

4.2.3.5 Consulting Four Swiss Churches

The Court ordered Calvin to prepare a reply to Servetus' response in two days, and Calvin wrote *Refutatio Errorum (Opera, 519-53)*.²⁵⁴ After Servetus learned that Calvin had submitted a reply with the signatures of thirteen pastors,²⁵⁵ he determined to write a letter to the Court, which was enclosed with Calvin's reply. It reads (Allwoerden, 1727:95-6, Wright 1806a:203-4; see *Opera, 553* & Drummond 1848:101-2):

Thus far we have had noise enough indeed, and a crowd of subscribers to Calvin's dictates; but what places of scripture have they produced to prove what they assert concerning the Son, that he is an invisible and really distinct being. They do not show any, nor can they ever do it. This they should have done, had they acted up to the character of ministers of the gospel, especially since they pretend to value themselves to all the world, upon nothing so much as this; That, it has always been their resolution to teach nothing but what is demonstrated from plain and solid quotations of scripture: but no such quotations can be found therein. My doctrine therefore is condemned by mere clamor and noise, without producing any reason or authority whatsoever. Subscribed by Michael Servetus, who here is alone, but who has Christ for his undoubted protector.

Like a madman Servetus submitted his opinions with their subscriptions. He intended to get revenge, and did not hesitate to insult Calvin, who was dejected and critical. He also mocked the pastors calling them "a crowd of subscribers to Calvin's dictates." He boasted about himself that his doctrine was condemned "by mere clamour and noise", but not by reasonable authorities, and his own protector was Christ.

It was on Tuesday, September 5 that the Council gathered all the documents and send them to the Swiss Churches. They put the Lord Treasurer, Claude du Pan,²⁵⁶ in charge of preparing the proposal on the guilt of Servetus. The Council adjourned for two weeks to allow the Lord Treasurer to examine all the material thoroughly without any interference. It is possible that the Libertines interfered. The original idea to consult with the Swiss Churches probably originated in the conspiracy between Servetus and the Libertines (Collins 1968:180).²⁵⁷ Calvin was against this decision. On September 7, Calvin sent a letter to Henry Bullinger (*Letters*, vol. II, 426-7), the Reformed leader in Zürich, saying:

²⁵⁴ On Servetus' replies, Calvin concludes: "Whoever thinks justly, will acknowledge, that the main end of Michael Servetus, was to undermine all religion, by extinguishing the light of sound doctrine" (Wright 1806a:201-2).

²⁵⁵ They were: Michael Cope, Abel Pouppinus, John Pyrery, James Bernard, John de St. Andrew, Nicholas Galasius, John Baldwin, Francis Borgonius, John Faber, Nicholas Little, John Macarius, Raymond Calvet, Nicholas Colladonius, Matthew Malesian (*Opera, 553*).

²⁵⁶ He was a devoted follower of Calvin.

²⁵⁷ "The protectors of the prisoner wished ... that his affair should be referred to the Churches of Switzerland" (Rilliet 1846:161).

Our Council will, on an early day, send the opinions of Servetus to your city, to obtain your judgement regarding them. Indeed they cause you this trouble, despite our remonstrances; but they have reached such a pitch of folly and madness, that they regard with suspicion whatever we say to them. So much so, that were I to allege that it is clear at mid-day, they would forthwith begin to doubt of it. Our brother Gualter²⁵⁸ [will tell you] more; for I am compelled to conclude, as there are many here whom I found on returning home from dinner.

Bullinger immediately appreciated Calvin's dejected state of mind and replied at once (Rilliet 1846:175-6.):

Do not abandon, I conjured you, a Church which contains so many excellent men. Ever support the cause of the elect; think of the joy which your withdrawal would occasion to the enemies of Reform, and with what dangerous it would be accompanied to the French refugees. Moreover, the Lord will not forsake you. He has presented to the mighty Council of Geneva a most favorable opportunity to cleanse both it and the Council from the pollution of heresy, by delivering into its hands the Spaniard, Servetus. If they treat him as deserves for being an impudent blasphemer, the whole world will declare that the Genevese abhor the impious; that they pursue, with the sword of justice, heretics that are really obstinate; and that they thus maintain the glory of the Divine Majesty."

Concurrent to these events, the 'Berthelier' issue was continuing. Calvin and the pastors of Geneva argued that the matter of excommunicating was not a matter for the civil Council but for the ecclesiastical Consistory in accordance to the Ecclesiastical Ordinances (*Opera*, 675).²⁵⁹ There were several crimes that pastors should never tolerate ((Calvin 1975:232-4 & see Kingdon 1995:17-22)):

Of the first sort are: heresy, schism, rebellion against ecclesiastical order, blasphemy open and meeting civil punishment, simony and all corruption in presentations, intrigue to occupy another's place, leaving one's Church without lawful leave, or just calling, ...

... In the case of the crimes which cannot at all be tolerated, if some accusation and complaint arise, let the assembly of ministers and elders investigate it, in order to proceed reasonably and according to whatever is discovered in judging the case, and then report judgement to the magistrate in order that if required the delinquent be deposed.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁸ His full name was Rudolph Gualter. He was a minister of the Church of Zürich, and son-in-law to Bullinger.

²⁵⁹ "The Consistory has no jurisdiction, but only the right to reprove according to the Word of God, and its severest punishment is excommunication." - "Nulla in Consistorio civilis jurisdictio, sed tantum reprehensiones ex Verbo Domini: ultima vero poena, excommunicatio."

²⁶⁰ In order to gain the right to excommunicate from the Small Council, Calvin struggled to the point of resigning in 1543. In the end "the magistrates informed the pastors that their original intention had been to reserve for themselves the power to absolve anyone rejected from communion by the Consistory, and this remained in doubt until 1555. Only in 1556 did the Consistory win the power to hear witnesses under oath" (See Monter 1967:138-9).

Consequently the Consistory sent two pastors, Abel Poupin and James Bernard, to the Council, demanding a positive answer to the request submitted on September 15. The Council, however, answered that “we must command M. Calvin, that while waiting for that settlement, he must preach and do his duty” (Rilliet 1846:180). Against their request, the Council annulled the sentence of excommunication in the afternoon of the same day.

Although Calvin considered his magistrates to be capable and valid to accuse Servetus of heresy and blasphemy, the Genevan government kept him from inciting them and prevented him from restricting their authority (Castellio 1935:273).

4.2.3.6 Subsequent Petitions of Servetus

While the Council was deliberating about sending the documents to the Swiss Churches, Servetus became impatient and wrote another petition to the Syndics and the Council. This happened on September 15 (*Opera*, 797, Bainton 1953b:197):

I humbly beg that you cut short these long delays and deliver me from prosecution. You see that Calvin is at the end of his rope, 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 jacket nor shirt, but a bad one. I have addressed to you another petition which was according to God and to impede it Calvin cites Justinian. He is in a bad way to quote against me what he does not himself credit, for he does not believe what Justinian has said about the Holy Church of bishops and priests and other matters of religion and knows well that the Church was already degenerated. It is a great shame, the more so that I have been caged here for five weeks and he has not urged against me a single passage.

My lords, I have also asked you to give me a procurator or advocate as you did to my opponent, who was not in the same straits as I, who am a stranger and ignorant of the customs of the country. You permitted it to him, but not to me and you have liberated him from prison before knowing. I petition you that my case be referred to the Council of Two Hundred with my requests, and if I may appeal there I do so ready to assume all the cost, loss and interest of the law of an eye for an eye [*poena talionis*], both against the first accuser and against Calvin, who has taken up the case himself. Done in your prisons of Geneva. September 15, 1553.

Michael Servetus in his own cause.

Servetus first complains that the conditions in the prison were wretched and he asks for a few clothes and some money. He was granted it. One can sense, the above petition was written in a most belligerent spirit. It is the product of a mind that felt little compunction when resorting to exaggeration and falsehood. Full of retaliation he labours under a misunderstanding that Calvin had him confined: “Calvin is at the end of his rope, not

knowing what to say and for his pleasure wishes to make me rot here in prison.” He, in the mood of victory, asserts that Calvin did not cite from Justin’s writings correctly. Although Servetus demanded an advocate and the transfer of his trial to the Council of Two Hundred, assisted by his jailer, Claude de Genève, where he had reason to expect a majority in his favour, the Council rejected it (Shields 1983:374-5).

We can ask a revealing question as to how Servetus came to know so much about the governmental system of Geneva, even though he insists that he never had interaction with anyone since arriving in city (*Opera*, 763). There is a contradiction here: How could a stranger know the procedure of appealing to the Council of Two Hundred? It is possible that someone secretly communicated with him while he was in into prison (Bainton 1936:147-8 & see *Opera*, 767).

Servetus had no scruple about denouncing Calvin with his imaginations and personal hatred (*Opera*, 799, Rilliet 1846:185). He alleged that Calvin was not only full of vengeance and lies but blind. He again revealed that he did fear death for defending his system as he had written earlier in letter to pastor Abel Poupin.

Servetus was given a chance to review Calvin’s reply to his comments before they were sent to the Swiss Churches on Monday, September 18. He wanted to add two books of Tertullian and Irenæus referred to by him in his defence. He requested that Calvin’s second reply should be sent him. After reading Calvin’s replies, the packages were delivered to the Swiss Churches.

The trial developed from a local to a national, Swiss case. Under the circumstances Servetus looked like he was still hoping to achieve a victory over Calvin, or even release, or at least a reduction in his punishment.

On September 19 the Council referred Servetus’ case to the magistrates and pastors of the four Swiss Churches as the Council had already determined to consult them on September 5. The appeals to the Swiss Cites must have strengthened Servetus’ position because the idea came from the conspiracy between him and Calvin’s opponents who informed him about his weakness in and outside Geneva. It is well known that Calvin did not have a good relationship with the church of Berne, since the matter of Bolsec. We can realize the

matter by the letter that Calvin had written about the case to Bullinger (*Letters*, vol. II, 334-5 on January, 1552):

Would that Jerome were a better man than our letter declared him to be! Would that he attributed all to the grace of God, as you seem to think. But for you to plead in defence of a man who seditiously disturbed a peaceful Church, who strove to divide us by deadly discord, who, without ever having received the slightest provocation, loaded us with all sorts of abuse, who publicly taunted us with representing God as a tyrannical governor, nay more, that we had put the Jove of the poets in the place of God, – to defend such a man, I say, were the extreme of absurdity ...

... But at the request of the neighboring brethren, we were anxious to remove that plague from the Bernese district. Now that your answer has been ambiguous, the sorry wretch is making his boast that you countenance his error. I only wish I could at present venture to indicate the catastrophe of the tragedy, regarding which you desired to be informed. You will hear, before long, or I am much mistaken, in certain attempts just made, that he has paved the way for making still greater disturbances. Now, if I have laid bare my inmost feelings in making these complaints to you, let that have no weight so far as our reply is concerned. Although you disappointed my expectations, I nevertheless gladly offer you our friendship.

Two days were required to make four copies of the relevant manuscripts and to distribute them between the churches. The Council appointed Jaquemoz Jernoz as the official messenger. The distributed documents contained the following: Oral and written debates between Calvin and Servetus, including the thirty-eight propositions extracted from the heretical books of Servetus; a copy of *Christianismi Restitutio*; the works of St. Clement, Tertullian and Irenæus cited in defence; statements of Calvin with the signatures of thirteen other pastors of Geneva; Servetus' comments for his defence; and a circular letter from the Council of Geneva. All documents accompanying Jernoz "were disfigured with the polemical billingsgate current in that day; but those of Servetus read now like the profane ravings of a madman. Calvin was careful to insist in his paper that the alleged errors were contrary to the common consent of the universal Church and destructive of all revealed religion" (Shields 1983:377-8). This took nearly one month. The Council made it clear in the letter that this consultation did not result from distrusting the pastors of Geneva, nor from doubting their competency, but was for the objective additional advice that could be given before any further decision was made. Servetus fate would now depend on these opinions. The following letters were sent to each of them with all material:

Geneva, September 21, 1553.

Honourable Sirs!—Well assured that you are every way disposed to persevere in the good and holy purpose of upholding and furthering the Word of God, we have thought We should do you an injustice did we not inform you of the

business in which we have been engaged for some time past. It is this. There is a man now in prison with us, Michael Servetus by name, who has thought fit to write and have printed certain books on the Holy Scriptures, containing matters which we think are nowise according to God and the holy evangelical doctrine. He has been heard [in his defence] by our ministers, who have drawn up Articles against him, to which he has replied, and to his replies answers have been given—all in writing; and we pray you, for the honour of God, to take the papers now forwarded to you into consideration, and to return them by the same messenger with your opinion and advice. We beg you further to look into the book which will be delivered to you by our messenger, so that you may be well and fully informed of the unhappy propositions of the writer.

In writing thus and asking your advice we, desire to say that we do so without any mistrust of our own ministers.

To the Burgomaster and Council of Zürich (*Opera*, 803-4, Willis 1877:447-8):

Geneva, September 22, 1553.

High and mighty Lords!—We know not if your Lordships are aware that we have in hand a prisoner, Michael Servetus by name, who has written and had printed a book containing many things against our religion. This we have shown to our ministers; and, although we have no mistrust of them, we desire to communicate the work to you, in order that, if it so please you, you may lay it before your clergy, together with the replies and rejoinders that have been made in connection therewith. We therefore pray you to be good enough to submit the documents now sent to your minister's and request them to give us their opinion of their merits, to the end that we may bring the business, to which they refer, to a close.

In the meantime another petition of Servetus wherein he felt confident of victory was sent to the Council on September 22. In it, Servetus, full of personal hate, again made false accusations against Calvin condemning him unto death, as follows (*Opera*, 804-5 & Allwoerden, 1727:101-2, Willis 1877:451-2 & see Wright 1806a:207-8):

To the Syndics and Council of Geneva.

My most honoured Lords,—I am detained on a criminal charge at the instance of John Calvin, who has accused me, falsely saying that in my writings I maintain—

1st. That the soul of man is mortal, and

2nd. That Jesus Christ had only taken the fourth part of his body from the Virgin Mary.

These are horrible, execrable charges. Of all heresies and crimes, I think of none greater than that which would make the soul of man to be mortal. In every other there is hope of salvation, but none in this. He who should say what I am charged with saying, neither believes in God nor justice, in the resurrection, in Christ Jesus, in the Scriptures, nor, indeed, in anything, but declares that all is death, and that man and beast are alike. Had I said anything of the kind—said it not in words only, but written and published it I should myself think me worth of death.

Wherefore, my Lords, I demand that my false accuser be declared subject to the law of retaliation, and like me be sent to prison until the cause between him and me, for death or other penalty, is decided. To this effect I here engage myself against him, submit myself to all that the Lex Talionis requires, and declare that I shall be content to die if I am not borne out in everything. I shall bring against him. My Lords, I demand of you, Justice, justice, justice!

From your prison of Geneva, this 22nd of September, 1553

MICHAEL SERVETUS,
pleading his own cause.

The letter was followed by a series of articles in form like those lately brought against himself, headed (*Opera*, 804-6 & Allwoerden, 1727:103-4, Willis 1877:452-453 & see Wright 1806a:208-11):

Articles on which Michael Servetus demands that John Calvin be interrogated.

I. Whether in the month of March last he did not write, by the hand of William Trie, to Lyons, and say many things about Michael Villanovanus called Servetus? What were the contents of the letter, and with what motive was it sent?

II. Whether with letter in question he sent half of the first sheet of the book of the said Michael Servetus, entitled 'Christianismi Restitutio,' on which were the Title, the Table of Contents, and the beginning of the work?

III. Whether this was not sent with a view to its being shown to the authorities of Lyons, in order to have Servetus arrested and impeached, as happened in fact?

IV. Whether he has not heard since then that in consequence of the charges thereby brought against him, he, the said Servetus, had been burned in effigy, and his property confiscated; he himself having only escaped burning in person by escaping from prison?

V. Whether he was not informed since, that by virtue of the said accusation, the said Servetus was burnt effigy, and his estate confiscated; and that he would actually have been burnt, had he not made his escape.]²⁶¹

VI. Whether he does not know that it is no business of a minister of the gospel to appear as a criminal accuser and pursuer of a man judicially on a capital charge?

My Lords, there are four great and notable reasons why Calvin ought to be condemned:

First: Because doctrinal matters are no subjects for criminal prosecutions, as I have shown in my petition, and will show more fully from the Doctors of the Church. Acting as he has done, he has therefore gone beyond the province of a minister of the Gospel—and gravely sinned against justice.

Second: Because he is a false accuser, as the above articles declare, and as is easily proved by reading my book.

Third: Because by frivolous reasons and calumnious assertions he would suppress the Truth as it is in Jesus Christ, as will be made obvious to you, by reference to my writings; what he has said of me, being full of lies and wickedness.

²⁶¹ Willis omits this item but is translated by Wright (1806a:209).

Fourth: Because he follows the doctrine of Simon Magus, in great part, against all the Doctors of the Church. Wherefore, magician as he is, he deserves not only to be condemned, but to be banished and cast out of your city, his goods being adjudged to me in recompense for mine which he has made me to lose. These, my Lords, are the demands I make.
 Michael Servetus
 in his own cause.

In this petition Servetus was retaliating against Calvin, demanding that Calvin be “declared subject to the law of retaliation, and like me be sent to prison until the cause between him and me, for death or other penalty, is decided.” Compared to the previous petition of August 22, in which he asked to be freed, began with the title: “Articles on which M. Servetus demands that J. Calvin be interrogated.” He attacked Calvin without reasonable proofs that he “followed the doctrine of Simon Magus”, and alleged that he dictated de Trie’s letters and was a false accuser. He concluded his petition with the following notes:

“Wherefore, magician as he is, he deserves not only to be condemned, but to be banished and cast out of your city, his goods being adjudged to me in recompense for mine which he has made me to lose. These, my Lords, are the demands I make.”

He intended to inculcate Calvin, questioning and defaming him. He consequently admitted the right of civil jurisdiction over religious matters, although he had formerly denied this. Even he was willing to stake his life on this decision, provided that his antagonist should be exposed to the same fate in light of *Lex(poena) Talionis*.²⁶² “Servetus had formerly declined the civil jurisdiction in matters theological; he now, in the hope of placing the Reformer [Calvin] in the same hazard as himself, accepts that jurisdiction in those very matters which he had before declined it. And further, he makes it plain that he was not more liberal than his age, in holding that a conviction for heresy ought to draw after it the punishment of death” (Wylie 1899:334). In fact, the victory strategy proposed by him, was from first to last inspired and conspired by Calvin’s opponents, who were anxious to get at Calvin once more, and so their strategy and Servetus coincided. Rilliet judges his intention of petitioning as follows: “To dislodge Calvin from his position, to expel him from Geneva, to satisfy a just vengeance,— these were the objects toward which Servetus rushed, and which he thinks he will now obtain. But this bright illusion of the prisoner lasted only for a few days. The absolute silence of the Council regarding his petition very soon again enveloped his thoughts in disquietude and sadness” (Rilliet 1846:191).

²⁶² It is based on the Exodus 21:24 and Leviticus 24:20 and adopted in the civil codes of Southern Europe.

Willis believes that Servetus' spirit of victory and retaliation was influenced by Perrin and Berthelmer (Willis 1877:453):

“They might have imagined that the same result would ensue from the appeal to the Churches as had followed the reference made to them in the case of Jerome Bolsec, and believed that the worst that would befall their puppet would be banishment from the city and territory of Geneva.”

His unstable mind was now controlled by the Libertines, and caused him not only to change his testimonies but to be full of personal hatred towards Calvin.

Servetus lost his patience when he did not get an immediately response from the Swiss Cities and Churches, so he planned another attempt. On October 10, he sent a last petition in which he did not attempt to entrap Calvin but appealed to the sympathy and mercy of the Council (*Opera*, 806-7 & Allwoerden, 1727:105, Bainton 1953b:200-1 & see Wright 1806a:211):

Honored sirs, It is now three weeks that I have sought an audience and have been unable to secure one. I beg you for the love of Jesus Christ not to refuse me what you would not refuse to a Turk, who sought justice at your hands. I have some important and necessary matters to communicate to you.

As for what you commanded that something be done to keep me clean, nothing has been done and I am in a worse state than before. The cold greatly distresses me, because of my colic and rupture, causing other complaints which I should be ashamed to describe. It is great cruelty that I have not permission to speak if only to remedy my necessities. For the love of God, honored sirs, give your order whether for pity or duty. Done in your prisons of Geneva, October 10, 1553.

Michael Servetus.

The Council delivered his petition ordering the Lord Syndic, Darlod, and the Secretary of State, Calude Roset, to hear what Servetus had requested. We do not know what was discussed, but it appears it had little effect on the deliberations to come.

4.2.4 Fourth Phase

On October 18, 1553, after about a month of deliberations, Jaquemoz Jernoz, the messenger, returned the verdict. The documents were translated from Latin to French, and two days later, on October 20, the Council read the verdict. The cities had found Servetus guilty as charged, unanimously condemning him as a heretic and a blasphemer!²⁶³

²⁶³ Their answers were twofold – of pastors and magistrates. There were eight in all (*Opera*, 555-8, 808-9).

4.2.4.1 Swiss Churches' Responses

In the response dated on October 2 the ministers of Zürich were so shocked that Servetus had repudiated the doctrine of the Trinity, that they sharply criticised him, calling him a horrible blasphemer who called the Trinity a three-headed monster, Cerberus (*Opera*, 556). They unanimously approved of Calvin's judgements to avoid further spread of heresy, emphasising that the only suitable punishment for Servetus was death (*Opera*, 557-8, Rilliet 1846:195-6):

We hope that the faith and zeal of Calvin, your pastor and our brother—that his noble devotion to the refugees and pious men will be sufficiently clear not be eclipsed, either with your Lordships, or upright people, by the worthless charges of that man. Against the latter we think you ought to manifest much faith and much zeal, especially because our Churches have, abroad, the evil reputation of being heretical, and favorable to heresy. But the holy providence of God offers to you at this hour an opportunity of freeing yourselves and us from that injurious suspicion, if you know how to be vigilant and active in preventing the further spreading of that poison. We do not doubt but that your Lordships will act thus.

Even the ministers of Berne, who were not on good terms with Calvin, and who had counselled toleration in the case of Jerome Bolsec two years earlier, regarded Servetus as Satanic, a pest, and one among other ancient heretics (*Opera*, 818-9). They not only were incensed at his arrogance but also condemned his errors of intending to destroy all religion. They insisted strongly that the spread of heresy among the faithful be stemmed (*Opera*, 819, Willis 1877:456):

He seems to have thought himself at liberty to call in question all the most essential elements of our religion, to upset everything by new interpretations of Scripture, and to corrupt and throw all into confusion by reviving the poison of the ancient heresies We pray that the Lord will give you such a spirit of prudence, of counsel, and of strength, as will enable you to fence your Church and the other Churches from this pestilence, and that you will at the same time take no step that might be held unbecoming in a Christian magistracy.²⁶⁴

The ministers of Schaffhausen also rejected Servetus' books, considering them blasphemy against the Trinity. They were in agreement with the other churches on the need for eliminating blasphemies like a cancer from the church. In the letter dated on October 6, they stated this: "We do not question but that you will repress the attempt of Servetus, according to your praiseworthy prudence, in order that his blasphemies may not waste like

²⁶⁴ For the Council's response see 818: even "the Bernese had advised to put Servetus to death" (Holtrop 1993:772, 774).

a gangrene the members of Christ; for, to engage in long reasoning to overthrow his errors, would be to go mad with a fool” (*Opera*, 810, Rilliet 1846:196).²⁶⁵

The ministers of Basel, agreeing with Zürich, not only celebrated the capture of Servetus and exhorted the Genevan people to clean the church, but also condemned his heresy. He was like the malicious serpent who insulted the faithful servant of God, Calvin, and who blasphemed against God. Then they said (*Opera*, 823, Willis 1877:458):

We exhort you, therefore, to use, as it seems you are disposed to do, all the means at your command to cure him of his errors, and so to remedy the scandals he has occasioned; or, otherwise, does he show himself incurably anchored in his perverse opinions, to constrain him, as is your duty, by the powers you have from God, in such a way that henceforth he shall not continue to disquiet the Church of Christ, and so make the end worse than the beginning. The Lord will surely grant you his spirit of wisdom and of strength to this end.²⁶⁶

It is no exaggeration to conclude that the actions of Calvin and the Genevan church were entirely in agreement with the whole of Christianity in Switzerland, which was in favour of the extreme measures taken in Geneva. All of them condemned Servetus and supported the Council and Calvin.²⁶⁷ It was their wish that the Council should not allow Servetus to disturb Geneva or other cities any more. Calvin says of their responses later (*Letters*, vol. II, 435 on October 26, 1553):

The messenger has returned from the Swiss Churches. They are unanimous in pronouncing that Servetus has now renewed those impious errors with which Satan formerly disturbed the Church, and that he is a monster not to be borne. Those of Bale were judicious. The Zurichers were the most vehement of all; for they not only animadverted in severe terms on the atrocity of his impieties, but also exhorted our Senate to severity. They of Schaffhausen will agree. Also to an appropriate letter from the Bernese is added one from the Senate, in which they stimulate ours not a little.

²⁶⁵ For the Council’s response see 809.

²⁶⁶ The rest of the ministers’ response is recorded in 820-23. For the Council see 820.

²⁶⁷ It was likely that David Joris pleaded for Michael Servetus before the Swiss magistrates on July 1, 1553. But it must have been doubted that he sent the letter to them on the day, because he referred to the letters sent by the Council of Geneva in September, 1553. See Allwoerden (1727:89). Joris maintains that the punishment for Servetus should have been banishment rather than death: “And if the aforesaid Servetus is a heretic or a sectary before God ... we should inflict on him harm in any of his members, but admonish him in a friendly way and at most banish him from the city, if he will not give up his obstinacy and stop disturbing the peace by his teaching ... that he may come to a better mind and no longer molest your territory. No one should go beyond this....” (Allwoerden, 1727:91, Bainton 1953b:307-8). Joris, a fanatic Anabaptist, was born in about 1501 in Flanders and had his tongue pieced with an awl as blasphemer. He died in 1556. The Roman Catholic Church sentenced him for being a heretic, and had his body disinterred and burned with his writings five years after his death.

The Council could not hesitate in condemning Servetus but “yield, not to Calvin, but to four important Churches and to the whole body of Protestantism,— and Servetus had decidedly against him the majority of the Council” (Bungener 1863:254). Calvin, who was restrained from any influence and could not attend the trial, was totally prevented from influencing the decision of the trial: “From this moment Calvin quits the scene ... His influence with the Council was then at zero” (Wylie 1899:333). It has been alleged by some that Calvin had influenced every aspect of the trial and he was like a ‘dictator’ in Geneva. Brown says “... it is erroneous and unjust to attribute to him everything that was done in Geneva to restrain and punish men for publishing their opinions on religion” (Brown 1998:28). His influence was consistently restricted to the religious matter, in particular, on the occasion of sentencing and executing Servetus. He never even attended the trial except at their own particular request, although the Council seems to have repeatedly solicited his presence. Yet Calvin gave them more compelling advice in a case of peculiar difficulty than any one else in Geneva, appealing against Servetus’ dreadful punishment. He was offered an opportunity to debate against Servetus. Even though Servetus blatantly insulted him on several occasions, Calvin kept to theology, trying to save him from his errors. In all this time, Perrin and Berthelier not only were controlling the Council as a whole but restricted Calvin’s influence in the civil matters.

4.2.4.2 Discussion of Servetus’ Case

The session, called to examine the responses of the Swiss Churches thoroughly, adjourned for the weekend. The Council looked through the responses carefully but could not reach a decision, because some members of the Council were absent on October 23. The chief Syndic, Perrin, leader of the Libertines, was absent for three days on the pretext of sickness (Schaff 1993:781 & Rilliet 1846:199).²⁶⁸ Privately, he attempted to persuade members of the Council to release Servetus, but his proposal was ineffective. Schaff, the church historian, says of Perrin’s intention: “He was influenced by political passion rather than by sympathy with heresy or love of toleration, which had very few advocates at that time. When he perceived that the majority of the Council was inclined to a sentence of death, he quitted the Senate House with a few others” (Schaff 1993:781).

²⁶⁸ “Caesar, the comedian, after feigning illness for three days, at length went up to the assembly in order to free that wretch from punishment” (*Letters*, vol. II, 436). The following persons were present at the session: De messieurs les Scindiques, Estienne Chappeaurouge, Dommene Darloz, Pernet Defosses, des Seigneurs Conseillers, Anthoine Chicand, Amblard Cornarz, Henry Aubert, Claude du pain, Iehan Lambert, Michel de larche, Pierre Malegnod, Pierre Iehan Iesse, Claude Vandel conseillers, Pierre Bonnaz, Iehan Cusin, Iehan perne, Luppi Tissot let Souttier, M. Philibert berllier pour Lieutenant (*Opera*, 824-5).

The original intention of Perrin's party was to conspire to defeat or at least to harass at least Calvin by exploiting this case was clearly revealed. Perceiving what was to happen, Perrin abandoned his task of leading the session, walking away from the meeting, leaving the decision to his colleagues.

It is an interesting that a considerable number of the members of the Council were exceedingly unfriendly towards Calvin, and that its president, Amy Perrin, was his most bitter and implacable enemy. Nevertheless, they were able to carry out the trial as they wished, although they could not go along with the outcome. The Council once more visited the prison. In order to prevent any power from interrupting and influencing the Council, the Council had Servetus placed under the care of Jehanton Gerod, a sheriff, and Peter Costel, from the Council of Sixty (*Opera*, 824; Rilliet 1846:200) rather than the jailer Claude de Genève, who was one member of the Libertines. In the meantime, Servetus' hope chilled. Servetus was very aware not only that the influence of Amy Perrin was predominant and that Perrin had even tried to acquit him by leaving the meeting but that the Council had refused to admit the appeal, and thus, all hope was now frustrated. Everything had "gone far to damp out the hope he had been led to entertain either of acquittal or a sentence short of that which he knew Calvin had made his mind from the first to exhort" (Willis 1877:464). Furthermore (*Opera*, 824, Hillar 1997:299):

Having read the opinions and recommendations of churches from Berne, Zürich, Basel, and Schaffhausen given because of the false error [sic] and articles expressed by Michael Servetus against the Trinity and the sacred unity of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit and other errors which are found false by the above advise, and which are spreading the false and very dangerous doctrines so that they might trouble the church of our Lord and reformation of the Gospel. It is ordered by this resolution to put to him questions so he can answer orthodoxally ... after which the Council will convene on the Thursday [October 26] to pass a judgement under the oath.

As seen above, the decision of the Council depended largely upon result of the judgement of the Swiss Churches. When his case had been referred to the Swiss Churches, Servetus had expected that if he would not gain a victory over Calvin, he would at least be dismissed without bodily punishment. His confidence had risen to such a height that he had insisted on putting Calvin himself on trial, declaring that he was the one who ought to be chased from the city and to have his goods confiscated (Rilliet 1846:190). Even after the decision of the Swiss Churches became known, he still reckoned upon the success of an appeal to the Council of Two Hundred. But the Council was no longer controlled by the

Libertines, who now realised what the outcome of the discussion would be. They recognised that the case was now not in their hands.

As a result, Servetus was left abandoned, like an orphan, in the prison, to wait for the sentence. They had betrayed him and exploited him. Rilliet says of the contemporary situation of Servetus as follows (Rilliet 1846: 201; see Robinson, 48-9):

But whatever were the motives of the opposition to the condemnation of Servetus, the number of opponents was very limited; and though they might wish, they could not expect, that reason would prevail over custom. The resistance might have been stronger had Servetus enjoyed any popularity at Geneva; but it does not appear that his connection with the heads of the Libertine party had acquired for him any great favour among the masses, who were unacquainted with him. He [Servetus] was a tool which the leaders of to employ for their own ends.

They used Servetus as a tool to discredit Calvin and, in the end, could not avoid giving up their schemes. Shields (1898:65) made a witty drama that describes vividly the conspiracy:

Berthelier. 'T is time for 'Cæsar' to be tragically.

Perrin. Methinks we've had enough of comedy.

Berthelier. Too much. This madcap Spaniard mars the plot.

The senators will have no more of him.

The cantons will adjudge him to the stake.

'T will but remain to lift him as martyr

Before an angry, surging populace,

And whelm our does as in a storm of blood.

Then may he serve us better dead than living.

Perrin. I hope we yet may save as well as use him.

Berthelier. I much fear it. Our pious tyrant prayed

As if he were prime-minister of Heaven,

And doubtless sent before our Messenger

Letters to shape the judgement he invok'd.

So do such saints oft answer their own prayers.

And now we can but thwart his art with force,

That desp'rate remedy for tyranny

No less than heresy.

Willis also describes Servetus in the eyes of the Libertines thus: "He was in some sort the particular puppet of Perrin and Berthelier, rather than the representative of a principle. Even to the leaders he was nothing more than a counter in the political game of the day" (Willis 1877:466; see Wilbur 1972:182). Their abandonment and betrayal caused the Council to make a final decision clearly. Rilliet explains how the Council defeated the influence of the Libertines and reached the decision to condemn Servetus. First, the Genevan people were inclined to "a higher religion than theirs" (Rilliet 1846:201) and not to heed the influence of the Libertines in the Council. Secondly, the interest in reform in

Geneva was more vital than the desires of thwarting Calvin. Third, “the unanimity of the Swiss Churches is condemning Servetus—for his attacks against doctrines till then held sacred in every communion, among others, against the Trinity and the baptism of infants” (Rilliet 1846:203-4). For this three-fold reason the Council decided the case in light of politics and religion. As to politics, Servetus was seditious, as to religion, a blasphemer and heretic. It is likely that his death resulted more from political and social ferment than religious one (Bungener 1863:245-6).²⁶⁹

Rilliet observes the influences behind the decision: “It was at once the outraged honour of God and the peace of the society that they believed themselves to be defending, while they punished him” (Rilliet 1846:204). In the eyes of the Council, Servetus would be a disruption to society, seditious, with his heretical writings. It is clear that they were more concerned that the public peace than they were with the religious issue (Willis 1877:468-9; Rilliet 1846:213).

Wilbur points out that the issue of the trial was no longer heresy itself but the danger of spreading the heresy into society, thus disturbing the peace (Wilbur 1972:179). Calvin’s role in the trial is clear. His role was limited only to the theological or religious aspects. He did not share in the civil aspect nor in the decision. Calvin wrote Farel a letter to inform him of the circumstances on October 26, 1553, in which he clearly divulged the final plot of the Libertines to save Servetus as follows (*Letters*, vol. II, 435-6):

The messenger has returned from the Swiss Churches. They are unanimous in pronouncing that Servetus has now renewed those impious errors with which Satan formerly disturbed the Church, and that he is a monster not to be borne. Those of Bale were judicious. The Zurichers were the most vehement of all; for they not only animadverted in severe terms on the atrocity of his impieties, but also exhorted our Senate to severity. They of Schaffhausen will agree. Also to an appropriate letter from the Bernese is added one from the Senate, in which they stimulate ours not a little. Caesar, the comedian, after feigning illness for three days, at length went up to the assembly in order to free that wretch from punishment. Nor was he ashamed to ask that inquiry might be made at the [Council of the] Two Hundred. However, he was without doubt condemned. He will be led forth to punishment tomorrow. We endeavoured to alter the mode of his death, but in vain. Why we did not succeed I defer for narration until I see you. Adieu, most upright brother, and distinguished minister of Christ. May God ever guide and preserve you. Much health to all friends. Ours salute you again.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁹ Simpler (d.a.:137-8) also observes that the case of Servetus was amounted to a form of civil insurrection.

²⁷⁰ See also two letters on December 30, 1553 to Farel and Bullinger.

4.2.4.3 Sentence and Execution

4.2.4.3.1 Sentence

As the discussions on Servetus' punishment proceeded, Perrin tried to end his conspiratorial connection with Servetus by avoiding the decision making (Wilbur 1972:178). The opinions of the Council were divided: Most of them desired to execute the death sentence through, unless he recanted. Some were in favour of life imprisonment and others were for life banishment. Perrin, who appeared at the session later, had tried to have Servetus acquitted by appealing to the Council of Two Hundred. This did not help. The Council reached a verdict after a stormy and long discussion and unanimously condemned Servetus to death. The imperial law of Geneva, in which a heretic was to be burnt was still effective (Rilliet 1846:209).²⁷¹ Despite the last attempt by Perrin to save Servetus, the Council once more consulted the Council of Sixty rather than the Council of Two Hundred before making a final decision and then formulated their final decision.²⁷² It is most interesting that of the twenty-five members in the Council only seven were Calvinists and the majority belonged to Calvin's enemies. Penning explains how the Council came to their decision (Penning 1954:214-5):

Thus Protestant Switzerland had passed judgement, and the Geneva Council could only uphold this sentence. Acquittal would have been an insult to Church and State, whose opinion had been asked, and treason to the Reformation, the honour and safety of which were at stake. Many members of the Council had hitherto considered the lawsuit only as one between a Spaniard, whose monstrous doctrines disturbed them, a Frenchman, whom they hated. However, this Frenchman was supported by four powerful Protestant Churches, and it was no longer dubious which side the scales would turn. Then Perrin sprang to his feet to save Servet. He demanded acquittal, but the Council refused, for his for this acquittal would have caused Calvin's banishment. Then he requested the case to be brought before the Council of Two Hundred, less influenced by the advice of the four churches, and counting among its members many enemies of Calvin. This request was also refused; then Servet's doom was irrevocable, and in spite of the strong attempts of Calvin and his colleagues to save the unfortunate man from the terrible death by fire, Servet was condemned to the stake.

When Calvin heard the verdict, he called the pastors of Geneva and then requested they punish him by a milder mode – beheading by sword – rather than by burning on the stake so as not to loose his soul. The request was denied by the Council (Henry 1849:216 &

²⁷¹ Beza (1836:110) says "Calvin would never have thought of placing in the hands of the clergy of that city the power of punishing the blasphemy of Servetus as a capital crime, since simple excommunication was the extreme punishment, which the consistory could inflict."

²⁷² "ayans heu bonne participation de conseil avec noz citoins...." (*Opera*, 829).

Wileman, s.a.:104).²⁷³ Calvin's opponents gave up trying to save Servetus and went away. Calvin and his pastors tried to save him, and at least reduce his punishment (Smyth 1856:105):

'When the sentence was irrevocably passed, Calvin and his colleagues used all their efforts to have the punishment mitigated, by at least substituting the sword for the fire, but 'the little council rejected the request of Calvin. It is to him, notwithstanding, that men have always imputed the guilt of that funeral pile, which he wished had never been reared!'...."

The Council did not pay head to his appeal, and did not want any change to the final decision. Calvin confessed in his letter to Farel on October 26, 1553: "We endeavoured to alter the mode of his death, but in vain" (*Letters*, vol. II, 436). Historian Bungener (1863:256) answers the question: Why the Council disregarded Calvin's appeal of mitigating the manner?

Perhaps that they might not seem to adopt in part only the imperial canon law, which recognises nothing but the stake for heresy; perhaps, also,—for we know that those who voted for the stake were not all Calvin's friends,—not to give the Reformer a fresh victory, by allowing him, as it were, the right to pardon. But, finally, the assertion remains, and remains indubitable. As for the pile, which figures so much in the interested apotheosis of the unhappy man for whom it was kindled,—for death by the sword would have been much less canvassed;—the pile whose bloody smoke has cast so odious a shadow over the whole life of Calvin,—Calvin did not demand it,—Calvin did not desire it,—Calvin wished that the guilty man might be exempted from it.

Dyer says of Calvin's effort on behalf of Servetus: "The world, therefore, will most probably for ever remain in ignorance of the nature of Calvin's exertions on this occasion, and of the causes which nullified his powerful influence in so merciful and praiseworthy an undertaking" (Dyer 1850:345).

After hearing the dreadful verdict in his cell during the morning of October 27, Servetus, who still had a hope of acquittal (*Opera*, 498, 826 & Allwoerden, 1727:113,. Bainton 1953b: 209 & see Castellio 1935:285):

"was stunned and then sighed so as to be heard throughout all the room; then he moaned like a madman and had no more composure than a demoniac. At length his cries so increased that he continually beat his breast and bellowed in Spanish, 'Misericordia! misericordia!'[mercy]."

²⁷³ In a letter to Farel of August 20, 1553, Calvin "hope that sentence of death will at least be passed upon him; but I desire that the severity of the punishment may be mitigated" (*Letters*, vol. II, 417).

Although there are no records of how he spent the last night, Servetus, who did not expect the death sentence at all, might have acted like a lunatic. Farel arrived and heard his sentence during the evening of October 26. He visited Servetus at seven in the morning to convince him of his errors and stayed there continuously until the execution at noon. His attempts to get Servetus to recant of his blasphemous sayings were in vain.²⁷⁴ He asked Servetus to confess that Christ was the Son of God before his incarnation as human being, but Servetus refused to abandon his conviction.²⁷⁵ Farel insisted on a meeting between Calvin and Servetus before the formal sentence in public. Servetus also requested to see him. Calvin, with the appointed Councillors, Corna and Bonna, visited him to hear his confession just before execution. Calvin reported on the interview with Servetus (*Opera*, 460-1, Hillar 1997:310-1):

I shall describe briefly what he himself confessed about two hours before his death, in the presence of several witnesses. Since he requested that he could talk to me, the Council sent two members to accompany me. When one of them asked what he wanted to tell me, he responded that he wanted to ask my forgiveness. Then I simply stated as it was the truth, that I have never persecuted him for any personal offence, I reminded him gently that for more than 16 years I did not spare anything in order to gain him for our Lord, even to the point of risking my own life and if he would agree with reason, I would faithfully dedicate myself to reconcile him with all good servants of God. Even though he abandoned the struggle I have not ceased to exhort him benignly by letters; in short I have used till the end all human means until having become irritated against my good and saintly admonishings, he burst against me in I do not know what type of rage or anger. Afterwards saying that I disregarded all that concerning my person I begged him rather to think and ask God's mercy, whom he vilely blasphemed by wanting to abolish the three Persons that are in his essence and stating that those who recognize in one God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit with the real distinction, are fabricating an infernal dog with three heads[Cerberus]. I begged him to ask with all his heart forgiveness of the Son of God whom he had disfigured by his derangement negating that he assumed our body and that he resembled us in his human nature, and doing this he refused to recognize him as our savior. Seeing that I do not accomplish anything by exhortations, I did not want to be wiser than my Master would permit me. Therefore following the rule of Saint Paul²⁷⁶ I separated myself from the heretic who had condemned himself, carrying in his heart the sign of his condemnation. I have reported this in order that everyone could know that I was directed during the life of Servetus by modesty rather than by fear, and did

²⁷⁴ For Servetus' last hours, see *Opera* (460, 498-9, 826) & Wright (1806a:451-55).

²⁷⁵ We can imagine the conversation, based on Shields' drama (1898:70): "*Farel*. To save thy soul. *Servetus*. Thou 'rt not its Saviour. *Farel*. And the souls of those Thou seekest to destroy with heresy. Recant, that life may come to thee and them, And peace be made 'twixt brethren in the Church. *Servetus*. What ye call heresy I call the truth. Can I recant the truth? And ye alone Make brethren fight. How then can I make peace? *Farel*. Thou hast the sacred name of Christ dishonor'd. *Servetus*. Proof! Cite one text for an eternal Christ! *Farel*. In principio erat Verbum;—*Servetus*. Tush! Old straw thrice thresh'd. Let's have no more of that."

²⁷⁶ "A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself" (Titus 3:10-11).

not invent any dispute against him, hoping even for a favorable outcome of the case.

Calvin never had any personal hatred towards Servetus, as his apologists asserted. With the heart of Christ Calvin implored him to ask for God's forgiveness, but he was too arrogant to listen to him. Compared to Servetus' last petition of insulting and cursing him, he said that he disregarded all insults against him. We can also read how Calvin had tried to save Servetus from his errors and heresy even to the point of death. Calvin concluded he "did not invent any dispute with him [Servetus], hoping even for a favourable outcome of the case." If he had recanted his faults he would have been released.²⁷⁷ Calvin concluded that Servetus' fate was a self-condemnation: "qui *αὐτοχάταχριτος* peccabat" (*Opera*, 460). It is sad that no tolerance was spared Servetus. It was Servetus who proclaimed that the blasphemer should be put to death and petitioned that he would condemn himself to death, if his sayings were found to have any errors: "Had I said anything of the kind – said it not in words only, but written and published it I should myself think me worthy of death."²⁷⁸

As it is written in the Bible,²⁷⁹ he deserves to repay it as if blasphemers might be punished with death—*Hoc crimen est morte simpliciter dignum*.²⁸⁰ Beza says of the justice of the execution: "Servetus was justly punished in Geneva, not as a secretary, but as a monster, made up of nothing but impiety and horrid blasphemies, with which, by his speeches and writings, for the space of thirty years, he had infected both heaven and earth" (Beza 1836:60).

4.2.4.3.2 Execution

The time came for Servetus to be taken formally to the gates of the Town Hall from his prison cell, where he had stayed for more than two months. At eleven o'clock, on October 27, 1553 the Lord-Lieutenant, Pierre Tissot, entered his cell, accompanied by other officials and ordered Servetus "to come with me, to hear the Lord Syndic Darlod

²⁷⁷ Five years after Servetus' execution a similar trial took place at Geneva. Valentin Gentili, the Italian, attacked the Trinity like Servetus, but he recanted and confessed his faults. He was acquitted and released, burning his book himself. If Servetus confessed his faults he could have been acquitted. See Rilliet (1846:219).

²⁷⁸ "Si iaves dict cela, non seulemant dict, mays escript publicamant, pour enfecir le monde, ie me condemnares moy mesme a mort" (*Opera*, 805 on the petition of September 22, 1553).

²⁷⁹ "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matt. 7.1-2).

²⁸⁰ Servetus never mentioned that the incorrigible and malicious obstinacy like Ananias and Sappira (Acts 5) deserved to die before God and man. "Illud verum est, quod correctione non expectata, Ananiam et Sapiroam, occidit Petrus, ibi morituros prædicens, in criminis detestationem, et aliorum exemplum. Aut certe, quia spiritus sanctus tunc maxime vigens, quem spreuerant, docebat esse incorrigibiles, in malitia obstinatos. Hoc crimen est morte simpliciter dignum, et apud Deum et apud homines" (*CR*, 656 & *Opera*, 462).

pronounce the sentence of condemnation” (Rilliet 1846:213).²⁸¹ Servetus was accompanied out of the place by Farel before the judges to hear the sentence. The full text was to be read by Darlod in public before the porch of the Hotel de Ville and Servetus was to hear it. It was proclaimed that Servetus was to be condemned to be burnt at the stake for “*the propagation of heresy*” rather than as a simple heretic of anti-Trinitarianism and anti-pedobaptism (Rilliet 1846:213, Mattison 1991:32 & Simpler, 134).²⁸²

The death sentence, passed by the Syndics and Judges, was based on the Codes of Justinian and Theodosius and the Imperial Constitutions, by which a person who denied the Trinity and insisted on rebaptism should be put to death (Hillar 1997:311; Bainton 1953b:210 & Wilbur 1972:179).²⁸³ The following verdict contains the fourteen separate heads against Servetus as follows:

The trial initiated and conducted before our formidable Syndics, judges of the criminal cases of this city at the request of the Lord Lieutenant.

Against

Michael Servetus of Villeneuve of the Kingdom of Aragón in Spain, Who is first accused to have printed about 23 to 24 years ago a book in Hagenau in Germany against the Holy and indivisible Trinity, containing several and great blasphemies against it in the churches of Germany. He spontaneously confessed to have printed this book not without the admonishments and corrections expressed to him by the learned evangelical doctors of Germany.

Moreover, this book was reproved by the doctors of the churches of Germany as full of heresies and the mentioned Servetus became a refugee from Germany because of this book.

Moreover, and notwithstanding this the said Servetus has persevered in his false errors [sic!] corrupting with them as many as possible.

Moreover, and not content with this in order to divulge and spread better his venom and heresy, not long time ago he has printed secretly another book in Vienne in Dauphiné replete with heresies, horrible and execrable blasphemies against the Holy Trinity, against the Son of God, against the baptism of infants and many other holy passages of the Bible and foundations of the Christian religion.

²⁸¹ Darlod was supposed to read the sentence in public. See *Opera* (830).

²⁸² Wesley (1872:318) thinks that Servetus was not Anti-Trinitarian but Trinitarian: “Thur. 9.—Being in the Library, I light on Mr. Calvin’s account of the case of Michael Servetus; several of whose letters he occasionally inserts; wherein Servetus often declares in terms, “I believe the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Ghost is God.” Mr. Calvin, however, paints him such a monster as never was, — an Arian, a blasphemer, and what not: Besides strewing over him his flowers of “dog, devil, swine”, and so on; which are the usual appellations he gives to his opponents.” But he misunderstood him: “He seems to claim Servetus here as a Trinitarian, but he was misled by words” (Faulkner 1910:641).

²⁸³ These codes and Constitutions pronounced the pain of death against heresy.

Moreover, he has confessed spontaneously that he calls in this book those who believe in the Trinity Trinitarians and atheists.

Moreover, he calls the Trinity a devil and a three-headed monster.

Moreover, against the true foundation of the Christian religion and blaspheming detestably against the Son of God, he said that Jesus Christ is not the son of God from all eternity, but only since his Incarnation.

Moreover, against what the Scripture says that Jesus Christ is the son of David according to the flesh, he unfortunately denies it saying that Jesus Christ is created from the substance of God the Father, having received the three elements from Him and only one from the Virgin: by this he attempts to abolish the true and complete humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ, the supreme consolation of the poor mankind.

Moreover, he maintains that baptism of infants is only a diabolic invention and superstition.

Moreover, His execrable blasphemies are scandalous against the majesty of God, the Son of God and the Holy Spirit. This entails the murder and ruin of many souls.]

Moreover, the said Servetus, full of malice, entitled his book addressed against God and his Holy evangelical doctrine, *Christianismi restitutio*, that is, the Restitution of Christianity, and that in order to seduce and deceive more effectively the poor and ignorant and to infect the readers with his miserable and malicious venom of this book under the disguise of a good doctrine.

Moreover, besides the mentioned book, assailing through letters even our faith and submitting it to the corruption of his poison, he voluntarily confessed and admitted to have written a letter to one of the ministers of this city in which, among other horrible and enormous blasphemies against our Holy Evangelic religion, he declares that our Gospel lacks faith and is without God, and that instead of God we have a three-headed Cerber.

Moreover, he also voluntarily confessed that in the place mentioned above, Vienne, because of this malicious and abominable book and his opinions, he was put in prison, from which he perfidly broke out and escaped.

Moreover, the said Servetus not only attacked in his doctrine the true Christian religion, but also was an arrogant innovator of heresies against the papists and others, so that in the same Vienne he was burned in effigy together with five bales of the mentioned book (*Opera*, 827-9, Allwoerden, 1727:107-10& Hillar 1997:307-9).

Moreover, and not withstanding all of this, being detained in the prison of this city, he does not cease to persist maliciously in the above mentioned evil and detestable errors, maintaining them with injuries and calumnies against all true Christians and faithful followers of the pure immaculate Christian religion, by calling them Trinitarians, atheists, and sorcerers, notwithstanding the

admonishments addressed to him a long time ago in Germany, and disregarding the reprehensions, imprisonments and corrections here and elsewhere, as it is amply evidenced during this trial.

This verdict speaks against his crimes, errors, and faults in detail. He was certainly a terrible heretic and a blasphemer. Because of these, the Council gave the sentence of the dreadful punishment. The Syndics sitting on tribunal of their ancestors issued the following death sentence (*Opera*, 829-30, Allwoerden, 1727:111-2 & Hillar 1997:309-10):

We the Syndics, the judges of the criminal cases of this city, having witnessed the trial conducted before us, and acting in the name of the Lieutenant against you, Michael Servetus of Villeneuve of the Kingdom of Aragón in Spain, through this trial and your voluntary confessions made here and many times reiterated, and by your books produced before us, it is clear that you, Servetus, have for a long time propagated a false and plainly heretical doctrine, rejecting all admonishments and corrections, and which you have persistently sowed and divulged with a malicious and perverse obstinacy, even to the point of printing public books against God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, briefly—against the true foundation of the Christian religion and by doing this you have tried to introduce a schism and disturbance in the church of God. By this many souls can be ruined and lost: the horrible and terrifying thing scandalous and corruptive, and without any shame and horror of rising totally against the divine majesty and the Holy Trinity, you have tried hard and obstinately to infect the world with your heresies and your stinking heretical poison. The case and crime of grave and detestable heresies merits a grave corporal punishment.

Moved by these and other just causes, desiring to purge the church of God of such a corruption and to cut off from her such a putrefied member, after having consulted our citizens and having invoked the name of God, in order to make right judgement, and constituted in the Tribunal in lieu of our magistrates, having God and his holy sacred Scriptures before our eyes, and speaking in the name of Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, by this our definitive sentence, which we give to you in writing, we condemn you Michael Servetus to be tied and conducted to the place of Champel and there to be attached to a post and burned alive together with your book written by your hands, as well as printed, until your body will be reduced to ashes. This way you will finish your days in order to give example to others who would like to commit similar deeds. And we request that you our Lieutenant execute the present sentence.

The dreadful sentence contains his seditious affairs causing disjunction in the church in Germany, France, and Geneva; his blasphemies against the Holy Trinity, the Son of God, and the true foundations of the Christian religion. The sentence concentrated on his political crime, causing a schism in the Church, and trying to infect the world with his poisonous heresy.

It was finally the crime of sedition, arising from his spreading the heresy and blasphemy, that caused Servetus to be punished by the Council. The judges were determined to carry

out this sentence in order “to be rid of a pestilent fanatic who had embroiled Geneva in anarchical strife, who had been outlawed in every country of Europe which he had entered” (Shields 1983:380). In compliance with the sentence the execution was to be carried out at once, in public at Champel by the Lieutenant.

On hearing the last words of the sentence, Servetus cried out in tears: “The sword in mercy, and not fire, lest I lose my soul” (Shields 1983:385). Then, shortly after twelve o’clock, from the porch of the Hotel de Ville he was taken to Champel²⁸⁴ where there was a small rise, about a quarter of a mile southward from the walls of Geneva. Servetus was accompanied on horseback to the place by Farel, between the Lieutenant and a herald. Many citizens followed them (Osler 1909:3). All the way to the place of burning, Farel asked him to confess his fault, to give him less punishment, but he maintained his characteristic obstinacy and he would not allow Farel to ask for prayers from the people.²⁸⁵ Farel wanted him to confess his faults and sins even as he followed Servetus up to the point of burning. Farel later described Servetus’ last scene in a letter to Balurer, a pastor of Berne (*Opera*, 693-4, Hillar 1997:311-2):

While the condemned walked to the place of his ordeal, some friars exhorted him to confess frankly his faults and repudiate errors, he responded that he would suffer death unjustly and prayed God to be merciful towards his accuser. Then I said to him: ‘Having committed the most grave sin you still want to justify yourself? If you continue this way I shall abandon you and God’s judgement and shall not make one pace more. I had intended not to leave you until you expire your last breath.’ Then he fell silent and did not say anything. It is true, he asked for forgiveness for his errors, and his faults, and ignorance, but he never wanted to make any authentic confession. Several times he recited prayers and asked the accompanying persons to pray for him. But we never could obtain from him open recognition of his errors and of Christ as the eternal Son of God.

His stake was piled up with bundles of the fresh and wet wood of live oak still green, mixed with the branches still bearing leaves, only to burn longer and more bitterly. An executioner fastened him with chains of iron. The heretical manuscripts and printed copies of *Christianismi Restitutio* were bound beside him (Allwoerden, 1727:123). “A chaplet of straw crown and green twigs covered with sulphur” was placed on his head (Osler 1909:4).

²⁸⁴ It used to be the appointed place for public executions in Geneva. Historically it was also where Arminius studied and completed his theological system. Servetus’ monument was erected in 1903 at the 350th anniversary of his execution and now the new clinic stands on the spot. See Kingdon (1995:29).

²⁸⁵ It is said: “ ... ‘Hast thou nothing else to say?’ asked Farel. ‘What can I do else but speak of God?’ ‘Do you not wish the people to pray for you?’ Servetus asked the bystanders to intercede for him with God” (Ford 1860:98).

His neck was bound with four or five turns of a thick rope. He asked one of the executioners how long he should endure in the fire (Waterman 1813:107).

Servetus suffered in a slow fire for about half-hour before he died (Allwoerden, 1727:123). His last words were “Oh Jesus, Son of the eternal God, have mercy on me” rather than eternal Son of God.²⁸⁶ It ended when the clock of St. Peter’s struck twelve. The watchers quietly returned to their homes. Farel went to Neuchâtel at once. Considering his last interview with Servetus it is enough to imagine that his heart toward Servetus was not filled with personal hatred but with the very heart of Christ. Calvin laments his unavailing efforts to save the unhappy man from so horrible a death, and afterwards speaks with a sigh of his punishment. “Ah!” he says, “if we could but have obtained from Servetus a recantation like that of Gentilis!” (Henry 1849:225 & see Bungener 1863:280-1).²⁸⁷ This is the true and tender mind of Calvin toward Servetus.

²⁸⁶ Besson (1903:27): “O Jésus! Fils du Dieu éternel, aie pitié de moi! ... Fils éternel de Dieu.”

²⁸⁷ Gentilis is known as Giovanni Valentine Gentilis, a native of Cosenza in Naples. He was one of those who had questions on the Trinity and the satisfaction of Christ in about 1546. He was arrested for heresy, but recanted in 1558. See Levy (1993:70). “An ardent, restless spirit, disposed to dogmatize continually, in an age inflexible towards any differences of opinion in matters of faith, he refused to subscribe the Formulary of the Italian Church. Imprisoned for some rather too free expressions against the Trinity, he boldly maintained his opinion, then retracted, and was not the less condemned as a blasphemer, to capital punishment (15th August, 1558).