

The Sealing with the Holy Spirit in Bucer and Calvin

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Introduction

In 1527 Bucer published a small commentary on Paul's epistle to the Ephesians.¹ Along with a commentary on the four gospels², this marked the beginning of Bucer's exegetical work. His final work as an expositor of Holy Scripture were his lectures at Cambridge on the same epistle, which were

I wish to express my thanks to dr. L.W. Bilkes for translating my paper into English.

Some literature: Johannes de Boer, *De verzegeling met de Heilige Geest volgens de opvatting van de Nadere Reformatie*. Dissertatie Theologische Academie uitgaande van de Johannes Calvijn Stichting te Kampen, Rotterdam 1968; Ernst Saxer, "Siegel" und "Versiegeln" in der calvinisch-reformierten Sakramentstheologie des 16. Jahrhunderts', in *Zwingliana*, Band XIV, Heft 8, 1977, S. 397-430; Bernard Roussel, 'Martin Bucer tourmenté par les "Spiritualistes". L'exégèse polémique de l'épître aux Ephésiens (1527)', in: Jean-Georges Rott/Simon L. Verheus, *Bibliotheca Dissidentium. Scripta et studia*, No 3. *Anabaptistes et dissidents a XVIe siècle. Actes du Colloque international d'histoire anabaptiste du XVIe siècle tenu à l'occasion de la XIe Conférence Mennonite mondiale à Strasbourg, juillet 1984*, p. 412-447; W. van 't Spijker, 'Geest, Woord en Kerk in Bucers commentaar op de brief van Paulus aan Ephese', in: J.C. Coutzee (red.), *Koninkrijk, Gees en Woord (Huldigingsbundel aangeboden aan Prof. Dr. L. Floor)*, Pretoria 1988, p. 269-286, ook in: C. Augustijn, W.H. Neuser, H.J. Selderhuis (red.), *Geest, Woord en Kerk. Opstellen over de geschiedenis van het gereformeerd protestantisme door dr. W. van 't Spijker*, Kampen 1991, blz. 79-93; Peter Stephens, 'The Church in Bucer's commentaries on the Epistle to the Ephesians', in: D.F. Wright (ed.), *Martin Bucer, reforming Church and community*, Cambridge 1994, p. 45-60.

¹*Epistola D. Pauli ad Ephesios, qua rationem Christianismi breviter iuxta et locuplete, ut nulla brevis, simul et locupletius explicat, versa paulo liberius, ne peregrini idiotismi rudiores scripturarum offenderent, bona tamen fide, sententiis Apostoli appensis. In eandem Commentarius per Martinum Bucerum*, Strasbourg 1527.

²*Enarrationum in Evangelia Matthaei, Marci et Lucae libri duo. Loci communes syncerioris Theologiae supra centum, ad simplicem scripturarum fidem, citra ullius insectationem aut criminationem, excussit, per M. Bucerum*, Strasbourg 1527.

posthumously published by Trelcatius in 1562.³ These lectures give insight into Bucer's mature theology. Apparently, Bucer had a predilection for this Pauline letter. Perhaps this was in part due to the significance which he attributed to the confession of the gracious election of God, which he considered part of the principles of Reformed theology.⁴ It is even more plausible that the theme of the church particularly fascinated him, as it is set forth in this epistle. In an extensive excursion in his last lectures, Bucer presented his view on the significance of church and office in the church of Christ.⁵ If the epistle to the Galatians had special significance for Luther (after all, he called it his *Käthe*), so the epistle to the Ephesians continually inspired Bucer. I am of the opinion that he set a trend which has continued to be of significance for the Reformed tradition.

Calvin, too, presented a careful exegesis of this New Testament epistle in his commentary which was published in 1548.⁶ From May 1, 1558 until March 1559 he preached on this epistle. Likewise, other Reformed theologians have occupied themselves with this epistle. We could mention here the names of Bullinger⁷, Zanchius⁸, Musculus⁹, Olevianus¹⁰ and others.

Besides the themes of election and church, the significance of the work of the Holy Spirit stands out, which particularly the Reformed theologians such as Bucer and Calvin recognized. The treatment which both Bucer and Calvin give to the sealing with the Holy Spirit, as spelled out in Ephesians 1:13, 14, and 4:30, demonstrates how much agreement there is between their theology. It is well-known that Bucer influenced Calvin. Bucer's lectures at Cambridge make clear that he in turn was guided by Calvin's commentary.¹¹ In the well-known

³*Praelectiones doctiss. in Epistolam D. P. ad Ephesios, eximii doctoris D. Martini Buceri, habitae Cantabrigiae in Anglia, Anno MDL&LI. Ex ore praelegentis collectae, et nunc primum in lucem editae, diligentia Immanuelis Tremellii Theologiae doctoris, et eiusdem professoris in Academia Heydelbergensi, cum indice copiosissimo*, Basel 1562.

⁴'Primus locus Theologiae, quem Paulus hac epistola tractat, est de Electione nostri ad haereditatem aeternam', *Eph. 1562*, p. 19.

⁵'Quid sit ecclesia', *Eph. 1562*, p. 111-129.

⁶*CO 51*, col. 137-240. Now available in the *Opera omnia denuo recognita*, ed. by Helmut Feld, Genève 1992, p. 151-294.

⁷*In D. Apostoli Pauli ad Galatas, Ephesios, Philippen. et Colossen. epistolas Heinrychi Bullingeri Commentarii*, Zürich 1535.

⁸In the *Opera omnia edition*, Genève 1605, and in the *Bibliotheca reformata*, Vol. 5 (edd. A.H. de Hartog), Amsterdam 1888.

⁹*In Epistolas [...] ad Galatas en Ephesios*, Basel 1561.

¹⁰*In Epistolam D. Pauli ad Ephesios notae, ex concionibus Gaspari Oleviani excerptae*, Herborn 1588.

¹¹T.F. Torrance, *Kingdom and Church. A Study in the Theology of the Reformation*, Edinburgh/London 1956, p. 73, speaks about Bucer's 'masterful influence on Calvin or Calvin's considerable influence on him', referring in n. 1 to their use of all four senses of cause.

Colloquy of Marburg (1529), Luther accused Bucer of having a different spirit.¹² Indeed, there is a difference between the Lutheran and Reformed tradition with respect to pneumatology. Bucer opposed Luther at this point already in 1527, without mentioning Luther's name.¹³ He also turned against the Anabaptists of his day and, of course, against the Aristotelian theologians with their questionable ideas. Already, then, the basic concept of his theology began to show up clearly, with his emphasis on piety, *pietas*, in which Scripture, grace, election and church play a significant role. The factor which determines piety in all its aspects is the Spirit and his hidden work. We see something similar in Calvin. At the most significant junctions of his theology we encounter the same concepts. Everything coheres for Bucer and for Calvin in the hidden work of the Spirit, which manifests itself in piety and living *coram Deo*. They use the same concepts with similar definitions, concepts such as assurance and ethics, knowledge and confidence, faith and experience. These are the *notae*, which come through as overtones (the melody line) in the *obsignatio Spiritus Sancti*, or which always *subaudiendae sunt* (are heard underneath), to say it with a Calvinian expression.¹⁴

In this lecture I first will present a summary of Bucer's view on the sealing with the Holy Spirit, after which I will also reproduce Calvin's views. Then I will attempt to make a comparison, specifically with reference to the issue of assurance of faith, the place of experience and the relationship between sealing and sanctification.

1. Bucer on the sealing with the Holy Spirit

The relationship between election, reconciliation, and sealing is referred to in the opening lines of the letter to Ephesus. This leads Bucer in his early commentary to strongly emphasize the significance of predestination and satisfaction for sealing. Election takes place in Christ, who is the Mediator.¹⁵ On the

¹²W. van 't Spijker, "Gij hebt een andere geest dan wij". Luther tot Bucer te Marburg, zondag 3 oktober 1529", in: *Uw knecht hoort. Theologische opstellen aangeboden aan: W. Kremer, emeritus-hoogleraar en aan dr. J. van Genderen en dr. B.J. Oosterhoff, hoogleraren aan de Theologische Hogeschool der Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland te Apeldoorn ter gelegenheid van hun vijftienvigtiarig ambtsjubileum*, Amsterdam 1979, blz. 65-83.

¹³In his *Argumentum*, p. 3^r, Bucer criticizes the Lutherans, 'hos [...] qui [...] Sacramentis, quae symbola sunt Christianorum, et externo verbo, ea tribuunt, unde divinae benevolentiae, virtutisque claritas non parum obscuratur. Vehicula enim illa faciunt, spiritus sancti et fidei, cum haec donet sola bonitas Dei, imperata morte CHRISTI'.

¹⁴*Inst.* I, 17, 14; II, 3, 6; III, 22, 3.

¹⁵Cum haec igitur inde filiis Dei contingunt, ut diserte hic Paulus docet, quod in hoc ipsum nos Deus, priusquam mundi iacerent fundamenta, elegerit, antequam omnino essemus, nihil profecto sanctitatis, vitaeque probatae Deo, humanis viribus potest tribui, sed liberae ac benignae Dei electioni accepta omnia referri oportet. Non tamen id sine mediatore. Ut enim sanguine suo Christus

basis of his reconciliation the believers receive the Holy Spirit, Who is the Spirit of freedom for them.¹⁶ Through Him the *electi* are called to true freedom, that is to say, to a life of sincere piety. This does not take place without struggle, because there is a power in our members, which spurs us on to sin. "But this Spirit is called a certain pledge, a sealing and seal, an anointing and guarantee of perfect freedom, which the elect will receive only then when their mortal bodies have been changed into an immortal life, raised by Christ on the day of the Lord".¹⁷

Bucer pictures the essence of redemption in the concepts of *cognitio Dei*, participation in righteousness, endowment with the Spirit, meditation on the future life. The ground of redemption lies at one and the same time in God's election and the satisfaction by Christ. Both exclude any form of merit and any appeal to free will. God mediates salvation by the external preaching. At this point Bucer goes a middle way. In a veiled way he criticizes Luther, who tries to make the Spirit a vehicle (*vehiculum Spiritus*) of the external means.¹⁸ At the same time he rejects the view of the Anabaptists, who pin their faith on an *interna vox*. To him that internal voice is nothing other than the impulse of one's own soul, "an exceedingly harmful concoction".¹⁹ Bucer joins Word and Spirit in a way that wishes to do justice to the freedom of God's grace. It is effective, wherever, whenever and with whomever it pleases God. No internal voice, neither an automatic activity of the Word as vehicle of the Spirit. Instead a special work of God: "In this way we hear what God speaks through His Spirit in our hearts, and we clearly and plainly distinguish the motions of the Holy Spirit from the emotions of our flesh. As children of God we experience that we are led by the Spirit of God. And that is quite different from that arrogance, by which we pretend that we are leading ourselves".²⁰ Where this takes place, there is the sealing with the Spirit.

sanctificantem illum spiritum filiorum Dei, qui et fide illos Deo consecrat, et per dilectionem proximis vivere facit, promeruerit, ita ante iacta mundi fundamenta, gratia sanguinis huius olim fundendi, sancti in album filiorum Dei inscripti fuere. Nam sunt Deo omnia praesentia', *Eph. 1527*, p. 25^v. Bucer translates not 'in ipso' but 'per ipsum', 'quo dilucidius esset, Paulum Christi merito tribuere nostri electionem [...]. Et in Christo electum esse, vitaeque sanctae et beatae donari, haud aliud est, quam Christi merito et gratia electis adnumeratum esse, facultatemque sancte et beate vivendi, divinitus accipere'.

¹⁶"libertatis spiritus", *Eph. 1527*, p. 27^v.

¹⁷*Eph. 1527*, p. 27^v.

¹⁸See n. 13; *Eph. 1527*, p. 37^r.

¹⁹"Nihil vero meminit, de illa interna voce Dei impulsuque proprii animi, figmento sane nocentissimo", *Eph. 1527*, p. 37^r.

²⁰"Sic et quid Dominus suo spiritu cordibus nostris loquatur, exaudiemus, probe discernentes motum spiritus Sancti ab affectu carnis, et ut filii Dei, spiritu Dei agi nos sentiemus, procul ab ea arrogantia, ut ipsi agere nos metipsos praesumeremus", *Eph. 1527*, p. 39^r.

This sealing, by which hearts are persuaded to believe the Gospel, is twofold. The elect are sealed so that they learn to know themselves as children of God, and at the same time are recognized by others as such.

The same Spirit, through Whom hearts are convinced, so that they give faith to the Gospel, is this "seal" (*sphragis*), by which the elect are sealed, so that they not only come to know that they are children of God, but by which they are also recognized as such by others. After all, He provides to their spirit an undoubted testimony that they are children and heirs of God (Rom. 8). At the same time, He so reforms them to the image of God that others can easily see in their fruits that they are holy plantings of God, vessels of his grace, destined for eternal glory. That is why this Spirit is also called the earnest [guarantee] of our inheritance. Through Him we are assured that we shall go to meet the promised inheritance of eternal salvation. They cannot doubt that they have been endowed with this Spirit, that they are pleasing to God, and that by His power they shall be finally recreated after the image of His Son.²¹

Bucer joins the assurance of faith to receiving the Spirit of promise. In the Old Testament believers were also led by the Spirit. In the new covenant the Spirit works in a more abundant way, as He is poured out over all nations.²² Where the Spirit works, there comes assurance, not only because He gives a testimony to the heart, but particularly because He reforms all of life. The elect are sealed by Him and in that way distinguished from the wicked.²³ Believers also have to strive with the weakness of their flesh. Nevertheless they cherish a living hope that one day they shall be fully freed. Three aspects stand out in Bucer's small commentary: assurance, renewal and well-founded expectation. This portrait concurs with the basic tenor of Bucer's theology, in which a pneumatic-ethical color dominates.

In the lectures which Bucer gave a quarter of a century later in Cambridge,²⁴ it comes through how much he considers the sealing with the Holy Spirit within a total concept of salvation, in which election, satisfaction, and sealing are related

²¹*Eph. 1527*, p. 39^v.

²²*Eph. 1527*, p. 40^r.

²³*Eph. 1527*, p. 40^r: "Hoc spiritu inanes sunt impii omnes, quia electi eo obsignantur et ab impiis secernentur, qui tam nequeunt Deo acclamare pater, et Christo, Domine, quam verum est quod in corde suo dicunt non est Deus, et Christus est anathema".

²⁴A. Edward Harvey, *Martin Bucer in England. Inaugural-dissertation zur Erlangung der Doktorwürde der Hohen Philosophischen Fakultät der Universität Marburg*, Marburg 1906; Constantin Hopf, *Martin Bucer and the English Reformation*, Oxford 1946; Willem van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices in the Thought of Martin Bucer*, Translated by John Vriend and Lyle D. Bierma, Leiden/New York/Köln 1996, p. 345-352; N. Scott Amos, 'The Alsatian among the Athenians: Martin Bucer, Mid-Tudor Cambridge, and the Edwardian Reformation', Lecture, held at the 8th Annual Conference 17-20 April 2001, Westminster College, Cambridge, to be published in *Reformation & Renaissance Review* 2002.

to each other. All three have a place in the work of the Triune God. There is a distinction between the Persons of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but their operations that concern us are not divided.²⁵ Since Scripture as a whole is a testimony of the Trinity, faith in God also means that we believe in the Son and in the Spirit. This trinitarian relationship has the following implication for the sealing with the Holy Spirit: this sealing must be regarded as an accommodation or application of election and redemption.²⁶ The work of the Holy Spirit therefore takes the form of applied election, the mystery of God's good pleasure becoming visible in those who are led and sealed by the Spirit. It receives its efficacy by the satisfaction of Christ, whose work must be regarded as the *causa efficiens* of election.²⁷ In the *ordo salutis*, election takes form in time.²⁸ The Holy Spirit offers Christ to us in the preaching of the gospel. Proclamation precedes faith, and true faith becomes distinguished from the *simulata credulitas*, simulated faith.²⁹ Through the Gospel of salvation the Spirit joins us to Christ Himself, who reconciles us to God, assures us of His unchangeable love, and renews our obedience to Him. Our sanctification and the application of that divine power by which we are born again and inundated by heavenly light must all be attributed to the Spirit. This cleanses us and plants in us the zeal to serve God.³⁰

²⁵*Eph.* 1562, p. 27: "Tribuitur Spiritui sancto nostri sanctificatio, et afflatus ille quo divina quadam virtute regeneramur, et lumine perfundimur caelesti. Is purgat nos et inserit studium dei etc. Et licet opera Trinitatis erga nos, non sint divisa, tamen Scriptura hinc nos quodammodo docere vult, discretionem personarum".

²⁶*Eph.* 1562, p. 24: "Redemptionis nostrae causam esse in Deo, non in nobis. Accommodatur autem illa, et applicatur nobis spiritu, verbo, sacramentis et fide vivifica".

²⁷*Eph.* 1562, p. 19: "Ergo ab omnium primo, et maximo incipit, nimirum ab Electione et complexu aeterno, quo ipsos et omnes suos, ante omne tempus, ad vitam et salutem aeternam complexus est. Huius causam efficientem dicit esse meram gratiam Dei et meritum Christi".

²⁸*Eph.* 1562, p. 27: "Ordinem salutis nostrae describit. Omnium prima est electio. Deinde per Evangelium vocatio efficax et regeneratrix. Fides et spes, quibus simul est coniuncta charitas, audito verbo veritatis". Cf. p. 28: "Itaque ordo sic habet: Mittit Deus Evangelium, quae est tota doctrina caelestis, universa Scriptura sacra...Dat deinde spiritum, ut credamus, et illud excipiamus tanquam Dei verbum...Facit deinde ut nos exponamus Deo et proximo, totique inardescamus ad perficiendam voluntatem Dei. Sed haec omnia sunt opera Spiritus sancti in nobis, quo oportet iudicium nostrum illuminari, et voluntatem accendi ad bona opera. Haec vis, obsignatio quaedam est, quod filii Dei sumus...". Cf. *Eph.* 1527, p. 26: "Sed notandus ordo. Primum locum habet Dei electio sive praedestinatio, proximum adoptio in filios, quae alias vocatio dicitur, dum nimirum spiritu suo donatos, ad se Dominus trahit, sui que cognitione donat, quos ab aeterno ad hoc deputavit. Tertio demum loco succedit vitae sanctimonia, et dilectionis officiositas, qua bona opera proferuntur, quae videntes homines, patrem caelestem, cuius beneficio ea proveniunt, glorificant. Ut ita quartum in sanctis sit, gloria Dei, ex iustitia, qua illos dignatio Dei ornat, resultans". In his exegesis of Eph. 2, v. 8 ("Benevolentia gratuita servati estis..."), Bucer summarizes: "Ordo iustificationis et salutis nostrae hic, sanequam brevissime, simul et luculentissime descriptus est. Nihil huius nostrum est, nihil nostris operibus descriptus est", *Eph.* 1527, p. 52".

²⁹*Eph.* 1562, p. 27.

³⁰*Eph.* 1562, p. 27: "Is purgat nos et inserit studium dei etc.".

The reality of this spiritual change is clearly recognizable. In distinction from the gifts of the Spirit, all believers partake of this spiritual change. Though not all partake of the same charismata, this spiritual renewal is given to all believers: the grace of faith and of rebirth, sanctification and the sealing unto eternal life are given to us and to all who belong to Christ.³¹ This does not mean that full redemption has been received. The Spirit rules over the flesh in the saints. He puts to death (mortifies) the passions "so that He not only cleanses us from sins, but also makes our body to be conformed to the glorious body of Christ."³² Because he does not yet take complete possession of us, He is called the *sphragis* or seal, the guarantee of full redemption which has already begun. This denotes the provisional character of redemption, as well as its assurance. The guarantee of complete redemption, which we have already received and by which we believe and love, also has in view that we shall no longer doubt God's benevolence towards us and our future perfection. Whoever is thus led by the Spirit and endowed with this power can never again doubt God's work in himself and the fact that he is a child of God.³³

The complete inheritance consists of the perfect knowledge of God and therefore perfect comfort, joy and gladness. A guarantee makes the purchase reliable and sure. That is how the work of the Spirit confirms our salvation. Bucer underlines the ethical character of the work of the Spirit with a reference to Ephesians 4:30. The assurance of salvation derives its certainty not from the inner or moral renewal which the Spirit brings about, but rather from the gracious election of God which is known in a practical syllogism *aposteriori*. The sacrifice of Christ is the basis for knowing our election: God has predestined us and adopted us to be His children through Jesus Christ. It is Christ in whom the assurance of faith can be found, because we have Him as Reconciler and Provider of perfect righteousness. In Him we have God as the most excellent Father. By this unchangeable assurance we can resist both the devil and despair.³⁴ Our imperfect righteousness cannot be the basis on which we might

³¹*Eph. 1562*, p. 28: "Quia [Spiritus sanctus] promissus est omnibus sanctis, licet non omnibus omnia dona contingant, ut in Act. non contigerat piis omnibus donum linguarum, et miraculorum, veruntamen fidei et regenerationis gratia, sanctitas et obsignatio in vitam aeternam nobis datur et confertur omnibus qui sunt Christi".

³²*Eph. 1562*, p. 28: "Hic spiritus, in sanctis praevallet carni, et eius conatus, ac vim mortificat, et restinguit, ac refrænat cupiditates, adeo ut non solum repurget nos a peccatis, verum etiam conformet corpus nostrum, ad corpus Christi gloriosum".

³³*Eph. 1562*, p. 28: "Sic nos regenerat Deus, ut suos facit, ita tamen ut remaneamus hic in carne. Atque ea accepta arra renovationis, qua credimus et amamus, nequaquam dubitare amplius debemus de Dei benevolentia erga nos, et nostra futura perfectione [...]. Nemo hoc spiritu actus, hac energia donatus, dubitare potest de opere Dei in se, et quod sit illius filius".

³⁴*Eph. 1562*, p. 22: "Inculcat Christum, quia in eo est certitudo fidei, quod eum habemus reconciliatorem, et perfectæ iustitiæ donatorem, ac deum habemus optimum patrem immutabilem, qua immobilitate, diabolo et desperationi resistere possumus".

calmly rest. "Therefore we must let go the vain opinion of our own righteousness and pray God that He grant us that we shall show our gratitude to Him with our whole life, because he has shown us such an immense benefit".³⁵

Bucer's emphasis on the sealing with the Holy Spirit did not diminish the emphasis on the work of Christ, in which the assurance of faith is to be found.³⁶ The Spirit works out the election of God in our life. That is why the final ground for the assurance of faith lies also in predestination, which has sanctification of life as its final goal and in that way the glory of God. Bucer's starting point for the *ordo salutis*, in which the work of the Holy Spirit realizes (works out) election, consists in the preaching of the Gospel. "The beginning of salvation lies in the preaching of the Gospel".³⁷

The place which Bucer affords to the sealing with the Holy Spirit in his lectures is significant. He first spends a number of important lectures in an exposition of the Word of God and the rules for hermeneutics.³⁸ He concludes the first chapter with a small treatise on the church, in which we find the material for a paper which the Magistrate in Strasbourg had forbidden him to publish.³⁹ He places the work of the Holy Spirit between Word and church. In this way Bucer avoids the danger of subjectivism, for which he opposes the Anabaptists. The sealing with the Holy Spirit takes place in close relationship to Holy Scripture in which the Gospel is offered to us as ground for faith. Bucer is therefore not a biblicist in his usage of the principle of Scripture. Furthermore, the work of the Holy Spirit is christologically determined. The Spirit binds us to the work and especially to the Person of Christ. It therefore lacks any mark of spiritualism. Moreover, the work of the Spirit takes place within the context of the church, which removes the threat of individualism. Bucer's Trinitarian setting provides a beneficial theological latitude.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, his many-sidedness prevented him from rendering many subjects, including the *obsignatio Spiritus Sancti*, with a *perspicua brevitatis*. In that respect Calvin greatly surpasses him. There is the question whether Calvin essentially differs from Bucer's insights. I am of the opinion that this is not the case.

³⁵*Eph. 1562*, p. 22.

³⁶*Eph. 1562*, p. 32s.: "Causa redditur omnis certitudinis spei et amplitudinis haereditatis, gratis datae regeneratis. Est meritum Christi, qui nobis patrem reddidit benignum, stabilem in caelis haereditatem paravit, et licet caro nunquam det quietem ad cultum Dei, tamen illa energia est omnipotens et invincibilis, qua Deus agit, et vegetat nos, nec sinit hostem de nobis triumphare".

³⁷*Eph. 1562*, p. 29.

³⁸*Eph. 1562*, p. 8-16.

³⁹*Eph. 1562*, p. 36-50.

⁴⁰*Eph. 1562*, p. 29: "Capite fratres, quanquam tota Scriptura est Trinitatis, atque ideo quae est in Christo fides, est etiam in Patre, et Spiritu sancto".

2. Calvin on the sealing with the Holy Spirit

For Calvin's point of view we limit ourselves to his Institutes, to his commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians from 1548, and the sermon which he delivered on this passage in 1558. In his commentary Calvin emphasizes the significance of the Gospel as the Word of truth and the instrument of salvation.⁴¹ When we join the truth of the Gospel to the salvation that is ministered to us by it, any form of doubt which can be found in man's heart is removed. The concept of truth does not function in the intellectualistic sphere, but rather in that of experience.⁴²

Believers receive the certainty of truth and salvation through the Holy Spirit. There is here no human authority; the Spirit seals faith in our hearts. Because the Spirit confirms the gospel, the truth of God is firm and holds out against all assaults of Satan. Believers have a firm conviction of the Word of God, of their own salvation, and of religion in general. This conviction does not spring from the feelings of the flesh, nor from human and philosophical arguments, but from the sealing of the Holy Spirit who imparts such certainty to consciences that all form of doubt disappears.⁴³ If certainty consisted in human wisdom, the foundation of faith would waver. Like Bucer, Calvin emphasizes preaching as the instrument of faith, which is made efficacious by the work of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁴ Calvin anticipates a difficulty when he comments that it seems that faith precedes sealing. Calvin is apparently prepared to draw the assurance of faith into faith itself right from the very beginning. There is no faith that does not have in it a firm certainty. Faith and certainty belong immediately together. One could perhaps suppose that since there is a twofold operation of the Spirit in the believer, faith and certainty could be separated. Calvin responds by giving the analogy of faith having two aspects, namely, knowledge and confidence. The Spirit enlightens the mind (*mens*) and He confirms the heart (*animus*). "The commencement of faith is knowledge; the completion of it is a firm and steady conviction which admits no opposing doubt".⁴⁵ Both are the work of the Spirit. The Spirit sees to it that we believe the promise of the Gospel. Calvin dif-

⁴¹*Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. G. Baum, E. Cunitz, E. Reuss, Brunswigiae 1895, Vol. LI, col. 152 (=CO): "Duplici autem epitheto evangelium ornat, quod sit sermo veritatis, et quod Ephesiis fuerit salutis instrumentum."

⁴²CO LI, col. 153: "Significat enim experimento hoc perceptum fuisse ab Ephesiis, quia salutis facti fuerint compotes".

⁴³CO LI, col. 153: "Vera igitur persuasio, quam de verbo Dei, de salute sua, de tota religione habent fideles, non est ex sensu carnis, non ex humanis aut philosophicis rationibus, sed ex spiritus obsignatione, qui illorum conscientias ita reddit certiores, ut dubitationem omnem eximat".

⁴⁴CO LI, col. 153: "Ergo sicuti praedicatio instrumentum est fidei, ita spiritus sanctus facit ut praedicatio sit efficax".

⁴⁵CO LI, col. 153: "Initium fidei est notitia. Consummatio est fixa et stabilis persuasio, quae contrariam dubitationem nullam admittat".

fers from Bucer on the significance of the expression "Spirit of promise." For Calvin this relates to the *ordo salutis* and does not have primarily a redemptive-historical significance. The Spirit is called the "Spirit of promise" on account of the effect produced by the preaching of the promise.⁴⁶ With Luther, Calvin posits that faith and the promise are oriented to one another. "The Spirit sees to it that the promise of salvation is not made to us in vain. For as God promises by His Word that He will be a Father to us, so He gives to us the testimony of His adoption by the Holy Spirit."⁴⁷ According to Calvin, this does not mean that the promises are weak in themselves. However, we shall never be able to find secure rest in them if they are not supported by the testimony of the Spirit. The promises are known in their power when they are sealed upon the heart through the Holy Spirit. When we receive the Spirit, we know the validity of the promises, and we are not afraid that they will be revoked.⁴⁸

For Calvin, the sealing through the Holy Spirit contains a reference to the future of Christ: the day of complete redemption. Calvin appeals to the images of seal (*sphragis*) and earnest (*arrhobo*), to make clear that the certainty of faith manifests itself in the form of hope. When Christ shall appear, then redemption shall complete.⁴⁹ As long as we are in this world, we wage war under the banner of hope. We need a seal and a guarantee until it will all be complete. This goes for the church as a whole. She shares in God's eternal love and the fruit of redemption. The riches of election and the power of the sealing keep the church standing, as long as we *sub spe militamus* (fight under hope).⁵⁰

In his sermon on Ephesians 1:13-14, Calvin puts a strong emphasis on the work of the Spirit as the effect of God's grace. As for Bucer, so also for Calvin the full significance of the secret and incomprehensible election appears from the visible evidences of the sealing through the Holy Spirit. The gift of faith, which God bestows upon us, flows from God's election, which in itself is hidden.⁵¹ To Calvin, just as to Bucer and also to Luther, this is a fact of experience. Why is it that I accept the Gospel, while others remain in their senseless foolishness? This is not due to our insight, our zeal or works. The gift of faith in the preached Gospel is a sign of election in Christ. Paul knows *par l' experience* that the Ephesians had been elected and that their faith was grounded upon the

⁴⁶COLI, col. 153: "Hac ratione appellat spiritum promissionis, ab effectu scilicet".

⁴⁷COLI, col. 153: "Facit enim ne frustra nobis offertur salutis promissio. Nam sicut Deus verbo suo promittit se nobis fore in patrem, ita spiritu suo testimonium adoptionis suae nobis reddit".

⁴⁸COLI, col. 154: "Ita, accepto Dei spiritu, promissiones Dei ratas habemus, nec timemus periculum retractationis".

⁴⁹COLI, col. 154: "Fruemur autem re ipsa, quum Christus in iudicium apparuerit".

⁵⁰COLI, col. 154: "Quamdiu enim sumus in mundo, quia sub spe militamus, opus habemus hac arrha".

⁵¹COLI, col. 299: "Voilà donc l' election de Dieu qui est en soy cachee".

unmerited goodness of God.⁵² They were confirmed in it through the Holy Spirit. "And so it is useless to enter into so deep a labyrinth as God's eternal counsel. For He shows us, as it were, with His finger how He has elected us."⁵³ God gives us His seal already from all eternity. By faith, which is a work of the Holy Spirit, we participate in the salvation that Christ has obtained, without which we have neither part nor lot in our Lord Jesus Christ, neither in all the benefits He has obtained for us. Eternal election works itself out in the sealing with the Holy Spirit.

God uses the Gospel to that end. Without trust in God as our eternal Father we cannot even pray. God reveals the trustworthiness of His will in the Gospel. Our salvation lies enfolded in the Gospel itself, for in it God shows His heart.⁵⁴ The whole process of God's pure mercy and eternal election is revealed in the Gospel. God as it were shows Himself visibly, as if the heavens were opened.⁵⁵ And when the Gospel is proclaimed on earth, it is ratified in heaven.⁵⁶ From that there arises a firm certainty, which delivers us from doubt. The fact that we come to that certainty is no fruit of our own free will. We would wrong the grace of God. It is not so that God offers us His grace, as one holds out an apple to little children, and the child who runs the fastest gets it. God calls us daily to His salvation. And because this is a matter of sovereign grace, He adds that it is necessary to be touched by the Spirit.⁵⁷

This work of the Spirit is twofold: The Spirit enlightens us by His grace, whereby the blindness, foolishness, and brutishness into which we of ourselves have fallen is removed. The Spirit brings clarity and understanding. Beyond

⁵²COLI, col. 299: "Ainsi donc, combien que nous ne puissions apprehender ni par raison ni par argument, comment c'est que Dieu nous a eleus devant le monde fust creé, toutesfois nous cognoissons cela par ce qu'il nous en declare, et l'experience en est assez notoire, quand nous sommes illuminez en la foy". "Ainsi en ce passage S. Paul par l'experience declare comme les Ephesiens avoyent esté eleus de Dieu..."

⁵³COLI, col. 299/300: "Ainsi il n'est plus question d'entrer en ce labirinthe si profond que le conseil eternal de Dieu. Car il nous montre quasi au doigt comme il nous a eleus, voire moyennant que nous ne luy soyons point ingrats, et que nous cognoissons le bien qu'il nous a fait, et que nous ayons tout cela persuadé et bien resolu, qu'il n'y a autre cause sinon d'autant qu'il nous avoit donné sa marque de toute eternité, c'est à dire, qu'il nous avoit reservez à soy comme ses propres enfans".

⁵⁴COLI, col. 300: "car l'Evangile est autant comme s'il vous desployoit son coeur".

⁵⁵COLI, col. 301: "que ce nous soit autant que si Dieu se monstroit d'une façon visible, que les cieus fussent ouverts".

⁵⁶COLI, col. 301: "que quand les pechez ont esté pardonnez au monde par la predication de l'Evangile, que cela est quant et quant ratifié au ciel".

⁵⁷COLI, col. 302: "il faut bien que nous soyons touchez de l'Esprit de Dieu".

this first aspect of enlightenment, there is the second aspect: perseverance.⁵⁸ This is necessary, because – even though we are on the way of salvation – we are inclined to wander away. There could be no certainty if the Lord did not give perseverance to the end. The Spirit not only gives enlightenment by which we understand things which otherwise would be hidden from us. We also learn to know and experience the grace of God by which He draws us to obedience to the Gospel. Alongside of that He confirms us: we must be sealed in our hearts.⁵⁹

Calvin posits that actually we should say that the Gospel is already sealed, for it is solid and certainly trustworthy. Nevertheless, we are not. The fault lies with us. We are weak and cannot overcome the many assaults that come over us, from which it is clear that we do not profit from the Gospel as we should.⁶⁰ God therefore from His side, through His Spirit, empowers the Gospel and imprints it so certainly on our hearts that we can continue to be steadfast, unmoved under the assaults of the devil.⁶¹

Calvin exhorts his congregation to heed what Paul says, namely that the Spirit of God seals in us the truth and the certainty of the Gospel so that we know where we can find the weapons in order to be able to fight and overcome, regardless of how powerful the enemy may be. In this way the Spirit not only ratifies the promises of the Gospel but is also the guarantee of our complete redemption. He reigns in our hearts and thus functions as *arrabon*. Calvin uses the figure of speech of a deposit (the first installment or down payment), which pays a part of the purchase price in advance and so secures a legal claim to the article in question, even though we do not yet have full possession.⁶² Calvin pictures this living in hope in two ways: christologically and pneumatologically. Both are fully dependent upon each other. Christ has purchased us. His satisfaction or redemption has a double aspect. It has already been accomplished for us in the Person of Christ himself. It must also still be accomplished in us, which shall take place at His coming again. Calvin calls the first aspect that of the

⁵⁸COLI, col. 303: "Ainsi l'Esprit de Dieu besongne doublement en nous quant à la foy. Car il nous illumine à ce que nous comprenions ce qui autrement nous seroit caché. Et à fin que nous recevions en toute obeissance ce que Dieu nous promet. Voilà pour le premier. Mais pour le second, il faut que le mesme Esprit continue en nous, et qu'il nous donne perseverance, à fin que nous ne defaillions point au milieu du chemin".

⁵⁹COLI, col. 303: "Pour ceste cause S. Paul dit qu'il faut nous soyons seellez en nos coeurs".

⁶⁰COLI, col. 304: "Or il est vray, que pour parler proprement, il devoit dire, L'Evangile a este seellé. Mais à fin de nous advertir que la faute vient et procede de nous, et que l'Evangile de soy est une doctrine assez authentique, il a voulu monstrer, que quand Dieu seelle sa verité, s'est au regard de ce que nous sommes si difficiles...".

⁶¹COLI, col. 304: "Ainsi il faut bien qu'il l'autorise de son costé par son saint Esprit, et qu'il l'imprime en nos coeurs avec telle certitude que nous puissions estre constans, et que ceste fermeté-là ne puisse estre abatue par tout ce que le diable pourra esmouvoir, et qu'il machinera pour renverser nostre foy".

⁶²COLI, col. 305.

redemption d'acquisition.⁶³ Redemption has been accomplished. However, it must be fully enjoyed. Meanwhile, our salvation is assured in the manner of its having been accomplished in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. He has not suffered in vain. And therefore we shall also become partakers of this full salvation. In the meantime, the Spirit is not only a seal by which He convinces us of the truth of God's Gospel; the Spirit with all His gifts is equally a guarantee by which we "take the bit between our teeth and ... walk with such steadfastness that all the miseries of the world will not stop us pursuing our course till we come to our goal".⁶⁴ The Spirit shall effect what Christ has obtained. That is how the Christian can entertain the hope that full heavenly joy will be his portion.

Calvin described the significance of the sealing with the Spirit in various places in his commentaries. We wish to refer to two more texts. In Ephesians 4:30, according to Calvin, emphasis is placed on the sealing, whereby believers are distinguished from the *reprobi*.⁶⁵ The seal has been imprinted on our hearts in order that the grace of adoption might be absolutely sure for us. We are sealed until we partake of the full possession of the promised inheritance. God has imprinted the Spirit as His own mark upon His own, in order that every one who sees these sealed persons shall know that they are his children.⁶⁶ Here we encounter the same thought that we also encountered with Bucer, namely that the believers themselves come to assurance and at the same time are recognized as children of God by others.

In a sermon on Ephesians 4:30, Calvin explains that the Spirit dwells in our hearts and thus seals the hope of our salvation in our consciences.⁶⁷ The promises of God ought to be sufficient for us, because they are authentic and carry in them complete certainty. But our being unbelieving prevents us from

⁶³COLI, col. 308: "Il est vray que nous sommes rachetez par nostre Seigneur Iesus Christ. Et il nous a esté donné pour Redemption, comme il est dit en l'autre passage. Mais cependant l'effect et la iouissance n'est pas encores. Il y a donc double redemption. Il y a celle qui a este accomplie en la personne de nostre Seigneur Iesus Christ. Et l'autre est celle que nous attendons, et qui se declarera en nous à sa venue[...] Et quant à ceste redemption d'acquisition, on la peut bien prendre pour une redemption acquise. Car c'est une façon de parler assez commune, comme quand il est dit l'Esprit de promesse, c'est à dire, qui ratifie toutes les promesses".

⁶⁴COLI, col. 307: "Voilà donc comme nous sommes ici exhortez à prendre le frein aux dents et cheminer en telle constance, que toutes les miseres du monde n'empeschent pas que nous ne poursuivions nostre course, iusques à ce que nous soyons parvenus à nostre but".

⁶⁵COLI, col. 212: "Est enim spiritus Dei quasi sigillum quo a reprobis discernimur, et quod impressum est cordibus nostris, ut certa sit nobis adoptionis gratia".

⁶⁶COLI, col. 212: "...nempe quod Deus spiritum quasi notam suam nobis impresserit, ut in filiis suis censeat quoscunque videt ita signatos".

⁶⁷COLI, col. 648-656.

applying them.⁶⁸ The promises are of no avail until the Spirit imprints them on our hearts. Not until then shall we come to the obedience of faith which is the most important sacrifice that God requires of us. The Spirit must convince us: Here God Himself is speaking. Where that takes place, the power of election is manifest. "Therefore let us understand that the Spirit of God is a special gift which is not bestowed upon all men indifferently, but is reserved as a treasure for His children whom He has chosen."⁶⁹ We may therefore not attribute anything to our spirit or to our zeal when it concerns the doctrine of salvation. The sealing belongs to the working out of election and takes place entirely in the light of the absolute character of grace, which excludes every form of free will or merit.⁷⁰ Every believer must also experience or sense what is said here: where the Spirit is grieved, there assurance departs.⁷¹ After all, the Spirit is not only the Spirit of adoption, but in that quality also, at the same time, the Spirit of sanctification. This is a most certain experience, and such a one as shows us what the Holy Spirit has put into us is utterly against all evil, and that there is bound to be a battle and strife between them.⁷² Where the Spirit is grieved by our sin, there we also need to know the sorrow for sin. Also, then, the seal stays until the day of redemption.

For Calvin there is at this point a tension between the work of Christ in whose Person we have been redeemed: we have been purchased by Him, whereby we share in His redemption; yet, as far as we ourselves are concerned, *when we come to ourselves*, we do not yet find this redemption there.⁷³ Our salvation consists in hope.⁷⁴ The sealing with the Spirit directs our heart to the firmness of God's promises and in that way to the future, the great day of redemption.

⁶⁸COLI, col. 650: "car combien que les promesses de Dieu doyvent estre assez authentiques d'elles-mesmes et avoir une pleine certitude, tant y a qu'en nostre incredulité nous ne pouvons pas adiuster foy et nous y appuyer, iusques à ce que nous y soyons confermez et assurez, pour dire: Voilà Dieu qui parle[...] Et voilà comme ses promesses seront tousiours inutiles, iusques à ce qu'il les imprime en nos coeurs, ce qu'il fait par son saint Esprit".

⁶⁹COLI, col. 652: "Cognoissons donc que l'Esprit de Dieu est un don special qu'il ne communique point à tous indifferement, mais qu'il reserve comme un thresor pour ses enfans qu'il a eleus".

⁷⁰COLI, col. 652: "Et au reste, quand il est dit que l'Esprit seelle ainsi les promesses en nos coeurs, cognoissons que c'est à cause qu'il luy a pleu nous elire".

⁷¹COLI, col. 653: "Et au reste, il est certain que chacun fidele doit sentir ce qui est ici déclaré".

⁷²COLI, col. 653/654: "Voilà donc l'experience qui nous est toute certaine et qui nous monstre que ce que le S. Esprit a mis en nous, est tout contraire au mal et qu'il faut qu'il y ait un combat et une repugnance, en sorte que nul des enfans de Dieu pourra pecher qu'incontinent il ne soit sollicité de crainte pour dire, Helas! que deviendray-ie? Et où me suis-ie mis? Et que feray-ie? Et c'est la tristesse dont parle saint Paul, laquelle nous ne devons point fuir".

⁷³COLI, col. 655: "Il est vray qu'en la personne de nostre Seigneur Iesus Christ nous avons esté rachetez. Mais nous ne iouissons pas encores de ce bien-là [...] Mais quand nous venons à nous, nous n'y trouverons pas ceste redemption".

⁷⁴COLI, col. 656: "Et voilà pourquoy il est dit que nostre salut gist en esperance et ce qui nous apparoist, nous ne l'esperons point".

In his exposition of 2 Corinthians 1:21ff., Calvin puts the emphasis on the steadfastness of God's promises, which, from God's side are so immovable that God, as soon as He has spoken these promises, can utter His Amen to them.⁷⁵ But as for us, we do not utter our Amen in return, except when the Spirit has given a sure testimony in our hearts.⁷⁶ Man does not have the ability to keep pace with God's steadfastness. God cures our weakness by correcting us and confirming us by His Spirit. Paul expresses the same thing when he writes about confirmation, anointing, and sealing. By those terms God confirms the promise. Calvin attributes a threefold significance to these terms:

Here we must notice, in the *first* place, the relation which Paul requires between the Gospel of God and our faith; for as everything that God says is more than merely certain, so He wishes that this should be established in our hearts by a firm and sure assent. *Secondly*, we must observe that, as an assurance of this nature is a thing that is above the capacity of the human mind, it is the office of the Holy Spirit to confirm within us what God promises us by His Word. Hence it is that He has these names—the *Anointing*, the *Earnest*, the *Paraclete*, and the *Seal*. In the *third* place we must observe, that all who do not have the Holy Spirit as a witness of the fact that they with their *Amen* respond to God, who calls them to the sure hope of salvation, do on false grounds assume the name of Christians.⁷⁷

3. Bucer and Calvin: Agreement and Difference⁷⁸

A comparison between Bucer's thoughts and those of Calvin concerning the sealing with the Holy Spirit leads to the conclusion that there is considerable agreement. What stands out in both of them is their reference to the election of God, their emphasis on the trustworthiness of the Word of God, and the

⁷⁵CO L, col. 24: "Deus quidem semper est verax constansque in omnibus suis promissis, habetque perpetuo simul ac locutus est suum amen".

⁷⁶CO L, col. 24: "Nos autem qua sumus vanitate, non aliter respondemus illi nostrum amen quam dum verbo suo certum testimonium reddit in cordibus nostris. Id facit per spiritum suum".

⁷⁷CO L, col. 24.

⁷⁸W. van 't Spijker, 'Bucer und Calvin', in: Christian Krieger/Marc Lienhard (ed.), *Martin Bucer and the Sixteenth Century Europe. Actes du colloque de Strasbourg, 28.-31 August 1991*, Bd. 1, Leiden 1993, p. 461-470; Idem, 'The Kingdom of Christ according to Bucer and Calvin' in: *Calvin and the State. Papers and responses presented at the Seventh and Eighth Colloquia on Calvin and Calvin Studies, Minneapolis, October 26-29, 1989/ Grand Rapids, May 8 and 9, Grand Rapids, Calvin Studies Society 1993*, p. 109-132; Idem, 'Bucer's influence on Calvin: church and community', in: D.F. Wright (ed.), *Martin Bucer. Reforming church and community*, Cambridge 1994, p. 32-44; Idem, 'Calvin's Friendship with Bucer: Did It Make Calvin a Calvinist?', in David Foxgrover (ed.), *Calvin and Spirituality. Papers Presented at the 10th Colloquium of the Calvin Studies Society, May 18-20, 1995, Calvin Theological Seminary/ Calvin and his Contemporaries: Colleagues, Friends and Conflicts. Papers Presented at the 11th Colloquium of the Calvin Studies Society, April 24-26, 1997, Louisville Theological Seminary*, Published for the Calvin Studies Society by CRC Product Services, Grand Rapids 1998, p. 169-186.

close relation of Word and Spirit. Both theologians can claim to have been theologians of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁹

We attribute this agreement to a large extent to the fact that they were friends and even more to the fact that they agreed in the Reformed view that faith includes a firm conviction, and that assurance of faith belongs to the essence of faith itself. It is evident that there is a reciprocal influence, which is also connected to their view of what theology actually ought to be: a practical science which finds its content in the message of Scripture and which always is related to the up-building of the congregation.⁸⁰ Both have been, as far as their "theological existence" concerned, Biblical theologians. Calvin speaks highly of Bucer's exegetical work. Conversely, it is evident that Bucer made use of Calvin's commentaries for his lectures. Their respect for each other was high.

This does not mean that there are no differences between them. First of all, there is a difference between them with respect to their theological method. It was mentioned already that Calvin stands out for his conciseness and clarity. Bucer was occupied by many ecclesiastical and political activities which made it impossible for him to be steadily engaged in scholarly labors. Both Bucer's commentaries and lectures at Cambridge demonstrate that. His mind kept on pouring forth such amazingly rich thoughts that his pen could hardly keep pace with them.⁸¹ Calvin's self-discipline prevented such unevenness; moreover, the circumstances of his work were also entirely different. This, however,

⁷⁹W.P. Stephens, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Martin Bucer*, Cambridge 1970, p. 1: 'The centrality of the Holy Spirit in the theology of Martin Bucer was noted by August Lang in 1900. In his magisterial study, *De Evangelienkommentar Martin Butzers*, he argued that one could speak of Bucer's theology as a 'theology of the Spirit'. For Calvin: S. van der Linde, *De leer van den Heiligen Geest bij Calvijn. Bijdrage tot de kennis der reformatorische theologie*, Wageningen 1943; Werner Krusche, *Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin*, Göttingen 1957; Morii Makoto, *La notion du Saint-Esprit chez Calvin dans son développement historique*, diss. Strasbourg 1961; Sou-Young Lee, *La notion d'expérience chez Calvin d'après son Institution de la religion chrétienne*, Thèse Strasbourg 1984.

⁸⁰Bucer in *In sacra quatuor evangelia, Enarrationes perpetuae* [...], Basel 1536, p. 753: 'Vera theologia non est theoretica et speculativa, sed activa et practica est. Finis siquidem agere est, hoc est vitam vivere deiformem'; cf p. 549: 'Vera Theologia scientia est, pie et beate vivendi, sine quo multa nosse, et variis de rebus posse disserere, etiam daemonum est'. Cf.: Tr. Schieß, *Briefwechsel der Brüder Ambrosius Blaurer und Thomas Blaurer 1509 bis 1567*, Band I, p. 648: 'In vera theologia tantum quisque rite novit quantum in vita expressit'. We find the same way of thinking in Calvin's commentaries, for example COLII, col. 405: 'Atque hinc etiam monemur, ut quisque in pietate optime profecit, ita optimum esse Christi discipulum. Sicut is demum verus theologus censendus est, qui in timore Dei conscientias aedificat'. COLII, col. 434: 'Ergo in doctrina semper utilitas spectanda est, ut quidquid ad pietatem nihil confert, nullo sit loco'.

⁸¹Well known is Calvin's utterance about Bucer's way of working in his letter to Grynaeus: 'Bucerus et prolixior est quam ut ab hominibus aliis occupationibus districtis raptim legi, et sublimior quam ab humilibus et non valde attentis intelligi facile queat. Nam ad cuiuscunque argumenti tractationem se contulit, tam multa illi ad manum suggeruntur ab incredibili qua pollet, ingenii foecunditate, ut manum de tabula tollere nesciat', *Iohannis Calvini Commentarius in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, ed. T.H.L. Parker, Leiden 1981, p. 2s.

is not a thematic difference, but rather a difference in presentation. Both convey the impression that the focal point always and everywhere is true piety. In piety experience has a place, for it does justice to the liberating message of justification, as it is known in a life of sanctification. Perhaps one could say that the focal point of this piety is the relationship between Word and Spirit. Calvin places the emphasis on the Word, without detracting in any way from the Spirit. "For the Lord by a mutual relationship has joined to one another the assurance of His Word and of His Spirit."⁸² The Spirit only reveals His power when we receive His Word with appropriate reverence and respect for its worthiness. On the other hand, the Word shall only be strong and powerful when it is confirmed by the witness of the Spirit.

On the other hand, Bucer emphasizes the work of the Spirit within the coordinates of Word and Spirit. Nevertheless, he cannot be accused of spiritualism. Both Bucer and Calvin are standing at the start of the Reformed tradition, and one can accurately call the relation of Word and Spirit, as also the sealing, the hinge on which everything turns.

This comes through clearly at three points. First of all, we think of the significance of the sealing with the Spirit for one's view of **the assurance of faith**. It is remarkable, as was observed earlier, that the terminology of Bucer as well as Calvin at important points is very similar. The assurance of faith rests, first of all, on the authority of Scripture. When Bucer unfolds his doctrine of Scripture, as he has done at the start of his lectures in Cambridge and as this also comes through in the small commentary from 1527, then the authority of Scripture does not rest on the word of the church, neither on the inner revelation that the Anabaptists in Strasbourg boasted of, but rather on the enlightenment of the Spirit who binds us to the Word. Precisely the conflict with the Anabaptists and Spiritualists brought him to a stronger emphasis on the Scriptures as the means by which the Spirit works. The Spirit does not depart one tittle or iota from what Scripture testifies. God is the most important Speaker of His own Word, the *principalis loquens*.⁸³ This view ascribes a dynamic

⁸² 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', *Inst.* I, 9, 3.

⁸³ ...eo ipso quod hoc, quod praedicamus, dei verbum est, et deus principalis loquens, deum etiam pro suo arbitrio, ubi, quid, quantum ipsi visum fuerit, non ideo quod, nec ilico, cum nos verbum externe administramus, hoc ipso verbo per nos administrato in animis auditorum operari, eoque precandum semper esse, quod ecclesia publico more solet, ut deus incrementum salutis, nobis plantantibus et rigantibus, suppeditare dignetur, quod incrementum scilicet salvificum multis, quibus nos bona fide praedicamus, non contingit', Bucer in his *Abhandlungen vom äußeren und inneren Wort gegen Bernard Wacker*, in: Manfred Krebs/Hans Georg Rott (ed.): *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer*, VIII. Band, *Elsaß*, II. Teil, *Stadt Straßburg 1533-1535*, Gütersloh 1960, S. 195; Willem van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices in the Thought of Martin Bucer*, translated by John Vriend and Lyle D. Bierma, (SMRT 57), Leiden/New York/Köln 1996, p. 122ss.

actuality to the Scriptures. Calvin says in his *Institutes* that faith in the *doctrina salutis* shall not be certain to us unless we become absolutely convinced that God is the author of Scripture. The final proof of Scripture is to be derived from the Person of the living God: *a Dei loquentis persona*.⁸⁴ This prevents both a spiritualizing of the authority of Scripture and a stagnation, which led in later time to the views of Reformed scholasticism. For both Bucer and Calvin the authority of Scripture rests on encountering the speaking God, who knows *how* to speak to us through His Word and Spirit so that we hear His voice.

For both Bucer and Calvin the important thing in this speech of God is the content of the Gospel. The certainty of faith does not rest on a formal authority of Scripture. It finds its ground in the Gospel, which speaks to us of God's benevolence, goodness, and faithfulness. For Bucer and Calvin, letter and Spirit function differently than for Luther, that is to say, more in line with Augustine. Luther set letter and Spirit at odds with each other in parallel with the tension between law and gospel. Bucer and Calvin treat the pair of concepts in a way in which the law also becomes gospel: the preface, Bucer says, is already gospel.⁸⁵ Bucer and Calvin seek to understand the law in a spiritual way, so that it may be called *doctrina salutis*. We receive the Scriptures either with or without the Spirit. The Gospel brings the freedom of the Spirit. The Spiritualists also spoke about letter and spirit, as we know from Karlstadt. However, they left the letter far behind them and thereby lost themselves in libertinism. Bucer and Calvin saw the Spirit as the active Teacher of the Gospel offered in Scripture.

The fact that a person understands the Scriptures and the Gospel is the fruit of the testimony of the Spirit. It surpasses all other methods and means. He who is inwardly taught by the Spirit finds perfect rest in Scripture, which is trustworthy in itself and is not subject to reasoning and argumentation. Scripture receives the certainty it deserves by the testimony of the Spirit. "In spite of the fact that it demands respect for itself by its majesty, it only truly takes hold of us when it is sealed to our hearts by the Spirit".⁸⁶ Here *testimonium* and *obsignatio* coincide. Something takes place that withdraws itself from our judgment and which must be traced back to God's electing grace; it is a conviction which does not need a method of reasoning; it is a knowledge which concurs with the highest reason, because the heart finds rest in that with more certainty and more firmness than any other ground could afford. It is ultimately an experience

⁸⁴Calvin, *Inst.* I, 7, 4: 'Tenendum quod nuper dixi, non ante stabiliri doctrinae fidem, quam nobis indubie persuasum sit auctorum eius esse Deum. Itaque summa Scripturae probatio passim a Dei loquentis persona sumitur'.

⁸⁵'Et in ipso decalogo: Ego sum Dominus Deus tuus, est Evangelium', *Eph.* 1562, p. 28.

⁸⁶Calvin, *Inst.* I, 7, 5.

which can only come about by a heavenly revelation.⁸⁷ For Calvin this is the experience of every believer. The testimony of the Spirit concerning Scripture and its authority does not essentially differ from the sealing with and by the Spirit, as this also reappears in Calvin's definition of faith.

The assurance of faith rests in our knowledge of the benevolence of God.⁸⁸ This definition, which we also find with Bucer⁸⁹, expresses what is determinative for Calvin as well. Faith is a sure and certain knowledge of God's *benevolentia*. The certainty rests on a *revelatio*, on the basis of a gracious promise, together with an *obsignatio*. The knowledge rests on the Word, more specifically on the Gospel, and still more specifically on the promise which may be proclaimed as trustworthy. The nature and quality of this knowledge is soteriologically determined. The *benevolentia* itself, or to put it differently, the gracious election of God works itself out in the enlightenment of our mind and the sealing of our heart, by which a certainty comes into being which gives the believer power to remain standing in spite of everything that could come against him. Calvin included the sealing with the Holy Spirit in his concept of faith. He could not have stated the certainty more strongly than that.

The nature of this knowledge is determined by its being the **experience of all believers**. Neither Calvin's theology nor Bucer's theology became an experience-theology. As with Luther, faith functions within the space of our history, that is to say, within the reality of our experience. One might posit that within Bucer's and Calvin's conception of faith, openness has been created for growth in the knowledge of experience. The concept of daily growth (*dies in diem*: more and more) which marks their view is related to this. In his commentary

⁸⁷Calvin, *Inst.* I, 7, 5: '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 coelesti revelatione nasci nequeat. Non aliud loquor quam quod apud se experitur fidelium unusquisque, nisi quod longe infra iustam rei explicationem verba subsidunt. Pluribus nunc supersedeo, quoniam hac de re alibi tractandi locus iterum se offeret, tantum nunc sciamus veram esse fidem, quam Spiritus Dei cordibus nostris obsignat'.

⁸⁸Calvin, *Inst.* III, 2, 7: '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'.

⁸⁹*Eph.* 1527, p. 19^v: 'Paulo itaque fides proprie persuasio est, qua mens de verbis DOMINI nihil addubitat, persuasa scilicet a spiritu sancto'. In his commentary, *In sacra quatuor evangelia* (see n. 80), p. 221: 'Est enim constans firmaque animi per spiritum sanctum de Dei bonitate atque promissis persuasio, qua is ut verbis certam fidem habet, ita et de eius erga se bonitate omnia sibi indubitato pollicetur, tum demerendo quoslibet, tam ipsi gratificari, quam referre hoc bonitatis studio impensissime studet'. In *Metaphrasis et enarratio in epist. D. Pauli Apostoli ad Romanos* (Basel 1562), praefatio, p. 6, Bucer defines: 'Fides est, certa per spiritum sanctum de Dei in nos charitate, et paterna benevolentia persuasio, nitens Domino nostro Iesu Christo qui morte sua peccata nostra expiavit, et vita sua in qua nunc regnat, participes nos suae iustitiae reddit'. Just like Calvin Bucer writes: 'Proinde simulacrum fidei, non fides fuerit, ubi de aeterna erga nos Dei benignitate dubitatur. Aliud est esse filium et haeredem Dei, quam modo credere, et postea Deum negare?' (*Eph.* 1527, p. 26^v).

Calvin says that faith has two sides: *illuminatio* and *confirmatio*. "The beginning of faith consists of knowledge, the completion consists of a sure and stable conviction."⁹⁰ Also, in the *Institutes* he points to the truth that knowledge must be confirmed. What the mind draws from God's Word must be conveyed to the heart.⁹¹ The Word of God does not flutter in the brains when it is received in faith. The distrust of the heart exceeds the blindness of the mind. Therefore it is more difficult to convince the heart. But the Spirit carries out this action, whereby the knowledge of the revelation is sealed in the heart. It is clear that this growth in faith plays a role for Bucer and Calvin, as does the fact that the trials and assaults are used by God to let faith take root in the heart. Faith's deepest secret consists in the hidden power of the Spirit which, as in the mystery of the Lord's Supper, can better be experienced than understood.⁹² Meanwhile, Calvin maintains that this sealing of the Spirit continues to be part of the actual nature of faith in spiritual growth as well. He does not teach a second experience alongside the one of the knowledge of God's benevolence.

The Spirit who seals us is the **Spirit of sanctification**. According to both Bucer and Calvin there can be no sealing without renewal. We ourselves know that we belong to Christ and that we are called children of God. Others can also recognize it in us. Even though Calvin emphasizes the relation between certainty and the sealing of the Gospel, he maintains that the truth of faith becomes evident in the renewal of life. This explains the order of the chapters in the third book of the *Institutes*. Both Bucer and Calvin are equally convinced that the ground for the certainty can never be found in the fruits of rebirth.⁹³ At most one can afterwards (*a posteriori*) make use of these signs of grace, which are closely connected with the sealing through the Spirit. But the very first ground for assurance lies in that goodness of God, by which we really experience Him as Father. And that goodness is sealed by nothing other than the cer-

⁹⁰See n. 45.

⁹¹Calvin, *Inst.* III, 2, 36: 'Restat deinde ut quod mens hausit in cor ipsum transfundatur. Neque enim si in summo cerebro volutatur Dei verbum, fide perceptum est, sed ubi in imo corde radices egit, ut ad sustinendas repellendasque omnes tentationum machinas invictum sit propugnaculum. Quod si veram mentis intelligentiam, eius illuminationem esse verum est, in tali cordis confirmatione multo evidentius eius virtus apparet [...] Proinde spiritus sigilli vice fungitur, ad eas ipsas promissiones in cordibus nostris obsignandas, quarum certitudinem prius mentibus impressit, atque ad confirmandas et constituendas arrhae locum tenet'.

⁹²Calvin, *Inst.* IV, 17, 32: 'Porro de modo si quis me interroget, fateri non pudebit, sublimius esse arcanum, quam ut vel meo ingenio comprehendendi vel enarrari verbis quaeat, atque, ut apertius dicam, experiri magis, quam intelligam'.

⁹³Calvin, *Inst.* III, 14, 19: 'Quum igitur a conscientiae innocentia fidem suam confirmant sancti, et exultandi materia sumunt, nihil aliud quam a fructibus vocationis se in filiorum locum a Domino cooptatus esse reputant [...] in iacendo firmandae conscientiae fundamento nullum habent, sed tum demum valent si a posteriori sumuntur [...]. Ac ne id quidem possunt, nisi primum Dei bonitatem, nulla alia quam promissionis certitudine obsignatam apprehenderint. Nam si illam aestimare incipiunt a bonis operibus, nihil erit incertius, nec magis infirmum'.

tainty of the promise. The practical syllogism may afterwards offer support to a good conscience, and thus this conscience can know itself to be strengthened in the promises of God and by the sealing of the Holy Spirit.

Both Bucer and Calvin, standing at the start of the Reformed tradition, knew that the certainty of the Gospel and of the promise must be anchored in this Word itself. The highest form of the authority of Scripture rests on the fact that God Himself is the most important speaker of His own Word. It is He who seals us with the Holy Spirit of promise, so that the highest proof for the confirmation of Scripture in our life is derived from the Person of the speaking God Himself. *Deus principalis loquens* is a sixteenth century description of God which remains valid in the twenty-first century.