



Heinrich Bullinger and Jean Calvin on the Authority of Scripture (1538-1571)

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Abstract

This article summarizes Jean Calvin's concept of the self-convincing authority of Scripture, and relates his position to the writings of Heinrich Bullinger. The authors possibly influenced each other. Both use the Greek term *autopistos* for the authority of Scripture. In 1571, Bullinger published an anonymous work that relies on Calvin's *Institutes*. In spite of minor differences in emphasis, the reformers agreed in maintaining the independent authority of Scripture as the norm of faith. For both authors Word and Spirit were intimately connected, although in the writings studied for this article Calvin more explicitly connects the acknowledgement of Scripture's authority to the witness of the Spirit.

Keywords

Heinrich Bullinger, Jean Calvin, Authority of Scripture, *autopistia*, witness of the Holy Spirit

The relationship between Bullinger and Calvin regarding the authority of Scripture is an interesting field of research. After a short introduction of the term *autopistos*, we first will turn to Bullinger's *De Scripturae Sanctae auctoritate* of 1538 and Calvin's *Institutes* of 1539, next we will trace the use of the term *autopistos* in both authors, and finally show that some passages on the authority of Scripture in the anonymous *De Scripturae Sanctae praestantia disertatio* (1571) depend on the text of the *Institutes*.

In the *Institutes* of 1559 Jean Calvin writes "Let this therefore stand: those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught, truly find rest in Scripture; it is indeed self-convincing [*autopistos*]¹—it should not be submitted to demonstration by proofs—while it still owes the certainty that it deserves among us to the testimony of the Spirit."¹ At first sight there is a tension in the phrase

¹ Jean Calvin, *Institutes* 1.7.5. Translation mine, see Henk van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology: Truth and Trust* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 53. For the Latin text see

between the work of the Spirit and the authority of Scripture. The authority of Scripture stands independently from any external proof or demonstration, but still only gains certainty through the witness of the Spirit. The crucial term to understand Calvin's point is the Greek word *autopistos*.

In ancient Greek philosophy this word is used to define the Euclidian axioms. These axioms or common notions—for instance, that things equal to the same thing are equal to each other—are undeniable or self-convincing.² In the ancient commentaries on Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, the term is used to define the *principia* on which all forms of true *scientia* rest. According to Aristotle every science starts from first principles (*archai*).³ Demonstration of these principles is impossible, because this implies that there are principles behind the principles in an infinite series.⁴

In medieval scholastic discourse it became common to discuss whether theology can be called a science in the Aristotelian sense, as soon as the Latin translation of the *Posterior Analytics* became available.⁵ Theological surveys faced the question whether *theologia* is a *scientia* and which *principia* it has. In his commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, for instance, Thomas Aquinas argues that theology can be called a *scientia*, be it a subalternate science, because its first principles rest on a superior *scientia*, namely the knowledge of God and of the blessed. The Latin phrase for self-convincing principles is: *principia per se nota*.⁶

In medieval theological texts it was not common to use Greek words. The introduction of the Greek *autopistos* into theological discourse illustrates the Renaissance influence in the Reformation: back to the sources. The main difference, however, between the medieval *principia per se nota* and the use of *autopistos* in the Reformation, is the way in which the latter defined Scripture as the basis of theology. The *autopistia* of Scripture denoted the independency of theology from the authority of the institutional church and extra-biblical tradition. If faith rests on

Jean Calvin, *Opera Selecta*, 3rd edn, Peter Barth and Wilhelm Niesel, ed. (Munich: Christian Kaiser, 1967) [Henceforth: Calvin, *OS*], 3, 70.

² T.L. Heath, *The Thirteen Books of Euclid's Elements*, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (New York: Dover Publications), 155.

³ Aristotle, *Analytica posteriora* 1.6, 74b 5.

⁴ Aristotle *Metaphysica* 997a 5-8, 1005a 21-b 17, 1006a 5, 17.

⁵ James of Venice offered an influential translation some time before 1159. Jean de Reading and Steven John Livesey, *Theology and Science in the Fourteenth Century: Three Questions on the Unity and Subalternation of the Sciences from John of Reading's Commentary on the Sentences* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 26.

⁶ "Omnis scientia procedit ex principiis per se notis." *S. Thomae Aquinatis Scriptum Super Sententiis*, vol. 1, ed. P. Mandonnet (Paris: Lethielleux, 1929), q1 a3 qc2.

sola scriptura, Scripture must be self-sustaining and self-convincing. The question how you can know this without the authority of the church, is answered by the Swiss Reformers with a reference the work of the Spirit.

Bullinger's *De Scripturae Sanctae autoritate*

In 1538, Heinrich Bullinger sent a volume to Henry VIII with the title *On the Authority of Holy Scripture, Its Certainty, Trustworthiness and Absolute Perfection*.⁷ At that time the Zürich Reformer had already developed his theology by writing, among other books, commentaries on the whole New Testament. The work on Scripture was the first part of a diptych; the second part focuses on church structure and leadership. In the *Praefatio* Bullinger writes that the opponents of the Word of God not only state that the study of Scripture is an innovation and that Scripture is not sufficient as rule for a pious life without the traditions of the church, but also that Scripture does not have authority if the authority of the church and the fathers is not added to it.⁸ The first chapter deals with this point: according to Rome, Scripture does not stand without the approbation and assent of the church. Speaking of the acceptance of the revealed truth by the patriarchs, Bullinger says that what is believed “has authority of itself as it insinuates into our minds by its own virtue and excellence.”⁹ His opponents want to be judges in a thing that is to be believed because of itself (*per se credenda*), just like Adam who wanted to judge the word of God and fell. After the fall mankind became more careful and accepted the promise the Word of God in simple faith as indubitable rule for his faith and life. Bullinger finishes the chapter with the conclusion that the Word of God has sufficient authority of itself and does not need human confirmation to be made perfect.

Bullinger repeats this in the next chapter by telling how the people of Israel at the foot of Mount Sinai did not call a meeting to decide whether the law was from God, but simply accepted it. “Therefore the law of God—a testimony

⁷ On the background and general content of this work, see the previous article in this journal: Peter Opitz, ‘The Authority of Scripture in the Early Zurich Reformation (1522-1540).’ *Journal of Reformed Theology* 5.3 (2011), 296-309.

⁸ *Heinrich Bullinger theologische Schriften Bd. 4: De scripturae sanctae autoritate deque episcoporum institutione et functione: (1538)*, eds. Emidio Campi together with Philipp Wälchli (Zürich: TVZ, 2009), (henceforth: Bullinger, *HBTS* 4), 20.

⁹ “At hic ipsa res, quam credimus, ex se ipsa habet autoritatem suapte virtute et praestantia insinuantem se animis nostris.” Bullinger, *HBTS* 4, 24.

of God's will—is not subject to the judgment of anyone, but itself judges over everything and has its authority out of itself.¹⁰ The Latin phrase is: *ex seipsa auctoritatis habere*.¹¹ In John 5 Christ says that the Father who sent him, testifies concerning him and that this is more than any human witness. In the same way, Scripture has sufficient witness and authority out of itself, because it is the oracle of God, even if all people and the church itself would cease to witness.¹² The authority of Scripture can not only be compared with that of Christ, it is also underlined by the many references of Christ to Scripture. Bullinger lists examples and concludes:

Who would still doubt the indubitable authority of Scripture that even God's Son himself so amply and honestly declares? Therefore Scripture has sufficient authority of itself, for it is inspired by the Holy Spirit and approved of by the Son of God himself, who has testified that it is truly an eternal oracle of God. Who then would not understand that a divine and perfect work does not need human cooperation and confirmation?¹³

Calvin's Institutes

Jean Calvin worked on the *Institutio Christianae Religionis* and its French translations until the end of his life. The first edition (1536) has six chapters, while the second edition (1539) contains nearly three times as much material. In that latter edition Calvin first discusses the authority of Scripture. He develops his ideas on this subject in three phases; after 1539 some major paragraphs are added in 1550 and again in the final text in 1559.

In 1539 he divides the *Institutes* into seventeen chapters, the first of which has the title: *De cognitione Dei*. Because people are unable to come to the pure and clear knowledge of God from the *sensus divinitatis*, God's verbal revelation is necessary. God spoke to Adam, Noah, Abraham and the other patriarchs and they received inner knowledge of God, who made their faith certain, whenever his revelation took place.¹⁴ This verbal revelation of God was written down to prevent the heavenly teaching from perishing through forgetfulness or error.

¹⁰ Bullinger, *HBTS* 4, 26.

¹¹ Bullinger uses the phrase "ex se habere auctoritatis" or similar phrases nine times in the first four chapters of the book. Bullinger, *HBTS* 4, 22, 24-26, 33-36.

¹² Bullinger, *HBTS* 4, 32-33.

¹³ Bullinger, *HBTS* 4, 34.

¹⁴ Calvin, *OS* 3, 62.

But while no daily revelations are given from heaven anymore, only the Scriptures remain, wherein it pleased the Lord to consecrate his truth to everlasting remembrance; it must also be noticed how they will justly receive authority among believers and be heard as the own living voices of God.¹⁵

According to Calvin, it is a most pernicious error to think that Scripture has no more importance than is rendered to it by the church and thus to make the eternal and inviolable truth of God depend on human arbitrariness. Scripture is not founded on the church, but on the contrary, the church is founded on the *doctrina* of the prophets and apostles (Eph. 2,20). “Thus, while the church receives and gives its seal of approval to Scripture, it does not thereby make it authentic as if it were doubtful or wavering. But because the church recognizes Scripture to be the truth of its Lord, as a pious duty it unhesitatingly honors it.”¹⁶

The church, says Calvin, receives and seals Scripture and recognizes it as the truth, but it does not give Scripture its authenticity. For Calvin this is not a theoretical discussion about the relation between the Scripture and the church, because the certainty of faith is at stake and the promises of eternal life may not depend on human authority. He continues:

As to their question—how we can be assured that this has sprung from God unless we have recourse to the decree of the church?—it is as if someone asked: how shall we learn to distinguish light from darkness, white from black, sweet from bitter? Scripture does not give an obscurer sense of its own truth than white and black things do of their color, or sweet and bitter things do of their taste. If we desire to take care for our consciences in the best way, so that they may not waver by continual doubt, we must derive the authority of Scripture from something higher than human reasons, indications or conjectures. That is from the inner testifying of the Holy Spirit, for although it gains reverence for itself by its own majesty, still it only then really impresses us seriously when it is sealed by the Spirit to our hearts.¹⁷

In his answer, Calvin first compares the sense that Scripture gives of its truth with color and flavor; the authority of Scripture does not depend on an external source. Next, he refers to the witness or the *interior testificatio*—in later editions replaced by *arcanum testimonium*—of the Spirit. In the third part of his answer, he connects the majesty of Scripture and the seal of the Spirit to

¹⁵ Calvin, *OS* 3, 65.

¹⁶ Calvin, *OS* 3, 66.

¹⁷ Calvin, *OS* 3, 67, 69, 70. In the later editions of the *Institutes* the quote falls into three parts.

each other. He continues by stating that we believe that Scripture is from God, illumined by the power of the Spirit and not because of our own or anyone else's judgment. "We affirm with complete certainty, just as if we behold the glory (*numen*) of God, that Scripture has flowed to us from God's own mouth by the ministry of men."¹⁸ Through the illumination of the Spirit we behold the glory of God in Scripture. Calvin's deepest motive is the assurance of faith that necessarily must rest on God's own authority. Therefore the divine origin of Scripture may never depend on anything else than God himself. In 1539 he closes the discussion of this topic with the remark:

This is a persuasion (*persuasio*) which needs no proofs, this is a knowledge (*notitia*) with which the best proof agrees, the mind rests in it more securely and constantly than in any proof, this finally is a feeling that can only be born of heavenly revelation. I say nothing else than what each believer experiences for himself, though my words fall far short to explain the matter.¹⁹

Similarities and Differences

Possibly Calvin knew Bullinger's *De Scripturae Sanctae autoritate* when he wrote the second edition of the *Institutes*.²⁰ The two had met each other in 1536 in Basel for the first time and when Calvin and Guillaume Farel (1489-1565) were expelled from Geneva in 1538, Calvin traveled through Zürich to Strasbourg and stayed in Bullinger's parsonage.²¹ At least it is interesting enough to notice some similarities and differences.

At the heart of both concepts of the authority of Scripture lies the notion of its independency of any human authority. Bullinger repeatedly uses the expression that Scripture has its authority from itself *ex se* or *ex seipsa*, for instance, in the conclusion of chapter 4:

¹⁸ Calvin, *OS* 3, 70.

¹⁹ Calvin, *OS* 3, 71.

²⁰ The footnotes in the Latin edition and in the English translation of Calvin's *Institutes* refer to Bullinger's work, but, as far as known to me, no elaborate study on the relationship between the two works has been published thus far. Calvin *OS* 3, 65-66. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John T. McNeill (ed.), Ford Lewis Battles (transl.), (London: SCM, 1961), 75.

²¹ Fritz Büsser, *Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575): Leben, Werk und Wirkung*, vol. 1, (Zürich: TVZ, 2004), 118-119. In March 1538 Bullinger had sent the work to Luther. Martin Luther, *WA Br* 8, 207 (no. 3222). See also Michael W. Bruening, *Calvinism's First Battleground: Conflict and Reform in the Pays De Vaud, 1528-1559*, (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), 89.

Therefore the preaching of the gospel and the teaching of the apostles do not have their authority from human beings, but from God himself and also from the scriptures of the prophets. They are inspired by the Holy Spirit of God and, consequently, the Scripture of both testaments has authority out of itself, without any human authority added to it.²²

Calvin does not use *ex seipsa*, but in the metaphors of black and white and of sweet and bitter things, expresses the same idea. Both hold strongly to the notion that the authority of the church is human and therefore insufficient for the proclamation of the gospel and for the certainty of faith that ultimately rests on the Scriptures. Bullinger says: “Where there is no truth of the Word of God, there is no certainty of salvation.”²³ If the truth of God depends on human arbitrariness, Calvin says: “what will happen to miserable consciences that seek solid assurance of eternal life if all the promises with regard to it depend only upon human judgment?”²⁴ There are some similarities in the words used by both authors; for the ecclesial—but all too human—opinion regarding Scripture, they both prefer words as *iudicium* and *approbatio*.²⁵ Bullinger ends his second chapter with the conclusion that the trustworthiness of Scripture is indubitable (*indubitatus*) and that all its authority is from itself, because it depends (*pendere*) on the truth of God—of whom it is the oracle—and not on human confirmation.²⁶ Calvin writes that God by his Word rendered the faith of the patriarchs unambiguous (*indubius*) and above all opinion.²⁷ In a different context, Calvin writes that according to his opponents the reverence for Scripture depends (*pendere*) on the determination of the church.²⁸

Bullinger says of the fathers: “For what is Scripture to us, to them was the living voice of God (*viva domini vox*).”²⁹ Calvin makes the same comparison, but then the other way around, when he says that no new oracles (*oracula*) come from heaven, but the Scriptures “have the same authority among believers, as if they are heard as the living voices of God (*vivae Dei voces*).”³⁰

²² Bullinger, *HBTS* 4, 36.

²³ Bullinger, *HBTS* 4, 25.

²⁴ Calvin, *OS* 3, 66. Cf. Calvin, Battles, *Institutes*, 75.

²⁵ For instance, *iudicium*: Bullinger, *HBTS* 4, 33 and Calvin, *OS* 3, 70; *approbatio*: Bullinger, *HBTS* 4, 22 and Calvin, *OS* 3, 66.

²⁶ Bullinger, *HBTS* 4, 28.

²⁷ Calvin, *OS* 3, 62.

²⁸ Calvin, *OS* 3, 66. For Calvin’s use of *oraculum* see also Calvin, *OS* 3, 62, 65.

²⁹ Bullinger, *HBTS* 4, 23.

³⁰ The phrasing is a little different in the later editions. Calvin, *OS* 3, 65.

The similar words, however, are used in different contexts and that makes it unlikely that Calvin depends immediately on Bullinger.

Moreover, there are also three main differences in the argumentation. In the first place, Bullinger mainly connects the work of the Spirit to the inspiration of Scripture.³¹ Calvin, however, emphasizes the witness of the Spirit in the process of the acceptance of the authority of Scripture; it will only lead to a saving knowledge of God when its certainty is founded on the inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit.³² Word and Spirit are joined together by a mutual bond “The Word is the instrument by which the Lord dispenses the illumination of his Spirit to believers.”³³ Bullinger mostly just says that faith implies that the thing believed has divine authority. Although the work of the Spirit is certainly involved, in *De Scripturae Sanctae autoritate* Bullinger does not connect it explicitly to the acceptance of Scripture. The church as communion of saints believes the Word of God and has no other judgment about the Scriptures than that of faith.³⁴

Secondly, the 1539 edition of the *Institutes* contains a discussion of the *argumenta* for the authority of Scripture. Calvin admits that unless the certainty regarding Scripture be higher and stronger than any human judgment, it is useless to fortify its authority “by arguments, to establish it by common agreement of the church, or to confirm it with other helps.”³⁵ Still he does mention arguments, like the dispensation of divine wisdom, the heavenly character of the *doctrina*, and the beautiful agreement of all its parts. The mysteries of the kingdom of heaven come to us in humble words and this simplicity excites greater reverence for itself than any rhetoric eloquence. The simplicity of Scripture is an important argument for its authority. “Truth is then protected against all doubt when it is not supported by foreign troops, but when it is able to sustain itself just by itself alone.”³⁶

Although Bullinger does not deny that there are secondary arguments, he does not elaborate on them in *De Scripturae Sanctae autoritate*.³⁷ Calvin’s

³¹ Bullinger, *HBTS* 4, 22, 23, 26, 29, 31, 34-36. Of course, Bullinger affirms that faith is the result of the work of the Spirit. *HBTS* 4, 39, 177.

³² Calvin, *OS* 3, 81. In the edition of 1543, Calvin elaborates on the doctrine of inspiration in the context of ecclesiology, saying that the apostles were scribes of the Holy Spirit and their writings are therefore to be considered oracles of God. Calvin, *OS* 5, 141.

³³ Calvin, *OS* 3, 84.

³⁴ Bullinger, *HBTS* 4, 31.

³⁵ Calvin, *OS* 3, 71-72.

³⁶ Calvin, *OS* 3, 72.

³⁷ In his article Peter Opitz states that the self-evidence of God’s Word in Scripture does not exclude arguments from the church authorities and from history. Opitz, “Authority of Scripture,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 5 (2011), 308.

discussion of the secondary arguments enables him to give the church its proper place. The *consensus ecclesiae* is one of the *adminicula* and not the principal ground of faith. Calvin does not seek support in the authority of the institutional *ecclesia* but in the consent of the church of all times and places. Scripture is dispersed through the whole world, has gained authority by diverse nations and is confirmed by the blood of martyrs. Human witnesses that confirm Scripture will not be in vain if they follow the first and highest witness as secondary aids.³⁸

Finally, Bullinger inserts a chapter on the famous quote from Augustine's anti-Manichean work, that he would not believe the gospel if he were not moved to do so by the authority of the catholic church.³⁹ It would not be until 1550 before Calvin discussed the quote in the *Institutes*, where he inserted his explanation immediately after his remark that Scripture gives evidence of its own truth just like white and black things do of their color or sweet and bitter things of their taste. Both authors differ in the way in which they deal with the problem.

Autopistos

Both Bullinger and Calvin were to write more on the authority of Scripture in later years. An extensive comparison of their writings and the possible mutual relationship would be an interesting topic for further research. For now, a few things may be said on the development of what became known in Protestant theology as the *autopistia* of Scripture, the self-convincing, or self-authenticating character of its authority.

The term *autopistos* is listed in a Greek dictionary edited by Guillaume Budé (1468-1540) in 1530, who translates it as "per se fidem faciens sine argumentis" or as "per se notum" when it refers to the common notions.⁴⁰ The first time Calvin uses the term *autopistos* is in his defense against a work from Albertus

³⁸ Calvin, *OS* 3, 81.

³⁹ Augustine, *Contra epistolam Manichaei quam vocant fundamenti*, 5, *CSEL* 25/1, 197. The quote was one of the favorites of the opponents of the Reformation. Cf. J. Eck, *Enchiridion locorum communium adversus Lutherum et alios hostes ecclesiae (1525-1543)*, ed. T. Smeling and P. Fraenkel, Münster 1979, 28, 398. J. Cochlaeus *Philippicae I-VII*, ed. R. Keen, [Bibliotheca humanistica & reformatrica, vol. 54], Nieuwkoop 1995, 217.

⁴⁰ G. Budé, D. Erasmus, and L. Valla, *Lexicon Graeco Latinum* (Paris: Collegium Sorbonae, 1530), s.v. Sometimes the dictionary is titled *Dictionarium Graeco Latinum*. It was reprinted in Basel in 1532 and 1537, and in Geneva in 1554 and 1562.

Pighius (1490-1542), titled: *De libero hominis arbitrio et divina gratia* (1542).⁴¹ Calvin wanted to present his reply at the book fair of 1543 in Frankfurt and had only two or three months to write his *Defensio sanae et orthodoxae doctrinae de servitute et liberatione humani arbitrii*.⁴² Calvin accuses Pighius of making every appeal to Scripture senseless, because he will only accept from Scripture what he already believes.⁴³ He accuses Pighius of calling Scripture uncertain and obscure because he is unable to settle the controversy over the freedom of the will on the basis of the Word of God. For Calvin, the Word of God is not merely the true and certain rule of faith, but also the only rule.⁴⁴ If Pighius calls Scripture uncertain, it is inconsistent and ridiculous that he appeals to Scripture. Pighius takes his *principium* from the Scriptures, but *principia* ought to be *autopistos*.⁴⁵ Calvin is familiar with the logical and philosophical connotations of the Greek term. The term does not refer directly to the authority of Scripture, but it is used in a discussion of the relation between Scripture and tradition.

One year later, in 1544 Bullinger writes his *Ad Ioannis Cochlei de Canonicae Scripturae*. As the title shows it was a response to Johannes Cochlaeus', *De canonicae scripturae & catholicae ecclesiae auctoritate*, printed in 1543.⁴⁶ Bullinger repeats that the Scriptures have sufficient authority of themselves.⁴⁷ It is interesting that he adds that the Holy Spirit witnesses regarding the truth of God's Word. The early Christians accepted the books of Moses and the gospels as from the hand of God, not only because of the vivid and written testimonies of the apostles, but "from the witness of the Spirit, testifying in their

⁴¹ Albertus Pighius, *De libero hominis arbitrio et divina gratia, Libri decem*, (Cologne: Melchior Novesianus, 1542). In the *Institutes* of 1539 Calvin had stated the church fathers, except Augustine, wrote so ambiguously on free will, that nothing could be concluded from their writings. Pighius responded to that claim. On the debate see A.N.S. Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 151-178.

⁴² Jean Calvin, *Defensio sanae et orthodoxae doctrinae de servitute et liberatione humani arbitrii*, [Calvini Opera Recognita IV, Scripta didactica et polemica, vol. 3] ed. Anthony S. Lane (Geneva: Droz, 2008); English translation J. Calvin, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will: A Defence of the Orthodox Doctrine of Human Choice against Pighius*, trans. G.I. Davies, ed. A.N.S. Lane, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996).

⁴³ Calvin, *Defensio*, 118.

⁴⁴ Calvin, *Defensio*, 125.

⁴⁵ Calvin, *Defensio*, 127.

⁴⁶ The work was a reaction against Bullinger's *De Scripturae Sanctae auctoritate* of 1538 that in fact responded to Cochlaeus' previous work *De auctoritate ecclesiae et scripturae* (1524).

⁴⁷ Bullinger, *Ad Ioannis Cochlei*, 5r.

hearts and convincing them of the truth or error of the thing.”⁴⁸ Possibly, there is some influence from Calvin’s *Institutes* in the phrasing of the text. Bullinger says that God himself renders Scripture authentic (*reddere authenticam scripturarum*) through his word. “After such clear testimonies of God, still to expect human ones, that make Scripture authentic (*facere authenticam scripturam*), from doubtful certain (*ex dubia certam*) is nothing else than helping the rising sun by torches.” Bullinger is not copying Calvin, but it seems that a sentence from the *Institutes* resounds here: “The church does not render authentic what is otherwise doubtful or staggering.”⁴⁹

Bullinger also writes that “the books of the Old and New Testament were canonical and authentic, just like someone calls those things *autopistos* that gain faith by themselves without arguments and have their truth and authority completely from themselves and not from elsewhere.”⁵⁰ In his explanation of the term, however, he elaborates on the authenticity of Scripture and not on the philosophical background of the term in ancient philosophy.

In the final edition of the *Institutes*, Calvin divides the four books into chapters, which he all gives a separate heading. The seventh chapter, into which he inserts the sentence on the self-convincing authority of Scripture, is titled: “By which testimony Scripture must be sanctioned, namely of the Spirit; so that its authority is certain and that it is impious to say that its trustworthiness depends on the judgment of the church.”⁵¹ He opens the fifth and final paragraph with the statement that those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught, truly find rest in Scripture, that is *autopistos*. In this way he again emphasizes the idea from the 1539 edition that the authority of Scripture is as clear as the white color and as the sweet taste. He underlines the philosophical meaning of the Greek term, by offering as an explanation or definition that Scripture should not be submitted to demonstration by proofs, and he connects the independent authority of Scripture to the work of the Spirit by the statement that Scripture owes the certainty that it deserves among us to the testimony of the Spirit.

⁴⁸ Bullinger, *Ad Ioannis Cochlei*, 5r. See also the statement in the index: “Spiritus sanctus testatur de veritate verbi dei.”

⁴⁹ “non ex dubia aut alioqui nutabunda authenticam reddit.” Calvin, *OS* 3, 66.

⁵⁰ “Ea de caussa libri Veteris & Novi testamenti a priscis haud dubie appellati sunt canonici ac authentici, quasi quis dicat *autopistoi*, ueluti per se fidem facientes, etiam sine argumentis, ex seipsis utiq; non aliunde ueritas opinionem & autoritatem habentes.” The margin says: “Authentici libri *autopistoi*” Bullinger, *Ad Ioannis Cochlei*, 10v.

⁵¹ Calvin, *OS* 3, 65.

In a strict historical sense Bullinger was the Reformer who introduced *autopistos* into the concept of the authority of Scripture. Calvin may have depended on his work against Cochlaeus for his application of the term to Scripture, but it is also possible that Bullinger knew the term from Calvin's polemical work against Pighius. Calvin more strictly explains the term from the philosophical background whereas Bullinger uses it as a synonym for authentic. Through the *Institutes* the Greek term became an influential theological term in the development of Reformed theology.

De Scripturae Sanctae praestantia

In his later writings, Bullinger still underlines the independent authority of Scripture. In the influential *Decades*, written between 1549 and 1551, he calls the Scriptures "completely and totally trustworthy, so that they have sufficient authority from themselves and the whole world should trust them without resistance."⁵² In his *Summa christenlicher Religion* (1556) he writes "that the holy biblical Scripture has enough authority or esteem of itself and does not need to be made trustworthy by the church or by human beings."⁵³ Bullinger's concept of the independent authority of Scripture became influential through the *Confessio Helvetica Posterior* (1566); the canonical Scriptures truly are the Word of God and have sufficient authority of themselves and not from human beings (*ex semetipsis, non ex hominibus*).⁵⁴

In 1571 Bullinger published *De Scripturae Sanctae praestantia dissertatio*.⁵⁵ In his preface, Bullinger says that he is the editor only; the anonymous work

⁵² Heinrich Bullinger *theologische Schriften Bd. 3: Sermonum decades quinque de potissimis Christianae religionis capitibus, 1552*, eds. Emidio Campi and Peter Opitz, (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2008), 35.

⁵³ "Das die heilig Biblisch gschriffe uß iren selbs autoritet oder ansahens unnd glaubens gnüg habe / nit erst von der kirchen oder menschen bedörffe glaubwirdig gemacht zewerden." H. Bullinger, *Summa christenlicher Religion* (Zürich: Christoph Froschauer, 1556), 7v. Cf. H. Bullinger, *Compendium Christianae religionis: decem libris comprehensum*, (Zürich: Christoph Froschauer, 1556), 6.

⁵⁴ W. Niesel, ed., *Bekennnisschriften und Kirchenordnungen der nach Gottes Wort reformierten Kirche* (Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag Zollikon, [1938]), 222.

⁵⁵ N.N., Heinrich Bullinger ed., *De Scripturae Sanctae praestantia, dignitate, excellentissima[ue] autoritate, perfectione, vel sufficientia, claritate item, facilitate, perspicuitateq[ue], & vero earum usu, pijsima doctissimaque dissertatio* (Zürich: Christopher Froschauer, 1571). The book was translated into English: Heinrich Bullinger ed., *A Most Godly and Learned Discourse of the Woorthyess, Authoritie, and Sufficiencie of the Holy Scripture*, transl. John Tomkys, (London: William Ponnsonby, 1579).

was sent to him from a distant and famous city, with the request that if he found it worthy of publication he would deliver it to the printer.⁵⁶ The book is divided into 25 chapters, the first of which deals with the opinion of those who extol the authority of the church above the Scriptures. The title of the ninth chapter states that Scripture “has its authority from the Holy Spirit and from itself and that the church has her authority from Scripture.”⁵⁷ The Roman Catholics say that the authority of the church is greater than the authority of the Scriptures; “As if the word of God [...] were subject to men’s decrees or as if God’s truth would need human beings to authorize it.”⁵⁸ This is not the case; the word of God is of itself most sure and does not need human support. After referring to 2 Timothy 3 and 2 Peter 1 for the inspiration of the Scriptures, the argument continues by stating that the same Spirit that has caused the Scriptures to be written, assures us that they are not the inventions of men. When the Spirit of God witnesses to the human spirit and seals up Scripture in the heart, the faithful soul marvelously rejoices and is greatly confirmed.

Therefore, being illuminated by the virtue of the Spirit, we do not now believe either through our own judgment, or through the judgment of others, that Scripture is of God; but do most certainly persuade ourselves, above man’s judgment, none otherwise than if we did behold therein the power of God, that the Scriptures come unto us, even from the very mouth of God by the administration of men.⁵⁹

The text is an exact copy from Calvin’s *Institutes*.⁶⁰ This is not the only time that the work literally copies the *Institutes*. After a quote from the Song of Song’s, the author says: “I say nothing but what everyone who is enlightened

⁵⁶ N.N., *Godly and Learned Discourse* [ix]. Bullinger also writes to Tobias Egli (1534-1574), that the author, who is unknown to him, lives in a distant city and has sent the manuscript with the intention that Bullinger publish it. Bullinger added that it pleased him so much that he wanted to share it with Egli. The letter is dated August 24, 1571. Heinrich Bullinger, Traugott Schiess ed., *Korrespondenz mit den Graubündnern*, vol. 3 (Basel: Nieuwkoop & de Graaf, 1968), 259. Bullinger also sent the work to Beza and remarked that he did not think it would displease him. The letter is dated September 17, 1571. Théodore de Bèze, *Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze*, ed. Hippolyte Aubert, Fernand Aubert, and Henri Meylan, vol. 12 (1571), (Genève: Droz, 1986), 182.

⁵⁷ N.N., *De Scripturae Sanctae praestantia*, 34.

⁵⁸ N.N., *De Scripturae Sanctae praestantia*, 34.

⁵⁹ We followed the English translation, except for the spelling. N.N., *Godly and Learned Discourse*, 45. For the Latin original see N.N., *De Scripturae Sanctae praestantia*, 35.

⁶⁰ Calvin, *OS* 3, 70.

with the light of true faith, must needs find by experience in himself.”⁶¹ This is a paraphrase from Calvin, who wrote: “I speak of nothing other than what each believer experiences within himself.”⁶² For the next quote, the author takes an earlier phrase from his copy of the *Institutes*, for he writes: “Therefore the authority of Scripture does not depend on the judgment of the church, but on the inward testifying of the Holy Spirit.”⁶³ The author evidently did not use a copy of Calvin’s final edition, for he follows the wording of the previous editions.⁶⁴ One quote in the text of *De Scripturae Sanctae praestantia* shows that the edition probably was from 1550; the expression that “the Spirit of God seals up the Scriptures in the heart” resembles a statement inserted in 1550, that “the Spirit of God seals up true faith in our hearts.”⁶⁵

It might be interesting to compare other parts of the texts by a close reading, such as, for instance, the third chapter that explains that the authority of Scripture is greater than that of the church because it contains the word of God which in the beginning was delivered to the church by a lively voice. In this chapter the author states that the Scriptures are the principles of divinity or theology and just as the principles in other sciences the statements of Scripture must be supposed and taken for granted.⁶⁶ The apostles first witnessed with a lively voice but after the message of Christ was spread abroad and confirmed by miracles and after the church was established “it seemed good to the Holy Ghost that the sum of the apostles preaching should be set forth in writing that it might be left perfect for them which should come after.”⁶⁷ If the author used the 1550 edition of the *Institutes* there might also be some influence on the sixteenth chapter that discusses the saying of Augustine that he would not believe the Gospel unless the authority of the church moved him.⁶⁸

⁶¹ N.N., *Godly and Learned Discourse*, 45. “Nihil hic loquor, quod non in se experitur, quisquis fidei verae lumine illustrates est.” N.N., *De Scripturae Sanctae praestantia*, 35.

⁶² Non aliud loquor, quam quod apud se experitur fidelium unusquisque. Calvin, *OS* 3, 71.

⁶³ N.N., *De Scripturae Sanctae praestantia*, 35. Cf. Calvin, *OS* 3, 69.

⁶⁴ He uses *interior testificatio* instead of the *testimonium arcanum* from the 1559 edition. When Calvin, in one of the previous quotes, says that the Scriptures come unto us from the mouth of God he uses the verb *fluxisse* in 1559 to in stead of *emanasse*. The text of *De Scripturae Sanctae praestantia* has *emanasse*.

⁶⁵ The resemblance in this case may be a coincidence, but the Latin is quite similar: Calvin: “quam spiritus Dei cordibus nostris obsignat.” Calvin, *OS* 3, 71. *De Scripturae Sanctae praestantia*: “spiritus Dei [...] scripturarum cordibus nostris obsignat.” N.N., *De Scripturae Sanctae praestantia*, 35.

⁶⁶ N.N., *Godly and Learned Discourse*, 9.

⁶⁷ N.N., *Godly and Learned Discourse*, 10.

⁶⁸ N.N., *Godly and Learned Discourse*, 75-78.

Bullinger might not have been aware of the exact quotations from the *Institutes*. His wholehearted support for the publication of this book, however, shows that he agreed with the way in which Calvin explained the acceptance of Scripture by believers from the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

In spite of minor differences in emphasis, the Swiss reformers Bullinger and Calvin agreed in maintaining the independent authority of Scripture as the norm of faith. The theological background is the medieval concept of *principia per se nota* as the basis of all true knowledge. Theology is a science, be it one of a special sort, because it rests on revelation. The reformers connected to this tradition, but also gave it a twist by stressing the independency of Scripture from the authority of the church. This application of the concept of *principia* presupposes a gap between church and Scripture, between tradition and the word of God that did not exist before the reformation. The reformers found it necessary to free Scripture from the bondage of institutional ecclesial authority.

The Swiss reformation is characterized by the confession of the independent authority of Scripture: in different writings on the subject Heinrich Bullinger and Jean Calvin strongly maintained that Scripture has its authority of itself. They might have influenced each other in their development, although they do not seem to depend directly on each other. Their mutual relationship is an interesting field of further research.

Calvin was the first to use the term *autopistos* in a theological context, but Bullinger was the first to apply it to the independent authority of Scripture. The special contribution of Calvin to the doctrine of Scripture is not so much that he emphasized its self-convincing character—for others had done that before him in different words—but that he explained the acknowledgement of the authority of Scripture through the inner witness of the Holy Spirit. His influence on this point can be illustrated from the anonymous work *De Scripturae Sanctae praestantia dissertation* published by Bullinger in 1571. From the beginning, Reformed theology relates the authority of Scripture to pneumatology.

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