

THE 'CONSENSUS GENEVENSIS' REVISITED
 THE GENESIS OF THE GENEVAN CONSENSUS
 ON DIVINE ELECTION IN 1551

E.A. de Boer¹

ABSTRACT

In the weekly Bible study meetings on Fridays in Geneva, called *les congrégations*, biblical books were expounded in *lectio continua*. On one occasion the doctrine of divine election was presented over against the intervention of Jerome Bolsec. The ministers of Geneva presented their internal consensus on predestination and sought the approval of the Swiss churches. This paper argues on historical, literary and material grounds that not Calvin's book *De aeterna praedestinatione Dei* of early 1552, but the *Congrégation sur l'élection éternelle de Dieu* of 18 December 1551, should be identified as the 'Consensus Genevensis'. The doctrine of predestination was not a particularity of John Calvin's, but a point of teaching the Scriptures, shared by the Genevan ministers.

On my first visit to Potchefstroom fifteen years ago professor L.F. Schulze presented to me a copy of his thesis, *Calvin's Reply to Pighius*,² a kind gift symbolizing his generous interest in the plans of a student in Reformation history. I would like to repay him for his kindness with an essay which can be considered as a footnote to his thesis. To me Schulze represented the link between South-African and European Calvin studies.

During his stay at the University of Strasbourg Schulze also met Rodolphe Peter. This scholar was the first to draw renewed attention to the Genevan ecclesiastical institution, called *la congrégation*.³ The present essay

- 1 Dr. Erik A. de Boer, Godfried van Seijstlaan 50, NL-3703 BT Zeist, Netherlands; Associated researcher of the Theological University in Kampen (Broederweg), the Netherlands; Also Research Associate of the Department of Ecclesiology, Faculty of Theology, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa. deboerea@xs4all.nl
- 2 L.F. Schulze, *Calvin's Reply to Pighius* (Human Sciences Research Council, Publication Series no. 9) (Potchefstroom: Pro Rege Press, 1971).
- 3 Jean Calvin, *Deux congrégations et Exposition du Catéchisme. Première réimpression de l'édition de 1563 avec une introduction et des notes*, ed. Rodolphe Peter [Cahiers de la Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses] (Paris: Presses Universitaires

addresses the question of the relation between John Calvin's book *De aeterna Praedestinatione Dei* of January 1552, the second of the two treatises so ably analysed by Schulze, and the *Congrégation sur l'élection éternelle de Dieu* of December 1551. Which of the two documents should be regarded as the 'Consensus Genevensis' on the doctrine of divine election?

1. THE BIBLE STUDY MEETINGS

The *Congrégation sur l'élection éternelle de Dieu* of 18 December 1551 is one of the very few surviving texts, which document the proceedings of the Bible studies, held in Geneva on Fridays. Normally the ministers of the city and the surrounding villages would meet after the early morning service on Fridays, to hear the exposition of a chapter or passage from Scripture by one of the members of the Company of Pastors and discuss its contents. Also a number of lay people from Geneva was frequently present in these Bible studies.⁴ In the discussion, following the *proposition* of one of the ministers, the lay members could participate by posing questions and adding their thoughts. As did Jerome Bolsec, physician in Vevey (Veigy), close to Geneva. His attack on the doctrine of predestination, as it was taught by Calvin, led to the trial against him. In the aftermath of this trial the Company of Pastors decided that a special *congrégation* on 18 December 1551 would be dedicated to the doctrine of election. An interesting detail, not known from any other source: in this *congrégation* not only men, but also women were present. Two ministers address their audience with '*Mes freres et soeurs*' (My brothers and sisters).⁵

In order to describe the general picture of the ecclesiastical institution, called la *congrégation*, in Geneva, it seems fit in the context of this 'Festschrift' to draw attention to some less known South-African secondary literature. In 1911 one of Ludi Schulze's famous predecessors, dr. Jacob Daniël du Toit, gave his first public lecture as (the only) professor of the Theological School in Potchefstroom, entitled *De zestiende-eeuwse profetie en haar betekenis voor*

de France, 1964). Cf. W. de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin. An Introductory Guide* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books — Apollos, 1994), 117-120.

4 See my 'The *Congrégations*: In-Service Theological Training Center of the Preachers to the People of Geneva', forthcoming in the proceedings of the 2003 colloquium of the Calvin Studies Society, and 'The Presence and Participation of Lay People in the *Congrégations* of the Company of Pastors in Geneva', forthcoming in *Sixteenth Century Journal*.

5 CO 8, 130f (Michel Cop and Jean Perier).

onze tijd (The Sixteenth Century Prophecy and its Meaning for Our Times).⁶ Du Toit, better known to all 'Afrikaans'-speaking people as Totius, presented and published his lecture in Dutch, since Afrikaans only became an official national language as late as 1925. Totius had studied at the Free University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and his promotor was Herman Hubert Kuiper, son of Abraham Kuiper. With his inaugural lecture Totius was the first to try to revive the institution of the *Prophezei* from Zurich and the *Congrégations* from Geneva in the context of the South African Reformed Churches.

Totius followed the theological encyclopaedia of Abraham Kuiper and discussed the idea of the *congrégations* in the context of practical theology, but then as a form not of the ministry, but of the activity of lay members in the Church. He placed such Bible study meetings in the part of the theological program called 'laiek', which analyses the ministry of all believers ('het ambt aller gelovigen').⁷ H.H. Kuiper, Totius' promotor, had devoted his own thesis to 'The Training for the Ministry of the Word by the Reformed' (*De opleiding tot de dienst des Woords bij de Gereformeerden*). He had focussed on the *Prophezei*, the reformed *lectiones publicae* at the Grossmunster in Zurich, especially drawing on Zwingli's *Von dem Predigtamt*, and compared this institution to the Genevan *congrégations*.⁸ Totius expanded this primary research to the development of prophecy by John à Lasko and Marten Micron in London, where the active participation of lay members in the public discussions on Scripture was much greater than in Zurich or

- 6 J.D. du Toit, *De zestiende-eeuwse profetie en haar betekenis voor onze tijd. Rede gehouden bij de aanvaarding van het hoogleraarsambt in de theologie aan de Theologische School te Potchefstroom op zaterdag 15 April 1911* (Potchefstroom: A.H. Koomans, 1911); translated into Afrikaans by prof. Herzog Venter and printed in *Totius Versamelde Werke*, red. H. Venter (Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 1977), vol. 6, 75ff. Totius received his degree as doctor of theology at the Free University, Amsterdam, in 1903 on a thesis on the *Mistisisme in die kerklike praktyk van die Methodisme* (see V.E. d'Assonville, sr., *Dit is Totius. J.D. du Toit 1877-1953* (Lynnwoodrif: Marnix, 1993), 96f (on Totius' promotion), 117f (on his inauguration).
- 7 Totius wanted to develop the principals of F.L. Rutgers, *De betekenis der gemeentelieden als zoodanig, volgens de beginselen die Calvijn, toen bij openlijk optrad, heeft ontwikkeld en toegepast. Rede, gehouden bij de overdracht van het rectoraat der Vrije Universiteit, den 20 October 1906* (Amsterdam: J.W.A. van Schaik, 1906).
- 8 Herman Hubert Kuiper, *De opleiding tot de dienst des Woords bij de Gereformeerden*, deel 1 (diss. Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam) (s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1891), 123-127. The projected second volume on theological education in the various countries never appeared.

Geneva.⁹ From this angle it is clear why Totius proposed to revive the institution of Bible studies in order to stimulate the biblical knowledge of lay members in the churches.

Among the secondary literature on the *congrégations* also an article by Wilhelm Neuser, the ambassador of European Calvin research in South Africa, is important: 'Calvin the preacher: his explanation of the doctrine of predestination in the sermon of 1551 and in the Institutes of 1559', published in the *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*.¹⁰ Neuser analysed the contents of the *Congrégation sur l'élection éternelle de Dieu* of 1551 and compared the presentation of the doctrine of election in that unique document with the *Institutes*. To the publication of this article was added a Dutch translation of the *Congrégation* itself in order to make the text known in South Africa.

Regarding the character of the biblical studies it is important to correct the fact that Neuser calls the presentation by the leading minister — in this case John Calvin — a sermon.¹¹ The idea of a sermon was probably suggested by Theodore Beza, who listed Calvin's contribution to the *congrégation* of 18 December 1551 under the heading '*sermons imprimez et qu'on a recueillis quand il preschoit*' (printed sermons as they were noted while he preached) in the first bibliography.¹² But Beza also clearly distinguished Calvin's preaching activity from his contributions in the Bible studies: these were '*comme une leçon entière tous les vendredis en la conférence de l'Écriture que nous appelons Congrégation*' (like a full lecture on every Friday in the conference on Scripture which we call 'gathering').¹³ The introductory exposition, normally pre-

9 Totius also used the work of H. Schokking, *De leertucht in de Gereformeerde Kerk van Nederland tusschen 1570 en 1620* (Amsterdam: J. Clausen, 1902), 174-181, works by Abraham Kuyper, and A.A. van Schelven's *Kerkenraads-protocollen der Nederduitsche vluchtelingen-kerke Londen, 1560-1563* (Amsterdam: Mueller, 1921).

10 Wilhelm H. Neuser, 'Calvin the preacher: his explanation of the doctrine of predestination in the sermon of 1551 and in the Institutes of 1559', in: *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 54 (1998), 60-78 (Appendix pp. 79-103).

11 Also in *De aeterna Dei predestinatione — De la prédestination éternelle*, ed. W.H. Neuser (*Ioannis Calvini Opera Omnia denuo recognita*, Series III, vol. 1) (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1998), XII ('Calvin's dort gehaltene Predigt ...'); also in Johannes Calvin, *Von der ewigen Vorberbestimmung Gottes*, transl. and ed. W.H. Neuser [Schriften des Archivs der Evangelischen Kirche im Rheinland, no. 18] (Düsseldorf, 1998), V; followed by Chr. Link in *Calvin Studienausgabe*, vol. 4, *Reformatorsche Klärungen* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 2002), 90.

12 CO 21, 48.

13 CO 21, 33; cf. o.c., 66, 132.

sented in the biblical studies, can not be called a sermon, since the *congrégation* was no Church service. The ministers themselves used the term *proposition*, to be translated as ‘presentation’ or ‘exposition’. The fact that lay members were present, as in the meeting where Bolsec spoke out, did not alter the character of the Bible studies. The special *congrégation* of 18 December 1551 was convened to show the unity of the pastors on the doctrine of election to the citizens of Geneva.

2. WHAT IS THE CONSENSUS GENEVENSIS?

In his dissertation Schulze briefly touched upon the controversy with Jerome Bolsec over the doctrine of predestination in 1551 as the stimulus for Calvin to write, directed against Pighius, his *De aeterna praedestinatione Dei*. Quoting from and relying on the introduction by J.K.S. Reid’s translation,¹⁴ Schulze noted the following conclusion regarding the dedication of this work to the Council of Geneva and its authorisation to print:

The request was granted and thus ‘a private writing of Calvin became an authentic document of Genevan orthodoxy, though it never enjoyed magisterial approval in other Swiss states’.¹⁵

While this statement refers to *De aeterna praedestinatione Dei* only as ‘an authentic document of orthodoxy’, it has long since become a commonplace in Reformation literature to refer to Calvin’s book as the Consensus Genevensis. *De aeterna Dei praedestinatione* has even been incorporated in several editions of Reformed confessions.¹⁶ Timothy George wrote the article ‘Consensus Genevensis’ in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*. Referring to Calvin’s book of 1552 he states:

The Consensus Genevensis remains one of the most important official statements on the doctrine of election in Reformation theology, comparable in its passion and magnitude to Luther’s *De servo arbitrio*.¹⁷

14 John Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, transl. J.K.S. Reid (London: James Clarke, 1961).

15 Schulze, *Calvin’s Reply to Pighius*, 19, quoted from Reid’s translation of Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination*, 6.

16 Ernst Gottfried Adolf Böckel, ‘Die Genfer Übereinkunft’, in: *Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-reformierten Kirche* (Leipzig, 1847), 182-280; H.A. Niemeyer, *Collectio confessionum in ecclesiis reformatis publicatarum* (Lipsiae, 1840), 218-310; *Johannes Calvin: Von der ewigen Vorherbestimmung Gottes*, ed. Wilhelm H. Neuser (Düsseldorf: Archiv der Evangelischen Kirche im Rheinland, 1998), V.

17 Timothy George, s.v. ‘Consensus Genevensis’, in *OER* I, 412v. Other authors who label Calvin’s book of 1552 as the Consensus Genevensis: C.D. Hundeshagen,

Such a sweeping statement raises some questions. How could a polemical book of the size of *De aeterna Dei praedestinatione* ever have been intended as a confessional statement? How should the subtitle of the book, *Consensus Pastororum Genevensis ecclesiae, à Io. Calvino expositus*, be translated?

Wilhelm Neuser published his splendid edition of *De aeterna Dei praedestinatione* in the new series of Calvin's works and also presented a German translation. In the translation of the title he reads: 'Übereinkunft der Pastoren der Kirche zu Genf, entworfen von [that is: drafted by] Johann Calvin'.¹⁸ A more accurate translation is given by J.S.K. Reid: 'The Agreement of the Pastors of the Church of Geneva, set forth by John Calvin'. My thesis is: the book *De aeterna Dei praedestinatione* is not the consensus, but the *congrégation sur l'élection éternelle de Dieu* of 1551. In writing his book of 1552 John Calvin could built on the consensus among the Genevan ministers, as it was established in the special *congrégation* of 18 December 1551, and present it to a larger public. Thus the historical analysis forces us to concentrate on the *Congrégation* and evaluate the book in the light of this consensus as presented in the public meeting of the Bible studies.

When we regard the *congrégation* on election as the true Consensus Genevensis, the story of its conception, presentation, and publication sheds light on an intriguing part of Genevan city history and of equally Genevan theology, and not only Calvin's. What were the circumstances which prompted the ministers to arrange a public meeting in order to express their unity in the doctrine of election? The trial against Bolsec is worth analysing.

Die Conflict des Zwinglianismus, Lutberthums und Calvinismus in der Bernischen Landeskirche von 1532-1558 (Bern: C.A. Jenni, 1842), 277; Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1990; reprint of 1930 edition), 474-478; L. Doekes, *Credo. Handboek voor de gereformeerde symboliek*, 2e ed. (Amsterdam: Ton Bolland, 1979), 46; L. Smits, *Saint Augustin dans l'oeuvre de Jean Calvin*, vol. 1 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1957), 97; G. Melles, *Albertus Pigbius en zijn strijd met Calvijn over het liberum arbitrium* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1973), 11; C. van Sliedregt, *Calvijns opvolger Theodorus Beza. Zijn verkiezingsleer en zijn belijdenis van de drieënige God* (Kerkhistorische monografieën 4) (Leiden: J.J. Groen en zoon, 1996), 99; W.H. Neuser in the works mentioned above (n. 11).

18 Johannes Calvin, *Von der ewigen Vorherbestimmung Gottes*, title page (see n. 11).

3. MAISTRE HIEROSME BOLSEC

Jerome Bolsec, the physician who spoke out against the doctrine of election as it was taught in Geneva, was born in Paris (c. 1524-1584), some fifteen years Calvin's junior.¹⁹ Formerly a Carmelite monk and holding a doctorate in theology, he broke around 1545 with the Catholic Church. After his flight from Paris he stayed in Italy at the court of Renée, duchess of Ferrara, where he studied medicine and got married. At some point in time between 1548 and 1550 Bolsec became the personal physician of Jacques de Bourgogne, lord of Falais, and his wife, Yolande van Brederode, at Veigy (Vevey), Chablais, four miles to the north of Geneva, at the east bank of Lac Léman, but in Bernese territory. He lived with his wife in the house of his lord. Bolsec seems to have visited the *congrégations* in Geneva occasionally.

The friendship of Jacques de Bourgogne and his wife with Calvin reached back to 1543.²⁰ In 1548 they settled, not, as Calvin had hoped, in Geneva, but in the castle of Veigy. It is likely that De Bourgogne introduced his physician to the Bible study meetings in Geneva. In early 1551 Bolsec, a young man in his late twenties, partook in the *congrégations* at least two times, as he himself testified.²¹ The first time must have been in February.²² At some point he wrote a letter to Abel Poupin, to be read also by Calvin and the other ministers. He then

was invited to a private meeting with Calvin and his fellow ministers of the Church. There they admonished him long enough, with various passages from Scripture, which he misused.²³

19 *OER*, vol 1, 188f. (J. Wayne Baker); *Registres de la Compagnie des Pasteurs de Genève au temps de Calvin*, vol. I (1546-1553), ed. Jean-François Bergier (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1964), 80; Philip C. Holtrop, *The Bolsec Controversy on Predestination from 1551 to 1555*, vol. 1, book 2 (Lewiston — Queenston — Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1993), 767-776. The sources on Bolsec's life are poor. No in-depth historical research into his life is known.

20 See Jean Calvin, *Lettres à Monsieur et Madame de Falais*, ed. F. Bonali-Fiquet (Textes littéraires français) (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1991).

21 *CO* 8, 154f.

22 The ministers wrote to the Swiss Churches:

Is jam ante octo menses in publico Ecclesiae nostrae coetu doctrinam de gratuita Dei electione, quam ex verbo Dei acceptam vobiscum docemus, labefactare conatus est (*CO* 8, 206).

23 *CO* 21, 73. In a letter to Christoph Fabri (Libertetus) Calvin wrote:

When he was called to our meeting, he gained nothing by his evasions, except that I drew him out of his hiding into the light. Be-

Nicolas Colladon dated this meeting as 'around May 15th'. Bolsec's responses during the trial indicate that the subject matter of discussion had been predestination all the way.²⁴

On 16 October Jerome Bolsec entered into the debate in an ordinary *congrégation* again. It was not as if the doctrine of predestination was the subject matter of that Friday morning in October 1551. The expositor of the biblical text was Jean de Saint-André, the passage at hand that called forth Bolsec's comments was John 8, especially verse 47 ('He who is of God, hears the words of God').²⁵

Calvin's commentary on John was a fruit of the expository work in the *congrégations* on the Gospel of John. The ministers of Geneva worked on this book from 1550 to 1553. Calvin's commentary was published soon afterwards. Since De Saint-André's exposition of 16 October has not been preserved in writing, we can learn from Calvin's commentary what doctrinal drift the exposition might have had. On John 8, verse 47 Calvin comments:

Moreover, we are taught in this passage that there is no plainer sign of a reprobate mind than when a man cannot bear the teachings of Christ, even though in other respects he shines outwardly with an angelic sanctity. Just as, if we embrace it cheerfully, we have, as it were, a visible sign of our election.²⁶

Such a juxtaposition of reprobation and election would have provoked Bolsec's comments. After De Saint-André had given the introductory exposition, Guillaume Farel, on a visit to the city and as former leading pastor in Geneva and respected colleague replacing the Moderator, added his comments. Then followed the round in which other ministers or lay persons could add their thoughts or pose questions. The minutes of the trial recount that Bolsec then

sides fifteen ministers also other trustworthy witnesses were present (*In coetum nostrum vocatus, cavillando nihil profecit, quin eum ex suis lateribus in lucem protraherem. Praeter quindecim verbi Ministros aderant et alii testes idonei*, CO 14, 279, no. 1600, undated).

24 CO 8, 155.

25 CO 8, 145f. The second clause of verse 47 (*ubi pronunciat Christus ex Deo non esse, qui verba Dei non audiunt*) is noted in the circular letter to the Swiss Churches (RCP I, 119).

26 COR II, vol. XI/1: *In Evangelium secundum Johannem commentarius, pars prior*, ed. Helmut Feld (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1997), 289.

began to put forth his faulty propositions on election and reprobation, denying that they are *ab aeterno* and stating with big exclamations and exhortations that we should not recognize another election or reprobation than what is to be seen in believing or not-believing. And that they who place an eternal will in God, by which He has ordained some to life and others to death, make Him a tyrant, and even an idol as the heathens have made of Jupiter: as I want and as I command is therefore my will.²⁷

Bolsec also claimed that Augustine was not the authority on election as the Genevan ministers would have it. It is important to note that Bolsec had the chance to speak his mind in public without being silenced.

Calvin was absent from the meeting, but, probably alerted by someone on Bolsec's presence, entered the *Auditoire* quietly during the physician's diatribe. In retrospect Colladon, who had been present at the *congrégation*, wrote that Calvin

answered him out of hand on every single point during almost a full hour, besides many testimonies from Scripture quoting in so many words numerous passages from St. Augustine that it seemed as if he had read and studied them that very same day.²⁸

This is quite true, since Calvin was already writing his book on predestination, directed against the late Albert Pighius.

Immediately after the meeting Bolsec was arrested by the assistant to the Lieutenant, Jean de la Maisonneuve, who was also present at the *congrégation*. That very same day a record of the meeting was written. The trial began. In the afternoon the ministers assembled to work on a summary of Bolsec's objections and a series of articles to question him. The following two months were occupied with the interrogation, the hearing of witnesses, the intervention of Jacques de Bourgogne, and the letters to the Swiss Churches. On 23 December 1551 Bolsec was sentenced and banished from Genevan territory. After his 'perpetual banishment' from Geneva Bolsec settled in Thonon. In 1555 he was exiled once again. It must not have been easy to antagonize the Bernese authorities, but he succeeded. In 1561 he returned to Bern and was permitted to stay. In 1563 he practiced medicine in Lau-

27 CO 8, 145. Jerome or, in the Latin version, Hieronymus Bolsec's specific thoughts on predestination are only known to us through the statements (*articles*) in response to questions and through letters which he wrote during the trial. He wrote no theological book or, if he did, no trace survived.

28 CO 21, 73. Holtrop gives a biased report by quoting only the version by Beza (*The Bolsec Controversy*, vol. 1, 55).

sanne, but was exiled again at the end of the year. He returned to France and reconverted to Catholicism. In 1577 he published his libellous *Histoire de la vie, moeurs, actes, doctrines, constance et mort de Jean Calvin*, and in 1582 a similar book on Theodore Beza. Bolsec died in 1584.

Part of the tragedy is that the friendship of Jacques de Bourgogne, sieur de Falais, with Calvin collapsed because of the former's interventions on behalf of his personal physician. De Falais wrote to the Genevan Council:

The fact is that your prisoner, Master Jerome, understands my physical problems more than any other doctor I know ... To him, after God, I owe my life.²⁹

He asked the Council for justice,

since the reason for his [Bolsec's] detention is only that he spoke freely in the *congrégation* on doctrine, which should be permitted to all Christians, without for that reason being imprisoned.³⁰

This question of tolerance of heterodox positions would divide the Reformed camp in the years to come.

4. THE SPECIAL CONGRÉGATION

On 11 December 1551 — that is before the verdict in the trial against Bolsec — the Company of Pastors decided to give a special character to the *congrégation* of the 18th in order to present the biblical doctrine of election. As primary reason for this special meeting the minutes of the Company state:

Because the celebration of the Lord's Supper approaches, it will be good to remedy this havoc, caused by master Jerome, so that, when there are some who are infected by his aberration, this can be averted and that the sacrament shall not be polluted by them.³¹

Bolsec seems to have been respected as a physician by some of the Genevan population. This popular support for Bolsec's person and ideas kept the ministers on their toes.³²

29 *CO* 8, 202.

30 *RCP*, vol. 1, 83.

31 *RCP* I, 131; *CO* 21, 495f.

32 Robert M. Kingdon, 'Popular Reactions to the Debate between Bolsec and Calvin', *Calvin: Erbe und Auftrag*, ed. Willem van 't Spijker (Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing, 1991), 138-145.

The minutes do not reveal two other factors that influenced the Company's decision to hold a special *congrégation* on election. The first is that not only among the citizens, but even in the circle of the ministers the unity in this point of doctrine was not totally clear. Even though all twelve ministers, present in the *congrégation* of 18 December, voiced total support to the doctrine of election as presented, especially Philip d'Ecclesia was not trusted. Since 1549 he had been the subject of brotherly censure in the Company of Pastors and was forbidden for some time to participate in the presentations and discussions in the biblical studies. In 1551 a new series of charges was brought against D'Ecclesia. He was charged with not living up to a promise of marriage and with usury.³³ Still, in the special *congrégation* of 18 December he was permitted to take his place among the ministers. In the following year it was Jean Trolliet who took up the attack against the doctrine of predestination as it was taught in Geneva. And Philippe d'Ecclesia defended him. One of the charges, made against D'Ecclesia afterwards in the circle of the Company of Pastors was

even the friendly association which he had with Master Jerome and the opinions he held regarding the doctrine of the said Jerome against whom he, d'Ecclesia, had testified by his signature together with the other ministers.³⁴

One of the questions posed to him is: whether he had said

that in the *congrégation* where he had spoken his opinion on the matter of predestination, he then had not said everything.

He denied it. Also Pierre Ninaud, from 1545 to 1554 minister in the outpost of Draillans, who had been absent in the special meeting of 18 December 1551, was charged some time later for having been too close to Bolsec.³⁵

There was yet another factor that influenced the decision by the Company of Pastors to hold a special *congrégation*. The ministers of Geneva had written a circular letter to the other Swiss Churches (14 November) in order to gain approval of their stand against Bolsec. In the meeting of the city

33 RCP I, 76.

34 RCP I, 144f, 151f; cf. on Trolliet, William G. Naphy, *Calvin and the Consolidation of the Genevan Reformation* (Manchester — New York: Manchester University Press, 1994), 174f. The reference to D'Ecclesia's signature points to the circular letter, sent to the Swiss Churches and signed by sixteen of the eighteen ministers, D'Ecclesia included (RCP I, 120).

35 CO 20, 581. Interestingly, before 1551 Ninaud presented a proposition on predestination (RCP I, 168f).

Council of 11 December the answers from Basle, Bern, and Zurich were read in translation. The Latin originals were handed over to the ministers.³⁶ But to the bitter disappointment of the Genevan ministers the letters from Bern and Basle, even from Zurich, were not fully supportive, to say the least.³⁷ This may have been another reason to proceed and to express the unity of doctrine in a public meeting.

The minutes of the Company of Pastors conclude:

... it was resolved that on the following Friday the matter should be propounded in the *congrégation* and that M. Calvin would expand on it, while each of the ministers in their order would add briefly what our Lord had given him for the confirmation of doctrine. This was done on the following Friday, which was the 18th; and all the ministers, both from the city and the country, announced one after the other their judgment concerning this matter.³⁸

The full transcript of this special *congrégation* has been preserved.³⁹ Following John Calvin's presentation twelve ministers added their short or longer statements in reaction: Abel Poupin, Jaques Bernard, Nicolas des Gallars, Philippe d'Ecclesia, François Bourgoing, Louis Treppereau, Raimond Chauvet, Matthieu Malesian,⁴⁰ Michel Cop, Jean Perier, Jean Fabri and Jean de St. André.⁴¹ Some names are well known, others hardly. It is worthwhile to hear

36 CO 21, 495 (*Reg. Du Conseil*, f. 114).

37 Cf. Wilhelm Heinrich Neuser, 'Calvins Kritik an den Basler, Berner und Zürcher Predigern in der Schrift "De praedestinatione" 1552', in: *Reformiertes Erbe. Festschrift für Gottfried W. Locher zu seinem 80. Geburtstag*, ed. H.A. Oberman, E. Saxer, A. Schindler und H. Stucki, vol. 2 (Zurich: TVZ, 1993), 237-243 (*Zwingliana* 19 (1991/2-1992/2)).

38 RCP I, 131; cf. Colladon's account in CO 21, 75.

39 CO 8, 93-138.

40 Matthieu Malesier is omitted in Naphy's list of pastors (*The Consolidation*, 59). Malesier was appointed as minister to the hospital in 1544 (CO 21, 351), was soon transferred to Bossey and in 1545 back to Geneva, where he served until his death on 11 December 1557 (RCP I, 22). Only one of his contributions to the *propositiones* was preserved (RCP I, 177).

41 The order in which the ministers presented their opinion, seems one of seniority, coupled with priority to the city pastors. In the following G means 'city-pastor', R means 'pastor in a rural village', with the year in which they entered their service (data from Naphy, *The Consolidation*, 58).

John Calvin	G36	Phil. d'Ecclesia	G42/R44	Michel Cop	G45
Abel Poupin	G43	Fr. Bourgoing	G45	Jean Perier	R45
Jaques Bernard	G36/R42	Louis Treppereau	G42/R44	Jean Fabri	G49
Nic. des Gallars	G44	Raim. Chauvet	G45	Jean de St. André	R46/G52

their voices, since of many of them no trace of their spoken words remain. Even the contribution by Claude Baduel who had recently sought refuge in Geneva, a moving confession of faith, is preserved.⁴²

The text of John Calvin's contribution to this meeting has recently been translated for the first time into English by Philip Holtrop and into German by Christian Link.⁴³ These translations, valuable in themselves, both suffer however from one great defect, their incompleteness. They omitted the contributions of the twelve other ministers in Geneva and the one by Claude Baduel, probably to save pages. Thus historically, the integrity of the *congrégation* as a consensus is damaged by this omission. Theologically, without the contributions of the colleagues the special *congrégation* of December 1551 is presented as only the work of John Calvin, where as the whole point of this special meeting was to present the consensus of all the ministers of Geneva. Only the Dutch translations, from the first edition in 1612 until the latest in 1986, include the full text of the contributions of the other ministers.⁴⁴

5. BACKGROUND: THE *CONSENSUS* *TIGURINUS*

The term *consensus* reminds us of the agreement on the sacraments between Calvin on behalf of Geneva and, in the name of the Church of Zurich, Heinrich Bullinger in 1549, which would later be called the *Consensus*

- 42 Not all ministers, serving in one of the villages, were present. Absent were: Louis Cugniet (Russin 1544-1552†), Nicolas Petit (Chancy 1544-1557, Draillans 1557-1578†), Jean Baldin (Jussy 1546, Genthod-Moens 1548-1560†), Matthieu Malesier (see n. 40), Pierre Ninaud (Genève 1544, Draillans 1545-1554), and Jean Chappuis (Chancy 1546-1557). I could find no evidence that Jean Macar, mentioned by Naphy as minister in Geneva since 1548 (*The Consolidation*, 58), was a pastor before 1553 (Russin).
- 43 Holtrop, *The Bolsec Controversy*, vol. 2, 695-719 (an analysis of the contribution of the other ministers in vol. 1, 332-336); *Calvin Studienausgabe*, vol. 4, 92-149.
- 44 *Vergaderinghe, Ghehouden in de Kercke van Geneven door den Weerden, Godtzaligen ende Hoochgeleerden D.D. Iohannem Calvinum* (Rotterdam: Felix van Sambix, 1612); id. (Goes: De Jonge, 1867); *Bijeenkomst gehouden in de kerk van Genève (1551)*, transl. M. van Dijk [*Stemmen uit Genève*, vol. 3] (Goudriaan: De Gereformeerde Bibliotheek, 1971), 7-61; *De eenwige verkiezing*, transl. M. van Dijk (Veenendaal: Uitgeverij Kool, 1986). Also W.H. Neuser omitted the contributions of the twelve ministers, when he had the translation of M. van Dijk printed as appendix to this article on the *congrégation* (Neuser, 'Calvin the Preacher', see n. 10).

Tigurinus.⁴⁵ The joy over this doctrinal unity between the Swiss Churches made Calvin expect their support in the conflict on predestination. Jerome Bolsec had maintained that other theologians would support him. The Council of Geneva decided to ask for the opinion of the other Churches before passing judgment on Bolsec. The circular letter, written by the Company of Pastors, to the Swiss Churches of Basle, Bern, and Zurich described the heresy of Bolsec and argued that

it is of great importance to us and to the public peace that the doctrine which we profess should be confirmed by your consent (*vestro consensu approbari*) ...⁴⁶

The various letters, which arrived in Geneva in response, condemned the manner in which Bolsec had behaved, but were reluctant to make a strong statement on the *causae* of above all reprobation. The circular letter had stressed this point: 'In short, he [Bolsec] removes all distinction between ultimate and hidden causes and proximate causes ...' In their answer the ministers of Zurich referred to the *Consensus Tigurinus*:

As for the doctrinal issue over which you have been disputing, there was no need for you to ask our opinion concerning election and reprobation, and concerning faith and human ability, since you cannot be ignorant of what it is, especially from our very last consensus (*ex ultima consensione nostra*), in which we consider this question to have been fully covered.⁴⁷

45 Timothy George, 'John Calvin and the Agreement of Zurich (1549), in: *John Calvin & the Church. A Prism of Reform*, ed. Timothy George (Louisville: Westminster — John Knox Press, 1990), 42-58; Paul Rorem, *Calvin and Bullinger on the Lord's Supper* [Alcuin/GROW Liturgical Studies 12] (Nottingham: Grove Books, 1989). See the semantic and systematic study of term consensus and related forms and translations in: Michael Becht, *Pium consensum tueri. Studien zum Begriff consensus im Werk von Erasmus von Rotterdam, Philipp Melancthon und Johann Calvin* [Reformationsgeschichtliche Studien und Texte, vol. 144] (Münster: Aschendorff, 2000), 372-404. Becht pays neither attention to the Consensus Tigurinus nor to the Consensus Genevensis.

46 RCP I, 120. At the end of the letter:

Proinde, quod mutua inter nos conjunctio postulat, vestra subscriptione Christi doctrinam sacrilegiis protervi et male feriatii hominis gravatam levare et asserere ne gravemini ('We trust, then, that, as the mutual fellowship between us demands, you will not scruple to uplift and affirm by your subscription the doctrine of Christ on which the impieties of this rash and irresponsible man have been heaped').

47 RCP I, 124. Bullinger pointed in his letter to Calvin especially to the first arti-

Article 15 of the *Consensus Tigurinus* indeed has an inclusive passage on election:

Furthermore we carefully teach that God does not exert power indiscriminately in all who receive the sacraments, but only in the elect. For just as He enlightens with faith only those whom He has foreordained to life, so also by the secret power of His Spirit He causes them to appropriate what the sacraments offer.

And article 16 expands on that:

For the signs are administered to the reprobate equally with the elect, but the truth of which are signs belongs only to the latter.⁴⁸

Calvin's disappointment with the reactions of the Swiss Churches was great. Only Neuchâtel (and Farel) sided totally with Geneva. In a letter to Bullinger he wrote:

Especially for his [Bolsec's] sake I am very sorry that there is not a better consensus between us (*meliozem esse inter nos consensum*).⁴⁹

On this point of doctrine Geneva had to do without the full consent of Zurich, let alone of Bern and Basle.⁵⁰ In a letter to Farel in Neuchâtel of 27 January 1552 Calvin's tone is still wounded:

Wait rather till they totally deny the election of God. We have experienced the wonderful providence of God in this matter; for without being at the time aware of it, I, by the formula of our consensus (*in concordiae nostrae formula*), have so bound them, that they are no longer at liberty to do damage to the cause.⁵¹

cles of the *Consensus Tigurinus* (CO 14, 208, no. 1558 of 27 November 1551). To this letter he added his *De causis humanae salutis et damnationis aporismi ex consensione in re sacramentaria ministrorum ecclesiae Tigurinae et Genevensis* (CO 14, 209-211, no. 1559). Cf. Cornelis P. Venema, 'Heinrich Bullinger's Correspondence on Calvin's Doctrine of Predestination, 1551-1553', in: *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 17 (1986), 435-450; reprinted in Cornelis P. Venema, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Doctrine of Predestination. Author of 'the Other Reformed Tradition'?* [Texts & Studies in Reformation & Post-Reformation Thought, ed. Richard A. Muller] (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 57-69.

48 RCP I, 68.

49 CO 14, 252f (no. 1590). In the letter to the Pastors of Basel he argues that Bolsec sought the counsel of the Churches '*fallaci consensus simulatione*' (o.c., 269, no. 1593).

50 See Neuser, 'Calvin's Kritik' (n. 37).

51 CO 14, 272 (no. 1596).

Calvin claims that the *Consensus Tigurinus* also safeguarded the doctrine of election. This leads us to Calvin's book of 1552, *De aeterna Dei praedestinatione* and its relation to the *congrégation* of 18 December 1551.

6. THE DEDICATION OF THE BOOK

In 1552 John Calvin's polemical work *De aeterna Dei praedestinatione* appeared in Geneva. It was the sequel, promised long before, of his *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*,⁵² his reply to Pighius (1543), in which the Dutchman's attack on *Institutes* (1539), Chapter 2 — on 'the knowledge of humanity and free choice' — in Books 1-6 of his *De libero hominis arbitrio et divina gratia* had already been countered. Extant had been Calvin's reply to Books 7-10, Pighius' critique of *Institutes*, Chapter 8 on 'the predestination and providence of God' from the 1539 edition. Because Pighius had passed away, Calvin had dropped the project, so as 'not to insult a dead dog'. When in 1551 the controversy over predestination flared up in Geneva itself, Calvin saw a chance to live up to his promise to deal with the second half of Pighius' book. *De aeterna Dei praedestinatione* is the sequel to the *Defensio sanae et orthodoxae doctrinae de servitute et liberatione humani arbitrii, adversus calumnias A. Pighii*.

Calvin decided not to deal with Jerome Bolsec's teachings on predestination in public. Had he done so, he would have had to present a summary of Bolsec's teaching. He chose to write against a more systematic opponent, who had attacked his teachings in the *Institutes*.⁵³ 'The insolence of this windbag forced me to add to my answer to Pighius what remained on predestination', he wrote to Bullinger.⁵⁴ The preface makes it clear that the ghost of Bolsec wandered around. It seems that Calvin was working on *De*

52 John Calvin, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will. A Defense of the Orthodox Doctrine of Human Choice against Pighius*, ed. A.N.S. Lane, transl. G.I. Davies [Texts & Studies in Reformation & Post-Reformation Thought] (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books — Paternoster, 1996).

53 Calvin had written on the doctrine of election in the various editions of the *Institutes*. In 1550 Chapters 14 (on predestination) and 12 (on providence) from the edition of that year were also published as a little book by Jean Crespin and Conrad Badius: *De praedestinatione & providentia Dei, libellus* (BC I, 50/8). This booklet is mentioned by Bullinger in his letter to Calvin of 1 December 1551: 'Believe me, various people are offended by the fragment of your *Institutes* on predestination' (CO 14, 215). The same book is mentioned in the Bolsec trial by Calvin: *de laquelle j'ay fait un livre exprès* (RCP I, 106).

54 CO 14, 253 (undated, but probably from January 1552).

aeterna Dei praedestinatione in the fall of 1551, probably triggered to do so by Bolsec's critique, similar to the reasoning of Pighius. Even though the letter of dedication bears the symbolic date 1 January 1552, he was still working on the text during that month.⁵⁵

The date and contents of the prefatory letter connect the book to the special *congrégation* of 18 December 1551 and the verdict against Bolsec. The book is dedicated to the Council of Geneva, who had passed sentence on Bolsec.

To our excellent and much honored Seigneurs, Messieurs the Syndics and Council of Geneva, the ministers of God's Word — both in the city and in the subordinate villages — wish a just and holy bearing to govern well and in a successful way, and end in well governing.⁵⁶

The dedicatory letter is thus not written in Calvin's name, but on behalf of the Company of Pastors as a full body.⁵⁷ The subtitle *Consensus Pastorum Genevensis Ecclesiae à Io. Calvino expositus* ties the contents of the book closely to the meeting of 18 December 1551 in which this consensus was shown. It was Calvin who on the basis of this consensus expounded the doctrine 'On the Eternal Predestination of God, by which He has chosen some men to salvation and left others to their own destruction and on the Providence of God by which He governs all human affairs'. After some corrections in the preface, the Council accepted the dedication.⁵⁸

The subtitle with its stress on the words 'Consensus Pastorum Genevensis Ecclesiae' in the Latin edition indicate that the Genevan ministers took their stand on the issue of election in reaction to the other Swiss Churches and their — in Genevan eyes — dissent.⁵⁹ The internal consensus, reached

55 Rodolphe Peter — Jean-François Gilmont, *Bibliotheca Calviniana. Les œuvres de Jean Calvin publiées au XVIe siècle*, vol. 1 *Écrits théologiques, littéraires et juridiques 1532-1554* [Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance, vol. 255] (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1991), 52/4.

56 *COR* III.1, p. 3 (following the French text).

57 Nicolas Colladon described Calvin's book as follows:

En quoy il a comprins ce que croyent touchant ce point selon les Escritures toutes Eglises fideles, et nommément les Ministres de l'Eglise de Geneve (CO 21, 75).

58 CO 21, 500f (*Reg. Du Conseil*, 21, 25, and 28 January 1552).

59 See: Neuser, 'Calvin's Kritik' (n. 37). Michel Roset wrote in *Les chroniques de Genève on the year 1562*:

L'attentat de ce schismatique fut cause que les Ministres publièrent leur accord en ceste doctrine, exposé par Calvin & le dédièrent ès Sindicques & Conseil du premier de Janvier 1552, comme on le trouve imprimé (ed. Henri Fazy, (Genève: Georg & Co, 1894), 344).

and demonstrated on 18 December 1551, was now published and set forth in Calvin's book. The subtitle to the book, 'Consensus Pastorum Ecclesiae Genevensis', is a conscious allusion and even appeal to the *Consensio mutua de re sacramentaria ministrorum Tigurinae Ecclesiae, et D. Joannis Calvini ministri Genevensis Ecclesiae*.⁶⁰ The subtitle was not printed in the French translation which appeared in February 1552.⁶¹ This underlines the fact that the Latin edition was an indicator to the learned public, which could be dropped for the French readers. The subtitle to the French edition reads simply: *Traicté nouvellement compose de Iean Calvin* ('Treatise Newly Composed by John Calvin'). The preface with its references to Bolsec, however, remained.

To summarize: the *Congrégation sur l'élection éternelle de Dieu* remained, because of the unwillingness of Zurich, Basle, and Bern to commit themselves fully, a local consensus. By the dedication, preface, publication, and translation of *De aeterna Dei praedestinatione* John Calvin sought to transcend the local scene and defend the doctrine of divine election as it was taught in Geneva.

7. THE PUBLICATION OF THE CONGRÉGATION IN 1562

If the text of the special *congrégation* of 18 December 1551 is the actual consensus, and not Calvin's book of 1552,⁶² why was this text not published immediately as such? The text was not included in the Registers of the Company of Pastors, as the *Consensus Tigurinus* had been. It seems that Denis

60 RCP I, 64 (-70). Cf. also the title of Bullinger's appendix to his letter to Calvin of 27 November 1551, *De causis humanae salutis et damnationis aphorismi ex consensione in re sacramentaria ministrorum ecclesiae Tigurinae et Genevensis* (CO 14, 209-211, no. 1559).

61 BC I, 52/5; the French text in COR III.1 has been edited by Olivier Fatio.

62 In a letter from 1555 Calvin described his book as '*un accord et resolution faicte en commun par nous tous*.' (CO 15, 601: letter no. 2199 to the Council of Bern). This seems to say that *De aeterna Dei praedestinatione* is the Consensus Genevensis. But the words '*accord ... commun*' are found in the title of the *Congrégation sur l'élection éternelle de Dieu* of 1562. In fact, Calvin wanted to stress that the book was not his sole responsibility, but that of the body of pastors in Geneva. He proceeded, referring to the preface:

Combien qu'il n'est pas icy question de nous seulement: car, Dieu mercy, nous accordons avec les ministres tant de vostre ville que de vostre pays, tellement que nostre cause ne peut estre condamnée qu'au prejudice de la foy qu'on vous presche et à voz subjectz.

Raguenier, official scribe in the service of the *Bourse française*, and not the secretary of the Company, took down notes in the *congrégation*, as he always did, and worked out the full text at home.⁶³ There is no indication that the minutes were ratified and signed in the Company of Pastors afterwards, giving this document an official status. Denis Raguenier may have kept the manuscript, which after his death in 1560 was somehow appropriated by the publisher of the 1562 edition. As happened to all manuscripts, the original was destroyed after the text had been published. Nicolas Colladon noted in his account of the proceedings of 18 December 1551: ‘The minutes of this *congrégation* have been published in the mean time; there the matter can be seen’ (*L’acte de ladite Congregation a esté imprimé depuis*).⁶⁴ Until then the manuscript of the Consensus Genevensis remained a local document, as obviously had been intended. The means, chosen for publicity, was Calvin’s book in which he built on the Consensus in the name of all colleagues.

This transcript of all contributions to the meeting of 18 December 1551 has indeed been published in 1562 as *Congrégation faite en l’Eglise de Genève par Jean Calvin, en laquelle la matière de l’élection éternelle de Dieu fut sommairement et clairement déduite et ratifiée d’un commun accord par les frères ministres*.⁶⁵ No immediate reason for this publication, more than ten years later, nor of any involvement of Calvin, is reported. The booklet was brought out by Vincent Brès *in octavo*. In the preceding year his father, Jacques Brès, had projected a larger volume on predestination, including two sermons by Calvin. On advice of the Consistory the printer had received permission to publish the *congrégation*, but not the sermons, which had been edited before. The greater project was thus aborted. Vincent Brès succeeded his father and published the booklet — permission had already been granted — separately in April 1562.

63 On Raguenier as ‘keeper of the books’, Erik A. de Boer, ‘Pagina Obscura in Geneva. A Fragment from a Sermon of John Calvin’, in: *Calvin Theological Journal* 34 (1999), 170-177 (162-179).

64 *CO* 21, 75.

65 *BC* II, 62/6 (p. 896-898); text: *CO* 8, 89-140. Christian Link followed A. Ruchat, *Histoire de la reformation Suisse (1727/28)*, vol. 5, (Genève, 1838), 467 in supposing that the text of the *congrégation* was published and presented to the Council on 1 January 1552 ‘als Neujahrs-geschenk’ (*Calvin Studienausgabe*, vol. 4, 84, 90). But no other edition than *De aeterna Dei praedestinatione* was presented to the Council.

Brès, owning one of the smaller bookshops in Geneva, tried to get a piece of the large cake of publications of Calvin's writings.⁶⁶ In 1563 Brès disappears from the records. His bookshop had been open in Geneva for only a few years. The publication of the *congrégation* seems to have been his one and only independent production.

But why was this booklet published in 1562? Nicolas Colladon reported at the end of his account of Bolsec's trial and fate:

In the end, being unbearable to all, he has given glory to God by admitting his faults and above all his bad conscience, at Orleans in the session of the general synod of the French Churches, in the year 1562, in such a way that one could hope something.⁶⁷

But afterwards Bolsec fell back in his old errors. The synod took place in April 1562, the same month in which permission to print the *Congrégation sur l'élection éternelle de Dieu* was granted. Did the news of Bolsec's return to the fold reach Geneva and was distrust maybe the reason for this publication? Whatever the circumstances of publication, the fact remains that at last in 1562 the full text of the *Congrégation sur l'élection éternelle de Dieu* was published. Thanks to this edition the real text of the *Consensus Pastorum Ecclesiae Genevensis* is known to us.⁶⁸

66 In that same year Vincent Brez took part in a project with five other smaller printers to publish Calvin's sermons on Hezekiah's canticle and in a similar enterprise to bring out the sermons on the ten commandments (BC II, 62/21c and 62/17c, printed by François Estienne, son of Robert). On other such joint ventures see BC II, 968, 973. In 1563 Vincent was reprimanded twice for the diffusion of *abécédaires*, containing theological errors (Jean-François Gilmont, *Jean Calvin et le livre imprimé* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1997), 319, 332).

67 Colladon tells that Bolsec was afterwards three times evicted by the Council of Bern, and added:

à la fin, estant intolérable à chacun a donné gloire à Dieu, recognoissant ses fautes, et sur tout sa mauvaise conscience à Orleans, en plein Synode general des Eglises Françaises, l'an 1562 tellement qu'on esperoit quelque chose (CO 21, 74).

Cf. E. & E. Haag, *La France protestante*, 2. ed. (Paris: Librairie Sandoz et Fischbacher, 1879), vol. 2, 750f.

68 The only work, known to me, in which the *congrégation* is identified as the *Consensus Genevensis*, is André Bouvier:

On sait [...] que les prédicans genevois éprouvèrent le besoin de préciser leur doctrine, après l'expulsion de Bolsec, dans le *Consensus Genevensis* (imprimé seulement en 1562). (*Henri Bullinger, le successeur de Zwingli d'après sa correspondance avec les réformés et les humanistes de langue française* (Neuchâtel-Paris, 1940), 54).

In later years the debate on predestination did not come to rest. Various publications show that the booklet, containing the text of the *congrégation*, had its context. In 1560 the French edition of *Traité de la predestination éternelle* was published again, together with *Treize sermons de l'élection gratuite de Dieu*, taken from Calvin running series on Genesis.⁶⁹ A reprint of these sermons in 1562 was brought out, and again Calvin's *Response à certaines calomnies*, a pamphlet written in 1557 against Castellio, whom Calvin took as the author.⁷⁰

8. BEZA'S TABULA, A SYSTEMATIC ANSWER TO BOLSEC

From the perspective of reactions from those who were sympathetic towards Genevan theology, we can see that Calvin's book *De aeterna Dei praedestinatione* can not have been the actual Consensus Genevensis. His younger friend Theodore Beza from Lausanne fully supported Calvin's teaching on predestination. He read the manuscript of the book and reacted to it in his letter of 21 January 1552.⁷¹ On the one hand he praises Calvin's work, but on the other hand he puts his finger on the sore spot: that Calvin followed the line of Pighius' critique and did not present a positive and systematic presentation of the doctrine of predestination. This is where Beza's own contribution comes in.

It is interesting that Beza's *Tabula praedestinationis*, published in 1555, had already been drafted in 1551 and were probably meant as his systematic refutation of Bolsec's ideas. In the words of Richard Muller:

Calvin could have easily been struck by Beza's methodological comments and, in the midst of his technical responses to an adversary far more skilled in theology than Bolsec, left the task of answering Bolsec's articles on predestination and its relation to sin and grace to his younger ally and future associate.⁷²

69 BC II, 60/12.

70 BC II, 62/25. This reprint may not have been published in Geneva, bearing no indication of publisher and place, but the contents reflect Genevan theology. On the pamphlet, BC II, 57/9.

71 CO 14, 254-257. Transl. and analysis by Holtrop, *The Bolsec Controversy*, vol. 2, 731-735; transl. also by G. Michael Thomas, 'Constructing and Clarifying the Doctrine of Predestination: Theodore Beza's Letters During, and in the Wake of, the Bolsec Controversy (1551-1555)', in: *Reformation & Renaissance Review* 4 (2000), 13v (7-28).

72 Richard A. Muller, 'The Use and Abuse of a Document: Beza's *Tabula praedestinationis*, The Bolsec Controversy, and the Origins of Reformed Orthodoxy',

Beza's criticism to the structure of Calvin's *De aeterna Dei praedestinatione* illustrates that the book was built on the basis of the consensus, but was not the Consensus Genevensis itself.

Beza is known for his use of Aristotelian philosophy and especially the use of causal terms.⁷³ He is portrayed as the link between Reformation and Reformed orthodoxy. The *Congrégation sur l'élection éternelle de Dieu* reveals, especially in the contributions of some of Calvin's colleagues, that various distinctions in *causae* were part and parcel of their theological training. They freely used these distinctions to clarify that both election and reprobation can be taught without the danger (the spearhead of Bolsec's critique) of making God responsible for sin and unbelief. The following paragraph clarifies this.

9. DOCTRINAL DISCUSSION

The *Congrégation sur l'élection éternelle de Dieu* is a unique document in the context of the weekly Bible studies. It is not part of the customary study of a biblical book, read in *lectio continua*, but a doctrinal statement, followed not so much by discussion but by approval. The primary aim of the Bible studies, however, was: 'to preserve unity and concord of doctrine' among the ministers.⁷⁴ Although all other manuscripts and editions of texts from these Bible studies show no concentration on the formulation of doctrine, the special meeting of 11 December 1551 fits into the profile of the *congrégation* as formulated in the Church order of Geneva. When the editions and manuscripts hardly ever show a trace of the contributions of the other ministers, the text of the 'Congrégation, Held in the Church of Geneva by John Calvin, in which the Matter of God's Eternal Election Was Concisely and Clearly Argued and Was Confirmed by an Unanimous Agreement of His Fellow Ministers' highlights also the full statements made by the twelve ministers besides Calvin.

in: *Protestant Scholasticism. Essays in Reassessment*, ed. Carl R. Trueman — R.S. Clark (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999), 40f (33-61); C. van Sliedregt, *Calvijns opvolger Theodorus Beza*, 82, 102-108, following Ian Mc Phee, *Conservator or Transformer of Calvin's Theology? A Study of the Origins and Development of Theodore Beza's Thought (1550-1570)* (Cambridge, 1979).

73 Van Sliedregt, *Calvijns opvolger Theodorus Beza*, 274f.

74 CO 10a, 18 and RCP I, 3 (text of 1541); CO 10a, 96 and OS II, 332 (text of 1561).

It is a historical fact that only Calvin's contributions to the *congrégations* were taken down, while the input of the other ministers hardly ever seem to have been preserved in writing. It is this fact that can mislead historians, so that in concentrating on Calvin's theology they ignore that other highly trained ministers worked and spoke in Geneva. The text of the *Congregation sur l'élection éternelle de Dieu* offers a chance to investigate and evaluate their statements on the doctrine of predestination. Could it be that this locus, 'which is the most difficult and intricate in religion' (as the ministers of Basle wrote in their reply to the circular letter from Geneva),⁷⁵ was less Calvin's original creation and had a broader basis in a real consensus of all theological minds in Geneva?

One final question is in order to highlight the *congrégation* of 18 December 1551 as the real Consensus Genevensis. Did the statements of the Genevan ministers on divine election really constitute a consensus? In the following I will take the crucial point of disagreement between Calvin and Bullinger as the point of departure and investigate what the various ministers had to say.⁷⁶ The Swiss Churches did not want to accentuate the *causae* of, above all, reprobation. The circular letter had stressed this point: 'In short, he [Jerome Bolsec] removes all distinction between ultimate and hidden causes and proximate causes ...'. The philosophical tool of the various *causae* was used to distinguish between divine and human aspects.

It is interesting to note that Philippe d'Ecclesia — the minister who in the wake of the Bolsec controversy was accused of being too close to the popular physician — was the first to speak of the various causes in relation to divine election. He started with Ephesians 1,

where the cause of our election is mentioned when it is said that this has been the good pleasure of the will of God. Here is what its cause is and this should be enough to us since St. Paul does not advance another cause but this good will of God.

A little further D'Ecclesia mentions *la cause finale* of election: 'that we should be holy and blameless before him' (Eph. 1:4). He also draws on another distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge.

75 RCP I, 121.

76 The following works give an analysis of Calvin's contribution: W.H. Neuser, 'Calvin the Preacher', 62-72 (see n. 10); C. van Sliedregt, *Calvijs opvolger Theodor Beza*, 94-97 (see n. 17); especially Christian Link, 'Calvins Erwählungslehre zwischen Providenz und Christologie', in: *Calvin im Kontext der Schweizer Reformation. Historische und theologische Beiträge zur Calvinforschung*, ed. Peter Opitz (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 2003), 169-194.

For it is certain that we can not know that we are among God's elect *a priori* (as it is said), that is that we may enter in his counsel to learn it; but *a posteriori* we can understand it, when he declares it to us and reveals it through Jesus Christ.

When D'Ecclesia finally comes to reprobation, 'the second part of predestination', he insists on a logical *antithèse* between choosing and rejecting. If we are chosen in Jesus Christ, then there are others who are rejected apart from Jesus Christ (*bors de Jésus-Christ*). He concedes that the ancient doctors spoke of reprobation as a mere letting the wicked in their wicked nature. But this cannot mean that God is the author of sin, since he is the sum of all justice and righteousness. D'Ecclesia concludes:

And therefore what has been put forward on election and reprobation is a very true doctrine to which we have hold and keep totally.⁷⁷

Another minister, Louis Treppereau, also comments on the cause of reprobation.

[For] we should not say that God is the cause of the damnation of the wicked, but that is the sin which is in them.

If we would all be lost and cast down and God would never have pity on us, this would be a just judgement and we would have nothing but reason to give glory to him, confessing that he is a just judge since he punishes the wicked for their sins and iniquities. Treppereau underlines that God cannot be called the cause of damnation.⁷⁸

Matthieu Malesier speaks of a double aim in election, the distinction between the *causa prima* and the *causa finalis* (the first and ultimate cause). He uses the example of a man who builds a house. The first aim is the construction of the house itself, the ultimate aim is that he enjoys living in the house. As D'Ecclesia had done, Malesier points to the ultimate cause of election, that we would be holy and without blemish before his countenance (Eph. 1:4).⁷⁹ Then there is Jean Fabri, who speaks of a twofold cause in God's counsel:

77 CO 8, 123f; modern French text: *Calvin. Homme d'Église. Oeuvres choisies du réformateur et documents sur les Eglises réformées du XVIIe siècle*, 2. édition (Genève: Éditions Labor et Fides, 1971), 106-108.

78 CO 8, 127f; *Calvin. Homme d'Église*, 112-114.

79 CO 8, 129f; *Calvin. Homme d'Église*, 116f. Cf. on the *causa finalis* Calvin in *COR* III.1, 140, l. 8f.

There is a distant cause (*une cause lointaine*), which is the will of God; there is a cause close-by (*une cause prochaine*), which is the wickedness, the infidelity, the iniquity, and the rebellion of man; man is therefore worthy to be thus rejected.⁸⁰

This use of various logical distinctions from Medieval theology by four of the twelve pastors is telling. Calvin did not use any of these in his full-length *congrégation* on election. Only Treppereau stated that God cannot be called the cause (in the strict sense of *causa proxima*) of damnation. Malesier used the distinction between *causa propinqua* or *proxima* and the *causa remota* in order to maintain that God is not the author of sin, but that he uses the malice of man (as the *causa proxima*).

While Calvin did not use these distinctions explicitly in the *congrégation*, he did so in the book he was writing on the same matter against Pighius. On providence Bolsec is reported to have said: no act of God is just unless its plain reason lies before our eyes. 'Thus he removes the distinction between remote and proximate causes'. The sufferings of Job are the work of God, but they are inflicted by the Chaldean robbers.⁸¹ This is a recurrent theme in Calvin's refutation of Pighius on election.⁸² Only when the distinction between the remote cause (God's will) and the proximate cause (human sin and unbelief) is forgotten, the problem arises if God is the author of sin. Heinrich Bullinger and the ministers of Zurich wanted to avoid this problem by refusing to speak of the cause of reprobation, other than human sin over against the goodness of God. Calvin and the ministers of Geneva, stressing the justice of God, warded off the reproach to the doctrine of predestination that God is made the author of sin by using the distinction between the various *causae*.

Dr. Ludi Schulze ended his thesis on Calvin's twofold reply to Pighius stating that Calvin did not teach an equilibrium between predestination and reprobation. Schulze also drew attention to the theological instrument of the *causae*. '[W]e must always remember ... that the "proximate" and "remote causes" do not lie on the same level.' Schulze speaks of a conscious imbalance in Calvin's doctrine of predestination. In election we should not focus on the proximate causes (faith, good works) but on the deeper cause, that is God's merciful election. On the contrary in reprobation we should not try to penetrate the remote cause (God's counsel), but rather focus on the proxi-

80 CO 8, 132-134; *Calvin. Homme d'Église*, 122 (121-124).

81 COR III.1, 6-8.

82 O.c., 102, l. 4, 23 and 30; 132, l. 30; 148, l. 22f.; 210, l. 20; 254, l. 6-8; 260, l. 13.

mate causes, that is personal guilt and unbelief.⁸³ On the level of theological discourse this is the background of the *Congrégation sur l'élection éternelle de Dieu*, in which the ministers of Geneva presented a united front.

10. PREACHING THE DOCTRINE OF PREDESTINATION

One of the points of dissent between Geneva and the other Swiss Churches was whether or not the doctrine of predestination should be treated in sermons before the people. After 1551 the Council of Bern began to forbid its ministers to preach on this point of doctrine. The Genevan ministers took their stand by dedicating a public *congrégation* — after the morning service on Friday 18 December 1551 — to the doctrine of predestination, in which not only the preachers from the city and the villages were present, but also laymen and women from Geneva.

The editor of *La Congrégation sur l'élection éternelle de Dieu* in 1562 included at the end an *advertissement* (recommendation) with five quotes in French translation, filling three and a half pages *in octavo*, from Augustine's *De dono perseverantiae*. In these quotes St. Augustine speaks against those who object to the doctrine of predestination as subject of preaching and against taking this doctrine as an excuse to live in licence. Central is Jesus' saying: 'He who has ears, let him listen' (Mt. 11:15). These words are understood as a mirror of predestination. Those who have ears, will listen gladly to the preaching of doctrine. They have received the gift of listening. It has been given to them to come to the Son. Those who do not listen, miss this gracious gift of God. In them the sentence is fulfilled: 'Hear, but do not understand' (Is. 6:9; Mt. 13:14). The message to the public is clear: in preaching the doctrine of election and reprobation should be addressed. And what is more, preached in accord with the Word, election and reprobation become reality in the acceptance or rejection of the Word.

Was there a French translation of Augustine's *De dono perseverantiae* on the market? No, but all five quotations are taken in the exact order and following the French translation from John Calvin's own hand of his book of 1552, *De la prédestination éternelle de Dieu*.⁸⁴ A small, but interesting detail:

83 Schulze, *Calvin's reply to Pigbius*, 144f, 172.

84 CO 8, 139-140. For quote 1 see COR III.1, 171 l. 11-15; quote 2: o.c., 171 l. 35-38 and 173 l. 4-11; quote 3: o.c., 173, l. 14-17; quote 4: o.c., 173, l. 36-175, l. 2; quote 5 follows directly after nr. 4 in *De la prédestination*: o.c., 175, l. 3-15 (with *et ceux qui ont succédé après eux* replacing *et les docteurs de l'Eglise*).

the last quotation from Augustine ends with the words: ‘For as we have to preach the reverence to God ...’, followed by Calvin’s summary:

so that he may be served well and worthy, so it is necessary to preach predestination, so that he who has ears to hear, glorifies in God of his grace and not in himself.

This line of Calvin’s has been mistaken as a full quote from Augustine in the closing text of the edition of the *Congrégation sur l’élection éternelle de Dieu*. The editor of the *Congrégation* and the ministers of Geneva valued their consensus with the authority of the Church Father Augustine. The public appeal to *De dono perseverantiae* somewhat masked the fact that according to Augustine reprobation can only be understood from God’s foreknowledge⁸⁵ and not so much from God’s will.

11. CONCLUSION

Whereas Jerome Bolsec taught a synergistic theology, learnt from the later Middle Ages, the doctrine of predestination of the Genevan ministers is fully Augustinian. Swiss theologians like Heinrich Bullinger did not take God’s will, but his goodness for men as their theological starting point and left the cause of eternal damnation in God’s counsel, while maintaining the absolute priority of his election and grace. The ministers of Geneva used the tools of logical distinctions and the theory of causality to maintain both divine pre-eminence and human responsibility in election on the one hand and in reprobation on the other, without coming to a full parallelism. Probably not so much in preaching, but at least in teaching the people in the public congregation, they used such distinctions to clarify the finer points of doctrine, which in Bolsec’s battle cry that “it made God the author of sin” was so vulnerable to criticism — as it is today in the context of evangelical and charismatic synergism. The “Consensus Genevensis” documents the Genevan method of teaching and the drive of the body of ministers to come to full doctrinal agreement, at least in their own midst as colleagues. While today we may need other instruments than the theory of causality, the drive towards consensus in doctrine may be a stimulus for all who have a teaching and preaching obligation in the Church.

85 Still, quote 3 reads:

Je vous prie, dit-il, si aucuns sous ombre de la predestiantion s’adonnent à nonchaloir et, selon qu’ils sont enclins, à flatter leur chair vont après leurs cupiditez, faut-il pourtant juger que ce qui est escrit de la prescience de Dieu, soit faux? (Augustin, De dono perseverantiae 15, 38 in: J.-P. Migne, Patrologia latina 45, 1016 l. 58-1017 l. 3; quoted from CO 8, 139).

de Boer

The 'Consensus Genevensis' revisited

Trefwoorde

Keywords

Calvyn

Calvin

Predestinatie

Predestination

Consensus Genevensis

Consensus Genevensis

Reformasie

Reformation

Kerkgeskiedenis

Church history