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Faith in the modern Reformed church: Calvin and Barth

ABSTRACT

Calvin and Barth are arguably the main exponents of two notable soteriological camps in the Reformed world nowadays and their soteriology has wide and sometimes unarticulated impacts on Reformed doctrine and praxis. By exploring the systematic theologies of Calvin and Barth, we articulate the similarities and differences between their views of faith. Both theologians emphasise that an individual's faith must be in Christ and not in one's own works; neither is one justified because of one's faith, but because of Christ's redemptive work. The locus of faith is the main point of difference: Calvin locates an individual's faith in the Christ revealed in the Bible, whereas Barth locates it in Christ's immanent revelation of himself at a time of crisis. Behind this difference are divergent views of the Bible and its relationships with theology and praxis.

1. INTRODUCTION

“Justification by faith alone” was a central cry of the Reformation since Luther understood Romans 1:17, “the just shall live by faith”, to mean that believers receive Christ’s righteousness by faith (Bingham 2019). This understanding is codified in the comprehensive Lutheran scholastic theology of Quenstedt (1685), and in Article 11 of the Anglican *Thirty-Nine Articles*, but it is arguably in the writings of Calvin’s *Institutes* that the doctrine receives its most prominent treatment in the Reformation era. Whilst justification by faith is less prominent in modern Lutheranism and Anglicanism, it remains a doctrine whereby the mainline Reformed church is identified. It is, therefore, important that the wider

Christian church understands what the Reformed church believes when it professes to believe in justification by faith alone.

There are several soteriological disciplines in the modern Reformed church. These should not be thought of as wholly separate camps with no interplay, but instead as disciplines that use different soteriological emphases and focus on the writings of different Reformed theologians. First, there is an orthodox, classical, Reformed soteriological discipline. Modern leaders of this discipline include F.N. Lee, J. Pipa Jr., and J. Beeke. The definition of faith in the final edition of Calvin's *Institutes* remains the faith definition around which the classical Reformed discipline coalesces, and which is essentially codified in the historical Reformed confessions. Secondly, a neo-orthodox discipline grew around the work of the Swiss theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968), who wrote prolifically in the middle of the last century. Other disciples of this school include T.F. Torrance (Fergusson 2019) and Reinhold Niebuhr (Paas 2016:267). Thirdly, the movement of liberation theology emerged from the ashes of the Second World War and the period of global decolonisation that it precipitated. Liberation theologians can be found across the theological spectrum and their theology is socio-politically oriented. Liberation theologians, who identify as Reformed, include Jürgen Moltmann, Allan Boesak, and Beyers Naudé. However, they are few in number and the extent to which they can properly be considered a subset of the Reformed church tradition is for a future study. We have not included them in this work.

This article compares and contrasts the view of faith emerging from Calvin for the classical Reformed discipline, and from Barth for the neo-orthodox Reformed discipline. In Section 2, we locate their doctrine of faith in their wider theological system, and then explore their understanding of faith in more detail. Section 3 considers some main points of debate that arise. In conclusion, we articulate the similarities and differences between Calvin's and Barth's views of faith, probe from where these differences stem, and offer reflections on the relationship between the Bible and faith.

2. DEFINITIONS OF FAITH

2.1 Calvin

Calvin was trained as a lawyer in the art of rhetoric. This includes not only developing an effective argument, but also delivering it at appropriate locations in a wider communicative context. As Calhoun (1998) notes in his lectures, Calvin's ordering of the chapters in the *Institutes* instructs us, along with their contents, about the typical order of doctrinal growth in an individual who is coming to understand the systematic theological truths underpinning

an individual's soteriological experiences. In the first edition (1536), faith is contained in Chapter Two of a total of six chapters. By Calvin's much-expanded final edition of the *Institutes* (1559/1560), faith is found discussed mainly in Book 3, Chapters 2 ("Of faith", vol.1:467-507) and 11 ("Justification by faith", Vol. 2:36-59).

Although the *Institutes* is a body of systematic theology, Calvin writes pre-eminently as a biblical theologian who regarded his main work as the orderly preaching of Scripture (Schulze 1998:50). The content of his chapters represents a departure from the medieval scholastic pattern used in Peter Lombard's *Sentences* or in Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, which had been the standard theological textbooks prior to the Reformation (Gonzalez 1971:258-279). A major Reformation theme is the sufficiency of Scripture, and Calvin places greater emphasis on Scripture, and less emphasis on philosophical method than the medieval schoolmen who preceded him. Some church historians suggest that Calvin's high view of the sovereignty of God dominates his theology; as one of God's attributes, Calvin indeed views God's sovereignty as overarching everything. However, to suggest that Calvin's high view of God's sovereignty is disproportionate to Calvin's high views of God's other attributes would be a mischaracterisation of his theology (Bouma 1947:34; Winterdink 1976:9; Pillay 2015). If anything may be said to loom large in Calvin's writings, it is his commitment to the divine inspiration and authority of the Bible (Murray 1959). Accordingly, to rightly understand Calvin's doctrine of faith, we must first make a brief excursion into Calvin's doctrine of revelation.

In Calvin (1949), God's created world affords men some understanding of the existence and character of the creator (1.5.1-11). However, because of man's blindness in his fallen state, this "light of nature" is inadequate to reveal enough of whom God is or what is required to restore a sinner to fellowship with God (1.5.14). Therefore, God sent his Word, the Old and New Testament Scriptures, to "make himself known unto salvation" (1.6). A person cannot be firmly persuaded of a doctrine unless s/he is firmly persuaded that God is the author of the Scripture that contains it (1.7.4). This conviction of the divine inspiration of Scripture requires the internal teaching of the Holy Spirit (1.7.4-5) but is not contrary to arguments from human reason, which can be used as subordinate proofs (1.8.13). Hence, Calvin teaches that God's special revelation to mankind across the ages is the Bible.

From this basis, Calvin develops his doctrine of faith. It is one of the fruits of election (3.2.11): a gift of the Holy Spirit (3.1.4) that enables man to receive Christ as he is revealed in the Scriptures (3.2.6).

Whether God uses the agency of man, or works immediately by his own power, it is always by his word that he manifests himself to those whom he designs to draw to himself. Hence Paul designates faith as the obedience which is given to the Gospel (Rom. 1:5) (3.2.6).

Faith is more than a simple knowledge of the divine will (3.2.7); there are many kinds of knowledge, or understanding, that do not amount to faith (Jas. 2:19). Neither is faith a simple knowledge of divine benevolence, which “cannot be of much importance unless it leads us to confide in it” (3.2.7). It is not mere comprehension but “so much superior, that the human mind must far surpass and go beyond itself in order to reach it (Eph. 3:18-19)” (3.2.14). It is not even a cognitive agreement or concord with the teachings of Scripture (3.2.8). It is, rather,

a firm and sure knowledge of the divine favour toward us, founded on the truth of a free promise in Christ, and revealed to our minds, and sealed on our hearts, by the Holy Spirit (3.2.7).

The principal act of faith is the inward embrace of God’s promises; this is a peace or security that

quiets and calms the conscience in the view of the judgement of God, and without which it is necessarily vexed and almost torn with tumultuous dread (3.2.16).

[Faith] seeks life in God, life which is not found in commands or the denunciations of punishment, but in the promise of mercy (3.2.29).

These are not conditional but “gratuitous” promises.

Believers, indeed, ought to recognise God as the judge and avenger of wickedness; and yet mercy is the object to which they properly look, since he is exhibited to their contemplation as ‘good and ready to forgive,’ ‘plenteous in mercy,’ ‘slow to anger’ [etc.] (3.2.29).

Faith centres on the person and work of Christ. Calvin observes that all the promises of Scripture point towards and receive their commensurate fulfilment in Christ: they are “yea and amen in Christ Jesus” (3.2.32; see Rom. 1:3; 1 Col. 2:2; 2 Col. 1:20). Both our faith and the Father’s love rest on Christ who is “the bond by which the Father is united to us in paternal affection” (3.2.32). God views his children in Christ and only because of their relationship to Christ does he love them (3.2.32).

Calvin stops just short of asserting that full assurance is of the essence of faith but nonetheless sets a high bar of confidence in the promises of Scripture

and their fulfilment in Christ and a slightly lower, but still considerable¹ bar of confidence that Christ's redemptive work has been applied to the individual. Faith is not a "wavering" knowledge, "fluctuating with perpetual doubt" but "a firm and sure knowledge of the divine favour toward us" (3.2.7) and bold and confident in Christ (3.2.15). In this instance, Calvin regards faith as a confidence, not only that God is generally benevolent or that Christ has the ability to save, but that God has favoured "us". It is not altogether clear whether this "us" is the majestic plural or the regular first-person plural and, by extension, whether Calvin means that the faithful individual knows that God is favourable to him/her specifically or the church, in general – but the former appears more plausible. It is a peace or security that

quiets and calms the conscience in the view of the judgement of God, and without which it is necessarily vexed and almost torn with tumultuous dread (3.2.16).

Our knowledge that God is favourable to us does not arise from direct revelation, dreams, or ecstasies (1.9), but from confidence in the absoluteness and gratuity (freeness) of God's promises in Scripture as sealed by the Spirit operating in the believing soul (3.2.29). However, it is wrong to suggest that Calvin's doctrine of assurance leaves no room for the reality of unbelief in the life of the Christian.

Believers have a perpetual struggle with their own distrust and are thus far from thinking that their consciences possess a placid quiet, uninterrupted by perturbation. On the other hand, whatever be the mode in which they are assailed, we deny that they fall off and abandon that sure confidence which they have formed in the mercy of God (3.2.17).

David is given as an example of this, and contrasted with Ahaz, who heard God's promise, but his heart was shaken, and he ceased not to tremble (3.2.17). Lane helpfully summarises that, in Calvin's writings, full assurance (in degree) is not of the essence of faith, but assurance (in some measure) must necessarily exist if a person is extending faith in another (Lane 1979:32). On assurance, Calvin concludes:

[When] faith is instilled into our minds, we begin to behold the face of God placid, serene, and propitious; far off, indeed, but still so distinctly as to assure us that there is no delusion in it (3.2.19).

Having considered Calvin's views on the nature of faith, our attention now turns to consider Calvin's doctrine of justification by faith. His order of unfolding the

1 Divines of the Second Reformation, the Dutch Pietists, and Highland Scottish Presbyterians, place more emphasis on the reality of unbelief in the exercise of faith.

doctrine is noteworthy: he first explains what justification by faith is, and then its place in the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation).

Calvin explains what justification by faith is in terms that are familiar to any Reformed theologian nowadays:

A man will be justified by faith when, excluded from the righteousness of works, he by faith lays hold of the righteousness of Christ, and clothed in it appears in the sight of God not as a sinner, but as righteous [...] This justification consists in the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ (3.11.2).

Let us analyse this statement. In Calvin's theology, there are two parts to the justification of sinners. First, there is the forgiveness of their sins, as Christ has paid the judicial penalty on their behalf. Secondly, there is the imputation, by the Spirit, of Christ's obedience to God's law, which he perfected as a man. These two parts mean that the justified sinner is now no longer merely guiltless but has possession of the full and perfect righteousness, required by the law, and accomplished by Christ.

Calvin repudiates Osiander's doctrine that a person's faith itself justifies him/her. Calvin states that "the power of justifying exists not in faith, considered in itself, but only as receiving Christ" (3.11.7). Osiander's position was broadly repeated later in church history by J.N. Darby and the Plymouth Brethren and refuted contemporaneously by Dabney (1890:169-228) in two long essays. The argument is too lengthy to enter in detail, in this instance, but what both Calvin and Dabney argue is that a belief of the truth and inspiration of Scripture, believing that Jesus is the Son of God, or indeed believing that there is forgiveness of sin in Christ – whilst all parts of faith are not themselves the cause or *locus* of salvation. Rather, the *locus* of salvation is in the person and work of Christ and one's faith, which is enabled by the activity of the Spirit in the soul, instrumentally receives Christ's justifying work to himself. The "efficient cause" of salvation is the mercy and free love of the Father; the "material cause" is Christ and his obedience unto righteousness, and the "instrumental cause" is faith (3.14.17). We might summarise this by saying that, for Calvin and Dabney, we are not justified because of our faith; it is the instrument, not the grounds, of justification.

Unlike his Genevan successor Beza (2016), Calvin's *ordo salutis* was embryonic (McGowan 2004). He speaks of sanctification and regeneration as the same concept and, along with justification, as consequences to faith.

Christ given to us by the kindness of God is apprehended and possessed by faith, by means of which we obtain in particular a twofold benefit: first, being reconciled by the righteousness of Christ, God becomes

instead of a judge, an indulgent Father; and, secondly, being sanctified by his Spirit, we aspire to integrity and purity of life. This second benefit – viz. regeneration” (3.11.1).

He nonetheless admits that

they may be arranged in a better order than that in which they are here presented. But it is of little consequence, provided they are so connected with each other as to give us a full exposition and solid confirmation of the whole subject (3.11.16).

New readers of Calvin may be surprised to note how little he writes on the *ordo salutis*.

2.2 Barth

Karl Barth seemed destined to become an academic theologian. After studying at the Universities of Bern, Berlin (under Adolf von Harnack), Tübingen, and Marburg (under Wilhelm Herrmann), and rejecting the liberal school then dominating Germanic theological life, he became the minister of the village in Safenwil in the Swiss Aargau between 1911 and 1921. Academic life called, however, and he taught theology at the Universities of Göttingen, Münster, and Bonn, before taking a Professorship at Bern in 1935, in which Chair he was to remain for the rest of his academic life (Busch 1977).

Among Barth’s early theological influences is the existentialist Kierkegaard, whose idea of conversion as a surrender to God in a time of crisis was further developed by Barth: God is the infinite “wholly other”, whereas man is finite, needy, and sinful (Paas 2016:267). Barth’s view of the Bible is that it is the record of God’s revelation – which is, essentially, Christ; the Bible is not intrinsically revelation but becomes revelation when it is applied to a person at a time of crisis (Paas 2016:267). However, when reading Barth’s writings on faith, this view of Scripture does not immediately come to the fore. The theological relationship between Barth and the liberal 19th-century theologian Schleiermacher is debated. Heron (2000:394-395) shows that, although Barth was resolutely critical of Schleiermacher’s theological method, he quotes him extensively and respected the paradigm-changing nature of his conclusions. Heron (2000:403) further observes that their understanding of God’s revelation is radically different: Schleiermacher (1928:123) argues that God reveals himself immediately in the “common Spirit that animates the corporate life of believers”, whereas Barth argues that God reveals himself transcendentally through Jesus Christ as the Word of God with the Bible as a record or “witness” of that revelation (De Moor 1937; Ramm 1993:92-93). Hence, Schleiermacher’s doctrine of revelation is anthropocentric, whereas

Barth's is Christocentric; both differ from Calvin's doctrine of the divine inspiration of authoritative Scripture.

This excursion into Barth's background is necessary for our discussion of faith in Barthian theology, because his strongly objective Christocentric view pervades not only his doctrine of revelation – which, in turn, affects his view of faith – but also directly contributes to his conceptualisation of faith in his theological system. Barth's *magnum opus* is his multi-volume *Church Dogmatics* (1956); his writings on faith are concentrated in Volume IV.1: in Sections 61.4 ("Justification by faith alone, pp. 609-642); 63.1 ("Faith and its object", pp. 741-757), and 63.2 ("The act of faith", pp. 757-779). Note that Barth inverts Calvin's order by first discussing justification by faith, and then considering faith independently; we shall consider his treatments of these subjects in the order he lays them out.

Barth begins with the two dialectic poles that faith is both a real human action but also entirely received from outside the self, which accords with faith as the working of God and Barth's theological observation of God as "wholly other" (Barth 1960:72). Faith "is a free decision, but made with the genuine necessity of obedience" (Barth 1956:IV.1:620).

The ability required is a genuinely and concretely human ability, but ... when a man does make use of it it is shown not to be an ability which he himself has contributed and exchanged as a presupposition, in the form of a capacity of his own (613).

Faith cannot be observed directly but only reflectively as it affects the life and actions of the possessor (613). The humanity and super-humanity of faith is expressed in the following dense quote, which we must then unpack:

It is faith which can do what has to be done and what cannot be done by anyone naturally. It is in faith that a man surmounts the great difficulty which consists in the fact that he is not adapted of himself to do justice to the sovereign self-demonstration of the justified man – not to speak of the lesser difficulty caused by the historical questioning of this man, the anxiety whether he is not after all a myth or an illusion (614).

At this point, the reader may wonder whether Barth is conflating faith with assurance. The key, in this instance, is that the "justified man" of whom Barth speaks is not the justified sinner but Christ, and his main point is not questioning the reality of the individual person's justification but that faith rests assured of the historical reality of Christ as The Justified Man. It is

the absolutely positive answer to the question of the reality and existence of the man justified by God ... in his own person in its

solidarity with all other men, and therefore virtually and prospectively in their persons too (614).

The distinctively Barthian doctrine of hypothetical prospective universal corporate election in Christ as The Elect Man emerges, in this instance, and we must pause a moment to outline it. Barth affirms double predestination, that, in the eternal decree, God elected man to life and death, but then restricts that elective decree to Christ who would undergo life and death in potentiality for all men (II.2) and every man (IV.1:750); this understanding of election is, for Barth, the basis of the gospel message (IV.3.2). Hence, Barth's theological system is highly Christocentric.

Barth repeats similar negations as Calvin and Dabney when he observes that a person is not justified because of his/her faith, which would be Pharisaic self-righteousness (IV.1:617). It appears, but may simply be a matter of semantics, that Barth does not regard faith as a "means" of grace:

For there is as little justification of man 'by' – that is to say, by means of – the faith produced in him ... as there is a justification 'by' any other works (616-617).

The one who is righteous by faith can only live in an atmosphere which is purified completely from the noxious fumes of the dream of other justifications (621).

Rather, it is "wholly and utter humility" (618) as regards one's self, without descending into the Colossian error (Col. 2:23) of pessimism or defeatism (619). The humility of faith stems from its monergistic nature (627). This humility essentially involves obedience to Christ: "the free decision of faith [is] made with the genuine necessity of obedience" (620). Faith and the obedience of performing good works are inseparable, as justification and sanctification appear together. The outward activity reflects the inward reality. Faith has "nothing to do with indifferentism, quietism or libertinism" (627). Believers cannot either keep their faith to themselves or behave in a manner disobedient to Christ.

Positively,

justifying faith [is] a faith which knows and grasps and realises the justification of man as the decision and act and word of God (630);

a monergistic salvation and revelation. A bare acceptance of the historicity of Christ does not pass muster in Barth's definition of faith; reliance on Christ must accompany it. "[Faith] lets itself be told and accepts the fact and trusts in it that Jesus Christ is man's justification" (631).

Barth's discussion of faith itself comes several chapters after his discussion of justification by faith. Whereas, on justification by faith, Barth walks largely (but not altogether) down established Reformed paths, many of his remarks on the nature of faith are fresh and insightful. Faith "is a subjective realisation ... a subjectivisation of an objective *res*" (742). The fall corrupted mankind so that mankind is incapable of faith (745); "in the rivalry between a possible faith and actual sin, faith will always come off second best" (746). Objectively, man is justified in Christ, which reality s/he subjectivises to him-/herself by faith. The believer closes the object circle, whilst the object circle of the unbeliever remains open (742). Faith rests on Christ's restorative work, but the faithless person is also the subject of Christ's work of restoring the broken covenant between God and man – not in a mere theoretical way – but as a present person and for all humanity and all men (irrespective of their attitude to him) (743). Barth views faith itself in the same monergistic terms as he views justification. "In faith, man ceases to be in control", because it comes from Christ (743). The life of faith may be viewed as revolving around an external point, namely Christ, "finding in Him the true centre of himself which is outside himself" and from which point source it grows (744). Because of this absolute monergism, faith is a free choice: there are no other plausible, evident choices for the believer to make;

the action of faith is the doing of the self-evident – just because it takes place in the free choice beside which man has no other choice (748).

Like Calvin, Barth associates faith with a very high degree of assurance, characterised by an "adamantine, unquestioning and joyful certainty" that is superlatively beyond "the certainty of any other human action" (747). This assurance is obtained when one is regenerated by Christ² and one's eyes are now opened to see the new state into which one has entered:

that the night has passed and the day dawned; that there is peace between God and sinful man, revealed truth, full and present salvation (748-749).

Indeed, Barth regards the very possession of faith as itself an assurance for the believer, as the evidence of a change that came upon all mankind at the resurrection, which assurance is further confirmed by the testimony of the church (751). Barth's doctrine of assurance, therefore, requires introspection and extrospection from man: man must look at himself to find all humanity (including himself) in a new state, and he must look to Christ as God's revelation and as confirmed by the church through history. Because

2 In this instance, Barth does not ascribe regeneration primarily to the Holy Spirit, which is more common among Reformed writers.

Barth is not drawn into the agency of the Holy Spirit, and because he views Christ's redemptive work as for all men, it is unclear whether anyone can or should find him-/herself in an original fallen state, the reality of which Barth readily admits.

Faith pervades the whole life of a Christian and all that s/he does (757-758) and should be expressed in three main ways, namely acknowledgement, recognition, and confession (758). In acknowledgement, the believer should be drawn to the church

with such compulsion that he must not only accept and respect it but submit to its law and desire to associate himself with it and join it (759).

Barth then introduces his novel doctrine of revelation into the equation.

The active acknowledgement of the Christian faith, in which recognition and confession are included and from which they result, does not have reference to any doctrine, theory, or theology represented by or in the community. ... Nor does it have reference – as the Reformers so sharply emphasised – to the histories of the Old and New Testaments, to the prophetic and apostolic theology as such on whose witness the proclamation of the community is founded (760).

Rather, Barth argues that the acknowledging act of faith is acknowledging the community of Christ, in which community one encounters Christ himself (759). This point at which soteriology and ecclesiology meet is clearly a departure from Calvin and one to which we will return in Section 3. Next, the recognising act of faith is the recognition of the sinfulness of self, and also recognising Christ as Lord and beginning to see and understand him (762). This involves contrition for sin in very orthodox Reformed language:

[From] the recognition that my pride and fall are vanquished in the death of Jesus Christ ... it follows that I am seriously alarmed at myself, that I am radically and heartily sorry for my condition, that I can no longer boast of myself and my thoughts and words and works and especially my heart, but can only be ashamed of them, that I can think of myself and my acts only with remorse and penitence (771).

Recognising one's self thus, faith also has knowledge of Christ as the Word of God revealed in history (774). In this light, the believer begins to recognise positive changes in his/her life:

little renovations and provisional sanctifications and reassurances and elucidations will necessarily penetrate the whole man, who in the knowledge of faith has undoubtedly become a new subject (775).

Finally, confession is Barth's third main act of faith. It involves a public declaration of one's faith in Christ whom he has come to acknowledge and recognise. Helpfully, Barth observes:

Confessing is not a special action of the Christian. All that is demanded is that he should be what he is. ... If he stands out in some respect ... if, as a confessor, he has to suffer in some way, it is not because he intends all this. It proceeds from his action, but he himself does not impart to it the quality to provoke it (777).

These words are somewhat profound when one considers that Barth was writing against the backdrop of the Second World War, in which the Confessing Church in Germany suffered heavily for standing out on the side of Christ.

3. POINTS OF DEBATE

This section outlines the main points of debate between Calvin and Barth that have emerged from our study in Section 2 as touching on the doctrine of faith. In the interests of brevity, we do not effect an extensive comparison with other Reformed theologians, in this instance, as to do so judiciously would require a chapter devoted to each. Instead, in the debated areas, we summarise the positions of Calvin and Barth and attempt to articulate the basic points of disagreement.

We noted that Barth inverts Calvin's order by first discussing justification by faith, and then considering faith independently. The scholastic method first requires a definition of the individual elements before a discussion can proceed to the relationships between the elements: scientifically working "toward the ultimate unknowableness of the totally transcendent God" (Vanderhaar 2012:73). One can only tentatively suggest possible reasons for Barth's inversion of the expected order. Certainly, Barth unfolds an external, monergistic, and intensely Christocentric doctrine of justification by faith. Perhaps, Barth places his discussion of justification by faith before his discussion of faith itself because he wishes to emphasise that the external justification by Christ, on which faith trusts, is necessary before one can either possess that faith or be aware of one's possession. However, this is merely conjecture. It is altogether clear that Barth emphasises justification on the basis of Christ's faith (Rom. 3:22) more than the believer's faith as the instrument (or means) of appropriating the justification accomplished by Christ. Both are correct statements but, when discussing justification, Barth stresses the former whereas Calvin stresses the latter. Furthermore, Yu (2019:312-313) observes an ontological divergence between Calvin and Barth. Whilst Calvin emphasises a theocentric faith on the mediatorial work of Christ as linking

man with God, Barth's object of faith is Christocentric – “primarily and only Jesus Christ” (Yu 2019:313).

Calvin asserts that faith rests on Christ as he is revealed in the Bible, whereas Barth argues that faith rests on Christ but not in the biblical record. We have observed (see p. 3) that Calvin's doctrine of revelation is that the Protestant Canon is the inspired special revelation of God; the Bible alone is the ultimate authority and the standard to which we must refer our thoughts, activities, or experiences. Kuiper (1993) shows how Calvin's doctrine of revelation is critical of the authority of extra-biblical special revelations and experiences as subversive to doctrine and piety. Barth emphasises that faith rests not principally on the record of Christ in the Bible, but on a personal experience of Christ after a point of spiritual crisis or conversion; the Bible and the church help bolster faith, by providing historical rationale and continuity, but they are not themselves authoritative. He views the Bible as a “meaningful history” that is a helpful but occasionally erroneous witness of Christ the Word (Sonderregger 2019); and that the Bible is not itself God's revelation but contains the substance of God's revelation, who is Christ (Bosman 2019). Whilst Calvin also rejects the primary authority of the church, he and Barth disagree on the relationship between faith and Scripture. Calvin views Christ, as found in Scripture, and extra-Scriptural experiences of Christ are only valid in so far as they agree with Scripture. Barth holds to faith in an imminent Christ and Scripture as valid only so far as it agrees with Christ. Calvin locates faith in the Christ of the Scriptures, whilst Barth locates faith in Christ as contained in the Scriptures. Both these positions contrast with Schleiermacher, who locates faith in Christ in one's personal and shared experience of him (1928:123), and yet there is a sense in which Barth, in his intense Christomony, returns the question to experience: if Christ but not the Bible is my divine authority, how may I be authoritatively convinced of Christ except by my immediate experience of him? Calvin's solution is that Christ as God is indeed our divine authority, has revealed all that we need to know about himself in the Bible, and communicates that knowledge to us especially by his Spirit. But it is hard to pinpoint whether the difference between Calvin and Barth on the locus of faith amounts to a fundamental difference in their definitions of faith, or a difference in emphasis. Might Calvin say of Barth that his faith rests on his own understanding of meeting Christ, rather than on Christ? And might Barth say of Calvin that his faith rests on a book that purports to teach of Christ, rather than on Christ? We suggest that the potential Barthian critique, in this instance, is valid only if the Bible is not the inspired Word of God. If, however, it is, then the revelation of the Word in Christ's incarnation and his writings are equally authoritative, each flowing from the same divine source. John uses λόγος to mean both Christ and the written word: in John 1:1-4, the λόγος is evidently Christ, but in most other Johannine uses, the evident meaning is

the written word.³ The words of the incarnate Christ instruct that, for the New Testament church, faith (πίστις) in himself will be on account of the written word: “[I pray] for them also which shall believe on me through my word” (John 17:20).

Barth’s doctrine of corporate justification in Christ flows from his views of hypothetical prospective universal corporate election and reprobation in Christ. This theological system is internally consistent but the original premise is flawed, as all men are not depicted by Scripture as prospectively universally elect in Christ; rather, the eternal decree concerns individuals (Rom. 9:13). Some individuals are elected to make up Christ’s body (Col. 1:24) and others are reprobate to make up those upon whom Christ would show his justice (2 Thess. 1:3-10). Although Barth denied that he was a universalist (see Jüngel 1986:44-45), several theologians have argued that this understanding of election amounts to universalism (Crisp 2004). Von Balthasar (1971:163) argues that Barth’s grounding of election in God’s absolute grace must lead to universal salvation. Berkouwer (1960:229) contrasts Barth with classical universalists in his resolving election and the Gospel offer into Christ who is elected and reprobated for the universality of mankind, but he observes that Barth’s system logically leads to universalism.

4. CONCLUSION

There is much on the doctrine of faith that the neo-orthodox Barth shares with the Reformation Father Calvin. Both are quick to assert a monergistic doctrine of faith: an instrument bestowed by God, whereby a person is enabled to perform a real human action to rest on Christ for his/her salvation and cannot be earned or otherwise obtained by his/her own good works. Both repudiate the idea that a person is justified on the mere basis of his/her faith; rather, Christ justifies, and faith receives that justification. Both Calvin and Barth contend that faith is accompanied by a high degree of assurance, although Calvin also acknowledges the perturbations of conscience from the (re) discovery of personal sin and an imperfect trust that admits unbelief.

The theologian’s doctrine of revelation has a major impact on his systematics. Comparing Calvin and Barth’s doctrine of faith, the main difference is on the locus of faith and that stems from their variant doctrines of revelation. Calvin holds that the Christ and the Bible are both God’s inspired Word. Barth accepts the former but rejects the latter; for him, the Bible is a historical record containing God’s Word – Christ. Calvin is foremost a biblical theologian and his doctrine of faith accords better with the plain teachings

3 See especially John 10:35.

of the Bible. Barth is foremost a systematic theologian and his Christomonic system resolves some of the hard questions regarding, for example, the eternal decree, but sometimes at the expense of strict biblical fidelity. If we might summarise Calvin's faith in words such as *the instrument whereby I hold to Christ as he reveals himself in Scripture*. Barth's faith is something like *the solid trust that Christ is the centre of my world*. The role of the Bible is the principal point of divergence in their definitions of faith. As Clark (2008) has commented, the Reformed church would do well to reflect on the relationships between the Bible, experience, and faith, if it is to recover a Reformed identity for the 21st century.

If one were to imagine how these two theologians do their work, one imagines Calvin at his desk, flicking backwards and forwards through the Bible, and through Augustine and Bernard, taking copious notes and arranging and rearranging these into publishable form. One imagines Barth sitting in an armchair, with a coffee and perhaps a cigar, thinking, then discussing with his *amanuensis* Lollo,⁴ then dictating a paragraph, then moving on to the next sphere of thought. When working with Calvin's writings nowadays, one generally finds a subject where one expects where the subject is dealt with summarily and then left; when working with Barth's writings, one finds him leaving a subject only to return to it several pages or chapters later. If Calvin is precise and methodical so that the reader receives a honed and unambiguous statement of truth, Barth's thoughts flow onto the page as a stream of consciousness in which the loose ends are sometimes left for the reader to complete and develop.

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