

Why the Memory of Servetus Should Be Kept Alive?

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Liberty of conscience is every man's natural right.

John Locke

Thomas Jefferson

Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legislative powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between Church and State.

Thomas Jefferson, 1 January 1802

Letter of reply to the Danbury Association

To uphold a tenet that contradicts reason is to undermine one's credibility, to contradict empirical evidence is a still greater fallacy.

Buddhist dictum

The Genius of Servetus

The genius of Michael Servetus was probably best described by the German theologian Adolf von Harnack who wrote: "The representative of the most remarkable union of the two tendencies – speculative mysticism and cold rationalism – was Michael Servetus, the Spanish thinker who is distinguished also for his profound piety. In him was found the fusion of all that was best in the sixteenth century development if one puts aside the evangelical Reformation. Servetus equally distinguished himself as a learned experimenter, as a critical thinker, as a speculative philosopher, and as a Christian reformer in the best sense of the word."¹

Undoubtedly the title of his major work *The Restoration of Christianity* is reminiscent of the proposal by Erasmus (1466-1536) who, however, satisfied his interests with philological studies and made no effort in reforming the old system of thought.

Servetus, in the realm of intellectual inquiry, demanded a radical reevaluation of the entire ideological religious system of assertions and dogmas imposed on Western Europe since the fourth century. His theological inquiry initiated the study of scriptural tradition in an attempt to uncover the real religious doctrines contained in it. In the process he developed a new more humane religion and a new understanding of divinity and divine matters closer to the realities of the human condition. It evolved eventually into biblical Unitarianism and in modern times into Universalist Unitarianism. This is one

major legacy² of Servetus which has importance for the evolution of religion. At the intellectual level it led to the development of critical biblical studies and to comparative studies of religions of the nineteenth century with great consequences for modern understanding of religion. Today biblical scholars confirm the discovery of Servetus and his universal understanding of the divinity which breaks with tribal or ecclesiastical particularism.³ Philosophers and religious scholars develop further Servetian understanding of the divinity which manifests itself and evolves in a historical process in the new concepts of process theology.⁴ Others, however, reject the ontological concept of divinity but recognize the importance of human values and make them the center of a true religion, a religion of the "Highest Values" as the one propounded by a Polish philosopher of religion, Stanisław Cieniawa.⁵

The other legacy has universal and durable value. It was consequential for the development of the Enlightenment and recovery of the ancient humanistic social paradigm. It concerns the function of society at the moral level. Servetus recognized the full potential of human nature, capabilities, and rationality. Thus he demanded freedom of intellectual inquiry, thought, conscience, and expression that was denied to millions on doctrinal theological grounds. At the same time he remained a deeply pious person. He believed in a personal divinity access to whom was granted to every believer without the intermediary of the ecclesiastical institution.

Establishment of a paradigm of ecclesiastical dominion.

Servetus's role as the central figure in history who initiated the process of recovering the social humanistic paradigm becomes obvious if we put it in a historical perspective.

Christianity developed originally from the Jewish eschatological speculations and expectations which were stimulated by the events of the first century B.C.E. and the first century C.E. in Palestine. This messianic movement gave rise to many writings and stories which were first codified in an organized system by the author standing behind literature ascribed to Paul who was undoubtedly influenced by the surrounding Hellenistic culture. His Messianism, later labeled as Christianity, was a result of a clash of two cultures – the theocratic, exclusive, repressive, and strongly nationalistic Jewish culture and the open, universalistic of the ancient Greeks and Romans. It represented an attempt at the reformation of the rigid Jewish system based on animal sacrifices and legal rules, and making it accessible to the Hellenistic people. The process went, however, beyond Paul's expectations and led to the fusion of the two cultures. This was facilitated by the fact that Hellenistic philosophers developed very sophisticated speculations concerning divinity and when combined with the Greek religious concept of the Mediator-Savior they could be easily adopted by the monotheism of the Jews.

In contrast to the Jews Greco-Roman society enjoyed toleration, freedom of religion, of conscience, and of thought. The ancient western world did not have the concept of "heresy" or "heretic." Greco-Roman society tolerated all religions and did not impose restrictions on free thought. This was due to the lack of a state religion and a state sanctioned theological doctrine, though the people and the centers of power were highly religious. All this was dramatically changed with the advent of state supported Christianity. From the fourth century Christianity became an institution of organized

clergy and was fused with the political power of the Roman Empire and later in the rest of the western Europe.⁶ Profession of religious, mythical beliefs became the touchstone of morality, reversing the humanistic principles of ancient morality. The ecclesiastical hierarchy became a political party and the secular state power became its executive branch. Laws were introduced that legalized religious, dogmatic assertions, imposed obligatory adherence, and prohibited any deviation in thought.

Thus in the fourth century a switch took place in the social paradigm, if we may borrow the concept from the history of science,⁷ from the humanistic principles of ancient morality to the new ecclesiastical one. The social paradigm can be defined as an entire constellation of beliefs, values, and worldview which is shared by the community and has a normative character. Initially it was imposed forcefully by the emperor and formulated by the clergy; later it became a tradition established by a system of laws (state and ecclesiastical), theological doctrines (e.g., the doctrines of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas).⁸

Theological doctrine of persecution and its evolution

Church fathers since the second century developed theological doctrine of persecution culminating in the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas differentiated between unbelievers and heretics and apostates: ...”the faithful, if they are able, should compel them [i.e. unbelievers such as gentiles and Jews] not to hinder the faith whether by their blasphemies or evil persecutions or even open persecutions. It is for this reason that Christ’s faithful often wage war on the infidels, not indeed for the purpose of forcing them to believe, ... but for the purpose of stopping them obstructing the faith of Christ...”⁹ And concerning the heretics he justifies their violent extermination:

As for heretics their sin deserves banishment, not only from the Church by excommunication, but also from this world by death. To corrupt the faith, whereby the soul lives, is much graver than to counterfeit money, which supports temporal life. Since forgers and other malefactors are summarily condemned to death by the civil authorities with much more reason may heretics as soon as they are convicted of heresy be not only excommunicated but, also justly be put to death.”¹⁰

Though acceptance of faith was to be free, once faith was accepted, even if through baptism of an infant, one was obliged to keep it as a matter of moral obligation, just like in Islamic *sharia*. Catholic position on freedom of conscience was explicitly and succinctly formulated by the director of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, before he became the present Pope Benedict XVI, in the following way:

The freedom of the act of faith cannot justify a right to dissent. This freedom does not indicate freedom with regard to the truth, but signifies the free determination of the person in conformity with his moral obligations to accept the truth.¹¹

The church practiced compulsory conversions and baptism wherever it was in power to impose its rule. The preservation of the church doctrine and the new social paradigm was scrupulously supervised by the ecclesiastical authority, institutions (e.g., infant baptism, canon law), and courts (e.g., Inquisition).¹²

Freedom of religion was slowly recognized in many countries after the Reformation as going against the teaching and practice of the Catholic and Protestant churches.¹³ This freedom became guaranteed in most of the Western countries and upheld by practically all political ideologies. The church is the last organization to recognize freedom of religion, however severely limited, for tactical reasons only, after almost fifteen centuries. One of the most important acts of the Vatican II Council (1962-1965) is undoubtedly the Declaration on Religious Freedom (*Dignitatis Humanae Personae*).¹⁴

The declaration is only a partial recognition of the processes that developed outside the sphere of the Catholic church control such as the rejection of a religious world-view imposed by a religious organization, the rise in man's personal consciousness and awareness of his personal dignity, and the rise in political consciousness and aspiration to live in a free society under a limited government with the freedom to exercise any religion.

The essence of this conciliar statement is freedom from coercion. The Vatican II position is merely a change in tactics since the church lost most of its traditional influence and power. The church still maintains its old dogma of exclusivity as representing the only true religion. It still maintains that it is a moral obligation of man and society to accept the Catholic church and its religion. It only restrains itself today from the use of coercion.

The same was proclaimed by the Vatican I Council. It mentioned in its documents that "submission of will and mind must be shown in a special way to the authentic teaching authority of the Roman Pontiff," and "the individual bishop can proclaim Christ's doctrine infallibly" (quoted p. 48 in Vatican II *Document*). The Code of Canon Law maintains the same church doctrine: "The College of Bishops also possesses infallibility in its teaching ... exercising their magisterium as teachers and judges of faith and morals ... "(Canon 749 # 2).

The most revealing is Canon 752:

While the assent of faith is not required, a religious submission of intellect and will is to be given to any doctrine which either the Supreme Pontiff or the College of Bishops, declares as a matter of faith or morals, even though they do not intend to proclaim that doctrine by definitive act.

Moreover, let's make no mistake, in spite of all attempts at reconciliation with the rest of the world, the church still claims that the whole world must be christianized and incorporated into the dominion of the Catholic church:

All must be converted to Him [i.e. Jesus] as He is made known by the Church's preaching. All must be incorporated into Him by baptism, and into the Church which is His body.

The Reformation

The Reformation arose in the sixteenth century aiming at correcting financial abuses of the ecclesiastical institution and a competition for political power by local centers.¹⁵ It brought also new trends: the assertion of individual, personal experience as a basis for religion, and an emphasis on biblical studies. It also underscored the need for tolerance, at least in the initial phase, for its own survival. Unfortunately, as soon as the “reformed” churches gained independence they, too, quickly became as intolerant as the old Roman church and ossified into the old dogmatic tradition. There were a few leaders of liberal religious thought who opposed the moral corruption and power of the popes and the clergy, though any real investigation of the accepted dogmatic assertions was persecuted by both Roman Catholic and Protestant churches.¹⁶ Protestants accepted the theological arguments of the Catholic church for the persecution of those who differed in their views based on the Hebrew Laws expressed in the book of Deuteronomy. The so-called heretics, apostates, and non-believers were considered sinners of the highest degree and their punishment was justified by a wide range of arguments ranging from the political necessity of maintaining the unity of the church and state to the vindication of God’s honor.

Humanism of Servetus

Out of this background then stands out the solitary figure of Michael Servetus, a bold mind daring to analyze afresh accepted dogmas and the authority of the ancient creeds and medieval theologians. The Christianity Servetus found in his lifetime had little in common with the scripture and its practice produced disastrous results in societies. He dared to question fundamental religious premises and single-handedly developed an alternative Christianity closer to the letter and spirit of the scripture. He also combined his religious doctrine with the naturalistic world view of his time in a unifying system of thought. He was unequalled in his time and remains one of the greatest minds in human history, one who contributed to universal culture.

With the rediscovery of humanism in the first half of the fifteenth century, Servetus became one of its most prominent representatives. His understanding of humanism was much more profound than the one propagated by the Renaissance humanists who were focused primarily on the study of ancient literature and culture, and limited to the secular interests in everyday life. They still retained a religious condemnation of human nature. The humanism of Servetus went much deeper as he understood it as a defense of human dignity, liberty, and potential for self-redemption through the good works which were to be the highest values in Christian life. He remained a deeply religious person with Christ as the central motif of his existence and guide for his personal and professional conduct.

Man, according to Servetus, occupies a special place in the world. His soul is produced by inspiration of the divine element and mixing with the elements of blood. All this is in accordance with Plato's contention that man is made of a mixture of the elements and the substance of divinity and with the views of Trismegistus that man was born of divine substance, the light, and life.¹⁷ Even more, making reference to Pythagoras

and to Philo of Alexandria, Servetus claimed that man is basically divine: "Philo says in the book *On Agriculture* that the soul of man was made with the image of the Word serving as an exemplar Therefore man was made after the example, form, and figure of Christ, in body and in soul."¹⁸ Man is analogous to Christ in composition. The spirit of man is a hypostasis of the Spirit of God, so man is a hypostasis of the Word of God, and both communicate with us. Servetus's insistence on our closeness to God, even after the Fall, is the most outstanding characteristic of Servetus's humanism and differentiates him from other humanists. God still communicates with us and this is done through the natural physiological process.¹⁹ This is an innate gift of grace available to all humans. From such an understanding of a natural physiological process comes Servetus's interest in pulmonary circulation.

Servetus placed great value on human natural spontaneity, reason, and capability to do good works, and through this he emphasized human dignity and autonomy in moral decisions. Catholics could not agree with him because he eliminated the role of the church and the papacy for justification and salvation, and Protestants disagreed with his concept of faith and accepting the works of love. Though he states that faith is first a precondition of secondary grace, he confirms that love is the greatest and supports this statement with several arguments. "Faith then, to conclude, if considered in its pure and essential property, does not contain such perfection as love ... Love is superior to everything ... durable, sublime, more resembling God, and closer to the perfection of the future age."²⁰ Even faith now from the act of mental assent to the credible propositions became an act of will, and is "a creative act of the soul."²¹ Luther, Calvin, and other reformers denied man any spontaneity and moral impulse.

Human nature cannot be depraved, condemned, utterly corrupt, and helpless, claimed Servetus in opposition to the reformers and Catholics. There is no inherent necessity for sin in man, no state of sin and depravity. Though Servetus justified this state by constant communication with God through God's innate Spirit and inner light, he believed that we have knowledge of good and evil, and that we act with a free will. Sin thus becomes qualified, conditioned by historical, cultural and personal factors. And from this Servetus was able to deduce a universal and humanistic moral principle:

Natural righteousness is to give everyone what is his: that is, to help everybody in need and harm nobody; to do what conscience and natural reason dictate so that whatever you want others to do to you, do to others. In such righteousness ... nations are justified and saved, including the Jews.²²

Thus, all nations and peoples are taught from nature. Israelites were capable of righteousness through the Law and all other people through an inner natural light. Servetus granted all men dignity and recognized equal endowment in their ability to recognize good and evil.²³

Struggle for Freedom of Conscience

Servetus was the first Christian thinker in modern times who proclaimed in clear terms the right of every individual to follow his own conscience and express his own

convictions. He was the first to express an idea that it was a crime to persecute and kill for ideas. His argument was rational based on a humanistic principle of morality:

Neither with those nor with others I am in agreement in everything, because all seem to me partly right and partly in error. Moreover, everyone sees the error of the other, but nobody sees his own It would be easy to distinguish all this if in the church all people would be allowed to speak by contending in a prophetic spirit.²⁴

Servetus clearly stated that persecution and killing for ideas is contrary to the teaching of the apostles and the original church doctrine. In a letter already in 1531, to Iohannes Oecolampadius (Johan Hausschein), leader of the Reformation in Basel, Servetus stated:

If you find me in error in one point you should not on that account condemn me in all, for according to this there is no mortal who would not be burned a thousand times The greatest of the apostles were sometimes in error. Even though you see Luther erring egregiously on some points you do not condemn him in the rest Such is human frailty that we condemn the spirits of others as impostors and impious and except our own, for no one recognizes his own errors ... I beg you, for God's sake, spare my name and fame ... You say that I want all to be robbers and that I will not suffer any to be punished and killed. I call almighty God to witness that this is not my opinion and I detest it, but if ever I said anything it is that I consider it a serious matter to kill men because they are in error on some question of scriptural interpretation, when we know that the very elect may be led astray.²⁵

This assertion of Servetus was later fully elaborated by Sebastian Castellio in his famous defense of Servetus and condemnation of Calvin, *Contra libellum Calvini* (1554):

To kill a man is not to defend a doctrine, but to kill a man. When the Genevans killed Servetus they did not defend a doctrine, they killed a man. The defense of a doctrine is not the matter to be resolved by the judges, it is an issue only to be solved by teachers. What has the sword to do with the matter of teaching?²⁶

In a letter to judges in Geneva dated August 22, 1553, Servetus defended the right to freedom of conscience and expression. He accused the court of instituting "a new invention unknown to the apostles, to their disciples, and the ancient church of initiating criminal procedure for the doctrines of the Scripture or for the theological themes derived from it." Even the Arians in the time of Constantine the Great were not handed over to civilian tribunals in accordance with the ancient doctrine, but the church alone decided such questions and the only possible punishment for "heresy" was banishment. Such a punishment was used against heretics in the primitive church. On the basis of these precedents he demanded to be set free from the criminal accusations.²⁷

Servetus's struggle for freedom of conscience was a part of his program for the restoration of Christianity and one of the "heresies" for which he was condemned. Servetus attempted to discuss the issue with Calvin in one of his letters to Calvin sent with *Christianismi restitutio*. He approaches a problematic subject in his time and rhetorically asks himself whether it is permissible for the Christian to fulfill the duties of a magistrate or to be a king, or to kill. And Servetus answers to himself that: "While there is the world, regardless whether we want it or not, we have to preserve the worldly order, especially the one which is safeguarded by the administration of justice." And he admits the death penalty for some especially malicious crimes, but categorically rejects such a penalty for schism or heresy.²⁸

In his religious program, Servetus inspired by the rising spirit of the reform Servetus foresaw a plan for the restoration of Christianity to its simplicity and integrity. His basic premise is that the faith is a free voluntary and spontaneous act, an impulse or élan of the heart and only as secondary aspects brings with itself an act of rational approbation. From this he concludes that the infant baptism and forceful indoctrination or forced conversion are abuses of human rights and dignity. In his doctrine of justification Servetus differentiated the first justification by faith from the justification obtained by the posterior works in accordance with the Catholic doctrine and contrary to that of Luther or Calvin. And this justification by works derives from the recognition of the natural justice shared by all mankind as was taught by Paul (Rom. 2;14-17). And he links this doctrine with the Neo-Platonic and Stoic thought and explains its psychological mechanism in naturalistic terms. In terms of practice of religion Servetus recognizes three ministries: preaching, baptism, and dominical supper. He wants to restore the universal priesthood which was also Paul's doctrine (Thes. 4:8). The church is not a divine institution as the Catholic church claimed, but reunion of the believers.

Setting in movement a process of change in the social paradigm

Just like in science where the accumulation of new data and scientific facts makes it necessary to reevaluate the old paradigm and establish a new one,²⁹ so personal sacrifice of a pious scholar became a turning point inducing thinking people to rethink the morality of the prevailing church ideology and mental framework of how religion and society treated the issue of intellectual inquiry and its repression.

The idea of punishing "heretics" was so pervasive in the society that it did not occur even to most thinking Protestants that the whole concept of repression of thought was evil and against the spirit, and the letter, of the Gospels. No Protestant religious leader was against the punishment of heretics in general. Even Sebastian Castellio, recognized champion of rational tolerance and a precursor of the French Revolution and the *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme*, could not avoid these contradictions. Only later did he develop, through the experience of the fraternal religious war in France, the concept of mutual toleration and freedom of conscience. Though he still recognized the scripture as the source of valid statements, the concept of "*liberum arbitrium*" became the foundation of human rationality and natural moral principle. The trap of contradictions and theocratic mentality were so pervading that even in the eighteenth century Jean Jacques Rousseau wrote in 1762 in his *Contrat social*, that in the future

ideal state, one who did not believe in the religious truths decreed by the legislator should be banished from the state or even, one who, after having recognized them, would cease to believe should be punished by death.³⁰

A month after the publication of Calvin's *Defensio* there appeared in Basel an anonymous, eloquent pamphlet against intolerance entitled *De haereticis, an sint persecuendi...* A few weeks later there appeared a French translation of this treatise entitled *Tracté des hérétiques, a savoir, si on les doit persecuter, etc.*³¹ This treatise was later translated into German and Dutch (1620, 1663), and English (1935).³² The book contained extracts promoting toleration taken from the writings of some twenty five Christian writers, ancient and modern, including Luther and Calvin himself and was authored by Castellio, perhaps with some collaboration from Laelius Socinus and Celio Secondo Curione. Castellio wrote also a rebuttal to Calvin's *Defensio*, in the already mentioned *Contra libellum Calvini*.

The movement for tolerance grew out of the influence of Castellio and his associates in Basel. Servetus's martyrdom gave a stimulus to the rise of religious toleration as a general policy, as a moral principle. But the process was very slow and lasted for several centuries before the switch in paradigm could take place.

The figure of Servetus stands out at the beginning of the movement. In the later phase Castellio deserves more ample recognition than he received. He continued to point out that most important is the principle of absolute tolerance of differing views. This position was an outgrowth of an entirely new concept of religion initiated by Servetus as centered not in dogma but in life and character. It is the very essence of this kind of religion to regard freedom and reason not as incidental but as fundamental conditions of a thoroughly wholesome existence of religion.

Servetus's legacy was first spread by the Italian humanists and reformers Francesco Stancarò, Giorgio Biandrata, Gianpaolo Alciati, Valentino Gentile, Bernardino Ochino, and Lelio and Fausto Sozzini in Poland and Transylvania, and led to the development of the Antitrinitarian or Unitarian movement represented by the Unitarians of Transylvania and the Socinians of Poland. In Poland they were known as the Minor Church or Polish Brethren. After their expulsion from Poland they developed into the Unitarian movement in England and America. Socinians were the first who demanded and fully understood the moral imperative of the complete separation of church and state. Such ideas were developed by Faustus Socinus (1539-1604), John Crell (1590-1633), Christopher Ostorodt (d. ca 1611), Andrew Wojdowski (1565-1622), John Sachs (1641-1671), and particularly by Samuel Przymkowski (1592-1670) and Jonasz Szlichtyng (1592-1661).³³ They published numerous treatises in Poland and in Holland and defended their rights against the machinations of Jesuits who eventually succeeded in the destruction of the Reformation in Poland.

Przymkowski, for example, argued in six points in a pamphlet entitled *Brotherly Declaration* (1646), the importance of guaranteeing freedom of conscience: 1. It is a fundamental right on which is based the integrity and freedom of the republic; 2. It is a foundation of the unity of the republic composed of many ethnic and religious groups; 3. It is a foundation of the social equality of citizens; 4. it is a foundation of all civil liberties; 5. It is a guardian against religious and ecclesiastical jurisdiction; 6. It is the highest law. Przymkowski, still in another treatise, *On the Law of the Christian*

Magistrate and Private Person in War and Peace (1650), and Szlichtyng in *Apology for the Truth* (1654), developed a complete modern and secular doctrine of the separation of church and state.

Moral, social, and political doctrines of the Socinians eventually led to the development of the Enlightenment. Their ideas were perfected, extended and popularized by writings of philosophers John Locke (1632-1704), Pierre Bayle (1647-1706), Voltaire (1694-1778), and David Hume (1711-1776).³⁴ The arguments used by John Locke in his famous four *Letters on Toleration*, published in Holland between 1683 and 1689, coincide with those used by the Polish philosophers. Locke possessed in his library a complete set of Socinian works and certainly read them. He presented a detailed analysis of toleration and church-state relations from a political point of view, obviously suitable for the circumstances in England. A severe weakness of Locke's statements in which he contradicted himself, as well of some statements of the Polish Brethren, was the exclusion of atheists from religious liberty. Pierre Bayle made numerous references to the Socinians and introduced one more element for the change of the social paradigm: namely, *he was the first in the Christian world who argued for the separation of ethics and morality from religion. He also defended atheism on a rational basis.*

The ideas of John Locke were transplanted directly to the American continent by James Madison (1751-1836) and Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), who implemented them for the first time in American legislation.³⁵ They were philosopher-statesmen who shared a strong conviction of absolute freedom of conscience and distrusted any kind of established ecclesiastical institution. Their conviction was that the established churches create only "ignorance and corruption" and introduce the "diabolic principle of persecution." The exercise of religion should be completely separated from government. Toleration was not enough; only absolute freedom could be acceptable. For them democracy was the best guarantee of religious freedom. It was an institution that erected a "wall of separation" between church and state, and protected the liberties of minority groups against the imposition of majority views. Both were broadly educated and Jefferson had a keen interest in studying religions, especially Servetus and the Socinians.³⁶

Epilogue

Recent events such as the attack on the World Trade Center in New York, suicide bombings in various part of the world including the Middle, Near, and Far East, and attacks of religious groups on practice of science and its tenets, persistent rejection of rationality in the Western world, make one ponder if the world is regressing into a new cave age and the sacrifice of Servetus was in vain. As, especially people in the Western world, hoped that they finally achieved the state of harmonious coexistence of various ideologies and worldviews, we observe resurgence of the old doctrines formulated in or extracted from the old texts written hundreds or thousands of years ago. The most disturbing fact, however, is that all these evils are done in the name of protecting and strengthening morality of humankind under the cover of the injunction of the highest authority, the divinity.

In the Islamic world the situation is still more complex since Islam did not experience Renaissance or Reformation thus in its main trends is still dominated by fundamentalism. Though no Christian faction renounced its exclusive claim to truth, they were forced after bloody struggle to a compromise of peaceful coexistence. Main trend in Islam, however, takes an extreme position. Moslem tradition maintains that all previous prophetic religions were initially true, but at a certain stage of their evolution they became corrupt and ceased to exist as true religions. With the emergence of prophet Muhammad and appearance of Islam Judaism and Christianity were abrogated. Islam supersedes all other religions and is now the only true one with a divine mandate to convert the rest of the world.³⁷ Servetus in his program had a hope that by restoring Christianity to its original simplicity it could be united with Judaism and Islam.

Ideology is the driving force behind any social event or change. It is the most powerful motivation for humans and can inspire them to the lofty acts of sacrifice and altruism as well as to the most hideous and atrocious acts of savagery. No wonder that the reaction among many intellectuals to rising extremism and fundamentalism to condemn all traditional theistic religions as the “root of all evil.”³⁸

Theistic religion is the most common form of ideology. It stands at the center of most cultures. It performs several functions. At the psychological and epistemological level it may give an explanation for the meaning of life and the world, and instructions on how to live accordingly. At the social level most religions serve the rulers of societies as a tool for its organization. This was succinctly stated by the Greek philosopher, Isocrates (436-338 B.C.E.): “Men who show piety will be equally submissive to all other injunctions.” In practical terms thus religion can be defined as follows: “religion is constituted by a set of beliefs, actions, and experiences, both personal and corporate, organized around a concept of an Ultimate Reality. This Reality can be understood as a unity or a plurality, personal or nonpersonal, divine or not, differing from religion to religion.”³⁹

Since the nineteenth century, with the development of new evolutionary ideas which were applied not only to the external world where the process was originally discovered, but also to the ideology and religion, we came to the realization that religious ideology, theology, evolves with the rest of the human endeavors. Thus we can label the twenty first century as the century of evolutionary outlook. There are two, it seems, major movements of thought related to religion.

Movement 1. One issue is the critical study and reevaluation of the written sources of various religions and their tenets. In Christianity in modern times it was initiated by critical studies of the Bible during the Reformation and continues in the comparative studies of religions. It leads to modification of accepted dogmas or to nontheistic types of “religion” exemplified by the Religion of the Highest Values propounded by Stanisław Cieniawa or secular Humanism. According to him there are many confessions, i.e., the traditional theistic religions, but only one authentic true religion which was also discovered by Jesus himself, the intuition of the highest ethical values.⁴⁰ Cieniawa wrote:

The central principle governing harmony in the human realm is the dependence of internal peace and happiness on the mental or spiritual order, that is, order in the domain of values, and, more precisely, on the search and active implementation of the highest values in every domain which we encounter in all the stages of our practical life. The cult of the Highest Truth excludes any divagation concerning heaven, hell, reincarnation, or any form of existence beyond the grave. On the other hand, trust in our own Intuition of the Highest and our courageous fidelity to this Intuition in practical life, guarantees us, as Karl Rahner affirms, an experience of existence in harmony with values, that is, experiencing a happy eternity here and now. This is the essential but regularly ignored sense of religious life.⁴¹

The other key theoretical issues in the first movement is the traditional trinitarian dogma. The incendiary character of this issue was already feared by Erasmus. In his 1972 exhaustive study Edmund J. Fortman, a Catholic theologian, summarized it this way:

The formulation of this dogma was the most important theological achievement of the first five centuries of the Church ... yet this monumental dogma, celebrated in the liturgy by the recitation of the Nicene creed, seems to many even within the Church to be a museum piece, with little or no relevance to the crucial problems of contemporary life and thought. And to those outside the Church, the trinitarian dogma is a fine illustration of the absurd length to which theology has been carried, a bizarre formula of 'sacred arithmetic.'⁴²

Fortman's study was followed recently by that of yet another Catholic theologian, Karl-Joseph Kuschel, and Anthony F. Buzzard.⁴³

Movement 2. The second movement is diversified and tends to accommodate the natural sciences to religious doctrines or religious doctrines to natural sciences, depending on whom we ask. As initiators of this type of approach we may consider Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Alfred North Whitehead, and Charles Hartshorne.⁴⁴ This trend arose with the realization of the epistemological superiority of the scientific method and reason over the revelation but still preserving the supernatural reality.

The second movement occurs in two varieties: A. One is the broad based and popular attempt at unification of the natural sciences and religious speculations; B. The other is more restricted, based primarily on philosophical speculations, the so-called process theology or process thought.

A. From the side of theologically oriented natural scientists or scientifically oriented theologians there is a trend to use the natural sciences as a standard against which all theological speculations can be now evaluated. This trend is exemplified by the spreading movement supported by the Templeton Foundation which has one goal only – to prove scientifically that god exists. The title of the award given yearly by the Foundation reflects this attitude: The Templeton Prize for Progress Toward Research

Discoveries about Spiritual Realities. Of course, this is a subterfuge, because the Templeton Foundation knows perfectly well that science cannot prove anything like that. Some scientists openly admit that they are believers in some kind of Christianity (or other religious systems), but that they do not have any evidence or that they believe in spite of not understanding the theological, religious premises. Others on the other extreme of the spectrum, like Paul Davies, who, when talking about various design schemes for the universe says: “I accept the fact that all the physical systems that we see, from the biological realm right through to the galaxies, are the products of natural physical processes and I would not use the word design in connection with those.” When asked how he visualizes God he answers “First of all I try to avoid using the word “god.”... I have in mind something like that rational ground in which the laws of physics are rooted. My position is the rational ground on which the order of the universe is rooted, but the crucial quality here is that this rational ground is timeless. ... what I am talking about is something beyond space and time, so this is not a god within time, not a god to whom you can pray and have something change, because this god is a timeless being ... If you want to use the laws of physics to explain how the universe came to exist, then these laws have to transcend the universe – they have to exist in some sort of timeless Platonic realm, and that is what I really do believe.”⁴⁵ And he rejects religion based on the Bible classifying it as a sort of “madness.”

B. In the process theology model God, though he is still an absolute, immutable, independent and infinite being, is placed in a temporal process, creative and dependent upon the free decisions of his creatures. His perfection is understood now in terms of his social relatedness where he responds to all creatures in every event (his love). God grows with the evolving world but he does not know the contingent events.

All these developments and trends religious movements are a result of a natural process which could be initiated only after the reversal of the paradigm of ecclesiastical dominion and recovery of the ancient Hellenistic humanistic paradigm. The key figure who symbolizes this turning point is Michael Servetus. Though we may not agree with all of his postulates he remains a beacon on the horizon of history.

As long as the traditional religion remains in the sphere of personal and private relation of an individual to the supreme being, there is little danger to the society as a whole. The danger appears when the religious tenets become institutionalized, declared to be an absolute truth which is to be supported, taught, and spread by an army of professional clergy and when they dominate or influence the secular organs of the governing body with legal and physical means of coercion. In the pluralistic societies, and they are increasing in number in the era of globalization, the only remedy for avoiding religious ideological conflicts is the realization in practice that all religious faiths are only subjectively true and none can be designated objectively true on a rational basis.

Thus the Pope Benedict XVI commits a gross error when he claims in his recent speech at the University of Regensburg that “theology rightly belongs in the university and within the wide-ranging dialogue of sciences, not merely as a historical discipline and one of the human sciences, but precisely as theology, as inquiry into the rationality of faith.”⁴⁶ And he calls that “listening to the great experience and insights of the religious traditions of humanity and those of the Christian faith in particular” be recognized as “a

source of knowledge, and to ignore it would be an unacceptable restriction of our listening and responding.” There is in this statement an internal contradiction since all theologians and all religions emphasize the fact that the supernatural world is unintelligible, unreachable, shrouded in the mysteries which have to be revealed to humankind in order that we might learn about. Even then when supposedly revealed they are unintelligible as exemplified by the mystery of the Trinity. It is ironic that the Pope appeals to the statement of the Emperor Manuel II who said in the context of violence inspired by faith “God is not pleased by blood – and not acting reasonably ... is contrary to God’s nature.” Servetus, Castellio, Socinians, Locke, Hume, and all other philosophers of the Enlightenment would agree with the Emperor. Precisely, because of their faith, church Fathers developed their contrary theological doctrine.

For humanity to reach this conclusion will probably require a new stage of struggle and the development of a new paradigm.

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