in Lyons.<sup>159</sup> Calvin regarded Dolet's remarks as an evidence of enmity against the law of God and Holy Scripture.<sup>160</sup>

François Rabelais (c. 1494-c. 1553) became chiefly known for his romance *La Vie de Gargantua et de Pantagruel* that appeared from 1532 to 1552. It is difficult to analyze this literary work that combines learning, eloquence, coarse humor, and obscenities. In this book Rabelais showed little respect for the Word of God. In the prologue of the second book he equated his chronicle of the giant Gargantua with the holy gospel and the infallible text of Scripture.<sup>161</sup> Rabelais abused Christ's words on the cross by letting a drunkard cite Christ's saying on the cross "I thirst" and a women who is left by her lover: "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"<sup>162</sup> Calvin was familiar with Rabelais's writings. As early as 1533 Calvin mentioned *Pantagruel* together with another book in a letter to Francis Daniel.<sup>163</sup> In a sermon on Deuteronomy 13 (1555) Calvin says that a devil called Pantagruel dares to spit at the Holy Scriptures and at the majesty of God as a mad dog, perverting and destroying true religion. Those who mock Holy Scripture and deny the wonders that are revealed there, alienate themselves completely from God.<sup>164</sup> Rabelais in turn found Calvin's theology as unnatural and repugnant as that of the Sorbonne.<sup>165</sup> Perhaps he formed a specific threat for Calvin

<sup>158</sup> E. Dolet, *Dialogus de imitatione Ciceroniana*, 1535, 38. A fascimile reproduction of the original edition can be found in E. Dolet, *L'Erasmianus sive Ciceronianus d'Etienne Dolet* (1535), ed. E.V. Telle, Geneva 1974, 97-293.

<sup>159</sup> Gauna, *Upwellings*, 79; cf. Berriot, *Athéismes*, 852. The truth of this confession is questioned by Gauna, because it could have been the result of his tortures. Gauna, *Upwellings*, 79. According to Bohatec, Dolet's ideas are also echoed in Fumée's letters to Calvin. Bohatec, *Budé und Calvin*, 222.

<sup>160</sup> Calvin says this in his fifth sermon on 1 Timothy. CO 53, 60. Bohatec, *Budé und Calvin*, 240. Cf. R.C. Christie, *Étienne Dolet: The Martyr of the Renaissance, 1508-1546: A Biography*, London 1899, 266.

<sup>161</sup> Bohatec, *Budé und Calvin*, 216.

<sup>162</sup> Bohatec, *Budé und Calvin*, 217-218.

<sup>163</sup> CO 10b, 29.

<sup>164</sup> CO 27, 261, 262. Bohatec's conclusion that Calvin has Rabelais in mind whenever he writes against Epicureans and Lucianians is too absolute. Calvin uses these terms to describe a position regarding Scripture that is similar to that of Rabelais and the other skeptical humanists. Bohatec, *Budé und Calvin*, 228. Bohatec also suggests a relation between this book of Rabelais and the group in Paris, to which Fumée refers, because both denied eternal life. *Budé und Calvin*, 221. Battles remark that Bohatec regards Rabelais as the leader of this group is a mistake. Battles, *Institutes*, 79, n. 14.

<sup>165</sup> M.A. Screech, *Rabelais and the Challenge of the Gospel: Evangelism, Reformation, Dissent*, Baden-Baden 1992, 150.

because he first belonged to the circle of the Reformers and was accused of being a Lutheran by the theologians of the Sorbonne.<sup>166</sup> Calvin intended to distinguish his own position sharply from Rabelais's skepticism.

Jean Bonaventure Des Périers (c.1500–1544) was a French humanist and a protégé of Margaret of Navarre. His chief work *Cymbalum mundi* (1537) was banned because of its attack on Christianity. The book consisted of four dialogues in imitation of Lucian in an allegorical form. After the publication, Des Périers prudently left Paris and settled at Lyons, where he lived in poverty, until in 1544 he put an end to his life by falling on his sword. In 1544 his collected works were printed at Lyons. Little is known of his thoughts on the authority of Scripture, but according to some, Des Périers mocked the miracles.<sup>167</sup> Other interpreters state that he also mocked Luther and Bucer.<sup>168</sup> We know very little about the last man mentioned, Goveanus, maybe he was the Portuguese scholar Antonio De Gouvea (1505-1566).<sup>169</sup>

These examples give Calvin's opponents a face. The polemical tone of Calvin's additions in the 1550 edition of the *Institutes* can be explained from a rhetorical perspective. This is possibly also the reason why Calvin called his opponents "atheists," although it is unlikely that they denied the existence of God. In his polemical writings the term atheist functions as a broad category to describe people whom Calvin considered dangerous to the faith.<sup>170</sup> For Calvin atheism mostly meant "practical atheism," the idea that God does not intervene with human affairs.<sup>171</sup> In some cases, however, he approached the modern meaning of the term atheism. In the *Institutes* he suggested that in the past and present some people denied that God existed although they felt an inkling of what they did not want to believe.<sup>172</sup>

Calvin was not the only Reformer who dealt with skeptical humanism. Andreas Osiander (1498-1552) for example also wrote a book in 1545 titled *On the Mockers of the Word of God* in which he wrote that some people mocked and defied the whole Word of

<sup>166</sup> M.A. Screech, *Rabelais*, London 1979, 315.

<sup>167</sup> W. Schröder, 'Bonaventure des Périers und Geoffroy Vallée. Zwei "Ertz-Atheisten" des 16. Jahrhunderts und ihre Wiedergänger in der Aufklärung,' in *Atheismus im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance*, ed. F. Niewöhner and O. Pluta, Wiesbaden 1999, 173-192, 185.

<sup>168</sup> W. Börner, *Das "Cymbalum mundi" des Bonaventure Des Périers: eine Satire auf die Redep Praxis im Zeitalter der Glaubensspaltung*, Munich 1980, 207.

<sup>169</sup> Bohatec, *Budé und Calvin*, 231-239. Cf. Calvin, *Des scandales*, 139-140, n. 249.

<sup>170</sup> Cf. Jones, *Calvin and the Rhetoric of Piety*, 171. According to Calvin, Servet charged all whom he called Trinitarians with being atheists (*atheos*). Calvin, *Institutes* 1.3.22, OS 3,137. On the meaning of the term "atheist" for Calvin cf. F. Berriot, *Athéismes et athéistes au xvi<sup>e</sup> siècle en France*, Lille 1984, 594-609.

<sup>171</sup> There is some discussion whether "atheism" in the modern sense of the word can be found in the early Renaissance. Some argue that questioning the existence of God was impossible in the conceptual framework of medieval cosmology. P.O. Kristeller, 'The Myth of Renaissance Atheism and the French Tradition of Free Thought,' *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 6 (1968), 233-243. Cf. Jones, *Calvin and the Rhetoric of Piety*, 173-174, 184, n. 31. Others have a broader definition of atheism. Cf. Schröder, 'Bonaventure des Périers,' 173-174.

<sup>172</sup> "Tametsi enim extiterunt olim nonnulli, et hodie non pauci emergunt qui Deum esse negent: velint tamen nolint, quod nescire cupiunt, subinde sentiscunt." Calvin, *Institutes* 1.3.2, OS 3, 38-39. Cf. Jones, *Calvin and the Rhetoric of Piety*, 170.

God and everything that is or is called religion.<sup>173</sup> It is not clear from the text who Osiander's opponents were, but they probably must be sought in the same circle of skeptical humanism as Calvin's opponents.<sup>174</sup> Bullinger also said that the trustworthiness of Scripture must be maintained and that it should not be allowed that "the indubitable truth of the Scriptures be doubted by the unbelieving voices of mockers."<sup>175</sup>

There is no fundamental change in Calvin's thought on the relation between the testimony of the Spirit and the authority of Scripture for believers in 1550, but the function of the *argumenta* does change. In 1539 they were posterior arguments to confirm faith, but in 1550 they are proofs for the authority of Scripture. This change is caused by Calvin's polemic against skepticism. In 1539 the arguments formed a safeguard for believers against enthusiasm, now they are used to demonstrate the authority of Scripture to skeptical humanists and leave them without excuse. Even if the arguments were not convincing for the skeptics themselves, at least they served as ammunition against their attacks. Calvin also intended to win the sympathy of moderate humanists by taking away the "scandals" caused by the skepticism of the radical humanists. This is the reason why Calvin discusses the authority of Scripture in the 1550 edition of the *Institutes* more independently of the work of the Spirit.

In 1550 Calvin maintains and even underlines that the *testimonium* is absolutely necessary for true faith. In one of his minor additions he says: "those who want to prove to unbelievers that Scripture is the Word of God, act foolishly, for without faith this cannot be known."<sup>176</sup> Still the emphasis in Calvin's concept changes; the expansion of the secondary arguments influences the coherence of the *maiestas* and *testimonium*, because the *maiestas* of Scripture can be proved by them without the *testimonium*.<sup>177</sup> In 1550 a new and important question is carried into the discussion: Does Scripture have authority without the *testimonium*? Calvin maintains that the *testimonium* is necessary for faith, but there are enough proofs for the *maiestas* of Scripture at hand to take away every excuse. The confrontation with skepticism changed the character of the *argumenta*. The tension between the independent authority of Scripture for believers

<sup>173</sup> A. Osiander, *Von den Spöttern des Wortes Gottes* (1545), in A. Osiander, *Schriften und Briefe April 1543 bis Ende 1548*, ed. G. Müller [Gesamtausgabe, vol. 8], Gütersloh 1990, 380-423, 386. Cf. W. Möller, *Andreas Osiander: Leben und ausgewählte Schriften*, Elberfeld 1870, 273.

<sup>174</sup> G. Zimmermann 'Einleitung,' in Osiander, *Schriften und Briefe April 1543 bis Ende 1548*, 380-383, 381.

<sup>175</sup> "nec unquam permittendum ut indubitata scripturarum ueritas, irreligiosis uocibus uocetur in dubiam." H. Bullinger, *Ad Ioannis Cochlei de Canonicae Scripturae*, 1544 Tiguri [Zurich], 5b. Cf. Koch, *Theologie der Confessio Helvetica Posterior*, 27, n. 21.

<sup>176</sup> "Sed inepte faciunt qui probari volunt infidelibus, Scripturam esse verbum Dei: quod nisi fide, cognosci nequit." *OS* 3, 81. Calvin adds a quote from Augustine's *De utilitate credendi*, who says that godliness and peace of mind ought to come first. This reference is somewhat strange, because Augustine's words refer to Honoratus, who is not a Christian. Augustine, *De utilitate credendi*, *PL* 42:92.

<sup>177</sup> The tendency to treat the majesty of Scripture and the witness of the Spirit complementarily, appears in Calvin's 1548 commentary on 2 Timothy, where he states that although the majesty of God is displayed in Scripture, only those who are illuminated by the Spirit have eyes to perceive what ought to be visible to all. "Nam utcunque illic Dei maiestas se ostendat: non tamen habent oculos nisi qui sunt a spiritu sancto illuminati, ut cernant quod omnibus quidem esse debebat, solis tamen electis est conspicuum." Commentary on 2 Tim. 3,16, *CO* 52, 383.

and the theoretical possibility of proving Scripture to skeptics must be kept in mind in the examination of the final edition of the *Institutes*.

## 2.4 The Introduction of Αὐτόπιστος (*Institutes* 1559)

It is time to turn to the meaning of αὐτόπιστος, that is first found in the *Institutes* in an addition to the final edition. The question rises why Calvin adds the passage and why he introduces the term. Does αὐτόπιστος constitute a new element in his discussion of Scripture? We are interested in its relationship to the text of the previous editions and in the reason why he uses αὐτόπιστος now, while he was familiar with the term at least since 1543. To answer our questions we will look at the structure of the final edition of this part of the *Institutes*, carefully examine the phrase in which αὐτόπιστος occurs, consider the French translation, and, finally, we will compare what we have found with a few other additions in 1559.

### 2.4.1 The Structure of the Section on Scripture

Calvin restructured the *Institutes* in 1559, dividing it into four books and subdividing the books into chapters with a title.<sup>178</sup> Scripture is discussed in chapters 6 to 9 of the first book *De Cognitione Dei Creatoris*. The chapter headings illustrate the train of Calvin's thought. Calvin explains why the *cognitio Dei* is his central theme (1-2), how this *cognitio* cannot be attained (3-5), and how it can be attained (6-9). The *cognitio Dei* implanted in our minds is insufficient to salvation, because it is corrupted by ignorance and malice and therefore Scripture is necessary. The title of chapter 6 reads: "For anyone coming to God the Creator, Scripture is necessary as guide and teacher."<sup>179</sup> Calvin's first point is that Scripture is necessary. The knowledge of God revealed in the creation and government of the world makes everyone inexcusable, but does not lead to clear knowledge of God. We need a different guide and teacher. The heading of chapter 7 is: "By which testimony Scripture must be sanctioned, namely of the Spirit; so that its authority is certain and that it is impious to say that its trustworthiness depends on the judgment of the church."<sup>180</sup> This chapter heading is formulated from a believer's point of view. In the French translation the pronoun "*nous*" is added twice. Scripture must be approved to us by the testimony of the Spirit so that we hold its authority for certain.<sup>181</sup> There is no doubt that with "*nous*" Calvin means believers. Calvin who was trained as a lawyer, rhetorically contrasts two legal terms here: the *iudicium* of the church and the *testimonium* of the Spirit. Rome claims the role of a judge and makes Scripture depend on human judgment. For Calvin the Spirit is not a judge but a witness that testifies to Scripture. The *testimonium* is not exalted above Scripture itself, but it sanctions (*sancire*) and confirms (*constare*) its authority.

---

<sup>178</sup> On the structure of the subsequent editions of the *Institutes* cf. Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin*, 118-139. A well known change in the final Latin edition is the disconnection of providence and predestination. Muller, however, states that it is anachronistic to draw doctrinal conclusions from this change. Muller, *Unaccommodated Calvin*, 135.

<sup>179</sup> "Ut ad Deum creatorem quis perveniat, opus esse Scriptura duce et magistra." *OS* 3, 60.

<sup>180</sup> "Quo testimonio scripturam oporteat sanciri, nempe Spiritus: ut certa constet eius autoritas: atque impium esse commentum, fidem eius pendere ab Ecclesiae iudicio." *OS* 3, 65.

<sup>181</sup> "Par quels tesmoignages il faut que l'Ecriture nous soit approuvée, à ce que nous tenions son autorité certaine, assavoir du Saint Esprit." Calvin, Benoit, *Institution* 1, 92.

In the heading of chapter 8 Calvin states: “There are enough proofs at hand, which are sufficiently firm as far as human reason goes, to consolidate the trustworthiness of Scripture.”<sup>182</sup> Calvin makes explicit that the *probationes* are strong enough to confirm the authority of Scripture as far as *humana ratio* goes. The expression *humana ratio* is used by Calvin in the *Institutes* in a negative context and placed in opposition to faith.<sup>183</sup> Calvin states that the *probationes* confirm – Calvin uses the verb *stabilire* – the trustworthiness of Scripture, they show that Scripture is indubitable.<sup>184</sup> This indicates that the *probationes* have a place independent of the *testimonium*, they do not give true certainty, but they confirm the trustworthiness of Scripture to human reason. In 1559 Calvin uses the term *probatio* for the first time in this context next to *argumentum* and *ratio* that he used in the former editions. A *probatio* is a demonstration by trial or examination, while an *argumentum* has a wider semantic range; it is a means by which a supposition can be made clear.<sup>185</sup> This implies that Calvin does not draw back from his shift in emphasis in this final edition. Although the *testimonium* of the Spirit remains necessary to gain absolute certainty regarding Scripture, Calvin also wants to establish its authority independently from the *testimonium* of the Spirit.

Chapter 9 is directed against the “Spiritual Libertines” and is titled: “All the principles of piety are cast down by fanatics, who neglect Scripture and fly to revelation.”<sup>186</sup> By “revelation” Calvin means their own fantasies, presented under the appearance of the revelations of the Spirit.<sup>187</sup> In brief, the subject is divided into four main points.

1. Scripture is necessary to know God.
2. The *testimonium* is necessary to establish the authority of Scripture.
3. The *probationes* are firm enough to confirm Scripture to human reason.
4. Scripture must not be neglected in favor of fantastic revelations.

Each of these chapters contains some pieces of the text in the 1539 edition. Still the original train of thought has changed. The idea that the proofs as such are strong enough to confirm Scripture apart from the *testimonium* is a new element that originated in the 1550 edition. The main question in 1539 was how the acceptance of Scripture and the work of the Spirit were interrelated for believers. In 1550 a new question, prompted by the discussion with skeptical humanists, complicated the train of thought. The new question was how the authority of Scripture could be maintained in general. Now we will see how Calvin deals with the original problem and this new issue in the final edition of the *Institutes* and how that is related to the introduction of αὐτόπιστος. There

<sup>182</sup> “Probationes, quatenus fert humana ratio, satis firmas suppetere ad stabiliendam Scripturae fidem.” *OS* 3, 71.

<sup>183</sup> Cf. Calvin, *Institutes* 1.14.2, *OS* 3, 154. Calvin, *Institutes* 2.2.18, *OS* 260-261. For a more neutral sense, however, cf. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.10.6, *OS* 4, 181. Calvin, *Institutes* 4.17.24, *OS* 5, 375-376.

<sup>184</sup> The French translation has: “Qu’il y a des preuves assez certaines, entant que la raison humaine le porte, pour rendre l’Ecriture indubitable.” Calvin, Benoit, *Institution* 1, 100.

<sup>185</sup> Sometimes *argumentum* simply stands for ‘topic.’ Lewis and Short, *Latin Dictionary*, 159, 1449. Cf. P.G.W. Glare, ed., *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, Oxford 1982, 168, 1464. There both terms are translated as ‘proof’ but with a difference in nuance.

<sup>186</sup> “Omnia pietatis principia evertere fanaticos, qui posthabita Scriptura, ad revelationem transvolant.” *OS* 3, 81.

<sup>187</sup> Cf. Calvin, Benoit, *Institution* 1, 112.

seems to be a contradiction between the fact that Scripture is αὐτόπιστος and still can be proved by *probationes*. How can Calvin say that Scripture is not subject to proofs and demonstrations and at the same time offer these proofs and demonstrations abundantly? And how are the *testimonium* and the term αὐτόπιστος connected to each other? To answer these questions we will analyze the sentence in which Calvin uses the word αὐτόπιστος in the Latin edition and French translation and interpret it from the context.

#### 2.4.2 Analysis of the Use of Αὐτόπιστος

The Latin text of the first sentence of *Institutes* 1.7.5 has a complicated syntax, which makes it difficult to translate it correctly. Because the meaning of αὐτόπιστος depends on the syntax we will parse the whole sentence. The sentence is divided into five parts: a principal clause and four following AcI-constructions (*Accusativus cum Infinitivo*).

1. Maneat ergo hoc fixum,
2. quos Spiritus sanctus intus docuit, solide acquiescere in Scriptura,
3. et hanc quidem esse αὐτόπιστον,
4. neque demonstrationi et rationibus subiici eam fas esse;
5. quam tamen meretur apud nos certitudinem, Spiritus testimonio consequi.

The four AcI-constructions can be linked together in different ways. The meaning of the clauses as such is rather clear, but it is difficult to decide how they are related to each other. The meaning of the conjunctions: *et*, *neque* and *quidem ... tamen* is essential for the right understanding of the whole sentence and of αὐτόπιστος in particular. A comparison of three translations can be helpful to analyze the Latin text.

J. Allen (1813) has:

Let it be considered, then, as an undeniable truth,  
that they who have been inwardly taught by the Spirit, feel an entire acquiescence in the Scripture,  
and that it is self-authenticated, carrying with it its own evidence,  
and ought not to be made the subject of demonstration and arguments from reason;  
but it obtains the credit which it deserves with us by the testimony of the Spirit.<sup>188</sup>

H. Beveridge (1845-1846) has:

Let it therefore be held as fixed,  
that those who are inwardly taught by the Holy Spirit acquiesce implicitly in Scripture;  
that Scripture carrying its own evidence along with it,  
deigns not to submit to proofs and arguments,  
but owes the full conviction with which we ought to receive it to the testimony of the Spirit.<sup>189</sup>

F.L. Battles (1960) has:

Let this point therefore stand:  
that those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught truly rest upon Scripture,  
and that Scripture indeed is self-authenticated;  
hence, it is not right to subject it to proof and reasoning.  
And the certainty it deserves with us, it attains by the testimony of the Spirit.<sup>190</sup>

The first line is the principal clause on which the other lines depend. The differences in the force of the translation indicate a difficulty in the Latin text. Is the self-convincing

<sup>188</sup> J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. J. Allen, 6th ed., vol. 1, Philadelphia 1921, 79-80.

<sup>189</sup> J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. H. Beveridge, vol. 1, Edinburgh 1845, 95.

<sup>190</sup> Calvin, Battles, *Institutes* 1, 80.

character of Scripture to be “considered as an undeniable truth,” “held as fixed,” or is it a “point that we have to let stand”? In the second line the word “acquiescence” or “rest” is intriguing. What is the proper translation of *solide acquiescere*: “to feel an entire acquiescence,” “to acquiesce implicitly,” or “to rest truly”? The third line gives several translations of the term αὐτόπιστος. Beveridge and Battles both seem to depend on Allen, who gives a double description of the term. The fourth clause is also translated differently. Calvin uses a singular and a plural noun (*demonstratio et rationes*). The last line also has some difficulties. Scripture “deserves credit” or “certainty” or “ought to be received with full conviction.” It deserves this “with us” or “we ought to receive it” this way. Scripture however also “obtains it by,” “attains it by” or “owes it to” the testimony of the Spirit. There is a tension between what Scripture deserves and what it receives. The greatest difficulty in the Latin sentence, however, appears when we compare the way in which the five clauses are connected. The first connection is clear: “let it stand, *that...*” The second connection is unanimously translated by a coordinating conjunction that places the third clause next to the second: “let it also stand, that Scripture is αὐτόπιστος.” The fourth clause is connected to the third by Beveridge who uses a present participle and by Battles who uses “hence”; this connection is a little looser in Allen’s translation by “and.” The connection of the fourth and fifth clauses is either antithetic, by the use of “but” (Allen and Beveridge) or concessive, a new sentence beginning with “And” (Battles).

I will first give my own translation and then make a few remarks on the meaning of the words and the syntax of the sentence.

1. Maneat ergo hoc fixum,
2. quos Spiritus sanctus intus docuit, solide acquiescere in Scriptura,
3. et hanc quidem esse αὐτόπιστον,
4. neque demonstrationi et rationibus subiici eam fas esse;
5. quam tamen meretur apud nos certitudinem, Spiritus testimonio consequi.

Let this therefore stand:

those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught, truly find rest in Scripture;

it is indeed αὐτόπιστος

– it should not be submitted to demonstration by proofs –

while it still owes the certainty that it deserves among us to the testimony of the Spirit.

1. The first clause *maneat ergo hoc fixum* is typical for Calvin’s logical discourse; it summarizes what was demonstrated before and introduces a conclusion as the use of *ergo* shows. The use of the subjunctive mood (*maneat*) indicates an appeal to the reader. In his rhetorical style Calvin often first makes a statement, then discusses the objections or gives a nuance and then picks up his point with the expression “Let this therefore stand.”<sup>191</sup> In the previous paragraph (1.7.4) Calvin says that the highest proof (*probatio*) for Scripture is the fact that God himself speaks in it. Therefore we ought to seek our

<sup>191</sup> Calvin uses *hoc fixum maneat* with an infinitive construction more often. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes* 2.6.4, *OS* 3, 325. Calvin, *Institutes* 2.7.16, *OS* 3, 341. Calvin, *Institutes* 4.17.15, *OS* 5, 362. In these cases the phrase introduces a conclusion after the discussion of the nuances or objections; drawing back on what was said before.

conviction in the secret testimony of the Spirit, if we desire to provide in the best way for our consciences. Then follows the nuance or the objection, where Calvin explains the function of the arguments, but maintains that the *testimonium* is necessary. Here he returns to his main point and summarizes his position in a conclusion in the opening sentence of the new paragraph in which he explains what the *testimonium* is.

2. Calvin continues with *quos Spiritus sanctus intus docuit, solide acquiescere in Scriptura*. True certainty of Scripture belongs only to those whom the Spirit has taught. The perfect tense (*docuit*) indicates that the teaching of the Spirit leads to the acquiescence in Scripture. The work of the Spirit is described as “teaching.” This is a common metaphor for Calvin. The Spirit is our *Doctor internus* and Christ, through his Spirit, is our *interior Magister*.<sup>192</sup> At the background of the use of this metaphor stands the claim of the *magisterium* of the Catholic Church. According to Calvin, not the institutional church, but the Spirit is the teacher of the true meaning of Scripture. In the chapter heading of 1.6 Calvin called Scripture the guide and teacher (*dux et magistra*) for the true knowledge of God. This shows how closely Scripture and Spirit are connected to each other; Spirit and Scripture both are teachers.<sup>193</sup> The Spirit is the *Doctor* and the Scriptures contain the *doctrina*. The way in which this teaching takes place, is called *intus*. Calvin uses this term more often for the work of the Spirit; the Spirit teaches us inwardly (*intus docere*). The Holy Spirit teaches believers inwardly to love what pleases God and to hate what displeases him.<sup>194</sup> God works in his elect in two ways, inwardly (*intus*) by the Spirit and outwardly (*extra*) by the Word.<sup>195</sup> Calvin uses the verb *acquiescere* for the certainty of faith. The verb does not indicate a state of rest, but a movement towards rest (*ad-quiescere*). Therefore we have translated it by “finding rest” in Scripture. *Acquiescere* occurs more than 50 times in the *Institutes*. This verb is important for the meaning of ἀυτόπιστος and will be discussed in our examination of Calvin’s commentaries. *Solide* can be translated as ‘truly’ or ‘completely’; it also has the connotation of ‘certainly.’

3. Then Calvin introduces the term ἀυτόπιστος: *et hanc quidem esse αυτόπιστον*. The accusative case (ἀυτόπιστον) is used here because of the AcI construction. In this study we normally use it in the nominative case ἀυτόπιστος. We have not translated the term, because it is a Greek word in a Latin text. Calvin did not choose a Latin equivalent, perhaps because the term ἀυτόπιστος is linked with πίστις. The meaning of *et* is very important here. The last three AcI clauses are held together by *quidem ... tamen*; therefore *et* connects the second clause with the following three. If *et* is explained as a coordinating conjunction, then the fact that believers find rest in Scripture is independent of the fact that Scripture is ἀυτόπιστος. This is the way in which the sentence is usually understood. The conjunction *et* can also introduce an

<sup>192</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 3.1.4, OS 4, 5-6. Calvin also calls the Spirit the *interior magister*. Calvin, *Institutes* 2.2.20, OS 3, 262.

<sup>193</sup> Elsewhere Calvin calls Scripture the school of the Spirit. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.21.3, OS 4, 372.

<sup>194</sup> “in summa, nequid ex nobis velimus ipsi, sed ut Spiritus eius corda nostra gubernet, quo intus docente discamus amare quae ei placent, odisse vero quae displicent.” Calvin, *Institutes* 3.20.43, OS 4, 355. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes* 2.5.5, OS 3, 303.

<sup>195</sup> “Bifariam Deus in electis suis operatur: intus, per Spiritum: extra, per verbum.” Calvin, *Institutes* 2.5.5, OS 3, 303.



explanation. Then the last three clauses explain how believers find rest in Scripture. This is the way in which we understand the sentence and therefore we have not translated *et* with “and.”

4. In the fourth clause Calvin turns to the proofs or arguments that he has discussed in the former paragraph, “neque demonstrationi et rationibus subiici eam fas esse.” This clause is connected to αὐτόπιστος by the conjunction *neque* that is explanatory here: αὐτόπιστος means that Scripture is not subject to rational demonstration. *Demonstratio* is singular, while *rationes* is plural; both words form a unity. Calvin means a logical argumentation (*demonstratio*) by proofs (*rationes*). That Scripture is not submitted to such a rational argumentation does not mean that there are no *rationes* for Scripture, but that Scripture does not depend on them. The literal translation of *fas* is ‘according to the divine order.’ Calvin mostly uses the expression to indicate that something is forbidden by God.<sup>196</sup> The meaning here is that it is wrong to do so.

5. The final clause is the most difficult one; “quam tamen meretur apud nos certitudinem, Spiritus testimonio consequi.” For Calvin *certitudo* is related to *fides*; Calvin contrasts *certitudo fidei* with *securitas carnis*.<sup>197</sup> *Certitudo* can be translated as assurance or certainty; it means certainty here, because of the connection to *mereri*, but the connotation of assurance should not be forgotten. That Scripture deserves *certitudo* means that it deserves to be received and believed. Calvin uses the expression *apud nos* to express the personal side of faith in the Word of God. Our mind must be enlightened and our heart confirmed, so that “the Word of God may gain full credit with us.”<sup>198</sup> If we praise God in all his works, “Scripture will receive its just authority with us.”<sup>199</sup> The use of *apud nos* here shows that Scripture is αὐτόπιστος for believers. The expression should not be explained in the sense that Scripture has authority *in se* (αὐτόπιστος) but must gain authority *apud nos* by the *testimonium*.<sup>200</sup> As we will see, the term αὐτόπιστος is often connected with *apud nos* or another expression that stresses the personal side of the authority of Scripture. Scripture deserves (*meretur*) certainty and this certainty is a consequence of the Spirit’s testimony. *Consequi* is the passive infinitive and is

<sup>196</sup> Cf. Calvin, *Institutes* 1.11.12, OS 3, 101. Calvin, *Institutes* 2.12.5, OS 3, 442.

<sup>197</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 3.2.11, OS 4, 21. Cf. the connection of *certitudo* and *fides* in Calvin, *Institutes* 3.2.14, OS 4, 25 and Calvin, *Institutes* 3.2.17, OS 4, 27. *Securitas*, however, is not always used negatively by Calvin; not all security is carnal security, sometimes Calvin even speaks of the security of faith. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.2.22, OS 4, 32.

<sup>198</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 3.2.7, OS 4, 16. “Itaque aliunde et mentem illuminari, et cor obfirmari convenit, quo Dei verbum plenam apud nos fidem obtineat.”

<sup>199</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 3.20.41, OS 4, 351. “Ita fiet ut Scriptura iustam apud nos auctoritatem obtineat.” Calvin uses expressions as “auctoritatem habere apud nos,” “apud nos maiestatem sanciri.” Calvin, *Institutes* 1.9.2, OS 3, 83. He also uses “fidem obtinere apud nos.” Calvin, *Institutes* 3.14.7, OS 4, 226.

<sup>200</sup> K. Heim suggests that the *testimonium* is subjective (*apud nos*), while the *autopistia* of Scripture is objective (*in se*). “Einerseits erscheint die Autopistie nur als ein neuer Ausdruck für die aller Demonstration enthobene Vergewisserungsweise des Geisteszeugnisses. Andererseits rückt sie als neues primäres Prinzip vor das *testimonium* und drückt dieses, sofern es von ihm unterscheidbar ist, zu einem bloßen subjectiven Aneignungsmittel (*apud nos*) der an sich feststehenden Autopistie der Schrift herab.” Heim, *Gewißheitsproblem*, 277. Krusche follows this interpretation. Krusche, *Wirken des Heiligen Geistes*, 208.

connected to *hanc* (that refers to *scriptura*) in an AcI-clause.<sup>201</sup> It indicates that Scripture attains or obtains or is followed by *certitudo* as a consequence. Scripture leads to certainty through the testimony of the Spirit; *testimonio* is in the ablative case and denotes the means by which Scripture attains *certitudo*. Finally the use of *quidem ... tamen* is most important for the meaning of αὐτόπιστος. What does Calvin mean when he says that Scripture is αὐτόπιστος and that the *testimonium* is necessary? How strong is the contrast between the two? It is possible that *quidem* and *tamen* are simply two independent words; then *quidem* means ‘indeed’ or ‘for sure.’ Believers find rest in Scripture, that is indeed αὐτόπιστος. *Tamen* then only underlines the necessity of the *testimonium* and can be translated as ‘only’ or ‘after all.’ In the end true certainty is a consequence of the *testimonium*. This solution, however, is not probable because Calvin uses the *quidem ... tamen* construction in other places to indicate a slight contrast and because the sentence that follows also expresses a similar contrast. What is the exact meaning of *quidem ... tamen*? It is significant that Calvin does not choose the conjunction *sed*.<sup>202</sup> Nor does he use a strong concessive construction like *quanvis ... tamen* or *etsi ... tamen*.<sup>203</sup> In both cases the contrast between the *testimonium* and αὐτόπιστος would be much larger. *Tamen* indicates that not everything is said, there is more to say than what the *quidem* clause contains.<sup>204</sup> The translation ‘indeed ... while still’ is chosen to express this slight contrast. With the fact that Scripture is αὐτόπιστος not everything is said of its authority. The word αὐτόπιστος characterizes Scripture for believers, but this does not take away the fact that the *testimonium* is necessary to discern its authority. Scripture is independent of any demonstration; still it only receives faith through the *testimonium*. Scripture is αὐτόπιστος, still it is only through the Spirit that this can be recognized. Because *et* in the third clause has an explanatory meaning, *acquiescere in Scriptura* is as well explained by αὐτόπιστος as by *testimonium Spiritus*. The fact that Scripture is self-convincing does not make the testimony of the Spirit superfluous. Believers find rest in it because it is αὐτόπιστος to them through the testimony of the Spirit. So αὐτόπιστος and *testimonium* do not stand over against each

<sup>201</sup> Cf. Calvin, *Institutes* 2.5.11, *OS* 3, 311. “scimus pios, dum adversus Satanam militant, non aliis quam Dei armis victoriam consequi.” This is also an AcI clause. “The pious” attain “the victory” through the “weaponry of God.”

<sup>202</sup> He uses *quidem ... sed* in cases of strong contrast. “Deum quidem esse noverant [...] sed propinquum sibi esse non confidebant.” Calvin, *Institutes* 1.11.8, *OS* 3, 97. Citing Augustine he says: “Liberum quidem esse arbitrium, sed non liberatum.” Calvin, *Institutes* 2.2.8, *OS* 3, 250-251.

<sup>203</sup> Concessive clauses are most frequently expressed by a dependent clause introduced by a concessive particle that can be translated as: ‘although’ or ‘granting that.’ The concessive force lies chiefly in the conjunctions, and is often made clearer by an adversative particle (*tamen*, *certe*) in the main clause. The concessive particles are *quamvis*, *ut*, *licet*, *etsi*, *tametsi*, *etiam si*, *quamquam*, and *cum*. Cf. J.H. Allen and J.B. Greenough, ed., *New Latin Grammar for Schools and Colleges*, revised ed., Boston 1931, § 526, 527. Calvin mostly uses *etsi ... tamen*, *quanvis ... tamen* or *quamquam ... tamen*. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes* 1.5.13, *OS* 3, 58.

<sup>204</sup> This use of *quidem ... tamen* occurs for a second time in this same paragraph, when Calvin deals with the convincing power of Scripture: “qua ad parendum, scientes quidem ac volentes, vividius tamen et efficacius quam pro humana aut voluntate, aut scientia trahimur et accendimur.” Calvin, *Institutes* 1.7.5, *OS* 3, 71.

other, but are as closely related as the two sides of the same coin, or rather as two surfaces of a lens.

One of the reasons why *quidem ... tamen* is often interpreted as a strong contrast is the sentence that follows immediately in *Institutes* 1.7.5.<sup>205</sup> It is the third part of the original sentence of 1539. *Etsi enim reverentiam sua sibi ultro maiestate conciliat, tunc tamen demum serio nos afficit quum per Spiritum obsignata est cordibus nostris.* In 1539 Calvin referred to believers as those who are overwhelmed by the majesty of God in Scripture. Scripture has an intrinsic authority that is seen and tasted by believers, still Scripture only then really (*tunc demum*) impresses us seriously when it is sealed by the Spirit to our hearts. The authority of Scripture is founded in the majesty of Scripture itself, and to understand that or to be touched by that, it must be sealed to our hearts by the Spirit.<sup>206</sup> The sentence in the 1539 edition does not refer to the authority of Scripture in general, but to the authority that it has when it is sealed by the Spirit. In the 1559 edition the statement that Scripture “wins reverence for itself by its own majesty” is often understood against the background of Calvin’s claim that he could easily prove Scripture if necessary and *αὐτόπιστος* is also often understood in this way. Although Calvin says that Scripture does not rest on demonstration by proofs, *αὐτόπιστος* is related to the objective and general authority of Scripture. The term, however, does not refer to the authority of Scripture that can be proved – on the contrary, *αὐτόπιστος* means: not subject to demonstration by proofs – but it refers to the “intrinsic” authority of Scripture that gives a sense of its own truth just as white and black things of their color and sweet and bitter things of their taste. That authority is sensed by all those whom the Spirit has taught and by them only. The term *αὐτόπιστος* refers to the intrinsic majesty of Scripture that is only discerned by faith through the *testimonium* of the Spirit. Calvin uses the term *αὐτόπιστος* to express his original position regarding the intrinsic *maiestas* of Scripture. Believers find rest in Scripture because it is *αὐτόπιστος* and they recognize this self-convincing authority through the teaching of the Spirit.

#### 2.4.3 The French Translation (1560)

Calvin’s authorship of this final French translation was formerly disputed, but is now commonly accepted.<sup>207</sup> Calvin gives the following French translation of the sentence in

---

<sup>205</sup> In Reformed orthodoxy, the distinction of the authority of Scripture *apud nos* and *in se* is quite common, but this must not be read anachronistically into the *Institutes*. This was done already in Reformed orthodoxy. In his summary of Calvin’s *Institutes*, John Piscator (1546-1625) says that Scripture deserves faith from all as *αὐτόπιστος*, but that still the Spirit must sanctify it in our hearts to establish its authority as certain to us. J. Piscator, *Aphorismi doctrinae christianae*, Herborn 1589, 16.

<sup>206</sup> Calvin uses the verb *obsignare* to indicate the work of the Spirit regarding true faith in this same paragraph: “veram demum esse fidem quam Spiritus Dei cordibus nostris obsignat.” Calvin, *Institutes* 1.7.5, OS 3, 71. We find the same tension in his definition of faith; the sure *cognitio* of faith is founded in the promises and sealed by the Spirit. Faith is “divinae erga nos benevolentiae firmam certamque cognitionem, quae gratuita in Christo promissionis veritate fundata, per Spiritum sanctum et revelatur mentibus nostris et cordibus obsignatur.” Calvin, *Institutes* 3.2.7, OS 4, 16.

<sup>207</sup> J.W. Marmelstein, *Étude comparative des textes latins et français de l’Institution de la Religion Chrestienne par Jean Calvin*, Groningen, 1921, 5-24, 60-66. Cf. F. Wendel, *Calvin: sources et*

1560:

1. Ainsi que ce poinct nous soit résolu,
2. qu'il n'y a que celui que le saint Esprit aura enseigné qui se repose en l'Ecriture en droite fermeté,
3. et combien qu'elle porte avec soy sa créance pour estre receue sans contredit
4. et n'estre submise a proeues ou argumens,
5. toutesfois que c'est par le tesmoignage de l'Ecriture qu'elle obtient la certitude qu'elle mérite.<sup>208</sup>

Calvin says that there is no one, except those whom the Spirit instructs, that repose in Scripture in the right way. In Latin the sentence could be read as a general remark: the teaching of the Spirit leads to rest in Scripture. The French translation makes clear that Calvin wants to say that only true believers really repose in Scripture. *Acquiescere* is translated with the reflexive verb “se reposer”, which means ‘to rest on’ or ‘to rely on.’

The translation of αὐτόπιστος is interesting for us. Scripture carries its own “créance” with it. The French translation confirms that αὐτόπιστος has two sides: a truth-side and a trust-side. *Créance* in French means trust or trustworthiness, just as the Greek πίστις from which αὐτόπιστος is derived. Scripture is trustworthy enough to be received without any objection. “Sans contredit” underlines the logical meaning of αὐτόπιστος: there is nothing above or behind Scripture. The use of the verb *recevoir* indicates the trust-side of αὐτόπιστος; the authority of Scripture must be accepted by us.

*Quidem ... tamen* is translated with the words “combien ... toutesfois” which have a concessive meaning. This translation makes it difficult to interpret *quidem ... tamen* as independent words; it underlines the unity of the last three clauses in the Latin edition. In a concessive construction the concessive clause describes something that normally would not be joined with the governing clause. There seems to be a contradiction, but still both things go together. Although Scripture carries its *créance* with it, still it only gains certainty through the testimony of the Spirit. The testimony of the Spirit is not the reason why believers repose in Scripture, but it is by the testimony (“par le tesmoignage”) that Scripture is accepted with the right steadfastness. Believers find rest in Scripture because it is αὐτόπιστος and through the *testimonium* of the Spirit.

It is remarkable that the Latin *apud nos* is not translated; this underlines that the use of *apud nos* does not imply that Scripture has a general authority in itself (*in se*) and only gains authority for us through the work of the Spirit.

Finally, it is strange that *Spiritus testimonium* is translated as “le tesmoignage de l'Ecriture.” This can be translated as the testimony regarding Scripture; sometimes Calvin uses “témoignage de” with a direct object, for example in his *Brève Instruction*, where he says that the catechumens in the early church were baptized after having given “témoignage de leur foi et repentance.”<sup>209</sup> The editors of later editions corrected the text, changing “l'Ecriture” into “l'Esprit.” Most probably they were right that it was a

---

évolution de sa pensée religieuse, Paris, 1950, 85-86. Cf. De Greef, *Johannes Calvijn*, 184. For the differences in style between the earlier and later French and Latin editions cf. O. Millet, *Calvin et la dynamique de la parole: étude de rhétorique réformée*, Paris 1992, 853-870.

<sup>208</sup> Calvin, Benoit, *Institution* 1, 98.

<sup>209</sup> CO 7, 58. Cf. *Institutes* 4.16.15 where the circumcision of infants is called a “tesmoignage de la communication spirituelle avec Christ.” J Calvin, *Institution de la religion chrestienne*, ed. J-D. Benoit, vol. 4, Paris 1961, 352.

mistake, because the original Latin is clear and a typographical mistake is easily made. Still this mistake or Freudian slip illustrates how tightly Scripture and the Spirit are connected. It is the Spirit's witness to Scripture, by which Scripture is believed. The Spirit is not an external witness, but the author of Scripture who still witnesses in the inspired text. Just as Calvin used the expression "testimony of the Spirit" in the first edition of the *Institutes* (1536) to refer to a quotation from Scripture, so in this final French edition he mistakenly uses "testimony of Scripture" for the witness of the Spirit.

#### 2.4.4 *Maiestas* and Αὐτόπιστος

In the 1539 edition of the *Institutes* the *maiestas* of Scripture and the *testimonium* of the Spirit were linked directly together in one sentence, containing three elements: 1. Scripture does not give an obscurer sense of its own truth than white and black things do of their color, or sweet and bitter things do of their taste. 2. If we desire to take care for our consciences in the best way, so that they may not waver by continual doubt, we must derive the authority of Scripture from something higher than human reasons, indications, or conjectures. That is from the inner testifying of the Holy Spirit. 3. Scripture gains reverence for itself by its own majesty, but it only affects us seriously when it is sealed by the Spirit to our hearts.<sup>210</sup>

In the final edition this coherence is easily lost out of sight, because the three sentences are separated. In 1550 Calvin placed a paragraph between the first two parts and in 1559 another paragraph between the second and the third part. In the final Latin edition the first remark is found in the *Institutes* 1.7.2, the second in 1.7.4, and the third in 1.7.5. We will examine a few other additions to the final Latin edition to trace a possible shift in Calvin's concept of the relationship between the *maiestas* of Scripture and the *testimonium* of the Spirit.

At the beginning of *Institutes* 1.7.4 Calvin adds an explicit reference to 1.7.2 to facilitate the shift from Augustine's dictum to the discussion of the *testimonium*. "We should remember, as I said a little before, that the trustworthiness of the *doctrina* is not established until we are persuaded without doubt that God is its Author."<sup>211</sup> The highest proof of Scripture (*summa scripturae probatio*) is the fact that God himself speaks in it. The prophets and apostles appealed to the holy name of God and did not dwell on *rationes*.<sup>212</sup> These terms indicate that Calvin wants to contrast the *testimonium* of the Spirit with rational demonstration.

Calvin also asks how we can know for sure that the claim of the prophets and apostles is true. "Now we ought to see in which way it shows up not only as a probable opinion but as transparent truth (*vertias liquida*), that they do not call upon God's name unfoundedly or deceitfully."<sup>213</sup> Calvin is looking for truth that is "transparent" or as he

<sup>210</sup> OS 3, 67, 69, 70.

<sup>211</sup> "Tenendum quod nuper dixi, non ante stabiliri doctrinae fidem, quam nobis indubie persuasum sit, autorem eius esse Deum." OS 3, 68.

<sup>212</sup> OS 3, 69.

<sup>213</sup> "Nunc videndum quomodo non opinione tantum probabili, sed liquida veritate pateat, non temere, nec fallaciter obtendi Dei nomen." OS 3, 69. *Opinio* and *veritas* were also contrasted in *Institutes* 1.7.3 where Calvin quotes Augustine's *De utilitate credendi*. We should not acquiesce in opinion, but rely on sure and firm truth. OS 3, 68.

already stated in 1539 “truth that is able to sustain itself just by itself.”<sup>214</sup> Calvin answers the question how we can know for sure that the claim of the prophets and apostles is true, by the second part of his original triad:

If we desire to take care for our consciences in the best way, so that they may not be carried around or waver by continual doubt, nor hesitate at the smallest scruples, we must derive this persuasion from something higher than human reasons, indications or conjectures, namely from the secret testimony of the Spirit.<sup>215</sup>

It is remarkable that Calvin changes *scripturae autoritas* (1539) for *haec persuasio* (1559). This change can be explained as an improvement of style, because it falls back on the use of *persuasio* in the first sentence. Still it is illustrative for the careful distinction Calvin is now making between the general authority of Scripture and the persuasion of its authority in the hearts of believers through the *testimonium*. The *testimonium* is the foundation of our persuasion and not of Scripture. Calvin wants ultimate certainty for the conscience. Human reasons, judgments, and conjectures can never satisfy the soul that thirsts for clear and sure truth; instead they would cause perpetual doubt. This is Calvin’s main answer in *Institutes* 1.7.4 to the question why the *testimonium* is necessary.

In the 1559 edition Calvin also deals with an objection, which was prompted by the additions in 1550, namely why the *testimonium* is necessary if it is also possible to prove the authority of Scripture. To meet this objection Calvin adds a substantial part to this paragraph in 1559. In this addition Calvin says that though it is possible to prove the divine origin of Scripture, it is not possible to overcome all opposition in this way. If we want to use arguments it is easy to advance many things that prove (*evincere*) that the law, the prophets and the gospel flow forth from God, if he exists.<sup>216</sup> Unless the opponents are completely hardened “this confession can be wrested from them that there are manifest signs in Scripture that God is speaking, and consequently, that its *doctrina* is from heaven.”<sup>217</sup> Still Calvin is very careful in the way he expresses himself. He uses the word “if” (*si* or *nisi*) a few times: “if” we want to use arguments; “if” there is a God

---

<sup>214</sup> OS 3, 72.

<sup>215</sup> “*Iam si conscientiis optime consultum volumus, ne instabili dubitatione perpetuo circumferantur, aut vacillent, ne etiam haesitent ad minimos quosque scrupulos, altius quam ab humanis vel rationibus, vel iudiciis, vel coniecturis petenda est haec persuasio nempe ab arcano testimonio spiritus.*” OS 3, 69. The italics are the changes in this edition. Cf. the Latin text of 1539: “*Quanquam si conscientiis optime consultum volumus, ne instabili dubitatione perpetuo vacillent, altius petenda, quam ab humanis vel rationibus, vel indicis, vel coniecturis, scripturae autoritas. Nempe ab interiori spiritus sancti testificatione.*” The sound of *arcanus* is more mystical than of *interior*; in *Institutes* 3.1.1 Calvin says that the work of Christ only profits us by the “secret operation” of the Spirit. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.1.1, OS 4, 1. He uses *interior* for the work of the Spirit. By the *interior illuminatio* of his Spirit God causes the Word that is preached to take deep root in the hearts. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.24.8, OS 4, 419. The use of *testimonium* instead of *testificatio* may indicate a preference for *testimonium* as a reference to the witness of the Spirit for Calvin in his later works. *Testificatio* is not used for the work of the Spirit in the 1559 edition of the *Institutes*.

<sup>216</sup> OS 3, 69.

<sup>217</sup> “*extorquebitur illis haec confessio, manifesta signa loquentis Dei conspici in Scriptura, ex quibus pateat caelestem esse eius doctrinam.*” OS 3, 69. Calvin also refers to *Institutes* 1.8.1 where he will show that Scripture surpasses all other writings.

in heaven; “if” they are not hardened. Calvin knows that it is impossible to convince hardened skeptics by arguments only. “If we approach Scripture with pure eyes and honest senses, the majesty of God will immediately meet us, subdue our bold opposition and force us to obey.”<sup>218</sup> If the skeptic were honest and pure there is enough in Scripture itself to convince him of its truth. The *maiestas* of Scripture takes away all the excuses of unbelievers. The *testimonium* is necessary because no one will approach Scripture with pure eyes and honest senses until the Spirit opens his eyes and renews his senses.

In this addition Calvin also says that it is wrong to try to build up solid faith by disputing.<sup>219</sup> The adverb *praepostere* indicates that the use of evidences for this goal is absurd. You can defend God’s holy Word against skeptical slander by disputation, but you cannot imprint the certainty in the hearts that is necessary for true *pietas*.<sup>220</sup> For skeptics religion is only a matter of *opinio* and that is exactly the reason why they insist on rational proof.<sup>221</sup> Calvin does not want to confirm them in this wrong conception. Religion is a matter of *veritas* and not of *opinio*, and therefore something stronger than disputation is necessary.

Calvin finally concludes that the testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than any rational proof.<sup>222</sup> “For as God alone is a competent witness of himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find faith in human hearts until it is sealed by the inner testimony of the Spirit.”<sup>223</sup> Here Calvin compares the testimony of God in Scripture itself with the *interior testimonium* of the Spirit. They are not identical, but they are inseparable. The first is the voice of God in Scripture, the second the voice of God in the hearts of believers. It is the same voice, speaking twice. “Therefore it is necessary that the same Spirit who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets, penetrates into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully delivered what was divinely instructed.”<sup>224</sup> To illustrate the close tie between Word and Spirit, Calvin quotes Isaiah 59,21. “My Spirit that is in you and the words that I have put into your mouth and those of your children shall never fail.”<sup>225</sup> The answer to the question whether Scripture can be proved by reasoning is

<sup>218</sup> “Imo si puros oculos, et integros sensus illuc afferimus, statim occurret Dei maiestas, quae subacta reclamandi audacia, nos sibi parere cogat.” *OS* 3, 69.

<sup>219</sup> “Praepostere tamen faciunt qui disputando contendunt solidam Scripturae fidem adstueri.” *OS* 3, 69.

<sup>220</sup> “Verum si quis sacrum Dei verbum asserat ab hominum maledictis, non protinus tamen quam requirit pietas certitudinem cordibus infiget.” *OS* 3, 69.

<sup>221</sup> *OS* 3, 69-70.

<sup>222</sup> “Atqui testimonium Spiritus omni ratione praestantius esse respondeo.” *OS* 3, 70.

<sup>223</sup> “Nam sicuti Deus solus de se idoneus est testis in suo sermone: ita etiam non ante fidem reperiet sermo in hominum cordibus quam interiore Spiritus testimonio obsignetur.” *OS* 3, 70.

<sup>224</sup> “Idem ergo Spiritus qui per os Prophetarum loquutus est, in corda nostra penetret necesse est, ut persuadeat fideliter protulisse quod divinitus erat mandatum.” *OS* 3, 70. Calvin also uses the verb *penetrare* for the work of the Spirit when he says that the Spirit is the *Doctor internus* by whose work the promise of salvation penetrates into our minds. Calvin *Institutes* 3.1.4, *OS* 4, 5. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.2.34, *OS* 4, 45. The Word cannot penetrate into the mind unless the Spirit, the *interior Magister*, makes an entrance by his illumination.

<sup>225</sup> *OS* 3, 70. He also adds this text to *Institutes* 1.9.1 where he says that it is wrong to separate Word and Spirit. *OS* 3, 82. In his commentary on Isaiah 59,21 he says that the Word must not be separated from the Spirit as fanatics imagine. The spirit of Satan is separated from the Word; the Spirit of God is continually joined to it. *CO* 37, 352.

ambiguous: Calvin states that he could prove it if necessary, but still maintains that a clear *probatio* is not at hand when the impious murmur against God's Word.

As we have seen, the first sentence of *Institutes* 1.7.5 is a summary of paragraph 1.7.4; with the expression *mane at ergo hoc fixum* Calvin returns to the main point of the former paragraph. He has shown why the *testimonium* is necessary in spite of the fact that in theory it is possible to prove Scripture to skeptics. The *testimonium* is not necessary for Scripture itself, but it is necessary for us, to take away all our doubts and grant us true certainty about the divine origin of Scripture.

The main subject of *Institutes* 1.7.5 is the relation between the *maiestas* of Scripture and the *testimonium* of the Spirit. The opening sentence of this paragraph, in which Calvin introduces the term αὐτόπιστος, is new and is immediately followed by the third part of the original triad of 1539. "Although it gains reverence for itself by its own majesty, still it only then really impresses us seriously when it is sealed by the Spirit to our hearts."<sup>226</sup> In 1559 Calvin explains his original intention of the *maiestas* of Scripture by the Greek term αὐτόπιστος. The term *maiestas* could lead to confusion because the majesty of Scripture in theory can also be proved to skeptics. Calvin elaborates this in *Institutes* 1.8. But these proofs lead no further than to a plausible opinion. For believers Scripture must have ultimate authority; it must be independent of any human authority be it in the Church or in the human mind. This ultimate independence of Scripture is the meaning of αὐτόπιστος. The majesty of Scripture can be proved, but the fact that it is αὐτόπιστος cannot be proved; this would even be a contradiction in terms, for αὐτόπιστος means not subject to rational proof. The term αὐτόπιστος explains what Scripture is for those who find rest in it; although it is αὐτόπιστος for them, the acceptance of Scripture is effected through the *testimonium* of the Spirit. The reason why believers find rest in Scripture is that it is αὐτόπιστος; the way in which they find this rest is by the *testimonium*; they find rest in Scripture because it is αὐτόπιστος and through the *testimonium* of the Spirit. The word αὐτόπιστος in the final Latin edition has the same function as *maiestas* in the earlier editions.

Calvin continues this paragraph in the words from the 1539 edition. Illumined by the power of the Spirit, we believe that Scripture is from God. We seek no arguments for our judgment, but subject our judgment to it as to something that is above all doubt. We know for sure that we hold unassailable truth.<sup>227</sup>

This is a persuasion which needs no proofs, this is a knowledge with which the best proof agrees, the mind rests in it more securely and constantly than in any proof, this finally is a feeling that can only be born of heavenly revelation. I say nothing else than what each believer experiences for himself, though my words fall far short to explain the matter.<sup>228</sup>

---

<sup>226</sup> "Etsi enim reverentiam sua sibi ultro maiestate conciliat, tunc tamen demum serio nos afficit, quum per Spiritum obsignata est cordibus nostris." *OS* 3, 70. The Spirit is a *sigillum* and *arrha* to confirm the faith of the pious by illuminating their minds. Calvin also uses *sigillum* and *arrha* with regards to the Spirit of adoption, that is the seal and earnest of the promises. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.2.12, *OS* 4, 22. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.2.36, *OS* 4, 47.

<sup>227</sup> *OS* 3, 70.

<sup>228</sup> "Talis ergo est persuasio quae rationes non requirat; talis notitia, cui optima ratio constet, nempe in qua securius constantiusque mens quiescit quam in ullis rationibus; talis denique sensus, qui nisi ex caelesti revelatione nasci nequeat. Non aliud loquor, quam quod apud se



The other additions to *Institutes* 1.7.5 in 1559 are less important. Calvin adds a few quotations from Scripture, mainly to show that the *testimonium* is a singular privilege of God's elect.<sup>229</sup> He also expands the chapter on the *probationes* (*Institutes* 1.8) with four new paragraphs.<sup>230</sup> Calvin mainly repeats the arguments of the earlier editions and this repetition shows that the evidences still function as a refutation of skeptical humanism. Proud people reject the *simplicitas* of the gospels, the 'sharp-nosed faultfinders' desire to drive the reverence for Scripture from their own and others' hearts, and the 'dogs' deny that the Spirit came down on the apostles and even discredit history, nonetheless, the heavenly majesty revealed in the New Testament writings holds all attached and as it were bound to itself.<sup>231</sup>

## 2.5 Conclusions and Theological Considerations

Calvin discusses the nature of Scripture fully for the first time in the second edition of the *Institutes* (1539), placing it in the context of the knowledge of God. The authority of the church cannot guarantee Scripture, because then faith would rest upon a human judgment. Scripture is the foundation of the church and not the other way round. Answering the question how we can be assured of the divine origin of Scripture without the authority of the church, Calvin answers that Scripture itself gives a sense of its own truth, just as light and dark, white and black, sweet and bitter things do. The persuasion of the authority of Scripture must be sought higher than in human beings, namely in the *interior testificatio* of the Spirit. Scripture gains reverence for itself by its own *maiestas*, but only affects us seriously when the Spirit seals it to our hearts and every believer recognizes this. Arguments for Scripture can never persuade us in and of themselves, but they can be useful once we have embraced Scripture. Calvin uses the word *argumenta* and not *probationes* in 1539. Calvin mentions two arguments: in Scripture the majesty of the truth comes to us in plain words and Scripture is confirmed by the *consensus ecclesiae*. This agreement is not the foundation of Scripture; it is only a posterior argument.

Calvin mentions the arguments next to the *maiestas* and the *testimonium*, because he needs these arguments over against the "Spiritual Libertines," who deny the authority of the Word with an appeal to the Spirit. Calvin cannot found the authority of Scripture exclusively in the testimony of the Spirit without coming too close to their position. Just as the Word must be confirmed by the testimony of the Spirit, so the Spirit must be examined by the Word. When Calvin opposes the Catholic position he underlines the testimony of the Spirit, but when he opposes the "Spiritual Libertines" he underlines the intrinsic majesty of the Word by arguments. The tension between these two accents becomes stronger in the following editions of the *Institutes*.

---

experitur fidelium unusquisque, nisi quod longe infra iustam rei explicationem verba subsidunt." *OS* 3, 71.

<sup>229</sup> "Singulari privilegio illic Deus solos electos dignatur, quos a toto humano genere discernit." *OS* 3, 71.

<sup>230</sup> The additions are the paragraphs 1.8.2 (an extension of the argument regarding the style of Scripture), 1.8.4 (an extension regarding the antiquity of Scripture), 1.8.6 (a discussion of the miracles related by Moses), and 1.8.11 on the New Testament.

<sup>231</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* 1.8.11, *OS* 3, 79-80.

In 1550 Calvin discusses Augustine's remark that he would not have believed the gospel, if the authority of the church had not moved him to do so. According to Calvin, Augustine refers to unbelievers, for whom the authority of the church is a strong argument to persuade them of the truth of the gospel. This does not make the faith of believers in the Scriptures depend on the judgment of the church. The authority of the church is only an introduction to faith in the gospel. Calvin inserts this paragraph immediately after the sentence about light and darkness, white and black, sweet and bitter and just before he speaks of the internal testifying of the Spirit. This new paragraph forms a wedge between the sense that Scripture gives to believers of its own majesty and the testimony of the Spirit and therefore the original coherence is lost out of sight.

In the 1550 edition Calvin also adds some secondary arguments. In 1539 they functioned only for believers, but in 1550 they also prove the authority of Scripture to unbelievers. Calvin discusses the antiquity of Scripture, the miracles, and the predictions, and stresses God's wonderful providence in preserving the Scriptures throughout the ages. This does not make the *testimonium* superfluous; on the contrary, he again stresses the absolute necessity of the work of the Spirit for true assurance. Calvin, however, has to deal with a new problem; he must maintain Scripture over against the critique of skeptics who deny it completely. The skepticism of some radical humanists forced Calvin to deal with Scripture in a different way. The majesty of Scripture can be proved over against unbelief, but only the witness of the Spirit leads to true faith. Thus Calvin evokes the question regarding the difference between the forced conviction of unbelievers and the persuasion of believers.

Calvin introduces the word *αὐτόπιστος* in 1559 to explain what Scripture is for those who are inwardly taught by the Spirit and distinguishes between a general *opinio* of the majesty of Scripture and the full *persuasio* of the divine origin of Scripture in which believers find rest. For them Scripture is *αὐτόπιστος*, absolutely trustworthy in and of itself. The new questions from 1550 prompt him in 1559 to introduce a fourth element next to the three original elements in his concept of Scripture: the majesty of the Word, the testimony of the Spirit, and the arguments for the truth of Scripture. By using the Greek term *αὐτόπιστος* Calvin explains that though the majesty of Scripture can be proved by evidences, this is not necessary for believers and not sufficient to convince unbelievers. The inward persuasion of believers is the effect of the *testimonium Spiritus*, by which they find rest in Scripture as *αὐτόπιστος*. Calvin uses the Greek term *αὐτόπιστος* to safeguard the assurance of salvation with which the discussion started in 1539. The term *αὐτόπιστος* replaces the term *maiestas* as far as believers are concerned: their certainty does not rest on proof but is the result of the testimony of the Spirit, by which believers find complete rest (*acquiescere*) in the Scriptures.

There are also some theological considerations that flow from our historical research in this chapter. Calvin, for instance, has a double attitude regarding the authority of the church. He rejects that authority as a foundation for Scripture. It is essential for him that Scripture is self-convincing and therefore he uses strong language to diminish the authority of the church. He calls his opponents "sacrilegious persons that are looking for tyranny" and their position a "most pernicious error" (*Institutes* 1.7.1). Behind his strong language lies a deep concern for the assurance of salvation. Our conscience cannot find rest if our salvation depends merely upon human opinion and not upon God himself.

Nevertheless, the additions in 1550 on Augustine's dictum show how Calvin values the church as a means to introduce us and lead us to Scripture. The authority of the church prepares us for faith. This is confirmed by the fact that Calvin returns to the theme of the authority and inspiration of Scripture in the context of the fourth book of the *Institutes* on the church as the external means by which God invites us into the society of Christ.

The main difference with the Catholic position was the definition of the church. Calvin emphasized the *consensus ecclesiae*, the witness of the church of all ages to Scripture and his Catholic opponents stressed the official and institutional appearance of the body of Christ. Both sides were concerned for the certainty of faith. For the Catholic theologians the *magisterium* of the church was indispensable to save the church from heresy and to keep its true unity. Calvin and the other Reformers, however, were looking for the certainty of faith and the assurance of salvation. According to Calvin, this assurance of salvation could only rest in the witness of the Spirit and not on the human judgment of the church. Founding Scripture on the church would ultimately lead to perpetual doubt. Therefore Calvin and the other Reformers emphasized the *testimonium* of the Spirit as a safeguard against spiritual tyranny and bondage. On the other hand, this emphasis on the witness of the Spirit in the heart of believers could easily lead to subjectivism and undermine the church. Thus the Catholic theologians emphasized the *magisterium* of the church as a safeguard against spiritual chaos and the case of the Radical Reformers illustrated that their fear was not without ground. The fear of bondage on the Protestant side and the fear of chaos on the Catholic side both led to a quest for certainty. For Rome this certainty was to be found in the stability and safety of the institutional church, while for the Reformation it was to be found in the assurance of the conscience regarding the restored relationship with God.

A Reformed concept of the authority of Scripture today must take this double attitude towards the church into full account. The final independency of Scripture must be maintained. If Scripture is bound by any form of human authority, ultimately our salvation becomes dependent on human arbitrariness and we are given over to doubt. Nonetheless, the positive function of the church as the guide that leads us to Scripture and helps us to accept its authority is also essential for a Reformed concept of the authority of Scripture. The pedagogical task of the church implies that Scripture ought not to be forced on us. The church is a mother that teaches her children to trust the truth.

The question whether the authority of Scripture depends on the church comes to its full tension in the determination of the canon. Historically the church determined which books belonged to the canon of Scripture, but, according to Calvin, principally the church could only recognize these books, because they already had authority of themselves. He does not deny that the church ought to discern between the true Scriptures and the counterfeit, but only for the reason that the church embraces what is of God.<sup>232</sup> A Reformed concept of Scripture will have to deal with the problem of the canon. In this study we cannot deal with the historical questions about the forming of the canon in the first centuries, but we will have to face the question what makes these books so special that they are accepted by the church.

Calvin discussed Scripture as an introduction to the *doctrina* of God. He was aware

---

<sup>232</sup> "Quin proprium ecclesiae officium sit, scripturas veras a supposititiis discernere, non nego: nempe, quia obedienter amplectitur, quidquid Dei est." CO 7, 612.

of the fact that he was dealing with the authority of Scripture and the witness of the Spirit outside of its proper locus. Sooner or later the question arises how the authority of Scripture functions in general, apart from faith. The development in the subsequent editions of the *Institutes* illustrates this; as soon as Scripture in relation to unbelievers became an issue, Calvin was forced to consider its authority in a general sense. Again Calvin is ambivalent; he maintains that the witness of the Spirit is absolutely necessary for reaching true certainty regarding Scripture, but he also maintains that it is possible to prove Scripture convincingly to unbelievers. Apparently, the self-convincing character of Scripture for believers does not imply that faith in Scripture is an irrational jump into the deep; it is supported by the evidences of the intrinsic majesty of Scripture that renders rejecters inexcusable.

Calvin's emphasis on the evidences is rather problematic for Reformed theology today. The evidences for Scripture are no longer convincing, due to the historical-critical approach to Scripture. If the prophecies are interpreted as *vaticinia ex eventu*, their fulfillment cannot be interpreted as an evidence of the truth of Scripture. The *indicia* that Calvin lists in *Institutes* 1.8 are not very different from the traditional apologetic arguments for Christianity.<sup>233</sup> In using these evidences Calvin was a child of his own time.<sup>234</sup> If we want to look for convincing arguments to underline that believing Scripture is not irrational, we also will have to be children of our own time. We will have to emphasize the intrinsic arguments for the authority of Scripture more than the extrinsic arguments. In a postmodern context the appeal to the effect of Scripture in our personal life is a better argument than any rational demonstration.

As we have seen, Calvin introduced the term *αὐτόπιστος* in the final edition of the *Institutes* in order to make a distinction between the conviction that can be forced on unbelievers by arguments and the inward persuasion that is a result of the witness of the Holy Spirit. He used *αὐτόπιστος* to express what he meant by *maiestas* in 1539. The evidences and arguments can lead to a grudging recognition of the majesty of Scripture, but to discern white from black and sweet from bitter, our eyes must be opened and we must taste Scripture. There is a very close connection between the self-convincing character of Scripture and the *testimonium* of the Holy Spirit. Scripture is only accepted as the Word of God through the witness of the Spirit and the Spirit gives his testimony to the Word, because Scripture deserves that certainty of itself, because it is *αὐτόπιστος*. The Spirit is present in Scripture, and the only way in which he teaches us is by Scripture. His witness comes to us through the Scriptures and teaches us how to find rest in them.

This implies that we will have to keep the *autopistia* of Scripture and the *testimonium* of the Spirit close together in stead of interpreting the duality in an object-subject scheme that is strange to Calvin.<sup>235</sup> Still we will also have to realize that it is

<sup>233</sup> A.R. Dulles, *A History of Apologetics*, London 1971, 115.

<sup>234</sup> Krusche remarks that although it is evident that Calvin's "crutches" are no longer useful today, the real question is whether faith needs such helps at all. Krusche, *Wirken des Heiligen Geistes*, 211.

<sup>235</sup> Van 't Spijker keeps the *autopistia* of Scripture and the *testimonium* of the Spirit closely together. "Der Heilige Geist, der durch den Mund der Propheten gesprochen hat, muß in unsere Herzen eindringen, um uns zu überzeugen. Sein Zeugnis verleiht der Schrift ihre eigene

hardly possible for us to think in another scheme and that we will have to deal with the epistemological questions of modernity. We cannot naively copy Calvin at this point. It can be helpful for us to keep the essential difference in mind between the forced conviction that is a result of our efforts to defend the authority of Scripture and the hearty persuasion that is a result of the teaching of the Spirit. Then we will not be too disappointed if it turns out to be much more difficult in our context to prove the authority of Scripture to others and trust more in the persuading power of the heavenly Advocate. We will also be warned not to trust our own ideas about Scripture as long as they are based on human opinion, but strive for the full persuasion that is inseparably connected with the assurance of faith. Only in this way will truth and certainty be in harmony.

---

Autorität. Diese „Autopistie“, die durch das Zeugnis des Geistes in den Herzen wirkt, macht eine argumentative Beweisführung überflüssig.” W. Van ‘t Spijker, *Calvin: Biographie und Theologie* [Die Kirche in ihrer Geschichte, vol. 3.2], Göttingen 2001, 210. Cf. G.P. Van IJterson, ‘Het Testimonium Spiritus Sancti bij Calvijn,’ in *Belijnd Belijden*, Kampen: Kok, 1971, p. 43-56, 43. Cf. Van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror*, 97-98.