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tolerance of ideas
freedom of conscience



Michael Servetus Biography

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Michael Servetus Biography Abstract



Michael Servetus is in more than one respect one of the most remarkable men of the sixteenth century; while the tragic death which he suffered made him the first and most conspicuous martyr to the faith whose history we are following. Records of the life of Servetus are scanty and inconsistent, and the gaps in them have often been filled up by conjectures which have later proved to be mistaken.

Servetus, Michael, in Spanish, Miguel Serveto (1511-1553), Spanish physician and theologian, who was executed for his beliefs by the Calvinist government of Geneva. He was born in Villanueva de Sijena, Huesca Province. He studied law at the University of Toulouse, medicine at the universities of Paris and Montpellier. Beginning in 1540 he practiced medicine in Vienne, France, where he also served as the personal physician to the archbishop. About 1545 he began a correspondence with the French Protestant theologian John Calvin.

Although still a nominal Catholic, he described his heretical opposition to the concept of the Trinity. He wrote to Calvin in 1545 about his desire to go there, but Calvin did not answer and in a letter to one of his ministers he condemned him to death, a goal he got in 1553. He was arrested while attending church in Geneva, convicted of heresy and blasphemy against Christianity, and burned at the stake on October 27, 1553.

Servetus's religious opinions were strongly opposed by Catholics and Protestants of his time. In 1531 he repudiated, in his *De Trinitatis Erroribus* (On the Error of the Trinity), the tripartite personality of God. In 1532 he wrote *Dialogorum de Trinitate Libri Duo* (Second Book of Dialogues on the Trinity). His scientific contributions were also notable; his *Christianismi Restitutio* (The Restoration of Christianity), published shortly before his death in 1553, included the first accurate description of the pulmonary circulatory system.

1511-1530. Early times and first contacts with the reformation



Servetus was born in 1511 at Villanueva de Sijena, a small city in Aragon, where his father had received an appointment as royal Notary, an office of some distinction, and where the family lived in handsome style. His parents were devoted Catholics, and it is thought that he may at first have been designed for the priesthood. Little is known to a certainty about his early education, but he seems to have been a precocious youth, and early in his teens to have acquired a knowledge of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and to have become well versed in mathematics and the scholastic philosophy. At age 14 he entered the service of Juan Quintana, a scholarly Franciscan monk. [[1.- more about historical context](#)]

When Servetus was seventeen his father determined that he should enter the law, and to that end sent him across the Pyrenees to the University of Toulouse, then the most celebrated in France. Even in his youth Servetus was struck by the fact that the doctrine of the trinity was a serious obstacle to evangelization of the Moors and Jews. While studying law at the University of Toulouse in France, he read the Bible, which the invention of the printing press had made newly and dangerously available. He was surprised to find the trinity nowhere explicitly mentioned, much less defined, in the sacred text.

After two years at the University, Servetus was recalled, in late 1529, to the service of Quintana, who had been appointed confessor to Emperor Charles V. He was to accompany Quintana as he traveled with the imperial party to the coronation of the Emperor in Bologna, Italy. In Italy Servetus was horrified by riches of the church, the adoration accorded the Pope, and the worldliness of the priesthood. Some time in 1530 Servetus dropped out of the



emperor's entourage and made his way to the Swiss city of Basel to join the Protestants. He stayed for months in the household of [2] **Oecolampadius**, the local pastor and Reform leader, nevertheless he did not find any support on his views. [3.- [know more](#)]

1.- Historical context

There was much going on in Spain at this period to make a serious minded youth thoughtful about questions of religion. Ferdinand and Isabella the Catholic were on the throne, determined to secure political unity in their new nation by compelling religious uniformity; and a spirit of the most intolerant orthodoxy controlled the government. In 1492, for refusing to deny the faith of their fathers and profess Christianity, 800,000 Jews had been banished from the kingdom. In the same year the Moors had been overthrown in Granada, and although for a few years they were granted toleration, they were soon compelled to choose between abandoning their Mohammedanism and being driven from Spain. In both cases it was the dogma of the Trinity that proved the insurmountable obstacle for races which held as the first article of their faith the undivided unity of God. Within the generation including Servetus's boyhood, some 20,000 victims, Jewish or Mohammedan, were thus burned at the stake. Despite the resistance of the liberty loving Aragonians, the Inquisition was set up among them to root out heresy; and these things must all have made a deep impression upon the mind of the young Servetus, and may well have laid the foundation for the main passion of his life.

2.- J. Oecolampadius (1482-1531)



German Protestant reformer, associate of Huldreich Zwingli in the Reformation in Switzerland. He was in 1516 a preacher at Basel, where he worked with Erasmus on his New Testament. In 1520 he preached in Augsburg, then for a time was in a convent at Altmünster. Martin Luther's teachings won his interest, and in 1522 he acted as chaplain among reformers under Franz von Sickingen at Ebernburg and then returned to Basel to devote himself to the work of the Reformation. He agreed with the views of Zwingli on the nature of the Eucharist, defending this position against Luther in the Colloquy of Marburg, 1529, while Zwingli disputed the question with Melanchthon.

See biographies by J. J. Herzog (1843) and K. R. Hagenbach (1859); W. Walker, *The Reformation* (1900).

3.- Know more

Though Servetus was but a youth of nineteen, a foreigner and a Catholic, and Oecolampadius was far more than twice his age, a distinguished man busy with important affairs, yet he received Servetus for some time patiently, and though scandalized by the views he expressed tried to convince him of his errors. Before long he found Servetus so conceited, so obstinate in his opinions, and so much more bent on pressing his own views than upon humbly seeking to learn the truth, that he lost patience; and when Servetus complained because Oecolampadius would no longer listen to him, the latter wrote in reply, "I have more reason for complaint than you. You thrust yourself upon me as if I had nothing to do but answer your questions." Servetus therefore, after having failed to get an interview with Erasmus, who, was then living at Basel, next went to Strassburg to see what he might accomplish with the reformers there.

1530-1532. The first writings



Having worn out his welcome there with constant theological dispute, Servetus moved to more tolerant Strasburg where he met the town reformers **Bucer** and **Capito**. There, in 1531, he published *De Trinitatis Erroribus* (On the Errors of the Trinity). If Servetus hoped his book would persuade the new Protestant establishment to re-think orthodox trinitarian doctrine, as traditionally interpreted from the fourth century Council of Nicaea through the late mediaeval Scholastics, and replace it with his own formulation, he was quickly disappointed.

Though Protestants admired some aspects of Servetus' thought, they deplored many others. Moreover, they were especially defensive concerning their trinitarian orthodoxy, having no desire to call upon themselves still more Roman Catholic denunciation. The Lutheran reformer **Melanchthon**, commenting on *De Trinitatis Erroribus*, lamented, "As for the Trinity you know I have always feared this would break out some day. Good God, what tragedies this question will excite among those who come after us!"

Servetus tried the effect of a more conciliatory volume, *Dialogorum de Trinitate* (Dialogues on the Trinity), published the following year. But in it he neither conceded anything important to his system, nor even softened the vituperation of his rhetoric. His second volume was neither intended nor received as a recantation. His books were confiscated, and he was warned out of several Protestant towns. Meanwhile, in 1532, the Supreme Council of the Inquisition in Spain began proceedings to summon him, or to apprehend him if he would not appear before the tribunal. His brother, Juan, a priest, was sent to persuade him to return to Spain for questioning. He was terrified. He later wrote of this period, "I was sought up and down to be snatched to my death." He fled to Paris and surfaced there with a new name, Michel de Villeneuve.

1.- Martin Bucer (1491-1551)



One of the leaders in the South German Reformation movement, b. 11 November, 1491, at Schlettstadt, Alsace; d. 28 February, 1551, at Cambridge, England. He received his early education at the Latin School of his native place, where at the age of fifteen (1506) he also entered the Order of St. Dominic. Later he was sent to the University of Heidelberg to prosecute his studies, and matriculated, 31 January, 1517. He became an ardent admirer of Erasmus, and soon an enthusiastic disciple of Luther. He heard the Saxon monk at a public disputation, held at Heidelberg in 1518, on the occasion of a meeting of the Augustinian order, became personally acquainted with him, and was immediately won over to his ideas. Having openly adopted the new doctrine he withdrew from the Dominican order, in 1521, became court chaplain of Frederick the Elector Palatine, and laboured as secular priest at Landstuhl, in the Palatinate (1522), and as a member of the household of Count Sickingen and at Weissenburg, Lower Alsace (1522-23). During his incumbency at Landstuhl he married Elizabeth Silbereisen, a former nun. When, in 1523, his position became untenable at Weissenburg, he proceeded to Strasburg. Here his activity was soon exercised over a large field; he became the chief reformer of the city and was connected with many important religio-political events of the period. His doctrinal views on points controverted between Luther and Zwingli at first harmonized completely with the ideas of the Swiss Reformer.

Subsequently he sought to mediate between Lutherans and Zwinglians. The highly questionable methods to which he resorted in the interest of peace drew upon him the denunciation of both parties. In spite of the efforts of Bucer, the Conference of Marburg (1529), at which the divergent views of Luther and Zwingli, especially the doctrine regarding the Eucharist, were discussed, failed to bring about a reconciliation. At the Diet of Augsburg, in the following year, he drew up with Capito the "Confessio Tetrapolitana", or Confession of



the Four Cities (Strasburg, Constance, Memmingen, and Lindau). Later on, moved by political considerations, he abandoned this for the Augsburg Confession. In 1536, he brought about the more nominal than real "Concordia of Wittenberg" among German Protestants. He gave his own, and obtained Luther's and Melanchthon's approbation for the bigamy of the Landgrave Philip of Hesse, attended in 1540 the religious conference between Catholics and Protestants at Hagenau, Lower Alsace, and in 1541 the Diet of Ratisbon. The combined attempt of Bucer and Melanchthon to introduce the Reformation into the Archdiocese of Cologne ended in failure (1542). Political troubles and the resistance of Bucer to the agreement arrived at by Catholics and Protestants in 1548, and known as the "Augsburg Interim", made his stay in Strasburg impossible. At the invitation of Archbishop Cranmer, he proceeded to England in 1549. After a short stay in London, during which he was received by King Edward VI (1547-53), he was called to Cambridge as Regius Professor of Divinity. His opinion was frequently asked by Cranmer on church matters, notably on the controversy regarding ecclesiastical vestments. But his sojourn was to be of short duration, as he died in February, 1551. Under the reign of Queen Mary (1553-58) his remains were exhumed and burned, and his tomb was demolished (1556), but was reconstructed in 1560 by Queen Elizabeth (1558-1603).

Bucer was, after Luther and Melanchthon, the most influential of German Reformers. For a clear statement of doctrine he was ever ready to substitute vague formulas in the interest of unity, which even his able efforts could not establish among the Reformers. He forms a connecting link between the German and the English Reformation. Of the thirteen children he had by his first marriage, only one, a weak-minded son, survived. Wibrandis Rosenblatt, the successive wife of several Reformers (Cellarius, Oecolampadius, Capito, and Bucer), whom he married after his first wife died from the plague in 1541, bore him three children, of whom a daughter survived. Only one of the ten folio volumes in which his works were to appear was published (Basle, 1577). It is known as "Tomas Anglicanus" because its contents were mostly written in England.

2.- W. Capito (1478-1541)



Professor and Preacher at Basel. Capito had three Doctorates in Law, Medicine and Theology. In 1512, he was invited to become the Cure of Cathedral at Basel. Rome's errors were revealed to him while preaching through Romans, resulting in his quitting the Mass in 1517. His preaching on Matthew had an impact on Basel, that was continued by Hedio when Capito was invited by the Archbishop to become his chaplain at Mainz. In 1523, Capito went to Strasburg, where Matthew Zell convinced him to join in reformation efforts. He had a prominent role in the Synod of Berne in 1532. His first wife Agnus had died in 1531. At Basel he met and then married Oecolampadius' widow, Wilibrandis Rosenblatt and together they had five children before his death in

Strasburg of the Plague in 1541.

3.- Melanchthon (1497-1560)



Born Feb. 15, 1497, Bretten, Palatinate [Germany]

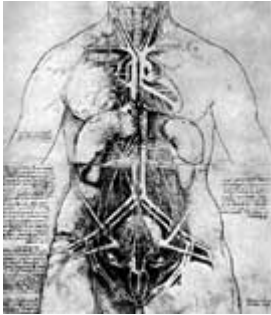
Died April 19, 1560, probably Wittenberg, Saxony [Germany]

Original name Philipp Schwartzerd (German: "Black Earth"; in Greek, Melanchthon) German author of the Confession of Augsburg of the Lutheran Church (1530), humanist, Reformer, theologian, and educator. He was a friend of Martin Luther and defended his views. In 1521 Melanchthon published the Loci communes, the first systematic treatment of evangelical doctrine. Because of his academic expertise he

was asked to help in founding schools, and he virtually reorganized the whole educational system of Germany, founding and reforming several of its universities.



1532-1538. Studies of Medicine in Paris



As "Villeneuve" Servetus studied mathematics and medicine at colleges in Paris, then a center of religious ferment. Nicholas Cop, Rector of the University, was forced to flee the city after an inaugural address deemed too Protestant. A young student of Servetus' acquaintance, John Calvin, who may have written the address, had also to leave town and to go into hiding. Sometime during the next year Calvin risked his life to return to Paris that he might meet Servetus and respond to his theological challenges.

Servetus, perhaps afraid of being seen with a fugitive, did not show up. Driven to witness for his religious cause, he yet felt unready to be its effective champion. "On this account I delayed," he recalled, "and also because of imminent persecution, so that with Jonah I longed rather to flee to the sea or to one of the New Isles."

Servetus left temporarily Paris and began to support himself in France by working as corrector of proof in Lyon, which ranked next to Paris as a publishing center. He was employed for over two years by Treschel, a famous publishing house. In this capacity Servetus served as editor of a new edition of Ptolemy's Geography (1535), which the recent explorations in the New World had made necessary. This work was enriched by many pungent notes, and one of these, which spoke of Palestine as a very poor country for a "promised land," afterwards brought him into trouble as a defamer of Moses.

Inspired by some of the medical works published by Trechsel, Servetus decided to return to the study of medicine. From 1536-38 he was a medical student at the University of Paris. He followed Andreas Vesalius as assistant to Hans Gunther in dissection. Gunther wrote that "Michael Villonovanus" had a knowledge of Galen "second to none." Servetus soon came to differ from Galen in the matter of pulmonary circulation. Galen had supposed aeration of the blood took place in the heart and assigned the lungs a fairly minor function. Servetus, by examining the wall of the heart and noting the size of the pulmonary artery, concluded that transformation of the blood, accomplished by the release of waste gases and the infusion of air, occurred in the lungs. It is not clear whether Servetus or a contemporary, unknown to Servetus, first made this discovery. Servetus was the first to publish. Although he only expressed the new knowledge as a lengthy metaphorical aside in his theological writing, he was the first person to record a modern understanding of pulmonary respiration.

In 1538 Servetus, as Villeneuve, got into trouble with the faculty of medicine, the Parlement of Paris, and the Inquisition for mixing astrology with medicine. Although he was acquitted by the Inquisition, the Parlement ruled that his published self-defense (*Disceptatio Pro Astrologia*) was to be confiscated and he was to desist from the practice of astrology. [[1.- To know more about this](#)]

Servetus left Paris shortly thereafter, perhaps without a degree, to practice medicine in the area of Lyons. Around 1540 he became the personal physician of Pierre Palmier, Archbishop of Vienne.

1.- Know more

Astrology was still in good repute, and the line was not sharply drawn between that and meteorology. Theologians like Melancthon believed in it and practiced it, and kings and princes had their court astrologers whom they consulted before any important undertaking. In his lectures and in a published pamphlet on the subject, Servetus made some disrespectful remarks about the medical scholars of the time, charging them with ignorance for neglecting this important subject, and calling them a plague of the world. His colleagues in the faculty were furious, and had him haled before the Inquisitor on a charge of heresy. When he was acquitted of this, they prosecuted him before the Supreme Court for advocating the practice of divination, which was forbidden on pain of death by fire. The Court

ordered Servetus to withdraw his pamphlet, to pay his colleagues more respect, and to cease lecturing on the subject. But he had now had enough of academic life, and so he left Paris and entered upon the practice of medicine.

1542-1553. Working as a physiscian in Vienne



During his twelve-year residence in Vienne, the longest quiet period of his troubled life, Servetus acquired fame and fortune as a physician and, at the same time, he continued working as proof corrector. In 1542, he brought out a new edition of Ptolemy which he softened down some of the notes that had given offense before. He next prepared an edition of the Santes Pagnini's Bible, completed in seven volumes in 1545. His introduction and notes anticipate modern biblical criticism and show a marked advance in sophistication beyond that of his earlier theological writing.

At the same time, Michel de Villeneuve, Servetus continued cultivating his interest in theology with the prepararion of his major theological treatise, *Christianismi Restitutio* (The Restoration of Christianity). He also began, in 1546, a fateful secret correspondence with his old acquaintance, [1] **John Calvin**. By this time Calvin, author of *Institutio Christianae Religionis* (Institutions of Christian Religion), 1536, and pastor and chief reformer of Geneva, was the most prestigious figure in the Reform branch of Protestantism.

Calvin's theology had included little mention of the trinitarian nature of the godhead until, in 1537, another reformer, Pierre Caroli, accused him of being an Arian. Although cleared by a synod at Lausanne, Calvin was afterwards on his guard and determined to deal severely with deviations in this area of orthodoxy. The subject, associated with unpleasant memories, was distasteful to him. Servetus, surely aware of Calvin's previous lack of clarity on the subject, bombarded him with letters insisting on unorthodox conceptions more radical than those he had presented a decade and more ago. Calvin replied with increasing impatience and asperity. Servetus sent Calvin a manuscript of his yet unpublished *Restitutio*. Calvin reciprocated by sending a copy of the *Institutio*. Servetus returned it with abusive annotations. On the day Calvin broke off the correspondence, he wrote to his colleague, Guillaume Farel, that should Servetus ever come to Geneva, "if my authority is of any avail I will not suffer him to get out alive."

1.- Calvin and context at Geneva in 1553



Before proceeding to speak of the long trial that followed, it will be necessary for a clear understanding of it to say something of Calvin himself, and of conditions in Geneva at this time. John Calvin had been born in 1509, two years before Servetus, at Noyon in Picardie, and had been well educated and designed for the priesthood. Later falling out with the Church, he had, like Servetus, studied law; and he was becoming converted to the views of the Reformation at the very time when Servetus was publishing his first books against the Trinity. In 1536 he had published his Institutes of the Christian Religion, a clear, logical, and able presentation of the Protestant system of belief, much the strongest work yet written in defense of the Protestant cause; and this had at once caused him to be recognized as the intellectual leader of the Reformed religion outside Germany. Obligated to flee from France, where no Protestant's life was quite safe, he had

happened to come to Geneva at the very moment when the cause of the Reformation, which had been adopted earlier that year, hung trembling in the balance for want of a powerful leader. Quite against his inclination he was pressed into service there, and although never in



name more than one of the city pastors and a preacher and teacher of theology, he soon became in fact, and by the force of his character, practically dictator.

Geneva in 1553 was a cosmopolitan little city of about 20,000 inhabitants. Before the Reformation it had been gay and dissolute, and even now its people were much given to pleasure, and none too strict in their morals. Calvin determined to change all this, and to make Geneva a model for the Protestant world, with its life strictly conformed to the Word of God. He soon brought order out of chaos, reformed the code of laws, and aimed by strict laws strictly enforced, even as to the small details of private life, to root out vice and make religion and good morals universal among the inhabitants. The Genevese, however, resenting that a mere foreigner should thus interfere with their old habits and customs, rose in indignant opposition, and after two years drove Calvin and his fellow reformer, Farel, into exile, forbidding them ever to return. Thereupon things drifted from bad to worse until after three years it was necessary to recall Calvin. He returned in 1541 to remain at Geneva for the rest of his life, ruling with a more absolute hand than ever, though not without great and persistent opposition. The Libertines (as the strong party opposed to Calvin came at a later time to be called) found him in the way of their political ambitions, and determined if possible to destroy his power. After he had caused one of their number to be beheaded in 1547 they became doubly infuriated against him. They insulted him in every way: named their dogs Calvin, and called him Cain. The struggle was hard and hot, and the outcome of it was long uncertain. After gaining some temporary victories over his opponents, Calvin had had to face renewed opposition, and in the summer of 1553 he seemed to be all but defeated. This was the critical state of things when Servetus arrived upon the scene, with the Libertines ready, if opportunity offered, to take any advantage of his presence in order further to thwart Calvin's influence. The trial of Servetus was thus not merely a trial of an individual for heresy, but one in which political and personal interests were also deeply involved; and on its outcome seemed to depend not simply the life of the accused, but also the fate of the Reformation in Geneva, and perhaps even in all Switzerland and France.

1553. Last work and final days



When Servetus published the *Restitutio* in early 1553 he sent an advance copy to Geneva. The printed text included thirty of his letters to Calvin. Soon afterward, at Calvin's behest, the identity of "Villeneuve" was betrayed to the Catholic Inquisition in Vienne. After his arrest and interrogation Servetus managed to escape from the prison. [1.- [To know more](#)]

On his way, perhaps, to northern Italy where, he believed, there were people receptive to his writings, he made his way across the border to Geneva.

Recognized at a Geneva church service, he was arrested and tried for heresy by Protestant authorities.

The secular officials were unable to establish that Servetus was an immoral disturber of the public peace. Nevertheless, he made damaging theological statements in the course of a written debate with Calvin [2.- [Complaint of Nicolas de la Fontaine against Servetus](#)]. The Council of Geneva, after receiving the advice of churches in four other Swiss cities, convicted Servetus of antitrinitarianism and opposition to child baptism [3.- [Letters from prison](#)]. Calvin asked that Servetus be mercifully beheaded. The Council insisted he should be burned at the stake.

Spectators were impressed by the tenacity of Servetus' faith. Perishing in the flames, he is said to have cried out, "O Jesus, Son of the Eternal God, have pity on me!" Farel, who witnessed the execution, observed that Servetus, defiant to the last, might have been saved had he but called upon "Jesus, the Eternal Son." A few months later Servetus was again



executed, this time in effigy, by the Catholic Inquisition in France. [4.- The execution scene as described by Sir William Osler]

1.- Know more

Restitutio was printed early in 1553, a thousand copies of it. They were sent in bales to Lyon, where they were to be held until they could be put on sale at the Easter fairs there and at Frankfurt, the great book markets of northern Europe. Frelon, probably not foreseeing the consequences of his act, at once sent a copy to Calvin, who could easily see from a comparison of it with the manuscript which Servetus had sent him, that both were from the same author. It would never do to let such heresy be sown over Europe, to say nothing of the disrespect shown himself in the letters the book contained; and Calvin was quick to act. Now it happened that he had a neighbor and confidential friend, one Guillaume Trie, a Protestant refugee from Lyon, who was still in correspondence with a Catholic relative there. To him Calvin related what he knew of this new book and its author. Trie at once wrote to his Catholic relative (it is hard not to believe that this was done with Calvin's knowledge and approval, for he had himself previously denounced Servetus to the Archbishop of Lyon as a heretic), saying to him that there was a heretic in his vicinity who deserved to be burned alive for blaspheming the Trinity and uttering other dreadful heresies; that his name was Michael Servetus, though he now called himself Villeneuve; and that he was living at Vienne as a physician. To clinch the matter he enclosed the first four sheets of the Restitutio. It came out as Trie (and Calvin) desired. The letter soon reached the hands of the Inquisitor. Steps were cautiously taken, Servetus was summoned before the authorities and questioned, and his lodgings were searched. The printers were likewise examined; but no evidence could be found, and the accused were all discharged.

Trie was then written to for further proof of what he had charged, and he produced it nothing loath, Calvin assisting. He forwarded a number of letters which Servetus had written to Calvin and marked confidential, and the copy of the Institutes with Servetus's notes on the margin, and later on also the manuscript book which Servetus had sent Calvin some years before. The judges examined these, found the evidence convincing, and caused Servetus to be arrested and brought before them. After artfully leading him on through questions as to his former life and writings and meeting with some evasion, the judges at length laid before him the letters written in his own hand which he could not well deny, but signed Servetus, thus identifying the Dr. Michel de Villeneuve before them with the notorious heretic Michael Servetus. Realizing that he was cornered, and grasping at any straw that might save him from death, he made an artful equivocation, which, however, did not deceive his judges. Before the examination was concluded the court adjourned for the night. That evening Servetus sent his servant from the prison to collect a large sum of money owing to him, and the next morning at daybreak he made his escape from prison — as was generally believed, not without connivance on the part of influential friends. When his escape was discovered, he was already well out of reach.

The trial went on without him, and dragged on for ten weeks. The printers were discovered, and bales containing 500 copies of the book were found at Lyon. Servetus was found guilty of heresy and various related crimes, and was condemned to be burned to death by a slow fire, along with his books. It was not the custom in those times to put off the execution of a capital sentence simply because the condemned could not be found. An effigy of Servetus was therefore made that very day, and after being first duly hanged, was burned, together with his books, in the public square, whereat perhaps every one was well enough satisfied save the Inquisitor — and Calvin. The trial had been by the civil court. The ecclesiastical court now proceeded to do its duty in trying Servetus on its own account. Two days before Christmas it too found him guilty of heresy, and again ordered his books to be burned. But it was too late. Servetus had already met his fiery fate at Geneva two months before.

2.- The Complaint of Nicholas de la Fontaine Against Servetus, 14 August, 1553

in Merrick Whitcomb, ed., Period of the later reformation
in Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History, 6 vols.,



(Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania History Department, 1898-1912), vol. 3, no. 3, pp.

Scanned by Mike Anderson, January 1998.

Whitcomb's Note: Among the possible reasons which prevented Calvin from appearing personally against Servetus there was one which must have seemed of itself sufficient. The laws regulating criminal actions in Geneva required that in certain grave cases the complainant himself should be incarcerated pending the trial. Calvin's delicate health and his great and constant usefulness in the administration of the state rendered a prolonged absence from the public life of Geneva impracticable. Nevertheless, Calvin is to be regarded as the author of the prosecution, and in this and in the subsequent burning of Servetus his course met the approval of the most advanced theologians of the time. The idea that diverse religious views might be tolerated in the same political area made little headway in the sixteenth century. The Peace of Augsburg and the Edict of Nantes are evidence of this. In so far, however, as a broader concept was beginning to make its way, its beginnings are not to be sought in the minds of those who were sharpening their prejudice with acrimonious doctrinal disputation: and even when a glimmering of the modern solution appears, as in the public utterances of Chancellor L'Hopital, its expression seems to have evoked no favorable response.

Process of 14 August, 1553, before the Lesser Council of Geneva. Calvin : Opera. Vol. XIII, pp.727-731. French. Nicholas de la Fontaine asserts that he has instituted proceedings against Michael Servetus and on this account he has allowed himself to be held prisoner in criminal process.

I	<i>In the first place that about twenty-four years ago the defendant commenced to annoy the churches of Germany with his errors and heresies, and was condemned and took to flight in order to escape the punishment prepared for him</i>
II	<i>Item, that on or about this time he printed a wretched book, which has infected many people</i>
III	<i>Item, that since that time he has not ceased by all means in his power to scatter his poison, as much by his construction of biblical text, as by certain annotations which he has made upon Ptolemy</i>
IV	<i>Item, that since that time he has printed in secrecy another book containing endless blasphemies</i>
V	<i>Item, that while detained in prison in the city of Vienne, when he saw that they were willing to pardon him on condition of his recanting, he found means to escape from prison</i>
VI	<i>Said Nicholas demands that said Servetus be examined on all these points</i>
VII	<i>And since he is able to evade the question by pretending that his blasphemies and heresies are nought else than good doctrine, said Nicholas proposes certain articles on which he demands said heretic be examined</i>
VIII	<i>To wit, whether he has not written and falsely taught and published that to believe in a single essence of God there are three distinct persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, is to create four phantoms, which cannot and ought not to be imagined</i>
IX	<i>Item, that to put such distinctions into the essence of God is to cause God to be divided into three parts, and that this is a three-headed devil, like to Cerberus, whom the ancient poets have called the dog of hell. a monster. and thinas equally</i>



	<i>injurious</i>
X	<i>Item, whether he has not maintained such blasphemies most injuriously, as much as against the ancient doctors, such as St. Ambrose, St. Augustin, Chrysostom, Athanasius and the like as against all those who sought in our times to elevate Christianity, even calling to Melancthon a man without faith, son of the Devil, Belial, and Satan</i>
XI	<i>Item, whether he does not say that our Lord Jesus Christ is not the Son of God, except in so much as he was conceived of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the virgin Mary</i>
XII	<i>Item, that those who believe Jesus Christ to have been the word of God the Father, engendered through all eternity, have a scheme of redemption which is fanciful and of the nature of sorcery</i>
XIII	<i>Item, that Jesus Christ is God, insomuch as God has caused him to be such</i>
XIV	<i>Item, that the flesh of Jesus Christ came from heaven and from the substance of God</i>
XV	<i>Item, that divinity was imparted to Jesus Christ only when he was made man, and afterwards spiritually communicated to the apostles on the day of Pentecost</i>
XVI	<i>Item, that when it is said that Jesus Christ is of the same essence as his Father, it is the same as saying that in this man Jesus Christ there is the same Trinity, power and will as God, and not that the word of God dwells and subsists in his essence</i>
XVII	<i>Item, whether he does not condemn those who seek in the essence of God His holy spirit, saying that all those who believe in the Trinity are atheists</i>
XVIII	<i>Item, that those who believe in any distinction of property in the essence of God dissipate His nature and reduce it to fragments</i>
XIX	<i>Item, that the word of God is no other thing than the flesh of Jesus Christ</i>
XX	<i>Item, that the flesh of Jesus Christ was engendered, out of the substance of God by a word which he calls "seminal"</i>
XXI	<i>Item, that the flesh of Jesus Christ was engendered, out of the substance of God by a word which he calls "seminal"</i>
XXII	<i>Item, that if Jesus Christ were the Son of God otherwise than on account of his humanity, because that is engendered out of the substance of God, then he would not be really dead. For if he is dead he is no longer the Son of God</i>
XXIII	<i>Item, that when St. John says that the word was in God, it is the same as saying that the man Jesus Christ was there</i>



XXIV	<i>Item, that the substance of Jesus Christ is that which was in the skies, and that this is the same substance whence proceed the angels and our souls</i>
XXV	<i>Item, instead of conferring three persons in the essence of God, or three hypostases which have each His property, he says that God is a single entity, containing one hundred thousand essences, so that He is a portion of us, and that we are a portion of His spirit</i>
XXVI	<i>Item, in consequence whereof not alone the models of all creatures are in God, but also the material forms, so that our souls are of the substantial seed of the word of God</i>
XXVII	<i>Item, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God because he has the elements of the substance of the Father, to wit: fire, air and water</i>
XXVIII	<i>Item, that the soul of man is mortal, and that the only thing which is immortal is an elementary breath, which is the substance that Jesus Christ now possesses in heaven and which is also the elementary and divine and incorruptible substance of the Holy Ghost</i>
XXIX	<i>Item, that the Fathers under the Law have never received the spirit of regeneration</i>
XXX	<i>Item, that by the sin of Adam the soul of man as well as the body was made mortal</i>
XXXI	<i>Item, that little children are sinless, and moreover are incapable of redemption until they come of age</i>
XXXII	<i>Item, that they do not commit mortal sin up to the age of twenty</i>
XXXIII	<i>Item, that the baptism of little children is an invention of the Devil, an infernal falsehood tending to the destruction of all Christianity</i>
XXXIV	<i>Item, that the word of God is no longer that which it was before the incarnation of Jesus Christ, because its substance was the clearness of the skies and is now made flesh</i>
XXXV	<i>Item, that however much he confesses that the philosophers have erred in saying that the word was God Himself, he says that Jesus Christ, insomuch as he is a man, was always in God and that from Him is the divinity of the world</i>
XXXVI	<i>Item, that the air is the Spirit of God and that God is called Spirit, because He breathes life in all things by His spirit of air</i>
XXXVII	<i>Item, the soul of man insomuch as it possesses many divine properties is full of an infinity of Gods</i>
XXXVIII	<i>Item, that in the person of Msr. Calvin, minister of the word of God in the Church of Geneva, he has defamed with printed book the doctrine which he preached, uttering all the injurious and blasphemous things which it is possible to invent</i>



And because he knows well that his said book could not be tolerated even among Papists, in somuch as it destroyed all the foundations of Christianity, therefore he hid himself at the house of William Guerou, at that time proof corrector, as said Guerou has testified

Said Nicholas demands that the said Servetus should be compelled to respond as to the fact of the articles here presented, without entering into dispute as to whether the doctrine is true or not, because that will appear later on.

In the articles of the Procureur General are to be found several charges not incorporated in the complaint of Nicholas de la Fontaine. Among these are the following:

XXXIX	Item, whether he has married, and if he answers that he has not, he shall be asked why, in consideration of his age, he could refrain so long from marriage
XL	Item, whether he did not know that his doctrine was pernicious, considering that he favors Jews and Turks, by making excuses for them, and if he has not studied the Koran in order to disprove and controvert the doctrine and religion that the Christian churches hold, together with other profane books, from which people ought to abstain in matters of religion, according to the doctrine of St. Paul
	Item, whether the said book Koran is not a bad book, full of blasphemies

Footnotes

[1] Nicholas de la Fontaine was a refugee in Geneva and entered the service of Calvin, by whom he was employed as secretary.

[2] There were as originally conceived forty articles, but prior to the presentation the number was reduced to thirty eight, and both sets of numerals, Roman and Arabic, are preserved in the original document.

[3] It is impossible to substantiate this accusation except in so far as it may be justified in the publication of a book: *De Trinitatis Erroribus*, 1531.

[4] *Dialogorum de Trinitate*, 1532.

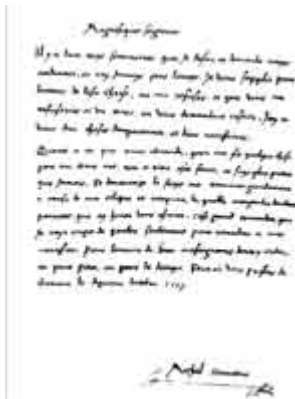
[5] *Christianismi Restitutio*, 1533.

[6] Servetus in the third interrogatory replies to this that he does not apply the term atheist to those who believe in the Trinity, but "those who disguise it as something which it is not, that is to say, those who make a real distinction in the divine essence, for these in dividing God remove the unity of the divine essence." Calvin insisted that the distinction was a real one.



3.- Letters from Prison

Letter 1



Most honorable Seigneurs. I humbly ask you that you shorten these long delays or acquit me from the criminal accusation. You see that Calvin is at the dead end, not knowing what to say and for his pleasure wishes to make me rot here in prison. The lice eat me alive, my clothes are torn and I have nothing for a change, neither a jacket nor a shirt, but a bad one. I have sent another request to you which was according to God, but in order to impede it Calvin cited you Justinian. Certainly it is malicious to allege against me what he himself does not believe. For he himself does not believe what Justinian has said about the Holy Church, about bishops, about clergy, and other matters of religion and knows well that the Church was already degenerated. It is a great shame on his part, the more so that already for five weeks he keeps me locked up here and he has not alleged against me a single passage.

My lords, I have also asked you for a procurator or an advocate who would speak on my part, as you permitted him to my opponent who was not in the same situation as I. For being a stranger ignorant of the customs of this country I cannot defend myself. You permitted an advocate to him and not to me and you have released him from prison. I request that my case be presented before the Council of Two Hundred with my requests and if I may appeal I do so ready to assume all expenses, loss and interest, and the 'poena talionis,' both against my first accuser and against Calvin, his master, who has taken the case himself. In prison of Geneva, September 15, 1553. Michael Servetus in his own cause

Letter 2

Honorable Seigneurs. I am detained for the criminal charges made by lehan Calvin who falsely accuses me saying that I have written: 1. that the souls are mortal 2. that Jesus Christ took from the Virgin Mary only the fourth part of his body. These are horrible and execrable things. Among all heresies and all crimes there is none so great as to make the soul mortal. For in all other there is a hope of salvation, whereas there is none in such a heresy. Whoever says so does not believe that there is a God, nor justice, nor resurrection, nor Jesus Christ, nor Holy Scripture, nor anything else. He believes only that everything dies and that the man and the beast are the same. If I had said or written this, for offending the world I should condemn myself to death. Therefore, messeigneurs, I ask that my accuser be punished according to the law of poena talionis and detained as prisoner with me, until the matter is settled by his death or mine or any other punishment. And for this I submit myself to the mentioned poena talionis. I am content to die if he is not convicted both of this and other things which I list below. I demand from you, messeigneurs, justice, justice, justice.

Written in prison of Geneva, 22 of September 1553.
Michel Servetus in his own cause.

Letter 3

Magnificent Seigneurs. It is now three weeks as I have sought and asked for an audience and I have been unable to obtain one. I beg you for the love of Jesus Christ not to refuse me what you would not refuse a Turk, who would seek justice from your hands. I have some important and necessary matters to communicate.

As for what you commanded that something be done to keep me clean, nothing had been done and I am in a worse condition than before. Moreover, the cold distresses me greatly, because of my colic and rupture, causing me other complaints which I should be ashamed to describe. It is a great cruelty that I do not have permission to speak if only to remedy my



necessities. For the love of God, my lords, give your order for pity or for duty. Written in the prison of Geneva, October 10, 1553.

Michel Servetus.

4.- The execution scene as described by Sir William Osler



Had one visited the town of Geneva on the 27th of October 1553, one would have been witness of that tragic scene which William Osler describes so poignantly and dramatically:

"...Shortly after twelve o'clock, a procession started from the town-hall of Geneva-the chief magistrates of the city, the clergy in their robes, the Lieutenant Criminel and other officers on horseback, a guard of mounted archers, the citizens, with a motley crowd of followers, and in their midst, with arms bound, in shabby, dirty clothes, walked a man of middle age, whose intellectual face bore the marks of long suffering. Passing along the rue St. Antoine through the gate of the same name, the cortege took its way towards the Golgotha of the city. Once outside the walls a superb sight broke on their view: in the distance the blue waters and enchanting shores of Lake Geneva,

to the west and north the immense amphitheater of the Jura, with its snow-capped mountains, and to the south and west the lovely valley of the Rhone; but we may well think that few eyes were turned away from the central figure of that sad procession. By his side, in earnest entreaty, walked the aged pastor, Farel, who had devoted a long and useful life to the service of his fellow citizens. Mounting the hill, the field of Champel was reached, and here on sight eminence was the fateful stake, with dangling chains and heaping bundles of faggots. At this sight the poor victim prostrated himself on the ground in prayer. In reply to the exhortation of the clergyman for a specific confession of faith, there was the cry, 'Misericordia, misericordia! Jesu, thou Son of the eternal God, have compassion upon me!' Bound to the stake by the iron chains, with a chaplet of straw and green twigs covered with sulphur on his head, with long dark face, it is said that he looked like the Christ in whose name he was bound. Around his waist were tied a large bundle of manuscript and a thick octavo printed book. The torch was applied, and as the flames spread to the straw and sulphur and flashed in his eyes, there was a piercing cry that struck terror into the hearts of the bystanders. The faggots were green, the burning was slow, and it was long before in a last agony he cried again, 'Jesu, thou Son of the eternal God, have mercy on me!' Thus died in his forty-fourth year, Michael Servetus Villanovanus, physician, physiologist, and heretic. Strange, is it not, that could he have cried, 'Jesu, thou Eternal Son of God!' even at this last moment, the chains would have been unwound, the chaplet removed, and the faggots scattered; but he remained faithful unto death to what he believed was the Truth as revealed in the Bible."

Detail on the Trial and Execution of Servetus at Geneva



- The arrest at Geneva
- The charges are set
- The trial begins
- Calvin vs. Servetus on theological matters
- Servetus appeals to the court
- The condemnation and execution
- Reactions to the Servetus case



The arrest at Geneva

Although escaped from his imprisonment at Vienne, Servetus found the world by no means a place in which he might feel free to go or be wherever he would. He dared not stay in France for fear of recapture. It was hardly more safe for him to return to the Rhine country whence he had fled years before, and where he might still be recognized. Still less could he think of returning to his native land in fanatical Spain. He therefore determined to go to Naples in order to practice his profession among his countrymen, of whom many had fled thither for the sake of enjoying greater religious liberty. He thought at first of crossing the Pyrenees and going through Spain, but danger of arrest on the border deterred him, and after wandering like a hunted thing for four months he at length turned to the route through Switzerland into northern Italy as the safest one for him. Fortunately for him, he was well provided with money.

Thus it was that Servetus at length arrived at an inn in Geneva one evening about the middle of August, intending as soon as possible to get a boat up the lake on his way to Zürich and Italy. He had meant to keep out of sight as much as possible, hoping thus to escape discovery; but unhappily for him the next day was Sunday, when the laws required every one to attend church, and he may indeed even have been curious to hear Calvin preach. Here he was recognized before ever the sermon began. Calvin felt that Servetus had long deserved death as a blasphemous and heretic, and he may have suspected that he had come in order to spread his heresies in Geneva itself, and thus to endanger the success of the Reformation there. He was the more keenly alive to this danger since he had but lately had a letter telling him how rapidly and widely the diabolical teachings of Servetus had spread in the cities of northern Italy. He therefore felt bound to do all in his power to rid the world of Servetus, now that the Inquisition at Vienne had failed of doing so, and he at once caused him to be arrested and thrown into prison. The law required that the accuser in such a case should be imprisoned with the accused until the charges were established, and since this would be inconvenient for himself Calvin got a student named Nicolas de la Fontaine, who was living in his household as his secretary, to enter the prison in his stead as the accuser.

The charges are set

On the day after his arrest Servetus was brought for preliminary examination before the proper authority, to whom de la Fontaine, his formal accuser, presented a complaint against Servetus, drawn up by Calvin under . These were based mainly on the Restitutio, and after charging that some twenty-four years ago Servetus had begun to trouble the churches with his heresies, and had since then continued his mischief by his notes on the Bible and on Ptolemy, and by a recent book full of infinite blasphemies, and that he was an escaped prisoner from Vienne; they went on to charge him with destroying the very foundations of Christianity by various heresies as to the Trinity, the person of Christ, the immortality of the soul, and infant baptism; and finally led up to the climax by charging that he had defamed Calvin by heaping all possible blasphemies upon him, and had concealed his scandalous views from the printer at Vienne. Some of these charges Servetus at once admitted as true, some he denied as false, and some he explained away; adding, however, that if in anything he had fallen into error he was willing to stand corrected. But on the whole the charges were held to be well taken, and it was ordered that he be held for trial.

The trial begins

On the following day trial was begun before the Little Council of Geneva, and conducted by the Prosecuting Attorney. Servetus being duly sworn was re-examined on the charges made the previous day. He now made his admissions and denials rather more distinct than before, but took a fling at Calvin by saying that it was no fault of his that he had not been burned alive at Vienne, and that he was ready before a full congregation to give Calvin the reasons and scripture proofs for his teachings. A little later one of Calvin's most prominent supporters



entered the case as counsel for the prosecution, while on the other hand one of his most active political opponents took a hand in defense of Servetus. This threatened to turn the case into a phase of the political struggle to overthrow Calvin, so that he now resolved to take no chances, but threw off the mask and came into court himself as openly the accuser, and assisted in the prosecution of the case. In the further examination of Servetus little new evidence was brought out, save that Servetus had applied to those that believed in the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity the term Trinitarians, at which Calvin took the greatest offense. The prosecution now maintained that the charges against Servetus had been sufficiently proved to show him a criminal, and asked that de la Fontaine be discharged from his imprisonment as accuser, and this was granted. The Attorney General therefore took charge of the prosecution in the name of the State, and opened a new stage of the trial by bringing in an entirely new indictment; while Calvin soon retired again into the background, though from the pulpit he appealed to public feeling by making bitter attacks against Servetus. Meanwhile it had been voted to request the authorities at Vienne to send a copy of the evidence they had against Servetus, and then to lay the case before the other churches of Switzerland for their information.

Now that the regular state trial was about to commence, Servetus came before the court with a motion that he be discharged. His grounds were that it was not the custom of the Apostles nor of the first Christian Emperors to treat heretics as guilty of capital crime, but only to excommunicate or at the most banish them; that he had committed no crime either in their territory or elsewhere; that the questions he had treated were only for scholars, and he had never spoken of them to others; that as for the Anabaptists, with whom they had sought to identify him as a person dangerous to public order, he had always disapproved of them; and finally, since he was a stranger and ignorant of the customs of the land and of the forms of legal procedure, he asked for legal counsel to conduct his case for him.

The items in the new indictment touched but lightly on the doctrinal matters which had been so prominent in the original charges, but instead were designed to show that Servetus had long been spreading doctrines opposed to Christianity as commonly received, and had led a criminal and immoral life; that his very teaching led to immorality and favored other religions; that his doctrines were those of heretics long ago condemned; and that he had come to Geneva in order to disturb that city with them. When he was examined, Servetus's answers to these questions were so frank and clear that he must have created a very favorable impression upon his judges. The Attorney General, however, apparently coached by Calvin, at once sought to counteract this impression by taking up Servetus's petition of a few days before and arguing that all the reasons urged for his discharge were unsupported by fact; that it was therefore evident that Servetus was one of the most audacious, rash, and dangerous heretics that had ever lived, since he wished to have the very laws annulled under which heretics might be punished; that his Anabaptist teachings were the least of his errors; that in his testimony he had lied and contradicted himself; that it had never been heard of that such criminals should be represented by counsel; and moreover that he was so clearly guilty that he needed no attorney. His request was therefore denied, and the trial went on to further examination of the prisoner.

In due time a reply was received from the authorities at Vienne, sending a copy of the sentence there passed against Servetus, but claiming jurisdiction over him as an escaped prisoner for crimes committed in their territory, and therefore asking that he be returned to them for punishment. They also begged to be excused from forwarding evidence for anyone else to try him on. Upon being asked whether he chose to be tried here or to be sent back to Vienne, Servetus threw himself upon the ground and begged them with tears not to send him back, but to try him here and do with him as they would. This fell in well with the ideas of Calvin and his friends, for if the heretic were to be burned at all they wished the credit of it, in order to prove that Protestants were not less zealous than Catholics to preserve the purity of the Christian faith. They therefore politely declined to grant the request from Vienne, though they promised that justice should be done.



Calvin vs. Servetus on theological matters

When the heretical teachings of Servetus next came up for discussion, it was felt that the discussion might take up too much time if carried on in court, and besides the subject was one too intricate for the judges to pass upon. It was therefore agreed that the necessary books should be furnished Servetus in prison, and that he and Calvin should discuss in writing the points at issue between them. The papers thus written, together with the rest of the documents in the case, were then to be submitted to the Swiss churches for their advice as to what to do; though this reference of the case can have been little to Calvin's liking, and may even have been proposed by his enemies in order to foil him; for two years before, when Bolsec was on trial for opposing Calvin's teaching on predestination, and Calvin wished that he, too, might be condemned to death, a similar appeal had resulted in Bolsec's favor.

Now it happened that on the very morning of the day that the Council ordered the written discussion between Calvin and Servetus, Calvin's enemies had scored a notable point against him in the Council. This seems to have elated Servetus with the belief that he should certainly win his case, and to have bred in him a false sense of security. The written discussion lasted four days. In the name of the Geneva ministers Calvin first drew up a collection of thirty-eight extracts from the books of Servetus, which he offered as "partly impious blasphemies, partly profane and insane errors, and all wholly foreign to the Word of God and the orthodox faith." These were submitted on their face and without comment. Servetus replied explaining and justifying his positions. Calvin wrote in refutation, and Servetus ended by merely penciling brief notes between the lines or on the margin of Calvin's manuscript. The discussion began on a fairly dignified plane, but Servetus, regarding Calvin as already defeated, soon lost his head, and at length abandoning argument fell into violent abuse and invective, much to the prejudice of his case. Calvin on the contrary kept his poise, and correspondingly strengthened his case. The papers were then submitted to the Council, and were duly forwarded to the churches and Councils of Zürich, Bern, Basel, and Schaffhausen, while Calvin had anticipated this step by writing to the several pastors in order to prepossess them against Servetus.

Servetus appeals to the court

It was four weeks before the answers were received, and all this time Servetus was languishing in prison.. Calvin, he said, was at the end of his rope, and was keeping him there for spite. Vermin were eating him alive, his clothes were in rags, and he had no change of garments. He again demanded counsel, and appealed his case to the Council of Two Hundred. The leader of the opposition to Calvin supported his appeal, but nothing came of it. A week later Servetus, still sure of his cause, demanded that Calvin himself be imprisoned as a false accuser, on pain of death if found guilty, and he brought six charges against him. This request was ignored like the rest. Finally, after waiting more than three weeks, he again made a pitiful appeal for the clothes he needed, being now ill and suffering from the cold; and this request was at last granted.

The condemnation and execution

The replies from the churches at length arrived. The Councils had with one accord referred the matter to their pastors, and the latter, though expressing themselves in differing terms and in guarded language, urged that Servetus was plainly guilty, and that all due means ought to be used to rid the churches of him, especially lest they get a bad reputation for harboring heretics. In the face of such unanimous advice there was but one action to be taken, and after a few days' delay it was voted that Servetus be condemned to be taken to the suburb of Champel and there be burned alive the following day, together with his books. Burning had for centuries been the penalty for heresy under the law of the Empire, and when Calvin revised the laws at Geneva he had let this law stand unchanged. In the present case he tried to get beheading substituted for burning, but the matter had passed beyond his control. When the sentence was announced to Servetus he broke down completely, for he



had expected acquittal, or at the worst only banishment; but he soon regained composure, sent for Calvin, and begged his forgiveness. Farel, minister at Neuchatel, had that morning arrived at Calvin's desire. He tried to get Servetus to renounce his errors and thus save his life. But Servetus remained true to his convictions, only begging for another form of death, lest the suffering at the stake cause him at last weakly to recant. Farel accompanied him to the place of execution, where a large crowd had gathered, and there he died with a prayer upon his lips (October 27, 1553).

Reactions to the Servetus case

Even during the trial of Servetus a few voices had been raised in his behalf, one of them that of an Italian jurist, Gribaldo, who was in Geneva at the time; while David Joris wrote from Basel to the governments of the Protestant cities of Switzerland urging them to avert his fate. But only the Anabaptists as yet disapproved the repression of heresy by force; and anything that Erasmus, [1] **Martin Luther**, Zwingli, or Calvin might earlier have said in favor of the milder treatment of heretics, or that had this very year been urged by Calvin in behalf of five young Protestants from Lausanne on trial for their life before the Inquisition at Lyon, was assiduously forgotten.

The leading reformers without exception strongly approved the execution of Servetus, and Melancthon called it "a pious example, which deserved to be remembered to all posterity." Calvin himself never expressed the slightest regret for it; but Catholics did not forget, and for generations afterwards whenever Protestants complained of Catholic treatment of Protestant heretics, they retorted by pointing to Calvin's treatment of Servetus. Servetus's ashes were not cold before there began a general revulsion of public feeling over the affair, and a bitter indignation against Calvin for his part in it. The Council at once dismissed the charges pending against the printer of the *Restitutio*, who had fallen into their hands. Calvin was naturally the object of the bitterest attacks, even in Geneva: "the dogs are now barking at me on all sides," he wrote; and in Protestant Basel he was said to be detested almost more than in Catholic Paris. Within two months from Servetus's death, Calvin was driven almost to the point of leaving Geneva. Forced to defend himself, he published early the next year a *Defense of the Orthodox Faith on the Holy Trinity*, against the *Prodigious Errors of Michael Servetus*, in which after defending the capital punishment of heretics on general grounds he undertook to set forth Servetus in the most odious light. This did nothing to raise Calvin in general esteem, and it was soon far more than offset by an anonymous work on the punishment of heretics, a noble plea for tolerance generally attributed to [2] **Chatillon** (Castellio), who some years before had had friction with Calvin at Geneva and was now at Basel; while this in turn was followed by an answer from Calvin's admiring friend Beza. In fact, by these and other writings, the whole question of the punishment or the toleration of heretics was now opened for discussion, and with the most salutary result. For while heretics were for a long time still occasionally put to death in Protestant countries, from this time forth opposition to the practice steadily increased. Thus it may be said that if the writings of Servetus had a great and lasting influence toward undermining belief in the Athanasian doctrine of the Trinity, his death had a yet more important influence in opening the way for religious liberty of thought and speech.



1.- Martin Luther (1483-1546)



Martin Luther was born in Eisleben, Germany, the son of Hans Luther, who worked in the copper mines, and his wife Margarethe. He went to school at Magdeburg and Eisenach, and entered the University of Erfurt in 1501, graduating with a BA in 1502 and an MA in 1505. His father wished him to be a lawyer, but Luther was drawn to the study of the Scriptures, and spent three years in the Augustinian monastery at Erfurt. In 1507 he was ordained a priest, and went to the University of Wittenberg, where he lectured on philosophy and the Scriptures, becoming a powerful and influential preacher.

On a mission to Rome in 1510-11 he was appalled by the corruption he found there. Money was greatly needed at the time for the rebuilding of St Peter's, and papal emissaries sought everywhere to raise funds by the sale of indulgences. The system was grossly abused, and Luther's indignation at the shameless traffic, carried on in particular by the Dominican Johann Tetzel, became irrepressible. As professor of biblical exegesis at Wittenberg (1512--46), he began to preach the doctrine of salvation by faith rather than works; and on 31 October 1517 drew up a list of 95 theses on indulgences denying the pope any right to forgive sins, and nailed them on the church door at Wittenberg. Tetzel retreated from Saxony to Frankfurt-an-der-Oder, where he published a set of counter-theses and burnt Luther's. The Wittenberg students retaliated by burning Tetzel's, and in 1518 Luther was joined in his views by Phillipp Melanchthon.

The pope, Leo X, at first took little notice of this disturbance, but in 1518 summoned Luther to Rome to answer for his theses. His university and the elector interfered, and ineffective negotiations were undertaken by Cardinal Cajetan and by Miltitz, envoy of the pope to the Saxon court. The scholar Johann Eck and Luther held a memorable disputation at Leipzig (1519); and Luther began to attack the papal system more boldly. In 1520 he published his famous address *An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation* (Address to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation), followed by a treatise *De captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae praeludium* (A Prelude concerning the Babylonian Captivity of the Church), which also attacked the doctrinal system of the Church of Rome.

A papal bull containing 41 theses was issued against him. He burned it before a multitude of doctors, students, and citizens in Wittenberg. He was excommunicated, and Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, convened the first Diet at Worms in 1521, before which Luther was called to retract his teachings. Luther refused to relent. An order was issued for the destruction of his books, and he was put under the ban of the Empire. On his return from Worms he was seized, at the instigation of the elector of Saxony, and lodged (for his own protection) in the Wartburg, the elector's fortress. During the year he spent there, he translated the Scriptures and composed his cogent controversial treatise, "Refutation of the Argument of Latomus".

Civil unrest called Luther back to Wittenberg in 1522. He rebuked the unruly elements, and made a stand against lawlessness on the one hand, and tyranny on the other. In the same year Luther published his acrimonious reply to Henry VIII's attack on him in *Assertio septem sacramentorum adversus Martinum Lutherum* (1521) about the nature of the seven sacraments.

A divergence had gradually taken place also between the views of the Humanist scholar Erasmus and Luther. There was an open breach in 1525, when Erasmus published *De libero arbitrio* (1524, Discourse on Free Will), and Luther followed with *De Servo arbitrio* (Concerning the Bondage of Will). In the same year he married Katherine von Bora, a nun who had withdrawn from convent life.

In 1529 he engaged with the controversial question of transubstantiation in the famous conference at Marburg with Zwingli and other Swiss theologians; he obstinately maintained his view that Christ is present in the bread and wine of the Eucharist. The drawing up of his



theological views in the Augsburg Confession (1530) by Melancthon, ably representing Luther at the Diet of Augsburg, marks the culmination of the German Reformation.

Luther died in Eisleben, and was buried at Wittenberg. Endowed with broad human sympathies, massive energy, manly and affectionate simplicity, and a rich, if sometimes coarse, humour, he was undoubtedly a spiritual genius. His intuitions of divine truth were bold, vivid, and penetrating, if not necessarily philosophical and comprehensive; and he possessed the power of kindling other souls with the fire of his own convictions. His voluminous works include "Von den guten Wercken" (1520, Of Good Works), and "Widder die hymelischen Propheten von den Bildern und Sacrament".

2.- Sebastian Castellio (1515-1563)



1515-63, French Protestant theologian. Castalion was with Calvin at Strasbourg and Geneva until he split with Calvin over doctrinal differences and moved to Basel. He obtained a chair of Greek literature in the university there. In the preface to his Latin translation of the Bible (1551) Castalion defended religious toleration. In 1554 he published, under the pseudonym Martinus Bellius, *Concerning Heretics* (tr. 1935), in which he protested the execution of Servetus. The name also appears as Castellion and Châtillon. See Stefan Zweig, *Right to Heresy* (1936).

A view of the Servetus affair 450 years later



In judging this whole affair one must take care not to be unjust toward Calvin, by being as narrow and unsympathetic toward him as he was toward Servetus. For he deserves to be judged by the standards of his own age rather than of ours, even though we condemn those in comparison with our own. Besides being a man of extraordinary ability, he had many of the finest traits of personal character. He has been called the father of popular education and the inventor of free schools.

Protestantism owes him more than any other man after Luther, and for more than three centuries he remained the leader of its thought outside the Lutheran churches. But he took his office very seriously, and so wholly identified himself with his cause that he took attacks upon himself as equivalent to attacks upon the Christian religion; and when one had seemed to him to commit an offense against the honor of God, or to endanger the salvation of immortal souls, he would never forgive nor make allowances, but would pursue his opponent vindictively, relentlessly, and without pity. This should help us to explain, if not to excuse, his attitude toward Servetus, and even his willingness so treacherously to betray him to the authorities at Vienne.

Servetus, on the other hand, was in controversy self-conceited, obstinate, fanatical, insulting, and exasperating to the last degree, and by his own manner brought upon himself no small part of what he suffered. Though a man of brilliant and versatile talents, he held, along with the most advanced ideas, others that bordered on the superstitious and made some think him half mad. Yet at bottom he was a sincere and reverent Christian, prizing the Bible far above all other books, devoutly attached to Jesus, who to him was all in all, and willing for the sake of what he held true to be faithful even unto death. Three centuries and a half have squared accounts between him and Calvin. Persecution has been condemned and toleration vindicated. Servetus's heresy has steadily gained upon Calvin's orthodoxy until at



Geneva itself Calvin's creed has long since been laid aside, and an expiatory monument has been erected by Calvin's followers near the spot where Servetus perished; while in four cities of Europe where in 1553 he would not have been permitted to live, statues of him now stand to honor his memory.



Michael Servetus Writings

- On the Errors of the Trinity.1531
- Dialogs on the Trinity.1531
- Ptolemy's Geography. 1535,1541
- The Apology against Fuchs.1536
- The Syrups.1537
- The Discourse in favor of Astrology.1538
- Biblia Sacra.1542, 1545
- Chistianismi Restitutio. 1553
- Other works



On The Errors of the Trinity. 1531 (trinitatis erroribus)

- Context
- Some excerpts
- Prints
- Translations



Context

On the Errors of the Trinity was issued in the summer of 1531, at Hagenau in Alsace. A little book which was destined to start a profound revolution in the religious world. It was written in Latin using expressions easy to comprehend, with thoughts not too well digested or arranged, though its main intention is clear enough, and it shows a remarkable range of reading for a youth. It was put on sale in the Rhine cities, and its influence soon spread far and wide through Switzerland and Germany and into northern Italy; and wherever it was read it won marked attention. Servetus seems naïvely still to have expected that the reformers would actually welcome his contribution to their cause as soon as they took time to reflect on what he had to say; but instead they were thrown into the greatest consternation by it. [1.- [know more](#)]

Some excerpts

"In investigating the holy mysteries of the divine Triad, I have thought that one ought to start from the man; for I see most men approaching their lofty speculation about the Word without having any fundamental understanding of CHRIST, and they attach little or no importance to the man, and give the true CHRIST quite over to oblivion. But I shall endeavor to recall to their memories who the CHRIST is. However, what and how much importance is to be attached to CHRIST, the Church shall decide.

Seeing that the pronoun indicates a man, whom they call the human nature, I shall admit these three things: first, this man is JESUS CHRIST; second, he is the Son of God; third, he is God."

Translated by WILBUR, E.M. The two treatises of Servetus on the Trinity. London: Harvard University Press, 1932, p. 6

Prints

De Trinitatis erroribus, libri septem. Per Michaellem Serveto, alias Reves ab Aragonia Hispanum. Anno M.D. XXXI. [Hagenau, 1531]. Published by the press of Johann Setzer (Secerius). Several copies are preserved in various libraries. Reprinted in Regensburg in 1721.



Translations

Dutch: in 1620 by Reiner Talle (Regnerus Vitellius, 1558[9]-1619[20]). Van de Dolinghen in de Drievuldigheid, Seven Boecken, Eertijds in Latijn beschreven Door Michiel Servetus, gheseyt Reves van Aragonien, Spaenjaerd ...," Amsterdam, 1620.

English: in 1932 by Earl Morse Wilbur On the Errors of the Trinity. Seven Books. By Michael Serveto, alias Reves, a Spaniard of Aragon MDXXXI. In The two treatises of Servetus on the Trinity Now first translated into English by Earl Morse Wilbur, D.D. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press; London: Humphrey Milford; Oxford University Press; Harvard Theological Studies, 1932).

Catalan: by Ana Gómez Rabal Dels errors sobre la Trinitat (Barcelona: Edicions Proa, 1999).

1.- Know more

Melanchthon, it is true, admitted that he was reading it a good deal; and he and Oecolampadius agreed that it contained many good points; but any slight praise was soon drowned by the general chorus of denunciation. To Luther it seemed "an abominably wicked book"; Melanchthon foresaw (correctly enough, as the event proved) great tragedies resulting from it; Oecolampadius saw the whole Reformation imperiled by this new Hydra, if he were tolerated, since the Emperor would hold the Protestant churches responsible for these odious blasphemies; Bucer said from his pulpit that the author deserved to be drawn and quartered; and the vocabulary in general was exhausted for offensive epithets to heap upon him. It was charged that he must have gone to Africa and learned his doctrine from the Moors, and that he was in secret league with the Grand Turk who was just then threatening to conquer Christian Europe. As soon as the character of the book became generally known the sale of it was forbidden at Basel and Strassburg; and when it was brought next year to the notice of Quintana, to his infinite chagrin that it should have been written by one who had been his protégé, he had "that most pestilent book" at once prohibited throughout the Empire. So thoroughly was it suppressed that some twenty years later, when a copy was eagerly wanted at Geneva in the trial of Servetus for heresy, not one could be found.

Dialogs On The Trinity.1531

- Context
- Some excerpts
- Prints
- Translations



Context

At the request of Oecolampadius, Bucer wrote a refutation of Servetus's book Trinitatis Erroribus (which, however, he never ventured to publish), and he warned him that though he would not himself do him the least harm, the magistrate would no longer suffer him to stay at Strassburg, nor would he himself intercede with the magistrate in Servetus's behalf.



Servetus therefore returned to Basel, where he had previously made at least a partial living by giving language lessons; and he brought with him a part of the edition of his book to dispose of there or to send on to the book fair at Lyon. Here too he found the feeling against him so intense that he scarcely knew what to expect next. Accordingly he wrote to Oecolampadius offering to leave town if it were thought best, but also saying that he was willing to publish a retraction of what he had written. Indulgence was given him, and the result was that the following spring he brought out another and smaller book, entitled Dialogues on the Trinity; for the dialogue was at that time a favorite form for discussing subjects of every sort.

This new work was hastily and carelessly done, but it was ostensibly meant to correct the errors and imperfections of the former book which, he said, were due partly to his own lack of skill, and partly to the carelessness of the printer. It was in fact intended only to strengthen his former arguments by meeting the objections which the reformers had raised against them; and he prided himself that they had not brought forward a single passage of Scripture to disprove what he had said. He omitted, to be sure, some of the objectionable things in the first book, and he restated his views in language somewhat nearer the teaching of the Church; but so far as his main purpose was concerned, it was the same thought as before, only expressed more briefly, and in another form. His opponents were in no wise appeased, and as he lacked both friends and money, while his ignorance of German hindered him in trying to earn his bread, he now left the German world, and for more than twenty years was as completely lost to sight as if the earth had opened and swallowed him up.

Some excerpts

"All that I have lately written, in seven Books, against the received view as to the Trinity, honest reader, I now retract; not because it is untrue, but because it is incomplete, and written as though by a child for children. Yet I pray you to keep such of it as might help you to an understanding of what is to be said here. Moreover, that such a barbarous, confused, and incorrect book appear as my former one was, must be ascribed to my own lack of experience, and to the printer's carelessness. Nor would I have any Christian offended thereby, since God is wont sometimes to make his own wisdom known through the foolish instruments of the world. I beg you, therefore, to pay attention to the matter itself; for if you give heed to this, my halting words will not stand in your way. Fare you well."

*/***/*

"Petrucius. I hear the man speaking whom I was looking for. Ho there! What are you saying to yourself here alone?

Michael. I am greatly tormented in mind when I see that the minds of Christians are so estranged from any knowledge of the Son of God.

Pet. I too have seen some carried away with their minds perfectly enraged against you because you are bent upon taking away from them a large part of their Gods.

Mich. With what reasons, or by what Scriptures, do they censure me?"

Translated by WILBUR, E.M. The two treatises of Servetus on the Trinity. London: Harvard University Press, 1932, p. 189.

Prints

Dialogorum de Trinitate libri duo. De Iustitia regni Christi, capitula quatuor. per Michaellem Serveto, alias Reves, ab Aragonia Hispanu Hagenau, 1532. Published by Johann Setzer. A second pamphlet on the Trinity of 19 pages, to which he added a treatise of 25 pages, De Iustitia regni Christi, capitula quatuor. Several copies preserved in various libraries. Reprinted in Regensburg, 1721.



Translations

English: in 1932 by Earl Morse Wilbur (1932). All three works were reprinted: Servetus, M., De Trinitatis erroribus libri septem, 1531. Dialogorum de Trinitate libri duo, 1532. De Iustitia regni Christi, capitula quatuor, 1532. Minerva G.m.b.H., Frankfurt a.M. 1965

Ptolemy's Geography

First edition 1535

Second edition 1541

- Context
- Some excerpts
- Prints
- Translations



Context

At a time of growing interest in empiricism, Ptolemy's popularity was increasing, and the Trechsel asked Servetus to create a better Ptolemy. This meant that Servetus (writing as Michael Villanovanus) was responsible not only for translating and correcting the text but also for composing entirely new sections to update the work.

Servetus chose to use the Pirkheimer edition as his base but compared it to the oldest Latin and Greek editions he could find in order to create a more authentic book. He entitled his edition The Eight Books of the Account of Geography by Claudius Ptolemy of Alexandria, now for the first time edited according to the translation of Bilabald Pirkheimer, but compared to the Greek and early editions by Michael Villanovanus: This version was so extensive, so much of an improvement on what had gone before, that there are some who have claimed that Servetus was the father of comparative geography. Although this is probably an overstatement, the 1536 edition was both the most careful rendition available of Ptolemy's original conception and as exhaustive an ethnological treatise as had been done anywhere.

It was an enormous job, taking over two years. The book included fifty maps, all of which were accompanied by a statistical abstract and a commentary on the populace, climate, and industry of the area. Servetus carried over Pirkheimer's notations if he felt they were appropriate, but overwhelmingly the notes that made up the commentaries were his.

Some excerpts

Servetus being Servetus (or Villanovanus), he could not resist expressing himself pointedly, provocatively, and with wit. The English, he noted, were brave, the Scots fearless, the Italians vulgar, and the Irish "rude, inhospitable, barbarous and cruel." Opposite the map of Germany, he wrote, 'Hungary produces cattle, Bavaria hogs, Franconia onions, turnips and licorice, Swabia harlots, Bohemia heretics, Bavaria again thieves, Helvetia bangmen and



herdsmen, Westphalia liars arrd all Germany gluttons and drunkards:' He was a good deal more kind to France, except that he attempted that "I have seen myself seen the king (Francis I) touching many laboring under, but I did not see that they were cured"

About Palestine, the legendary land of milk and honey, Servetus retained Pirkheimer's general description bu added a joke:

"Know, however, most worthy reader, that it is mere boasting and untruth when so much excellence is ascribed to this land; the experience of merchants and others, travelers who have visisted it, proving it to be inhospitable, barren, and altogether without amenity. Ehrefore you may say that the land is promised, indeed, but it is os little promise when spoken in every-day terms"

This passage, which he did not even really write, was to come back and haunt him later because, unfortunately, one of those who ascribed ecclence to the Holy Land had been Moses.

Prints

Fist Edition

Claudii Ptolemaei Alexandrini Geographicae enarrationis libri octo. Ex Bilibaldi Pirckeymheri tralatione, sed ad graeca & prisca exemplaria à Michaële Villanovano iam primum recogniti. Adiecta insuper ab eodem scholia, quibus exoleta urbium nomina ad nostri seculi morem exponuntur Lugduni, ex officina Melchioris et Gasparis Trechsel fratrum, MDXXXV (1535). Several copies are preserved in various libraries

Second Edition

Claudii Ptolemaei Alexandrini geographicae enarrationis libri octo.... à Michaële Villanovano secundó recogniti Prostat Lugduni apud Hugonem à Porta, M.D.XLI. Lyon 1541. Book is dedicated to Servetus's protector, Archbishop Palmier

Translations

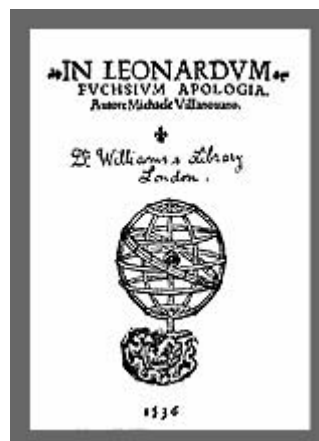
English: Fragments translated by Charles David O'Malley, op. cit., pp. 15-37 in 1953

Spanish: Descripciones geograficas del estado moderno de las regiones, en la geografía de Claudio Ptolomeo Alejandrino por Miguel Vilanovano (Miguel Servet) precedidas de una biografía del autor y traducidas del Latin por Dr. José Goyanes Capdevilla. Madrid, Imprenta y Encuadernación de Julio Cosano, 1932



The Apology against Fuchs. 1536

- Context
- Some excerpts
- Prints
- Translations



Context

This is a response by Servetus to the work of Leonard Fuchs Apologia, in defense of his friend, Symphorien Champier, a known Galenist and antiarabist. The study of medicine in these times amounted to little more than the philological interpretation of Greek and Latin texts which were rediscovered during the Renaissance. Many scholars wrote treatises trying to purify the medical concepts of Hippocrates and Galen from the additions and modifications introduced by the Arabs. The sequence of events of the dispute was as follows:

- Fuchs published in 1530 a treatise, *Errata recentiorum medicorum*, in which he defended the Greek school claiming the superiority of Hippocrates and Galen over the Arabs, especially Avicenna's Canon. The topic of special interest was the use of plants as purgatives, prescribed by the Arabs, and the origin of the new disease syphilis and its possible relation to the disease described by the Greeks as "lichen."

- Lorenz Fries, a Dutch physician, defended the Arabs advocating studying Avicenna in a work *Defensio medicorum Principis Avicennae ad Germaniae medicos* (1530).

- Champier entered in 1533 the quarrel with his work, *Epistola responsiva in defensionem Avicennae Laurentii Frisi*, in which he criticized Fuchs and later, with *Annotatio in Fuchsium*, directly attacking Fuchs. In the latter work, translated for Fuchs by his friend Arabist Sebastian Montanus (Monteux or Montuus), Champier tried to discredit the earlier corrections of medical concepts made by Fuchs.

- Fuchs replied in turn by the work *Paradoxa medicinae* (1535), a polemic on the errors of contemporary medicine, directed against the Arabists and Champier

- Champier brought Fuchs' book to the attention of the inquisitors in Paris on the basis of certain theological Lutheran tendencies (e.g., the doctrine of justification by faith). As a result of the inquiry, the book was condemned by the Sorbonne and burned in public as heretical.

- Fuchs in turn responded by a work *Apologia*

- Servetus, as a friend of Champier, a known Galenist and Antiarabist, replied by publishing a work in defense of Champier thus paying his debt of gratitude -- *In Leonardum Fuchsium Apologia defensio apologetica pro Symphoriano Campegio, autore Michaelae Villanovano* (Lyon 1536)



Some excerpts

Nobody could suspect that there was any connection between Servetus and Villanovanus. Here Servetus defended not only the medical views of Champier (e.g., the use of scammony made from the juice of a certain plant), but he also defended the orthodox Catholic doctrine against the doctrine of Fuchs and Luther of justification by faith:

"For the Lutherans whose arguments it will not be difficult to refute and whose errors to uncover, do not wish to attribute anything to works, because they do not sufficiently understand the force of justification."

Prints

In Leonardum Fuchsium apologia, autore Michaelae Villanovano. Lyon, 1536. There is a facsimile copy of the work done by Oxford University Press, 1909.

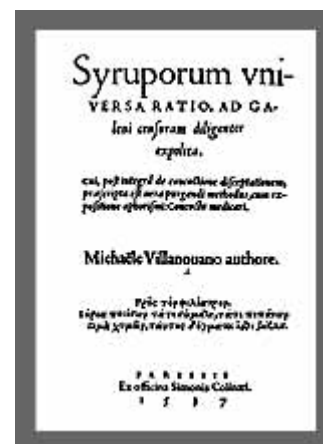
Translations

English: was published by Charles David O'Malley, Michael Servetus. A Translation of his Geographical, Medical and Astrological Writings with Introductions and Notes, (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1953), pp. 38-54.

Spanish: Apología contra Fuchs, Disertación sobre la Astrología by Ángel Alcalá, (Madrid, 1981)

The Syrup. 1537

- Context
- Some excerpts
- Prints
- Translations



Context

In Paris 1537 Servetus wrote Syruporum universa ratio. In this work Servetus demonstrated a deep knowledge of the Greek medical works of Galen but as a humanist, he did not hesitate to correct him, if observation proved him wrong. His knowledge of ancient and contemporary works was astonishing --he cites Galen, Hippocrates, Avicenna, Rhazes, Oribaso, Manardus (Giovanni Manardi, 1462-1536), Aristotle, etc. He reversed himself on the teachings of the Arabs, advising a critical approach to their works and did not follow blindly one school or the other. But in the theoretical analysis he supported the Hippocratic physiological and medical concepts. The problem concerned the use of syrups for digestion, called at that time, the "concoction." The Arabs supported the idea that the syrups enhanced



the independent vis concoctrix, whereas the Hippocratic school, supported by Servetus, followed the idea of the vis medicatrix naturae: "... there is no need of the syrups for the normal concoction (digestion) if the organ is not affected: in this case sleep, rest, massage, baths, drinks and foods moderately warm are sufficient."

Some excerpts

"Syrups are neither worthless nor should they be accepted blindly"

Prints

Syruporum universa ratio, ad Galeni censuram diligenter expolita. Cui, post integra de concoctione disceptationem, praescripta est vera purgandi methodus, cum expositione aphorismi: Concocta medicari. Michaelae Villanovano auctore. Parisiis Ex officina Simonis Colinaei. 1537. (Several editions of the work appeared, in Venice in 1545; in Lyon in 1546, 1547, 1548).

Translations

English: was published by Charles David O'Malley, Michael Servetus. A Translation of his Geographical, Medical and Astrological Writings with Introductions and Notes, (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1953), pp. 55-167

Spanish: Razón universal de los jarabes segun inteligencia de Galeno por Miguel Villanovano (Miguel Serveto). Traducida al Español por el Dr. J. Goyanes Capdevila ... Madrid, Imp. de J. Cosano, 1943). And by Ana Gómez, Tratado universal de jarabes, Madrid, 1935

The Discourse in favor of Astrology. 1538

- Context
- Some excerpts
- Prints
- Translations



Context

Astrology was still in good repute, and the line was not sharply drawn between that and meteorology. Theologians like Melancthon believed in it and practiced it, and kings and princes had their court astrologers whom they consulted before any important undertaking. In his lectures and in a published pamphlet on the subject, Servetus made some disrespectful remarks about the medical scholars of the time, charging them with ignorance



for neglecting this important subject, and calling them a plague of the world. His colleagues in the faculty were furious, and had him haled before the Inquisitor on a charge of heresy. When he was acquitted of this, they prosecuted him before the Supreme Court for advocating the practice of divination, which was forbidden on pain of death by fire. The Court ordered Servetus to withdraw his pamphlet, to pay his colleagues more respect, and to cease lecturing on the subject. But he had now had enough of academic life, and so he left Paris and entered upon the practice of medicine.

Some excerpts

"When I was lecturing publicly on astronomy at Paris a certain physician¹ 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. Clearly he, the follower of another unskilled person who had been his ill-informed preceptor,² thus displayed nothing less than his ignorance so that both of them rashly condemned that of which they were greatly ignorant. Yet, if it please the gods, they announced themselves as philosophers and physicians, although from this incident anyone may clearly realize that they had withdrawn from their guides, Plato and Aristotle, Hippocrates and Galen, because all of the latter were skilled in astrology of which the former not only confessed themselves to be completely ignorant but which, as well, they impudently attacked. The latter contend that astrology is an intimate of philosophy, the former, a foe. And so first I shall mention the testimonies of those authors favoring both parts of astrology³, and then I shall come to the arguments..."

1 Jean Tagault, Dean of the Paris medical Faculty

2 Pico della Mirandola, the Italian humanist and neo-Platonist who opposed astrology in his *Disputationes adversus astrologiam*

3 That is, the observation of the stars, closely akin to astronomy and vaguely related to meteorology; and judicial astrology foretelling events largely of human character.

Prints

Michaelis Villanovani in quendam medicum apologetica disceptatio pro-astrologia, Paris 1538. It was also reprinted by Henri Tollin in 1880

Translations

English: was published by Charles David O'Malley, Michael Servetus. A Translation of his Geographical, Medical and Astrological Writings with Introductions and Notes, (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1953), pp. 168-188

Spanish: by Ángel Alcalá, *Discurso en pro la Astrología*, Madrid, 1981



Biblia Sacra. 1542

- Context
- Prints
- Translations



Context

In 1542 Servetus appears as the editor of the Bible of Santes Pagnini. The most important disciplines in this period were theology and medicine. Theology was studied through the Bible in the Latin translation and the texts of Galen in the Arabic translation were the basis for medicine. 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 such as Nebrija, Vergara, Coronel y Lopez de Zuñiga in Spain, Erasmus in Holland, Calvin in Geneva, Santes Pagnini in Lyon and Sébastien Castellion in Switzerland. 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 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. 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. There were two more reprints in 1542.

Servetus added a preface and notes to the Pagnini Bible recommending in the prologue the study of the history of the Hebrews for a better understanding of the Bible. He accused biblical studies of not reaching for the literal and historical sense but searching in vain for the mystical meaning.

Servetus's reputation grew and he was contracted next by the Compagnie des Libraires at Lyon to correct and edit the Pagnini Bible in seven volumes which was published in 1545.

Prints

First Edition

Biblia Sacra ex Santis Pagnini translatione, sed ad Hebraicae linguae amussim novissimè ita recognita, & scholiis illustrata, ut planè nova editio videri possitt. Accessit praeterea liber interpretationum Hebraicorum, Arabicorum, Graecorumque nominum, quae in sacris literis reperiuntur, ordine alphabetico digestus, eodem autore. Lugduni, apud Hugonem à Porta. M.D. XLII. Cum privilegio ad annos sex.



Biblia sacra ex postremis doctorum omnium vigiliis, ad Hebraicam veritatem, & probatissimorum exemplarium fidem. Cum argumentis, indice, & Hebraicorum nominum interpretatione. Lugduni, Apud Hugonem à Porta. 1542.

There was another edition of the Bible of Pagnini in octavo, the same year, probably edited by Servetus, too.

Second Edition

Biblia sacra cum glossis, interlineari & ordinaria, Nicolai Lyrani postilla & moralitatibus, Burgensis additionibus, & Thorungi replicis.... Omnia ad Hebraicorum & Graecorum fidem iam primum suo nitori restituta, & variis scholiis illustrata. Lugduni anno M.D. XLV. Cum privilegio regis. At the beginning of the seventh volume containing only the index, one finds the name of Michel Villeneuve as the sole corrector.

Translations

NA

Christianismi Restitutio. 1553

- Context
- Some excerpts
- Prints
- Translations



Context

Servetus again felt driven to publish his views for wide reading, and he was the more strongly impelled to do this because he was convinced by a passage of Scripture that the kingdom of Antichrist (the Papacy) was to come to an end in 1585, and he had the conviction that he himself was the Michael who it was foretold was to put the great dragon under his feet. A Basel printer friend of his to whom Servetus offered the manuscript dared not print it, but at length after much difficulty, and by paying a large bonus, he got it printed in great secrecy in a vacant house in Vienne, of course with no indication of place, printer, or author; though he could not resist the temptation to put his own initials at the end, and to insert his name in several places in the text. This work was entitled The Restoration of Christianity (Christianismi Restitutio). About half of it consisted of a recast of Servetus's two earlier books on the Trinity, to which he now added his thirty letters to Calvin, and an address to Melancthon, making in all a book of over 700 pages. It contains Servetus's plan for a more thorough and complete reformation of Christianity than the Protestant reformers had attempted. Though its thought is more developed, it does not essentially differ from the earlier works; but it is harsher than before, and while holding a position something between Catholics and Protestants it is especially bitter toward the reformers, while it violently attacks



the traditional doctrine of the Trinity with every weapon to be drawn from reason, history, or Scripture. It is in this book that Servetus describes the circulation of the blood referred in the "some excerpts" section.

[1] Servetus theological beliefs by Peter Hughes

Some excerpts

The following is Servetus' postulation of the secondary circulation of the blood. He is credited with being the first to publish this discovery! It was found in his final book, *Christianismi Restitutio*:

*"Not only because such gifts, but by reason of that one alone who breathes the divine spirit into us, God is said to give us his spirit, Gen. 2 and 6. Our soul is a kind of lantern of God, Prov. 20. It is like a spark of the spirit of God, a reflection of the wisdom of God, created yet very similar to that spiritual wisdom, incorporated in it, retaining the innate light of divinity, the spark of that prime wisdom and the very spirit of divinity. God himself testifies, in chapter 6 above, that the spirit of divinity was innate in man even after Adam's sin. The dispensation of our life is given and is sustained through grace from his breathe, as Job says, chap. 10 and 32 and following. God breathed the divine spirit into Adam's nostrils together with a breath of air, and thence it remains, Isaiah 2 and Psa. 103. God himself maintains the breath of life for us by his spirit, giving breath to the people who are upon the earth and spirit to those treading it, so that we live, move and exist in him, Isaiah 42 and Acts 17. Wind from the four winds and breath from the four breaths gathered by God revive corpses, Ezek. 37. From a breath of air God there introduces the divine spirit into men in whom the life of inspired air was innate. Hence in Hebrew "spirit" is represented in the same way as "breath." From the air God introduces the divine spirit, introducing the air with the spirit itself and the spark of the very deity which fills the air. The saying of Orpheus is true, that the divine spirit is carried by the winds and enters through full inspiration, as Aristotle cites in the books, *De anima*. Ezekiel teaches that the divine spirit contains a kind of elemental substance and, as God himself teaches, something in the substance of the blood. I shall explain this matter at great length here so that you may thence understand that the substance of the created spirit of Christ is essentially joined to the very substance of the holy spirit. I shall call the air spirit because in the sacred language there is no special name for air. Indeed, that fact indicated that the divine breath is in the air which the spirit of the Lord fills.*

So that you, the reader, may have the whole doctrine of the divine spirit and the spirit, I shall add here the divine philosophy which you will easily understand if you have been trained in anatomy. It is said that in us there is a triple spirit from substance of three higher elements, natural, vital and animal. Aphrodisaeus calls them three spirits. But they are not three but once again of the single spirit (spiritus). The vital spirit is that which is communicated through anastomoses from the arteries to the veins in which it is called the natural [spirit]. Therefore the first [i.e., natural spirit] is of the blood, and its seat is in the liver and in the veins of the body. The second is the vital spirit of which the seat is in the heart and the arteries of the body. The third is the animal spirit, a ray of light, as it were, of which the seat is in the brain and the nerves of the body. In all these there resides the energy of the one spirit and of the light of God. The formation of man from the uterus teaches that the vital spirit is communicated from the heart to the liver. For an artery joined to a vein is transmitted through the umbilicus of the foetus, and in like manner afterward the artery and vein are always joined in us. The divine spirit of Adam was inspired from God into the heart before [it was communicated into] the liver, and from there it was communicated to the liver. The divine spirit was truly drawn into the mouth and nostrils, but the inspiration extended to the heart. The heart is the first living thing, the source of heat in the middle of the body. From the liver it takes the liquid of life, a kind of material, and in return vivifies it, just as the liquid water furnishes material for higher substances and by them, with the addition of light, is vivified so that [in turn] it may invigorate. The material of the divine spirit is from the blood of the liver by way of a remarkable elaboration of which you will now hear.



Hence it is said that the divine spirit is in the blood, and the divine spirit is itself the blood, or the sanguineous spirit. It is not said that the divine spirit is principally in the walls of the heart, or in the body of the brain or of the liver, but in the blood, as by God himself in Gen. 9, Levit. 7 and Deut. 12.

In this matter there must first be understood the substantial generation of the vital spirit which is composed of a very subtle blood nourished by the inspired air. The vital spirit has its origin in the left ventricle of the heart, and the lungs assist greatly in its generation. It is a rarefied spirit, elaborated by the force of heat, reddish-yellow (flavo) and of firey potency, so that it is a kind of clear vapor from very pure blood, containing in itself the substance of water, air and fire. It is generated in the lungs from a mixture of inspired air with elaborated, subtle blood which the right ventricle of the heart communicates to the left. However, this communication is made not through the middle wall of the heart, as is commonly believed, but by a very ingenious arrangement the subtle blood is urged forward by a long course through the lungs; it is elaborated by the lungs, becomes reddish-yellow and is poured from the pulmonary artery into the pulmonary vein. Then in the pulmonary vein it is mixed with inspired air and through expiration it is cleansed of its sooty vapors. Thus finally the whole mixture, suitably prepared for the production of the vital spirit, is drawn onward from the left ventricle of the heart by diastole.

That the communication and elaboration are accomplished in this way through the lungs we are taught by the different conjunctions and the communication of the pulmonary artery with the pulmonary vein in the lungs. The notable size of the pulmonary artery confirms this; that is, it was not made of such sort or of such size, nor does it emit so great a force of pure blood from the heart itself into the lungs merely for their nourishment; nor would the heart be of such service to the lungs, since at an earlier stage, in the embryo, the lungs, as Galen teaches, are nourished from elsewhere because those little membranes or valvules of the heart are not opened until the time of birth. Therefore that the blood is poured from the heart into the lungs at the very time of birth, and so copiously, is for another purpose. Likewise, not merely air, but air mixed with blood, is sent from the lungs to the heart through the pulmonary vein; therefore the mixture occurs in the lungs. That reddish-yellow color is given to the spirituous blood by the lungs; it is not from the heart.

In the left ventricle of the heart there is no place large enough for so great and copious a mixture, nor for that elaborate imbuing the reddish-yellow color. Finally, that middle wall, since it is lacking in vessels and mechanisms, is not suitable for that communication and elaboration, although something may possibly sweat through. By the same arrangement by which a transfusion of the blood from the portal vein to the vena cava occurs in the liver, so a transfusion of the spirit from the pulmonary artery to the pulmonary vein occurs in the lung. If anyone compares these things with those which Galen wrote in books VI and VII, *De usu partium*, he will thoroughly understand a truth which was unknown to Galen. And so that vital spirit is then transfused from the left ventricle of the heart into the arteries of the whole body so that which is more rarefied seeks the higher regions where it is further elaborated, especially in the retiform plexus situated under the base of the brain, and approaching the special seat of the rational soul, the animal spirit begins to be formed from the vital. Again it is more greatly rarefied by the firey force of the mind, elaborated and completed in the very slender vessels or hair-like (*capillaribus*) arteries which are situated in the choroid plexuses and contain the mind itself. These plexuses penetrates all the inmost parts of the brain, internally girdling the ventricles of the brain, and those vessels, enfolded and woven together as far as the origins of the nerves, serve to introduce in these last the faculties of sensation and of motion. Those vessels in a very remarkable way are woven together very finely, and even if they are called arteries, nevertheless they are the termination of arteries extending through the assistance of the meninges to the origin of the nerves. It is a new kind of vessels. For just as in the transfusion from the veins into the artery, so in the transfusion from the arteries into the nerves there is a new kind of vessels from the tunic of the artery in the meninx, since especially do the meninges preserve their tunics in the nerves. The sensibility of the nerves is not in their soft material, as in the brain. All nerves end in membranous filaments which have the most exquisite sensibility and to which for this reason the spirit is always sent. And from those little vessels of the meninges, or choroid plexuses, as from a source, the clear animal spirit is poured forth like a ray



through the nerves into the eyes and other sense organs. By the same route, but in reverse, light images of things causing sensation, coming from without, are sent to the same source, penetrating inwardly, as it were, through the clear medium [i.e., spirit].

From these things it is sufficiently clear that that soft mass of the brain is not properly the seat of the rational soul, since it is cold and lacking in sensation. But it is like a bolster for the aforesaid vessels lest they be broken, and like a custodian of the animal spirit lest it blow away when it must be communicated to the nerves; and it is cold that it may temper that fiery heat contained within the vessels. Hence also it happens that the nerves serve the tunic of the membrane in the internal cavity, which is common to the aforesaid vessels as a faithful guardian of the spirit, and they hold this [away] from the thin meninx just as they hold another from the thick. Also those empty spaces of the ventricles of the brain which puzzle philosophers and physicians contain nothing else but the spirit. But the ventricles were made in the first place like a cloaca for the reception of the purgings from the brain so that they may test the excrementa received there, from which morbid defluxions arise, and provide a passage to the palate and nostrils. And when the ventricles are so filled with pituita that the arteries themselves or the choroid plexuses are immersed in it, then suddenly apoplexy is aroused. If a very noxious humor obstructs a part, and its vapor infects the mind, epilepsy occurs, or another disease, according to the part into which it settles when it has been expelled. Therefore let us say that it is the mind which we clearly perceive to be afflicted. From the immoderate heat of those vessels, or from the inflammation of the meninges, obvious delirium and frenzy occur. Whence from the diseases occurring by reason of site and substance, by force of heat and because of the ingenious construction of the vessels containing it, and from the actions of the mind apparent there, we always conclude that those little vessels must be given first consideration because all the rest serve them and because nerves of sensation are tied to them so that they may receive their force from them. Finally, because we perceive the intellect exerting itself there when, as a result of concentrated thought, those arteries are pulsating as far as the temples. He who has not seen this thing will scarcely understand. Those ventricles were made for a second reason, that a portion of the inspired air penetrating through the ethmoid bones to their empty spaces, attracted by diastole from the vessels of the spirit, may refresh and ventilate the animal spirit contained within and the soul. In those vessels are mind, soul, and fiery spirit requiring constant fanning; otherwise, like an eternal fire which has been covered up, there would be suffocation. As in the case of ordinary fire, there is required not only fanning and blowing upon so that it may take fuel from the air, but also that it may discharge its sooty vapors into the air. And just as this is common external fire is bound to a thick earthy body, because of a common dryness and because of a common form of light, so that which has the liquid of the body as its food is blown upon, supported and nourished by the air; thus that fiery spirit and our soul are similarly bound to the body, making one with it and having blood as food; it is blown upon, supported and nourished by the airy spirit through inspiration and expiration, so that there is a double nourishment for it, spiritual and corporeal."

Prints

Christianismi restitutio. Totius ecclesiae apostolicae est ad sua limina vocatio, in integrum restituta cognitione Dei, fidei Christi, iustificationis nostrae, regenerationis baptismi, et coenae domini manducationis. Restitutio denique nobis regno coelesti, Babylonis impiae captivitate soluta, et Antichristo cum suis penitus destructo. M.D. LIII. 734 pp. 8°. It ends with the initials M.S.V.

There is also a reprint of the fragment of *Christianismi restitutio* by Giorgio Biandrata, an Italian physician who obtained his degree in Montpellier (here he was a fellow student with Rabelais), became a personal physician of the Italian-born wife of King Sigismund of Poland. Later he returned to Italy and was forced to leave Italy around 1553 for his religious convictions, he returned to Poland and Transylvania. *De Regno Christi Liber primus. De Regno Antichristi Liber secundus. Accessit tractatus de Paedobaptismo, et circuncisione. Rerum capita sequens pagella demonstrabit. Ioan. 15. ver 14. Vos amici mei estis, si feceris quaecunq ego praecipio vobis. Albae Juliae. Anno Domini 1569.*



Translations

Polish: Gregorius Paulus (Grzegorz Pawel), who translated some chapters into Polish and published them in Pinczów already in 1568! *Okazanie Antychrysta y iego Królestwa ze znaków iego własnych w słowie bozym opisanych, których tu szescdziesiat*. [The advent of Antichrist and his kingdom, according to his own signs as described in the Word of God, of which there are sixty.

German: Bernhard Spiess, *Wiederherstellung des Christentums*, Wiesbaden. Verlag von Chr. Limbarth. 1892, 1895, 1896, 3 volumes

Spanish: was done in two separate books, one containing only the *Christianismi restitutio*, the second, the rest of the Servetus's book Miguel Servet, *Restitución del Cristianismo*. Primera traducción castellana de Ángel Alcalá y Luis Betés. Edición, introducción y notas de Ángel Alcalá (Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 1980). Miguel Servet, *Treinta cartas a Calvino. Sesenta signos del Antichristo. Apología de Melanchton*. Edición de Ángel Alcalá (Madrid: Editorial O:P/O:P Castalia, 1981).

Portuguese: part of the *Christianismi restitutio* (*De mysterio Trinitatis, et veterum disciplina, ad Philippum Melanchthonem, et eius colegas, apologia*) Aplogia a Felipe Malnchthon e a suas colegas sobre o mistério de Trindade e sobre os costumes antigos as part of the dissertation by Elaine Cristine Sartorelli *O Programa de Miguel Servet para a Restituição do Cristianismo; Teologia e Retorica na Apologia a Melanchthon*, presented at Universidade de São Paulo, Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciencias Humanas (São Pulo, 2000).

1.- Servetus theological beliefs by Peter Hughes

Nearly all copies of Servetus' magnum opus, *Christianismi Restitutio*, were destroyed by the authorities. Only three have survived (detailed stroy in "Out of the flames"). Its peculiar, unorthodox trinitarian theology, which made Servetus a hunted man in nearly every country in Western Europe, cannot be summarized simply. Unitarian scholar Earle Morse Wilbur, who translated *De Trinitatis Erroribus*, found the *Restitutio* less to his liking and passed over coming to terms with it. John Godbey, a Unitarian Universalist scholar of the Reformation, wrote that "most persons lack sufficient understanding of his views to make defensible statements about him."

Servetus rejected the doctrine of original sin and the entire theory of salvation based upon it, including the doctrines of Christ's dual nature and the vicarious atonement effected by his death. He believed Jesus had one nature, at once fully human and divine, and that Jesus was not another being of the godhead separate from the Father, but God come to earth. Other human beings, touched by Christian grace, could overcome sin and themselves become progressively divine. He thought of the trinity as manifesting an "economy" of the forms of activity which God could bring into play. Christ did not always exist. Once but a shadow, he had been brought to substantial existence when God needed to exercise that form of activity. In some future time he would no longer be a distinct mode of divine expression. Servetus called the crude and popular conception of the trinity, considerably less subtle than his own, "a three headed Cerberus." (In Greek mythology Cerberus is a three-headed dog-like creature of the underworld.)

Servetus did not believe people are totally depraved, as Calvin's theology supposed. He thought all people, even non-Christians, susceptible to or capable of improvement and justification. He did not restrict the benefits of faith to a few recipients of God's parsimonious dispensation of grace, as did Calvin's doctrine of the elect. Rather, grace abounds and human beings need only the intelligence and free will, which all human beings possess, to grasp it. Nor did Servetus describe, as did Calvin, an infinite chasm between the divine and mortal worlds. He conceived the divine and material realms to be a continuum of more and less divine entities. He held that God was present in and constitutive of all creation. This feature of Servetus' theology was especially obnoxious to Calvin. At the Geneva trial he



asked Servetus, "What, wretch! If one stamps the floor would one say that one stamped on your God?"

Calvin asked if the devil was part of God. Servetus laughed and replied, "Can you doubt it? This is my fundamental principle that all things are a part and portion of God and the nature of things is the substantial spirit of God."

The devil was an important factor in Servetian theology. Servetus was a dualist. He thought God and the devil were engaged in a great cosmic battle. The fate of humanity was just a small skirmish in salvation history. He charged orthodox trinitarians with creating their doctrine of the trinity, not to describe God, but to puff themselves up as central to God's concern. Because they defined God to suit their own purposes, he called them atheists.

Servetus' demonology included the notion that the devil had created the papacy as an effective countermeasure to Christ's coming to earth. Through the popes the devil had taken over the church. Infant baptism was a diabolic rite, instituted by Satan, who in ancient days had presided over pagan infant sacrifices. He calculated that the Archangel Michael would soon come to bring deliverance and the end of the world, probably in 1585.

Other works

Among other works he published there may have been an edition of the Summa of Thomas Aquinas in Spanish, but no exemplar has been found and it is not known where it might have been published; also, there were various treatises on grammar translated from the Latin into Spanish. This information was given by Jean Frelon, a bookseller from Lyon, in his declaration of May 23, 1553. It is interesting that he published a Hebrew lexicon and perhaps an edition of the Koran in Arabic



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