

John Calvin's 'Disputatio de Praedestinatione' The relevance of a manuscript on his doctrine Providence and Predestination

In an evaluation of the Calvin year 2009 a journalist noted that in the mass of spoken or written features in the Netherlands on his life, work and influence only lecture/article paid attention to the doctrine on predestination. The one lecture was presented by ... yours truly.² Object of the following study is the smallest document from Calvin's hand on the most controversial aspect of his work: a manuscript page, kept in the Genevan archives, and labelled by the editors of the *Calvini Opera* as *Articuli de praedestinatione*. This article can be summarized by the statement that this document should henceforth be called: Calvin's *disputatio de praedestinatione*.

This research is linked to a recent development in Calvin scholarship by focussing on the thesis, put forth by Wilhelm H. Neuser, that Calvin had in fact two doctrines on predestination, and that thus varying accents in various works can be explained. Is this an effort to 'save' Calvin from the odium of a rather harsh doctrine?

1. CONTEXT OF THE *DISPUTATIO*?

The doctrine of predestination, as it was taught in Geneva in the middle of the sixteenth century, became the object of polemics from Roman-catholic side (Albert Pighius) and some dissidents in Geneva (Jerome Bolsec), and between the Swiss reformed ministers. It was John Calvin who had developed this doctrine in the *Institutes* since 1539. From 1551 he had to defend his teaching and published *De aeterna Dei praedestinatione* (1552), but this work only strengthened the critique. These polemics influenced the presentation in the *Institutes*.

The present author is primarily interested in the workings of the *congrégations*, the Bible studies on Friday mornings in which all ministers on the payroll of Geneva participated.³ This posed the question: was the locus of predestination ever debated in the bosom of the Company of Pastors in Geneva itself? There are some archival documents that prove it was. The polemics, coming in various waves, must have touched the nerves of various colleagues in Geneva. By what means did the ministers of the city and surrounding villages 'maintain unity and purity of doctrine' on this issue, the specific purpose of the *congrégations*?

A manuscript, found in the library of the Bibliothèque Publique Universitaire in Geneva, offers an intriguing angle of research, preserved in John Calvin's handwriting. What is its date, and what the context in which it was written? Somewhat out of place in the section *Confessiones* in the ninth volume of the Strasbourg edition of John Calvin's works, the text of this small document

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² Published as 'Predestinatie voor eeuwig uit (de) gratie? Over de ongemakkelijke verkiezingsleer van Calvijn en Co' in: *Het calvinistisch ongemak. Calvijn als erflater en provocator van het Nederlands protestantisme*, ed. Rinse Reeling Brouwer, Bert de Leede, Klaas Spronk (Kampen, 2009), 37-49.

³ Cf. E.A. de Boer, 'Bible Study in Geneva: Theological Training for the Preachers to the People', in *Nederduits Gereformeerde Theologische Tydskrif* 47.3-4 (2006), 384-409.

was printed for the first time. The editors say no more than that they have not much to say on it.

‘We have transcribed it from Calvin’s autograph [...], but have not found anything in the collection of his letters or anywhere else transmitted on the occasion of its writing, nor on a more accurate date.’⁴

A fresh look at the single manuscript page may shed some new light on its provenance and contents. A similar case of an undated manuscript is Calvin’s Latin preface to his intended French edition of the church father Chrysostom’s homilies. Although no external evidence on its date and the circumstances of its composition was available, Ian Hazlett presented a convincing case of dating that manuscript in the years 1538-1540, using palaeographic, forensic, and internal evidence.⁵

What can we say about the intriguing folio page of theses on predestination, preserved in John Calvin’s handwriting? What was the context in which these ‘articles’ may have been debated? And what light does this set of short and sharp theses shed on Calvin’s doctrine on predestination as such? These are the questions This essay is aimed at addressing these questions.

2. INTRODUCTION TO THE TEXT AND TRANSLATION

In the first column we present a critical edition of the text (with only one textual correction on CO). The critical apparatus provides mainly cross references to Calvin’s works on the doctrine of election. The title, given in the *Calvini Opera*, is not found in the manuscript and must have been provided by the editors.⁶ The numbering of the theses is added. In the manuscript a total of ten theses can be distinguished, since a new thesis begins with a fresh line and a capital. I take the last line to be the conclusion.

In which volume of the *Opera Calvini denuo recognita*, the ambitious new critical edition appearing at Librairie Droz, should this set of theses be included? The series *scripta didactica et polemica* seems the most obvious choice (COR IV), since the locus on predestination is put forth in this document.⁷ My suggestion, however, is to include it in the edition of all Calvin’s contributions to the weekly *congrégations*, which the present writer is preparing. In this edition the *Congrégation sur l’élection éternelle* (1551) will be included and also the Latin so-called *propositiones* by the Genevan ministers (1545-1552), since these were part of the Bible studies and discussion on doctrine, central to the aim of the *congrégation*. The present essay suggests some arguments for the inclusion of this document on providence and predestination in the same projected volume of texts from

4 CO 9: LIV; text: CO 9: 713-714. The autograph is found in manuscript français 145, f. 101, of the B.P.U. in Geneva.

5 W. Ian. P. Hazlett, ‘Calvin’s Latin Preface to his Proposed French Edition of Chrysostom’s Homilies: Translation and Commentary’, in J. Kirk ed., *Humanism and Reform: The Church in Europe, England and Scotland, 1400-1643* [Studies in Church History, Subsidia 8] (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 129-150.

6 The manuscript seems to bear no title, although at the top of the folio one line has been written and then again was crossed out. The following words could be deciphered: Eterno Dei consilio ... [at the beginning, then two or three unreadable words, and as the last word:] ... praedestinatione. This line seems not to have been intended as a title, but maybe as a first try at writing a first thesis. A provisional translation is: ‘By the eternal predestination [...] by God’s counsel’). I am grateful for the professional help of Mrs. Paule Hochuli Dubuis, assistant conservator of manuscripts of the Bibliothèque Publique Universitaire of Geneva, in studying the manuscript folio.

7 Our document is not mentioned by Francis M. Higman in his overview of the polemical and didactical writings of Calvin (‘I Came not to Send Peace, but a Sword’, in: Calvinus Sincerionis Religionis Vindex. Calvin as Protector of the Purer Religion, ed. Wilhelm H. Neuser – Brian G. Armstrong [Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies, vol. 36] (Kirksville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1997), 136v.

the *congrégations*.

The only translation available until this day is in English and was published by J.S.K. Reid.⁸ He restricted his comments to the observation: 'The tone of the Articles is uncompromising, and this may be held to argue a comparatively late date.' The following translation, given in the second column, is based on Read's, but has in many respects been corrected.

Text

Translation

[Disputatio de praedestinatione]⁹

[Disputation on predestination]

1. Ante creatum primum hominem statuerat Deus aeterno consilio quid de toto genere humano fieri vellet. ^a	Before the first man was created, God in his eternal counsel had determined what he willed to become of the whole human race.
2. Hoc arcano Dei consilio factum est ut Adam ab integro naturae suae statu deficeret ac sua defectione traheret omnes suos posteros in reatum aeternae mortis. ^b	By the hidden counsel of God it was brought about that Adam should fall from the unimpaired condition of his nature, and by his defection should involve all his posterity in the guilt of eternal death.
3. Ab hoc eodem decreto pendet discrimen inter electos et reprobos, quia Deus ^c alios sibi adoptavit in salutem, alios aeterno exitio destinavit.	Upon the same decree depends the distinction between elect and reprobate: as he adopted some for himself for salvation, he destined others for eternal ruin.
4. Tametsi iustae Dei vindictae vasa sunt reprobi, rursus electi vasa misericordiae, ^d causa tamen discriminis non alia in Deo quaerenda est quam mera eius voluntas, quae summa est iustitiae regula. ^e	While the reprobate are vessels of the just wrath of God and on the other hand the elect vessels of his compassion, the cause of this distinction is to be sought no otherwise than in the pure will of God, which is the supreme rule of justice.
5. Tametsi electi fide percipiunt adoptionis gratiam, non tamen pendet electio a fide sed tempore et ordine prior est.	While the elect receive the grace of adoption by faith, their election still does not depend on faith, but is prior in time and order.
6. Sicut initium et perseverantia fidei a gratuita Dei electione fluit, ita non alii vere illuminantur in fidem, nec alii spiritu regenerationis donantur, nisi quos Deus elegit; reprobos vero vel in sua caecitate manere necesse est, vel excidere a parte fidei, si qua in illis fuerit.	As the beginning of faith and perseverance in it arises from God's gratuitous election, none are truly illuminated with faith, and none are granted the spirit of regeneration, except those whom God elects. But it is necessary that the reprobate remain in their blindness or be deprived of such portion of faith as has been in them.
7. Tametsi in Christo eligimur, ^f ordine tamen illud prius est ut nos Dominus in suis censeat, quam ut faciat Christi membra.	While we are elected in Christ, nevertheless that God reckons us among his own is prior in order to his making us members of Christ.

⁸ In J.S.K. Reid ed., Calvin: Theological Treatises [The Library of Christian Classics] (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), 178-180.

⁹ CO 9: 713-714: Ex autographo Bibl. Genev.. Cod. 145 fol. 100 (in fact ms.fr. 145, f. 101r).

<p>8. Tametsi Dei voluntas summa et prima est rerum omnium causa, et Deus diabolum et impios omnes suo arbitrio subiectos habet, Deus tamen neque peccati causa vocari potest, neque mali autor, neque ulli culpae obnoxius est.</p>	<p>While the will of God is the supreme and primary cause of all things, and God holds the devil and all the godless subject to his will, nevertheless God cannot be called the cause of sin, nor is He the author of evil, nor guilty of any blame.</p>
<p>9. Tametsi Deus peccato vere infensus est et damnat quidquid est iniustitiae in hominibus, quia illa displicet, non tamen nuda eius permissione tantum, sed nutu quoque et arcano decreto gubernantur omnia hominum facta.</p>	<p>While God is truly wrathful with sin and condemns whatever is unrighteousness in men since it displeases him, nevertheless all the deeds of men are governed not by his bare permission, but also by his command and secret counsel.</p>
<p>10. Tametsi diabolus et reprobi Dei ministri sunt et organa, et arcana eius iudicia exsequuntur, Deus tamen incomprehensibili modo sic in illis et per illos operatur ut nihil ex eorum vitio labis contrahat, quia illorum malitia iuste recteque utitur in bonum finem, licet modus saepe nobis sit absconditus.^g</p>	<p>While the devil and the reprobate are ministers and organs of God and carry out his secret judgments, God nevertheless in an incomprehensible way operates in and through them, so that no blemish whatsoever touches Him by their wickedness, because their malice is justly and rightly used to a good end, although the manner is often hidden to us.</p>
<p>[Conclusio:] Inscite vel calumniose faciunt qui Deum fieri dicunt autorem peccati, si omnia eo volente et ordinante fiant, quia inter manifestam hominum pravitatem et arcana Dei iudicia non distinguunt.</p>	<p>They are ignorant and malicious who say that God is made the author of sin, if all things are done by his will or ordination; for they do not distinguish between the manifest wickedness of men and the secret judgments of God.</p>

- a Inst. III xxi 5: Praedestinationem vocamus aeternum Dei decretum, quo apud se constitutum habuit quid de unoquoque homine fieri vellet. Non enim pari conditione creantur omnes, sed aliis vita aeterna, aliis damnatio aeterna praeordinatur (OS IV, 374 l. 11-15).
- b Inst. III xxiii 4: Fateor sane in hanc quae nunc illigati sunt, conditionis miseriam, Dei voluntate decidisse universos filios Adam; adque id est quod principio dicebam, redeundum tandem semper esse ad solum divinae voluntatis arbitrium, cuius causa sit in ipso abscondita (OS IV: 397 l. 24-28).
- c CO: Deus omitted.
- d Rom. 9:20-21.
- e Inst. III xxiii 2: Adeo enim summa est iustitiae regula Dei voluntas, ut quicquid vult, eo ipso quod vult, iustum habendum sit. Ubi ergo quaeritur cur ita fecerit Dominus, respondendum est: Quia voluit, with reference to Augustine (OS IV: 396 l. 3-5).
- f Inst. III xxi 7: ut efficax et vere stabilis sit electio, necesse est ascendere ad caput in quo electos suos caelestis Pater inter se colligavit, et sibi insolubili nexu devinxit (OS IV: 377 l. 27-29).
- g Cf. Inst. I 14.13-18; II 4.5.

3. CALVIN'S HANDWRITING AND OTHER CLUES

As far as I know this set of propositions has never been the object of any research and is seldom found quoted in the secondary literature.¹⁰ What information can be gathered from the document? Calvin's handwriting on the folio is in large script, probably in some haste, filling the whole page. *Palaeographic comparison* with the handwriting of some of Calvin's letters from various years of his life is no easy task, since his handwriting is surprisingly consistent over the years.¹¹ It is said that Calvin's handwriting until 1540 has a characteristic initial and medial 's'. 'This is elongated, like a swan's neck, with a small, crescent-shaped crotchet at the top right. To make this 's', his quill had made two movements instead of one.'¹² The 's' in our document is one flourish, ending towards the far left, which suggests a date *post* 1540. Most distinctive on the folio is the capital 'T', occurring six times. It is written with three stokes of the quill, the shaft almost like two linking quotation marks. The first one curves to the right, the second and lowest one curves to the left, together forming a white round in the middle. This characteristic is found in Calvin's earliest letters, but also later (for example in the word *Tuus*, preceding or following his signature).¹³ The palaeographic angle does not offer conclusive proof for dating.

Even less information could be gathered from the *forensic approach*. The one folio is bound in volume ms.fr. 104 and seems to be part of a folder of eight pages. The watermark is in the middle of the left margin and can be studied no further because of the binding. This half of the watermark shows a globe, without, however, the usual star below the globe.¹⁴ The forensic approach does not allow for any clear conclusions.

We are left with two angles of research: the historical approach and a systematic theological comparison. In which conflicts over the doctrine of predestination was Calvin involved? And what does this set of propositions tell us about Calvin's doctrine of predestination, compared to his systematic presentations?

4. THE GENESIS OF CALVIN'S DOCTRINE ON PREDESTINATION

John Calvin developed his doctrine of predestination in the various editions of the *Institutes*. In 1536 he positioned a brief discussion on 'How election and predestination of God are to be thought of' (according to the index) in the chapter on faith. Discussing the fourth part of the Apostolic confession, following Christology and pneumatology, Calvin writes: 'First, we believe the holy catholic church – that is the whole number of the elect [...].'¹⁵ Scripture often speaks of

10 For example in Fred. H. Klooster, *Calvin's Doctrine of Predestination*, 2 ed. (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1977), 41 n. 54, quoting article 7; C. Graafland, *Van Calvin tot Barth. Oorsprong en ontwikkeling van de leer der verkiezing in het Gereformeerd Protestantisme* ('s-Gravenhage: Boekencentrum, 1987), 38 n. 39, the same quote with the critical remark that the christological motive did not come to full fledge in Calvin's theology.

11 Dr. Frans P. van Stam (Free University of Amsterdam), working at the edition of Calvin's correspondance, kindly put some samples at my disposal and helped me study the particularities of Calvin's handwriting.

12 Hazlett, 'Calvin's Preface to Chrysostom's Homilies', 133.

13 Cf. E. Doumergue, *Jean Calvin. Les hommes et les choses de son temps*, 7 vols. (Lausanne, 1899-1927), vol. 1, 559f., 565. On Calvin's handwriting also: A. Ganoczy – S. Scheld, *Herrschaft, Tugend, Vorsehung. Hermeneutische Deutung und Veröffentlichung handschriftlicher Annotationen Calvins zu sieben Senecatragödien und der Pharsalia Lucans* [VIEG 105] (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1982), 4-8.

14 See Charles M. Briquet, *Les filigranes, dictionnaire historique des parques du papier dès leur apparition vers 1281 jusqu'en 1600*, 4 vols. (Leipzig, 1923; New York, 1966), vol., nrs. 14016, 14031 and 14072.

15 OS I:86. See on the development of Calvin's doctrine of predestination François Wendel, *Sources et evolution de sa pensée religieuse*, 2. ed. [Histoire et Société 9] (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1985), 201-216.

election as it can be seen in our calling and justification. But since not all prove in the end to be elect, this mode of speaking is not 'that one and unchangeable providence of God.' This passage already makes it clear that according to Calvin providence and predestination are closely linked. We can not find out 'who have been chosen by his eternal plan, who condemned.'¹⁶ Election is only discussed here in the context of ecclesiology.

In the 1539 edition Calvin combined the doctrines of predestination and providence in a special chapter of his revised *Institutes*. The reality of election rests in God's eternal counsel, the realisation, however, takes place in time. Man can only find his election (not *a priori*, but only) *a posteriori* by marvelling at its fruits. This starting point of discussion in the present and in our experience marks Calvin's entire presentation:

'In actual fact, the covenant of life is not preached equally among all men, and among those to whom it is preached, it does not gain the same acceptance either constantly or in equal degree. In this diversity the wonderful depth of God's judgement is made known.'¹⁷

In this edition Calvin already warns against curious probing into God's counsel on the one hand and against neglect of this part of biblical schooling on the other (Melanchthon). His definition of predestination is found here: 'We call predestination God's eternal decree, by which he compacted [with himself] what he willed that would become of each men.'¹⁸ Reprobation is expressed as '*laisser en ruine*' and '*livrer en damnation*'.

In the final edition of 1559 Calvin separated the two doctrines, placing providence in the doctrine of God in book I and predestination in book III as the conclusion of the doctrine of faith. In this edition the polemics since 1551 influenced Calvin's discourse. We encounter the following definition: 'We call predestination God's eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or death' (*Inst.* IV 21.5). Thus *pre-destinare* is defined in comparison to God's *pre-scientia* ('so that to his knowledge there is nothing future or past, but all things are present').

5. HISTORY OF CONTROVERSIES

Which controversies on predestination (and providence) were there around Calvin's position? The doctrine of election, as presented by Calvin in his *Institutes*, called forth critique on various occasions. First it was the Roman-catholic theologian Albert Pighius who wrote against the chapters on free will and on predestination and providence in the *Institutes*. Calvin responded in two books, the second one written much later – that is, after Pighius' death (1542) – during and after the trial against the physician Jerome Bolsec in Geneva. *De aeterna praedestinatione Dei* appeared in 1552.¹⁹ Before that the ministers of Geneva had presented the *Congrégation sur l'élection éternelle de Dieu* before the people of the city in a special meeting of the weekly Bible studies on 18 December 1551. This presentation is the 'Consensus Genevensis', on which Calvin's book is built.²⁰ Calvin chose not to write a refutation of Bolsec's teachings on predestination, but

16 OS I:87f.

17 Jean Calvin. *Institution chrestienne*, ed. Jacques Panier, vol. 3 (Paris: Société des Belles Lettres, 1938), 58; *Inst.* III 21.1 (OS I:368).

18 *Institution chrestienne*, vol. 3, 52.

19 See: W. de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin. An Introductory Guide* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1993), 158f.

20 See E.A. de Boer, 'The 'Consensus Genevensis' Revisited. The Genesis of the Genevan Consensus on Divine Election in 1551', in: *Ad fontes. Theologiese, historiese en wetenskaps-filosofiese studies binne*

to compose his intended second reply to the more systematic doctrine of the influential scholar Pighius.

The council and ministers of Geneva had sought the doctrinal approval of the other Swiss churches before passing sentence on Bolsec. To their dismay the churches of Basel, Bern, and Zurich gave reserved answers. Heinrich Bullinger responded personally to Calvin that enough had been said on election in the Consensus Tigurinus of 1549.²¹ To his letter of 27 November 1551 he added his 'Aphorisms on the causes of human salvation and damnation drawn from the consensus in the matter of the sacraments between the ministers of the Church of Zurich and of Geneva' (*De causis humanae salutis et damnationis aphorismi ex consensione in re sacramentaria ministrorum ecclesiae Tigurinae et Genevensis*).²² After the positions of Pighius and Bolsec, Calvin's theses on predestination could be a response to Bullinger's Aphorisms. On 1 December 1551 Bullinger wrote again to Calvin: 'Believe me, various people are offended by the fragment of your *Institutes* on predestination', meaning the separate edition by Jean Crespin and Conrad Badius of Chapters 12 and 14 (on providence and predestination) of the 1550 *Institutes*.²³

In the years after 1551 the differing positions on predestination remained a raw nerve between the church of Geneva and especially the preachers in the adjoining Bernese lands. Calvin's book of 1552 *De aeterna praedestinatione Dei*, meant to present the Consensus Genevensis to a wider audience, met with critique. Various publications suggest that a constant defence of the doctrine of predestination was deemed necessary.

A further spearhead of critique on the doctrine of predestination can be discerned in Calvin's pamphlets *Responses à certaines calomnies et blasphemes* and *Brevis responsio* of 1557²⁴ and his reply of 1558: *Calumniae nebulonis cuiusdam de occulta Dei providentia cum responsione*.²⁵ Calvin wrote his pamphlet against Sebastian Castellio, whom he took as the author.²⁶ This exchange of polemics concentrates on the broader doctrine of providence and not so much on election and reprobation. Here he defines as follows: 'I define predestination, as the Holy Scriptures teach, to be that free counsel of God by which he rules all mankind and all single parts of the world by his infinite wisdom and incomprehensible justice.'²⁷

reformatoires kader. Festschrift vir Ludi Schulze, ed. Erik A. de Boer – Victor E. d'Assonville [Acta theologica 2004, Supplementum 5] (Bloemfontein: Publications Office of University of the Free State, 2004), 51-78.

21 Bullinger pointed in his letter to Calvin especially to the first articles of the Consensus Tigurinus (CO 14: 208, no. 1558 of 27 November 1551). Cf. Cornelis P. Venema, 'Heinrich Bullinger's Correspondance on Calvin's Doctrine of Predestination, 1551-1553', in: *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 17 (1986), 435-450; reprinted in id., *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.

22 CO 14:209-211, no. 1559.

23 CO 14:215. See Rodolphe Peter – Jean François Gilmont, *Bibliotheca calviniana. Les oeuvres de Jean Calvin publiées au XVIe siècle. I. Écrits théologiques, littéraires et juridiques 1532-1554* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1991), 50/8 (further: BC I). The same booklet is mentioned by Calvin in the trial against Jerome Bolsec: 'Quant à ce que Me Hierome dit qu'il insiste sur cest article que Dieu n'est point auteur de peché, il ne fallout point qu'il vint esmouvoir ceste question, veu que c'est la doctrine que nous avons tousjours preschée et maintenue par escrit, mesmes de laquelle j'ay faict un livre expres' (RCP I: 106).

24 CO 58, 199-206 (cf. BC 57/9) and CO 9, 253-66 (cf. BC II, 57/2). English translation of the *Brevis responsio* in: *Calvin's Calvinism* (Manchester, 1927), 153-266.

25 Text in CO 9:257-318 (cf. BC II, 58/1). English translation by Henri Cole in: *Calvin's Calvinism* (Manchester, 1927), 223-350.

26 Rodolphe Peter – Jean François Gilmont, *Bibliotheca calviniana. Les oeuvres de Jean Calvin publiées au XVIe siècle. I. Écrits théologiques, littéraires et juridiques 1555-1564* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1994), 57/9 (further: BC II). Of this 1557 edition no copy remains.

27 CO 9, 287.

Various reprints in the following years testify that the doctrine of predestination continued to remain in the centre of attention.²⁸ All in all,, Calvin's theses on predestination can be situated in either in the context of his critique on Pighius or Bolsec or in his exchange with Bullinger. Either way, the history of polemics points to the year 1551 as a most fitting time of writing for the manuscript.

6. SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGICAL TRAINING

The fact that Calvin put together a set of *articuli* on the locus on predestination points to the so-called *propositiones*, held between 1545 and 1552 in Geneva.²⁹ In an appendix to the Registers of the Company of Pastors, manuscript volume I, we find a total of forty sets of propositions. Thirty of them bear the name of one of the pastors, the ten remaining ones are anonymous. Calvin's name does not feature in any of these manuscripts. Is it possible that the *Articuli de praedestinatione* were in fact a set of *propositiones*, presented to and defended in the circle of the Company of Pastors? It is only the form of a proposition (but usually with three or four theses) that suggestion oral exposition such as the Genevan practice of disputation among the ministers. Three years after the start of this discussion of propositions, in 1548, it was decided that the results would be preserved in writing. The secretary of the Company had to collect the papers, but the texts since 1545, the year in which the practice of propositions started, are sparse. It is conceivable that a contribution by Calvin was delivered in the early years, but was not included in the minutes and remained among his private papers. Among the forty texts, preserved in the Registers, three deal with an aspect the doctrine of predestination, one by Pierre Ninaud (no. 5) and two by Nicolas des Gallars (no. 34, 39).

Pierre Ninaud, one of the less known ministers, served in Geneva since 1544. One year later it is reported to the Council: 'Although Mr. Pierre Ninault, minister of St. Gervais, is very learned, the people of St. Gervais do not like him and, seeing him go to church, they turn back (1545).³⁰ He was then transferred to the village of Draillans, a post he deserted in 1554.³¹ The text from his hand is undated, but must be from the late 1540s. His *quaestio* is: 'Has the Lord so foreordained to life or death those which He foreknew that they, led by his providence, inevitably attain their destination?'³² In the propositions Ninaud makes a clear, Augustinian distinction between God's foreknowledge (as not the ground of predestination) and foreordination.³³ This point may have

28 The French translation *Traité de la predestination éternelle* of 1552 was reprinted in 1560, together with the *Treze sermons de l'élection gratuite de Dieu*, taken from Calvin's running series of sermons on Genesis (BC II:60/12). The *Treze sermons* were reprinted in 1562, together with a reprint of *Response à certaines calumnies* (BC II:62/25). The first edition of the text of the *Congrégation sur l'élection éternelle de Dieu* was published in 1562 (BC II:62/6).

29 The text is found in: *Registres de la Compagnie des Pasteurs de Genève au temps de Calvin*, vol. I (1546-1553), ed. Jean-François Bergier (Genève : Librairie Droz, 1964), 167-182 (further: RCP). For an introduction see: E.A. de Boer, 'Calvin and Colleagues: Propositions and Disputations in the Context of the Congrégations in Geneva', in: *Calvinus doctor ecclesiae. Papers of the International Congress on Calvin Research* Princeton, August 20-24, 2002, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2004), 331-342. On the weekly *congrégations* see E.A. de Boer, 'The *congrégations*: In-Service Theological Training Center of the Preachers to the People of Geneva', in: *Calvin and the Company of Pastors*. Calvin Studies Society Papers 2003, ed. David Foxgrover (Grand Rapids MI: Calvin studies Society, 2004), 57-87; 'The Presence and Participation of Lay People in the *Congrégations* of the Company of Pastors in Geneva', *Sixteenth Century Journal* XXV/3 (2004), 651-670.

30 CO 21:360.

31 RCP II:55.

32 RCP I:168f.

33 As Calvin had done in *Inst.* (1539) IV 21.5.

been made against the teachings of Albert Pighius (and later Jerome Bolsec).³⁴ In the early 1550s Ninaud was accused of having associated too closely with Jerome Bolsec (which he denied).³⁵ He had been absent from the special *congrégation* on 18 December 1551, held to state Geneva's position against Bolsec's teaching. However, in his propositions, the only text remaining of his hand, nothing suggests a heterodox position. In the bosom of the Company of Pastors he defended God's free election and just reprobation, and their respective *symbola* (marks) in the human life.

The text of these forty propositions will be included in the critical edition of all documents connected to the Genevan *congrégations*. Text and translation of the three propositions on predestination, as prepared by the present author, are published here for the sake of clarity.

[5.] Petri Nynault³⁶

An quos praescivit Dominus sic ad vitam vel mortem praedestinaverit, ut sua providentia recti suos necessario fines attingant?

1. Dominum sic ab aeterno presciisse omnia sacrae affirmant litterae, ut aeterna³⁷ ac immutabilis ejus praescientia sicut nec praedestinationis ita nec futurorum omnium contingentium causa sit.

[244] 2. Interim quos praescivit sic ante jacta mundi fundamenta in solo Christo gratuito elegit et ad gloriam preordinavit ut ad illam non possint non pertingere, quorum gratuita electionis vocationem et sanctificationem certa statuimus symbola.

3. Rursum quotquot in suo Christo non elegit, justo quidem sed incomprehensibili³⁸ judicio sic reprobavit, ut ad gloriam nequeant pervenire. Quorum justae reprobationis Dei ignorantiam et in verbum eius contumaciam certa statuimus symbola.

4. Quicquid autem ab aeterno³⁸ praescivit ac statuit, sic sua providentia moderatur, ut nihil fortuito sed necessario omnia eveniant, non modo naturalem rerum effectum, sed et voluntatem atque consilia, quae sic in suos fines flectit, ut malis etiam bene utatur.

Has the Lord so foreordained to life or death those that He foreknew, that they, led by his providence, inevitably attain their destination?

1. The holy Scriptures confirm that the Lord has so known all things from eternity that his eternal and immutable foreknowledge is neither the cause of predestination nor of all future contingent things.³⁹

2. Meanwhile He has so chosen them, whom He has foreknown before the foundation of the world, by sole mercy in Christ [Eph. 1,4] and foreordained them to glory that it is impossible that they do not reach it, whose calling and sanctification we hold as sure marks of the free election.⁴⁰

34 Cf. Inst. III 22.1-2.

35 CO 20:518f.

36 RCP I, 168f, 179f, 181f.

37 Ms: following eius crossed out.

38 Ms: following statuit crossed out.

39 An Augustinian distinction: not God's foreknowledge, but his will is the cause of predestination. This point may have been made against the teachings of Albert Pighius and Jerome Bolsec, cf. Inst. III xxii 1-2 and § 8 on Augustine. The whole chapters xxi-xxiv present the Genevan doctrine of predestination, with the corollary of reprobation. The intimate connection between the doctrine of providence and of predestination was most clear in the earlier editions of the Institutes since 1539, when both doctrines were treated in one chapter (VIII).

40 See on the symbola electionis: Inst. III xxi 7 (justification). Also : CO 52, 205 (on 2 Thess. 2:13); COR

3. Further, all whom He has not chosen in his Christ, He so has rejected by an indeed just but incomprehensible judgement that they cannot come to glory. We regard their ignorance of God and their rebellion against his Word as sure marks⁴¹ of his just reprobation.

4. Whatever He has foreknown and confirmed from eternity, is so governed by his providence that nothing happens by fate but all things by necessity: not only the natural course of things, but also the will and the decisions, which He so bows to his goals that He even makes good use of the evil ones.

Another set of theses on predestination is from Nicolas des Gallars, seigneur des Saules (c. 1520 in Paris). He served in Geneva (1544), Jussy (1553), and again in Geneva (1555), being one of Calvin's closest associates. His first quaestio on election, probably dating from 1551, was: 'Does salvation come from election or from faith?' (no. 34)⁴² In his succinct propositions Des Gallars sketches the effect of foreordination in the life of the elect. The testimony of their adoption can be absent for some time and must be given by the Holy Spirit, ratifying the foreordination and bringing 'a firm and unailing hope of perseverance until the very last end.' The conclusion is: 'Salvation thus comes from God's election and is yet not without faith.' In the background we hear the critique, levelled against Bolsec's position, who reasoned from faith to election. Des Gallars' presentation of the interrelation between election and faith concurs with Calvin's.⁴³ Text and translation of this contribution are as follows.

[34] Gallasii

Sitne ex electione Dei salus an ex fide?

1. Qui praedestinati sunt ad vitam aeternam non ideo protinus habent testimonium suae adoptionis, sicque interdum ad tempus vivunt [265] ut nihil in specie differant a reprobis.
2. Tunc demum rata fit praedestinatio Dei ad salutem cum per spiritum cordibus hominum obsignatur ut se filios Dei esse non dubitent.
3. Testimonium quod habent fideles suae adoptionis a spiritu Dei, non modo eos de presenti gratia reddit certiores, sed finalis quaeque perseverantiae firmam et indubiam illis spem adfert. Ergo salus ex Dei electione nec tamen absque fide.

Does salvation come from election by God or from faith?

1. They who are foreordained to eternal life, do not therefore have the testimony of their adoption right away and they so live meanwhile for some time that they do not differ apparently in any thing from the reprobate.
 2. Only then is God's foreordination unto salvation ratified, when it is sealed in the hearts of men by the Spirit, in order that they may not doubt that they are children of God. /180/
 3. The testimony, which the faithful possess of their adoption by the Spirit of God, renders them not only more sure of the present grace, but brings about a firm and unailing hope of perseverance for them until the very last end.
- Salvation thus comes from God's election and is yet not without faith.

Also set 39 is a presentation by Des Gallars on predestination, bearing the date 8 January 1552 – that is shortly after Bolsec's banishment from Geneva. Alas, only the first line is preserved and testifies to the mere fact of a disputation on predestination, being held on that date. Set 40, maybe by Des Gallars, is again a full text. The question is: 'Has God chosen some before

II, vol. XVI, 371 (on Phil. 4:3).

41 Marks? Cf. Int. III xxi. Cf. 1 Pet. 2:8.

42 RCP I:179f.

43 Inst. III 24.

the foundation of the world unto life, while rejecting the rest unto death?⁴⁴ The propositions describe God's creation and governing, his providence, and our fall. From Adam's fallen posterity God accepts those whom He had chosen in Christ. The reject perish by their own sin. The position of Christ as the source of election and adoption is totally in line with Calvin's thoughts. Text and translation both of the 'Unvollendete' and of the complete disputation are as follows.

[39] Propositiones Nicolai Gallasii disputatae Genevae, 8 Januarii 1552.

Deus majorem gloriae suae rationem habens quam ingratitude nostrae, ob quam merito omni veritatis notione privandi essemus, nunquam [...] ⁴⁵

God, taking account of his glory, more than of our ingratitude, because of which we rightly should have been robbed of any notion of the truth, ... never ...

[40] ... ⁴⁶

Elegitne Deus ante mundi constitutionem aliquos ad vitam, reiiciendo reliquos ad mortem?

[1.] Omnia ab ipso creata suo tempore, ut eterna eius sapientia ante tempus ordinaverat, nunc quoque providentia eiusdem et imperio reguntur ut nihil nisi immutabili eius consilio eveniat.

[2.] Cum homo, quem rectum Deus considerat, peccato se et totum genus suum perdidit, nunc ex damnatis Adae posteris Deus sola misericordia adoptat quos visum est. Sicut eos elegit in Christo ante mundi constitutionem et eosdem in tempore non solum externa verbi predicatione (quod non sufficeret), sed arcana virtute sui spiritus vocans, eidem Christo usque in finem custodiendos mandat.

[3.] Cum omnes natura in Adam perditum sunt, quos visum est occulto quidem et inscrutinabili, iusto tamen iudicio, ad interitum destinatos reiicit: qui quamvis ut mali sunt⁴⁷ et reprobi nihil possint quam peccare, sua tamen non Dei culpa pereunt, ita ut nihil vitii illi imputari debeat.

Elegit igitur et reiicit.

Has God chosen some before the foundation of the world to life, while rejecting the rest unto death?

[1.] All things, created by Him in his own time, as his eternal wisdom has determined before time, are also today governed by his providence and ruling, so that nothing happens except by his unchanging counsel.

[2.] Because man, whom God regarded as good, had corrupted himself and the whole of his race by sin, God now accepts those whom He saw fit from the condemned posterity of Adam only through his compassion. As He has chosen them in Christ before the foundation of the world and calling them in time not only by the outward preaching of the Word (which would not suffice), but by the hidden power of his Spirit, He entrusts them to the same Christ in order to keep them until the end.

[3.] Because all are by nature lost in Adam, they are rejected whom He saw fit by his hidden and inscrutable, yet just judgment as destined to destruction. And they, although as the wicked people whom they are and as reprobate they can do nothing but sin, perish yet by their own and not God's fault, so that no mistake what so ever can be ascribed to Him.⁴⁸

He has thus chosen and rejected.

44 RCP I:181f.

45 This proposition, without any elaboration in theses and conclusio, was written by another hand on a piece of paper, which was then glued in the middle of f. 268.

46 The author of the following set of propositions could also be Des Gallars, but this is not certain.

47 ut mali sint?

48 Cf. proposition no. 32.

Why was it deemed necessary to discuss the doctrine of predestination in the Company again, only three weeks after the public presentation of 18 December 1551, in which the explicit consensus of all Genevan ministers was presented in public? It seems that the ministers were less convinced of a full 'consensus' among them than had been intended. As we saw above, Pierre Ninaud from Draillans, who had been absent, was suspected of association with Bolsec. In 1552 also Philippe d'Ecclesia, minister of the village Vandoeuvre, was charged of a less orthodox view on predestination.⁴⁹ These facts prove that the systematic discussion of the doctrine of predestination remained on the agenda of the Company of Pastors as long as the public debate went on.

There is only documentation of such systematic theological disputations for the years 1545-1552. We do not know if this practice continued in the following years or stopped for some reason. The second manuscript volume of the Company's minutes preserved no collection of propositions whatsoever. Still, these theological disputations are a logical 'Sitz im Leben' for which Calvin's disputation on predestination and providence could have been written. It is also conceivable, however, that the manuscript page is a sketch or outline of some other oral or written exposition of this doctrine in defence against critique. Still, such a draft would hardly have been preserved after the presentation had been delivered or the writing was completed.

7. INTERNAL ANALYSIS

The document is a defence against the objection to the doctrine of providence and predestination that God would be the author or cause of sin (no. 8, 11). The line of reasoning, however, begins with positive theses.

No. 1-4: the form and perspective of the articles in the first four theses is a straightforward presentation of two-sided predestination. God's eternal (*consilium*) preceded creation and includes the fall (no. 1-2). Upon this decree (*decretum*) depends the distinction between the elect and the reprobate (no. 3). God's justice, flowing from his mere will, is the only ground (*causa*) for this distinction (no. 4).

No. 5-7: after the first four theses come the fifth, focussing on the relation between election and faith. This was a crucial point in the Pighius-Bolsec conflict. Election is prior, both in time and order, to faith. This is a classical statement of Calvin, now expressed in terms of logic (no. 5). Therefore illumination is impossible without election (no. 6). Our election in Christ precedes (*ordine prius est*) that we are made his members (no. 7).

No. 8 brings together the fundamental thought that God's will is the supreme cause of all things (*summa et prima est rerum omnium causa*) and the reality of the devil and godless men. The premise that God's will is the *prima causa* does not imply that he is also the *causa* of sin or the author of evil. For there are also *causae secundae*, although not mentioned as such, to be reckoned with. Still, evil deed do not happen out of mere permission by God, but are also governed by God's *arcanum decretum* (as mentioned in thesis 1-2).

No. 9 could be levelled against Heinrich Bullinger. Are the deeds of men, also the evil deeds, governed only by God's *nuda permissio* or also by his *nutus* and the *arcanum decretum* (and therefore by God's will)? The distinction of *permissio* replaced the *causa* terminology. No. 10 expands on this, stating that God in his providence carries out his judgments through the devil and reprobate men. He uses them to a good end (*finis*).

Thus the *conclusion* is prepared: that everything is done by God's will and design, does not make him the author of sin. That must have been in the *quaestio*, preceding the theses: is God the author of sin when all things are done by God's will and design?

⁴⁹ See for the case against D'Ecclesia: De Boer, 'The Congrégation: An In-Service Theological Training Center', 77f.

The method of theological discourse is that of making proper distinctions (cf. *distinguunt* in the conclusion), which implies the teleological method (cf. *in bonum finem* in no. 10) and causal links. God's will is called *summa et prima causa* of all things (no. 8). The other causal distinctions, as found in *De aeterna praedestinatione Dei*, are not mentioned as such.

Calvin's opponent could very well be the teaching of Jerome Bolsec.⁵⁰ The physician stated over against Calvin that a. election and reprobation are not *ab eterno*;⁵¹ b. faith and unbelief are prior to election; and c. God is a tyrant when he condemns some to death, which makes him the author of sin. Such was his semi-pelagian teaching (over against a Augustinian monergism).

Our conclusion is that the structure and contents of this disputation points to the defence of the Genevan doctrine of predestination against the critique of Bolsec or defenders of (the theological right of) his position. The historical and systematic analysis is not contradicted by palaeographic or forensic evidence. This set of propositions, written by Calvin, can be regarded as a disputation, held in the closed meeting of the Company of Pastors following the weekly *congrégation*, and as documented in the body of remaining written *disputationes* from 1545-1552. While the appendix to the first volume of the *Registres de la Compagnie des Pasteurs* contains no texts from Calvin's hand, this document may testify to a Friday when he presented these propositions for disputation among the colleagues.

Does this smallest contribution to the most difficult doctrine add anything to our knowledge of John Calvin's thought? This question we will finally consider.

8. A DOUBLE DOCTRINE OF PREDESTINATION?

Calvin taught a 'gemina praedestinatio', a two-sided predestination of men, either to life or unto death. Did Calvin also have 'two doctrines of predestination'? Wilhelm Neuser, the patriarch of the International Congress of Calvin Research, wrote in the *Calvijn Handboek*: Calvin had two different doctrines on predestination, a pastoral one in the 'we'-form and a more logical one in the third person.⁵² Prof. Neuser has repeated and developed his interpretation of Calvin over the years in a number of studies. Can the development and various accents in Calvin's doctrine of predestination be explained as two different (and contradicting) doctrines in one mind?

Earlier Neuser had presented his careful critical edition of Calvin's *De aeterna praedestinatione Dei* of 1552 (COR 3/1). In the introduction to that work he rightly pointed to the *Congrégation*

50 See the various sets of articuli: 1. Bolsec's teaching at the congrégation of 16 October 1551 was summarized by the ministers in 13 articles (CO 8, 147f; RCP I, 85f); a set of 17 questions (articles) was submitted to the Council (CO 8, 149f; RCP I, 86f); 2. Bolsec put before John Calvin a series of question (articles) on which the latter answered in writing (CO 8, 178-183; RCP I, 104-107); the ministers presented 12 articles to the Council to be used in the further interrogation of Bolsec and of the witnesses (CO 8, 186f); 4. an undated set of 11 questions (articles), presented to the Council by the ministers for the interrogation of Bolsec (RCP I, 108f). All these series of articles are phrased in French because of the public character of the proceedings against Bolsec. It could be that Calvin's propositions in Latin are a summary, meant for internal use. The *Disputatio de praedestinatione*, however, does not correspond to the various topics and to the order of these topics in the questions put to Bolsec. The topic of free will, for example, is missing. The centre of Bolsec's critique to Calvin's doctrine of predestination was 'ce qu'il dict en la congrégation de la cause de la perdition des damnez' (RCP I, 89).

51 RCP I, 81.

52 *Calvijn Handboek*, red. H.J. Selderhuis (Kampen, 2008), 363; see also W.H. Neuser, 'Calvin the preacher: His explanation of the doctrine of predestination in his sermon of 1551 and in the Institutes of 1559', in *Hervormde Theologische Studies* 54 (1998) (Universiteit van Pretoria), 60-78, with on p. 79-103 a re-print of the Dutch translation by D. van Dijk uit Stemmen uit Genève (Goudriaan 1971); id., 'Calvin als Prediger. Seine Erklärung der Prädestination in der Predigt von 1551 und in der Institutio von 1559', in: Michael Beintker ed., *Gottes freie Gnade. Studien zur Lehre von der Erwählung* Wuppertal, 2004), 69-91.

sur *l'élection éternelle de Dieu* of 18 December 1551 as an important expression of the doctrine of predestination. It was in the public gathering of the ministers of Geneva – city and villages where a conscious consensus on this doctrine was presented to the people of the city Geneva. The name 'Consensus Genevensis' was explicitly chosen to establish a line with the celebrated *Consensus Tigurinus* of 1549 on the Lord's Supper, as reached between Heinrich Bullinger and Calvin on behalf of Zurich and Geneva. The 1551 Consensus remained, to Calvin's dismay, a local one. Therefore Calvin explicitly used the book he was working on, *De aeterna praedestinatione Dei*, to launch this consensus into the wider theological debate. Elsewhere I have tried to show how scholars have mistakenly called Calvin's book of 1552 (instead of the *congrégation* of 18 December 1551) the Consensus Genevensis.⁵³ Still, Neuser is quite right in drawing attention to this *Congrégation sur l'élection éternelle de Dieu* and pointing to the pastoral tone.

A *congrégation* was not a sermon,⁵⁴ but a discussion on Scripture between the ministers, aiming at the preservation of unity in doctrine. There were lay-people present, but their participation in the discussion was restricted. The predominance of ministers was especially visible in that special *congrégation* of 18 December 1551, following the condemnation of Jerome Bolsec. John Calvin took the lead, but all the ministers who were present, either expressed their agreement or added some thoughts to what their Moderator had said. Twelve ministers speak out – albeit in various keys, varying from pastoral-personal to logical-consistent. A number of them end their contribution by saying: 'This is what we believe and thereby we will die and live.'⁵⁵

Speaking of 'two doctrines of predestination' creates a false contrast between a 'remarkable pastoral' presentation of this doctrine in the *congrégation* in colloquial French and a 'strict and harsh' dogmatical one in the learned Latin book, *De aeterna praedestinatione Dei*, of the 1559 *Institutes*, aimed at a theological readership.

What doctrinal differences does Neuser detect? He sees a difference between *congrégation* and *Institutes* in the presentation of reprobation. In the *congrégation* Calvin starts with God's judgement on the fall: the reprobate ate condemned by Adam's and their own guilt. Thus 'God leaves them in their corruption' when He elects others to eternal life. Neuser concludes: 'In dieser Lehrform gibt es eigentlich nur eine ewige Erwählung und keine doppelte Vorherbestimmung.'⁵⁶ And: 'Will man doch von einer doppelten Prädestination sprechen, dann nur in der Weise, daß Gott Erwählte und Nichterwählte bestimmt.' In the first part of this text Calvin indeed speaks of unbelievers, not of reprobate (not even in discussing Esau). When at the end Calvin answers objections to the doctrine of predestination, reprobation is mentioned. Did Calvin bypass the element of God's justice by referring to Judgment Day when the books will be opened? Neuser stresses that Calvin thinks for a general reprobation because of the fall from which God elects some to salvation. Always 'steht hinter der Verwerfung kein göttlicher Beschluß (von Ewigkeit her), sondern die *reicti* sind ausdrücklich die *non electi*'. But Neuser himself is forced to add: 'Er spricht von der Verwerfung wiederum nur um der logischen Konsequenz willen.' Over against this presentation the *Institutes* seem to start systematic-theologically with the one *decretum aeternum* on a twofold destination, a pre-destination to life or unto death. Here Calvin draws primarily on Ephesians 1 and Romans 9-11. This is the apologetic-polemical method of teaching

53 'The 'Consensus Genevensis' Revisited. The Genesis of the Genevan Consensus on Divine Election in 1551', in: Ad fontes. Teologiese, historiese en wetenskaps-filosofiese studies binne reformatoriese kader. Festschrift vir Ludi Schulze, ed. Erik A. de Boer – Victor E. d'Assonville [Acta theologica 2004, Suppl. 5] (Bloemfontein, 2004), 51-78.

54 So W.H. Neuser in his studies, mentioned in note 42, and also in the introduction to the critical edition of *De aeterna praedestinatione Dei* in *Calvini opera denuo recognita* 3/1, XIIv (verder: COR).

55 Cf. Abel Poupin, Louis Treppereau, Raymond Chauvet, and Jean Fabri in: CO 8, 119-38.

56 Neuser, 'Calvin als Prediger', 88.

(as represented by Theodore Beza) .

My evaluation is that Calvin did not hold two – contradicting – doctrines of predestination in his bosom. There were, however, different modes of presentation. The *congrégation* in this instance is an address before the people in response to critique in the Genevan doctrine as voiced by a popular physician in the city. Calvin chose not to present a systematic line of reasoning, but to let Scripture speak. The context of the *congrégation* is, however, the Company of Pastors in Geneva. They trained themselves in systematic thinking and argument. The disputations, such as the manuscript from Calvin's hand, testify not to a different doctrine but to a mode of teaching, the academic *disputatio*. By such a learned and thought through disputation in the old tradition of theological scholarship the more pastoral presentation before the public was prepared. When the proper distinctions are used and the right method of theology is followed, the road is clear for public teaching in a pastoral vein. The one cannot exist without the other.

KEY WORDS

John Calvin
500th Commemoration
Disputatio de Praedestinatione
Predestination
Double doctrine of predestination

TREFWOORDE

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