

**MICHAEL SERVETUS: THE UNFORTUNATE AND FAIR CONVICTION AS
HERETIC AND SEDITIONARY AT THE TRIALS IN VIENNE AND GENEVA,
1553**

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Submitted as fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Philosophiae Doctor

**in the Faculty of Theology
Department of Church History and Polity
of the
University of Pretoria**

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Pretoria

2001



Thank you

I would like to express my gratitude to the following people:

First of all, Professor Hattie Holmby, for her kindness, encouragement, guidance, and insight during this research.

For my mother, Sun-Nyu,
who has always been encouraging, and committed to me.

Professor John Woodbridge, who gave me the first insight into a Church History point of view.

Also for my wife, Young-Mee,
whom I love,

My closest friend, and for whom no human words can express my sincere appreciation as always given good advice.

and for whom no human words can express my sincere appreciation
for all she has sacrificed.

And my two children, Bo-Keurn and Samuel,
of whom I am very proud.

English, from the beginning.

Not forgetting my sister, Myung-Hee,
for her generous and loving support throughout my studies.

Thank you

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First of all, Professor HOFFIE Hofmeyr, for his kindness, encouragement, guidance, and insight during this research.

Professor John Woodbridge, who gave me the first insight into a Church History point of view.

My closest colleague, Reverend Yung-Sil Park, who is with me always, and has always given good advice.

And Mister Walter Cast. I cannot say how helpful his advice and comments on this thesis was. While I was writing, he patiently read through the manuscript, in its state of imperfect English, from the beginning till it developed into its first draft.

SUMMARY

Michael Servetus: the unfortunate and fair conviction as heretic and seditious at the trials in Vienne and Geneva, 1553

As a Spaniard, Michael Servetus (1509-1553) not only published heretical writings, such as *De Trinitatis Erroribus* and *Christianismi Restitutio*, but was also condemned by both Roman Catholics and Protestants.

When reference is made to Servetus' death on the stake in 1553, several historians suspect John Calvin (1509-1564) of being directly involved in the case. On a superficial view it would seem that Servetus was condemned, arrested, charged and sentenced by Calvin, the Reformer and church leader from Geneva. Some historians even rebuke Calvin for the blood murder, and remember Servetus as a martyr.

In order to re-evaluate the Case of Michael Servetus, this study concentrates on Servetus' finger prints on history, chronologically, to establish the identity of the man behind the heretical books. The heresies were principally anti-Trinitarianism and anti-infant baptism. The two mentioned documents are analysed and compared to Calvin's theology contained in his *Institute*.

There were two issues at stake during the trial at Geneva: the religious matter of the confronting heresies; and the political issue of Servetus' conspiracy with the Genevean Libertines. The prosecutors in Servetus' trials were the Catholic Inquisitors in Vienne, and the Protestant Civil Government of Geneva. The formal court proceedings are treated in Calvin's *Opera*. Calvin was summoned by the Genevean authorities to act as a religious consultant during the trial.

Servetus had ample opportunity to demonstrate and defend his theology, both orally and in writing. However, he also supported the Libertines and thus he reverted to insults and counter accusations. Calvin bravely appealed to reduce Servetus' punishment.

In light of the sixteenth century era, the civil government acted in accordance to accepted practice in its administered punishment of Servetus for being a seditious. His helpers, the Libertines, who dominated civil government in Geneva, used him for their own political purposes. Ironically also, the implicated John Calvin tried to help Servetus over a period of sixteen years prior to the trials. Servetus hated Calvin, making him a rival, but Calvin did not return the rivalry.

ABBREVIATIONS

CR	<i>Christianismi Restitutio</i>
DT	<i>Dialogorum de Trinitate libri Duo</i>
PG 1541	The Second of Edition of Ptolemy's Geography (1541)

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