

SERVETUS AND CALVIN

From the Introduction to Michel Servetus “Thirty Letters to Calvin & Sixty Signs of the Antichrist”, translated by Marian Hillar, and Christopher A. Hoffman, from *Christianismi restitutio* of Michael Servetus (Lewiston, NY; Queenston, Ont., Canada; Lampeter, Wales, UK: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010).

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Michel de Villeneuve in Paris and Lyon (1531-1536)

We shall begin this introduction with a moment when Servetus returned to Basel after publishing his first book *De Trinitatis erroribus* in 1531, in Hagenau, in Alsace. Servetus’s book spread all over Europe and he sent several copies to his friends in Italy. It became the seed from which was born Socinianism, an antitrinitarian, biblical unitarian religious movement which was organized in Poland in the second half of the sixteenth century. Melancthon, in order to stop the spread of these ideas, sent to the ministers of Venice a letter with a warning against the "impious error of Servetus."¹ In his eagerness Servetus also sent copies to Spain, even one to the archbishop of Zaragoza, and to Erasmus. Erasmus did not judge the work favorably and wanted to distance himself from antitrinitarian ideas since he already had enough problems.

Back in Basel, Servetus was not persecuted, and Oecolampadius recommended that the City Council ignore him if he recanted his views. He wrote: “Servetus's book contained some good things which were rendered dangerous by the context. The work should be either completely suppressed or read only by those who would not abuse it.”² Servetus requested in a letter to Oecolampadius permission to stay and to be able to send the copies destined for France undisturbed. He defended

his cause pleading for religious freedom and freedom of conscience:

If you find me in error in one point you should not on that account condemn me in all.... The greatest of the Apostles were sometimes in error. Even though you see clearly how Luther errs in some points you do not condemn him. And I sought your instruction but instead you rejected me. Such is the frailty of the human condition that we condemn the spirit 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 thieves and that no one should be punished or killed. I call Almighty God as witness that this is not my opinion and I detest it. But if ever I said anything it is because I consider it a serious matter to kill men because they are in error on some question of scriptural interpretation, when we know that even the elect ones may be led astray into error.³

It appears that Servetus received permission, tacit or expressed, to stay. But the sale of the book was prohibited in Basel. He was also afraid for his life as is attested by his letter to Oecolampadius. We do not know how long Servetus stayed in Basel, but before leaving the city again he published in the Fall of 1532 a second pamphlet of 22 double pages, *Dialogues on the Trinity in Two Books* (*Dialogorum de Trinitate libri duo*), to which he added a treatise of 25 double pages, *On the Righteousness of Christ's Kingdom* (*De Iusticia regni Christi, ad iusticiam legis collata, et de charitate*), with the intention of stating more precisely his views on the subject.⁴ The second book, too, was denounced and the Inquisition in Toulouse issued a decree for the arrest of about forty fugitives, monks and students, on June 17, 1532. Among them, first on the list, was Servetus. The Inquisition in Spain noticed the Servetus publications and initiated its investigation as well.

Servetus left Basel, though we do not know whether he was forced to go. He later wrote that when he was a youth of scarcely twenty, persecuted and exiled, he felt discouraged and considered giving up his cause and even thought of leaving Europe for America: "as Jonah rather to flee to the sea, or to one of the New

Islands.”⁵ He went first to Paris for a short time to study at the University of Paris (Collège de Calvi) and mathematics at College of Lombards. Eventually he went to Lyon, disguising himself under the name of Michel de Villeneuve (Villeneufve in old French orthography; Michael Villanovanus) and disappearing as a person.

In Lyon Servetus at first was employed for two-to-three years as a corrector of proofs for the press of Melchior and Kaspar Trechsel, a very honorable employment that required scholarly knowledge and competency in classical languages. Servetus probably corrected medical books that were printed at that time in Lyon, the works of Galen and Hippocrates in Greek and Latin with the French translation by François Rabelais. Soon the brothers Trechsel charged him with the new edition of *Geography* by Claudius Ptolemy of Alexandria, the second century Egyptian astronomer.

During this time he occupied himself studying mathematics, geography, and astronomy and got interested in medicine reading the medical works coming off the press written by Symphorien Champier (known also in the latinized form as Campegius, ca. 1471-1537), founder of the Medical Faculty at Lyon. Champier, an illustrious physician, theologian, botanist, and astronomer was a typical man of the Renaissance. After studying medicine in Paris and Montpellier, he settled in Lyon, and became a physician to the duke of Lorraine. Servetus, younger than Champier by 39 years, became his amanuensis and student. He certainly was influenced by Champier's philosophical humanism and eventually was prompted to study medicine in Paris.⁶

In 1534 we find Servetus back in Paris studying at the Collège de Calvi where he became professor of mathematics and prepared himself for a career in medicine. Years later, in his second edition of Ptolemy's *Geography* in 1541 dedicated to his protector the archbishop of Dauphiné, Pierre Palmier, Servetus informed his readers that Archbishop Palmier was his auditor while lecturing at the University of Paris. It was the time when the *Parlement* of Paris (a judicial body) and the Inquisition were on their way to eradicate any heterodoxy in France.⁷ Already a year earlier Calvin declared his first dogmatic assertions in Paris, became known as a reformer, and had to flee in 1533 to safety.

John Calvin – Introduction to Reformation

John Calvin (Jean Cauvain) (1509-1564) was born in the town of Noyon in the Picardy region of France. His father, Gérard, was a notary at the local cathedral and his mother a daughter of an innkeeper. He had two brothers, Charles, and Antoine. At the early age of twelve he was employed by the bishop as a clerk and even received a tonsure. It was hoped that he would become a priest. Under the patronage of a wealthy family of Montmors he was sent to Paris in 1523 where he studied Latin at the Collège de la Marche under Professor Mathurin Cordier (1477-1564), a known Latinist, and later at the Collège de Montaigu where he was a student of philosophy under Natalis Béda (d. 1536), principal of the college.

After his arrival in Paris in 1523 Calvin quickly became acquainted with the events and movements among humanists and reformers and joined the secret Protestant church. He was introduced to French Protestantism by his cousin, Pierre Robert, called Olivétan,⁸ who was considered to be the founder of the French language because of his translation of the Bible into French.

In 1525 or 1526 his father withdrew him from Collège de Montaigu and enrolled him at the University of New Orléans to study law. In 1529 Calvin entered the University of Bourges for about eighteen months where he was influenced by the humanist lawyer, Andreas Alciati. Here he continued to study classical languages and developed an interest in reading the Bible. He was back in Paris in 1530 studying at the Collège des Trois-langues (later called Collège Royal and Collège de France) newly opened by King François I. Sometime during this time he had a religious experience which led him to a break with the Roman Catholic Church. In 1532 he received his licentiate in law and published his first book, a commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia*. After a short trip to Noyon and New Orleans he returned to Paris in October.

Until 1533 Calvin probably considered himself an innovator and did not intend to break with the church. The turning point and the declaration of a new faith by Calvin took place on the occasion of a famous speech delivered at the inauguration of the academic year on November 1, 1533. During this time tensions

arose between the humanist-reformers and the conservative faculty members at the Collège Royal. Nicolas Cop, rector of the University and friend of Calvin, delivered an inaugural speech in which he emphasized the need for reform and renewal of the Catholic Church. For long time it was thought that the speech was written by Calvin, but modern scholarship rejects this legend.⁹ It was an attack on the sophists of the Theological Faculty at the Sorbonne and an exposition of Calvin's doctrine of the certitude of salvation due to the grace of God which later became the basis of his theory of predestination. The speech ended with the glorification of those who are persecuted for religion, a cry for missionary zeal in propagating the new *philosophia christiana*, a biblical doctrine, as opposed to the accepted scholastic doctrine, and an appeal for peace in the church based on “the word and not on the sword.” Calvin, however, reversed his role twenty years later and became himself a persecutor.

The Cop speech caused a strong reaction from the Theological Faculty at the Sorbonne and the *Parlement* ordered his and Calvin's imprisonment for “heresy.” Both escaped from Paris, Cop to Basel and Calvin to Saintonge.¹⁰ Calvin spent two years as a refugee in various places, and he was even imprisoned in his native town of Noyon under suspicion of heresy, but managed to escape.

He returned to Paris secretly in 1534 between April and October while Servetus was still there. This is the first time that Servetus and Calvin were to meet secretly and debate theological issues. Calvin wanted to convince Servetus of his errors and arranged a meeting; however, Servetus failed to appear at the appointed place on the rue St. Antoine.¹¹ He was finally forced to flee France during the Affair of the Placards in mid-October 1534 when some unknown reformers had posted placards in various cities attacking the Catholic mass. In January 1535 Calvin joined Cop in Basel, a city under the influence of the reformer Johannes Oecolampadius. In March 1536, Calvin published the first edition of his *Institutio Christianae Religionis* (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*). It was a defense of his faith and his doctrine as a reformer. It also was to serve as an elementary instruction book in the Christian religion. Calvin opposed in it the tyrannical oppression of conscience by the church, its authority to make laws which bind conscience and called pastors of the church

“butchers.”¹²

Calvin updated and modified this book throughout his life. Shortly after its publication, he left Basel for Ferrara, Italy, where he briefly served as secretary to Princess Renée of France. By June he was back in Paris and following the Edict of Coucy which gave a limited six-month period for heretics to reconcile with the Catholic Church, Calvin decided to leave France. On the way to Strasbourg, a free imperial city, due to military manoeuvres of imperial and French forces, he had to make a detour and ended up in Geneva.

Servetus Studying Medicine in Paris (1536-1538)

In 1536 Servetus is back in Paris studying geography and medicine probably on the advice of Symphorien Champier. He matriculated at the University of Paris in the College of Lombards as Michael Villanovanus on March 24, 1537 (or 1538 according to the new calendar). Among his professors were such famous names as François Jacques Dubois (Sylvius, d. 1551) and Guinter de Andernach (1487-1574). He supported himself by giving lectures in mathematics within the wide range accepted at that time: astrology, astronomy, and geography. He already gained some recognition for the publication of Ptolemy's *Geography* the year before. Now Servetus took part in the dispute concerning the use of the syrups taking an independent position advocating their discriminatory use. He wrote a popular book on the subject, *Syruporum universa ratio ad Galeni censuram diligenter expolita*, Paris 1537 (several editions of the work appeared, in Venice in 1545; in Lyon in 1546, 1547, 1548).¹³ According to Servetus, “Syrups are neither worthless nor should they be accepted blindly.”

Servetus was an active student taking part in the dissection of cadavers, serving as a prosector for Professor Jean Guinter de Andernach (Johannes Guinterius Andernacus). Jean de Andernach praised Servetus in his work *Institutiones anatomicae* (Basel, 1539): “After him [Andreas Vesalius, 1514-1564, Flemish anatomist from Wesel] is Miguel Villanovanus, who was my friendly assistant in dissections – a person who is an honor in any field of erudition – and does not have an equal in the knowledge of Galen.”¹⁴ But both were not Guinter's assistants at the

same time, since Vesalius left Paris in 1536. Vesalius went to Italy, obtained his medical degree from the University of Padua and taught anatomy at the Universities of Pavia, Bologna, and Pisa. He performed anatomical demonstrations, conducted dissections and became a popular lecturer. He made a sensation by a demonstration that men and women have equal numbers of ribs. Vesalius quit research after writing his epochal *Humani corporis fabrica* and became court physician to emperor Charles V and his son, king of Spain, Philip II. He was eventually accused by the Inquisition of heresy and sentenced to die, but his sentence was commuted to a pilgrimage to Palestine. On the way back his ship was wrecked and he died at sea off the coast of Greece. With Andreas Vesalius,¹⁵ Servetus is recognized as the father of modern anatomy.

There is an interesting recorded episode when Servetus lectured on astrology which adds a new dimension to his multifaceted life. Among the Reformers, Calvin opposed astrology and even wrote a treatise against it in 1549.¹⁶ He described it as an “insane curiosity to judge from the stars future events in man's life” and called it a “diabolic superstition.”¹⁷ But even he was not completely free of astrological connotations. Calvin did not oppose the use of astrological predictions in medical treatment and considered it a true science for physicians to determine the appropriate time for blood letting, application of medical concoctions and other medicaments. “Thus,” he said, “one has to admit that there is a certain relationship between the stars and planets and the dispositions of the human body. And this is the object of the study of natural astrology.”¹⁸ He still believed that God could act through the celestial events stating: “Nevertheless, I do not deny that when God wants to extend his hand in order to pass a judgment to the world worthy to be remembered, he may sometimes use the comets for this purpose. But this does not mean, however, that men and their condition are perpetually influenced by heaven.”¹⁹ One can imagine now how much the uneducated of that period relied on astrology!

Astrology was practiced in two branches: medical and judicial. Medical astrology was a descriptive science of the effects of celestial bodies on the objects on earth including the human body, and therefore regarded as legitimate. Galen

postulated a relationship between the crisis of the disease and the critical days connected to changes of the moon. He considered cyclic astral changes causes of the periodical manifestations of certain diseases.

The other type of astrology was the so-called judicial science, trying to predict the future and fate of man. This type of astrology was condemned by Cicero and Diocletian. The church also rejected judicial astrology but not the influence of the stars on the body. The first burning at the stake of an astrologer, Cecco d'Ascoli, took place in 1327. Cecco calculated the birth and death of Christ using astrological technique. The Bible itself accepts astrology in general and makes prominent use of it. With the publication in 1543 of Copernicus's *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* and the demolition of Ptolemy's system, a decisive blow was given to the principles of astrology.

Servetus's lecturing on astronomy strayed into the second type of astrology which the dean of the Medical Faculty at the University of Paris, Jean Tagault, tried to stamp out. The rumors must have spread about this as Servetus says: "When I was lecturing publicly on astronomy at Paris a certain physician [Jean Tagault] interrupted my lectures and attempted by two arguments to overthrow the entire subject, that part which predicts from the stars as well as the other which observes the celestial movements by the use of instruments."²⁰

When Servetus's course was terminated, he responded with a pamphlet of 16 pages *Michaelis Villanovani in quendam medicum apologetica disceptatio pro astrologia*, Paris 1538.²¹ This pamphlet was opposed and censured by the Medical Faculty at the University.²² Servetus was ordered again to withdraw his pamphlet but he refused, so Tagault brought the matter before the procurator general of the king. A council was called which on March 18, 1538, admonished Servetus to cease the practice of judiciary astrology. The Faculty also decided to request the *Parlement* of Paris to prohibit the printing of the *Apology*. Since Servetus already distributed the work gratis for wider readership, the matter was presented to the *Parlement* on a formal basis. Servetus defended himself on grounds that he talked only about natural things – the eclipse of the Moon by the star Lion's Heart and that in medical matters he

referred to Hippocrates and others. The court acquitted him, ordered him only to withdraw the exemplars of his pamphlet from the printers and booksellers under penalty of a fine, and prohibited him from publicly and privately teaching judiciary astrology. He could, however, practice astrology for the observation and disposition of natural phenomena.

Michel de Villeneuve in Charlieu and Vienne

Servetus eventually left Paris and opened his medical practice in Charlieu, a town in the Department of Loire, some 500 km from Paris and 80 km from Lyon. Servetus lived in Charlieu in a house which was the property of the family Rivoire, connected with the Cardinal de Tournon. His goal was to practice medicine and not to attract attention. Here he was a country doctor and became the private physician of the primate of France.²³ He stayed there for about three years.

He met at Lyon in 1540 Archbishop of Vienne Pierre Palmier (ruled the diocese between 1528-1554) who was his auditor at the University of Paris. Palmier persuaded the printer Kaspar Trechsel to set up a press at Vienne and also sponsored Servetus giving him a position as his adjunct physician and settled him in an apartment in the palace precinct in Vienne. Lyon was at that time the second city in France after Paris, an intellectual and commercial center where the humanist movement was very active.²⁴ Since the fifteenth century Lyon was a large center for printing books and by the sixteenth century it had about 100 printers. Servetus developed cordial relations with the aristocracy in the region. He cured the daughter of Antoine de la Court, the Vice-bailiff and judge, and showed devotion to the ill during the plague of 1542. Nominally Servetus was a Catholic, attended church and abstained from religious discussions. He also continued to work as a corrector for the Trechsel press set up in Vienne.

The hopes and expectations of the humanists were illusory; to their astonishment they were called the enemies of the church, makers of schism, accomplices of heresies. As such they were brutally persecuted from about 1536 when Cardinal de Tournon was appointed to exterminate all heresy in the region.

Pierre Palmier himself was an unusual person. He was interested not only in

theology, but also in science and new knowledge. This, however, did not make him less eager to exterminate heresy and heretics. He wanted to convert his archbishop's palace into a cultural center under his patronage. In 1528 he was nominated archbishop of Vienne and accepted as his physician Jean Perelle who in 1535 dedicated to Palmier his edition of the work of Teodoro Gaza (1398 - 1478), *De mensibus atticis*. Six years later in 1541 Servetus will dedicate his edition of Ptolemy's *Geography* to Palmier and will state in the dedication that Jean Perelle was his co-disciple in the Faculty of Medicine in Paris.²⁵

In 1540 Servetus appears as the editor of the Bible of Santes Pagnini. There were several editions of Bible translations including the Complutensian Polyglot Bible, the publication of which was coordinated by Cardinal Francisco Ximenes de Cisneros in cooperation with the most distinguished scholars in Europe. Santes Pagnini (1470 -1541) was a Dominican monk from Lucca, a pupil of Savonarola (1452-1498, who was hanged and burned in Florence for heresy and critique of the church practices), an erudite in Hebrew and classical languages. Pagnini became a professor of classical languages at the College of Oriental Languages, founded by Pope Leo X. He dedicated twenty-five years to the translation of his Bible from the original languages into Latin, which was first published at Lyon in 1527/1528. This edition is said to be the first to be divided into chapters and verses. The next edition appeared in 1541 in Cologne edited by Melchior Novesianus and then was corrected by Servetus and published by Hugues de la Porte in 1542 as *Biblia Sacra ex Santis Pagnini tralatione sed ad Hebraicos linguae amussim novissime ita recognita et scholiis illustrata ut plane nova editio videri posit. Lugduni, apud Hugonem a Porta. MDXLII, cum privilegio ad sex annos*. Servetus added a preface and notes for better understanding of the Bible. He accused biblical studies for not reaching for the literal and historical sense but searching in vain for the mystical meaning.

The theologians in Louvain suspected the Pagnini Bible of heresy and placed the book on the Louvain *Index librorum prohibitorum*. It was also prohibited by the Spanish Inquisition. The Council of Trent in 1546 did not accept it for use by the church, but instead selected the inferior Vulgate.

Servetus in Vienne and Correspondence with Calvin

After his arrival in France, Servetus did not discuss any religious issues publicly. The edition of the Pagnini Bible rekindled his own plans of broadening the scope of reform and he envisioned a plan for restoring Christianity to its original simplicity and purity free from all accrued traditions of philosophy and misconceptions about the Bible. He found in Lyon a kindred spirit in the printer Jean Frellon who was nominally a Catholic but sympathetic to reform and a friend of Calvin in Geneva. Servetus, eager to see if he could win Calvin to a radical reformation of Christian doctrines, entered into a long correspondence with Calvin using Frellon as an intermediary and sending him copies of his own writings. Calvin was a personage especially interesting to Servetus, since he was one of the most distinguished leaders of the Reformation, highly successful in Geneva, young and erudite. The correspondence started in 1546, when Calvin used the pseudonym of Charles D'Espeville, and Servetus signed the letters with his assumed name. The correspondence was used by Calvin much later as evidence against Servetus to burn him at the stake. Calvin gave us two of his letters and Servetus's replies in his *Defense of the Orthodox faith (Defensio orthodoxae fidei)*. Thirty letters/treatises which were included in the *The Restoration of Christianity (Christianismi restitutio)* were never sent to Calvin and they constitute rather a new genre of literary form – the essay.²⁶ Calvin commenting on an irritating idea of Servetus states that it is found in the *Letter 27* “of those thirty which he published as if they were actually written to me.”²⁷ It seems, however, that at least some of them may have been sent to Calvin, perhaps not in the final form, because in the acts of the trial in Vienne are included a “cayer” of fourteen letters and “deux carnets” of other writings.

The first three questions submitted by Servetus to Calvin were: 1. “Is the man Jesus, the crucified, the Son of God, and if so, how did this come to be?”; 2. “Does the kingdom of Jesus Christ exist among men; and if so, at what moment does one enter it and how is one regenerated?”; 3. “Should the baptism of Christ be a requirement of faith, as is the Lord's Supper, and to what purpose were these instituted under the New Testament?”²⁸ Calvin first briefly answered the questions

and then excused himself politely that he was busy – he would have to write a book to answer Servetus; thus he referred him to his *Institutio* sending it together with the letter.

Servetus was not satisfied with Calvin's response, and he annotated the book and sent it back to Calvin²⁹ and a second letter asked Calvin five more questions and urged him to read the fourth book on baptism in the Servetus manuscript.³⁰ This was the first mention about a new work by Servetus. Thus Servetus must have included in his first letter a fragment of his manuscript concerning baptism.³¹ Calvin wrote to Frelon, the mutual friend, on February 13, 1546, that he received a letter from Servetus written in a proud spirit to which he answered more harshly than usual. But Calvin wanted to teach Servetus a lesson in humility, and added: “If he [Servetus] continues writing in the same style you will lose time only asking me to work on him since I have other more pressing affairs to take care of. And I will pay more attention to them since I do not doubt that it was Satan who distracted me from my more useful reading.”³² The same day Calvin wrote the third letter to Guillaume Farel, his fellow reformer at Neuchâtel, stating: “Servetus lately wrote to me and coupled with his letter a long volume of his delirious fancies, with the Thrasonic boast, that I should see something astonishing and unheard of. He proposes to come hither, if it be agreeable to me. But I am unwilling to pledge my word for his safety, for if he shall come, I shall never permit him to depart alive, provided my authority be of any avail.” (*Nam si venerit, modo valeat mea auctoritas, vivum exire nunquam patior*).³³

The correspondence continued for some time until Calvin became irritated by the insistence of Servetus and his disputational spirit. His patience was finally exhausted and he wrote in a lengthy letter that he was willing to answer only if he knew what Servetus really wanted.³⁴ Servetus replied again in a defying tone: “Since you fear I am your Satan, I stop. So then return my writings, and farewell. If you really believe the Pope is Antichrist, you will also believe that the Trinity and infant baptism as taught by the Papacy are a doctrine of daemons. Again farewell.”³⁵

Calvin never returned Servetus's writings and became his strongest enemy. They were undoubtedly part of the first draft of *Christianismi restitutio* and were

accompanied by a note “From your brother and friend Michel Villanovanus, doctor of medicine in Vienne.” Servetus also wrote to other reformers such as Abel Poupin, a pastor since 1543 and colleague of Calvin in Geneva. He insisted in a preserved letter on the antievangelical nature of the dogma of the Trinity: “Instead of God you have a Cerberus of three heads: the Trinity.”³⁶

Servetus realized again that he could not influence the major figures of the Reformation as before he could not influence Oecolampadius or Bucer. His manuscript was practically finished in 1546, but he devoted the next seven years to rewriting and revising his major *opus*, whose fragments were already sent to Calvin together with some letters. It was finished in 1552 and sent to his friend Martin Borrhäus, professor of theology and printer in Basel. Servetus, however, got it back with the reply dated April 9, 1552: “Let God's grace and peace be with you. *Michael carissime*. I received your book with your letter. At present it is not possible to publish it in Basel. I think you yourself know the reasons *Marrinus tuus*.”³⁷ Nor was Trechsel, the printer of Ptolemy's *Geography* and the Pagnini Bible willing to do it. He finally found a printer in Vienne, Balthasar Arnoullet and his brother-in-law Guillaume Guérout, who agreed to print the book.

The press for printing Servetus's work was set up in secrecy outside the city operated by three workers. The printing took place between September 27, 1552, and January 3, 1553. The edition contained about 1000 printed copies which were not bound but distributed in bales simulating paper. Three shipments were prepared: one was sent through Frelon to the Frankfurt book fair, the largest in Europe at that time; the second went to bookseller Jacques Berthet's shop in Geneva, probably designated to the printer Robert Estienne; the third was sent via the river Rhône to the shop of Pierre Merrin, the type-caster in Lyon.³⁸ Berthet was not aware of the heretical nature of the printed book. Calvin, however, got one copy of the book, probably from Frelon who took the liberty of forwarding one to him not foreseeing the danger to Servetus. The identification of the author was no problem since Servetus himself disclosed his true name to Calvin. Calvin began immediately working on a plot against Servetus.

Practically all of the printing was destroyed. In Geneva it was destroyed after establishing contact between Estienne and Calvin. In Frankfurt the load was destroyed after Calvin wrote to the pastors of the church there on August 23, 1553, forewarning them about the blasphemies and errors of the book.³⁹ The distributor, forewarned on time, did not put the books up for sale. The load designated to Merrin in Lyon was returned to Vienne and burned together with an effigy of Servetus on June 17, 1553. Such was the fate of the book that, according to the Catholic tribunal of Vienne and the Protestant tribunal in Geneva, justified the death of Servetus at the stake. Though the book had no chance to produce any effect since it was not put up for sale, according to the authorities intention was enough to put someone to death. Shortly before the trial of Servetus in Vienne, five Protestant students who came to Lyon were burned at the stake by the Catholic Inquisition because of their alleged “intention” to propagate their faith.⁴⁰

Only three copies⁴¹ of *Christianismi restitutio* survive to this day, largely due to bibliophiles more interested in their books than in their faith.

Exposure and the Trial at Vienne

The environment of Vienne in which Servetus lived was especially hostile to any heterodoxy. The region remained since 1536 under the jurisdiction of the governor of the Lyonese province, Cardinal François de Tournon, a diplomat, politician and an especially vigorous persecutor of “heretics.” He was nominated Lieutenant General of the king for all the provinces in the southeast responsible for religion, justice, finance and war. He set up in 1535 an Inquisition by the *Parlement* of Paris that was nicknamed because of its bloody activity the “*chambre ardente*,”⁴² to protect France from the influence of Luther and Calvin. During the reign of Henri II, heretics were burned in France by the thousands. Cardinal de Tournon was responsible for the murder of thousands of Valdensians and Albigensians during the many years of his rule.⁴³

Matthieu Ory was another bloody persecutor and, as president of the Ecclesiastical Court of the Holy Apostolic See, was called from Rome by Cardinal de Tournon. In 1536 he was nominated Inquisitor General for France and all of Gaul to

combat the progress of "heresies," especially in the diocese of Lyon which was threatened by its proximity to Geneva. In a treatise dedicated to his superior, the Very Reverend Cardinal de Tournon, he made a defense of his sanguinary *métier*. He pointed out that Acts 19:19 of the New Testament commended the burning of occult books: "If then dead books may be committed to the flames, how much more live books, that is to say men? The Scripture says that a witch should not be allowed to live and heretics are spiritual witches. The law of nature commands that a corrupted member be amputated, the tares, of course, were not to be rooted out in Christ's day when the rulers were not yet Christians. The case is altered now."⁴⁴

Servetus in Vienne was aware that Calvin knew his identity, but he did not expect to be betrayed by the Protestants in Geneva. Calvin, upon learning about the book *Christianismi restitutio*, designed an intricate scheme to condemn Servetus. He already had enough material from the manuscript he received in 1546, but now he had it in printed form. His long conspiracy against Servetus and desire to get rid of him reached the culminating point. Already in 1550 he denounced Servetus's doctrine in his work *De Scandalis*,⁴⁵ revealing Servetus's name as Villanovanus, his nationality and profession, except for the place where Servetus worked. It was only because of some oversight on the part of the Inquisition that Servetus was not investigated earlier.

Evidently disappointed that no action was taken against Servetus by the Inquisition in Vienne, Calvin decided to initiate it himself. However, because of his reputation and standing in Geneva, Calvin could not act on his own, so prevailed upon his intimate, Guillaume de Trie, a merchant in Geneva and former sheriff of Lyon to do it for him. De Trie a fanatical and bigoted Protestant himself, fled to Geneva from the Catholic persecution in 1549. On February 26, 1553, de Trie sent a letter to his cousin Antoine Arneys, a devout and zealous Catholic, accompanied by the first eight pages of Servetus's book, torn from Calvin's exemplar (nobody else could have had a copy of the book) complaining about the ""heresies" allowed in Lyon. The letter was dictated by Calvin and charged Servetus specifically.

Historians debated as to who wrote the letter.⁴⁶ But it is clear that the letter could have been written or dictated only by Calvin. With it were included the first four leaves of the *Christianismi restitutio* which could come only from Calvin.

The letter was a scheme designed by Calvin to alert the Catholic Church authorities about Servetus. Moreover Calvin sentenced Servetus already to death at the stake. One can attempt to excuse the letter by the emotional status of Calvinists in Geneva watching helplessly as their correlative religionists were being burned in Lyon. Calvin's anger could be directed at a target under his reach, one equally objectionable to the Catholics and Protestants. Arneys, as it was expected, communicated this letter from his cousin, together with the pages of Servetus's work, to the Inquisitor of Lyon, the Dominican friar, Matthieu Ory who immediately proceeded with organizing the investigation, collecting additional material from de Trie and Calvin, setting up interrogation and the trial.

The role of Calvin and de Trie is especially contemptible since they were themselves "heretics" by Catholic standards, yet they helped the Catholic church to persecute a fellow Christian. That the accusatory letters signed by de Trie were dictated by Calvin was also the view of the judges who condemned Servetus at Vienne. For a long time Calvin preserved the secret of Servetus but at the first opportunity Calvin did not hesitate to attack him and reveal his identity to the Inquisition by which Calvin himself would be burned at the stake at the first occasion. Calvin strongly supported capital punishment for those who deviated from imposed doctrines – his own doctrines in the region under his control. He later defended the punishment of Servetus in his *Defensio orthodoxae fidei christianae* (Geneva 1554).⁴⁷ He does not deny the charge made against him of betraying Servetus to the Catholics, but he is evasive and only claims that he had not done anything directly with the inquisitors at Vienne.⁴⁸

The original letters of de Trie were published only in 1749 by a canon from Vienne, Antoine Gachet d'Artigny (1706-1778)⁴⁹ and after a few centuries of inquiry into the role played by Calvin and de Trie, all the facts indicate that Calvin was

directly involved in their writing and furnished the material. Calvin certainly supplied de Trie with the first sheet of *Christianismi restitutio*, with Calvin's book *Institutio* bearing the annotations made by Servetus, and a dozen of Servetus manuscripts which were sent to Calvin in confidence. He did all this knowing full well that he was putting into the hands of the inquisitors evidence by which Servetus was to be put to death. Servetus denounced Calvin at the trial at Vienne as the instigator⁵⁰ and later during the trial at Geneva reproached Calvin with treachery.⁵¹

At the first interrogation Servetus gave a brief account of his life omitting all references to his interactions with the Protestants. When he was shown the printed pages of Calvin's *Institutio* with hand-written annotations, he admitted that it might be his handwriting. Asked how he interpreted this text he answered in a way that was satisfactory to the church. At the second interrogation on April 6, 1553, Servetus was shown some of his letters to Calvin. To explain how they were written he gave an evasive answer saying that he wrote them in Germany with the intention of asking Calvin for his opinion. For this purpose he assumed the identity of Servetus.

It now became clear to Servetus that he was in real danger. Taking advantage of some laxity in the procedures of the Inquisition and special treatment for himself, he managed to escape from the prison.

In May the Inquisition found two printing presses in a country house and three young men who under pressure and threats confessed that they were printing a book from last Saint Michael's day until January 3, but they did not know the contents as it was written in Latin, and remained silent "for fear of being burned." Also, they revealed the details of shipping the book to Lyon, to Pierre Merrin the caster of type.

The bales were transported to the episcopal palace in Vienne. It is estimated that only some thirty copies of the book were sold in Frankfurt and Geneva. A few copies were also retained by the authorities.⁵²

The trial of Servetus continued *in absentia* for ten more weeks and the sentence of the civil court was pronounced on June 17. The vice-bailiff and the Delphinian royal judge began by listing the charges against Servetus. He did not limit

himself only to the facts, but also presented the consequences which they might produce, thus trying to aggravate to the maximum the responsibility of the condemned. The list of charges was as follows: “the crime of scandalous heresy, dogmatization; elaboration of new doctrines, publication of heretical books; sedition; schism and disturbance of unity and tranquility by public rebellion; disobedience against the decree concerning heresies; breaking out and escape from the royal prison.” The sentence continues:

We have declared and declare that all the evidence was duly and properly obtained. On the basis of it... we have pronounced him guilty of the crimes he was accused of ... and if caught he is to be taken together with his books in a *charrette* on a market day from the gate of the Delphinal palace, through the streets to the market place of this city named Charnève and burned alive in a slow fire until his body is turned into ashes. In the meantime this sentence is to be executed on his effigy together with which will be burned his books. His property and possessions are confiscated to pay for the legal costs.

Servetus was already earlier excommunicated as was indicated in the sentence pronounced later by the ecclesiastical tribunal. The clerk of the court Chasalis duly recorded that the same day the effigy of Servetus made by François Berodi, the executioner, was placed on a dump cart together with the five bales of the printed book recovered from Lyon. The cart was conducted by the executioner to the market place Charnève, the effigy was affixed to the post especially erected and burned with the books in the presence of the authorities and other onlookers.⁵³

The ecclesiastical judges of the ecclesiastical tribunal in Vienne continued the debate declaring Servetus on the 23 of December, guilty of a very great “heresy” (... *dictum Villanovanum maximum fuisse hereticum*) and, after listing all of his deviations from orthodoxy, declaring all his writings “erroneous, wicked, impious, sacrilegious, and more than heretical,” they ordered all the seized copies of his work to be burned, eight weeks after Servetus himself was already burned at the stake in

Geneva.⁵⁴

Calvin in Geneva

The Reformation in Geneva⁵⁵ was initially a political matter which threw off the yoke of the Duke of Savoy in 1530 and that of his vassal, Bishop Pierre de La Baume, in 1533. The bishop ran away from the city leaving it prey to the revolutionary preacher and fanatic zealot-reformer, Guillaume Farel (1489-1565),⁵⁶ who was characterized by Erasmus in these words: “Never in my life had I seen so presumptuous and shameless a creature.” Farel was able to mobilize the lowest instincts of the mob to raid the churches, remove the images of the saints, disrupt the Catholic services, even to incite children to perform acts of desecration. On May 11, 1536, he formally summoned the Genevan to the city square and formally declared by referendum that from now on they would live “*selon l'évangile et la parole de Dieu.*” From now on only the reformed religion would be permitted. Farel, however, being a revolutionary destructive spirit only, was not able to continue the Reformation in a constructive way. He took advantage of the coincidence when Calvin, his younger friend by twenty-years whom he knew in Paris and who was passing through Geneva, to convince Calvin to take over the reign of the Reformation there. Calvin at first refused, yet he yielded to Farel's insistence.⁵⁷

The office to which he was assigned at the beginning is unknown. He was eventually given the title of “reader,” which meant that he could give explanatory lectures on the Bible. Sometime in 1537 he was nominated a “pastor,” although he was never ordained to any ministry. He as a lawyer-theologian assumed pastoral duties such as baptisms, weddings, and church services. Calvin, who was first educated for the priesthood and later switched to the legal profession, fully realized the importance of the changes that were brought by the Reformation. In order to give the Protestant movement a universal, doctrinal character, he wrote in 1535 his famous *Institutio religionis Christianae*. His followers of the reformed church in France and elsewhere were called first “Lutherans” and later Huguenots. The etymology of the latter word is not very clear, but it seems to be derived from the

German term Eidgenossen (confederated, confederate) from which the inhabitants of Geneva made "eiguenots" or "ayguenos" and through the form of "hanguenots" the word became finally "Huguenots."⁵⁸ Just as Luther by his translation of the Bible and posting his theses on the door of the cathedral initiated the Reformation, so did Calvin by his book organize the Reformation into a universal and dogmatic movement: "arbitrariness became dogma, freedom became dictatorship, and spiritual order became shackles." His book was burned publicly on the square before the cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris on July 1, 1542, in the presence of the bookseller, Antoine Lenoir, who had the courage to introduce it to France. It was burned again together with other books considered heretical on February 14, 1543. These books were ordered to be burned by the *Parlement* as containing "pernicious and heretical doctrines:" the *New Testament*, printed by Étienne Dolet in French, *Loci*, by Philip Melancthon, *The Geneva Bible*, and above all, the book, *Institution de la religion chrétienne*, by Calvin.

On September 5, 1536, Calvin was nominated preacher by the Town Council. The event was not considered significant enough, as the scribe did not even mention Calvin's name in the official records saying only, "This Frenchman was to continue his activity as a preacher." However, the Town Council gave him unlimited powers in ecclesiastical matters which Calvin later skillfully manipulated and which allowed him to become the Master (Maître) of the city and state:

Here may be specified the powers with which the preachers of the Church are to be equipped. Since they are appointed as administrators and proclaimers of the divine word, they must venture all things, and must be ready to compel the great and the mighty of this world to bow before the majesty of God and to serve Him. They have to hold sway over the highest and the lowest; they have to enforce God's will on earth and to destroy the realm of Satan, to safeguard the lambs and to destroy the wolves; they have to exhort and to instruct the obedient, to accuse and to annihilate the refractory. They can bind and they can loose; they

can wield lightnings and scatter thunders, but all in accordance with the Holy Writ.⁵⁹

Many remained Catholics at heart and sought in the Reformation a guarantee of personal freedoms. But pastors took their traditional role seriously and enforced ordinances controlling the social and private lives of the citizens in accordance with the traditional practice. In the Fall of 1536, Farel drafted a confession of faith and Calvin wrote separate articles on reorganising the church in Geneva. On 16 January 1537, Farel and Calvin submitted to the Town Council a catechism in the form of *Articles on the Organisation of the Church and its Worship at Geneva* to the city council. The document described the manner and frequency of their celebrations of the eucharist the reason for and the method of excommunication, the requirement to subscribe to the confession of faith, the use of congregational singing in the liturgy, and the revision of marriage laws. The council accepted the document without any opposition. Calvin insisted on strict obedience, allowed no freedom with respect to doctrine, daily life, or individual convictions. The new church had not only the right but also the duty to impose absolute obedience on all men by force and to punish any resistance severely. Moreover, the burghers were compelled to acknowledge the acceptance of the new faith by a public oath before the secretary of state under pain of banishment. But Calvin himself did not have any power to exile the burghers for ecclesiastical offenses, so he invented an ingenious device for this purpose making out of the Council an executive organ of his commands and ordinances.

He converted the Lord's Supper into a means to promote his power and into an institution by which he controlled civil life in Geneva. The Consistory of Pastors, of which Calvin was president, had the power to deny the admission to the Lord's Supper, which was offered quarterly, to anyone who did not conform to their doctrines or behavioral rules. Refusal automatically meant excommunication and exclusion from civil life and banishment from the city. In this way Calvin could control any opposition and any free thought. When citizens voted for the new religion they did not foresee the terror and new shackles: "They did not approve a rigid moral

reform in order that they might find themselves threatened with exile merely for having uplifted their hearts in song when made merry by a glass of wine, or because they had worn clothes which seemed too bright of hue too sumptuous to Master Calvin or to Master Farel.”⁶⁰

During the year, Calvin and Farel's reputation with the council began to diminish. The council was reluctant to enforce the regulations as only a few citizens had accepted their confession of faith. Moreover, a major ecclesiastical-political quarrel developed when Bern proposed to introduce uniformity in the church ceremonies. One requirement was to use the unleavened bread for the eucharist. Since the two ministers were unwilling to follow Bern's lead the council ordered Calvin and Farel to use unleavened bread for the Easter eucharist. In protest, the ministers did not administer communion during the Easter service. This caused a riot and some resistance on the part of the more liberal pastors, the Patriots. The Town Great Council voted to oust both Farel and Calvin on April 11, 1538 and asked them to leave the city. The Catholic Church, on the other hand, by shrewd manipulations attempted to regain power in the city. Subsequently Farel received an invitation to lead the church in Neuchâtel. Calvin was invited to lead a church of French refugees in Strasbourg by that city's leading reformers, Martin Bucer and Wolfgang Capito. A few months later, he applied for and was granted citizenship of the city. In the meantime he also got married to Idelette deBure, a widow who had two children from her first marriage. While in Strasbourg Calvin published the second edition of his *Institutes* which was enlarged to seventeen chapters.

Meanwhile in Geneva church attendance had decreased and the political climate had changed. When Cardinal Jacopo Sadoleto wrote a letter to the city council inviting Geneva to return to the Catholic faith, the council searched for an ecclesiastical authority to respond to him. The disoriented and leaderless citizens decided to recall Calvin from Strasbourg to again take control of Geneva. Calvin defended Geneva's position concerning reforms in the church in his *Responsio ad Sadoletum* (*Letter to Sadoleto*). Calvin agreed under the condition that the

councilmen swear to accept his confession and establish discipline in accordance with his will. He returned on September 13, 1541, was received with great honors and became now the absolute Master of the city.

To support Calvin's proposals for reforms, the council of Geneva passed the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* on 20 November 1541. The ordinances defined four orders of ministerial function: pastors to preach and to administer the sacraments; doctors to instruct believers in the faith; elders to provide discipline; and deacons to care for the poor and needy. They also called for the creation of the *Consistoire* (Consistory), an ecclesiastical court composed of the lay elders and the ministers. The city government retained the power to summon persons before the court and the Consistory could judge only ecclesiastical matters having no civil jurisdiction. Originally, the court had the power to mete out sentences, with excommunication as its most severe penalty. However, the government contested this power and on 19 March 1543 the council decided that all sentencing would be carried out by the government.

In Geneva Calvin organized the church service, introduced music and published *The Form of Prayer and Church Hymns* as well as the *Catechism of the Church of Geneva*. Very little is known about his private life. He lived with his wife in a house owned by the city council. The house was big enough to accommodate also his brother Antoine and his family. Calvin's wife gave birth to a son Jacques who was born prematurely and survived only a short time. She died in 1549 and Calvin never remarried.

Calvin in fact established a dictatorship, becoming a civil and religious dictator. Geneva was nicknamed Protestant Rome and Calvin himself – the Pope of the Reformation. Thus, in fact he broke with the intentions of the Reformation instituting a Protestant theocracy. His church was the depository of the only truth; the Bible as interpreted by Calvin was the supreme wisdom, justice and the truth. He claimed that God revealed to him what is good and evil: "I have from God what I teach, and herein my conscience fortifies me."⁶¹ Calvin could never consider any opposing or different

view, any dissent in doctrinal or political matters declaring them to be a crime against the state and church, and as such deserving to be punished by the civil authority with the utmost severity and cruelty. Only the interpretations and judgments passed by the Consistory were valid and constituted the basis for legislative decrees issued by the Town Council. There was no limit to Calvin's power. He exercised his authority and hegemony and any heterodox or opponent had to die at the stake in order for him to maintain his theocracy.

Calvin introduced an absolute control of the private life of every citizen. In his doctrine every man was a wretched being not worthy of existence, a sinner and evil doer, "trash" (*une ordure*). He instituted a "spiritual police" to supervise constantly all Genevans and they were subject to periodical inspections in their households by the "*police des moeurs*." Anything that smacked of pleasure - music, song, laughter, theater, amusement, dancing, playing cards, even skating - was declared "*paillardise*" and severely punished. Calvin managed to destroy the normal bonds between people and simple decency inducing them to spy upon each other. His method of intimidation and terror was so refined that it involved control of every petty activity.

Calvin's philosophy was that it was better to punish too harshly than too gently where "God's honor" was concerned. In this New Jerusalem during the first five years of his dictatorship thirteen people were hanged, ten were decapitated, thirty five were burned and seventy six were expelled from the city.⁶² Later, during the time of the Servetus trial, he found opposition from the so-called Libertines who tried to oppose Calvin's domination in spite of the threat of banishment, executions, imprisonment and fines. The case of Servetus, in addition to counteracting a specific "heresy" that was spreading in northern Italy, was an additional element in his struggle against the Libertines. At the beginning of his own career when he was persecuted himself, Calvin, in theory supported toleration, advocated clemency against vengeance, and opposed any violence such as "prison, exile, proscription and fire." In the first edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* published in 1536 he talked about

kindness and persuasion against the excommunicated and in the dedicatory epistle to the king of Denmark, Christian III, in his *Commentary on Acts*, he wrote: "Wisdom is driven from among us, and the holy harmony of Christ's kingdom is compromised, when violence is pressed into the service of religion." Luther, too, at the beginning of his career as a reformer wrote: "The burning of heretics is contrary to the will of the Holy Spirit." These phrases, however, turned out to be only empty words.

Servetus's Trial in Geneva

According to Servetus's own testimony at the trial in Geneva, after escaping from Vienne, Servetus decided to go to the Kingdom of Naples to practice medicine among the Spaniards who chose to live there.⁶³ He selected a route through Geneva, Zürich and the Grisons to northern Italy. He arrived on foot in Geneva one night before his detention and stayed at the Hotel Rose d'Or at the corner of the Place la Tour du Molard and the rue du Rhône. He did not want to stay in Geneva but wanted to get a boat up the Lake of Lemman to Zürich. On Sunday August 13, 1553, he attended church in order not to attract attention but was recognized, probably by someone he attended in Vienne, and who reported him to Calvin. The record of the Genevan Consistory of Pastors simply indicates that Servetus was "recognized by certain brothers" and it was deemed right to imprison him so that he could not "infect the world with his blasphemies and heresies, especially that he was known to be incorrigible and hopeless."⁶⁴ Calvin seized the moment to realize his promise of February 13, 1546, and judged the accusation against Servetus grave enough to justify violating the law prohibiting arrest during a holiday. The arrest was made at the explicit demand of Calvin who admitted it in many documents.⁶⁵ He used a secretary of Pastor Falais, Nicolas de la Fontaine, who was a French cook and religious refugee, as the nominal accuser in order to put Servetus in prison at the rue de l'Évêché, but the accusation was prepared by Calvin himself. The legal code ruling at that time in Geneva was based on the Carolinian Law promulgated in Germany during the reign of Emperor Charles V. De la Fontaine had to become a prisoner in order to answer to the truthfulness of his accusation. Should Servetus be declared

innocent, he would have to suffer the punishment prescribed by the law. For that reason only did Calvin choose not to make the denunciation himself. Servetus stayed in this prison (a former palace of the bishop converted into prison after the Reformation took over) and left it only when he was led to the stake. Persuaded that he had done God a service, Calvin admitted responsibility for arresting Servetus at Geneva.

Calvin drafted the accusation against Servetus presented by de la Fontaine based on the extracts from the *Restitutio* in 39 articles including Servetus's denial of the Trinity, the eternal divinity of Christ, infant baptism and the defamation of Calvin and his doctrine.⁶⁶ The next day, August 14, Calvin presented to the Little Council a copy of Ptolemy's *Geography* of 1535, the Bible of Pagnini in Servetus's version and the copy of *Christianismi restitutio* sent to him by Servetus. After Servetus's reply to the accusations, Lieutenant General Pierre Tissot decided to present the case to the Council for the trial. Both the accuser and the accused were committed to the jailor and the valuables were taken away from Servetus. De la Fontaine requested release since the charges were substantiated against Servetus whose responses were nothing but "frivolous songs."⁶⁷

The first interrogation of Servetus before the Council being already the second examination, took place on August 15. As a result of this examination de la Fontaine was substituted by the brother of Calvin, Antoine Calvin.⁶⁸ The second interrogation started the next day. Germain Colladon, a close friend of Calvin was appointed the advocate of de la Fontaine and acted on instructions from Calvin. The attorney for the state was Philip Berthelier, one of the opponents of Calvin who was excommunicated and awaited now the verdict that would reverse this excommunication.⁶⁹ The Libertines, opponents of Calvin, never had any interest in Servetus or his doctrines. They were interested only in the case of Berthelier.⁷⁰ Even Professor Émile Doumergue, the strongest supporter of Calvin, admits that despite all the differences between the Libertines and Calvin, they agreed on the right of the civil and religious authorities to punish "heretics" by death.⁷¹

Calvin presented all the details of his accusation using materials from Servetus's writings and notes. The major accusations concerned his earlier life in Germany and publications, his doctrine that the Trinity is a philosophical notion, his Christology, his alleged pantheism, his views on immortality and baptism, and disrespect for Calvin and his doctrines.

On August 17, for the third interrogation, Calvin was brought to the court for a debate on matters of the Bible. Calvin opposed the description of Palestine in the sixteenth century in Ptolemy's *Geography* edited by Servetus as a land little cultivated and sterile.⁷²

During the fourth interrogation on August 21 and a debate on the church Fathers, Calvin even accused Servetus of not knowing Greek, since he asked for the Latin translation of Justin.⁷³ Servetus knew Greek perfectly and Calvin knew it. The problem was that Servetus knew Justin from the fragment in the Latin translation by Irenaeus and from quotations by an early author Servetus took for Justin. Servetus did not know about the publication in Paris in 1551 of the Greek text of Justin together with the spurious Justin when Calvin presented him with the spurious one to prove that Justin used the term Trinity before the Nicæan Council. The text read: "The One is perceived in the Triad and the Triad is known in One."⁷⁴ Calvin could not bear the profound knowledge of the texts shown by Servetus in the circumstances of a public debate. His own prestige and authority as the chief of the church of Geneva were at stake. On August 20, Calvin wrote to Farel in Neuchâtel that he hoped for a sentence of death though he wished to spare Servetus needless cruelty.⁷⁵

On August 22, the court in Geneva requested cooperation from the court at Vienne by asking for a copy of the evidence and documentation. Servetus was confident of a favorable outcome of the trial and in a letter dated August 22, 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."

In the next phase of the trial, Claude Rigot was appointed prosecutor general

and Calvin did not take active part. Servetus's request of August 22 was presented to the Council only on September 24 and had no effect since the new prosecutor general had already drafted a new list of accusations. It was treated only as a means of defense and was inserted into the acts of the trial.⁷⁶ Already on August 21, the thirty new charges were drafted by the new prosecutor, probably written by Calvin, some doctrinal in speculative theology, some more practical charges such as the dangerous effects of “heresies,” and used as a basis for the fifth interrogation on August 24.⁷⁷ Now the strategy of the court was shifted from the theological debates of little importance to its lay members to the private life of the accused and to the repercussion of his ideas so as to imply a charge of sedition and subversion of the social order: “These are the questions and articles on which the prosecutor general of this city of Geneva requests to interrogate Michael Servetus, the criminal prisoner accused of blasphemies, heresies and perturbation of Christianity.”⁷⁸

Between August 24 and August 27, the prosecutor general submitted another set of thirty eight accusations, undoubtedly prepared by Calvin and repeating all the previous accusations. They were the basis for the seventh interrogation held on August 28.⁷⁹ In the introduction to these accusations, the prosecutor also replied to the letter of Servetus of August 22. It is evident, he writes, that Servetus had not responded to the questions but has lied and avoided the truth. Servetus mocks God and God's word by corrupting and twisting the passages of the Scripture in order to cover the blasphemies and avoid punishment.

The prosecutor presented Servetus's plea for religious liberty as a political threat and subversion of justice:

It is quite manifest that Servetus is one of the most audacious, presumptuous, and pernicious heretics that had ever lived. Moreover, not being content with the evil he has wrought, he wants to subvert every order and justice and to deprive the magistrate of the right to punish by the sword, the right given to him by God. But one should not be mistaken for his conscience condemns him and argues for death. And in

order to avoid this punishment he wanted to propound such a false doctrine that the criminals should not be punished by death.⁸⁰

On August 31, a delegation arrived from Vienne with the reply from the tribunal there. They brought only the copy of the sentence and not the acts of the trial, as was requested. Moreover, they requested the extradition of Servetus.⁸¹ The Council played a cruel joke on Servetus offering him *pro forma* to choose extradition to France for sure death at the stake in Vienne or to continue the trial in Geneva.

During the eighth interrogation Servetus refused to give any information “For he was afraid he could do harm to many people who owed him money and who would be molested by those to whom belonged his confiscated assets.”⁸² Trial records indicate that Calvin was present during the eighth interrogation and asked Servetus some questions. But because the answers would take too much time and the discussion would be too confusing for the judges, it was decided to give Servetus some paper and ink in order that he could respond in writing and in Latin. Calvin was also obliged to give his replies in writing and in Latin. Moreover Calvin was requested to answer the main articles propounded in Servetus's book.⁸³

Now the third phase of the trial began. It was a discussion between Servetus and Calvin over doctrine with their statements submitted in Latin. The request for written statements by the court suggested that the court had decided to submit them to the judgment of other churches in Switzerland which were already informed on August 21. It is unlikely that Servetus suggested this arbitrament, though he certainly agreed to it. Calvin wrote in his *Defensio* that he gladly agreed with this idea, but in a letter to Bullinger of Zürich he was less than glad claiming that he objected to the Council's questioning his opinions.⁸⁴

On September 2, Calvin presented again thirty eight propositions⁸⁵ extracted from Servetus's writings to which Servetus gave a speedy response,⁸⁶ firm in his convictions as they were based entirely on the scripture. The discussion was conducted with bad temper on both sides. The key issue in the debate was the doctrine of the Trinity and the views of the church Fathers, especially those of

Tertullian and Irenaeus. Moreover, Servetus imputed to Calvin that he followed Simon Magus whom he believed to be the father of the doctrine of predestination which was the center of Calvin's doctrine.⁸⁷ Servetus did not admit that Jesus Christ was the Son of God from eternity, but only from his appearance on earth. Calvin attributed Jesus's deity to the Word before its incarnation in Jesus Christ. Servetus emphasized his strict adherence to the scripture:

My only purpose was so that this name the Son may be applied in religious writings to the human son as it is always properly applied to the name Jesus and to the name Christ. And to prove this I collected all the places in the Scripture in which occurs the word the Son is always used to describe the human son. No place can be found in the gospels in which this word the Son would not be used for the human son. Thus therefore if the scripture always accepts this usage so we should accept it too.⁸⁸

The final reply from Calvin that was presented to Servetus bore the signatures of fourteen pastors of churches in Geneva. The pastors were fundamentally lofty, ignorant, shameless and intellectually inferior to Servetus. They did not want to refute Servetus's assertions one by one, but classified them summarily as false and a “labyrinth of errors.”⁸⁹ All these materials were submitted to the court on September 5, after which the proceedings were suspended. The court decided to submit the documents to the Swiss cities and pending their reply to let the case rest.⁹⁰

In the meantime Calvin was busy writing letters to other Swiss churches suggesting how they should reply to the request of the Council. He also asked the Frankfurt pastors to destroy the copies of the *Restitutio*.⁹¹

Servetus submitted his notes on the reply redacted by Calvin and signed by thirteen other pastors of Geneva.⁹² Servetus terminated them with a statement that he had not been refuted from the scripture. He also included there a short letter to Calvin trying to explain Calvin's major errors.⁹³ The fourth and the last phase of the trial started on September 21, when the Council requested the opinion of church ministers and the city Councils in other cities – Zürich, Basel, Berne, Schaffhausen – on the

Servetus trial.⁹⁴ A similar letter was addressed to the councils of the Swiss cities.⁹⁵

Calvin intended in this way to broaden the responsibility and make the condemnation more serious. Shrewdly he instructed and prepared the ministers how to respond by writing earlier letters to them and preparing the background. Already on September 9, he wrote to Bullinger in Zürich explaining that it was his duty to order the arrest of Servetus. He invoked then the statement of Bucer ("who was such a soft spirit") about Servetus "who deserved to have his entrails torn out;" and by describing the stakes of papists at Lyon, he suggested in a camouflaged way to do the same with Servetus. Bullinger had no doubt what should be the punishment for Servetus: "The affair of Servetus fills me with unrest If the Genevans do their duty they will treat him according to what he deserves, this blasphemer. For he is not only guilty of heresy, but of the last blasphemies against God. I consider that it is by the grace of Providence that he fled to Geneva so that this city inflicting on him punishment that he deserves, could wash itself from many crimes of blasphemy and heresy."⁹⁶ His opinion influenced ministers from all other cities since they formulated their own only after reading the memoir of the pastors from Zürich.

There is nothing in the records of the trial until October 10, when we find another letter from Servetus who is now suffering greatly from the cold and from having no change of clothes.

Now the resolution of the trial depended on the perception of this trial by the ministers of the Swiss churches. Calvin, in the meantime, was preparing for the delegation of his mission to another person should the trial turn tragic for Servetus. On October 14, Calvin wrote a letter to Farel urging him to meet with him in Geneva regarding the Council's decision about Servetus.⁹⁷ However, already on October 19, the messenger of the Council returned carrying a reply not only from the ministers of the churches, but also from the civil magistrates of the Swiss cities. On October 23, the Council read the replies and issued a resolution:

Having read the opinions and recommendations of churches from Berne, Zürich, Basel, and Schaffhausen given because of the false error [sic] and

articles expressed by Michael Servetus against the Trinity and the sacred unity of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit and other errors which are found false by the above advise, and which are spreading the false and very dangerous doctrine so that they might trouble the church of our Lord and reformation of the Gospel. It is ordered by this resolution to put to him questions so he can answer orthodoxally after which the Council will convene on the Thursday [October 26] to pass a judgment under the oath.⁹⁸

The Reformers from Zürich, Basel, Berne, and Schaffhausen supported the accusation of the Geneva Council. They were unanimous since they exchanged opinions earlier. Except for the church in Berne, they did not mention the accusation of Anabaptism against Servetus.

Ministers in Zürich expressed confidence a proper sentence would be passed so that the “contagion of this venom” could not spread further, but left the final judgment and sentence on Servetus to the Geneva tribunal. It was clear that death was the only possible punishment for Servetus as was stated by Pietro Vergerio, once a papal nuncio, now a minister at the church in Chur in the Grisons, in a letter to Bullinger (on October 8, 1553): “I read your letters to the Council of Geneva and found them pleasing to me. You do not say explicitly that this heretic should be deprived of his life, but you insist in such a way that one who reads them can easily understand this: your opinion is that he should be punished by death.”⁹⁹ Though Vergerio detested “such monsters as Servetus,” he himself did not think that “fire and sword should be used against them.”¹⁰⁰ The ministers of Berne described Servetus as an immodest man who put on trial the fundamental principles of Christianity. They listed all the old “heresies” that Servetus was supposed to have revived. They were of the opinion that these “heresies” should be treated with appropriate severity to prevent spreading them among the faithful. They added: “We pray the Lord that he give you the spirit of prudence, good advice and courage to destroy this plague of the churches, and at the same time that you do everything that befits the Christian

magistrate.” A moderate minister of Berne, Haller, wrote to Bullinger on September 26: “This man is an absolute heretic who should be eliminated from the church.”¹⁰¹ Five days before the sentence he wrote: “On hearing the errors of Servetus the members of the Council were so horrified that if he were in their prison they certainly would have condemned him to burning at the stake.”¹⁰²

The ministers of Schaffhausen approved the opinion of Calvin and Bullinger, rejected Servetus's book that they considered blasphemous against the Trinity and had confidence that the Genevans would, in their prudence, repress not only the heretical intentions of Servetus, but also the fear that his “blasphemies, like a cancer, could spread among the members of Christ's Church.”

The church in Basel celebrated the capture of Servetus in Geneva and declared that the Servetus “heresy” was not a simple one but that he professed a “hydra” concocted from many impieties of “heretics.” Like an excited serpent, he emitted malicious and insulting hisses against Calvin, the faithful servant of God, and always blasphemed against God. They exhorted the Genevans to do everything to cure Servetus. But if he persisted in perversity, “he should be punished in accordance to their duty and authority given to them by God so he could be prevented by force from doing any harm again to the Church of Christ.”

None of the consulted churches recommended explicitly the death penalty for Servetus and they left the sentence to the judgment of the Geneva church. However, it was fully understood that this was the only possible punishment worthy of a pious Christian church. Thus Calvin was reassured in his Christian thinking. The supporters of Calvin take this fact as an excuse for his action. They say Calvin was doing only what the whole of Christianity approved: “Unanimously, all the churches of Switzerland replied: 'Servetus ought to be condemned to death.'”¹⁰³ Another factor that sealed the fate of Servetus was the consolidation of the power of Calvin; the sentence passed on Servetus strengthened Calvin's position. So the case of Servetus was a happy coincidence for Calvin in his power struggle. But history proved the truth was on Servetus's side.

The few supporters of Servetus or of his right to freedom of conscience hid their opinions for reasons of fear of repression. Pietro Vergerio reported to Bullinger on October 14, 1553, that there were supporters of Servetus in Basel.¹⁰⁴ Gallicius, from Basel, reported that a distinguished scholar from Italy espoused the cause of Servetus.¹⁰⁵ There was only one written protest based on the principle that nobody should be deprived of life for doctrinal reasons. It was an isolated reaction coming from Johan van Brugge, pseudonym of David Joris – the famous Anabaptist who fled from Münster and found refuge in Basel and had addressed the Council of Geneva. The document was not effective, but one of the first openly expressing the fundamental moral truth.

I have hope that the counsel satiated with the blood of the erudites will not fall on your ears, but that you will consider rather the precepts of Christ, our Lord who has taught us not only in the Scriptures, in a human and literary way, but also in the divine form by his word and his example that it would be better if we ourselves were crucified and killed before we crucify or kill anybody. He taught that no one should be crucified or put to death for reason of his teaching. He himself was crucified and put to death. Yes, not only that, but he has severely forbidden persecution. Will it not then be a great perversion, blindness, evil, and darkness to indulge in impudent disobedience through hate and envy? They must first themselves have been deranged before they could bring a life to death, damn a soul forever, and hasten it to hell. Is that a Christian procedure or a true spirit? I say eternally no, however plausible it may appear. If the preachers are not of this mind and wish to avoid the sin against the Holy Ghost, let them be wary of seizing and killing men for their good intentions and belief according to their understanding, especially when these ministers stand so badly in other people's books that they dare not go out of their own city and land The magistrate is to punish the bad and protect the good, lest they be dispossessed and killed by the evil. But,

as Dr. Martin Luther says, the servants of the temple have incited the magistrate to dispossess and kill good, upright folk who were not subservient to the clergy.... Noble, wise, and prudent Lords, consider what would happen if free rein were given to our opponents to kill heretics. How many men would be left on earth if each had this power over the other, inasmuch as each considers the other a heretic? The Jews so regard the Christians, so do the Saracens and the Turks, and the Christians reciprocate. The Papists and the Lutherans, the Zwinglians and the Anabaptists, the Calvinists and the Adiaphorists, mutually ban each other. Because of these differences of opinion should men hate and kill each other? And if the aforesaid Servetus is a heretic or a sectary before God ... we should inflict on him no harm in any of his members, but admonish him in a friendly way and at most banish him from the city, if he will not give up his obstinacy and stop disturbing the peace by his teaching.... Condemn no man that ye be not condemned. Shed no blood and do no violence, my dear Lords....¹⁰⁶

Joris wrote his protest originally in Dutch somewhere at the end of September or October of 1553. The principle expressed here was further developed by Sebastian Castellio and eventually found its expression in the practice and writings of the Socinians.

Sentence and Martyrdom

Before sentence was pronounced on Servetus, Calvin already publicized his own. He wrote to Bullinger in a letter of October 25, one day before the sentence: "What will happen to this man, it is not known yet As far as it can be conjectured the sentence will be pronounced tomorrow and after tomorrow he will be led to his torment."¹⁰⁷ On October 26, Calvin wrote to Farel informing him that Servetus was unanimously condemned by all the churches in Switzerland and without any dissent by the Council of Two Hundred in spite of the last attempt by Perrin to save Servetus. "Tomorrow he will be led to execution. We tried to change the mode of his death but

in vain.”¹⁰⁸ But there is no record of this attempt by anybody, though it seems plausible because there is an indication in a letter to Farel of August 20, that Calvin might have preferred a more humanitarian death for Servetus.¹⁰⁹

On October 26, 1553, the Council met and condemned Servetus “to be led to Champel and burned there alive on the next day together with his books.”¹¹⁰ On October 27, around midday, Servetus was taken from his prison cell to the gates of the Town Hall and here the full text of the sentence was read to him by the Syndic Darlod. Servetus was sentenced on only two accounts – antitrinitarianism and anti-paedobaptism.¹¹¹

“When the news about the death sentence was communicated to him, he remained for a while as if withdrawn; afterwards he breathed heavily so that he could be heard in the entire room; at times he sounded like a man who lost his senses. Shortly, he bellowed like a demon. In the end his cry reached such a height that, incessantly beating his chest, he cried in Spanish 'Misericordia, Misericordia.’”¹¹²

The first thing Servetus did was to request an audience with Calvin. The Council authorized Calvin to see Servetus accompanied by two members, Corna and Bonna.¹¹³ Again we have only Calvin's report about their meeting and conversation:

I shall describe briefly what he himself confessed about two hours before his death, in the presence of several witnesses. Since he requested that he could talk to me, the Council sent two members to accompany me. When one of them asked what he wanted to tell me, he responded that he wanted to ask my forgiveness. Then I simply stated as it was the truth, that I have never persecuted him for any personal offense, I reminded him gently that for more than 16 years I did not spare anything in order to gain him for our Lord, even to the point of risking my own life and if he would agree with reason, I would faithfully dedicate myself to reconcile him with all good servants of God. Even though he abandoned the struggle I have not ceased to exhort him benignly by letters; in short I have used till the end all human means until having become irritated

against my good and saintly admonishings, he burst against me in I do not know what type of rage or anger. Afterwards saying that I disregarded all that concerning my person I begged him rather to think and ask God's mercy, whom he vilely blasphemed by wanting to abolish the three Persons that are in his essence and stating that those who recognize in one God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit with the real distinction, are fabricating an infernal dog with three heads. I begged him to ask with all his heart forgiveness of the Son of God whom he had disfigured by his derangement negating that he assumed our body and that he resembled us in his human nature, and doing this he refused to recognize him as our savior. Seeing that I do not accomplish anything by exhortations, I did not want to be wiser than my Master would permit me. Therefore following the rule of Saint Paul I separated myself from the heretic who had condemned himself, carrying in his heart the sign of his condemnation. I have reported this in order that everyone could know that I was directed during the life of Servetus by modesty rather than by fear, and did not invent any dispute against him, hoping even for a favorable outcome of the case.¹¹⁴

This interview as reported by Calvin is a touchstone allowing us to evaluate the moral profile of each of them. The attempt of Calvin in writing it was to deceive the reader that he used “all human means” and exhorted Servetus “benignly.” The whole trial, its procedure, the conspiracy organized by Calvin to entrap Servetus – all this belies his explanations. Moreover, Calvin wanted to present Servetus as a demoniacal being: “*il n'y avait non plus de contenance qu'en un demoniacle.*” Servetus began the interview by asking with Christian humility for forgiveness and ended by rejecting any retraction. The image of his moral quality increases as the interview progresses and that of Calvin is reduced. Servetus, by his moral superiority, firmness in his convictions in face of death, and willingness to sacrifice his own life in their defense, became a precursor of and a symbol and stimulus for the struggle for the

freedom of conscience. Being afraid that his strength might yield, he asked for execution by sword rather than by fire.¹¹⁵ His petition was rejected. All this to no avail, his lips did not express words of retraction.¹¹⁶ Calvin disclosed himself as the typical figure of the Middle Ages, a follower of the rigid hypocritical religious views of Catholic and Protestant Christianity.

There was no legal basis for execution of Servetus. All previous Catholic laws were abolished in Geneva in 1535. The Justinian code mentioned by Calvin during the trial was never in effect in Geneva, and as matter of fact it was forgotten during the Middle Ages and only rediscovered in 1040. Calvin and Farel drafted in 1536 the Geneva Confession of Faith in which they abolished “all laws and regulations made binding on human conscience which oblige the faithful to things not commanded by God,” that is, by “the commandment of men.” There was no death penalty for any transgression, excommunication was the only possible punishment:

Therefore we believe that it is expedient according to the ordinance of God that all manifest idolaters, blasphemers, murderers, thieves, lewd persons, false witnesses, sedition-mongers, quarrelers, those guilty of defamation or assault, drunkards, dissolute livers, when they have been duly admonished and if they do not make amendment, be separated from the communion of the faithful until their repentance is known.¹¹⁷

The sentence was carried out immediately on October 27, 1553. The cortège leading Servetus to the place of his martyrdom was composed of a commanding officer and a group of archers on horses. The circumstances of the last road of Servetus were described by Farel in a letter to Blaurer, a pastor of Berne:

While the condemned walked to the place of his ordeal, some brothers exhorted him to confess frankly his faults and repudiate errors, he responded that he would suffer death unjustly and prayed God to be merciful towards his accusers. Then I said to him: 'Having committed the most grave sin you still want to justify yourself? If you continue this

way I shall abandon you and God's judgment and shall not make one pace more. I had intended not to leave you until you expire your last breath.' Then he fell silent and did not say anything. It is true, he asked for forgiveness for his errors, and his faults, and ignorance, but he never wanted to make any authentic confession. Several times he recited prayers and asked the accompanying persons to pray for him. But we never could obtain from him open recognition of his errors and of Christ as the eternal Son of God.¹¹⁸

Farel who came to Geneva from Neuchâtel, until the last moment urged Servetus to acknowledge errors and confess. Servetus answered him by asking for a single biblical passage showing the eternal sonship of Christ! For Calvin and Farel, Servetus was a martyr of error, whereas the Protestants burned in France by the Inquisition were martyrs of the truth. Servetus, according to them, deserved the fate which he met; the others were innocent, persecuted. With the rare exception of the radical reformers, all the religious chiefs of all Christian denominations shared this view.

Calvin after Servetus

After the murder of Servetus Calvin was declared a defender of Christianity but he still did not defeat the opposition from the liberal side of the Geneva constituency. He had always insisted that the Consistory of Pastors retain the power of excommunication, despite the Council's past decision to take it away. During Servetus's trial, Philibert Berthelier asked the council for permission to take communion as he had been excommunicated a year before for insulting a minister. Calvin protested that the council did not have the legal authority to overturn Berthelier's excommunication.

The disputes about power of the Council and Consistory continued until 22 January 1555 when the council announced the decision of the Swiss churches which were consulted about the matter. They advised that the original *Ordonnances* were to be kept and the Consistory was to regain its official powers. There was some small

disturbance but the leaders of the opposition, Perrin and others, were forced to flee Geneva. Other plotters who remained in the city were executed with the approval of Calvin.

Calvin became now an absolute authority in Geneva and was recognized as one of the leading authorities in Reformation. There were, however, doctrinal differences between Calvin, Luther and Zwingli. A concordat was reached between Zürich and Geneva churches, the so-called *Consensus Tigurinus*. He contributed to the development of the reformed church of John Knox and William Whittingham who found refuge in Geneva and later transplanted Calvin's ideas to Scotland and England. Also the Geneva church developed strong missionary activities in France.

In Geneva Calvin founded in 1559 a college which was divided into two institutions: a grammar school, the *collège* or *schola privata* and an advanced school called the *académie* or *schola publica*. The first became Collège Calvin, a preparatory school for the college and the second became the University of Geneva.

Calvin died on 27 May 1564 and was buried in an unmarked grave in the Cimetière Plainpalais. He never repented the murder of Servetus and three years before his death he wrote: "Such monsters [he was referring to Anabaptists] should be exterminated as I have exterminated Michael Servetus the Spaniard."¹¹⁹

Reaction to Servetus's Execution

The execution of Servetus brought to light the issue of religious liberty in the Christian world in a most conspicuous manner. Though all leaders of the Protestant community in Switzerland, with the exception of the evangelical radical reformers, supported Calvin in his decision, some people started asking questions about the legitimacy of capital punishment for heresy.¹²⁰ On November 16, 1553, Gulielmus Gratarolus (died in Basel in 1568), a physician from Bergamo who was a religious refugee in Basel since 1549, wrote to Bullinger that many people, even those who in other respects were not supporters of Servetus's ideas, blamed Calvin for the death of Servetus and asserted that the Christian magistrate was not justified in exacting this punishment.¹²¹ He previously reported that he heard in Basel many prominent and

learned people who in discussing the case of Servetus considered Calvin a “butcher” (*carnifex*).¹²² He himself took the side of Calvin and defended him.

From Chur (Coire) in the Grisons, Pietro Vergerio, a former Catholic prelate, wrote to Bullinger that the drama of Servetus horrified him. Though he hated such disturbers of the church, he opposed the death penalty.¹²³ On February 10, 1554, Zurkinden, a future secretary of state in Berne, wrote to Calvin himself protesting the sentence.¹²⁴ André Zébédée, the pastor of Noyon, wrote to Calvin denouncing the sentence. He declared that while the fires of the Spanish Inquisition were outdone by those in France, those at Geneva outdid them both: “*Ignis Gallicus vicit ignem Hispanicum, sed ignis Dei vicit ignem Gallicum.*”¹²⁵ Basel was a special city where many supporters of Servetus and of liberal thought resided: Sébastien Castellion, Coelius Secundus Curione, Martinus Cellarius called Borrhäus (professor of theology), Bernardino Ochino, Laelius Socinus, David Joris, and later Acontius. They were strong opponents of the death penalty for heretics as was reported to Bullinger by Vergerio.¹²⁶ The other centers were Chur and northern Italy with Matteo Gribaldi. These attitudes were reported to Bullinger and Calvin.¹²⁷

Laelius Socinus, an Italian reformer whose nephew later became a leader among the antitrinitarian Socinians, was in Geneva at the time of Servetus's martyrdom and expressed his regrets at the hasty execution:

I do not know whether I gave any occasion for regarding me as a follower of Servetus or as an Anabaptist, unless that when I was at Geneva I expressed regret at the hasty execution of Servetus. And this I said not because I utterly disapprove of the coercion of heretics and blasphemers nor because I favor the doctrine of Servetus, which I should like to see extinct, but precisely because I reject his depraved teaching I should have preferred to see him freed from it than to see it burned in him.¹²⁸

The death of Servetus united also all those who supported the antitrinitarian ideas: Gianpaolo Alciati, Matteo Gribaldi, Giorgio Biandrata, and Valentino Gentile

(later decapitated in Berne). In 1554, a Sicilian poet Camillo Renato wrote to Calvin:

Your cruelty, Calvin, is not worthy of the ferocious beasts. Don't you realize that the error subsists and spreads when one exterminates a heretic? Neither God nor his spirit have counselled such an action. Christ did not treat those who negated him that way. Was it not he who burst into anger against his disciples who wanted to set Samaria afire?¹²⁹

Calvin's Rationale

Jean Calvin was the first author of a major treatise of systematic Protestant theology. Before him there were declarations and minor treatises by Martin Luther, Philip Melancthon, Ulrich Zwingli, and Guillaume Farel. Calvin's work, *Institutio religionis christianae*, was first published in Latin on August 23, 1535. The first French edition, *Institution de la religion chrétienne*, appeared in 1541. The work was dedicated to the king of France, François I: "To the most Christian King of France, Jean Calvin, for peace and salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ." The prefatory dedication¹³⁰ is remarkable in that it contains a strong, passionate appeal for tolerance and religious freedom at a time when all religious dissenters were brutally persecuted. Calvin pleads with the king to read his book and learn about the doctrine "against which are furiously enraged those who by fire and sword trouble today your kingdom." He says further that all by common accord condemn the new doctrine and all those who confess it. Those who are constituted to make a judgment are so enraged that they consider it their duty to condemn to death those who confess it. "But," – asks Calvin – "for what crime? For professing that condemned doctrine, they say. But for what reason is it condemned?" Now, the central point in the prohibition is that the doctrine is held to be the true one. And Calvin continues: "It is true that our adversaries reproach us that we pretend to preach the word of God, of which, they say, we are perverse corruptors." To this charge Calvin gives the same answer as Augustine gave to the Donatists – by invoking the Lord who would overcome the false prophets (Matt. 24: 24) who, even by miracles, are able to deceive

the chosen ones. He complains that they are falsely accused of moral evils whereas they live a peaceful and virtuous life. Calvin ends his dedication asking the king for his ear in hearing the complaint, they have nobody else to defend them against the cruelty of persecution – “They remain like a lamb destined to be butchered.”

Calvin and the rest of the religious leaders of the Reformation, by persecuting Servetus, betrayed the spirit of the Reformation and demonstrated that as soon as they gained power and independence their behavior was no different from that of the church they condemned. Facing the rising critique and disapproval, Calvin felt a need to justify his position and his action against such attacks expressed by the “fantasts” (*esprits fantastiques*) and the “rebellious” or those who are “simple and of good nature.” In a letter to Bullinger of November 22, 1553, Calvin indicated that he would show in a short book what a monster Servetus was “in order to prevent the wicked (who I hear are in Basel) to spread the insults and the ignorant to spread rumors.”¹³¹ In reply, Bullinger encouraged Calvin to continue God's work and to publish his proposed book. In a *post scriptum* he added: “When you begin to write about the case of Servetus, please do not forget to demonstrate that it is legal (*iure*) to punish by the ultimate measure blasphemers and all who resemble Servetus.”¹³² He advised Calvin not to mention the supporters of Servetus in Basel in order not to make them “immortal.” And later, on December 13, Bullinger encouraged Calvin still more to “describe diligently and piously for all pious people the case of Servetus and his end in order that all could turn away from this monster.”¹³³

On December 11, 1553, Calvin addressed the Council asking for authorization to publish a book that would impugn the opinions of Servetus. He declared that he would not write anything that would not be in accordance with the law of God and honor of the city. His manuscript was already prepared since he submitted it to the Council some fifteen days later. On December 31, Calvin informed Bullinger that the work would be published in Frankfurt.¹³⁴ It was published in February of 1554, first in Latin under the title: *Defensio orthodoxae fidei de sacra Trinitate, contra prodigiosos errores Michaelis Serveti Hispani: ubi*

*ostenditur haereticos jure gladii coercendos esse, et nominatim de homine hoc tam impio juste et merito sumptum Genevae fuisse supplicium. Per Iohannem Calvinum. Oliva Stephani M.D.LIV.*¹³⁵ The Latin text was followed immediately by a somewhat different French version entitled: *Déclaration pour maintenir la vraye foy que tiennent tous Chrestiens de la Trinité des persones en un seul Dieu, par Iean Calvin. Contre les erreurs détestables de Michel Seruet Espagnol. Où il est aussi monstré, qu'il est licite de punir les hérétiques: & qu'à bon droict ce meschant a esté executé par iustice en la ville de Geneve. Chez Iean Crespin. A Geneve M.D.LIIII.*

It is worth mentioning that the same publisher of the French version of Calvin's book, authored also a famous book, *Martyrologie*, in which he collected documents on the fate of pious Protestant martyrs.

Calvin's book was written hastily and it contains long documents from the trial. Bullinger expressed a fear that simple minds might find it not very agreeable because of its brevity and difficult argumentation. Nevertheless, he said that all good people and especially those who are educated owe Calvin a debt of gratitude for the work.¹³⁶ Melancthon, in a letter of October 14, 1554, congratulated Calvin for the refutation of Servetus's blasphemies in his book and for putting him to death: "The church owes you now and in posterity a gratitude. Moreover I absolutely approve of your judgment. I also affirm that your magistrate did right putting to death this blasphemer through the regular judicial process."¹³⁷ Calvin seems not to be angry with his critics – he states that his only goal in writing the book was to make the detestable errors of Servetus manifest to everybody, so that they could be certain that Calvin defended only the true doctrine with sincere faith and just zeal and that he does not regret the job he has done.¹³⁸

In his book, a posthumous insult to Servetus, Calvin defends the rightfulness of putting heretics to death by arguing that heresy is worse than murder or poisoning, as it is treason against God. Such punishment is, according to him, divinely sanctioned and the blasphemous attempt to overthrow religious foundations deserves the extreme penalty. The irony is that at that time in France Protestants were being

burned by the thousands and in England the Catholic reaction under “bloody Mary” was just beginning.¹³⁹

Calvin evidently felt a need to excuse himself and his actions, and to clear his name. First he presents a theological rebuttal of the assertions of Servetus. He starts with presenting Servetus as an agent of the devil:

The devil in order to obscure the clarity excited many fantastic spirits who have sowed various forms of errors as they were propagated by the Anabaptists, Libertines and others. But among the others there is a certain Spaniard named Miguel Servet who made so many people confused by his enormous derangements that his impiety surpasses all the evil that the others have conspired to do...¹⁴⁰

And later he adds:

I have heard, as some people told me, that I have abused my power in this case.... Now, after M. Servetus is already dead, and has left moral corruption by his errors, nobody should feel offended if I remedied the similar evil, preventing it from spreading more than this vicious and cruel monster.... Because what justice was done by the Council was attributed to me by many ignorants as if I were the author. I am not going to deny that he was imprisoned by my persecution ... but afterwards I did not interfere in the condemnation to death.¹⁴¹

The imprisonment itself was not a factor in the condemnation, but providing the evidence was. Thus Calvin and only Calvin is directly responsible for Servetus's death. Nevertheless, the moral guilt for the persecution of Servetus and “heretics” in general, falls equally on the Catholic and Protestant leaders and their doctrines.

Calvin next attacks freedom of conscience and justifies the right to condemn to death the so-called heretic by developing his doctrine of persecution: “Thus I believe it is worthwhile to give a general treatment whether it is lawful to the Princes to judge Christians and punish the heretics.”¹⁴² And he concludes his deliberations:

Thus, there is no doubt that by the mandate of God, it is the duty of

the pious and holy magistrates to defend the kingdom of Christ.... Therefore [Paul] teaches that they are appointed not only for the duty of protecting piety by law, but also to promote it. Hence the sword is placed in their hands in order that they can defend the true doctrine. And by performing their duties they should not allow under threat of punishment the existence of impiety and corruption of the doctrine. May the ignorant and thoughtless men cease to negate that punishment should be exacted on the corruptors of the true doctrine if they do not want openly to oppose the will of God.¹⁴³

Calvin's doctrine is representative not only of his own views, he is a spokesman for entire Protestant Christianity as well. His arguments to justify this conclusion were exactly the same as those used by the church Fathers and Thomas Aquinas and which were applied to the "heresy" of Calvin himself. They derive from the specific interpretation of the Old Testament (e.g., Exod. 32:7-14; 32:27-29; Deut. 13:6-11; 13:12-16; Ps. 2:8-9; 2:10-12; Isa. 49:23; Dan. 3:29) and New Testament quotes (e.g., Matt. 13:24-30; 21:12; John 8:44; Acts 13:7-12; Rom. 13:1-5; 1 Cor. 3:16-18; 1 Tim. 1:18-20; 2:1-2).

Calvin then develops his principle from the assumption that, as in the Hebrew society, the first duty of the magistrate is to establish religion and laws which serve society's preservation and integrity. Moreover, one should forget about all humaneness and should not spare blood or anything else in defending God's honor and glory:¹⁴⁴

For is it not more absurd that the judge should punish theft severely and should allow sacrilege? That by protecting the right of someone he would expose God's glory to be insulted by the impious? Indeed, nobody would dare to question that breaking of an oath should be punished more severely. Is it not because those who oppose punishment of the heretics that the human society is injured by the breaking of an oath? Thus God's glory will be asserted for the benefit

of men: since whoever complains about his loss will he forgo frivolously the unpunished crime? It would be superfluous to continue this argument. For the purpose of the right polity is to conserve the legitimate order among men. And let us watch so that when the goal is ignored the order of piety would not be dissipated as well and that the life of men itself would not become senseless. For imperfect is the form of the government in which religion is neglected and magistrates are only miserable shadows if when occupied with their civil business they do not take care of maintaining the service of God.¹⁴⁵

In developing his principle of persecution, Calvin had to answer several objections. One obvious one, and very embarrassing to him, was that if it is permitted to punish heretics, why object to the Catholic Inquisition? Calvin explains that many simple and good people see how under the papacy religion is mutilated and plagued by numerous corruptions and that this “diabolic confusion” is supported by “naked terror” so that even to mutter one syllable against the papacy is punishable by capital punishment. The believers are so scandalized that they hate and are in horror of all punishment without discerning a just and unjust one. According to Calvin, they are justly outraged since the Catholic church suppresses by fire and sword any attempt at finding God's truth and does not allow any freedom of inquiry. Indeed, he argues, Protestants are moaning and crying under this terror. It is not acceptable that a legitimate inquiry into the facts of religion is not allowed by those who claim to be the prelates. This is why one can say that it is an exorbitant barbarism to support by the sword doctrines not based on reason and without inquiry into their foundations. Calvin condemns the cruelty and barbarism of the Catholic procedures presenting them as “an illustration of a bestial insanity combined with brutal savageness.”¹⁴⁶ But then he adds a specific twist to his deliberations: “Yet, if the papists are so excessive in the implementation of tyranny, this does not mean that all severity should be condemned,”¹⁴⁷ and he adds that “nothing prevents the swords of the

persecutors to be employed by the pious magistrates as the rod of justice in the defense of the Church which once was unjustly afflicted, and the torments once suffered by the martyrs should not prevent the faithful to be protected by the just laws and to worship God in peace.”¹⁴⁸ To justify this position, Calvin indicates that similar iniquity was experienced by the holy prophets of God and the apostles. Yet, they, too, did not deny that the veneration of God and His celestial doctrine should be defended by legitimate power. The impious destroyers of the doctrine should be submitted to the punishment prescribed by God's commandment. Though Christ did not defend Himself due to His virtue, faith depends on earthly decisions and ought to be protected by the king if someone tries to diminish the certitude of the gospels.¹⁴⁹

Needless to say, Calvin considered the Catholic doctrine false and at the same time he granted to those who seek true religion based on the word of God, the right to defend what they believe. If someone forms for himself a system of belief according to his whim or accepts what others recklessly contrived, the more he adheres to it, the greater will be his guilt. Thus, the true and legitimate worshipper of God, inasmuch as he goes along with his vocation, will fight to defend his faith. Therefore, Protestants condemn papists in their foolish and devoid of understanding zeal as well as their insane superstition, fascinated with which, they trample disdainfully on God's word.¹⁵⁰

Next Calvin differentiates between two types of victims of religious persecution: those who are martyrs and those who are blasphemers. Though both meet similar punishment, they differ in their offense: the just and righteous zealot follows knowledge, but the perverse and unconscionable one follows temerity and blind impulse. Thus, if they should torment someone who would maintain that all that is taught by the sacred scripture is nothing but a fiction, who would have enough courage to attribute to such a monster the honorific title of a martyr? For Calvin agrees with Augustine: “*Martyrem facit causa non poena.*”¹⁵¹

Another objection addressed by Calvin is that it seems to be absurd that the spiritual kingdom of Christ should be backed up by the “power of flesh.” But, to be

sure, Calvin's argument goes, it is absurd also to base faith on human eloquence. However, should someone silence those who are skilled in speaking, prevent all learned and refined in liberal arts from expressing their ideas, or exclude everyone endowed with talent from the office of teaching out of fear that eloquence and dexterity in debating might weaken faith, would he not insult openly God and His gifts? Or if there is no reason why the preaching of the gospel should not be less effective in order to allow its effect to be produced only through the secret power of the spirit, and if there is no objection that it could have human arts as servants, so there is no reason why religion, even though it is sustained only by God's hand and is triumphant under adversity, that it could not be aided by men and their authority when such is God's design.¹⁵²

Still another objection, continues Calvin, is that nothing is less befitting faith than to compel people to believe, since faith depends on voluntary obedience. He agrees with Augustine, that in defending the status of the church, there is a different use for the sword than when one is compelled to believe. He argues further that it is not in the power of the princes to enter the human hearts by their edicts, to compel them to obediently embrace the doctrine of salvation and to submit themselves to God. However, the vocation of the princes demands that they not permit the sacred name of God to be vituperated by insolent tongues and not allow God's veneration to be ruined.¹⁵³

In one more objection, he claims that the disciples of Christ should be tolerant and practice clemency as did their master, nor did He force with arms the stubborn into the fold of his followers. This doctrine was seductive (Isa. 42:3). But, explains Calvin, as we do not have a ready statement to the contrary, we should take an example from Christ himself when he took up the whip and cleaned the temple of God from profane trafficking (Matt. 21:12). If the Son of God chased out by force those who under the pretext of worship were selling sacrifices in the temple, why could not the pious magistrates draw the sword, which was given to them by the divine power, to coerce the perfidious apostates who openly profane the entire temple

of God?¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, among the gifts of the Holy Spirit, Calvin lists the power to strike the scorers of the true faith (1 Cor. 12:10). Thus ministers of God's word may use corporeal punishment in order to compel the impious, and the princes may use the sword. According to Calvin, far more cruel than the corporeal punishment is what they call clemency, because, in order that the wolf may be spared, the sheep are exposed as prey. Should the heretics be allowed to murder the souls by poisoning with their false dogmas and should the legitimate power of the sword be prevented from touching their bodies? Should they be allowed to tear the body of Christ in order to preserve intact the stench of one rotten member? I confess, continues Calvin, that pious doctors should remind and incite the princes to act with moderation and follow the example of a physician applying the extreme remedy only in a desperate disease. But there is much difference between dissolute leniency, which is nothing more than a ferment of evil, and the gentle human manner of medicine.¹⁵⁵

So far Calvin did not say anything new concerning the persecution of heretics, apostates and nonbelievers. He strictly followed the established Christian, post-Nicaean doctrines. But now, in order to defend his own right to dissent and that of his colleague reformers, Calvin assumes a more moderate tone advising practical restraint. Moreover, he says, before we move further, two things are worth to be noted. For God established His religion of whatever sort by His word and He did not proclaim punishment of lapidation for the people outside the faith but only against those who, having openly professed the doctrine of the law, may have perfidiously withdrawn from it. Thus there is no offense if someone ignorant is led into error. But if God revealed to His people a certain rule of piety and then punished the apostates, who among the mortals would dare to take onto himself the authority to sanction by sword and punishment the type of doctrine devised by his or someone else's opinions? Thus we do not provide the magistrates with vague and blind power so that under their protection any religion whatever without distinction may remain accepted, but we hold that one has to maintain the law imposed by the divine command and that the sanction of punishment may follow only after establishing the truth. This

was the error, he claims, made by the papists who indulge their foolish zeal and ignorance by shedding innocent blood or by threatening the Inquisition against others.

Using these premises they forced Turks, Jews, and others to submit to the faith of Christ. But Calvin maintains God did not indiscriminately decree the use of the sword against all, but only against the apostates who might alienate themselves from the true worship and against others who may have been led to similar treason and subjects them to just punishment. Moreover, whoever will claim that heretics and blasphemers are unjustly subjected to punishment, he willingly and knowingly will become guilty of blasphemy. Thus the authority of man is not thrust upon us, but we listen to God's word and we clearly recognize what He permanently entrusts to His church. Not without reason, continues Calvin, does God discard all human affections by which hearts are usually softened: paternal love, love between brothers, friends, and relatives; all this lest their holy zeal would be restrained by such obstacles. Why is such a severity exacted? Is it not so that we may know not to place our honor above that of God's honor? Is it not that to God is due the piety expressed in all human activities and, whenever his glory is asserted, our mutual humanity is virtually deleted from our memory ?¹⁵⁶

Finally Calvin designs his own practical rules and criteria for persecution. He designates the magistrates as protectors of the religion that has to be defended and equips them with sharp swords. But in order that they do not administer bloody punishment hastily for any error whatsoever, Calvin formulates his own theory of repression to be distinguished from the repression practiced by Rome. It is based on the punishment exacted according to the degree of errors:

Thus there are to be differentiated three degrees of errors, those we admit, that are to be tolerated, and others that are to be punished by moderate means so that only the obvious impiety may be punished by a capital penalty. Paul, time and again, encourages the believers to tolerate each other however much would they disagree among themselves. Certainly, this means that if there is a certain small

superstition or ignorance occupying the minds of the simple people, one should be patient in trying to correct them rather than too hastily seek violent retribution. Thus people should be punished according to their errors. Even the moderate type of errors call for severity. However, though the errors producing damage to the Church and resulting from negligence and ambition deserve a punishment -- nevertheless, when there is no contempt of God and rebellion combined with mutiny, the severity should not be excessive so that the indulgence may not nourish the audacity and defiance of those who would desire to tear apart the unity of faith. But since there are those who attempt to undermine religion at its foundations, and who profess execrable blasphemies against God and by impious and poisonous dogmas they drag the soul to ruin, in sum – those who attempt to revolt the public from the unique God and his doctrine, it is necessary to have a recourse to the extreme measure in order to prevent further spreading of the mortal poison. Such a rule which Moses received from the mouth of God he himself had followed faithfully.¹⁵⁷

Among the first who responded to Calvin's *Defensio* was Nicolaus Zurkinden (Zerkintes in Latin) a respected citizen of Berne and friend of Calvin and Castellio. He is quoted by Buisson as a witness of the negative reaction among lay people to the sacrifice of Servetus.¹⁵⁸ His testimony is important for the evaluation of post-Nicaean Christianity because he does not speak in anger against Calvin; on the contrary, he is a loyal, true, and often servile supporter. He expressed his own opinion as a neutral person though he disagreed with Calvin on the issue of predestination. In a letter to Calvin dated February 10, 1554, he writes:

I admit that I belong to those who, either by too much inexperience or by timidity, desire that the sword be used possibly the most rarely in order to repress the opponents of the faith who err either deliberately

or by ignorance I would rather prefer to see the magistrate and myself to sin by excess of indulgence and timidity than to be inclined to use vigorously the sword.... Wherever I turn it seems to me that the swords of the magistrates should be blunted rather than sharpened.... I would prefer to shed my blood rather than to become stained by the blood of a man who would not merit the torment absolutely.... I add that we cannot provide more pleasure to the Papists, we who have reproved their cruelties, by reinstalling among ourselves a new office of the executioner. I describe to you odious things and communicate them in a special letter because I do not want to conceal from you my reflections. I would not write to express my thought if I were not forced by my conscience. I would rather remain mute ... than to provoke quarrels and offend anybody.¹⁵⁹

In the *post scriptum* he adds that he would have preferred if the first part of Calvin's book on the justification of the sword appeared under the name of the Geneva Senate which then could defend itself well for what it had done. Then he states that he approved Calvin's position that only the most nefarious errors should be submitted to extreme punishment. But, he adds, he does not speak here on behalf of Servetus, an impious and cursed man who was justly punished; but Zurkinden would prefer to see another form of death for Servetus out of fear that it might be abused.

We do not know what Calvin's reply was but we may assume that Calvin insisted on cruel punishment since in a subsequent reply dated April 7, 1554, Zurkinden claimed again that he did not think the axe of the magistrate was the best way to restrain heresy. Examples from antiquity teach us, he wrote, that these faults are spread by human blood and cruelty rather than erased. But he hastened to explain that Servetus was excluded from those who might benefit from such an attitude. And again he expressed his deepest veneration for Calvin and the firmest belief that neither Calvin nor the Senate needed to apologize for the affair of Servetus.¹⁶⁰

Such was the opinion of the most cultivated citizen of Berne in the sixteenth

century who became in 1561 the secretary of state in Berne. He was a very pious person inspired by the Bible. His “tolerance” is considered an exception in his epoch which he himself described to Calvin as originating from a personal experience he witnessed in 1536 or 1537: “... what struck me were not the passages from the Bible, but the stupefying examples of our times in the punishment of Anabaptists. I have witnessed how an old octogenarian woman was led to her torment with her daughter, a mother of six small children. The only reason for their torment was that in accordance with the plausible and popular doctrine of the Anabaptists they did not admit the baptism of infants. And it was only to their own risk and peril, because there was no fear that these poor women with their false doctrine could corrupt mankind. This single example among many left such an impression on me that it suffices”¹⁶¹ However, he did not see anything morally wrong with the execution or torture of the so-called heretics or sorcerers, he wanted only to avoid “excesses” as those described in the case of the Anabaptist women.¹⁶² On this point he was in agreement with Castellio and maintained with him a vivid correspondence.¹⁶³ Since he ascribed only a secondary role to the dogmas, he could also be a friend to other enemies of Calvin like Bolsec, Curione, Biandrata, Gribaldi, and Schwenckfeld.

Zurkinden was great friend of Calvin in spite of differences concerning the doctrine of predestination. He wished that Calvin did not leave his followers in the “labyrinth” of his speculations and that he did not torment the Scripture.¹⁶⁴ He was always careful enough to emphasize in all his letters his respect and servility to Calvin and apologized in case he might have offended him.¹⁶⁵ In a letter of June 15, 1558, Zurkinden, in order to avoid any rupture with Calvin, explained his contacts with Gribaldi, Biandrata and the correspondence with Castellio: “... But in all these letters which I offer to show to you, there is nothing against you, even against your name”¹⁶⁶

Notes and Bibliography

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Reprint Corp. and Frankfurt a. Main: Minerva G.m.b.H.). See, *Ad Senatium Venetium*, 8: 748.

2. Calvin, *Opera*, VIII, 865 (July 18, 1531).
3. Ibid. 861-862.
4. They were reprinted together with *De Trinitatis erroribus libri septem* in 1965. Servetus, *De Trinitatis*.
5. The Servetus text is transcribed by Fernández, *Miguel Servet*, 319, from the unpublished manuscript pages, a draft of the theological treatise for the *Christianismi restitutio*, attached to the Edinburgh copy of *Christianismi restitutio*.
6. Jerome Friedman, *Michael Servetus. A Case Study in Total Heresy* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, S.A., 1978). 137-139. Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 8 vols, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923-1958), 5 (1941) : 111-126.
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9. Calvin, *Opera*, 10: 30-36. B. K. Kuiper, *The Church in History*, (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1964), p. 190.
10. Théodore De Bèze, *Histoire de la vie et mort de J. Calvin*, Geneva (1657; new edition published and annotated by Alfred Franklin, Paris: J. Cherbuliez, Libraire, 1864), 19-22.
11. The meeting was mentioned by de Bèze in *ibid.* 22; in de Bèze *Histoire ecclésiastique des Églises réformées au royaume de France*, 1: 14; in Calvin, *Opera*, 12: 57. Calvin himself mentions it in a reference to the conversation with Servetus, shortly before his death: "For more than 16 years I did not gain anything trying to win him for Our Lord, and not without danger to my own life," Calvin, *Opera*, 8: 826.
12. Quoted by Standford Rives, *Did Calvin Murder Servetus?*, (Charleston, South Carolina: Book Surge Publishers, 2008), p. 521 & ff.
13. The last edition translated into English, Charles O'Malley, *Michael Servetus. A Translation of his Geography, Medical, and Astrological Writings* with Introduction and Notes, (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1937), 55-167.
14. Jean Guinter de Andernach, *Institutiones anatomicae*, Basel 1539, quoted by Fernández, *Miguel Servet*, 99-100.
15. The major work of Andreas Vesalius is *De humani corporis fabrica libri septem*. (Basileae ex officina Ioannis Oporini, 1543).
16. *Advertissement contre l'Astrologie qu'on appelle iudiciaire et autres curiositez qui regnent auyourd'huy au monde. Par M. Iean Calvin*, A Genève, par Iean Girard, 1549. See Calvin, *Opera*, 7: 509-544.
17. Calvin, *Opera*, 8: 515-516.
18. Ibid. 517-518.
19. Ibid. 534
20. *Michaelis Villanovani in quendam medicum apologetica disceptatio pro astrologia* in O'Malley, *Michael Servetus*, 173. For photocopies of the report and its summary, see Fernández, *Miguel Servet*, 107-110.
21. Two exemplars are preserved in the National Library in Paris. It was also reedited by Henri Tollin in 1889. Its English translation was published by O'Malley. *Michael Servetus*, 168-188.
22. There is French translation of the Tractate, *Discussion apologétique pour l'astrologie. Texte établi et traduit par Jean Dupèpe*, (Genève: Librairie Droz, S.A. 2004).
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24. A good description of the atmosphere in Lyon is given in Ferdinand Buisson, *Sébastien Castellion, sa vie et son oeuvre*, 2 vols. (1882; reprint, Nieuwkoop: B. de Graaf, 1964), 1: 55 & ff. Servetus's reputation grew and he was contracted next by the Compagnie des Libraires in Lyon to correct and edit the Pagnini Bible. He, for sure, edited the Bible published *in folio* in 1542, but there

is no internal evidence that he contributed to the edition in *octavo* of 1542 or to the seven-volume edition of 1545.

25. O'Malley, *Michael Servetus*, 189-194.

26. Included in the *Christianismi restitutio* and printed in Calvin, *Opera*, 8: 649-714. Alcalá, *Treinta cartas*, 40.

27. *Ex triginta epistolis quas velut ad me scriptas in publicum edidit*. In *Defensio orthodoxae fidei de sacra Trinitate, contra prodigiosos errores Michaelis Serveti Hispani: ubi ostenditur haereticos iure gladii coercendos esse, et nominatim de homine hoc tam impio iuste et merito sumptum Genevae fuisse supplicium. Per Iohannem Calvinum*. Oliva Roberti Stephani, M.D.LIV in Calvin, *Opera*, 8: 462.

28. *Defensio orthodoxae fidei, op. cit.*, in Calvin, *Opera*, 8: 482.

29. Calvin, *Opera*, 8: 748

30. *Ibid.* 484-486.

31. Servetus, *Christianismi restitutio*, 525.

32. Calvin, *Opera*, 8: 833-834.

33. Calvin, *Opera*, 12: 281-283. English translation in *Letters of Calvin Compiled from the Original Manuscripts and Edited with Historical Notes by Jacques Bonnet*. (English translation first published in 1883; reprint, New York: Burt Franklin, 1972). 2: 33. Doumergue regards these letters of February 13, as published in 1547, in *Jean Calvin*, 6: 260-261.

This letter was originally quoted in 1582 by Jérôme Bolsec, an enemy of Calvin, in his biography of Calvin as the letter written to the pastor Pierre Viret in Lausanne. But it was discovered by Hugo Grotius in 1631 in Paris as a letter written to Farel and quoted in 1642 and in 1645. It was published in 1647 by the church historian Uytendogaers. It is preserved in the collection at the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris. Émile Doumergue, the staunch defender of Calvin, does not attach any importance to this letter and points to Servetus's letter to pastor Abel Poupin in which Servetus predicts his death for the cause. Doumergue tries to explain Calvin's letter saying that it was the spirit of the epoch to present everything in terms of life and death. This defense of Calvin is purely academic, the facts speak for themselves. The work by Bolsec: *Histoire de la vie, moeurs, actes, doctrine et mort de Jean Calvin, jadis grand ministre de Genève, recueilly par M. Hierosme Hermes Bolsec, Docteur-Médecin a Lyon, dédiée au révérendissime archevesque comte de l'Église de Lyon, et primat de France*, (1582), 4. The letter of Servetus to Abel Poupin, Calvin, *Opera*, 8: 750-751. Doumergue, *Jean Calvin*, 6: 261-265.

34. Calvin, *Opera*, 8: 487-495.

35. *Ibid.* prolegomena, XXX.

36. *Ibid.* 750-751.

37. Calvin, *Opera*, 8: 835.

38. *Ibid.* 749, 755, 756, 786, 787, 852-854.

39. *Ibid.*, 599.

40. N. Weiss, "Les cinq étudiants de Lyon," in *Bull. Société Historique du Protestantisme en France*, 41, (1892), 307.

41. Doumergue, *Jean Calvin*, 6: 272 & ff. David F. Wright, "The Edinburgh Manuscript Pages of Servetus's *Christianismi Restitutio*," in *Probing the Reformed Tradition. Historical Studies in Honor of Edward A. Dowey, Jr.*, eds. L.A. McKee and Brian G. Armstrong (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 263-291. Marian Hillar with Claire S. Allen, *Michael Servetus. Intellectual Giant, Humanist, and Martyr*, (Lanham, New York, Oxford: University Press of America, 2002), p. 92-95.

42. Nathanaël Weiss, *La Chambre ardente, étude sur la liberté de conscience en France sous François Ier et Henri II (1540-1550) suivie d'environ 500 arrêts inédits rendus par le Parlement de Paris de mai 1547 à mars 1550*. (1889; reprint, Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1970).

43. Antoine Gachet D'Artigny, *Nouveaux mémoires d'histoire, de critique et de littérature*. (Paris: Debure, l'aîné, 1749). 2: 114-115.

44. Quoted by Bainton, *Hunted Heretic*, 80.

45. *De Scandalis quibus hodie plerique obsterrentur nonnulli etiam alientur apura Evangelii*

doctrine. Ioannis Calvini libellum apprime utilis. Ad Laurentium Norandum. Genevae apud Ioannem Crispinum 1550, in Calvin, Opera, 8: 44.

46. Doumergue as a Calvinist is an ardent defender of Calvin arguing, often in demagogic way, that the letter was written independently of Calvin. However, the internal evidence and the following letters and materials supplied point to a conspiracy or at least an intention to hurt Servetus. Doumergue, *Jean Calvin*, 6: 277 &ff.

47. *Defensio orthodoxae fidei* in Ibid. 480-481.

48. Ibid. 479. It is indeed a poor excuse that it was de Trie who wrote the letter. The point was noticed by Michel de la Roche who wrote: "The problem was not the answer to accusations that were intended against Calvin but to know if in the last analysis he denounced Servetus in Vienne or not." *Bibliothèque anglaise. Histoire de la Grande Bretagne*, Amsterdam 1717. 2: 192, quoted by Doumergue, *Jean Calvin*, 6: 278.

49. D'Artigny, *Nouveaux mémoires*. The first mention of these letters comes from Castellio in his *Historia de morte Serveti* and from Bolsec in his *Vie de Calvin*. Both ascribed them to Calvin.

50. Calvin, *Opera*, 8: 732, 789.

51. Ibid. 732, 738, 789, 805.

52. Ibid. 844-853. Doumergue, *Jean Calvin*, 6: 265.

53. Calvin, *Opera*, 8:784-787.

54. Ibid. 851-856.

55. For the beginnings of the Reformation in Geneva see Henri Naef, *Les origines de la Réforme en Genève*. (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1968), vols 1, 2. Extensive information on Calvin, Geneva and people who were associated with Calvin may be found in a work by a Calvinist, Émile Doumergue, *Jean Calvin*, 6 vols. Critical analysis of Calvin and his system is given by Stefan Zweig in his essay *The Right to Heresy. Castellio against Calvin*, translated by Eden and Cedar Paul (1936; Boston: Beacon Press, 1951).

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58. Weiss, *La Chambre ardente*, 2: 17.

59. Ibid. 26.

60. Ibid. 31.

61. Quoted in Ibid. 34.

62. Ibid. 62.

63. Calvin, *Opera*, 8: 770, 782.

64. Ibid. 725.

65. Ibid. 462, 479.

66. Ibid. 727-731.

67. Ibid. 736.

68. Ibid. 741.

69. Doumergue, *Jean Calvin*, 6: 332 & ff.

70. The matter of Libertines is discussed by Bainton, *Hunted Heretic*, 172 & ff.

71. Doumergue, *Jean Calvin*, 6: 181.

72. *Defensio orthodoxae fidei* in Calvin, *Opera*, 8: 496-497; 745.

73. Ibid. 498.

74. Ibid. 759.

75. "*Spero capitale saltem fore iudicium, poenae vero atrocitatem remitti cupio.*" Calvini, *Opera*, 14: 590.

76. Ibid. 771.

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79. Calvin, *Opera*, 8: 771-778; 778-782.
80. Ibid. 774.
81. Ibid. 783-787.
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84. Calvin, *Opera*, 14: 611.
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86. Servetus's response in Ibid. 507-518.
87. In *Defensio orthodoxae fidei*, Ibid. 514.
88. Ibid. 507.
89. *Brevis refutatio errorum et impietatem Michaelis Serveti a ministris ecclesiae genevesis magnifico senatu sicuti iussi fuerant oblata*, Ibid. 519-554.
90. Ibid. 796.
91. Calvin, *Opera*, 14: 600.
92. Ibid. 519-553.
93. Ibid. 799-800.
94. Ibid. 802-803.
95. Ibid. 803.
96. Letter of September 18, 1553, to Haller. Calvin, *Opera*. 14: 624.
97. Calvin, *Opera*, 14: 640.
98. Calvin, *Opera*, 8: 824.
99. Calvin, *Opera*, 14: 635.
100. Letter to Bullinger of October 3, 1553, in Ibid. 633.
101. Ibid. 627.
102. Ibid. 647.
103. Doumergue, *Jean Calvin*, 6: 351.
104. Calvin, *Opera*, 14: 641-642.
105. Ibid. 649.
106. First part of the quote translated from the quote given by Fernández, *Miguel Servet*, 264. The rest from the text in English given by Roland H. Bainton, in *Concerning Heretics whether they are to be persecuted and how they are to be treated. A collection of the opinions of learned men both ancient and modern. An anonymous work attributed to Sebastian Castellio* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), 305-309 (hereafter cited as *Concerning Heretics*).
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108. Ibid. 657.
109. Ibid. 590: "Spero capitale saltem fore iudicium: peonae vero atrocitatem remitti cupio."
110. Calvin, *Opera*, 8: 825.
111. Ibid. 827-830.
112. *Defensio orthodoxae fidei*, in Ibid. 498; French translation Ibid. 826.
113. Ibid. 826.
114. *Defensio orthodoxae fidei*, in Ibid. 460; A French translation Ibid. 826.
115. Calvin, *Opera*, 14: 694.
116. Letter of Farel to Blaurer, December 10, 1553, in Ibid. 694.
117. Quoted in Rives, *op. cit.*, p. 517-518.
118. Letter of Farel to Blaurer, December 10, 1553, in Calvin, *Opera*, 14: 693-694.
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120. Amédée Roget, *Histoire du peuple de Genève, depuis la Réforme jusqu'à l'Escalade*, 8 vols, (Geneva: John Jullien, 1870-1883), 4 : 111.
121. Calvin, *Opera*, 14: 666.
122. In a letter to Bullinger of October 28, 1553, in Ibid. 657-658.
123. In a letter of October 14, 1553, in Ibid. 641-642.

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124. Calvin, *Opera*, 15: 19-22.
125. Calvin, *Opera*, 14: 565.
126. In a letter of Vergerius to Bullinger, October 8, 1553, Calvin, *Opera*, 14: 635, 636; letter of October 14, 1553, in *Ibid.* 641-642.
127. Philippus Gallitius, (b. 1504 in Puntavilla) as a capellanus in Carmogask organized reform there in 1526 and in the region of Engadina. From 138 he taught at the school of St. Nicolas in Chur. He reported to Bullinger in a letter of October 19, 1553, that he heard that there were many supporters of Servetus in Italy among the learned and scholars. He himself supported the opinion of Bullinger as a "pious and worthy of a Christian" about the sentence of Servetus. Calvin, *Opera*, 14: 648-650.
128. Hottingems, Johannes Henricus, *Historiae ecclesiasticae Novi Testamenti, IX, Seculi XVI*, (Paris, 1667), 419. Quoted by Bainton, *Sebastian Castellio. Concerning Heretics*, 8.
129. Calvin, *Opera*, 15: 239-245.
130. Calvin, *Opera*, 3: 9-36.
131. Calvin, *Opera*, 14: 671.
132. Letter of Calvin to Bullinger, November 28, 1553, *Ibid.* 683-684.
133. *Ibid.* 698.
134. *Ibid.* 723.
135. The Latin text is reproduced in Calvin, *Opera*, 8: 457-644. Also in the footnotes are indicated modifications in the French version.
136. In a letter to Calvin of March 26, Calvin, *Opera*, 15: 90.
137. *Ibid.* 268.
138. Letter of May 24, 1554, to Bullinger. In *Ibid.* 124.
139. Jacques Bainville, *Histoire de France*, (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1924), 134.
140. *Defensio*, in Calvin, *Opera*, 8: 457.
141. *Ibid.* 461.
142. *Ibid.* 461.
143. *Ibid.* 478-479.
144. *Ibid.* 474. The same principle is developed in Calvin's sermons on Deuteronomy, Calvin, *Opera*, 27: 243-244.
145. Calvin, *Opera*, 8: 474.
146. *Ibid.* 467.
147. *Ibid.* 464-465.
148. *Ibid.* 466.
149. *Ibid.* 465.
150. *Ibid.* 467.
151. *Ibid.* 466.
152. *Ibid.* 469.
153. *Ibid.* 470.
154. *Ibid.* 470-471.
155. *Ibid.* 471-472.
156. *Ibid.* 475.
157. *Ibid.* 477.
158. Ferdinand Buisson, *Sébastien Castellion, sa vie et son oeuvre*. 2 vols., (1882; reprint, Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1964). 1: 351-354.
159. Calvin, *Opera*, 15: 19-22.
160. *Ibid.* 115-116.
161. Letter of February 10, 1554, in *Ibid.* 20.
162. Letter to Castellio of December 15, 1560, in Buisson, *Sébastien Castellion*, 2: 309.
163. Buisson, *Sébastien Castellion*, 2: 301-408.
164. In letter to Castellio of February 11, 1563, in *Ibid.* 2: 407.
165. Calvin, *Opera*, 15: 416, 622, 623; 16: 58.
166. Calvin, 17:206-207.

