

# BANNED BY THE *EVANGELICAL TIMES*!

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Rev. Angus Stewart

*Earlier this year, the BRF placed paid ads in several British evangelical newspapers for both the 2016 BRF Conference and the British Reformed Journal (BRJ). The Evangelical Times (ET) accepted our money and carried the ad for the conference but later refused the ad for the BRJ, after asking for a recent copy of it and The Five Points of Calvinism, a BRF book.*

*Below is a copy of the e-mail sent by Rev. Angus Stewart (BRF Chairman) to Roger Fay (Senior Editor of the ET) on 11 April, 2016. Minor improvements have been made, especially in order for publication in a journal, such as moving website urls from the body of the e-mail to the footnotes of the article and adding fuller bibliographical details, etc.*

Dear Roger,

I am disappointed and sad to hear that the *Evangelical Times* (ET) will not even accept a paid ad from the British Reformed Fellowship (BRF). I was also surprised because our previous correspondence was positive and cordial.

Given as the chief reason by the *ET* is that we do not believe that the (all-wise, righteous, eternal, unchangeable and omnipotent) Triune God earnestly desires (but fails) to save those whom He has reprobated (which, in our day, is commonly referred to as the well-meant or free offer). Yet our position is that of the *Formula Consensus Helvetica* (1675) which states,

The same Holy Scriptures testify that the counsel and the will of God do not change, but stand immovable, and God in the heavens does whatsoever he will (Ps. 115:3; Isa. 46:10); for God is infinitely removed from all that human imperfection which characterizes inefficacious affections and desires, rashness, repentance, and change of purpose (Canon VI).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> James T. Dennison, Jr. (ed.), *Reformed Confessions of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries in English Translation*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), p. 522.

At this rate, others who also could not pay for advertisements in the *ET* would include Augustine, the greatest of the church fathers;<sup>2</sup> Fulgentius of Ruspe, the leading African theologian in the sixth century, and all fifteen African bishops for whom he spoke;<sup>3</sup> Gottschalk of Orbais, the double-predestinarian and particular-redemptionist, ninth-century, Saxon monk who was imprisoned for nineteen years for his faith (and those who agreed with him at the time and since);<sup>4</sup> John Knox, the great Scottish Reformer;<sup>5</sup> Pierre Du Moulin, the seventeenth-century Huguenot theologian;<sup>6</sup> the authors and subscribers to the 1649 *Geneva Theses*;<sup>7</sup> the authors and subscribers to the *Formula Consensus Helvetica* (1675), etc. Hendrik De Cock, Abraham Kuyper, A. W. Pink, Gordon H. Clark, John Gerstner, John Robbins, William Young, John Bolt, Randy Blacketer, Robert L. Reymond, Matthew Winzer, and Richard Bacon—to mention just a few significant theologians (outside of our circles) in the last couple of centuries—also clearly and indisputably oppose an ineffectual desire in God to save the reprobate.

If you check out this webpage, you will see the same theological and biblical concerns/issues/problems that we have regarding a failed wish of God to save the reprobate in the exegesis of many divines of I Timothy 2:4, which has historically been at the heart of this debate.<sup>8</sup> We have similar listings of quotes on the other key verses: II Peter 3:9, Matthew 23:37 and Ezekiel 33:11.<sup>9</sup> The

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<sup>2</sup> “Augustine Versus a Desire of God to Save the Reprobate” ([www.cprf.co.uk/articles/augustineenchiridion.htm](http://www.cprf.co.uk/articles/augustineenchiridion.htm)).

<sup>3</sup> Francis X. Gumerlock, *Fulgentius of Ruspe on the Saving Will of God: The Development of a Sixth-Century African Bishop's Interpretation of I Timothy 2:4 During the Semi-Pelagian Controversy* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Victor Genke and Francis X. Gumerlock (eds. & trans.), *Gottschalk and a Medieval Predestination Controversy: Texts Translated From the Latin* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> “John Knox on the Four Main Texts Cited in Support of a Failed Desire of God to Save Everybody” ([www.cprf.co.uk/quotes/knoxsavingdesire.html](http://www.cprf.co.uk/quotes/knoxsavingdesire.html)).

<sup>6</sup> “Pierre du Moulin (1568-1658) Against a Universal Divine Saving Desire” ([www.cprf.co.uk/quotes/dumoulinsavingdesire.html](http://www.cprf.co.uk/quotes/dumoulinsavingdesire.html)).

<sup>7</sup> Angus Stewart, “The *Geneva Theses* (1649): A Recently Uncovered Jewel,” *British Reformed Journal*, Issue 62 (Spring/Summer, 2015), pp. 8-26 ([www.cprf.co.uk/articles/genevatheses.html](http://www.cprf.co.uk/articles/genevatheses.html)).

<sup>8</sup> “Quotes on I Timothy 2:4” ([www.cprf.co.uk/quotes/1timothy2v4.html](http://www.cprf.co.uk/quotes/1timothy2v4.html)).

<sup>9</sup> “Quotes on II Peter 3:9” ([www.cprf.co.uk/quotes/2peter3v9.htm](http://www.cprf.co.uk/quotes/2peter3v9.htm)), “Quotes on Matthew 23:37 and Luke 13:34” ([www.cprf.co.uk/quotes/matthew23v37.htm](http://www.cprf.co.uk/quotes/matthew23v37.htm)) and “Quotes on Ezekiel 18:23,

calibre of the men on these webpages is formidable, including Peter Martyr Vermigli, John Calvin, Jerome Zanchius, William Perkins, Theodore Beza, John Owen, Francis Turretin, etc., besides the theologians I have already mentioned.

You write, “I need to make clear that *ET* does disagree strongly with Arminianism and Amyraldianism.” But does the *ET* also ask all organizations which they think may express Arminian or Amyraldian views to send copies of their periodicals or books? Does it then read their literature and forbid them from paid ads and the Events Diary, as the *ET* did with us, if it finds Arminian or Amyraldian views in their writings?

All the peculiar points of Arminianism are rejected in the Reformed creeds (e.g., the *Westminster Confession* and the *Canons of Dordt*) and there are Reformed creeds specifically written to oppose Amyraldianism (the *Geneva Theses* and the *Formula Consensus Helvetica*, which both teach our view), besides other creeds which, to say the least, sit ill with Amyraldianism. Whereas the Pelagians, Semi-Pelagians, Arminians, Amyraldians, Lutherans and Roman Catholics clearly teach—and the Lutherans, Roman Catholics and Arminians have this in their creedal formulations—a resistible grace, that God earnestly wants to save every individual person (including the reprobate), the Reformed creeds do not teach this and at least two explicitly oppose it (the *Geneva Theses* and the *Formula Consensus Helvetica*).

In the “Opinions of the Remonstrants” (1618), the Arminians advocate what is today called the free or well-meant offer of the gospel:

Whomever God calls to salvation, He calls seriously, that is, with a sincere and completely unhypocritical intention and will to save; nor do we assent to the opinions of those who hold that God calls certain ones externally whom He does not will to call internally, that is, as truly converted, even before the grace of calling has been rejected.

There is not in God a secret will which so contradicts the will of the same revealed in the Word that according to it (that is, the secret will) He does not will the conversion and salvation of the greatest part of those whom He seriously calls and

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32 and 33:11” ([www.cprf.co.uk/quotes/ezekiel33v11.htm](http://www.cprf.co.uk/quotes/ezekiel33v11.htm)).

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invites by the Word of the Gospel and by His revealed will; and we do not here, as some say, acknowledge in God a holy simulation, or a double person.<sup>10</sup>

The BRF holds to the *Westminster Standards* and the *Three Forms of Unity*, and rejects the Arminian view set forth by them in their “Opinions” before the Synod of Dordt, yet we are deemed outside the pale for the *ET*. There is something wrong here.

As regards your criticism of our “tone,” this can be difficult to ascertain and involves a degree of subjectivity. A few minutes before my typing this, I received an e-mail from a formerly unbelieving and liberal pastor in the Czech Republic who recently finished reading *The Five Points of Calvinism* (the book we proposed giving free to new *BRJ* subscribers in our paid advertisement in the *ET* and which we sent to you in electronic format).<sup>11</sup> “Great book!” was his evaluation and, unlike the *ET*, he had no problem with the “tone.”

I agree with you that God calls for unity in the truth, and I add that the truth is antithetical and must be taught antithetically. Both points are biblical and Reformed. There are disagreements here among true believers. One man’s complaint about “tone” may be viewed by another as faithful, antithetical instruction or scriptural polemics. In our day, and especially given the spirit of the age in the world and in too much of the church, I believe that lack of conviction of the truth is a bigger threat (though this does not, of course, justify rudeness or nastiness).

Would the following statements by Reformed worthies opposing the notion that God desires to save the reprobate be acceptable to the *ET* as regards “tone”?

In his longest and most thorough work that addresses this issue, John Calvin writes sharply,

After this, Pighius, like a wild beast escaped from his cage, rushes forth, bounding over all fences in his way, uttering such sentiments as these: “The mercy of God is extended to

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<sup>10</sup> Peter Y. De Jong (ed.), *Crisis in the Reformed Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Fellowship Inc., 1968), pp. 226-227.

<sup>11</sup> Herman Hanko and David J. Engelsma, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (USA: British Reformed Fellowship, 2008).

everyone, for God wishes all men to be saved; for that end he stands and knocks at the door of our heart, desiring to enter. Therefore, those were elected from before the foundation of the world, by whom he foreknew he should be received. But God hardens no one, excepting by his forbearance, in the same manner as too fond parents ruin their children by excessive indulgence.”

Just as if anyone, by such puerile dreams as these, could escape the force of all those things that the apostle plainly declares in direct contradiction to such sentiments.

[1. Argument from election and reprobation] And just as if it were nothing at all to his readers when Paul positively asserts that out of the twins, while they were yet in the womb of their mother, the one was chosen and the other rejected, without any respect to the works of either, present or future (the former of which there could be none), but solely by the good pleasure of God that calls [Rom 9:10-13].

[2. Argument from the hardening of the reprobate] As if it were nothing when the apostle testifies, “It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy,” who hardens whom he will, and has mercy on whom he will [Rom 9:16, 18].

[3. Argument from the reprobate being “vessels of wrath”] As if it were nothing when the same apostle avers that “God sheweth forth his power in the vessels of wrath” in order that “he might make known the riches of his grace on the vessels of mercy” [vv. 22, 23]. Paul undeniably here testifies that all those of Israel who were saved, were saved according to God’s free election, and that therefore “the election obtained it, and the rest were blinded” [Rom. 11:7].<sup>12</sup>

What of the “tone” of William Twisse, the Prolocutor of the Westminster Assembly? Twisse is very pointed in his question:

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<sup>12</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin’s Calvinism* (Jenison, MI: RFP, 2009), pp. 139-140.

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Can you perswade your self that ever the world will bee brought about to beleieve, or any intelligent or sober man amongst them, that God desires the repentance and life of them, whom hee hath determined from everlasting to deprive of those helps without which no man can repent and bee saved?<sup>13</sup>

What about the “tone” of John Owen, possibly Britain’s greatest theologian? He writes of as unfulfilled divine desire as “extreme madness” and a “vain and fruitless flourish.”

Now, if this be not extreme madness, to assign a will unto God of doing that which himself knows and orders that it shall never be done, of granting a thing upon a condition which without his help cannot be fulfilled, and which help he purposed not to grant, let all judge. Is this any thing but to delude poor creatures? ... Were not this the assigning such a will and purpose to Jesus Christ:— “... That is, I do will that that shall be done which I do not only know shall never be done, but that it cannot be done, because I will not do that without which it can never be accomplished”? No, whether such a will and purpose as this beseem the wisdom and goodness of our Saviour, let the reader judge. In brief; an intention of doing good unto any one upon the performance of such a condition as the intender knows is absolutely above the strength of him of whom it is required,—especially if he know that it can no way be done but by his concurrence, and he is resolved not to yield that assistance which is necessary to the actual accomplishment of it,—is a vain fruitless flourish.<sup>14</sup>

It might also be worthwhile to point out that we have been (and are) called by many in the UK, repeatedly and over many years, “not Reformed” and “hyper-Calvinists,” under the recent redefinition of hyper-Calvinist. I would

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<sup>13</sup> William Twisse, *A Treatise of Mr. Cotton’s, Clearing certaine Doubts concerning Predestination, Together with an Examination Thereof* (London: Printed by J. D. for Andrew Crook, 1646), p. 233.

<sup>14</sup> John Owen, *The Death of Death* (Great Britain: Banner, 1989), pp. 129, 130.

guess that you have heard this too, Roger. Yet we reject, and write and preach against, the heresy of the hyper-Calvinists who oppose duty repentance and duty faith, and who insist on preaching the gospel promises and commands only to “sensible sinners,” for we preach the gospel to as many as we can reach and we wish we could reach more.<sup>15</sup> We do not care for the accusations or the “tone” of our critics, but we refute the accusations and do not bother with the hurtful tone. I find it ironic that our tone is used as a justification of banning us from placing paid advertisements in the *ET* whereas we are called worse by our critics (and, at least in our opinion, falsely) and with a worse tone. Now A. W. Pink is even being called a hyper-Calvinist in some circles, as are the “hyper-Calvinistic” *Geneva Theses* and John Owen!<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps it might help in explaining our position if I add that (1) we, for our part, are called to, and do, desire the salvation of our neighbours (Acts 26:29; Rom. 9:1-3; 10:1); and (2) we declare that God commands and approves of repentance and faith (for they accord with His holiness) but He does not inefficaciously desire these things in the reprobate (for that would contradict His omnipotence and perfect blessedness). Thus we believe (1) God’s will of command (what He tells us man must do, i.e., repent, believe and obey Him) indicates behaviour He approves of, is pleased with and delights in, as the infinitely just, righteous and holy Lord; and (2) God’s will of decree (His eternal, all-embracing purpose, including election, reprobation and everything which comes to pass) expresses what He desires, wishes and wants (and always affects for His own glory), as the timeless, unchangeable, omnipotent, all-wise and perfectly simple Jehovah. This article, “Does God *Really* Desire to Save the Reprobate?” fairly concisely states our main concerns in this area.<sup>17</sup>

I can appreciate your sentiment: “I am sure, like me, you would not want to get into unfruitful correspondence.” You may be relieved to know, Roger, that I have no intention to write further to you on this. I have only taken the

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<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., Rev. McGeown’s editorial in this issue of the *BRJ*.

<sup>16</sup> E.g., Martin Foord states, “John Owen’s doctrine of God and free gospel offer tends thus toward the so-called ‘hyper-Calvinism’” (“John Owen’s Gospel Offer: Well-Meant or Not?” in Kelly M. Kapic and Mark Jones [eds.], *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen’s Theology* [Abingdon-on-Thames, England: Routledge, repr. 2015], p. 295).

<sup>17</sup> Angus Stewart, “Does God *Really* Desire to Save the Reprobate?” ([www.cprf.co.uk/articles/doesGoddesire.htm](http://www.cprf.co.uk/articles/doesGoddesire.htm)).

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time to write as much as I have done because I would like to set forth to some tolerably complete degree our position, for I believe we have been unfairly maligned in many circles and that few of our critics appreciate the support we have in the historic Reformed and Christian tradition, theologically and exegetically, as even Richard A. Muller, probably the world's leading authority in the history of Reformed thought, agrees.<sup>18</sup> A lot of people have written us off and trotted out the stock mischaracterizations of us, without knowing or being given a proper presentation of what we believe.

If you want a short listing of the three most important articles that I have mentioned above, I would say that they are, Roger:

“Quotes on I Timothy 2:4”

“The *Geneva Theses* (1649): A Recently Uncovered Jewel”

“Does God *Really* Desire to Save the Reprobate?”

I would be gratified if you would read them.

I also appreciate and share your desire, Roger: “May the Lord lead us all into greater light and unity in Christ.” This is truly the wish of all God's people. But I am sad that we are deemed to be outside the pale for paid ads in the *ET*. I believe that Augustine, Fulgentius, Gottschalk, Vermigli, Knox, Beza, Zanchius, Turretin, the *Geneva Theses*, etc., are right but now their views are excluded as unacceptable by the *ET*. Many in our day are unwilling to oppose Arminianism and Amyraldianism, so it is good that you and the BRF at least appear to agree on this. The problem is that a desire of God to save everybody is crucial to the Arminians (see the “Opinions of the Remonstrants”) and the Amyraldians (see the Reformed opposition to them in this regard especially in the *Geneva Theses*) and this is frequently where they start in their arguments. This is also the case with Rome, as is evident by its repeated appeal to a desire of God to save the reprobate in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, along with its frequent use of the usual “proof texts,” such as I Timothy 2:4 and II Peter 3:9.

Moreover, after Augustine, widespread acceptance of a desire of God to save everybody led the way to, and/or went hand-in-hand with, the rejection of

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<sup>18</sup> E.g., Richard A. Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker 2012), pp. 107-125.



reprobation and the acceptance of universal atonement by most in the Western church and so into medieval semi-Pelagianism. The same pattern (with regional variation, according to the spirit of the age) is evident in Switzerland with the revocation of the *Geneva Theses* and the *Formula Consensus Helvetica*, much of Scottish and American Presbyterianism in the decades around the beginning of the twentieth century, and later in the Christian Reformed Church in N. America, etc.

There are all sorts of warnings going forth in the religious world in our day against the God who is really and absolutely sovereign, whose wishes and desires are always carried out (Ps. 115:3; 135:6). The Augustinian tradition—yet few even admit that is what it is and that we hold his views!—is branded as hyper-Calvinism, while Arminianism is insufficiently opposed and even tolerated in many churches (which tragically, in time, leads further into liberalism). How many churches in our land have already gone that way in the last few centuries and are going that way today?

I conclude by adding, Roger, that I recognize that the *ET* has the (creaturely) authority to include and exclude people, groups and views from its paper as it sees fit (cf. Matt. 20:15a).<sup>19</sup>

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Angus Stewart  
BRF Chairman

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<sup>19</sup> Similarly, the BRF has the right to publish as an “open letter” our defence of the Augustinian position on the absolute sovereignty of God over against the policy of the *ET*.