



Hermeneutics: Calvinists Confirm “Saving Faith” by Empiricism & Rationalism; Bèza’s Conundrum Caused by “Temporary Faith”; The “Pisteuo” Polemic

NOTE: Insert with M. Charles Bell’s quote of John McLeod Campbell under point 19 (CC02-242):

Douglas, J. D. (gen. ed.). *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 184-85:

John McLeod Campbell (1800-1872). Scottish theologian. Studied at Glasgow and Edinburgh universities, and in 1825 became minister of Row in Dunbartonshire, where he applied himself with “almost apostolic zeal.” He was not to serve there long, however, for in 1830 he was accused of heresy before Dunbarton presbytery and found guilty of preaching “the doctrine of universal atonement and pardon through the death of Christ, and also the doctrine that assurance is of the essence of faith and necessary to salvation.” Despite appeals, the general assembly in 1831 overwhelmingly voted to depose him from the ministry—a decision accepted characteristically without bitterness. His views were later incorporated in *The Nature of the Atonement* (1856), which is regarded as a substantial contribution to the development of Scottish theology. From 1833 to 1859 Campbell ministered to an independent congregation in Glasgow.

27. Salvation is not confirmed by faith in the testimony of the God’s Word but by the empirical evidence of one’s works.
28. If the empirical evidence is sufficient to convince the individual that he is worthy for salvation then he may conclude through rationalism, expressed in a syllogism, that he is among the elect and therefore saved:
- Major premise: All who have the effects (good works) have faith.
- Minor premise: But I have the effects (good works).
- Conclusion: Therefore I have (saving) faith. (See Kendall, p. 33)
29. However, Bèza’s doctrine of limited atonement presents a dilemma to any hyper-Calvinist: “Was my faith ‘saving faith’ or was it ‘temporary faith’ and how am I to know?”
30. Answer: Based on the premise of limited atonement, who knows? Kendall evaluates the situation on page 32 of his book, *Calvin and English Calvinism*:

Bèza has told us Christ died for the elect. This makes trusting Christ’s death presumptuous: we could be putting our trust in One who did not die for us and therefore be damned. Thus we can no more trust Christ’s death by a direct act of faith than we can infallibly project that we are among the number chosen from eternity: for the number of the elect and the number for whom Christ died are one and the same. The ground of assurance, then, must be sought elsewhere than in Christ. (See Kendall, p. 32)

31. Since Christ’s atoning sacrifice was limited to a predetermined few, no individual may look to Christ for assurance about his eternal future. Bèza understood the quandary his theology created but, undaunted, he came up with a solution.

Bèza, Theodore. *A Briefe and Piththie Summe of the Christian Faith*. (1565?), 36, 37:

[NOTE: Bèza’s sixteenth-century spelling is modernized.]

When Satan puts you in doubt of our election, we may not search first the eternal counsel of god whose majesty we cannot comprehend, but on the contrary we must begin at the **sanctification which we feel in ourselves** ... forasmuch as our sanctification, from which proceeds good works, is a certain effect of Jesus Christ dwelling in us by faith. (See Kendall, p. 33)



32. Under Bèza's system, faith in Christ plays no major role in the salvation of the elect, but faith in one's "good works" is essential and even primary in ascertaining whether or not he is one of the elect.
33. Consequently, the object of his assurance is not the work of Christ on the cross but rather his own "good works." If a person has expressed faith in Christ he does not rely upon biblical assurances that he has eternal life. Instead, he reaches a subjective opinion about this based on a personal evaluation of his own "good works."
34. These "good works" prove to the person that he is sanctified and that Jesus Christ indwells him. Consequently, faith in one's "good works" is the proof that one's faith in Christ was efficacious.
35. Thus the syllogism:
- Major premise: All who have the effects (good works) have faith.
 Minor premise: But I have the effects (good works).
 Conclusion: Therefore I have (saving) faith. (See Kendall, p. 33)
36. It is important that we discredit this immediately. Both the premises are false. I will demonstrate. The word "faith" is the translation of the Greek noun, **πίστις, pistis**. The verb form is, **πιστεύω, pisteuō**, and is translated "believe." The definitions of these two words are obviously synonymous:
- Arndt, William F. and F. Wilber Gingrich. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament. 2d ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 660-62:**
- πιστεύω, [pisteuo]** 1. To believe in something; to be convinced of something. The person to whom one gives credence: Jesus and God whom one believes, in that he accepts their disclosures without doubt or contradiction. (pp. 660-61)
2. Faith in the Divinity that lays special emphasis on trust in his power and his nearness to help, in addition to being convinced that he exists and that his revelations or disclosures are true, In our literature, God and Christ are objects of this faith. (p. 661)
- πίστις, [pistis]** 2. Trust and confidence directed toward God and Christ, their revelations, teachings, promises, and their power and readiness to aid. (p. 662)
37. Both the noun and the verb are transitive. The merit is found in the object not the subject. The person who believes places his confidence for salvation in an object that he is certain is qualified to accomplish the desired effect: salvation and eternal life.
38. Jesus Christ is the only person qualified to accomplish this desired effect and this is stated repeatedly in Scripture.
39. Bèza's syllogism reveals that he was unable to find confidence in his salvation before placing confidence in his "good works." In effect, he places his faith in his works to verify his faith in Christ.
40. However, faith by its definition asserts that the one possessing it is absolutely convinced that the Word of God is true regarding Christ as Savior. Further, one is also convinced that by believing in the Person and work of Christ, he is indeed saved, among the elect, and with eternal life.
41. The definitions of **πίστις, pistis** and **πιστεύω, pisteuō**, unite the concepts of faith and assurance: if you believe in Christ for salvation then you believe in the promises that are attached to salvation: forgiveness of presalvation sins, and the imputation of eternal life.
42. Bèza's system does not agree with this. In fact, he is on record saying that there are two "works of grace": (1) The "first grace" which is faith in Christ and (2) the "second grace" which is sanctification.



43. He teaches that the first grace is rendered void if it is not ratified by the second. It is the second grace which assures, for the first grace may not persevere. (See Kendall, p. 35)
44. In effect the spiritual life of the hyper-Calvinist becomes an “examination” that seeks to confirm whether or not he is saved. The individual begins to observe his own life in order to discern whether he will produce good works and thus confirm his election or, on the other hand, fall away and confirm his reprobation.
45. One of the passages that the hyper-Calvinists use to illustrate their position is the parable of the sower in Matthew 13: 3-8. For them, only the seeds that produced fruit are the elect.
46. Limited atonement, or as the current parlance would have it, “particular atonement,” is a flawed system of theology that was developed by Theodore Bèza as is pointed out in the research done by R. T. Kendall:

J. S. Bray (in his book) *Theodore Bèza's Doctrine of Predestination*, sees Bèza as 'a transitional figure who bridged the gap' between Calvin and 'Reformed orthodoxy.' Bèza is not merely a bridge but the architect of a system fundamentally different from Calvin's. (p. 38, n1)