

Formula Consensus Helvetica 1675

COMPOSED AT ZURICH, A.D.1675, BY JOHN HENRY HEIDEGGER, OF ZURICH, ASSISTED BY FRANCIS TURRETINE, OF GENEVA, AND LUKE GERNLER, OF BASLE, AND DESIGNED TO CONDEMN AND EXCLUDE THAT MODIFIED FORM OF CALVINISM, WHICH, IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY, EMANATED FROM THE THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL AT SAUMUR, REPRESENTED BY AMYRAULT, PLACAEUS, AND DAILLE; ENTITLED “FORM OF AGREEMENT OF THE HELVETIC REFORMED CHURCHES RESPECTING E DOCTRINE OF UNIVERSAL GRACE, THE DOCTRINES CONNECTED THEREWITH, AND SOME OTHER POINTS.”

CANONS

I. God, the Supreme Judge, not only took care to have His word, which is the “power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth “(Rom. 1:16), committed to writing by Moses, the Prophets, and the Apostles, but has also watched and cherished it with paternal care ever since it was written up to the present time, so that it could not be corrupted by craft of Satan or fraud of man. Therefore the Church justly ascribes it to His singular grace and goodness that she has, and will have to the end of the world, a “sure word of prophecy“ and “Holy Scriptures” (2 Tim. 3:15), from which, though heaven and earth perish, “one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass”(Matt. 5:18).

II. But, in particular, the Hebrew Original of the Old Testament, which we have received and to this day do retain as handed down by the Jewish Church, unto whom formerly “were committed the oracles of God” (Rom. 3:2), is, not only in its consonants, but in its vowels—either the vowel points themselves, or at least the power of the points—not only in its matter, but in its words, inspired of God, thus forming, together with the Original of the New Testament, the sole and complete rule of our faith and life; and to its standard, as to a Lydian stone, all extant versions, oriental and occidental, ought to be applied, and where ever they differ, be conformed.

III. Therefore we can by no means approve the opinion of those who declare that the text which the Hebrew Original exhibits was determined by man’s will alone, and do not scruple at all to remodel a Hebrew reading which they consider unsuitable, and amend it from the Greek Versions of the LXX and others, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Chaldee Targums, or even from other sources, yea, sometimes from their own reason alone; and furthermore, they

do not acknowledge any other reading to be genuine except that which can be educed by the critical power of the human judgment from the collation of editions with each other and with the various readings of the Hebrew Original itself—which, they maintain, has been corrupted in various ways; and finally, they affirm that besides the Hebrew edition of the present time, there are in the Versions of the ancient interpreters which differ from our Hebrew context other Hebrew Originals, since these Versions are also indicative of ancient Hebrew Originals differing from each other. Thus they bring the foundation of our faith and its inviolable authority into perilous hazard.

IV. Before the foundation of the world God purposed in Christ Jesus, our Lord, an eternal purpose (Eph. 3:11), in which, from the mere good pleasure of His own will, without any prevision of the merit of works or of faith, unto the praise of His glorious grace, out of the human race lying in the same mass of corruption and of common blood, and, therefore, corrupted by sin, He elected a certain and definite number to be led, in time, unto salvation by Christ, their Surety and sole Mediator, and on account of His merit, by the mighty power of the regenerating Holy Spirit, to be effectually called, regenerated, and gifted with faith and repentance. So, indeed, God, determining to illustrate His glory, decreed to create man perfect, in the first place, then, permit him to fall, and at length pity some of the fallen, and therefore elect those, but leave the rest in the corrupt mass, and finally give them over to eternal destruction.

V. In that gracious decree of Divine Election, moreover, Christ himself is also included, not as the meritorious cause, or foundation anterior to Election itself, but as being Himself also elect (1 Peter 2:4, 6), foreknown before the foundation of the world, and accordingly, as the first requisite of the execution of the decree of Election, chosen Mediator, and our first born Brother, whose precious merit God determined to use for the purpose of conferring, without detriment to His own justice, salvation upon us. For the Holy Scriptures not only declare that Election was made according to the mere good pleasure of the Divine counsel and will (Eph. 1:5, 9; Matt. 11:26), but also make the appointment and giving of Christ, our Mediator, to proceed from the strenuous love of God the Father toward the world of the elect.

VI. Wherefore we can not give suffrage to the opinion of those who teach: (1) that God, moved by philanthropy, or a sort of special love for the fallen

human race, to previous election, did, in a kind of conditioned willing—willingness—first moving of pity, as they call it—inefficacious desire—purpose the salvation of all and each, at least, 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, i.e., He determined to graciously 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 kindred teachings are in no wise insignificant deviations from the form of sound words respecting 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. 9:10-13). The same Holy Scriptures testify that the counsel and the will of God change not, but stand immovable, and God in the heavens doeth 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 underlie Election as its foundation.

VII. As all His works were known unto God from eternity (Acts 15:18), so in time, according to His infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, He made man, the glory and end of His works, in His own image, and, therefore, upright, wise, and just. Him, thus constituted, He put under the Covenant of Works, and in this Covenant freely promised him communion with God, favor, and life, if indeed he acted in obedience to His Will.

VIII. Moreover that promise annexed to the Covenant of Works was not a continuation only of earthly life and happiness, but the possession especially of life eternal and celestial, a life, namely, of both body and soul in heaven—if indeed man ran the course of perfect obedience—with unspeakable joy in communion with God. For not only did the Tree of Life prefigure this very thing unto Adam, but the power of the law, which, being fulfilled by Christ, who went under it in our stead, awards to us no other than celestial life in Christ who kept the righteousness of the law (Rom. 2:26), manifestly proves the same, as also the opposite threatening of death both temporal and eternal.

IX. Wherefore we can not assent to the opinion of those who deny that a reward of heavenly bliss was proffered to Adam on condition of obedience to God, and do not admit that the promise of the Covenant of Works was any thing more than a promise of perpetual life abounding in every kind of good that can be suited to the body and soul of man in a state of perfect nature, and the enjoyment thereof in an earthly Paradise. For this also is contrary to the sound sense of the Divine Word, and weakens the power (potestas) of the law in itself considered.

X. As, however, God entered into the Covenant of Works not only with Adam for himself, but also, in him as the head and root (stirps), with the whole human race, who would, by virtue of the blessing of the nature derived from him, inherit also the same perfection, provided he continued therein; so Adam by his mournful fall, not only for himself, but also for the whole human race that would be born of bloods and the will of the flesh, sinned and lost the benefits promised in the Covenant. We hold, therefore, that the sin of Adam is imputed by the mysterious and just judgment of God to all his posterity. For the Apostle testifies that in Adam all sinned, by one man's disobedience many were made sinners (Rom. 5:12, 19), and in Adam all die (1 Cor. 15:21, 22). But there appears no way in which hereditary corruption could fall, as a spiritual death, upon the whole human race by the just judgment of God, unless some sin (delictum) of that race preceded, incurring (inducens) the penalty (reatum, guilt) of that death. For God, the supremely just Judge of all the earth, punishes none but the guilty.

XI. For a double reason, therefore, man, because of sin (post peccatum) is by nature, and hence from his birth, before committing any actual sin, exposed to God's wrath and curse; first, on account of the transgression and disobedience which he committed in the loins of Adam; and, secondly, on account of the consequent hereditary corruption implanted in his very conception, whereby his whole nature is depraved and spiritually dead; so that original sin may rightly be regarded as twofold, viz., imputed sin and inherent hereditary sin.

XII. Accordingly we can not, without harm to Divine truth, give assent to those who deny that Adam represented his posterity by appointment of God, and that his sin is imputed, therefore, immediately to his posterity; and under the term imputation mediate and consequent not only destroy the imputation of the first sin, but also expose the doctrine (assertio) of hereditary corruption to great danger.

XIII. As Christ was from eternity elected the Head, Prince, and Lord (Hoeres) of all who, in time, are saved by His grace, so also, in time, He was made Surety of the New Covenant only for those who, by the eternal Election, were given to Him as His own people (*populus peculi*), His seed and inheritance. For according to the determinate counsel of the Father and His own intention, He encountered dreadful death instead of the elect alone, restored only these into the bosom of the Father's grace, and these only he reconciled to God, the offended Father, and delivered from the curse of the law. For our Jesus saves His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21), who gave His life a ransom for many sheep (Matt. 20:28; John 10:15), His own, who hear His voice (John 10:27, 28), and for these only He also intercedes, as a divinely appointed Priest, and not for the world (John 17:9). Accordingly in the death of Christ, only the elect, who in time are made new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17), and for whom Christ in His death was substituted as an expiatory sacrifice, are regarded as having died with Him and as being justified from sin; and thus, with the counsel of the Father who gave to Christ none but the elect to be redeemed, and also with the working of the Holy Spirit, who sanctifies and seals unto a living hope of eternal life none but the elect, the will of Christ who died so agrees and amicably conspires in perfect harmony, that the sphere of the Father's election (*Patris eligentis*), the Son's redemption (*Filii redimentis*), and the Spirit's sanctification (*Spiritus S. sanctificantis*) is one and the same (*oequalis pateat*).

XIV. This very thing further appears in this also, that Christ merited for those in whose stead He died the means of salvation, especially the regenerating Spirit and the heavenly gift of faith, as well as salvation itself, and actually confers these upon them. For the Scriptures testify that Christ, the Lord, came to save the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 15:24), and sends the same Holy Spirit, the fount of regeneration, as His own (John 16:7, 8); that among the better promises of the New Covenant of which He was made Mediator and Surety this one is pre-eminent, that He will write His law, i.e., the law of faith, in the hearts of his people (Heb. 8:10); that whatsoever the Father has given to Christ will come to Him, by faith, surely; and finally, that we are chosen in Christ to be holy and without blame, and, moreover, children by Him (Eph. 1:4, 5); but our being holy and children of God proceeds only from faith and the Spirit of regeneration.

XV. But by the obedience of his death Christ instead of the elect so satisfied God the Father, that in the estimate, nevertheless, of His vicarious righteousness and of that obedience, all of that which He rendered to the

law, as its just servant, during the whole course of His life, whether by doing or by suffering, ought to be called obedience. For Christ's life, according to the Apostle's testimony (Philip. 2:7, 8), was nothing but a continuous emptying of self, submission and humiliation, descending step by step to the very lowest extreme, even the death of the Cross; and the Spirit of God plainly declares that Christ in our stead satisfied the law and Divine justice by His most holy life, and makes that ransom with which God has redeemed us to consist not in His sufferings only, but in His whole life conformed to the law. The Spirit, however, ascribes our redemption to the death, or the blood, of Christ, in no other sense than that it was consummated by sufferings; and from that last terminating and grandest act derives a name (denominationem facit) indeed, but in such a way as by no means to separate the life preceding from His death.

XVI. Since all these things are entirely so, surely we can not approve the contrary doctrine of those who affirm that of His own intention, by His own counsel and that of the Father who sent Him, Christ died for all and each upon the impossible condition, provided they believe; that He obtained for all a salvation, which, nevertheless, is not applied to all, and by His death merited salvation and faith for no one individually and certainly (*proprie et actu*), but only removed the obstacle of Divine justice, and acquired for the Father the liberty of entering into a new covenant of grace with all men; and finally, they so separate the active and passive righteousness of Christ, as to assert that He claims His active righteousness for himself as His own, but gives and imputes only His passive righteousness to the elect. All these opinions, and all that are like these, are contrary to the plain Scriptures and the glory of Christ, who is Author and Finisher of our faith and salvation; they make His cross of none effect, and under the appearance of augmenting His merit, they really diminish it.

XVII. The call unto salvation was suited to its due time (1 Tim. 2:6); since by God's will it was at one time more restricted, at another, more extended and general, but never absolutely universal. For, indeed, in the Old Testament God showed His word unto Jacob, His statutes and His judgments unto Israel; He dealt not so with any nation (Ps. 147:19, 20). In the New Testament, peace being made in the blood of Christ and the inner wall of partition broken down, God so extended the limits (*pomoeria*) of Gospel preaching and the external call, that there is no longer any difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him (Rom. 10:12). But not even thus is the call universal; for

Christ testifies that many are called (Matt. 20:16), not all; and when Paul and Timothy essayed to go into Bithynia to preach the Gospel, the Spirit suffered them not (Acts 16:7); and there have been and there are today, as experience testifies, innumerable myriads of men to whom Christ is not known even by rumor.

XVIII. Meanwhile God left not himself without witness (Acts 14:17) unto those whom He refused to call by His Word unto salvation. For He divided unto them the spectacle of the heavens and the stars (Deut. 4:19), and that which may be known of God, even from the works of nature and Providence, He hath showed unto them (Rom. 1:19), for the purpose of attesting His long suffering. Yet it is not to be affirmed that the works of nature and Divine Providence were means (organa), sufficient of themselves and fulfilling the function of the external call, whereby He would reveal unto them the mystery of the good pleasure or mercy of God in Christ. For the Apostle immediately adds (Rom. 1:20), “The invisible things of Him from the creation are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead;” not His hidden good pleasure in Christ, and not even to the end that thence they might learn the mystery of salvation through Christ, but that they might be without excuse, because they did not use aright the knowledge that was left them, but when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful. Wherefore also Christ glorifies God, His Father, because He had hidden these things from the wise and the prudent, and revealed them unto babes (Matt. 11:25); and the Apostle teaches, moreover, that God has made known unto us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself (in Christo), (Eph. 1:9).

XIX. Likewise the external call itself, which is made by the preaching of the Gospel, is on the part of God also, who calls, earnest and sincere. For in His Word He unfolds earnestly and most truly, not, indeed, His secret intention respecting the salvation or destruction of each individual, but what belongs to our duty, and what remains for 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 salvation, and so He promises eternal life also in good earnest, to those who come to Him by faith; for, as the Apostle declares, “it is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us; if we believe not, yet He abideth faithful; He can not deny Himself.” Nor in regard to those who do not obey the call is this will

inefficacious; for God always attains that which He intends in His will (quod volens intendit), even the demonstration of duty, and following this, either the salvation of the elect who do their duty, or the inexcusableness of the rest who neglect the duty set before them. Surely the spiritual man in no way secures (conciliat) the internal purpose of God to produce faith (conceptum Dei internum, fidei analogum) along with the externally proffered, or written Word of God. Moreover, because God approved every verity which flows from His counsel, therefore it is rightly said to be His will, that all who see the Son and believe on 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 every one but for the elect only 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 thus universally proffered, while the reprobate are hardened, proceeds solely from the discriminating grace of God: election by the same grace to them that believe; but their own native wickedness to the reprobate who remain in sin, and after their hardness and impenitent heart treasure up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God (Rom. 2:5).

XX. Accordingly we have no doubt that they err who hold that the call unto salvation is disclosed not by the preaching of the Gospel solely, but even by the works of nature and Providence without any further proclamation; adding, that the call unto salvation is so indefinite and universal that there is no mortal who is not, at least objectively, as they say, sufficiently called either mediately, namely, in that God will further bestow the light of grace on him who rightly uses the light of nature, or immediately, unto Christ and salvation; and finally denying that the external call can be said to be serious and true, or the candor and sincerity of God be defended, without asserting the absolute universality of grace. For such doctrines are contrary to the Holy Scriptures and the experience of all ages, and manifestly confound nature with grace, that which may be known of God with His hidden wisdom, the light of reason, in fine, with the light of Divine Revelation.

XXI. They who are called unto salvation through the preaching of the Gospel can neither believe nor obey the call, unless they are raised up out of spiritual death by that very power whereby God commanded the light to shine out of darkness, and God shines into their hearts with the soul-swaying grace of His Spirit, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in

the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). For the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor. 2:14); and this utter inability the Scripture demonstrates by so many direct testimonies and under so many emblems that scarcely in any other point is it surer (locupletior). This inability may, indeed, be called moral even in so far as it pertains to a moral subject or object; but it ought at the same time to be also called natural, inasmuch as man by nature, and so by the law of his formation in the womb, and hence from his birth, is the child of disobedience (Eph. 2:2); and has that inability so innate (congenitam) that it can be shaken off in no way except by the omnipotent heart-turning grace of the Holy Spirit.

XXII. We hold therefore that they speak with too little accuracy and not without danger, who call this inability to believe moral inability, and do not hold it to be natural, adding that man in whatever condition he may be placed is able to believe if he will, and that faith in some way or other, indeed, is self-originated ; and yet the Apostle most distinctly calls it the gift of God (Eph. 2:8).

XXIII. There are two ways in which God, the just Judge, has promised justification: either by one's own works or deeds in the law; or by the obedience or righteousness of another, even of Christ our Surety, imputed by grace to him that believes in the Gospel. The former is the method of justifying man perfect ; but the latter, of justifying man a sinner and corrupt. In accordance with these two ways of justification the Scripture establishes two covenants: the Covenant of Works, entered into with Adam and with each one of his descendants in him, but made void by sin; and the Covenant of Grace, made with only the elect in Christ, the second Adam, eternal, and liable to no abrogation, as the former.

XXIV. But this later Covenant of Grace according to the diversity of times had also different dispensations. For when the Apostle speaks of the dispensation of the fulness of times, i.e., the administration of the last time, he very clearly indicates that there had been another dispensation and administration for the times which the prothesmian (Gal. 4:2), or appointed time. Yet in each dispensation of the Covenant of Grace the elect have not been saved in any other way than by the Angel of his presence (Is. 43:9), the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8), Christ Jesus, through the knowledge of that just Servant and faith in Him and in the

Father and His Spirit. For Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever (Heb. 13:8); and by His grace we believe that we are saved (servari) in the same manner as the Fathers also were saved (salvati sunt), and in both Testaments these statutes remain immutable: "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him," the Son (Ps. 2:12); "He that believeth in Him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already" (John 3:18); "Ye believe in God," even the Father, "believe also in me" (John 14:1). But if, moreover, the sainted Fathers believed in Christ as their Goël, it follows that they also believed in the Holy Spirit, without whom no one can call Jesus Lord. Truly so many are the clearest exhibitions of this faith of the Fathers and of the necessity thereof in either Covenant, that they can not escape any one unless he wills it. But though this saving knowledge of Christ and the Holy Trinity was necessarily derived, according to the dispensation of that time, both from the promise and from shadows and figures and enigmas, with greater difficulty (operosius) than now in the New Testament; yet it was a true knowledge, and, in proportion to the measure of Divine Revelation, was sufficient to procure for the elect, by help of God's grace, salvation and peace of conscience.

XXV. We disapprove therefore of the doctrine of those who fabricate for us three Covenants, the Natural, the Legal, and the Gospel Covenant, different in their whole nature and pith; and in explaining these and assigning their differences, so intricately entangle themselves that they obscure not a little, or even impair, the nucleus of solid truth and piety; nor do they hesitate at all, with regard to the necessity, under the Old Testament dispensation, of knowledge of Christ and faith in Him and His satisfaction and in the whole sacred Trinity, to theologize much too loosely and not without danger.

XXVI. Finally, both unto us, to whom in the Church, which is God's house, has been entrusted the dispensation for the present, and unto all our Nazarenes, and unto those who under the will and direction of God will at any time succeed us in our charge, in order to prevent the fearful enkindling of dissensions with which the Church of God in different places is disturbed (infestatur) in terrible ways, we earnestly wish (volumus, will) this to be a law:

That in this corruption of the world, with the Apostle of the Gentiles as our faithful monitor, we all keep faithfully that which is committed to our trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings (1 Tim. 6:20); and religiously guard the

purity and simplicity of that knowledge which is according to piety, constantly clinging to that beautiful pair, Charity and Faith, unstained.

Moreover, in order that no one may be induced to propose either publicly or privately some doubtful or new dogma of faith hitherto unheard of in our churches, and contrary to God's Word, to our Helvetic Confession, our Symbolical Books, and to the Canons of the Synod of Dort, and not proved and sanctioned in a public assembly of brothers according to the Word of God, let it also be a law:

That we not only hand down sincerely in accordance with the Divine Word, the especial necessity of the sanctification of the Lord's Day, but also impressively inculcate it and importunately urge its observation; and, in fine, that in our churches and schools, as often as occasion demands, we unanimously and faithfully hold, teach, and assert the truth of the Canons herein recorded, truth deduced from the indubitable Word of God.

The very God of peace in truth sanctify us wholly, and preserve our whole spirit and soul and body blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ! to whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit be eternal honor, praise and glory. AMEN!

EXTRACTED FROM A. A. HODGE, OUTLINES OF THEOLOGY