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Setting the Stage

Calvin, Beza, and the Reformed Doctrine of Assurance before Westminster

Before we can address the Westminster doctrine of assurance or the ways in which later writers interacted with and expanded upon its formulation, we must look in general at the Reformed doctrine of assurance prior to Westminster. This will be helpful for at least three reasons. First, it will give us a better understanding of the kinds of questions the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) was—and in some cases was not—attempting to settle. Second, it will give us a framework for comprehending the expansions on the consensus reached at Westminster, which is our primary focus. Third, contrary to the way in which the Reformed doctrine of assurance is sometimes portrayed, the pattern of various streams of thinking within the Reformed tradition on assurance prior to Westminster mirrors what we will argue takes place after Westminster.

In this chapter, therefore, we will first give brief attention to the way in which John Calvin and Theodore Beza address the question of assurance. We choose these two because they are often seen as the most significant sources for the later English Puritan views, although it must be said at the outset that this conception is, as we will see, a significant oversimplification of the evidence. In the context of looking at Beza, we will also briefly attend to the question of the syllogisms. These syllogisms in particular must be addressed, in that they seem to provide the framework for much of what theologians writing after Westminster say on the question of assurance. Since using syllogisms to discuss assurance goes back at least to Beza, these must be introduced and examined here. Lastly, in this chapter, we must address the approaches that many scholars have taken to the question of the development of the Reformed doctrine of assurance prior to Westminster. As we will see, this has often been framed in terms of pitting the theology of Calvin against that of the English Puritans. We do not necessarily consider the question of Calvin versus the Calvinists to be among the most vital or helpful vantage points from which to view the historical evidence, and in fact, we would argue that it greatly oversimplifies the diverse views to be found on assurance in Reformed theology prior to the seventeenth century. Nonetheless, it is necessary to at least survey the ground from which so many scholarly salvos have been fired in order to place the present study in its proper context.

Calvin and Assurance

Many have questioned whether Calvin could assent to the first sentence of WCF 18:3, specifically the part that reads, "Assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith." In apparent contrast to this, Calvin writes, "Now we possess a right definition of faith if we

call it a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit."[1] The words *firm* and *certain* stand out particularly in Calvin's definition, as does the personal focus—it is "God's benevolence toward *us*." More than that, he writes that faith is "certainty, a firm conviction, assurance, firm assurance, and full assurance."[2] He writes, at greater length:

> Briefly, he alone is a true believer, who convinced by a firm conviction that God is a kindly and well-disposed Father toward him, promises himself in all things on the basis of his generosity; who, relying on the promises of divine benevolence toward him, lays hold on an undoubted expectation of salvation. . . . No man is a believer, I say, except him who, leaning upon the assurance of his salvation, confidently triumphs over the devil and death. . . . We cannot otherwise well comprehend the goodness of God unless we gather it from the fruit of great assurance.[3]

And again: "This so great an assurance, which dares to triumph over the devil, death, sin, and the gates of hell, ought to lodge deep in the hearts of all the godly; for our faith is nothing, except we feel assured that Christ is ours, and that the Father is in him propitious to us."[4]

Kendall, analyzing this evidence, writes, "The later distinction between faith and assurance seems never to have entered Calvin's mind."[5] He then goes on to say:

> That which Calvin does not do, then, is to urge men to make their calling and election sure to themselves. He thinks Christ's death is a sufficient pledge and merely seeing Him is assuring. Never does he

1. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* 2 vols., ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960) 3.2.16.
2. Ibid., 3.2.7.
3. Ibid., 3.2.16.
4. Ibid., 3.2.2.
5. R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Carlisle, United Kingdom: Paternoster, 1997), 25.

> employ 2 Peter 1: 10 in connection with seeking assurance of salvation. He regards 2 Peter generally as an encouragement 'to make proof' of one's calling 'by godly living' and 2 Peter 1: 10 particularly as an argument that our election is to be 'confirmed' by 'a good conscience and an upright life'. It should be noted moreover that Calvin does not link this verse to the conscience in terms of deducing assurance of salvation.[6]

We must therefore begin with an examination of what Calvin calls the 'certainty of faith.' Here is an extended quote from the *Institutes* that will perhaps provide some light:

> Here, indeed, is the chief hinge on which faith turns: that we do not regard the promises of mercy that God offers as truly only outside ourselves, but not at all in us; rather that we make them ours by inwardly embracing them. Hence, at last is born that confidence which Paul elsewhere calls 'peace' [Rom. 5:1], unless someone may prefer to derive peace from it. Nor it is an assurance that renders the conscience calm and peaceful before God's judgment. Without it the conscience must be harried by disturbed alarm, and almost torn to pieces; unless perhaps, forgetting God and self, it for the moment sleeps.[7]

While Calvin only mentions assurance in passing, it seems clear that "confidence" and "inward embrace" serve as useful stand-ins. Calvin seems to view assurance as something that is part and parcel of saving faith. It is hard to imagine someone having confidence of his or her salvation, along with a calm and peaceful conscience, without having assurance. Indeed, such a proposition seems almost nonsensical.

On other occasions, however, Calvin seems to strike a different note, as we can see in this string of quotations, also from the *Institutes*:

> Unbelief is always mixed with faith. . . . For unbelief is so deeply rooted in our hearts, and we are so inclined to it, that not without hard struggle is each one able to persuade himself of what all confess with the mouth,

6. Ibid. Kendall is quoting from John Calvin, *Commentary on 2 Peter*, preface and commentary on 2 Pet. 1:10.
7. Calvin, *Institutes* 5.20–21.

> namely, that God is faithful. Especially when it comes to reality itself, every man's wavering uncovers hidden weakness. . . .
>
> While we teach that faith ought to be certain and assured, we cannot imagine any certainty that is not tinged with doubt, or any assurance that is not assailed by some anxiety. On the other hand, we say that believers are in perpetual conflict with their unbelief. . . .
>
> The greatest doubt and trepidation must be mixed up with such wrappings of ignorance, since our heart especially inclines by its own natural instinct toward unbelief. Besides this, there are innumerable and varied temptations that constantly assail us with great violence. But it is especially our conscience itself that, weighed down by a mass of sins, now complains and groans, now accuses itself, now murmurs secretly, now breaks out in open tumult. And so, whether adversities reveal God's wrath, or the conscience finds in itself the proof and ground thereof, thence unbelief obtains weapons and devices to overthrow faith.[8]

Here, Calvin does warn against basing one's assurance strictly on works, as when he writes, "For there is nowhere such a fear of God as can give full security, and the saints are always conscious that any integrity which they may possess is mingled with many remains of the flesh."[9] However, he can also write this with respect to the disciples in John 20:

> There being so little faith, or rather almost no faith, both in the disciples and the women, it is astonishing that they had so great zeal; and, indeed, it is not possible that religious feelings led them to seek Christ. Some seed of faith, therefore, remained in their hearts, but quenched for a time, so that they were not aware of having what they had. Thus the Spirit of God often works in the elect in a secret manner. *In short, we must believe that there was some concealed root, from which we see fruit produced.* Though this feeling of piety, which they possessed, was

8. Ibid., 3.2.4, 15, 17, 20. Quoted and collated in Joel Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1999), 42.
9. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.11.19.

> confused, and was accompanied by much superstition, still I will give to it—though inaccurately—the name of *faith*, because it was only by the doctrine of the Gospel that it was produced, and it had no tendency but towards Christ. From this seed there at length sprang a true and sincere *faith*, which, leaving the sepulcher, ascended to the heavenly glory of Christ.[10]

Beeke summarizes the problem this way:

> How do we make sense of these seeming contradictions in Calvin? How can he say in one breath of many Christians, 'They are constrained with miserable anxiety at the same time they are in doubt whether he will be merciful to them because they confine that very kindness of which they seem utterly persuaded within too narrow limits . . .'—and then promptly proceed to add: 'but there is a far different feeling of full assurance that in the Scriptures is always attributed to faith . . .'?
>
> This prompts us to ask: How could Calvin say that assertions of faith are characterized by full assurance, yet still allow for the kind of faith that lacks assurance? The two statements appear antithetical. Assurance is free from doubt, yet not free. It does not hesitate, yet can hesitate; it contains security, but may be beset with anxiety; the faithful have assurance, yet waver and tremble.[11]

If we are to understand the context in which the WCF was formulated and the kinds of categories it was attempting to work within, we should understand something of these apparent contradictions in Calvin's thought. More precisely put, we should see the varying ways in which Calvin writes (and Beza along with him), ways that lend themselves to particular applications in the post-Westminster period of mid-seventeenth-century England.

Anthony Lane summarizes Calvin's view of works and assurance when he writes, "The argument from works may never be the primary ground of our confidence. This must be 'the goodness of

10. John Calvin, *Commentaries of John Calvin.* Reprint, 22 vols (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) 18:250.
11. Beeke, *Quest*, 44.

God,' 'the mercy of God,' 'the free promise of justification,' 'the certainty of the promise,' 'Christ's grace.'"[12] And Lane again: "Calvin recognized that our works can strengthen or confirm our confidence, as evidences of God's work in us, and that they are a test of the genuineness of faith. But once they become the primary ground of assurance a *de facto* justification by works has been introduced which will lead either to despair or to a false self-confidence."[13] For Lane, the issue in Calvin is distinguishing between a means of assurance and a *primary means* or *ground* of assurance. In Lane's estimation, works provide a means of assurance, but not one that is primary or foundational.

This seems to be borne out in a more thorough reading of the *Institutes*. Note, for instance, this reference in volume III: "In the meantime, believers are taught to examine themselves carefully and humbly, lest the confidence of the flesh creep in *and replace the assurance of faith*."[14] Here we see assurance as something already present in the life of the true believer; it is something that can be lost, to be sure, but it is essentially present in the normal, true believer. Later in the same volume, Calvin declares, "There is another kind of fear and trembling [Philippians 2:12], one that, so far from *diminishing the assurance of faith*, the more firmly establishes it."[15] Once again, we see the same pattern: assurance is something already present; it can be lost, but it is essentially there in the life of the believer.

In fact, what we find is that Calvin is most concerned with believers trying to deduce their salvation from the wrong sources. One longer quote will again make this point clear:

12. A. N. S. Lane, "Calvin's Doctrine of Assurance," *Vox Evangelica* 11 (1979): 32–54, quotations from 34–35.
13. Ibid, 35.
14. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.22 (italics mine).
15. Ibid., 3.35 (italics mine).

> Now, in the divine benevolence, which faith is said to look to, we understand the possession of salvation and eternal life is obtained. For if, while God is favorable, no good can be lacking, when he assures us of his love we are abundantly and sufficiently assured of salvation. 'Let him show his face,' says the prophet, 'and we will be saved.' [Psalm 80:3 p.; cf. Psalm 79:4, Vg.] Hence Scripture establishes this as the sum of our salvation, that he has abolished all enmities and received us into grace [Ephesians 2:14]. By this they intimate that when God is reconciled to us no danger remains to prevent all things from prospering for us. Faith, therefore, having grasped the love of God, has promises of the present life and of that to come [1 Timothy 4:8], and firm assurance of all good things, but of such sort as can be perceived from the Word. For faith does not certainly promise itself either length of years or honor or riches in this life, since the Lord willed that none of these things be appointed for us. But it is content with this certainty: that, however many things fail us that have to do with the maintenance of this life, God will never fail. Rather, the chief assurance of faith rests in the expectation of the life to come, which has been placed beyond doubt through the Word of God.[16]

Two things can be noted in these formulations. First, Calvin did believe that assurance of faith was a normally integral part of faith itself; elsewhere in the *Institutes*, it is identified as part of "the living root of faith."[17] But it would be unjust to push this too far. For Calvin also seems to say that this assurance—present in the mind of the converted believer—can be lost or minimized. Therefore, while it seems correct to assert that, for Calvin, assurance was a part of saving faith, it is equally true to say that Calvin could and did conceive of believers losing part or all of the assurance they had—through either sin, lack of reverence for God, or perhaps, a failure to dwell upon the promises of God—in short, through lack of consistent faith. And, it also must be noted, as a further qualification, Calvin viewed assurance

16. Ibid., 3.41–42.
17. Ibid., 5.54.

as part of *any* exercise of faith, because it is the Spirit's work. It seems Beeke is correct in his analysis, which is worth quoting at length:

> Consequently, the Christian may be tossed about with doubt and perplexity when faith is not in practical exercise, but the seed of faith, implanted by the Spirit, cannot perish. Precisely because it is the Spirit's seed, faith contains and retains the element of assurance. The sense or feeling of assurance increases and decreases in proportion to the rise and decline of faith's exercises, but the seed of faith can never be destroyed. Calvin said, 'In the meantime, we ought to grasp this: however deficient or weak faith may be in the elect, still, because the Spirit of God is for them the sure guarantee and seal of their adoption (Eph 1:14; 2 Cor 1:22), the mark he has engraved can never be erased from their hearts.'[18]

Beeke suggests that Calvin's apparently contradictory impulses stem from his attempt to distinguish between a definition of faith and the practical experience of faith in the life of the believer.[19] Beeke writes, "In short, Calvin distinguished between the *'ought to'* of faith in its essence, and the 'is' of faith as wrestled out in daily life."[20] He quotes Calvin to support the notion that this tension is one readily recognized by Calvin:

> Still, someone will say: 'Believers experience something far different: In recognizing the grace of God toward themselves they are not only tried by disquiet, which often comes upon them, but they are repeatedly shaken by gravest terrors. For so violent are the temptations that trouble their minds as not to seem quite compatible with that certainty of faith.' Accordingly, we shall have to solve this difficulty if we wish the above-stated doctrine to stand. Surely, while we teach that faith ought to be certain and assured, we cannot imagine any certainty that is not tinged with doubt, or any assurance that is not assailed.[21]

18. Beeke, *Quest*, 43.
19. Ibid., 44.
20. Ibid., 45.
21. Calvin, *Institutes* 3.2.16–17.

Perhaps Calvin can be rightly understood through an awareness of the tension between the "wrestling" experience of faith in everyday life and the "ought to" definition of faith's essence. In this case, then, although Calvin formulates his doctrine of saving faith and assurance in some ways that initially seem at odds with the WCF, it may in fact be plausible to suggest that the authors of the WCF were addressing something very present in Calvin's writings, and even formulating their theology in ways consistent with strands of his. Yet it also seems quite possible to conclude that, within Calvin's formulation, there existed some tension and different areas of emphasis, as indeed we will see throughout the Reformed tradition more generally.

Although this very cursory summary may provide some help, what we stated at the outset must be stated emphatically again: It is simply an oversimplification of the evidence to suggest that the main question is whether or not Calvin, as a singular figure, agreed or disagreed with the Reformed theologians who followed. Letham is worth quoting on this: "Popular history focuses on a few key figures and tends to bypass others. A temptation always exists to concentrate on 'star theologians.' Calvin was certainly *primus inter pares*. For us, he may well have overwhelming interest for his towering theological genius. But we must remember the network of theological interaction which covered Europe and which meant that Calvin was simply one of a range of influences in the process of theological cross-fertilization."[22]

In attempting to shed some light on the views of Calvin, we are not, therefore, implying that the key question is, as Kendall puts it, whether or not Calvin would have agreed with the English Puritans. That is an interesting question in its own right, but raising it often

22. Robert Letham, "Faith and Assurance in Early Calvinism: A Model of Continuity and Diversity," *Later Calvinism: International Perspectives*, ed. W. Fred Graham (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publications, 1994), 358.

means missing the many ways in which there was diversity on the matter of assurance in Reformed theology, a diversity we will see exemplified again, even after the formal codification provided by the later Westminster Confession.

Assurance in Theodore Beza

While John Calvin is surely more prominent in the minds of most commentators today, and the differences between his writings and those of the later Reformed tradition have engendered the most significant contemporary scholarly debate, it is quite possible that Theodore Beza's formulations on the doctrine of assurance had a greater influence on the minds of the writers of the WCF.[23] For instance, Anthony Burgess's treatise on assurance begins with a quote from Beza that seems to set the agenda for the rest of the work in many respects.[24] In addition, we will see that Beza's way of framing the questions on assurance bear striking resemblance, not just to Burgess, but also to others of his time. In this respect, it should be noted that, while Burgess barely quotes from any of the early Reformers in his treatise on assurance, Beza is the exception. Further, in *Vindiciae Legis*, Burgess quotes from Beza more than Calvin—thirteen times, rather than ten.[25] In fact, he quotes Beza

23. See Muller's arguments regarding Beza's influence on Perkins in Richard A. Muller, "Perkins' 'A Golden Chaine': Predestinarian System or Schematized *Ordo Salutis*?," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 9 (1978): 69–81.
24. There is a lively debate about the nature and extent of Beza's modifications of Calvin's theology in general, not just on this matter of assurance. Some see him as overly rationalistic, thus turning from Calvin's Biblicism. At the other end of the spectrum are those like Beeke, who writes, "Generally speaking, Beza was unconditionally supportive of Calvin's theology." Quoted in Beeke, *Quest*, 73.
25. He quotes from Beza on pages 24, 78, 166, 207, 218, 227, 233, 238, 265, 268, 271, and 274; from Calvin on 5, 7, 41, 76, 85, 97, 133, 134, 193, and 239. See Anthony Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis, or, a Vindication of the Morall Law and the Covenants, from the Errours of Papists, Arminians, Socinians, and More Especially, Antinomians in Xxx Lectures, Preached at Laurence-Jury, London*. The second edition, corrected and augmented. ed. London: Printed by James Young, for Thomas Underhill

more than any Reformation figure besides Luther himself; Beza, in his treatise on assurance, quotes from Luther only to distinguish his views from the Lutheran ones.[26]

Beza's definition of faith deviates slightly from that of Calvin. For Calvin, as we have seen, faith consists of a sure and certain knowledge. Beza, however, writes this:

> The faith by which the sons of light are distinguished from the sons of darkness is not simply that which we call knowledge which is common even to the demons, by which one might know to be true whatever is contained in the writings of the prophets and the apostles, but besides that a firm assent of the soul accompanies this knowledge by which the person is able to apply himself as his own the promise of eternal life in Christ, just as if it was fully his and he possessed the thing itself.[27]

It is true Beza is using the term *knowledge* here in a different way from Calvin, who would not have agreed that bare conjectural knowledge about certain facts is not equivalent to saving faith. Yet Beza is explicit about this. In making a distinction between "knowledge," which could simply be factual and uncommitted, and "firm assent," he introduces an important distinction, one that would later influence both the Westminster divines and those who followed after them.

Beyond this difference, Beza in general seems much more interested than was Calvin in the implications of predestination for assurance in the believer's life; in fact, he indicated that this was his

... 1647.[25] See, for instance, *Spiritual Refining, or, a Treatise of Grace and Assurance Part I : Wherein Are Handled, the Doctrine of Assurance, the Use of Signs in Self-Examination, How True Graces May Be Distinguished from Counterfeit, Several True Signs of Grace, and Many False Ones, the Nature of Grace, under Divers Scripture-Notions or Titles, as Regeneration, the New-Creature, the Heart of Flesh, Vocation, Sanctification, &C. : Many Chief Questions (Occasionally) Controverted between the Orthodox and the Arminians : As Also Many Cases of Conscience, Tending to Comfort and Confirm Saints, [and] Undeceive and Convert Sinners*. London: Printed by Jo. Streater, for T.U., and are to be sold by Thomas Johnson ... 1658. 96.

26. see above.

27. Replace with Theodori Bezae, *Vezelii Volumen Tractationum Theologicarum* (Geneva: Eustathium Vignon, 1582), 1:678.

primary concern in addressing predestination.[28] Nonetheless, Beza is aware of the potential problems for assurance introduced by the doctrine of election, and he introduces an important solution to those problems:

> But whither may I flee for succor in the perilous temptations of particular election? Ans. Unto the effects whereby the spiritual life is certainly discerned, and so consequently out of election, like as the life of the body is perceived by feeling and moving . . . that I am chosen, I shall perceive first by that holiness or sanctification begun in me, that is to say my hating of sin and by my loving of righteousness. Hereunto I shall add the witness of the Holy Ghost comforting my conscience. Upon this sanctification and comfort of the Holy Ghost, we gather faith. And thereby we rise up unto Christ, to whom whosoever is given, is of necessity chosen in Him from afore all worlds.[29]

Beza ultimately points the believer to the promise of Christ for his or her assurance of salvation. The allusion to John 6 in his final sentence makes that much clear. But he is also clear that the sanctification of the believer can serve a very important function in assuring one of his or her status as a believer, elected by God for salvation.

In addition, the most significant distinguishing characteristic of this formulation is the way in which Beza cites *sanctification* as a proof of genuine assurance. Though Calvin may have hinted at this, he was much more concerned with showing the things that ought to be present in genuine faith, such as inherent surety. Beza, in contrast, uses the terminology of "gathering" faith from the evidence provided in sanctification. At the very least, we could say that Beza's focus seems to reflect on the actual *experience* of the believer struggling with his or her assurance.

28. Beeke, *Quest*, 73.
29. Theodore Beza, *A booke of Christian Questions and answers*: *Wherein are set forth the cheef points of the Christian religion*, trans. Arthur Golding (London: William Verne for Abraham Veale, 1574), 16.

Beza expresses this basic approach even more clearly in his confession, and even goes further. Not only does he continue to connect the experience of assurance with observations about one's sanctification, but he also connects all of this with the reality of God's sovereign election; while we earlier saw his recognition that the doctrine of election posed "perilous temptation," here he seems to solve the problems caused by this doctrine by making an appeal to the certain evidence of good works:

> Seeing that good works are for us the certain evidences of our faith, they also bring to us afterwards the certainty of our eternal election. Faith lays hold of Christ, by which, being justified and sanctified, we have the enjoyment of the glory to which we have been destined before the foundation of the world (Rom. 8:39; Eph 1:3–4). This is so much the more important because the world holds it in less esteem, as if the doctrine of particular election were a curious and incomprehensible thing. On the contrary, faith is nothing other than that by which we have the certainty that we possess life eternal; by it we know that before the foundation of the world God has destined that we should possess, through Christ, a very great salvation and a most excellent glory. This is why all that we have said of faith and of its effects would be useless if we would not add this point of eternal election as the sole foundation and support of all the assurance of Christians.[30]

Karl Barth, who saw a great deal of discontinuity between Calvin and Beza (and then the later Reformed writers) in their doctrine of assurance, recognized this fundamental truth about Beza's formations. In a longer description of Beza's understanding of faith, he addresses assurance in Beza specifically:

> The *second testing* [according to Beza] addresses the *subjective* side of the relationship. We have said that faith saves us from perishing. But *do we have this faith*? is Satan's objection. There are two responses to

30. Theodore Beza, *A briefe and pithie Summe of Christian faith made in forme of a Confession, with a confutation of al such spurious errors, as are contrarie thereunto*, trans. R. F. (London: Roger Ward, 1639), 19.

> this. Firstly, we have the '*testimony of the Holy Spirit*' [*testimonium spiritus sancti*] (the principle of Scripture), which continually enables us to cry out undauntedly, 'Abba, Father!' Secondly, faith as the 'application of Christ' [applicatio Christi] is not without '*effect and power*' [*effectus et vires*], not without his bringing about the 'regeneration' [regeneration] or 'sanctification' [sanctification] of the person. Beza understands this to comprise three things. He speaks, first, of the *mortification*' [*mortificatio*] of the old person, the fundamental and effective setting aside of his existence. Then he describes its '*burial*' [*sepultura*], the 'continuation' [continuatio] and the 'increase' [progressus] or 'mortification' [mortificatio]. This is understood as the factual decaying and decomposition of the dead old person, which happens in the afflictions that come to us, in the 'exercises' [exercitationes] that we must undergo to tame our rebellious flesh, and finally in our bodily death, which ends the battle between flesh and spirit. The third moment of sanctification or rebirth is the '*resurrection of the new person*' [*resurrectio novi hominus*], the illumination, strengthening and tutoring of our intelligence, of our will, and of all our capacities through grace. The subjective presupposition to which we shall cling over against such testing is that we shall believe the testimony of the Holy Spirit, and practice, each of us on the basis of our calling, the use of the 'gift of regeneration' [donum regenerationis], which is inseparable from faith as the 'application of Christ' [applicatio Christi].[31]

Whatever Barth's personal conclusions about the direction that Beza takes, he does recognize that Beza's doctrine of assurance was directly tied to his understanding of sanctification in the Christian life. That is, as we have already noted, for Beza, the question of faith and assurance seems more directly related to his understanding of the struggles of the everyday believer than with more abstract questions about faith's substance. What Calvin made room for in his definition, Beza puts in a central position. Because of this, it is also the case that Beza spends a great deal more time on the practical matter of assurance than does Calvin. Although Calvin acknowledges the issue

31. Karl Barth, *The Theology of the Reformed Confessions*, trans. Darrell L. Guder and Judith J. Guder (Columbia: WJK, 2005), 117–18 (italics in original).

and even frames it in a way that can be fitted into the later Reformed categories, it is Beza, rather than Calvin, who discusses the issue with a depth of detail and a connection to practical pastoral concerns.

So for Beza, eternal election, far from actually posing an insurmountable problem for the attainment of assurance, actually is the grounds of assurance. Because Christ's salvation of specific individuals has been decreed, because they had been elected before the world began, then their salvation was sure. The good works that believers perform point them to the fact that these eternal realities are being worked out before their eyes; as they see their sanctification, they can have confidence of God's work in election, which in turn gives assurance about the stability of God's saving work in their lives. But note that, even for Beza, good works are not the sole means of assurance, nor are they even the primary ones. Although he points people to look at their good works as evidences of saving faith, their ultimate assurance is to be grounded in the promises of Christ and the electing action of God the Father.

Once again, however, we hasten to say that the particular view one has about Beza's notion of assurance may be less consequential for understanding later writers than some participants in the contemporary debate would imagine. There are diverse streams within Reformed theology on the matter of assurance leading up to the seventeenth century. While it is probably the case that Beza, more than any other post-Reformation theologian, influenced much of the later thinking on the English Puritans, particularly on the matter of assurance, it is far from clear that this influence was determinative or that it was exclusive. In fact, the evidence would suggest that no figure, Calvin included, had this kind of decisive influence over the seventeenth-century Puritan view, codified in the WCF.