

# Calvin's human being: Intellect and will in Calvin



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In Christian theological history, reflecting on the relationship between intellect and the will is an ongoing process. Roughly speaking, in Medieval Christianity, two concepts were employed to clarify the relationship between intellect and the will: intellectualism defended the primary role of the intellect, and voluntarism promoted the human will as decisive. These were represented respectively by Aquinas and Duns Scotus. After presenting these concepts as interpretive frameworks, the author examines Calvin. It appears that Calvin's metaphysical structure of the human being can be characterised as intellectualistic. Richard Muller agrees with this, but he suggests that Calvin's soteriology was influenced by voluntarism. From the fiducial character of faith, he argues the importance of the will in the fall from grace and suggests that Calvin placed himself in the voluntaristic tradition of Scotus. In this article, Muller's arguments are investigated and evaluated, and the conclusion is drawn that there is no ground for soteriological voluntarism in Calvin. This conclusion led the author to question whether intellectualism can be spoken of in Calvin's soteriology. His research into this question is answered affirmatively, leading to the conclusion that Calvin is best understood from an intellectualistic point of view in both his metaphysics and his soteriology.

**Contribution:** Firstly, this article contributes to a historical-theological discussion of the relationship of will and reason in Calvin. Secondly, this discussion is important for a reformed anthropology. Thirdly, this historical insight is important for contemporary anthropological reflection, for example in relation to neuroscience.

**Keywords:** intellect; will; voluntarism; intellectualism; soteriology.

## Introduction

In the history of Christian theology, deep thought has been given not only to the human will (McClusky n.d.; Muller 2017), but also to the relationship between intellect and will. After initially being influenced by Greek intellectualism, Augustine reflected upon this relationship, but increasingly came to stress the human will (Mendelson n.d.). Theologians also discussed the relationship between understanding and will during the Middle Ages, when the concepts of Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus became representative paradigms of the different approaches, namely intellectualism and voluntarism (Muller 1995:330–331; Murphy n.d.).

Intellectualism assigns a greater predominance to the decisive role of the human intellect, rather than the will in the making of a judgement about human intellect, while voluntarism propounds the opposite. According to Aquinas, the judgement of intellect had logical priority above the decision of will, to deliberate, consider and reconsider reasons for choosing various alternatives. Aquinas' concept of intellectualism implies that human deeds are necessitated by the judgement of intellect, on the one hand, and on the other, that human acts can be rationally grounded. An alternative to Aquinas' understanding of the relationship of intellect, is the voluntaristic concept of John Duns Scotus. Scotus understood intellectualism as determinism, because the judgement of the intellect is determined by the external environment, and therefore beyond human control. Scotus accepted Aquinas' view that will is informed by intellect, but to maintain human freedom, Scotus denied that will is determined by judgement of intellect and posited that will is free from determination by the intellect. This concept raises the question of the rationality of human decisions and acts.

Another difference between both approaches concerns the understanding of heavenly life. In the intellectualistic understanding of the Christian life, the eschatological life will be understood as *visio Dei* (the contemplation of God), while the eschatological life is understood as activity of love for God as *summum bonum* (the highest good) in the context of a voluntaristic approach (Muller

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2000:159–173). These notions from the historical background show that the differences between intellectualism and voluntarism have implications for understanding human identity, the doctrine of sin, the character of salvation and the eschatological life.

In this article the relationship between intellect and will is investigated in Calvin's works. Some research has already been done on Calvin's views (Muller 2000). The fact that the reformer of Geneva did not explicitly choose one option, raises the methodological question as to whether Calvin's choice can be examined at all. The following can be noted: firstly, on the one hand, Calvin's silence about his choice must be considered, but on the other hand, Calvin is not completely silent. He makes implicit remarks about the relationship between the intellect and the will. Analysing these remarks will reveal implicit structures, inconsistencies or tensions in his thought, that may clarify his view on this theme and other theological decisions he made.

Secondly, Calvin cannot be isolated from his historical background. There are also the 'Medieval prolegomena to Early Reformation thought' (Oberman 1994:3–22). Oberman spoke about 'prolegomena' in the context of *Via Antiqua* and *Via Moderna*, showing that while *Via Antiqua* could be characterised as being an intellectual approach, *Via Moderna* clearly represents a voluntaristic approach, and that the discord between both approaches caused deep theological differences, despite political pressure and economic interests.

Thirdly, several scholars have expressed their understanding of Calvin. Kendall (1981), for example, is of the opinion that Calvin was an intellectualist, while Helm (2004:146; cf. Van der Kooi 2005:67) argues that he is a voluntarist. Muller (2000:166) holds a more nuanced middle-position; according to Muller, Calvin should be seen as an ontological intellectualist and a soteriological voluntarist, while 'Calvin's soteriological interest creates in the doctrine of faith itself an emphasis on the primacy of the will in the cognitive act' (Muller 2000:172). Given the fact that his approach is highly nuanced and quite extensive, I would like to take the opportunity in this article to assess it.

The central question in this article is whether Calvin should be understood as an intellectualist, or as a voluntarist. The essay opens with a general description of Calvin's intellectualistic concept of the soul, then Richard Muller's interpretation of Calvin as a soteriological voluntarist is presented, this is followed by an evaluation of Muller's position, a discussion of Calvin as an intellectualist, and the conclusion that Calvin is better seen as an intellectualist than a voluntarist, also in the soteriological context.

## Calvin as an intellectualist

According to Calvin's anthropology, human beings consist of two parts, body and soul, of which the soul is the *nobilior pars* (more noble part; *Inst* 1.15.2). The reformer expresses

how the death of the body as the *carcer animae* (prison of the soul), liberates the soul in a variety of ways (Sewell 2011:223–238). In contrast to the Aristotelian way of thinking, Calvin defended the relative autonomy of the human soul in relation to the body. For him, the phenomenon of dreams demonstrates that the human soul is not dependent upon the body (*Inst* 1.15.2), while the body is inactive during sleep, the mind can be very active. The phenomenon that humans can imagine angels, also illustrates that the human soul is directed to the invisible reality of God.

However, the human soul is not to be identified with the invisible reality of God. In contrast with the opinion that the reformer had learned from Servet, namely that the human soul must be seen as a part of the essence of God, Calvin defends the position that the human soul is created and resists any impression that Creator and creature can be identified with one another (*Inst* 1.15.5; Kooi:65–66). Calvin had to fight on a second front too, to combat the idea that the soul is mortal because of its relatedness to matter. This Epicurean thought can be traced back to Aristotle, who could not imagine a soul without a body, and leads one to conclude that at the time of death, the human soul returns to the common world soul (OS 2:201; Schreiner 1991:20–21). In his *Psychopannychia*, Calvin had already clarified what was at stake, namely the conscious communion with God after death. These aspects of Calvin's theological reflection, illustrate his conviction that the view of the human soul is, that it is not of secondary importance, because the soul can be seen as the abutment of a bridge between God and men; and the most important activity of the soul is to strive after the knowledge of, and communion with God (*Inst* 1.15.6).

In this context, it is not strange that Calvin frequently refers to the soul: its characteristics, its experience and its faculties. He was conscious of the opinions of philosophers on the faculties of the soul, and he acknowledged the usefulness of this wisdom. In agreement with Plato, he acknowledged 'five senses, which Plato preferred to call organs, by which all objects are presented to common sense as a sort of receptacle.' The content of this 'receptacle', will be adapted by the cognitive powers of the soul in three steps. The *phantasia* (fantasy) provides a distinction, the *ratio* (reason) follows with a universal judgement, and finally a definitive decision is made by the human (*mens*; understanding). The three appetitive faculties correspond with these three cognitive instruments of the soul: The will follows the reason, the *vis irascendi* (the capacity for anger) seizes upon what is offered to it by reason and fantasy, and the *vis concupiscendi* (the capacity to desire) apprehends what is set before it by fantasy and sense.

With subtle distinctions, Calvin presents these faculties of the soul, while he acknowledges that other distinctions are possible. Searching the works of Calvin, we find different approaches in his description of the soul and its faculties. Most frequently he mentions two faculties, namely the *intellectus* (understanding) and the *voluntas* (will) (*Inst* 1.15.7; 2.1.8; 2.2.7 and 12; 2.3.7; 2.5.15; CR LX:126; CR LXIV:224).

He also says that the soul is described as *mens* and *cor* (heart) (CR LI:37; CR LX:135). In his commentary on Philippians 4:7, Calvin explains his understanding of these two parts of the human soul (CR LXXX:38). *Mens* signifies *intelligentia*, while *cor* signifies *affectus* or *voluntas*. In his commentary on the Magnificat, Calvin uses the distinction between *spiritus* and *anima*, explaining that the first faculty is *intelligentia* and the second faculty means the seat of *affectus* (CR LXXIII:37). In the subsequent exegesis of the text, Calvin defines *anima* as *voluntas*.

Calvin also remarks that there are other faculties (CR LI:37). In his commentary on John 11:25, he mentions *sensus* (sense), *intelligentia* and *voluntas*, while in the *Institutes* he also accepts the triad *sensus*, *intellectus* and *appetitus* (desire, longing; 1.15.6). In his commentary on John 5:25, he introduces a variation with a fourfold distinction between *intelligentia*, *iudicium* (judgement), *voluntas* and *sensus*. On another occasion, he characterises the soul as the seat of *intelligentia* and *affectus* (affection), to which he adds *intimas partes* (inward parts) (CR LX:48).

This short investigation into Calvin's anthropological views, leads to five conclusions. Firstly, Calvin did not work out a strictly defined anthropology, which gives the impression that Calvin's primary interest was not anthropology, but soteriology. A second conclusion is that Calvin uses many synonyms. *Mens*, *intellectus*, *intelligentia*, *ratio* and *spiritus* are largely equivalent. The fact that *mens* and *spiritus* can be understood as *intellectus*, *intelligentia* or *ratio*, indicates that these latter concepts should not be interpreted in a rationalistic way. In accordance with classic theology, *intellectus* functioned in harmony with the heart, so that intellect meant the direct knowledge of reality, which was immediately related to the experience of the object, in contrast with the modern understanding of this concept, in which the heart and intellect are separate, and the intellect is understood as a reduced and rational, reasonable knowledge of reality.

In the same way, *voluntas*, *cor*, *affectus*, *anima* and *appetites* belong to a field of meaning in which these concepts are interrelated. This interrelatedness indicates that affection and will should not be separated into completely different identities. The third conclusion from this investigation, affords us the insight that each of Calvin's divisions includes the twofold distinction between the aspects that are related to *intellectus*, and those which are related to *voluntas*. This is in harmony with Calvin's own conclusion in dealing with human faculties (*Inst* 1.15.7). The understanding must distinguish between good and bad, between just and unjust. The proper task of the will is to choose, and to follow the judgement of the understanding.

The next conclusion follows Calvin's own summary, that the twofold distinction in the human soul is sufficient. So, we can conclude that *sensus* is not an essential or differentiated aspect of the human soul. It is the instrument used by the intellect to gain knowledge, so it is understandable that it is

included in the intellectual powers of the soul. The same is true for the *iudicium*, which can be included with the *intellectus*. The conclusion is that the two powers of the soul can be distinguished, but not be separated. We find an example of this union of understanding and will in Calvin's exegesis of Psalm 8:3, in which he speaks about the *vis animae intellectiva* (the intellectual power of the soul) (CR LIX:54). Although the *intellectus* belongs to an area other than the *anima*, Calvin can also connect these distinguished areas. This means firstly, that the human soul is an intellectual soul, and secondly, that knowledge belongs to both the heart and the understanding.

These conclusions lead us to a search for a deeper understanding of the relationship between intellect and will. In his commentary on Genesis 1:26, Calvin declares that in the original state of human being, the light of the *intelligentia* shone in the *mens*, and all powers appeared to be ruled by the *ratio* (CR LI:38). We find the same priority of the intellect in the *Institutes* (1.15.7, cf. 2.2.2–3 and CR XXXIV:285–286). Let us look at a key passage:

Thus let us, therefore, hold – as indeed is suitable to our present purpose – that the human soul consists of two faculties, understanding and will. Let the office, moreover, of understanding be to distinguish between objects, as each seems worthy of approval or disapproval; while that of the will, to choose and follow what the understanding pronounces good, but to reject and flee what it disapproves [...] Not to entangle ourselves in useless questions, let it be enough for us that the understanding is, as it were, the leader and governor of the soul; and that the will is always mindful of the bidding of the understanding, and in its own desires awaits the judgment of the understanding.

This passage clearly illustrates, that Calvin summarises the faculties of the human soul as the understanding and the will. This passage is also clear about the relationship between these two faculties; the will follows the judgement of the understanding. This is not only a chronological following, but above all a qualitative following. The will is not free to choose between the possibilities, which are perceived by the understanding, but must follow the positive judgement of the understanding. It is only what the understanding accepts as good, that can be chosen by the will. So, the will does not follow its own desires, but 'awaits the judgement of the understanding'. In short, this key passage in Calvin's writings supports the evaluation that Calvin was an intellectualist.

## Calvin as a soteriological voluntarist

The real Calvin is more complicated than the preceding paragraph suggested, because man fell into sin by the choice of his will (*Inst* 1.15.8, cf. 2.2.26).

In this integrity man by free will had the power, if he so willed, to attain eternal life. Here it would be out of place to raise the question of God's secret predestination because our present subject is not what can happen or not, but what man's nature was like. Therefore, Adam could have stood if he wished, seeing that he fell solely by his own will. But it was because his will was

capable of being bent to one side or the other, and was not given the constancy to persevere, that he fell so easily. Yet his choice of good and evil was free, and not that alone, but the highest rectitude was in his mind and will, and all the organic parts were rightly composed to obedience, until in destroying himself he corrupted his own blessings.

In this passage, Calvin emphasises that human beings are created with a free will. In the context of God's sovereign omnipotence, Adam's fall or persistence in goodness, depended on his will. This seems inconsistent with Calvin's former emphasis on men's understanding (Hoitenga 1997:45–46). Because it is not conceivable that a thinker such as Calvin, should be inconsistent in adjacent paragraphs in a single book, we must take the line that the reformer was not mistaken and that he didn't see any inconsistency in these two expressions.

The apparent contradiction must be solved some other way. In this passage, Calvin deals with the created state of human beings. Human beings are created with their intellect in a leading position, and within an intellectualistic metaphysical structure. In this sense, Calvin agrees with classical philosophers, but he is:

[F]orced to part somewhat from this way of teaching because the philosophers, ignorant of the corruption of nature that originated from the penalty for man's defection, mistakenly confuse two very diverse states of man. (*Inst* 1.15.7. In 2.2.3)

This means that the distinction between *prelapsus* (before the fall) and *postlapsus* (after the fall) is fundamental in the anthropological aspects of theology.

The difference between the prelapsarian and the postlapsarian condition, touches the traditional faculties of psychology. What philosophers say about the relationship between intellect and will, is true for the prelapsarian situation, but sin has subverted the correct ordering in the functioning of the faculties, so that the will is no longer inclined to follow reason, but freely follows the senses into lust (*Inst* 2.2.24). This does not imply that human beings lack freedom of will, but that they miss soundness of will.

Here Muller (2000) offers his understanding of Calvin, as one who is inclined towards soteriological voluntarism, in a nuanced conclusion:

We cannot, therefore, make an absolute determination concerning the relationship of Calvin's views on intellect and will to the philosophical and speculative forms of intellectualism and voluntarism found in medieval thought – nor can we argue that this ultimate and rather speculative distinction would have been of any great concern to Calvin. Nonetheless, we can conclude that Calvin's theology falls, in its basic attitude toward the problems of human knowing and willing in their relation to the temporal working out of salvation, into a voluntarist rather than an intellectualist pattern. This conclusion is, moreover, supported by the practical, antispeculative character of Calvin's theology as a whole. The will, not the intellect, stands at the center of the soteriological problem: the sinner knows the good but does not will it. (p. 171)

Muller justly remarks that in Calvin, intellect and will cannot be separated; but he argues that within the union of intellect and will, in matters concerning salvation, priority must be given to will.

What brings Muller to this subtle soteriological voluntarism? Firstly, Muller (2000:167–170) relativises the intellectual aspect of *cognitio*, being a central concept for faith in Calvin. This concept cannot be reduced to rationalistic knowledge, nor can it restrictively be understood as a function of the intellect (pp. 159–164). Faith is not 'a naked or frigid apprehension of Christ, but a lively and effective sense of his power', cites Muller the reformer of Geneva. This means that faith does not only imply intellect, but also will. Calvin's concept has an experimental, affective and practical-spiritual content, so that in the fusion of intellectual knowledge and affective knowledge, intellect and will are drawn together. In this context, Muller refers to expressions of Calvin in which he speaks of a 'twofold effect of the Spirit on faith', namely the illumination of the mind, and the confirmation of the seat of our feelings, and to expressions in which Calvin declares, that the 'chief part of faith' is 'the firm and steadfast constancy of heart'.

Secondly, if I understand Muller (2000:166–167) correctly, he argues that the fall was a disruption of the normal order in which intellect had priority over will. In the disruption of the normal order in the fall, the will was moved from its subordinate position. Because the will had the inherent capacity for the vast upheaval of the faculties that occurred in the fall, will is also decisive in the redemption of humankind. Here the gracious activity of the Spirit is focused on when the human will is changed from evil to good as Muller (2000) indicates:

We find here, in other words, not a philosophical but a soteriological voluntarism that not only recognizes the necessity of grace to all good acts of the will but also recognizes that, in the soul's present sinful condition, the will most certainly stands prior to the intellect. (p. 197–167)

Thirdly, Muller (2000) argues that Calvin placed himself in the voluntarist tradition of Scotus, that protected freedom of will against intellect, insofar as Calvin places the aspect of choice in will, and does not make intellect the cause of will's choice, arguing that:

[T]emporal priority is not causal priority: the will is free to accept or to reject the knowledge presented by the intellect – not to the extent that will can eradicate the contents of intellect but rather to the extent that will need not appropriate in a personal and fiducial way the object of knowing. (p. 170)

## An evaluation of soteriological voluntarism

In this paragraph, we evaluate Muller's three arguments for soteriological voluntarism. In the first place, Muller does justice to Calvin in his opinion that faith is more than an intellectual assent. In this context, Calvin's statement (*Inst* 3.2.14) that spiritual knowledge belongs to a category

other than human or earthly knowledge, is important. While earthly knowledge implies having the grasp of the thing, the opposite is the case in spiritual knowledge. In relation to the meaning of Ephesians 3:19, Calvin (CR LXXIX:102, cf. *Inst* 1.5.9; 1.7.4; 1.10.2; 3.2.8; 3.2.14; Canlis 2010; Todd Billings 2008) explains that the believer does not grasp what he experiences, but he is assured of the things that exceed knowledge. This means that faith has an affective, existential and volutative dimension. Acknowledging this fiducial character of *cognition*, however, is different to proving that, within the 'twofold effect of the Spirit on faith', will has priority over understanding.

The foregoing argument brings us to the second argument of Muller. We can agree with Muller that the fall into sin is an abnormal occurrence, in which the normal created order of the faculties in the soul is broken by the disobedience of will. The conclusion that will has an equally key function in human redemption, sounds plausible; in that context, we can understand Calvin's negative judgement concerning the human fallen will. Before Calvin (*Inst* 1.15.8, cf. 2.1.8, 2.2.12–27) deals extensively with the sinfulness of will, he declares:

They, as professed disciples of Christ, are obviously playing the fool when, by compromising between the opinions of the philosophers and heavenly doctrine, so that these touch neither heaven nor earth, in man – who is lost and sunk down into spiritual destruction – they still seek after free choice.

It is nevertheless remarkable, that Calvin does not focus the saving work of the Holy Spirit in the human soul on will. The reason is, that not only our will is depraved by sin, but our intellect is too (*Inst* 2.3.7; 2.5.15; CR LIX:268). It is also remarkable, that the largest part of Calvin's chapter on the depravity of will, is spent on darkness in understanding, which can perhaps be summarised in Calvin's statement, that fallen men are 'blinder than moles' in the things of God's kingdom (*Inst* 2.2.18, cf. 2.2.12–25). Our sinful gross understanding is, as it were, devoted to this earthly life (CR LXXV:86).

This blindness of our understanding implies a distrust in the powers of the mind in the kingdom of God. Often, Calvin puts the direction of the Word in opposition to the leading of the understanding (CR LVII:271; LVII:312; LXXV:117, cf. CR LVIII:67). At other times, he stresses that the will of God exceeds our understanding (CR LXIV:187; LXXVI:20–21; CR LXXXVI:229–231). Therefore, the regeneration of the Spirit implies the denial of understanding (*Inst* 4.16.25):

Therefore, just as to baptize by the Holy Spirit and by fire is to confer the Holy Spirit, who in regeneration has the function and nature of fire, so to be reborn of water and the Spirit is but to receive that power of the Spirit, which does in the soul what water does in the body. I know that others interpret it differently, but I do not doubt that this is the real meaning, because Christ's purpose is only to teach that all who aspire to the Kingdom of Heaven must put off their own nature (*ingenium*).

These data confirm the conclusion of the 'twofold effect of the Spirit', without leading to the conclusion that in the regenerative work of the Spirit, 'the will most certainly stands prior to the intellect'.

We come to the third – most important – argument presented by Muller (2000):

Nonetheless, temporal priority is not causal priority; the will is free to accept or to reject the knowledge presented by the intellect. (p. 170)

While Muller acknowledges that understanding has a temporal priority requiring an object for its act of trust, he denies it any causal priority: will has freedom in relation to understanding and can accept or reject the content of the intellect. To prove this statement, he explains that intellectual assent, apart from the will's fiducial apprehension of the truth, does not constitute faith, and he refers to the following words of Calvin (*Inst* 3.2.33):

And it will not be enough for the mind to be illumined by the Spirit of God unless the heart is also strengthened and supported by his power. In this matter the Schoolmen go completely astray, who in considering faith identify it with a bare and simple assent arising out of knowledge and leave out confidence and assurance of heart.

This argument leads to several considerations:

- Muller is undoubtedly right when he writes that there can be knowledge of the mind without fiducial apprehension, but Muller's approach lacks the distinction between the unregenerate sinner on the one hand, and the regenerating work of the Spirit on the other. Muller's interpretation in the context of Calvin's soteriology suggests that he understands Calvin in such a way that, in the saving illumination by the Spirit, the illuminated understanding can remain without the assurance of the heart (including the renewal of the will), because of the freedom of will against the enlightening of intellect by the Spirit. Making the distinction between the unregenerate sinner and the saving work of the Spirit, clarifies that in Calvin's view, the autonomy of will can only exist in relation to the unconverted unenlightened intellect.
- Muller's reference to Calvin's expression that the illumination of the Spirit is not enough for faith, functions as proof that the reformer thought it a *realis* (real possibility), that the Spirit could savingly illuminate understanding without renewing will. Muller uses this reference as evidence for his statement that the will is free to accept or to reject the knowledge presented by the intellect. This must be denied. Instead of a *realis*, it must be understood as an *irrealis*, which is used to stress that the illumination of understanding is never separated from the assurance of heart, which includes the renewal of will.
- It is important to distinguish between the state of innocence and the state of redemption. Before the fall, Adam's will had the option of not following the lead of the mind, but in redemption, this freedom of will disappears in the irresistible work of the Spirit.

- It can also be noted that the freedom of the will 'to accept or to reject the knowledge presented by the intellect' in a soteriological context, goes against the results of Muller's own research on the concept of *cognitio*, in which he found that we must speak about the 'twofold effect of the Spirit' on understanding and will.
- The foregoing consideration makes it problematic to speak about a causal priority of intellect in an absolute and simplistic way, because this suggests at least a dependence of the will on intellect, instead of Calvin's approach in which both intellect and will are dependent upon the Spirit in an inseparable union.
- It appears that Muller interprets the denial of the causal priority of the intellect, as implying the freedom of will to reject the content of the illuminated intellect as a logical reverse. But more nuance is necessary. It is possible that within the unity of the 'twofold effect' of the Spirit, the understanding has a leading role, the so-called *causa instrumentalis* (instrumental cause) (Muller 1995:61–64).

After the evaluation of Muller's three arguments for soteriological voluntarism, it can be concluded that he has achieved academic progress in clarifying on the one hand, Calvin's concept of *cognitio* in which intellectual and affective knowledge belong together, and on the other hand, that the fall into sin means the disorder of human will in relation to understanding. The above-mentioned study, however, also leads to disagreement with Muller. Firstly, the union between understanding and will in *cognitio*, or the fiducial character of faith, cannot be explained as a primary role for will in the union of intellect and will. Secondly, Muller has proved that will had a key function in the first sin, but he has not proved that this disorder becomes God's order in recreation, nor has he stated otherwise, that the order of creation is inverted in recreation. Thirdly, Muller has not proved that the restorative effect of the Holy Spirit on will has priority over the work of the Spirit on understanding, nor has he proved that the saving activity of the Spirit is focused on will. Fourthly, Muller's claim of a certain autonomy of will against understanding, is not consistent with his earlier account of the union between intellect and will, nor is it proved from Calvin's soteriology. Fifthly, the observation that there can be naked understanding without fiducial *cognitio*, cannot lead one to the conclusion that there is the possibility that the will can veto the dictates of enlightened understanding. Therefore, it is sixthly, impossible to conclude from the observation of hamartiological voluntarism to soteriological voluntarism. In short, while Muller claims that within the 'twofold work of the Spirit', Calvin gives priority to the will, I am not convinced by that claim.

## Towards intellectualism

Given the fact that it cannot be proved that Calvin gives priority to will in his soteriology, the question arises as to whether it can be stated that the reformer is a soteriological intellectualist. I would like to answer this question affirmatively, for the following reasons:

Firstly, we have already seen that the intellect has a chronological priority, because will must have an object to choose and to trust in. Because it is impossible that will be autonomous regarding intellect in a soteriological event, there is no other possibility than that the illuminating of the mind is followed by the renewal of the will, implying the fiducial act of the heart. This means that chronological priority implies that the intellect is instrumentally causal.

Secondly, although the impact of the fall on human nature was very great, human nature changed accidentally but not essentially (Helm 2004:146). Calvin (*Inst* 2.1.11) attached great value to the statement that the corruption of our nature does not flow from nature:

We deny that it has flowed from nature in order to indicate that it is an adventitious quality which comes upon man rather than a substantial property which has been implanted from the beginning.

This means that there is every reason to start from the principle that – despite sin – the metaphysical structure of human nature still exists. The content of human intellect is darkened, but the structures of the mind are still present. Therefore, the enlightening of the Spirit does not mean a new organ of intellect, but the restoration of the existing intellect.

The preceding argument can thirdly, be strengthened by the understanding that Calvin located the first sin not in the will, but in seeking illicit knowledge (*Inst* 2.5.19). This noetic definition of sin reveals that sin is essentially a failure to know God and the self. The foregoing means that sin distorts the original knowledge of and the right relationship with God. As an effect of this distorting knowledge and relationship, humans become carnally minded.

Fourthly, there is support for the idea that the original metaphysical structure still exists, when Calvin writes that the quality of the human soul is recognisable in the many gifts of the intellect, especially in 'earthly things'. Calvin (*Inst* 2.2.13–17) is convinced of the light of reason in fallen men and devotes much attention to the powers of human intellect in social life, arts, and sciences. It is necessary to distinguish between understanding 'earthly things' and 'heavenly things', but this distinction does not involve the metaphysical structure as such, but the correct and spiritual understanding of the mind.

Fifthly, when we investigate Calvin's understanding of the applicative work of the Spirit in the redemption of human beings, illumination of the mind is the logical precondition for the quickening brought about by repentance (*Inst* 3.3.1 and further). There is an important expression in Calvin's commentary on the *Magnificat* (CR LXXIII:37), in which he writes that in the life of faith intellect precedes the will:

The words soul and spirit are used in Scripture in various senses, but, when employed together, they denote chiefly two faculties of the soul; spirit being taken for the understanding, and soul for the seat of the affections. To comprehend the meaning of the holy virgin, it must be observed that what is here placed second is first

in order; for the excitement of the will of man to praise God must be preceded by a rejoicing of the spirit.

Given the unbreakable unity of intellect and will, Calvin's exegesis confirms that the joyful knowledge of understanding, is the instrumental cause of the affections in the voluntative part of the soul.

Sixthly, in this context it is not surprising that Calvin (CR XXXVIII:245–246) can speak about the regenerative work of the Spirit, as understanding the Word of God. The illumination of intellect obviously encompasses the hearts of men. Another example which illustrates that the mind represents the whole of the soul, is the resting of our souls in the will of God. At first glance, it looks as if it is an act of will, but Calvin (CR LXII:57) calls it the use of our understanding.

The seventh reason is included within the scope of the sixth. Calvin stresses truth, doctrine and teaching. Because it is necessary that we have the correct understanding of God, ourselves, Christ and faith, Calvin rejects error and *fides implicita* (implicit faith). It is necessary for Christians to have a sound understanding of the doctrines of the gospel. It is true that the doctrines are more than mathematical truths, but their rational content is clear. The contrast offered in the sixth reason, is that the heart of faith consists of the spiritual understanding of the doctrines of the gospel. In Calvin there is no separation between faith in the person of Christ, and faith in the content of the Word. From the start, it appears that the whole of the *Institutes* (1.1.1) is written from the perspective of *sapientia* and *cognitio*. Knowing that these concepts cannot be understood in a reduced rationalistic way, it can be acknowledged that these concepts belong to understanding. These concepts point to a passive illumination, instead of an active willing. The same is true of Calvin's (*Inst* 3.2.7, cf. CR XLVII:141) definition of faith. He describes it as *cognitio*, which we receive by the revelation of the Spirit in our minds (*mens*) and the sealing in our hearts.

The eighth reason which substantiates the argument that Calvin (CR LXXVII, 514–515) is best read as an intellectualist, concerns his understanding of eschatological life as *visio Dei*. There are notions in Calvin (CR LIX:86; CR LIX:355–356) that indicate the rest of the soul in God as *summum bonum*, but from the context these expressions clearly function in a soteriological framework of interpretation, wherein the believer experiences God's help and receives God's good (Muller 2000:171). However, Calvin did not discuss the character of final blessedness; contemplation of God belongs to the eschatological life.

The final observation in support of Calvin's intellectualism, comes from the general structure of his eschatology. Given the fact that he understood the coming age primarily as the restoration of the original order of creation, we cannot but expect that his interpretation of the eschaton implies the return to the prelapsarian metaphysical structure of the human being. So, God's redeeming works redeems and restores the intellectualist structure of humans.

These arguments do not prove that Calvin is a rigid intellectualist, nevertheless, the argument that Calvin tends to intellectualism rather than to voluntarism, can be defended, not only in his understanding of the metaphysical structure of the human soul, but in his understanding of redemption too. Calvin's thinking is based on the unity of mind and heart, in which the mind has both a temporal and an instrumental priority. In short, while Muller claims that there is a priority of the will within the unity of understanding and will in Calvin, I argue that within this unity of understanding and will, Calvin gives a priority to understanding.

## Conclusion

Does Calvin teach intellectualism or voluntarism? The answer to this question remains somewhat elusive. On the one hand, Calvin's anti-speculative attitude restrained him from discussing issues such as intellectualism and voluntarism. We do not find a balanced position in his oeuvre, achieved by arguing with representatives of other opinions and coming to a nuanced and firm view.

On the other hand, although Calvin did not go explicitly into this question, he did implicitly have a structure of the human soul in his mind, which comes to the surface when he deals with the human soul and the redemptive work of the Spirit. Speaking about creation, there is a common agreement that in Calvin's view, the human soul has an intellectualistic structure, in which the will follows the lead of the understanding. In the fall, this order was negated because the will did not follow the lead of the mind, resulting in hamartiological voluntarism.

The question is how the human soul participates in God's grace. Muller suggests that because of the wrong choice made by the will for sin in the restoration of human beings, the restoration of the will is decisive. This is neither proven, nor is it consistent with the other findings of Muller. In judging Calvin's expressions about the relationship between intellect and will, no conclusion can be made other than that the structures of Calvin's theology point in the direction of an intellectualistic structure, rather than a voluntaristic one. The metaphysics of intellectualism is recognisable, both in creation and recreation.

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