

THE *GENEVA THESES* (1649): A RECENTLY UNCOVERED JEWEL

Rev. Angus Stewart

Introduction

Among the 127 creeds in the four volumes of *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, which was reviewed in the last *British Reformed Journal*, there is a highly significant document only available in our language before now in a 1971 Th.D. thesis for a Canadian university.¹ This “recently uncovered jewel,” as this article’s title puts it, is the *Geneva Theses* (1649). This beautiful, little gem nestles near the middle of volume 4 of Dennison’s work (pp. 413-422), which includes his introduction (pp. 413-415), his transcription of the Latin primary document (pp. 415-418) and his revised English translation (pp. 418-422).

The *Geneva Theses* were written to oppose the theology of the heretic Moise Amyraut (1596-1664)(hence Amyraldianism), the most famous student and professor of the Academy of Saumur (hence Salmurianism) in western France. At the rotten heart of Amyraut’s doctrine of hypothetical universal grace, in both hypothetical universal election and hypothetical universal atonement, is the notion that God desires to save everybody head for head, including the reprobate—today called the free offer or the well-meant offer.

Antoine Léger (1594-1661) was one of the two pastors and theological professors of the Genevan church and academy who drafted the *Geneva Theses*. Léger had a role in connection with two other Reformed confessions, the first being the *Confession of Cyril Lukaris* (1629). While minister of a church in the Italian Alps,

In 1628, the Venerable Company of Pastors in Geneva suggested that he go to Constantinople as chaplain to the Dutch embassy. Soon after his arrival, Léger became an intimate

¹ James T. Dennison, Jr. (ed.), *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008-2014).

The Geneva Theses

friend of Cyril and was welcomed as a theological kindred spirit (vol. 4, pp. 154-155).

Second, before his death in 1661, Léger wrote the preface to the *Waldensian Confession* (1662) (vol. 4, pp. 496-498).

The other theologian who drafted the *Geneva Theses* was Théodore Tronchin (1582-1657). Tronchin studied theology at Geneva and Basel (in what is now Switzerland), Heidelberg (Germany), Franeker and Leiden (the Netherlands). Along with Giovanni Diodati (1576-1649), whom he later succeeded as a theological professor, Tronchin was a Genevan delegate to the great Synod of Dordt which condemned Arminianism. Thirty years later, he wrote the *Geneva Theses* in the same tradition of sovereign grace as the *Canons of Dordt* (1618-1619), over against the more subtle enemy of Amyraldianism, with the later confession being more explicitly, antithetically and emphatically against the free offer, a more wily enemy than even Amyraldianism. This is noteworthy given that Tronchin was widely reckoned to be an irenic theologian.

The five heads of the *Geneva Theses* are entitled “I. Concerning Original Sin” (against mediate imputation, especially taught by Saumur’s Josué de la Place), “II. Concerning Predestination,” “III. Concerning Redemption,” “IV. Concerning the Disposition of Man to Grace” and “V. Concerning Promises Made to Believers and Their Prerogatives.” Like the more famous five heads of the *Canons of Dordt* (1618-1619), from which we have the Five Points of Calvinism, which the heads of the *Geneva Theses* sought to safe-guard, this much shorter creed consists of both positive statements (which range from two to four articles) and rejections of errors (from one to four articles).

Anti-Free-Offer Articles

It is highly significant that in theses II, III and IV (the ones dealing with predestination, redemption and the disposition of man to grace), seven of the seventeen articles, consisting of one of the ten positive statements and an amazingly high six of the seven rejections of errors, clearly oppose all the main tenets of well-meant offer theology. These are the anti-free-offer articles:

II:R. Rejection of the error of those:

British Reformed Journal

1. Who teach that in God there is granted, under the condition of faith and repentance, some good will of saving those who perish.
2. Who, using economy for an excuse, ascribe to God the inclination or volition or disposition or affection or less ardent love or power or intention or desire or will or counsel or decree or covenant or necessary or universal conditional loving kindness, by which He wills each and every man to be saved if they believe in Christ.
3. Who assign to God a design previous to election in which He determined to be merciful to the whole human race without limit.
4. Who attribute to God a twofold loving-kindness, one clear or first and universal by which He willed each and every person to be saved: the other more clear, second, and particular towards the elect (pp. 419-420).

III:R. Rejection of the error of those:

1. Who teach that Christ died for each and every one sufficiently, not merely by reason of worth, but also by reason of intention; or for all conditionally, if they were to believe; or who assert that Scripture teaches that Christ died for all men universally; and most especially the places of Scripture (Ezek. 18:21 etc. and 33:11; John 3:16; I Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9) ought to be extended to each and every man and by these the universality of love and grace ought to be proved (p. 421).²

IV. 1. Since the requisite conditions for salvation are impossible to the reprobate, God does not intend the salvation of them conditionally if they believe and repent unless it is sup-

² Instead of Ezekiel 31:11 in the English translation (p. 421), I have changed the reference to Ezekiel 33:11, which is the verse clearly intended, as indicated by the Latin original (p. 417).

The Geneva Theses

posed that there is an empty, deceptive, and useless intention and will of God (p. 421).

IV:R. Rejection of the error of those:

2. Who teach that by His revealed disposition, God wills the salvation of each and every one (p. 421).

God's Will

In opposition to the well-meant offer which posits a will of the Almighty to save everybody, as the last article cited above states, the *Geneva Theses* reject “the error of those: Who teach that by His revealed disposition, God wills the salvation of each and every one” (IV:R:2). Of the four rejections of error in “II. Concerning Predestination,” three spurn the free-offer view of God’s will. This creed from Calvin’s Geneva rejects the views of those who

(1) “teach that in God there is ... some good will of saving those who perish” (II:R:1);

(2) “ascribe to God the inclination or volition or disposition or affection or less ardent love or power or intention or desire or will or counsel or decree or covenant or necessary or universal conditional loving kindness, by which He wills each and every man to be saved if they believe in Christ” (II:R:2); and

(3) “attribute to God a ... universal [desire] by which He willed each and every person to be saved” (II:R:4).

Let us analyze the various components of the errors that the *Geneva Theses* sharply oppose. First, the issue is the will of God, both as a verb: He “wills” or “willed” (II:R:2, 4; IV:R:2), and as a noun: His “will” (II:R:1, 2; IV:1). Jehovah’s will is spoken of as His “disposition” (II:R:2), even His “revealed disposition” (IV:R:2). Besides Jehovah’s “will” and “disposition,” article II:R:2’s list includes God’s “inclination” or “volition” or “desire,” as well as eight other terms!

Second, this will of God is “universal” (II:R:2), concerning “each and every one” (IV:R:2), “each and every man” (II:R:2), “each and every person” (II:R:4) and “the whole human race without limit” (II:R:3), including “those who

perish” (II:R:1) who are “the reprobate” (IV:1)—a word the *Geneva Theses*, unlike many in our day, are not afraid to use.

Third, this view of the will of God concerning each and every reprobate human being is that He desires their “salvation” (IV:1; IV:R:2) or “saving” (II:R:1) or being “saved” (II:R:2, 4).

Fourth, in rejecting the views of those who “ascribe” (II:R:2) or “attribute” (II:R:4) to God, or “teach” (II:R:1; IV:R:2) that He has, a will to save the reprobate, the seventeenth-century *Geneva Theses* are clearly rejecting what in our generation is meant by, and called, the free offer. How often in our day do we not hear professed Calvinists “teach that by His revealed disposition, God wills the salvation of each and every one” (IV:R:2). But this Reformed creed calls this an “error” and pronounces its “rejection” of it!

It is worth pointing out the strong emphasis on the *conditionality* of salvation in the Amyraldian scheme and the repeated rejection of it in the *Geneva Theses*. In its seven anti-free-offer articles, this 1649 creed uses the noun “condition” or “conditions” twice (II:R:1; IV:1), the adverb “conditionally” twice (III:R:1; IV:1), and the adjective “conditional” once (II:R:2) in its description and critique of Salmurianism. The conditions are faith (II:R:2; III:R:1) or, more fully, faith and repentance (II:R:1; IV:1). The Amyraldian teaching of a conditional salvation for everybody head for head if they repent and believe (II:R:1, 2; III:R:1; IV:1) militates against God’s eternal and unconditional predestination (II; cf. II:R:1, 2), Christ’s particular and effectual atonement (III; cf. III:R:1) and man’s indisposition towards grace (IV; cf. IV:1)—as does the well-meant offer.

Since the Almighty does not give repentance and faith to absolutely everybody (II:3, 4; III:1, pp. 419, 420), and, by definition, the salvation of “the reprobate” is “impossible,” the *Geneva Theses* repudiate the free offer for it, like Amyraldianism, postulates “an empty, deceptive, and useless intention and will of God” (IV:1)!

First, the well-meant offer is “empty” as opposed to the full, rich and eternal will, desire, volition and revealed disposition of the blessed Triune God which manifests the wisdom, power and glory of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the salvation of all the elect (Eph. 1:3-14), “a certain number of men

The Geneva Theses

who make up His [i.e., Christ's] mystical body" (III:2, p. 420). How "empty" the foolish speculations of Saumur and the well-meant offer appear when set in the light of our Saviour's thanksgiving to His Father for the revelation of God's unconditional will of election and reprobation in the divinely ordained results of gospel preaching!

I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him (Matt. 11:25-27).

Second, the well-meant offer is "deceptive" since it is not honest or sincere to claim as gospel that the God of truth desires to save each and every reprobate person when He has not taken any of the necessary steps to deliver them from sin and destruction, and bring them to the bliss of covenant fellowship with the living God (*Westminster Confession* 3:3-7). Jehovah has not elected or redeemed any of them, and He never regenerates, calls, justifies, adopts, sanctifies, preserves or glorifies any of the reprobate. Instead, the infinitely holy One justly hates and hardens them as "vessels of wrath fitted for destruction" (Rom. 9:10-24).

Third, the free offer is utterly "useless," as the *Geneva Theses* point out, for it has not saved, it does not save and it will not save, a single reprobate in all the history of the world. Why? Because, by definition, it cannot save any one. Over against the impotent god of the well-meant offer, we confess, "But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased" (Ps. 115:3), for, unlike the god of Saumur and much of modern evangelicalism, the true God proclaims, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do *all* my pleasure" (Isa. 46:10)!

Any deity with an "empty, deceptive and useless" will is an "empty, deceptive and useless" god. Instead of the "empty, deceptive and useless" divine will and god of the free offer, this Genevan creed speaks repeatedly about God's eternal decree, counsel, good pleasure, predestination and election. Concerning Jehovah's predestination, it confesses, "Those whom God *elected in Christ* out of

His *good pleasure alone*, and those *only*, He *decreed to give to the Son*, and to give them faith in order that they would be *brought all the way to eternal life*" (II:3, p. 419; italics mine). Concerning Christ's purpose to redeem only those whom the Father has given Him, we read, "For these, Christ Himself, *perfectly conscious of His vocation, willed and resolved* to die and to add to the infinite value of His death, the *most efficacious and singular purpose of His will*" (III:3, p. 420; italics mine). No wonder the *Geneva Theses* have no place or toleration for the free-offer travesty regarding God's will in Jesus Christ!

God's Love

Both Amyraldianism and free-offer theology teach false views of both God's will and God's love. In rejecting the doctrine of Moise Amyraut on God's love, the *Geneva Theses* also repudiate the views of Louis Berkhof, John McArthur, Phil Johnson, John Piper, etc.

First, these men attribute to the Almighty a universal "love" (II:R:2; III:R:1), "lovingkindness" (II:R:2, 4), "affection" (II:R:2), mercy (II:R:3) and "grace" (III:R:1) for "the whole human race without limit" (II:R:3). They "teach that in God there is granted ... some good will of saving those who perish" (II:R:1). This "good will" is a favourable or gracious attitude or disposition towards the reprobate.

Second, along with the extent of God's love, there is the issue of the "number" of the divine love. Saumur taught a "twofold" grace or mercy of God, like all free-offer advocates. This "twofold loving-kindness" consists of "one clear or first and universal by which He willed each and every person to be saved: the other more clear, second, and particular towards the elect" (II:R:4).

Third, what about the degree or power of this secondary and universal divine affection? Again Amyraldianism and the well-meant offer agree: it is a "less ardent love" (II:R:2), a love without the necessary power to save. Hence this alleged divine love of the free-offer falls under the condemnation of this Genevan creed as "empty, deceptive, and useless" (IV:1). The correspondences are uncanny!

The attentive reader will notice from the letter "R" in all the parentheses in the three paragraphs above that these Amyraldian and well-meant offer views

The Geneva Theses

of a secondary, lesser divine love, grace, lovingkindness, mercy or affection toward the reprobate are classified, not as biblical or confessional or Reformed, but as *errors* which are *rejected* by the *Geneva Theses*!

This beautiful creed only knows of one love of God for some people: “His eternal love toward the elect” (II:2, p. 419). The singular “matchless love and mercy of God” is extolled in these comforting words about our gracious salvation in Jesus Christ, for it is sure and certain from beginning to end:

The matchless love and mercy of God is the sole cause both of the sending of the Son and of the satisfaction appointed beforehand through Him, even the conferring of faith and application of merit through it: which benefits should not be objects of separation or be torn asunder from themselves (II:4, p. 419).

Key Texts

Not only does the free offer involve two intrinsically-related false doctrines concerning God (regarding His will and His love for the salvation of the reprobate) but it also appeals (wrongly) to certain texts of Scripture, as if they support these errors. This 1649 confession states,

Rejection of the error of those: Who teach that ... most especially the places of Scripture (Ezek. 18:21 etc. and 33:11; John 3:16; I Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9) ought to be extended to each and every man and by these the universality of love and grace ought to be proved (III:R:1).³

³ Francis Turretin asks, “Can there be attributed to God any *conditional will*, or *universal purpose of pitying the whole human race fallen in sin*, of destinating Christ as Mediator to each and all, and of calling them all to a saving participation of his benefits?” and responds with a firm negative: “We deny” (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1992], vol. 1, p. 395; italics mine). Then follow ten pages of solid arguments from Scripture and the *Canons of Dordt* (III/IV:8) rejecting the free-offer views of the Lutherans, the Arminians and the Amyraldians (pp. 395-404). Turretin’s next nine pages contain a thorough refutation from God’s Word, Augustine, Calvin and Beza of a flawed interpretation of four biblical passages alleged in support of a failed desire of God to save the reprobate (pp. 405-413). Interestingly, these are the very four listed

How often free-offer advocates in our day claim that the “world” in John 3:16 includes those who are never saved! Thus they end up with a resistible love of God for the reprobate, contrary to Head IV of the *Canons of Dordt*, as well as some form of a universal atonement. These professed Calvinists do not seem to be bothered that the latter follows necessarily from the former; yea, some even state this explicitly, as if the *Canons of Dordt* do not teach the scriptural truth of the Lord’s cross as particular and effectual, and for the elect alone (II:8-9)!⁴

Little has changed in the over 350 years since the *Geneva Theses*. Besides John 3:16, the texts scraped up in defence of the well-meant offer in our day are still the Ezekielian verses, I Timothy 2:4 and II Peter 3:9.⁵ The only surprise is that Matthew 23:37 is not cited.⁶ Indeed, the four texts mentioned in *Geneva Theses* III:R:1 are those appealed to by the enemies of God’s sovereign grace in the early church, in the Middle Ages, at the Reformation, in the post-Reformation church and in our own times.

It is rare that a Reformed creed mentions the erroneous exegesis of specific passages of the Word of God. It is highly revealing that the *Geneva Theses* does exactly this and that the Bible verses it mentions are the very texts appealed to by advocates of the free offer today in support of a universal divine “love and grace” that is “extended to each and every man” and desires to save everybody! These are also “most especially the places of Scripture” (III:R:1) cited by the Pelagians, Semi-Pelagians, Roman Catholics, Anabaptists and Arminians, as well as the Amyraldians and well-meant offer men.⁷

in *Geneva Theses* III:R:1: John 3:16, Ezekiel 33:11, I Timothy 2:4 and II Peter 3:9! Turretin was a Genevan who signed and supported the *Theses*.

⁴ For faithful, on-line, Reformed exegesis of John 3:16, see Homer C. Hoeksema, “God So Loved the World (John 3:16),” which also includes the sound interpretations of Francis Turretin, Abraham Kuyper and A. W. Pink (www.cprf.co.uk/pamphlets/godsolovedtheworld.htm).

⁵ Many orthodox quotes on Ezekiel 18:23, 32 and 33:11, I Timothy 2:4 and II Peter 3:9, have been collected on-line (www.cprf.co.uk/quotes.htm#desire).

⁶ Many orthodox quotes on Matthew 23:37 have been collected on-line (www.cprf.co.uk/quotes/matthew2337quotes.htm).

⁷ For a Reformed work against an Anabaptist advocate of the free offer, including the well-meant offer interpretation of the standard biblical texts, see this superb book by John Knox (c. 1514-1572): *On Predestination, in Answer to the Cavillations by an Anabaptist* (1560), in *The Works of John Knox*, ed. David Laing (USA: Banner, 2014), vol. 5, pp. 7-468.

Binding Confession

It is significant that (1) this anti-free offer confession is infralapsarian (II:1, p. 419), so that its opposition to the well-meant offer cannot be dismissed merely as supralapsarian “extremism;” (2) it was approved by all the Venerable Company of Pastors of Calvin’s Geneva and “signed on their behalf by the moderator, Joannes Jacobus Sartorius (1619-1690)” (p. 414), so that it can hardly be misrepresented and then derided as hyper-Calvinism; (3) it is an official church confession and not merely a sermon or a commentary on Scripture or a theological writing, so that it does not merely present the personal sentiments of a minister or a professor; (4) its title contains the word “theses,” indicating that these theological propositions are to be steadfastly maintained against all opposition and gainsayers; and (5) Genevan professors and ministers, and those trained at the Genevan Academy to be appointed elsewhere, for example, in France and in the Lowlands, had to subscribe to it (p. 414).

“Is Amyraldianism with its well-meant offer theology a ‘big deal’? Is it really that bad? Why must you continually oppose it?” Some made these criticisms of the Genevan church in the seventeenth century, as they do against those today, like the BRF, who antithetically maintain God’s absolute sovereignty. Well, the Venerable Company of Pastors even wrote a new and binding confession against it: the *Geneva Theses*! A quarter of a century later, Geneva and the Swiss Reformed churches produced and adopted another creed against Saumur and the free offer: the *Formula Consensus Helvetica* (1675), which shall be considered later.

Calvin’s *Consensus Genevensis*

Théodore Tronchin, Antoine Léger and the *Geneva Theses* (1649) stand solidly in the line of John Calvin (1509-1564), the great Reformer of Geneva. The following lengthy quote from Calvin’s *Consensus Genevensis* (1552) shows that he maintained the scriptural truth of the absolute sovereignty of God, along with the *Geneva Theses* and Augustine, over against the Pelagians and the Roman Catholics with their false free-offer exegesis of I Timothy 2:4 (and Matthew 23:37).

The difficulty, according to Pighius [a Roman Catholic theologian], that lies in the other place of Paul, where the apostle

affirms that “God will have all men to be saved and come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. ii. 4), is solved in one moment, and by one question, namely, *How* does God wish all men to come to the knowledge of the truth? For Paul couples this *salvation* and this *coming to the knowledge of the truth* together. Now, I would ask, did the same will of God stand the same from the beginning of the world or not? For if God willed, or wished, that His truth should be known unto *all men*, how was it that He did not proclaim and make known His law to the *Gentiles* also? Why did He confine the light of life within the narrow limits of *Judea*? And what does Moses mean when he says, “For what nation is there so great who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon Him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day” (Deut. iv. 7, 8)? The Divine lawgiver surely means that there was no other nation which had statutes and laws, by which it was ruled, like unto that nation. And what does Moses here but extol the peculiar privilege of the race of Abraham? To this responds the high encomium of David, pronounced on the same nation: “He hath not dealt so with any nation, and as for his judgments, they have not known them” (Ps. cxlvii. 20). Nor must we disregard the express *reason* assigned by the Psalmist, “*Because the Lord loved thy fathers, therefore He chose their seed after them*” (Deut. iv. 37). And why did God thus choose them? Not because they were, in themselves, more excellent than others, but because *it pleased* God to choose them “for his peculiar people” [Deut. 14:2; 26:18; I Pet. 2:9]. What? Are we to suppose that the apostle did not know that he himself was prohibited by the Holy Spirit from “preaching the word” in Asia, and from passing over into Bithynia [Acts 16:6-7]? But as the continuance of this argument would render us too prolix, we will be content with taking one position more: that God, after having thus lighted the candle of eternal life to the *Jews*

alone, suffered the *Gentiles* to wander for many ages in the darkness of ignorance; and that, at length, this special gift and blessing were promised to the Church: “*But* the Lord shall arise upon *thee*; and His glory shall be seen upon thee” (Isa. lx. 2). *Now* let Pighius boast, if he can, that God willeth *all men* to be saved! The above arguments, founded on the Scriptures, prove that even the external preaching of the doctrine of salvation, which is very far inferior to the illumination of the Spirit, was not made of God common to *all men*.

This passage of the apostle (1 Tim. ii. 4) was long ago brought forward by the Pelagians, and handled against us with all their might. What Augustine advanced in reply to them in many parts of his works, I think it unnecessary to bring forward on the present occasion. I will only adduce one passage, which clearly and briefly proves how unconcernedly he despised their objection now in question. “When our Lord complains (says he) that though He wished to gather the children of Jerusalem as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but she would not [Matt. 23:37], are we to consider that the will of God was overpowered by a number of weak men, so that He who was Almighty God could not do what He wished or willed to do? If so, what is to become of that omnipotence by which He did ‘whatsoever pleased Him in heaven and in earth’ [Ps. 135:6]? Moreover, who will be found so profanely mad as to say that God cannot convert the evil wills of men, *which* He pleases, *when* He pleases, and *as* He pleases, to good? Now, when He does this, He does it *in mercy*; and when He doeth it not, *in judgment* He doeth it not.”

... The true meaning of Paul, however, in the passage now under consideration [I Tim. 2:4] is perfectly clear and intelligible to every one who is not determined on contention. The apostle is exhorting that all solemn “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men: for kings and for all that are in authority.” And because there

were, in that age, so many and such wrathful and bitter enemies of the Church, Paul, to prevent despair from hindering the prayers of the faithful, hastens to meet their distresses by earnestly entreating them to be instant in prayer “for all men,” and especially “for all those in authority.” *For* (saith the apostle) God will have *all men* to be saved.” Who does not see that the apostle is here speaking of *orders of men* rather than of individuals? Indeed, that distinction which commentators here make is not without great reason and point; that *nations* of individuals, not *individuals* of nations, are here intended by Paul (vol. 1, pp. 757-759; italics those in the book).

James Dennison observes, “The Senate of Geneva recognized [Calvin’s *Consensus Genevensis*] as a defining element of the Reformation in their city” (vol. 1, p. 692). This confession went forth with “The Consent of the Pastors of the Church of Christ at Geneva” (vol. 1, p. 693), as did the *Geneva Theses*. The Venerable Company of Pastors both in Calvin’s day (1562) and at the time of the *Geneva Theses* (1649) agreed that I Timothy 2:4 must not “be extended to each and every man” (III:R:1).

Theodore Beza’s Confession

The *Geneva Theses* (1649) are in a stream of anti-free-offer Genevan confessional literature that includes not only Calvin’s *Consensus Genevensis* (1552) but also *Theodore Beza’s Confession* (1560), written eight years later by Calvin’s worthy successor.

Interestingly, Théodore Tronchin was named after his maternal grandfather, Théodore Beza (1519-1605), and his mother, Théodora, who was the adopted daughter of the great Beza! Like the *Geneva Theses* almost ninety years later (III:R:1), Beza expressed creedally that those to whom God is “longsuffering” and whom He is “not willing that any should perish” are the elect and not the reprobate (II Pet. 3:9). Just as with Calvin’s *Consensus Genevensis* on I Timothy 2:4, so too *Theodore Beza’s Confession* agrees with the *Geneva Theses* that II Peter 3:9 ought not “be extended to each and every man” (III:R:1). Thus we read in *Theodore Beza’s Confession*:

The Geneva Theses

Finally, we believe according to the Word of God that in the time ordained of God (Acts 3:21; 1 Peter 4:7), which time the very angels do not know (Matt. 24:36; 25:13; 1 Thess. 5:1-2), Jesus Christ *seeing the number of his elect fulfilled and accomplished* (Rev. 6:11; 2 Peter 3:9) will come from heaven bodily with His divine majesty (Acts 1:11; Matt. 24:30), this old world being consumed by fire (2 Peter 3:10) (vol. 2, p. 333; italics mine).

This is also the anti-free-offer interpretation of II Peter 3:9 in the *Confession of Tarcal* (1562) and *Torda* (1563), a Hungarian Reformed creed drafted by Péter Melius Juhász (1532-1572) who appears to have used *Theodore Beza's Confession* (1560) with some modifications:

We believe, from the Word of God, that the day is to come at a certain time which even the angels do not know, when, *after the number of the elect is fulfilled* and the world has been purged by fire, Jesus Christ will come from heaven in His visible and true human form (but clothed in divine majesty), that all men that have existed from the beginning of the world may appear before Him (Acts 3:21; 1 Peter 4:7; Matt. 24:13, 36; 1 Thess. 5:2; Rev. 6:11; 2 Peter 3:9, 12; Acts 1:11; Matt. 24:30) (vol. 2, p. 751; italics mine).

Turretin and the *Formula Consensus Helvetica*

Tronchin was succeeded in his chair of theology at the Genevan Academy by no less than Francis Turretin (1623-1687), who signed and strenuously defended the *Geneva Theses* (1649). Along with John Henry Heidegger (1633-1698) of Zurich and Lucas Gernler (1625-1675) of Basel, Francis Turretin of Geneva was one of the three worthies who produced and promoted the *Formula Consensus Helvetica* (1675), which, as its extended title states, was “designed to condemn and exclude that modified form of Calvinism” that “emanated from the theological school at Saumur” (vol. 4, p. 518) so that it would not “infect our churches” (vol. 4, p. 519). According to the “Preface,” this “especially” included “the doctrine that concerns the extent of divine grace,” for it held to a form of “universal grace” (vol. 4, p. 519; cf. p. 518), like the free offer.

Canon VI deserves to be quoted in full:

Canon VI: Wherefore, we can not agree with the opinion of those who teach: 1) that God, moved by philanthropy, or a kind of special love for the fallen of the human race, did, in a kind of conditioned willing, first moving of pity, as they call it, or inefficacious desire, determine the salvation of all, conditionally, i.e., if they would believe; 2) that he appointed Christ Mediator for all and each of the fallen; and 3) that, at length, certain ones whom he regarded, not simply as sinners in the first Adam, but as redeemed in the second Adam, he elected, that is, he determined graciously to bestow on these, in time, the saving gift of faith; and in this sole act election properly so called is complete. For these and all other similar teachings are in no way insignificant deviations from the proper teaching concerning divine election; because the Scriptures do not extend unto all and each God's purpose of showing mercy to man, but restrict it to the elect alone, the reprobate being excluded even by name, as Esau, whom God hated with an eternal hatred (Rom. 9:13). The same Holy Scriptures testify that the counsel and will of God do not change, but stand immovable, and God in the heavens does whatsoever he will (Ps. 115:3; Isa. 46:10); for God is infinitely removed from all that human imperfection which characterizes inefficacious affections and desires, rashness, repentance, and change of purpose. The appointment, also, of Christ, as Mediator, equally with the salvation of those who were given to him for a possession and an inheritance that can not be taken away, proceeds from one and the same election, and does not form the basis of election (vol. 4, pp. 521-522).⁸

Amyraldianism is seen to include what is now called the well-meant offer in that both hold to a certain divine "philanthropy" or "love" or "pity" or "grac[e]" or "mercy" or "affection" for all men absolutely that wills their salvation with

⁸ I have corrected two of the three Scripture texts cited, changing Romans 9:11 to Romans 9:13, and Isaiah 47:10 to Isaiah 46:10.

an “inefficacious desire.” Heidegger, Gernler and Turretin contend that “these and all other similar teachings are in no way insignificant deviations from the proper teaching concerning divine election” for “the Scriptures do not extend unto all and each God’s purpose of showing mercy to man, but restrict it to the elect alone, the reprobate being excluded even by name, as Esau, whom God hated with an eternal hatred (Rom. 9:13).” The *Formula Consensus Helvetica* faithfully declares that “God is infinitely removed from all that human imperfection which characterizes inefficacious affections and desires” for “God in the heavens does whatsoever he will (Ps. 115:3).”

In citing this last biblical text, this Reformed creed echoes many worthies who quoted Psalm 115:3 (and Psalm 135:6, which is similar), such as Augustine of Hippo (354-430), Fulgentius of Ruspe (468-533) and Gottschalk of Orbais (c.808–c.867), in their opposition to an “inefficacious desire” in God to save the reprobate taught by the Pelagians and Semi-Pelagians.⁹

In keeping with God’s effectual desire, absolute perfection and “immovable” “counsel and will” in His unconditional election and reprobation (Canon VI), Canons XVII-XXI of the *Formula Consensus Helvetica* set forth the biblical and Reformed doctrine of the call to salvation (vol. 4, pp. 525-528). Canon XIX is the key article:

Likewise the external call itself, which is made by the preaching of the Gospel, is on the part of God also, who earnestly and sincerely calls. For in his Word he most earnestly and truly reveals, not, indeed, his secret will respecting the salvation or destruction of each individual, but our responsibility, and what will happen to us if we do or neglect this duty. Clearly it is the will of God who calls, that they who are called come to him and not neglect so great a salvation, and so he earnestly

⁹ See, e.g., Augustine, *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, ed. Henry Paolucci, trans. J. F. Shaw (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1961), xciv-ciii; Francis X. Gumerlock, *Fulgentius of Ruspe on the Saving Will of God: The Development of a Sixth-Century African Bishop’s Interpretation of I Timothy 2:4 During the Semi-Pelagian Controversy* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009); Victor Genke and Francis X. Gumerlock (eds. & trans.), *Gottschalk and a Medieval Predestination Controversy: Texts Translated From the Latin* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2010).

promises eternal life to those who come to him by faith; for, as the Apostle declares, “It is a trustworthy saying: For if we have died with Him, we shall also live with Him; if we disown Him, He will also disown us; if we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself” (2 Tim 2:12-13). Neither is this call without result for those who disobey; for God always accomplishes his will, even the demonstration of duty, and following this, either the salvation of the elect who fulfill their responsibility, or the inexcusableness of the rest who neglect the duty set before them. Certainly the spiritual man in no way determined the eternal purpose of God to produce faith along with the externally offered, or written Word of God. Moreover, because God approved every truth which flows from his counsel, it is correctly said to be his will, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have everlasting life (John 6:40). Although these “all” are the elect alone, and God formed no plan of universal salvation without any selection of persons, and Christ therefore died not for everyone but only for the elect who were given to him; yet he intends this in any case to be universally true, which follows from his special and definite purpose. But that, by God’s will, the elect alone believe in the external call which is universally offered, while the reprobate are hardened. This proceeds solely from the discriminating grace of God; election by the same grace to those who believe, but their own native wickedness to the reprobate who remain in sin, who after their hardened and impenitent heart build up for themselves wrath for the Day of Judgment, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God [Rom. 2:5] (vol. 4, pp. 526-527).

Through the preaching, the Triune God reveals both man’s “duty” and “responsibility,” and His gospel comes with commands, requirements, “promises” and threats: “what will happen to us if we ... neglect this duty.” In the external call, as with all things (Eph. 1:11), “God always accomplishes his will,” in “either the salvation of the elect” or “the inexcusableness of the rest who neglect the duty that is set before them” and are “hardened,” according

The Geneva Theses

to “the eternal purpose of God,” for the proclamation of the Word is never “without result,” even “for those who disobey.”

Thus Canon XIX teaches both Jehovah’s “secret will respecting the salvation or destruction of each individual,” that is, His will of decree; and His “will” of command that “they who are called come to him and not neglect so great a salvation,” for God “approve[s]” of man’s repentance and faith. Contrary to the Arminian, Amyraldian and well-meant offer view, Turretin and the *Formula Consensus Helvetica* explain how the gospel is proclaimed “earnestly,” “sincerely” and “truly,” without the Almighty ineffectually desiring to save the reprobate.¹⁰

Heidegger, Gernler and Turretin reject two evils, one on the left and the other on the right. Their Swiss Reformed confession not only opposes hypo-Calvinism, as we have seen above; it also rejects the hyper-Calvinist heresy that the external call is only to be made to “sensible sinners,” as we shall see by a further consideration of Canon XIX in connection with this point. Hyper-Calvinists deny duty repentance and duty faith, holding that unbelievers are not to be commanded in the gospel to repent and believe savingly in Jesus Christ. However, in the preaching, God commands all the hearers to “come to him by faith” and believe in “the Son” to “have everlasting life,” for the “external call ... is *universally* offered,” though “the elect alone believe ... while the reprobate are hardened” by the same gospel call. Canon XIX expressly refers in three places to the “duty” of all under the preaching to come to Christ, whether they are believers or unbelievers, elect or reprobate. It also speaks twice of the “responsibility” of all to trust in Jesus the only Saviour.¹¹

Those who “disobey” the gospel call and “neglect the duty set before them” and “remain in sin” will be punished terribly: “after their hardened and im-

¹⁰ The *Canons of Dordt* teach the same truth: “As many as are called by the gospel are *unfeignedly* called. For God hath *most earnestly and truly* shown in His Word what is *pleasing* to Him, namely, that those who are called should come to Him. He, moreover, *seriously promises* eternal life and rest to *as many as shall come to Him and believe on Him*” (III/IV:8).

¹¹ Likewise, the *Canons of Dordt* declare, “Moreover, the promise of the gospel is that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have everlasting life. *This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel*” (II:5).

penitent heart [they] build up for themselves wrath for the Day of Judgment, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God [Rom. 2:5].” Our salvation is by grace alone: “by God’s will, the elect alone believe in the external call ... This proceeds solely from the discriminating grace of God.”

Conclusion

A perennially fresh stream of Genevan confessional literature that advocates God’s effectual saving desire and rejects a divine will to save the reprobate, and avoids both hypo- and hyper- Calvinism, runs from Calvin’s *Consensus Genevensis* (1552) to *Theodore Beza’s Confession* (1560) to Théodore Tronchin and Antoine Léger’s *Geneva Theses* (1649) and to Francis Turretin and the *Formula Consensus Helvetica* (1675). When Geneva turned from the truth of the absolute sovereignty of the God who is “the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns,” the “broken cisterns” of Amyraldianism, free-offer theology, etc., “that can hold no water,” it departed from its creeds and apostatized (Jer. 2:13).¹²

Of all the Reformed confessional literature, including the four creeds mentioned above, as well as, for example, the *Canons of Dordt* (1618-1619), the *Geneva Theses* stand out as being the shortest, while yet tackling all the main aspects of the free offer (its views of God’s will and love, and its alleged scriptural proof) and doing so antithetically in its rejection of errors sections, presenting the well-meant offer as contrary to God’s absolute predestination (II), Christ’s particular redemption (III) and the Spirit’s effectual call (IV). Hopefully, in God’s sovereign purpose, this “recently uncovered jewel” will attract widespread attention and come to be admired and prized for the beautiful, little gem that it is.

¹² Cf. James T. Dennison, Jr., “The Life and Career of Francis Turretin,” in Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1997), vol. 3, pp. 639-658; James T. Dennison, Jr., “The Twilight of Scholasticism: Francis Turretin at the Dawn of the Enlightenment,” in Carl R. Trueman and R. S. Clark (eds.), *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Great Britain: Paternoster, 1999), pp. 244-255.