

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

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

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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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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Orientation to Michael Servetus

Michael Servetus (1509-1553) was condemned as a heretic, a blasphemer, and a seditious (for trying to bring disorder to the stable peace of Geneva) by both the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant churches, because of his views on the Trinity (blatantly denying the deity of Christ), and on infant baptism. He was burned on the stake by the Genevan Council on October 27, 1553. He was not content to keep his theological views to himself, but attempted to spread his system among the public through his published books, in order to convert others in the church as well as in society to his ideas.

Servetus was characterised as a wanderer in his short life of forty-four years.¹ He never settled down in one place, but lingered and pursued something indefinite and indeterminate. He had no scruples about despising those who disagreed with him, and thus was considered a troublemaker and a blasphemer in the eyes of Reformers.² What we know of his actual life depends entirely upon firstly his own testimony, delivered during his two trials, and secondly upon his surviving writings.

It is not easy to make a reasonable evaluation of his life without historical material on hand. This includes his confessions, which do not necessarily support his verity. The limited information rather encourages the development of individual opinions. Though, the facts indicate that he was a kind of theologian, a physician and an astrologer, also being a professor and an editor. He lived under the assumed name of Villeneuve. The surviving evidence indicates that he was possibly a genius, excelling in various areas and accomplishing several feats: in the field of medicine he discovered the pulmonary circulation of the blood; in the sciences he contributed significantly to the infant study of comparative geography and demography; as a theologian he helped lay an early foundation for modern scriptural exegesis. His interests were not restricted and also found expression in various proclamations made by him.

¹ "Like Bruno, Servetus was a wandering scholar." See Macdonell (1983:130).

² Irwin (1909:61).

A further complication in the reconstruction of Servetus' life is the limited, unreliable references to dates, which when given, sometimes oppose each other and at other times are changed to suit different situations.

Servetus held controversial discussions with several reformers and published several books, including some which were considered to contain heretical and blasphemous thoughts. Thus, he became known as an anti-Trinitarian, a heretic, and a blasphemer, who openly opposed the traditional doctrines such as infant baptism, justification and original sin. He entered public debate on these doctrines. Several leaders of the reformation debated or wrote against him, including: Philip Melancthon; Martin Bucer; Wolfgang Capito; Johannes Oecolampadius; and John Calvin. Servetus was not only condemned by the churches of Germany and Switzerland but was apprehended as a heretic at Vienne and condemned and executed in effigy by the inquisitors of the Roman Catholic Church on June 17, 1553. He escaped from the Catholic authorities, but was arrested again in Geneva on August 13, 1553. He was sentenced to death for heresy, blasphemy, and sedition on October 27 by the Council of Geneva.

1.2 Calvin's involvement

This study will not be focussing on Calvin's life (1509-1564). Rather the study will be focussing on his ministry in Geneva regarding Michael Servetus. Rather than elaborating on his training in law, in Roman Catholic Theology, or on his being influenced by Humanist thinkers, which would have had interesting implications had Calvin had a direct role in the trials and convictions of Servetus, this study will restrict its attention to Calvin's implied involvement in the Case of Michael Servetus.

Calvin was known as a religious leader and as the Great Reformer of Geneva in 1553. The allegations brought in against Calvin have dominated studies in the Case of Michael Servetus. It is therefore important to present a short orientation to the allegations brought in against Calvin. This orientation will assist us to understanding Michael Servetus, the man, who was a heretic, a blasphemer, and a seditious.

Such allegations against Calvin began with Sebastian Castellio³ and Camillo Renato⁴ shortly after Servetus' execution. Castellio, who was banished from Geneva in 1544, accused Calvin

³ Castellio is mentioned mainly in English biographers. His family name is Chatillion or Chateillon, but he preferred to be called 'Castellon'. See Buisson (1892:28). He was a professor of Greek at the University of Basel and a school teacher in Geneva under Calvin, and hoped to become office minister. Due to Calvin's refusal to recommend him to the civil council, he expressed both his views and resentment toward Calvin. He wrote a

of intolerance. Castellio wrote in several pamphlets, especially *De Haereticis an sint persequendi*, which was published under the alias Martin Bellius. He was willing to stand up for Servetus and condemned Calvin for lacking Christian sympathy. A year after Servetus' death, in September, 1554, Camillo Renato, an Italian Anabaptist writer, wrote the following in his book *Carmen*:

O Calvin, that you have consigned to future generations a disgraceful deed and proof a demented state sent to the consuming flames? What spirit or reasons compelled you to such a dire crime, or what revelation of God's will prompted you to enter upon such a profanation, or what desire befitting heavenly peace? ...
 ... O Calvin, to be shut up in the dark shades of prison (walls) grieving, crying aloud, and at last, consumed, to fall in the midst of flames,— a dreadful deed that no age would forgive!⁵

In the indictment, he severely accuses Calvin, claiming that the act of burning Servetus was cruel and unchristian. Such accusations were raised in earnest again on the 350th anniversary of Servetus' trial, during the erection of his monument at Champel.⁶ The accusations rest on the presupposition that Calvin had a major influence on the Council and the government of Geneva. However, it is also possible to distinguish in Servetus' a personal hatred towards Calvin. Those who criticise Calvin, usually quote Servetus' statements or testimonies made during the trial at Geneva.

However, the accusations against Calvin are at variance with each other, are often ignorant of the actual facts, and the spirit of the age in question, and tend to be influenced by sentiment. It

treatise, *Concerning Heretics, Whether They Are to Be Persecuted* under the name of Martin Bellius in 1544, but he only gained disrepute. For Sebastian Castellio, see Bainton (1951:25-79). For Castellio's points on Calvin's role in the case against Servetus see Simpler (da:145); & Bainton (1963:177). For Zweig's defending sympathetically in favour of Servetus see Zweig (1936).

⁴ Camillo Renato (c. 1500-?1575), who was an originator of Italian Anabaptists, stood against Calvin. For more details on him, see Williams (1972:170-1 180 185-7 passim).

⁵ Camillo Renato, "Carmen", in Tedeschi (1965: 187). It was published in Traona on the first anniversary of Servetus' execution. But it is criticised that it was mingled "biblical and mythological allusions in a highly mannered humanistic Latin." (176). It is also contained in Calvin's *Opera* (vol. XV, 236-45).

⁶ See Besson (1903:3-4) & Jones (1983:72). The published dates of books that are quoted in this thesis are mainly between 1800 and 1930. The articles on the trial of Servetus published before 1844 are not trustworthy, when Rilliet de Candolle published *Relations du procès criminel intenté à Genève en 1553 contre M. Servet, rédigé d'après les documents originaux* (1844), because one could hardly find actual materials of examination on the affair of Servetus. For details see Whedon (1866: 609-12). In order to commemorate the 350th anniversary of Servetus' execution, the Protestants of France and of Switzerland erected a monument of Servetus at Champel on November 1 1903. The following inscription is written on its front: "FILS RESPECTUEUX ET RECONNAISSANTS DE CALVIN NOTRE GRAND REFORMATEUR MAIS CONDAMNANT UNE ERREUR QUI FUT CELLE DE SON SIECLE ET FERMENT ATTACHES A LALIBERTE SERVETUS CONSCIENCE SELON LES VRAIS PRINCIPES DE LA REFORMATION ET DE L'EVANGILE NOUS AVONS ELEVE CE MONUMENT EXPIATOIRE LE XXVII OCTOBRE MCMIII" (Dutiful and grateful followers of Calvin our great Reformer, yet condemning an error which was that of his age, and strongly attached to liberty of conscience, according to the true principles of the Reformation and of the Gospel, we have erected this expiatory monument. October 27 1903). The following inscription is written on the reverse side:

"Le xxvii Octobre MDLIII Mourut sur le bucher à Champel Michel Servet de villeneuve d'Aragon, né le xxix Septembre MDXI." See Emerton (1909:139); Wilbur (1932; 1969: xxvii-viii); Lindsay (1908:131).

is therefore obligatory that the actual facts of the trial of Servetus are scrutinised impartially and carefully, so as to judge the allegations fairly, and thus evaluate Calvin's role in Servetus' trial.

1.3 *Probing the problem*

The controversy surrounding Servetus is considered by some as "one of the most famous controversies of modern times about religious freedom" since the Reformation (Lecler 1960: 325). According to historian Jean Henri Merle D'Aubigne "there is no character in history more misunderstood than he" (D'Aubigne 1876: 102). Servetus is also depicted as a harsh leader of a Genevan theocracy. The historian, Roland Herbert Bainton, argues in connection with religious toleration that this affair is of paramount importance "because it served as the occasion for the rise in volume and intensity of the toleration controversy within Protestantism" (Bainton 1953: 3).⁷

This thesis wishes to investigate the "murder" of Servetus laid to Calvin's charge.⁸ It has been alleged that Calvin was responsible for arresting, condemning, sentencing, and executing Servetus. According to a number of allegations,⁹ Calvin could be held responsible and could be

⁷ This book was published to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Servetus' execution and is the most recent book on the whole affair of Michael Servetus. Bainton expounds a mediate view of interpreting Calvin's role in it, as well as religious toleration based on historical materials, demonstrating the past controversial issues. But he stands against Calvin's role. On religious toleration see Klauber (1995:482-4).

⁸ The Calvinist, Loraine Boettner, on reviewing Calvinism, says: "We must now consider an event in the life of Calvin which to a certain extent has cast a shadow over his fair name and which has exposed him to the charge of intolerance and persecution. We refer to the death of Servetus which occurred in Geneva during the period of Calvin's work there. That it was a mistake is admitted by all. History knows only one spotless being-the Savior of sinners. All others have marks of infirmity written which forbid idolatry" (1954: 412).

⁹ There were the two major theological disputes during Calvin's career in Geneva, especially between 1541 and 1555. One had to do with Jérôme Bolsec, who was banished from Geneva in December 1551, because of his views on predestination. Afterwards, he, a former Roman Catholic theologian, stood at the forefront of those insulting and blaming Calvin' intolerance about the trial of Servetus. He blatantly insulted Calvin as "intractable, cruel, bloodthirsty, and covetous (3-4, 11) ... he expanded that list to include his being ambitious (12-3), extravagant (14), unchaste (15), filled with hatred (15-20)" in his book, *Vie de Calvin*. He had no scruple on insulting Calvin as a "heretic." See Holtrop (1993:787). For another criticism see 218-29. Holtrop is the well known scholar on the case of Bolsec. See also, Wright (1806:13-6). He eloquently and poetically insulted and made cynical marks on Calvin: "O Calvin! Is this the influence of thy boasted doctrines of grace? Is this thy spirit of reformation? ... Conducting a criminal prosecution against him, merely for his opinions, that thou mayest bring him to an ignominious death! O Shame! O cruel man! Will nothing but his blood satisfy thee? Must thou trample upon his ashes before thy wrath can be appeased? O tell it not at Rome! Publish it not in the court of Inquisition! Lest the persecuting papists rejoice, lest the lords inquisitors triumph, and say 'the protestants are persecutors as well as we! ... Who are the instigators and perpetrators of this barbarous deed? Is it at Rome, or in Spain, under the direction of popish priests, and agents of the bloody Inquisition? No. 'its at Geneva! protestant Geneva! Where Calvin's influence is paramount to the civil authority... O bigot! Thou monster! What hast thou done? ... Infernal deed! O Calvin! What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth from the ground. But see, the blessed martyr is fallen down in the midst of the fire, his life is departed, the conflict is over, his sufferings are for ever terminated. We weep, feel indignant at the conduct of Calvin, and retire." See Harnack (1899:134-5): "He had Servete burnt, and by his powerful words the other Swiss Cantons, where there was originally (especially in Bâsle) a more liberal judgement, were kept from showing toleration and were brought round to accept his strict principle." Wileman (u.d.:100-1) suggests three kinds of questions on Calvin's role in the trial of Servetus: "First,

guilty of intolerance, thus sharing in the shame of the Vienne trial of Servetus. Calvin helped formulate the charge and provided crucial evidence, which led to Servetus' arrest. It is also alleged that Calvin had a say in the administration of Servetus' punishment. In addition, in the alleged charges against Calvin, regarding Servetus' accusations, condemnation, and execution, Calvin is pictured as, not only a cruel monster, but is also called the "principal blood hound" (Lex Naturæ 1892:22).

1.4 Problem Formulation

The main question in this thesis wishes to ask: Who was Michael Servetus really?

The two supporting questions, which are used to give direction to the main question are: Did Servetus deserve to die as a criminal by burning on the stake in 1553? And: What was Calvin's involvement in the Case?

The following questions have also been raised by this study:

What was Calvin's actual role in the trial of Michael Servetus?

Was Calvin directly or primarily indirectly involved in the trial?

Why was Calvin reluctantly involved in the trial?

In order to support the main question the following subsidiary questions are required:

What crimes did Servetus commit to be charged with heresy, blasphemy, and sedition?¹⁰

Who was lawfully in charge of the sentencing and the execution during the trials?

What were the trials actually like?

If Calvin indirectly shared in the trials, to what extent was he related to them?

1.5 Hypothesis

Michael Servetus was a heretic and a seditious, but was unfortunate to be condemned. His teachings and sentencing should be reflected upon within the context of the sixteenth century,

the Roman Catholics, who may judge it to be an unanswerable taunt to a Protestant. Second, those who are not in accord with the great doctrines of grace, as taught by Paul and Calvin, and embraced and loved by thousands still. Then there is a third kind of person who can only be described as ill-informed. It is always desirable, and often useful, to really know something of what one professes to know." He criticises the three groups, especially the third saying, "they have to confess that they never at any time read a line about the matter." He read the reprinted version of Servetus' last book, *CR*, in 1790.

¹⁰ Penning points out in his evaluation of Servetus' execution, that "we feel entitled to ask if it is right to mention an error of Calvin's age without making mention an error of Michel Servet" (1954:218).

and not the twentieth century. However, he was treated and tried very fairly within the context of the sixteenth century, by both the Inquisitor at Vienne and the civil council of Geneva, and was exploited as a sacrifice by his defenders in the end.

Servetus' death was not condemned by Calvin, neither was he involved in his sentencing. Calvin was not involved in the trial of Vienne, but is involved by implication. The civil council of Geneva must be held responsible for the sentencing and punishment of Michael Servetus. Calvin's role is restricted to that of a religious observer and witness to the Geneva trial proceedings. Calvin's writings were used in both trials, but this would still not implicate him. His personal involvement in the trial at Geneva was restricted to a rejected consultation, in which he pleaded that Servetus be decapitated instead of being burnt.

It is our duty to re-examine the allegations that have been brought against Calvin in both the recent and distant past in his role in the trial of Servetus (Luck 1963:195-6).¹¹

1.6 Study goals

As a doctoral thesis the research conducted in this study wishes to present a new perspective which will help in evaluating the allegations brought in against Calvin on Servetus' charge. This study wishes to indicate that previous studies on the Case of Michael Servetus have not been based on either the broader information, which is available, nor on the actual facts pertaining to the trials and sentencing. This is set as goal in order to come to a better understanding of Michael Servetus. It will thus be able to re-evaluate the Case fairly and impartially.

1.7 Methodology

In order to determine the identity of Michael Servetus, as well as establishing the extent of Calvin's involvement in the implicated trials, this study will be consulting primarily primary sources. Servetus' works deal principally with his theology, where Calvin's letters and essays deal more specifically with the court circumstances in Vienne and Geneva.

A critical analysis of the two main sources, *De Trinitatis Erroribus*, and *Christianismi Restitutio*, will clarify vague points on Servetus' thoughts and trials. The critical analysis will

¹¹ The publication was published to commemorate the thirty years of publican from 1934 to 1963 by Dallas Theological Seminary.

make it possible to present a chronological demonstration of Servetus' theology, and then specifically his anti-Trinitarianism and anti-baptism trends.

Chapter one is devoted to a general orientation, in which the problems to be investigated are formulated, along with a hypothesis. In chapter two secondary sources will be consulted to reconstruct Servetus' biography. The complexity of Calvin's alleged involvement in the trials will be illustrated through the reconstruction of Servetus' biography. The secondary sources contain several allegations directed against Calvin's person, making it necessary to unravel these allegations and disputes in order to determine a reconstruction of Servetus' life. The complicating factors, which make the description of Servetus' life difficult, will receive particular attention. These are both chronological and doctrinal issues.

A doctrinal study of Servetus' teachings in chapter three will combine the use of secondary and primary sources. A sociological analysis of the civil system in sixteenth century Geneva is conducted to determine the relations between the ecclesiastic and civil authorities. Calvin's position in and influence on the civil system could thus be deduced. This has specific implications for assessing Calvin's involvement in Servetus' two trials, and evaluating Servetus' theology as spiritual reflection, as expressed in the two principle sources.

Chapter four makes use of a textual and critical analysis of the court proceedings, the related correspondence, and reflects on the trials objectively. The principle attention in the thesis falls on the deconstruction of the two trials, and thus the preceding chapters serve as orientation to distinguish between matters that cloud a correct assessment of the Servetus Case. A new perspective on the disputes between Calvin and Servetus is thus presented and evaluated. It is thus possible to compare Servetus' own testimonies and to determine Calvin's role in the trial proceedings. It would thus be possible to assess which party is responsible for Servetus' conviction and sentencing.

A summary of the findings is presented in the Conclusion, which is made to arrive at a concrete argument in which the hypothesis presented in the Introduction can be tested, and a answer to the posed question can be formulated.

CHAPTER 2

Early Journey

2.1 *Early Life*¹²

The data relating to the early life of Servetus is scanty and contradictory. The data is drawn mainly from the testimonies elicited at his two trials before the Roman Catholic Church at Vienne in April of 1553 and before the Council of Geneva in August of the same year. We know nothing of his life except through his testimonies, and it “appears quite certain that many of these declarations were more or less deliberately untrue” (Emerton 1909:141). The contradiction in his testimony makes it hard for us to believe much about personal history: “Almost all that we know of Servetus we have from his own lips. He tells us so many contradictory things about himself that it is hard to know what to believe” (Lingle 1900: 5). These descriptions are meagre and inconsistent and lack candour because he not only disguised his real name but occasionally changed his testimonies even though he swore to tell the truth on the Gospels (Wilbur 1972:51). Thus, the reconstructed early life of Michael Servetus is primarily based on assumptions.

2.1.1 His Birth and Early Education

Michael Servetus¹³ was originally called Miguel Serveto Conesa alias Revés. He was born in either 1509 or 1511 at Tudéla in Navarre or at Villeneuve in Aragón. In early infancy he went to Villeneuve de Sijena in Aragón.¹⁴ At the trial of Vienne he confessed that he was forty-two years old and was born at Tudéla in the Spanish kingdom of Navarre. If we accepted this description of his early life, his birth date would be September 29, 1511, as recorded on the front side of Servetus’ monument erected at Champé. But his tombstone has a different testimony.¹⁵ On the other hand, at the trial in Geneva he testified that he was

¹² It is easier to understand his life when divided into three periods: (1) his early life, first in Spain and later in Basel and Strassburg until 1532 under his real name, Serveto or Revés - which are inter-exchangeable; (2) his disguising life in France until 1553 under the name Villeneuve; (3) his miserable life at the trial of Vienne and Geneva. See Henry (1849:165).

¹³ His French name is Michel Servet, in *Opera*, 766. ; The affair between Calvin and Servetus, his correspondence, the records of the trials of both Vienne and Geneva, Calvin’s defence, are contained in Calvin’s *Opera*, 458-871. This is an indispensable primary source on the case of Servetus. It is presumed that Servetus’ first name was Michael because he was born on September 29, the day of St. Michael. See Drummond (1848:2). He argues in his book that Calvin entrapped, imprisoned, and burned Servetus.

¹⁴ At the trial of Geneva he declared that he was forty-four years old and was born in Villeneuve de Sijena in Aragón, and at Vienne he said the small town of Tudéla in southern Navarre of Spain. It is clearly recognized that his hometown was Villeneuve de Sijena. For the trial of Geneva see *Opera* (737, 766, 780) and for that of Vienne see *ibid* (845). Aragón was free spirited. See Ford (1860:12-3).

¹⁵ According to his tombstone, Michael Servetus died at the stake at Champé on October 27, 1553, and came from Villaneuva in Aragón and was born on September 29, 1511. See Emerton (1909: 139).

forty-four years of age and that he came from Villeneuve in Aragón, Spain. Accepting this testimony, we would conclude that he was born in 1509.¹⁶

There is no certainty to either the dates, and no parish records are available to verify his testimonies. If we accepted his confession at Geneva, it would be historically ironic that Calvin was born in the same year as Servetus. Contrasts and comparisons are inevitable: Both opposed the Roman Catholic Church, both were writers and both went to law school.¹⁷ It is imaginable that the information given on his age and place of origin were given in his attempt to defend himself. In line with this argument, Willis (1877:3-4) says:

When he spoke of himself as a Navarrese at Vienne, it may have been done to conciliate his French judges, Navarre having once been a province of France, and the natives of the two countries having still much in common. It was at a moment, too, when he had paramount motives for seeking to conceal his identity. When he said at Geneva that he was ‘Espagnol Arragonois de Villeneuve’ and forty-four, he was face to face with one who knew him well, and when he had neither motive nor opportunity for concealment.¹⁸

Most scholars accept that his birth place was Villeneuve based on the initials, M. S. V., printed on the cover of his last book *Christianismi Restitutio* and which stands for Michael Servetus Villanovanus. For the purposes of this study, his birth date will be assumed to be 1509 and his birth place Villeneuve.

His father, a notary, was Hernando Villeneuve. Little is known about his mother.¹⁹ According to his own testimony, his father was a royal Spanish descendant from an old Catholic family (*Opera*, 731). His mother might also have been from a noble family. He was the eldest and had two brothers, Petro and Juan. Petro was a notary like his father and

¹⁶ Osler (1909:4) prefers Servetus’ birth date in 1509 to 1511. Also in *The Johns Hopkins Hospital Bulletin* 11, no. 226 (January 1910). He addressed the same topic twice at the Johns Hopkins Hospital Historical Club and Extension lecture in the Summer School in Oxford 1910.

¹⁷ Allwoerden (1727:4-5) says that Servetus’ age was exactly the same as Calvin. He considers that the date of his birth was 1509. Most of those who are in favour of Servetus follow this date. Allwoerden’s book was the first attempt to describe Servetus’ life and “was written under superintendent of Dr. Mosheim. Every reader of Maclaine’s had learned to be on his guard against this learned man, whenever the question lies between the Lutherans and the Reformers” (Beza 1836:170). For detail see Drummond (1848:6-7), Schaff (1994:687-9) & Porter (1854:1-3). Henry (1849:163-4) contrasts the two persons in light of inner character: “The reformer [Calvin] was distinguished by his clear and logical intelligence. Servetus was no less so for his fantastic imaginativeness, and for his defective argumentation. With Calvin there was the profound religious feeling, which proves true faith; with Servetus, on the contrary, there was no acknowledgement of sin, but a mere philosophical element, altogether deficient in clearness.”

¹⁸ As a medical doctor he wrote a biography on Michael Servetus in favour of him and against Calvin, who describes him as ugly. This portrait of drawing Servetus apparently refers to the original sources such as Mosheim’s *Ketzergische* and Allwoerden’s *Historia*, which Willis translated into English.

Juan was rector of the church of Poleñino.²⁰ Although nothing is known with certainty about his early education and training (Gordon 1910:8-9 & Killen, M'Comb 1854:5),²¹ he might have been sent to one of the convents of Aragón by his father, who intended for his son to become a priest. It was a custom in Spain “to devote children who were weak in intellect or feeble in health to the church” (Robbins 1846:51). In fact, according to his Genevan testimony, he was physically unfit to marry.²² It is said that Servetus could read Greek, Hebrew, and Latin fluently at the age of fourteen, as well as being schooled in philosophy and mathematics (Wright 1806:90).

2.1.2 Spanish context

Servetus grew up in difficult circumstances. The political and religious situation he experienced as a youth must somehow have influenced his later life and mentality (Harnack 1899:128):

“It is a paradox of history that Spain, the country that was least affected in the sixteenth century by the ideas of the newer age, and in which at the earliest date Catholicism was restored, produced this unique man [Michael Servetus].”²³

Three religions were predominant in Spain: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Judaism and Islam “most plainly simply teach the unity of God, and are utterly irreconcilable with the popular notions he opposed” (Wright 1806: 96). There was general religious tolerance until the Crusades, after which Spain decreed Christianity as the national religion. Christian Spain began to persecute and oppress both Moors and Jews. As a matter of survival many Jews converted to Christianity and were baptised. These so-called *conversos*, converted to Christianity, outwardly lived as Christians and “took their children to church to be baptised, though they hastened to wash off the traces of the ceremony as soon as they

¹⁹ Gordon (1910:7-8), principal of the Unitarian Home Missionary College, Manchester, investigates the track of the Serveto family in his article, “His mother looked like a French Revés”. In contrast, Wilbur (1972:51-2) shows that his mother’s name was Catalina Conesa.

²⁰ See Hillar (1997:188). This book is the newest book on Servetus’ theology, life, background, trials, and influence. It is based consistently on Calvin’s *Opera* and other contemporary sources.

²¹ Killen (1843) professor of Church History at the Assembly’s College, debated with Porter, who was in favour of Servetus. In the article he tries to defend Calvin, accused by Porter. It is assumed that he received his first rudimentary education in a Dominican convent. See Dyer (1850:297).

²² The Attorney General of Geneva, Claude Rigot asked Servetus, “Had he ever been married and, if not, how could he refrain for so long?” *Opera*, 765. In answer, “Servetus replied that he was physically unfit because of an *Operation* and a rupture” in his childhood (ibid:769).

²³ Wright (1806:95-7) also says, “Conversation with Jews or Mahommedans might convince him more fully of the divine unity, and an attention to the scriptures mature his judgement and establish him in his opinions.”

returned home” (Roth 1959:19, 20-8 passim).²⁴ Spain suffered from problems related to the religious situation (Edwards 1884:149-50):

The new problem of false converts, which was thus created, was supposedly solved by the Inquisition ... The Inquisition was efficient in its own terms, and the expulsion of unbaptised Jews undoubtedly assisted the assimilation of the converses, but, in the last analysis, the Holy Office was trying to solve a social problem by theological means, and was thus *Operating* in the wrong set of categories. This contradiction was highlighted by the confrontation with the Muslim populations of Granada and Valencia.

It was suspected that they would revert back to their religions. The way to solve the problem was to banish all non-converted Catholics or non-Christians from Spain. The same solution was applied to the Moors after the fall of Granada in 1492 (Roth 1959:52-3).²⁵ This circumstance led to 800,000 Jews being expelled from Spain, seeking their refuges in Navarre. Thousands of Islamic followers were burnt at the stake (Wilbur 1972:53; Howlett 1947:n.p.). It is considered that the Spaniards were influenced by the Moors and the Jews, gaining a reputation for ruthlessness and injustice. They eliminated those who followed the heresy regarding the Trinity or the Deity of Christ. Martin Luther (Lehmann 1971:128) says, “the Inquisition had been employed to ferret out those of dubious faith among the Marranos, the Spanish Jews who had been forcibly converted.”

2.1.3 Influence of Islam and Judaism on teachings

It is not hard to see how these circumstances affected Servetus’ father and Servetus. It is possible that he went to Africa to learn Arabic so that he could read the Koran. We know he did not hesitate to call Christ one of the prophets, as the Moors did (Allwoerden 1727:17-22).²⁶ It is true that some of his writings were breathing Moorish and Jewish elements (Friedman 1978:18; also 1973:88 & Potter & Greengrass 1983:102). When expounding the term “the Trinity”, he is apt to mention Mohammed and Jews on a regular basis (ET 42b-43a):

“Furthermore, and worse than all this, how much this tradition of the Trinity has, alas! been a laughing-stock to the Mohammedans, only God knows. The Jews also shrink from giving adherence to this fancy of ours, and laugh at our foolishness about the Trinity.”²⁷

²⁴ See Braudel (1992:570-1). On the banishment of *Conversos* [converted from Judaism] and *Marranos* [converted from Islam], see Friedman (1984:139-40) & Edwards (1984:139-51).

²⁵ On March 30, 1492, the Spanish decreed the expulsion of the Jews who had all departed by July 31, 1492.

²⁶ The fact that he calls Christ a prophet in his book, establishes that Servetus was affected by Judaism and Islam, even though he denied belonging to them, insisting on having read the Fathers of Church and the Bible. See Servetus (ET 43a. 67). See also Wallace (1850:421).

²⁷ See also ET (56b.89): “I can not here refrain from sighing, when I see the replies that Rabbi Kimchi made against the Christians on this point.” Servetus also insisted that one should return to the rabbis to understand what “the first Christians believed”, naming them first Christian in *CR*, (108, 399-400).

Servetus reacted against the accusations that the Jews and Moors influenced him (ET 57b. 90):

“Some are scandalized that I call Christ a prophet, for inasmuch as they have not this custom themselves, it seems to them to be Judaism or Mohammedanism of Christ is called a prophet. Nor do they care whether Scripture and the earlier writers call him a prophet.”

The major difference between Christianity, Judaism, and Islam is the doctrine of the Trinity (Bainton 1953:30). The latter two religions do not adhere to the doctrine of the Trinity but believe in Monotheism.

2.1.4 Affinity to Erasmus

Servetus was also brought up in the climate of nondogmatic piety associated with Erasmus (Hillar 1997:190-2),²⁸ who lived in Spain from 1522 to 1532. Erasmus, whose writings influenced the Spanish of his age, applied the term of God exclusively to the Father in the New Testament and wanted to return Christianity to its origins. Later, Servetus tried to send his book *De Trinitatis Erroribus* to Erasmus, but he took no interest in it (Bainton 1953:224). The following expression used in the letter of Erasmus sent to Jean de Carondelet on January 5, 1523 might have influenced Servetus in his eagerness to refute the traditional Christian doctrine of the Trinity (Mynors 1989:250-57):

The ancient authors philosophized very rarely about theological questions, and they did not dare to make any pronouncement about such matters which was not clearly set forth in those writings whose authority is inviolable to us...

...Later the elaborate subtlety of the Arians drove the orthodox to a greater necessary—namely, to discuss with great controversy the question of the extension of the divine nature, of the creation of the Son, of the adoption into the name of God, and then the matter of *ὁμοούσιον* and *ὁμοιούσιον*, and finally to formulate definitions about these matters ...

... But may the ancient gain the pardon besought by those whom necessity has driven to this pass. On what pretext will we ask pardon for ourselves, we raise so many meddlesome, not to say irreverent, questions concerning matters very

²⁸ Hillar (1997) observes that Servetus' intention to return to the primitive Christianity came from Erasmus' antidogmatism: "The young Servetus was brought up in a climate of intellectual ferment of Erasmian humanism. The vogue of Desiderius Erasmus Reterodamus in Spain lasted from 1522-1532. He represented an ideal of nondogmatic piety, dreaming of restoring Christianity to its original purity and simplicity. He attacked the abuses of the church, its moral degeneration, its vices, superstitious ceremonies, and rituals. But he never attempted to correct the established dogmas. Luther even called Erasmus a 'snake.' To explain the sudden vogue of Erasmianism in Spain one has to understand the larger movement on the Spanish scene, which was labelled by the Inquisition as the movement of the *alumbrados* or illuminism. The Spanish illuminism started before the reform initiated by Luther in 1517 and represented a distinct movement different from Protestantism ... Servetus certainly grew up in the atmosphere of the antidogmatism of Erasmus.... See Durant (1957:479).

far removed from our nature, and who ignored without loss of salvation or left in doubt? Or is he not destined to have fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who cannot disentangle according to the method of philosophy what distinguishes the Father from the Son or the Holy Spirit from both or what the difference is between the generation of the Son from the Father and the procession of the Spirit? If I believe, as has been handed down, that the three are of one nature, what is the need of laboured disputation? If I do not believe, no human reasons will convince me. And such a dangerous inquisitiveness has generally arises in us from the study of philosophy, a fact which the illustrious Tertullian, the most learned by far of all the Latin theologians, has asserted in several places, although he himself was a philosopher of the first rank ... Therefore with all my energy I must aim, must practise, I must strive to cleanse my soul of malice, envy, hatred, pride, avarice, and lust. You will not be damned if you do not know whether the Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son has a single or a double principle, but you will not escape perdition unless you see to it in the mean time that you have the fruits of the Spirit, which are charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, forbearance, gentleness, faith, moderation, self-control, and chastity. Toward this end the chief concern of our study therefore must be focused and directed ...

... The sum and substance of our religion is peace and concord. This can hardly remain the case unless we define as few matters as possible and leave each individual's judgement free on many questions. This is because there is great uncertainty about very many issues, and the mind of man suffers from this deeply ingrained weakness, that it does not know how to give way when a question has been made a subject of contention. And after the debate has warmed up each one thinks that the side he has undertaken rashly to defend is absolute truth ...

... Many puzzling questions are now referred to an ecumenical council. It would be much more fitting to defer such questions to that time when we shall see God face to face without the mirror and without the mystery ...

... This kind of profession would not be sufficient in this age because the needful diligence of the ancient Fathers has been very instructive for us, but we are carried far beyond what is needful. Once faith was more a matter of a way of life than of a profession of articles. Soon necessity inspired the imposition of articles, but these were few, and apostolic in their moderation. Then the wickedness of the heretics made for a more precise examination of the sacred books, and intransigence necessitated the definition of certain matters by the authority of synods. Finally faith began to reside in the written word rather than in the soul, and there were almost as many faiths as men. Articles increased, but sincerity decreased: contention boiled over, charity grew cold. The teachings of Christ, which in former times were not touched by the clash of words, began to depend on the support of philosophy: this was the first step of the church on the downward path. There was an increase of wealth and an accretion of power. Furthermore, the intervention of imperial authority in this situation did not improve much the purity of faith. At length the consequence of all this was sophistical controversy and the eruption of thousands of articles. And then it became a matter of intimidation and threats. Although life may abandon us, although faith may be more on our lips than in our hearts, although

that genuine understanding of Holy Scripture may fail us, yet we force men by intimidation to believe what they do not believe, to love what they do not love, and to understand what they do not understand. Compulsion is incompatible with sincerity, and nothing is pleasing to Christ unless it is involuntary.²⁹

2.1.5 Further influences

Servetus was initially taught liberal arts at a Dominican convent and at the University of Saragossa when he was thirteen years old (Drummond 1848:3 & Henry 1849:166). The aged Peter Martyr De Angleria, a distinguished scholar who had a liberal mind, influenced him here (Willis 1877:8). The foundations for his future interests in the classics, scholastic philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, and geography were established.

Servetus confessed at the trial of Geneva that when he was seventeen when his father sent him to the University of Toulouse, a strictly orthodox school. Here he was to study jurisprudence for two or three years, because the city was extremely pious and famous for its law school (*Opera*, 780). Toulouse had been exposed to the new currents of reform, despite the measures taken to prevent any recurrence of the Albigensian heresy,³⁰. The Franciscans in particular were rallying for the purification of the Church and the conversion of the new world (Bainton 1953b:13). Servetus came in formal contact with the Codex of Justinian, the great textbook of the Roman law, in which he learned that “for the repetition of baptism and for a denial of the doctrine of the Trinity, the penalty was death” (Bainton 1953b:13).

His interests were closer to theology than to law. At the trial of Geneva he testified that he had never read more than the Codex of Justinian at college (*Opera*, 780). While he went to Toulouse to study law, he became acquainted with the Bible and “a scientific or rationalistic” theology (Naturæ 1923:894).³¹ It was also at Toulouse that he probably first saw a complete copy of the Bible. He had heard of the Reformation, which led him to study the Bible (Wallace, d.a.:420). He could not have read any part of the Bible until 1528, because of the prohibitions on reading the Bible at Toulouse (Wilbur 1972:53; *Opera*, 780). He might secretly have read a copy of the Complutensian Polyglot, in which the Vulgate version is flanked by Hebrew and Greek texts, which had reached Toulouse.

²⁹ See also Gauss (1965:410-59).

³⁰ Ford (1860:17) says his father was influenced by the Waldenses and Albigenses, especially by the former who emphasised the Bible. Servetus was also under its influence for a while.

³¹ Naturæ (1923:10) says that Servetus was influenced by ‘Rational Theology’ under Raymond de Sabundi. He was not merely a rationalist but also a pantheist and literalist. See Larson (1923:894). Larson compares Milton to Servetus on four points: Creation, Incarnation, Redemption, and the Trinity.

This was *la sainte escripture et evangile* of which he speaks (Gordon 1910:11; Hillar 1997:193).

Servetus studied theology eagerly and acquired more familiarity with the doctrines of the Reformation. His reading the Bible led him to accepting the supreme and sufficient authority, in opposition to Catholic tradition. In his first book he states that the Bible was the source of all his philosophy and science and he urged that it be read a thousand times over in order to seek the truth of Christianity, especially of Christ.³² During his new enlightening experience with the Bible, Servetus was amazed that he could find nothing about the term ‘Trinity’ (ET 32a. 50). He says (ET 27b. 43):

“But to me not merely the syllables, but all the letters, and the mouths of babes and sucklings, nay the very stones, cry out, One God the Father, and his CHRIST the Lord JESUS; *for there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man CHRIST JESUS; and, To us there is one God, who is the Father, ... and one Lord, JESUS CHRIST.*”

He attaching undue value to the Bible, leading him to ignore “the authority of the ancient creeds and the forms of medieval theology” (Wilbur 1972:49), and focus on his own style. Yet, it is likely that he esteemed the pre-Nicene Fathers next to the Bible. He quoted partially from both Tertullian and Irenæus in his first book. He thought that they established the true doctrine of Christianity. He not only read the books of Luther and the other Reformers – Oecolampadius, Zwingli, Bucer, and Capito – but he also acquainted himself with the Roman Catholic writers of the Middle Ages.³³ As result of this, he “was seized with the desire of distinguishing himself as a Reformer” (Dyer 1850:298) It is amazing that a young teenager would consider himself a reformer and try contacting the Reformers.

2.1.6 Service under Quintana

In 1525 or 1526 he served as a student secretary to Juan de Quintana, a Franciscan friar. Quintana guided him to study law at Toulouse (*Opera*, 845-6).³⁴ We do not know any

³² He confesses that the Bible is a gift of God from heaven. He says: “in the Bible I find all philosophy and wisdom.” He rejects the philosophy of Aristotle, preferring platonic philosophy. (ET, 107b. 166 & 78b-79a. 122 passim). See Henry (1849:246) & Dyer (1850:297).

³³ He mentions several medieval scholars in his books. For William Occam see ET 42a-b. 65-6 and CR, 42, 45; for Robert Holcot see ET 32a-b. 50 and CR, 29; for Pierre D’Ailly see ET 32b. 50 and CR, 29; for Duns Scotus, see CR, 45; for Richard of St. Victor see ET 31b. 49; for John Major see ET 21a-22a. 34-5 and CR, 29.

³⁴ Servetus says that he entered the service of Quintana at the age of 14 or 15. Juan de Quintana was a professor at the University of Paris and member of Cortes of Aragón. In 1529 he became court preacher of Emperor Charles V. He followed an Erasmian type of humanism concerning the Bible.

specific details about his service under Quintana, but that he “influenced Servetus most at this early stage” (Hillar 1997:192). Emerton suggests that Quintana may have chosen Servetus “due to the boy’s proficiency in languages; for he seems already to have had a practical command of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin”(Emerton 1909:142). With Quintana’s permission and his father’s consent, Servetus went to study law at the University of Toulouse for two more years.

When Quintana recalled Servetus back to his service, Servetus stopped further study of the problems in Christian doctrine. He was to experience something new. Quintana took him to the coronation of Emperor Charles V at Bologna in the summer of 1530.³⁵ Servetus saw the arrogant extravagance of the coronation procedure, and it reminded him of the words of the medieval sectaries used by the Reformers. He saw Pope Clement VII being adored almost like a god by nobles, legates, bishops, and the general public. And he saw those in the Church’s high stations, filled with worldliness, scepticism, and immorality. After this bad experience he felt more strongly than ever for the necessity to restore ‘pure Christianity’.³⁶ Twenty-three years after the experience he describes the scene vividly in his last book, *Christianismi Restitutio* (462, 670):

I have seen with my own eyes how the pope was carried on the shoulders of the princes, with all the pomp, being adored in the streets by the surrounding people. All those who managed to kiss his feet or his sandals were considered more fortunate than the rest and proclaimed to have obtained many indulgences to reduce the years of their infernal suffering. Oh, the most evil of the beasts; [the most shameless of the prostitutes] ...

... He who believes that the pope is an Antichrist, he also has to believe that the papal Trinity, infant baptism and the rest of the papal sacraments are teachings of the devil. Jesus Christ, sweet liberator, who so frequently have liberated people from the anxiety and misery, liberate us from the continuation of Babylon, Antichrist and his tyranny and from his idolatry.

This opulent scene was in stark contrast to the humble life of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. It is not difficult to see how Servetus experienced the spectacle. The historical Christ was not as

³⁵ The Emperor attended the Diet of Augsburg to reconcile the religious splits, and to gain support against the Turks. The Prince succeeded in getting Protestantism recognized politically. He “had already received the silver crown as Emperor of Germany at Aix-la-Chapelle ten years before, and now at Bologna he received the iron crown as King of Lombardy, and two days later, on February 24, the Pope placed on his head the golden crown as Roman Emperor” (Wilbur 1972:54). On Charles V, see Reeves (1969:358-74).

³⁶ Ford (1860:16-17) also observes that Servetus’ anxiety of restoring Christianity resulted from the circumstance of the Navarre and Biscay where he had spent his boyhood, especially during the hardy Pyreneans.

rich as the worldly pope was. Christ had lived a humble life with the poor. He thought that even the Reformers did not discover who Christ was, and that he, personally, had to restore Christianity. The experience reminded him that the metaphysical doctrine of Christ, taught after the Council of Nicea was to be restored by himself. He would show how to complete it (Mackinnon 1962:125). Servetus thought that the Reformers fell short in reforming the true doctrine of Christianity. He made his own position clear, that he did not belong to either the Roman Catholics nor the Reformers in the *Dialogorum de Trinitate libri Duo* (“On the Righteousness of Christ’s Kingdom” F8a. 264):

These are the things that occur to Me with regard to the Present article, in which I do not in all points agree, nor disagree, with either the one party or the other. All seem to me to have some truth and some error, and every one perceives the other’s error and no one sees his own. May God in his mercy cause us to realize our mistakes, and that without clinging to them. Yet it would be easy to decide all points if all were permitted to speak quietly in the church, so that all might be eager to prophesy, and (because the spirits of the former prophets were made subject to the prophets that followed) that when they spoke, if anything were revealed to them, the former ones might keep silence in accordance with the command of Paul. But our party are now struggling for honor. May the Lord destroy all tyrants of the Church. Amen.

The ‘one party or the other’ means the Roman Catholics and the Reformers respectively. ‘The former prophets’ probably refers to the Fathers of Church (Henry 1849:167-8). Later he prophesies that both the Roman Catholics and the Reformers were so corrupted that their error would become clearly visible. He claims that he would fight like the angel Michael to restore true Christianity. In his twentieth letter to Calvin he describes it as follows (CR, 628):

I labour incessantly for the requickening of the church, and you are indignant with me because I take a part in this conflict of Michael, and wish all pious men to follow my example. Consider well this passage, and you will see that there are men thus struggling who are ready to sacrifice their lives, in the blood and in the testimony of Christ. That they are called angels in according to the usage of Scripture. The new-birth from above makes us like the angels. See you not, that the subject here spoken of is the reviving of the ruined church.

Servetus left Quintana. Quintana went to Ratisbon and Nürnberg, where he would see Servetus’ first heretical book. After the Servetus’ affair had settled, Quintana returned to Spain, where he served as Prior of the Church of Monte Aragón and was a member of the Cortes of Spain until 1534. There he was to hear the terrible news that Servetus had published the heretical book, *De Trinitatis Erroribus*.

2.2 Contact with Reformers and his writings

2.2.1 Reformers

Servetus was an attendant traveller of the emperor, and accompanied Quintana throughout Italy. They travelled between Bologna to Basel,³⁷ from 1529 to the spring of 1530. We know nothing of when and why Servetus left Quintana or how long he stayed with him at Bologna.

After leaving the imperial service during the autumn of 1530, Servetus visited Johannes Oecolampadius³⁸ in Basel. This happened on October 30 1530. It is not clear whether Servetus was familiar with Erasmus' New Testament, nor if they had made contact while in Basel (1953b).³⁹ By the age of nineteen or twenty one, Servetus had discussed the negative development of his thoughts on the Trinity with Oecolampadius, then about a forty eight-year old professor at the University.

Servetus made vigorous attempts in his disputes with Oecolampadius to make him understand the purity of Christianity and the need for restoring the simplicity of the original doctrines (Schaff 1994: 715). The doctrine of God was one of his main topics. Servetus tried repeatedly not only to air his ideas on the Trinity and the divinity of Christ but he also tried persuading him to believe that the Reformers were in error on these doctrines, especially regarding the doctrine of the Trinity. He was anxious to air his views before Oecolampadius and the other Reformers. He corresponded through mail and private dialog,⁴⁰ but never was never involved in a public debate.

Oecolampadius was startled and in horror, finding that Servetus had a clearly blasphemous view of Christ, where Servetus maintained that Jesus was neither the consubstantial Son of God nor pre-existent.⁴¹ He tried to correct Servetus, but his attempts were in vain. Servetus'

³⁷ After leaving Bologna, and the Diet of Augusburg, he travelled to Lyon, Geneva, and then to Basel. See Bainton (1953b: 32). Servetus confesses this journey at both the trials of Vienne, on April 5, 1553, and Geneva on August 23. See Calvin (*Opera*, 767, 846).

³⁸ His original name was Johann Hausschein (1482-1531), and he was a distinguished reformer. He was trained at Heidelberg and Bologna consolidated the Reformation at Basel, and assisted Erasmus with his edition of the Greek New Testament (1516). He provided Servetus with accommodation for ten months. See Calvin (*Opera*, 767).

³⁹ Erasmus was staying at Basel until 1529.

⁴⁰ The letters between Servetus and Oecolampadius are in Calvin (*Opera*, 857-65) and Allwoerden (1772:12-7).

⁴¹ See Servetus (ET 111a.172). John Knox also criticises his heresy, stating that Servetus' death resulted from "the execution of God's judgement" and he was "an abominable blasphemer against God" (Laing 1966:224).

heretical view on the Trinity that upset Oecolampadius is clear in the following extract (ET 81b-82a. 126):

Again, CHRIST's kingdom is called eternal a thousand times, yet at the end deliver it up to God the Father; not that anything will be detracted from CHRIST's glory, indeed it will be his supreme glory to have ruled all things well even to the end, and to have made them subject to the Father as he intended. And this will be to deliver up the kingdom to God the Father, just as the general of the whole army offers the Emperor the palm of victory. Again, inasmuch as then all manner of ruling will cease, all authority and power will be abolished, all ministry of the Holy Spirit will cease, we shall need no advocate nor reconciler, but God will be all in all. And thus the dispensation of the Trinity will then cease. Tertullian also says⁴² that the Trinity will cease, which note, just as even now the Trinity is otherwise that it once was, as I shall show in what follows.

Servetus' impudent and ambitious manner, as well as the heretical content of his views, soon brought him into conflict with Oecolampadius who was a gentle and amiable character. In the conference of Reformers in 1530, Oecolampadius notified Ulrich Zwingli, the Swiss reformer, and other reformers of Servetus' Arian views (Emerton 1909:144; Levy 1993:63; Ruter 1814:10 & Beisner 1978:17-8).⁴³ They decided to prevent his heretical views from spreading. Zwingli advised Oecolampadius on Servetus' error on how to win him back to the truth:

“there did seem good ground for them to be on their guard; for the false and wicked doctrine of the troublesome Spaniard goes far to do away with the whole of our Christian religion ... God preserve us from the coming in among us of any such wickedness. Do what you can, then, to quit the man of his errors, and with good and wholesome argument win him to the truth.”

Oecolampadius replied (Willis 1877:33-4):

“that have I already done, but so haughty, daring and contentious is he, that all I say goes for nothing against him ... This is indeed a thing insufferable in the Church of God.”

In particular, he explains the blasphemous view on Godhead: “For what is more blasphemous, then to affirm that such as believe in the Godhead three distinct Persons, have no true God, but the illusion of the Devils: That Christ Jesus is not the Eternal Son of the Eternal Father: That there is no distinction betwixt the Father and the Sonne, but in imagination only: That Christ hath no participation of man's nature, but that this flesh is from heaven; yea, that it is the flesh of the Godhead: That in stocks, stones, and all creatures, is the substantial Godhead?” (ibid:1966:228).

⁴² Servetus probably quotes Tertullian (“Against Praxeas” IV, 599-600): “Look to it then, that it be not *you* rather who are destroying the Monarchy [or *sole empire*], when you overthrow the arrangement and dispensation of it, which has been constituted in just as many names as it has pleased God to *employ*.”

⁴³ Servetus himself admits that he was suspected of being an Arian. “The Father is greater than I; am I therefore an Arian? For when Arius held the very foolish view that the Son was of different Substance from the Father, having also no appreciation at all of the glory of CHRIST, he introduced a new creature, more exalted than man; although he might nevertheless have excluded this and every other distinction, and have admitted, The Father is greater than I.” See ET (12b-13a. 21-2). Brown (1998:331-2) does not agree that Servetus was an Arian observing that he regards Servetus as one among Socinians.

Zwingli then suggested to Oecolampadius that he should prevent the publication of Servetus' blasphemous book (Henry 1849:171). Zwingli then also informed Martin Bucer and Bullinger that Servetus denied the divine Trinity, the eternal divinity of Christ and the union of two natures in Christ.

In the meantime, Servetus continued to correspond with Oecolampadius. Responding to Servetus' second letter, Oecolampadius replies (*Opera*, 857-8; Allwoerden, 1772:12-3; Bainton 1953b:52 & Willis 1877:34-5):

You obtrude yourself on me as if I had nothing else ado than to answer you; asking me questions about all the foolish things the Sorbonne has said of the Trinity, and even taking it amiss that I do not criticise and in your way oppose myself to those distinguished theologians, Athanasius and Nazaianenus. You contend that the Church has been displayed from its true foundation of faith in Christ, [You accord more honor to Tertullian than to the whole Church. You deny the one person on two natures] and feign that we speak of his filiation in a sense which detracts from the honour that is due to him as the Son of God. But it is you who speak blasphemously; for I now understand the diabolical subterfuges you use. Forbearing enough in other respects, I own that I am not possessed of that extreme amount of patience which would keep me silent when I see Christ [Jesum Christum filium Dei]dishonoured ...

... You do not admit that it was the Son of God who was to come as man; but that it was the Son of God who came that was the Son of God; language which leads to the conclusion that the Son of God existed not eternally before the incarnation.

In his second or third letter to Oecolampadius, Servetus insults Luther's system of Justification as follows (*Opera*, 861-2 & Willis 1877:51-4):

Somewhat fearful of writing to you again, lest I should molest you still more than I have already done, I yet venture to ask of you not to interfere with my sending the books to France which I have with me here, the book-fair of Lyons drawing near; for you of all men are better entitled than any one else to pronounce an opinion upon things unheard of until now. If you think it better that I should not remain here, I shall certainly take my leave; only, you are not to think that I go as a fugitive. God knows I have been sincere in all I have written, although my crude style perchance displeased you. I did not imagine you would take offence at what I say of the Lutherans; especially when from your own mouth I heard you declare you were of opinion that Luther had treated Charity in too off-hand a style; adding, as you did, that folks were charitable mostly when they had nothing else to think of. Melanchthon, too, as you know, affirms that God has no regard for charity. Such sayings, believe me, are more hurtful to the soul than anything I have ever written. And this all the more as I see that you are not agreed among yourselves on the subject of faith; for with my own ears I have heard you say one thing, which is otherwise declared by doctor Paulus, otherwise by Luther, and yet otherwise by

b 153365
i 157847

Melanchthon; and of this I admonished you in your own house; but you would not hear me. ‘Your rule for proving the Spirit, I think, deceives you; for, if in your own mind there be any fear, or doubt, or confusion, you cannot judge truly of me; and this the more because, although you know me in error in one thing, you ought not, therefore, to condemn me in others, else there were none who should escape burning a thousand times over. This truth is forced on us on all hands, most especially perhaps by the example of the Apostles, who sometimes erred. And then, you do not condemn Luther in every particular, although you are well aware that he is mistaken in some things. I have myself entreated you to instruct me, which, however, you have not done. It is surely an infirmity of our human nature that none of us see our own faults, and so commonly look on those who differ from us as impious persons or impostors. I entreat you, for God’s sake, to spare my name and reputation. I say nothing of others who are not interested in the questions between us. You say that I would have no one punished or put to death, though all were thieves alike; but I call the omnipotent God to witness that this is not my opinion; nay, I scout any such conclusion. If I have spoken at any time on the subject (the punishment proper for heresy), it was because I saw it as a most serious matter to put men to death on the ground of mistake in interpreting the Scriptures; for do we not read that even the elect may err? You know full well that I have not treated my subject in so indifferent or indiscreet a manner as to deserve entire rejection at your hands. You make little yourself of speaking of the Holy Spirit as an angel, but think it a great crime in me when I say that the Son of God was a man.

Farewell.

Michael Servetus.

Servetus sent the confession of faith to Oecolampadius. In the same letter he complimented Oecolampadius, saying “I exhort that you confess that the Son of God is consubstantial and coeternal, because of the unity of the Word, in which case we shall be able to acknowledge you for a Christian.”⁴⁴ The controversial correspondence was closed in the beginning of 1531. It is likely that Servetus obtained his negative view on Christianity at Toulouse, and his positive view he developed while reconstructing Christianity at Basel (Bainton 1953b:41).

After failing to persuade Oecolampadius, Servetus chose to go to Strassburg, which had broken with Rome. Strassburg was considered among the more tolerant cities of the time, though a decree had been issued against the Anabaptists there. Martin Bucer, who was a professor of Greek at the University - founded by himself, led Strassburg. He was twice as

⁴⁴ “... hortor ut fatearis filium Dei consubstantialem et coaeternum, propter unionem verbi, ut pro Christiano te habere possimus” (*Opera* 861 & Allwoerden, 1772:17). Oecolampadius had already criticised Servetus in his second letter, giving advice to believe that Christ is “consubstantial and coeternal with the Father.” See Drummond (1848:5-6) and ET (93a.143).

old as Servetus, thus referring to him as ‘my dear son’.⁴⁵ Their association was soon over, like with Oecolampadius.

Wolfgang Fabricius Capito, another leader at Strassburg, was also a reformer. Capito might have shared Servetus’ beliefs, but at once found him impious and blasphemous. Capito and Bucer, who had already been warned about him by Oecolampadius, received him with kindness, at first apparently gave him sympathy, and laboured with him to correct him, but it was in vain (Kittelson 1975:189-90).⁴⁶ Bucer preached against Servetus and in a letter said “a man like Servetus deserved to have his bowels plucked out and his body torn to pieces” (D’Aubigne 1876:102).⁴⁷

Oecolampadius, in conversation with Zwingli and Bullinger, showed clearly that he understood his wily antagonist, and perceived the dangerous nature of his doctrines (Henry 1849:211, 215).

2.2.2 *De Trinitatis Erroribus*

Soon after he failed to propagate his views, Servetus decided to follow another way to spread it at Basel. He published his views in a book, *The Errors of the Trinity* [*De Trinitatis Erroribus*], which was published in Hagenau in the beginning of 1531. It consists of seven books. In this radical book, he attacks the traditional doctrine of the Trinity (Beza 1836:159; see *Opera*, 773-4.). The incomprehensibility of God was revealed in the world through two forms, he claimed, the Son and the Spirit after His first revelation in the creation by the Word. He understood the concept of Persons of the Trinity in light of disposition (ET 85a. 131-2):

God, in assuming a person in time past, showed us that the Trinity was to be manifold ... And God, when he began to employ in himself those dispositions which he was afterwards to manifest to us in various ways, ... Yet they all then existed only by a disposition.

They are only variant forms of the one self-revealing God as to economy or disposition, as derived from his readings of neoplatonic philosophy (Hirsch 1980:561-75 passim). He contends that there are not three eternal and consubstantial persons in the Godhead (Knox

⁴⁵ “filius meus dilectus” (Willis 1877:1877:39). Melancthon called him “a fanatic” (Henry 1849:170).

⁴⁶ When Kittelson wrote his commentary on Genesis, he rebuked Servetus’ anti-trinitarianism.

⁴⁷ “Bucerus, cum alioqui mansuetus esset ingenio, pro suggestu pronuntiavit, dignum esse, qui avulsis visceribus discerpatur”. See Beza (1836:159) and Wright (1806a:98). He also warned the magistrates of Strassburg not to tolerate him any more. “Haud enim feret te magistratus si de te rescierit, ut equidem arbitror.” See Calvin (*Opera*, 868).

1966:228). He has no scruples in calling the Trinitarians atheists (ET, 21b. 34 and CR, 31).⁴⁸ He also criticises the Reformers' doctrine of Justification. Especially the Lutheran view on the doctrine of Justification by faith alone, Servetus insults, rejects, and underestimates (ET, 82b.127 & 99a-b. 153; see 96a.147 and *Opera*, 866-8 passim):

The Lutheran, departing from this foundation of faith, have never been able to understand what justifications is... .

... This righteousness is not according to the Lutheran faith, but is for those that believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. For though we were dead through sins, he made us alive and made us heavenly. It is not needful that we seek righteousness and the friendship of God through works of the law; indeed, this would be to distrust Christ, as though he had not sufficiently and freely justified us once and for all. They sought this in the law, although they were unable to obtain it; but we have been justified, purified, and sanctified by Christ.

It was not easy for Servetus to find a publisher and a printer for his heretical book, because his views were being suspected. However, he did secure a publisher, Conrad Koenig,⁴⁹ who sent the manuscripts to John Setzer, an active printer, because it was dangerous to print it.⁵⁰ But Setzer was not willing to print it, because he was following the Lutheran view on the sacraments rather than the Swiss one (Bainton 1953b:56). To publish this book, Servetus moved to Strassburg near Alsace, right where the printer was located, and made him print it.

In July 1531, Servetus' first book was printed and then distributed in Strassburg, Frankfurt, Basel and Italy, but nobody knew where and by whom it was published until the trial of Geneva in 1553. The Anabaptists and other radical reformers at Strassburg were interested in the book for its views on the Sacrament.⁵¹ The Reformers – Oecolampadius and Zwingli – themselves were displeased to see his publication at Strassburg. Bucer soon forbade Servetus from preaching on the pulpit and destroyed a copy of the book (Dyer 1850:299 & Beza 1836:159). It was banned in Strassburg and in Basel. On July 18, 1531, immediately after the publication of *De Trinitatis Erroribus*, Oecolampadius informed Bucer (*Opera*, 866 & Willis 1877:48):

⁴⁸ "Athei vere sunt trinitarii omnes."; de la Fontaine accused Servetus of calling Trinitarian atheists on the fifteenth article at the trial of Geneva (*Opera*, 729).

⁴⁹ He had shops in Basel, Strassburg and Paris.

⁵⁰ Johannes Setzer printed his books at Hagenau in Alsace. He also printed the second book.

⁵¹ "...the most agitated doctrine among the reformers was that of the Lord's Supper ... Even more Servetus essaying the role of mediator between the sectaries and the established Church. His views in many respects resemble those of Casper Schwenckfeld and Melchoir Hofmann" (Bainton 1953b:64-50).

Read the book, and tell me what you think of it. Were I not busy with my Job, I should be disposed to answer it myself; but I must leave this duty to another with more leisure at command. Our Senate has forbidden the Spaniard's book to be sold here. They have asked my opinion of its merits, and I have said that as the writer does not acknowledge the coeternity of the Son, I can in no wise approve of it as a whole, although it contains much else that is good—*Etiamsi multa alia bona scribat*.

Oecolampadius also wrote another letter to Bucer on August 5, 1531 (*Opera*, 867, Willis 1877:42-3; see Wallace, d.a.:424):

Several of their friends had seen Servetus book [*De Trinitatis Erroribus*] and were beyond measure offended with it. I wish you would write to Luther and tell him it was printed elsewhere than at Basle, and without any privity of ours. It is surely a piece of consummate imprudence in the winter to say that the Libertines are ignorant of what Justification really means. Passing many things by, I fancy he must belong to the sect of the Photinians, or to some other I know not what. Unless he be put down by the doctors of our church, it will be the worse for us. I pray you of all others to keep watch; and if you find no better or earlier opportunity, be particular in your report to the Emperor in excusing us and our churches from the breaking in among us of this wild beast. He indeed abuses everything in his way of viewing it; and to such lengths does he go that he disputes the coeternity and consubstantiality of the Father and the Son he would even have the man Christ to be the Son of God in the usual natural way.

Willis (1877:44) contends that Luther must have read *De Trinitatis Erroribus*:

“When an exceedingly virulent book was published in 1532 against the [doctrine of the] Trinity, he [Martin Luther] said, ‘These people do not realize that other, too, have been assailed by doubts about this article. But to set my opinion over against the Word of God and the Holy Spirit is insupportable.’⁵²

Since the publication “throughout the Protestant world Servetus from this hour was considered to be nothing more nor less than an emissary of Satan” who adhered to the Arian heresy (Zweig 1936:98-9 & Breuer 1999). This publication was the beginning of a chain of events that led to his persecution (Macdonell 1927:131).

2.2.3 *Dialogorum de Trinitate libri Duo*

The following year, 1532, Setzer printed the second of his books at Hagenau. It consists of two volumes (19 pages and 25 pages), and is called *Two Dialogues on the Trinity* [*Dialogorum de Trinitate libri Duo*]. It contains six short chapters (two dialogues and four chapters on the Righteousness of Christ's Kingdom),⁵³ and a treatise on Justification

⁵² See Luther, vol. LIV, 32 in Lehmann (1971).

⁵³ They are on Justification, Christ' kingdom, a Comparison of the Law and the Gospel, and Love.

(Drummond 1848:15-6). In the preface of *Dialogorum de Trinitate libri Duo* (DT Alb.188), he states that all he had said in his former book was not false but childish and imperfect: “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” He supplies and defends the last system of his doctrine. There are a couple of differences between these two books. For example, in the first book he claims that Christ “is God not in Nature but in appearance, not by nature but by grace”(ET, 12b.21) but now by nature Christ has all things (DT, C3b. 217-8):

Pet. You had said elsewhere that Christ was God through grace, not through nature; but do you now ascribe all things to him by nature?

Mich. As I gave the first elements to babes, so I also said, in *accordance with his nature*, and, by nature, in the manner of this philosophical age, which has nothing in common with the Scriptures; for the philosophers will have nothing exist through grace, nor do they say that the will of God is the cause of the generation of the Son, but that it merely happened by nature that one of the beings then produced the other, and now produces it daily. Wishing to oppose this dream, I have maintained by all the Scriptures that his exaltation and glorification are the free and voluntary gift of the Father, denying their magical Natures and Generations. Nor do I now retract what I said of grace, but add to it, since it belongs to the glory of Christ that all things should be meet for him by nature, by reason of his filiation. Nor, according to the truth of Scripture, is it a contradiction to say that he was begotten and chosen by the grace and will of God, and along with this that by nature all the inheritance and glory of the Father is due to him. For it is a rule of nature: if son, then heir. And he is Son by nature, as I have said, because he was ineffably begotten of the Substance of the Father. Not born of another, and afterwards adopted, but born of God, and born a Son by an original begetting. If you also knew that the word nature is to be taken for the natural property itself of a being, just as whatever belongs to it from birth is called natural, you will easily distinguish and discern two Natures in Christ, and all his properties. For Christ received his Substance from God and man, and whatever is appropriate to him in accordance with the nature of the flesh, that is, in accordance with his partaking of man, and in accordance with that property which he received from the seed of man; even as Paul says, that he was born *of the seed of David according to the flesh*. For although the flesh of Christ is derived from the seed of God and of man, yet by the word *flesh* in this passage we signify his partaking of man. Since therefore Christ by his nature is partaker of God and man, he must needs have double properties, and divers considerations, and some stated as of God, and others of the flesh.

Another example can also be considered. In the first book he denies that the Holy Spirit is a ‘Person’ of God, but in the second book he says that the Holy Spirit is a Person. We can discern between the differences as follows (ET, 28b. 44):

And in the Scriptures there is frequent mention of the existence of God the Father, and of the Son, and of seeing and praying to them; but of the Holy

Spirit no mention is made, except where it speaks about doing something, as by a sort of casual statement; which is noteworthy, as though the Holy Spirit denoted not a separate being, but an activity of God, a kind of in-working or in-breathing of the power of God.

Compared to (DT, C5a. 219-20):

And, to speak more clearly, I say that Holy Spirit is now a Person, while in the law it was not thus a Person. I call it a Person because it is a divine *hypostasis*, or Substance, breathed by nature into Christ alone, and thence flowering out Christ into us. Properly speaking, then we do not say that there is a Person, or a face, in the Spirit, although in that breathing there was always a divine Substance, according to the dispensation of the God who breathed it.

Even though Servetus differentiated between the incarnate Son and the pre-existent Word, in the second book he admits that the Word is Christ, though the Word did not have any substance until Christ was revealed (ET, 79b-80a. 123-4):

Another question: whether we admit that the Word was ever the Son ...

... Again, do you think that John, speaking in a human sense, said Word rather than Son? And you can not produce one iota in which Scripture called this Word the Son. Again, John says of the Word, both in his Gospel and in his Epistle, that it was in the past; but it never says of it, *It is*, which difference and way of speaking you do not notice. But later on I shall make this beyond doubt to you if you attentively note the scripture ways of speaking; but meanwhile I shall here inquire into the eternity and beginning of the Word.

Compared to (DT, A5b. 194-5):

It was manifested through angels in a figure, and it was the shadow of the true manifestation to come. For the light and the Word had a Substance of their own, never known to the world until Christ was revealed and his Substance was touched and felt with the hands. No human reason can attribute to God any name of Substance or Nature, for he exists outside of all Substance and Nature; but, when about to create the world, he created in himself a Substance in the Likeness of the things of this world, and this was the Word, and the light, and the cause of all nature. Indeed, some have called this Substance the body of the Word; and of this Substance of the Word without a body we shall speak below.

Regarding the heated debates the reformers held on the Lord's Supper, Servetus sided with the Anabaptist, Melchoir Hofmann (Bainton 1953b, 65-6), saying (DT, C2a. 215):

Again, he enters into us when he truly offers his body to us to be eaten in the holy supper. Nor does he afterwards depart from us in a local sense, nor is there in this any movement from place to place; but only, through a certain dispensation, a jointing of him to us, which is in the spirit alone; and the body of Christ is mystically eaten in the mystical bread. But since the true use of the Lord's Supper has been buried in oblivion, and Christ is not yet known, the taste of this eating seems insipid ... But what we have to say here is in opposition, they understand him in a physical sense. This, at least, I would that they might know: that Christ distinctly said, and that without regard to the

giving of the Holy Spirit, that he was to come, and to make his abode among us.

In April of 1532, Johannes Cochlaeus, a liberal Catholic and chief opponent of the Reformers, found one of Servetus' printed books in a shop at Ratisbon, where Quintana was serving Charles V. He hastened to give Servetus' *De Trinitatis Erroribus* to his former employer, Quintana, who was then the head of the counsel of censors at Augsburg. Quintana was so annoyed with it that he expressed extreme disgust that a fellow countryman and a person he knew “– *quem de facie Servetus nōsse dicebat* – should have fallen so far into the slough of heresy as to write on the mystery of the Trinity in the style of Michael Servetus, alias Revés” (Willis 1877:30). He ordered for it to be banned in Augsburg. Jerome Aleander,⁵⁴ alarmed at the heresy in Ratisbon, wrote to Rome in April of 1532, criticising the book with these words (Laemmer 1861:109-10, Bainton 1953b:69-70):

I well believe that we are near the end of the world. There has been sent to the Diet a work in seven books, composed by an Aragonese Spaniard called Mihel Serveto, alias Dereves, entitled *On the Errors of the Trinity*. I should have sent the book by this post except that I have to return it. I will try to get you another. There will be plenty about ... I never saw or read anything more nauseating, though the man is very keen. The confessor of the Emperor [Quintana] says that he knows him, a man of twenty-six years [he was actually twenty-one], and of brilliant parts, but a great sophist. Since the work shows a wide reading in Scripture and a polish of style of which he is not capable, the confessor thinks that he may well have conceived the plan, but that for the style and wealth of material he must have received help in Germany, in which parts he has been now for over a year, in Strassburg and Bale, where he helped Oecolampadius for some months. Erasmus wrote the other day in a letter that this Spaniard tried to send the work to him, but he would not lend an ear. Now he has sent a copy to the Bishop of Saragossa. I will see what the princes will do about such a book, of which they all complain. And if nothing else, I will get together a committee of theologians, especially Spaniards—there are about six—that, when the book has been censored and condemned by the authority of the Holy See, they may write to Spain to make proclamation to burn the book and the effigy of the heretic *al modo di Spagna*, because they say he may have left behind some impression of his heresy and he has already sent the hook. The Most Reverend Legate will write to his vicar at Huesca in Spain to make such an execution, since the heretic is of his diocese. That is all that can be done for the present. These heretics of Germany, Lutheran or Zwinglian, wherever the Spaniard may be, ought to punish him if they are so very Christian and evangelical and defenders of the faith, as they boast, because he is as much opposed to their profession as to the Catholic. In some passages of his work he contradicts Luther by name, and yet he is in Lutheran territory.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ He was an Italian papal nuncio and soon became a Cardinal and an adversary of Luther at the Diet of Worms.

⁵⁵ See Gordon 1910:14-5; Bainton (1953a:224-5) says that Servetus probably sent his book to Spain.

Johannes Cochlaeus also read Servetus' second book, *Dialogorum de Trinitate libri Duo*, which was causing much uneasiness at the Diet at Ratison. On June 17, 1532, Aleander was forced to put Servetus – 'Michel de Serveto alias Revés' – on the list of writers who were to be arrested by the Spanish Inquisition, and condemn him to be burnt (Wilbur 1972:72). The national reputation of the inquisitors was at stake, so they began to develop a protest (Bainton 1953b, 71). On May 24, 1532 the Supreme Council of Inquisitors at Medina del Campo had already sent a letter to the Inquisitor of Saragossa to enquire where the books and their author came from (Fernández 1970:310-2 & Hillar 1997:207):

After writing the above and thinking further on this matter, which is of such great importance for our Christian religion, we consider it expedient to try every possible means to lure the said Miguel Reves back to Spain enticing him by promises of favor or other offers, and if this does not succeed then we advise to use pressure. We thought of a few suggestions to that end. Use them or such of them as you consider convenient, but in such a way that those with whom you deal may not suppose that the Holy Office would use any pressure other than to bring him back to the Church, which is indeed the case, so that others of our nation, who are abroad may be recalled to the faith, seeing the good treatment accorded to him. For this purpose it is not wise to publish the edict so solemnly as we said. Rather it should be read with dissimulation so that no one may suppose or understand that the said Reves, is summoned by the Inquisition, for that would be to notify his relatives and friends and they would alert him to accept no offer that might be made. And do not affix the edict to the church doors, or if you do, let it be done at an hour when no one can read, and take it down before any one has read it. This precaution in announcing the edict is necessary in order that you may use the measures that we thought of. If they fail the trial against the said Reves will not take place. As for the inquiry which we mentioned with regard to his person, lineage and other qualities, it would seem well to entrust this to some person who would secure the information with secrecy and dissimulation so that no one would suppose that he was sent by the Inquisition. All this should be done speedily and with secrecy as the importance of the case requires, and let us know later about the results.⁵⁶

Although Servetus' brother, Juan, a priest of Santiago de Compostela, was designated to issue the order to persuade Servetus, he could not carry out the order because Servetus was not in Germany at that time (Hillar 1997:208).

By this time, Servetus had not found any adherents to his ideas, and he realised that he not only could not hope to influence the Reformers at Basel and Strassburg but that he was in danger being summoned by the inquisition in Toulouse and Spain. Servetus,

⁵⁶ See Bainton, (1953a 225-8) for an introduction on Campo's letters.

notwithstanding the opposition he met from Oecolampadius and others, and regardless of the inquisition, openly gave his name as author of the book. The printer and publisher, Setzer and Koenig, were more wary, however, and did not add their names or place of publication to the title page.⁵⁷ Servetus had no alternative but to flee to Lyon in France. His German was poor and he could not make a living there.⁵⁸ Furthermore, he had rendered himself odious to all good men by living in the very cities where he had been banished from, Zürich and Constanz.

2.2.4 Other Writings under the alias Michel de Villeneuve

From this time on, Servetus travelled around under the alias of Michel de Villeneuve⁵⁹ – his family name – because rumours were being spread about his fate, and he was being threatened. His real name and his books disappeared from the visible world, until the books were reissued twenty years later in Vienne and in Geneva. He lived in France during the second phase of his life. He had an unsettled career because of his pseudonym name (Henry 1849:165). He wandered around and tried to hide himself from those who knew his real name for about 20 years (1532-1553). There is some conjecture that he considered fleeing to America.⁶⁰

He spent some time in Paris before going to Lyon. During this time in Paris, he preoccupied himself by studying mathematics, geography, and astronomy at Collège de Calvi and then at Collège de Lombards.⁶¹ He became interested in medicine while reading the medical works written by Symphorien Champier,⁶² the founder of the Medical School Faculty at Lyon. Champier published more than a hundred books on several topics.

⁵⁷ The cover of *De Trinitatis Erroribus* was inscribed: 'Seven Books by Michael Serveto, alias Reves A Spaniard of Aragon MDXXXI'. Under it, and on the cover of *Dialogorum de Trinitate libri Duo* was written: 'Two Books on the Righteousness of Christ's Kingdom Four Chapters by Michael Serveto, alias Reves, A Spaniard of Aragon MDXXXII.'

⁵⁸ He might have spoken German but was not fluent, as he confessed on August 23 at the trial of Geneva (*Opera*, 767 & see Beza 1836:160; Wright 1806a:106-7; Dyer, 1850:300; & Wilbur 1972:75).

⁵⁹ First he appeared in Paris under the pseudonym name of Michel de Villeneuve of diocese of Saragossa. His Latin name is Michael Servetus Villanovanus and his French name is Michel de Villeneuve, which is rarely written as Villeneufve in old French orthography.

⁶⁰ Servetus mentions "new islands (in insulis novos)" twice in his last book. See Servetus, *Christinismi Restitutio*, 333, 603-4. On the term 'new islands' referring to 'South America', see Wright (1989:279-80); & Gordon (1925: 360).

⁶¹ We do not know the next city of his refuge. At the trial of Geneva he testified that he went to Lyon and then Paris but at Vienne that he went to Paris to study at the college of Calvi and read mathematics at the college and afterwards went to Lyon; "et de là s'en vint à Paris et demeura au College de Calvi quelque temps, et puis après s'en alla lire les Mathmatiques au College des Lombards" (*Opera*, 846).

⁶² He was known also in the latinized form as Campegius, (ca. 1471-1537) as a herbalist, an illustrious physician, Platonist, botanist, astronomer, and a typical man of the renaissance at Lyons. Servetus is influenced by platonic philosophy, Cabbalistic mysticism, and Hermes Tresmegistus in the last book. See Gordon (1910:20-1); Osler (1909:9-10); Friedman (1982:19-20); Hirsch (1980 561-2).

Servetus probably developed the neoplatonic and Jewish aspects of his theology through the influence of Champier. He studied medicine in Paris (Friedman 1982:137-9). Champier tended to combine diverse cultures and religious beliefs into a new form of Christianity. Servetus confessed in the *Leonhardum Fuchsium in defensio apologetica pro Symphoriano Campeggio*,⁶³ published in 1536, that he considered himself a student or disciple of Symphorien Champier. He says, “I am unable to restrain myself from writing something in defence of the church, as a son for his mother, and in defence of Symphorien Champier to whom I, as a pupil, owe much” (“The Apology Against Fuchs,” 38, 44).⁶⁴ Another teacher was Gonzalvez of Toledo through whom Servetus became acquainted with astrology.⁶⁵

Meanwhile, John Calvin⁶⁶ had been studying in Paris under Professor Mathurin Cordier, a known Latinist since 1523. Calvin wanted to convince Servetus of his errors and arranged for a meeting between them in 1534. Servetus was resolved to impart his convictions to him. At the appointed time, Calvin left de la Forge’s house and waited for him. However, Servetus failed to appear at the appointed house in the suburb of St. Antoine. Beza (1836:7-8⁶⁷) states about the failed meeting as follows:

Not long after Calvin returned to Paris, as if called there by the hand of God himself; for the impious Servetus was even then disseminating his heretical poison against the sacred Trinity in that city. He professed to desire nothing more earnestly than to have an opportunity for entering into discussion with Calvin, who waited long for Servetus, the place and time for an interview having been appointed, with great danger to his own life, since he was at that time under the necessity of being concealed on account of the incensed rage of his adversaries. Calvin was disappointed in his expectations of meeting Servetus, who wanted courage to endure even the sight of his opponent.

No one knows why Servetus failed to attend the meeting, but it can be ascertained that he chose Calvin from among all the Reformers, to persuade him of his theological systems. This was possibly because of a feeling of competitiveness he had against him (Bungener 1863:34):

Servetus, it was never known why, did not appear. No matter; we shall not forget, when the time comes, the position into which the Spanish theologian had just thrust the leaders of the Reformation, and Calvin in particular. By

⁶³ Leonard Fuchsius (1501-1566) was a German anatomist, critic, physician, distinguished Professor of Medicine of Tübingen, and biologist. He adopted Protestantism but held common opinions with Champier and Servetus on human culture, classical knowledge, and propagation of Galenism. The treatise was a pamphlet of defending Champier against Fuchsius. See Bayon (1939:75).

⁶⁴ He was also influenced by Sebastian Montuus.

⁶⁵ He edited *Amicus medicorum*, the work of a Franciscan, Jean Ganivet at Trechseis. He was not only friend of Champier but a famous physician-astrologer.

⁶⁶ Calvin was in Paris during 1534, between April and October, while Servetus was still there.

⁶⁷ See Wileman (s.a.:43) and D’Aubigne 1876:103).

selecting him for his adversary on the question of the Trinity, upon which no variance existed between Romanism and the Reformation, he, in a measure, considered him the guardian of that doctrine, and rendered him responsible for it before all Christendom. It was this responsibility which, nineteen years afterwards, kindled the piled of Servetus.

2.2.5 Ptolemy's Geography

In 1535 Servetus was living in Lyon, a city of culture that had a flourishing, extensive book trade (Henry 1849:174). He worked for a firm of scholar-printers, the Trechsels,⁶⁸ who had a branch in Vienne (Osler 1909:14). He needed finance to publish his book and pay the tuition for his doctoral degree (Collins 1968:171; Dyer 1850:302; and Willis 1877:104). Servetus published Claudius Ptolemy's⁶⁹ *Geography*⁷⁰ under a pseudonym, Michael Villanovanus'. He inserted his comments in the preface ("Ptolemy's Geography" 21). The edition consisted of eight books. He claimed that his reason for publishing the book was because the earlier edition of Ptolemy had a number of faults. As with most books of that time, the earlier edition was published in Latin rather than in the original language. The geography appeared in a Greek book by Giacomo d'Angelo. It was translated into Latin in about 1410, but still contained many translation faults. In 1525 Bilibal Pirckheimer, a German humanist, published a new translation in Strassburg. A Greek version was published with a preface, written by Erasmus in 1533. Servetus felt he was improving the edition as he states on the cover: "Now for the first time edited according to the translation of Bilibald Prickheimer, but compared to the Greek and early editions by Michael Villanovanus. Scholia have been added by the editor in which the obsolete names of cities have been given according to present usage" ("Ptolemy's Geography" 17). Servetus first gives a short account of who Ptolemy was ("Ptolemy's Geography" 18):

Ptolemy was a native of Alexandria, royal city of Egypt, and was well versed in Greek letters with which Egypt was then imbued, although he also spent some time at Rhodes. He was a philosopher and astrologer as well as a capable mathematicians as, indeed, his other writings attest. He flourished under the emperors Trajan, Hadrian and Antonius Pius. His skill in surveying so vast a

⁶⁸ This firm was managed by two brothers, Caspar and Mechior Trechsel, so that it was called the Trechsels. See Bayon (1939:74).

⁶⁹ Claudius Ptolemaeus - in Latin (AD 100?-165?) - was a second century Gnostic, an Alexandrian geographer and astronomer. His work was translated into Latin for the first time in 1409 at Florence, and was printed in 1473. He states in his *Mathematike Syntaxis* that the earth moves and is at the centre of universe. But Nicolaus Copernicus rejected his theory of a moving planet. The *Geography* contains many places, illustrated with longitudes, latitudes and colour maps.

⁷⁰ The book was corrected and again published in 1541 by Hugues de la Porte in Lyon. In the dedication Servetus listed as consultants Nicolaus Angelus Florentinus, Ioannes Berenherus, and Erasmus. The edition of 1541 contained fifty maps, prepared by an Alexanderian geographer, Agatodemon, and was dedicated to Servetus' protector and archbishop of Dauphine, Pierre Palmer. Servetus informs his readers in an eulogy that Archbishop Palmer was his auditor while lecturing at the University of Paris.

world was greater than the glory of Hercules, as invading the earth without war he compelled it to be assessed according to a kind of rule and delivered over to us with a description for our enjoyment. And not only did he do this, but he joined the heavens to the earth, combining the measures of them both into one. He was later than Strabo, Pliny and Pomponius Mela, but he easily surpassed them, and at earlier, in the profession of geography.

Thus he accounts for amending and enlarging the original text of Ptolemy "Ptolemy's Geography" 20-1:

We have added scholia by which reading may be made more clear, pleasant and full, and how much aid they may bring to the reader will be judged by those who try the experiment of reading. In the course of Greek and Latin poems, descriptions and other writings, when the discourse, as very often happens, turns upon regions, cities, mountains and rivers, if one then consults our Ptolemy the names of the cities joined to the ancient names of the poets and adjusted to the speech of our times will undoubtedly bring some pleasure to the reader, since formerly the reading of Ptolemy without annotations was not very pleasant. And that we might turn the minds of young men more to this reading we have explained most names of cities in the maternal tongue as easier to understand, so that we may seem to speak with the Germans in German, with the Italians in Italian, and with the Spaniards in Spanish; we have seen all these lands and we know the tongues of all of them. In rendering the names of the cities into the vernacular speech we have relied as much as possible on the authority of writers, on experience and on the most certain conjectures. In addition, we have passed over in silence many of those which have been described by Ptolemy, since they have been destroyed. But when other cities arose in the same or a nearby place to those destroyed, we have substituted the new one in place of that described as destroyed, but in the margin, for we wanted Ptolemy's text to remain inviolate. This work of ours will contribute greatly to the knowledge of the provinces of the earth and to the comparison of the present with the past, a pleasant exercise which, unless I am mistaken, will be denied by no one unless some shameless Zoilus [i.e., critic] who is unable to regard the labors of others without malice. Whoever you may be, gentle reader, I hope that you will suffer our efforts as acceptable and worthy. Farewell.

Servetus writes extensively about the countries of Europe: Scotland, England, Ireland, Spain, France, Germany, and Italy.⁷¹ His description of Palestine was made a basic motive for his indictment at the trial of Geneva in 1553. In the book he not merely defamed Moses, but apparently made a disparaging description of the Palestine of Moses, saying that the promised land 'flowing with milk and honey' was no longer the fertile promised land (Willis 1877:97):

The Israelites lived at length under laws received from Moses, although they had gone on piously and prosperously enough through countless ages, before his day, without any written law, having had regard to the oracles of divine or

⁷¹ For more detail see Gordon (1910:18-20).

natural truth alone, gifted as they were with aptitude and greatness of mind. Moses, however, that distinguished theologian, thinking that no state could exist without a written code of law and equity, gave them one reduced to ten principle heads, engraved on two tables of stone; with the addition of a great number of minor commandments for the regulation of their lives and dealings with one another. But any more particular notice of these, they being so numerous—great birds not sitting in little nests—must here be passed by. Know, however, most worthy reader, that it is mere boasting and untruth when so much of excellence is ascribed to this land; the experience of merchants and others, travellers who have visited it, proving it to be inhospitable, barren, and altogether without amenity. Wherefore you may say that the land was *promised*, indeed, but is of *little promise* when spoken of in everyday terms.

2.2.6 *Syroporum Universa Ratio* and *Apologetica Disceptatio*

2.2.6.1 *Pro Astrologia*

The next year, 1537, Servetus went back to Paris and stayed for about a year and a half. He continued studying geography and medicine, probably on the advice of Symphorien Champier. After obtaining the degree Doctor of Medicine – no record of this is extant – he lectured on mathematics and astronomy (*Opera*, 767, 776, 780, 845 & Wilbur 1972:119-20).⁷²

Servetus was not interested in medicine until he met Champier (Willis 1877:10).⁷³ There were two medical schools: the Galenists, followers of the Greeks, in the traditions of Hippocrates and Galen; and the Averrhoists, disciples of the Arabians, in the traditions of Averrhoes and Avicenna. As a pupil of Champier, an ardent admirer of the Greeks, Servetus seemed to favor the Greeks, and was opposed to the Arabians. The debate between two schools drew extensive attention. In order to defend himself against the Arabians (Ford 1860:27), he wrote a treatise on Syrups: *Syroporum Universa Ratio*. The treatise was influenced by *Medulla Philosophiæ* of Champier, and was published with a review of the two schools in 1537. The review favoured the Galentists (Wilbur 1972:118-9). Servetus expresses his intention in the preface (“The Syrups” 59):

A Complete Account of Syrups Carefully Refined
According to the Judgement of Galen

⁷² It seems that he studied medicine under the instruction of Sylvinus and Fernel, but “there is no record of his degree in the registers of the Faculty of Medicine of Paris. The documents show only that he was a student of medicine during 1536-1538 at the University of Paris and that he resided in Paris in 1532 as a student of mathematics at the Collège of Calvi” (Hillar 1997:226; Wright 1806a:110 & Audin 1850:430).

⁷³ Champier was a Galentist (Osler 1909:9). He wrote *CRIBRATIO MEDICAMENTORUM*, with the *MEDULLA PHILOSOPHIÆ* in 1533, *PENTAPHARCUM GALLICUM* at Lyon in 1534 and Champier’s fivefold French Pharmacopoea, which Servetus must have read and corrected for press while he was working at Trechsel press.

To which after a full discourse on concoction has been added the true method of purgation, as well as exposition on the aphorism: Medicate that which has been concocted

By Michael Vullanouvanus

To the Philatron

You who are going to concoct the crude humors and restore health to the human body. Observe the teachings of this book

Paris

From the shop of Simon Colines

1537

Servetus discovered the pulmonary circulation of blood and published his findings. But, he is not the author of some of the claims. Chéreau strongly attributes the authorship to Mathieu Realdo Colombo de Creamona, an Italian, rather than to Servetus: “Whether he had grasped the larger truth of the general circulation of the blood may be left in doubt, for while there are indications which fit in with this, they should not be pressed too far” (Chéreau 1879:58-9).⁷⁴ Beza also doubts that Servetus made the discoveries (Beza 1836:130). He took a different position to Galen’s description, accounting for the movement of blood in the heart. can Two major different accounts can be distinguished (CR, “The Description of the Lesser Circulation” 199):

First, Galen proclaimed the presence of blood in both veins and arteries; second, he announced that there is anastomosis between the minute branches of veins and arteries and that ‘they mutually receive blood and spirits from each other through invisible and extremely minute passages’. In respect to Servetus’ discovery this would have its most important application in the lungs where, however, the exchange of blood from the pulmonary artery to the pulmonary vein would be interrupted by expiration since the pulmonary would then be compressed.

He insists unreasonably that the lung not only gives life but also imparts spirit.⁷⁵ He even speculates that the spirit was made in the blood (“The Description of the Less Circulation” 203):

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 the liver and in the veins of the body. The second is the vital spirit of which the seat is on the heart and in 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

⁷⁴ Chéreau, librarian of the Faculty of Medicine of University of Paris, is critical of Servetus. Gordon (1910) also doubts his authorship; Servetus’ theory of the circulation of the blood is given by Allwoerden (1727:232-4).

⁷⁵ “Nam afflante Deo, inspirate pe os et nares in cor et cerebrum ipsius Adæ, et natorum eius, illa cælestis spiritus aura, siue idealis scintilla, et spiratali illi sabguineæ materiæ intus essentialiter iuncta facta est eius visceribus anima. Gen. 2. Esa. 57. Ezech. 37. et Zacha. 12” (CR, 178 & see 258).

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 was communicated to the liver. The divine spirit was truly drawn into the mouth and nostrils, but the inspiration extended to the heart.⁷⁶

Servetus explains that the spirit was in the blood upon which the spirit depends. This implies that it is a consistent pantheist and that if the blood dies the spirit will die (Bayon 1939:93). This fanciful speculation on the spirit did not come from any scientific evidence but was based on his logic. Such expressions can be found in *Christianismi Restitutio* and became vital evidence at the trial of Geneva: “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.”⁷⁷

Servetus lectured on various questions of science, enjoying much applause and a large audience in Paris. A young Pierre Palmier was among his listeners. He provided Servetus with accommodation at Vienne. He also became Archbishop of Vienne in Dauphiné. Servetus taught Ptolemy’s Geography and the science of Astrology, but was later forbidden to lecture in the faculty at the University of Paris, because of the arrogance, quarrelsome, and stiffness of his strong temper: “He publicly insulted the whole of the literi of the University of Paris” (Killen 1854:9; see Guizot 1868:297 & Robbins 1846:57). His prediction of coming wars and pestilence on February 12, 1538 annoyed the Church (Bayon 1939:76). Although the teaching of astrology was forbidden, he proceeded to write a small treatise on astrology. It was called *Apologetica Disceptatio pro Astrologia* and was published in 1538. The treatise was criticised by the dean of the medical faculty (Allen 1941:60-1). On February 25, 1538, the dean, Tagault, commented as follows in his yearly report (Bainton 1953a:233, Osler 1909:11):

A certain student of medicine, a Spaniard, or as he says, from Navarre, but with a Spanish father, and taught for some days in Paris in 1537 judicial astrology or divination. After having found out that this was condemned by the Doctors of the Faculty, he caused to be printed a certain apology in which he attacked the doctors, and moreover declared that war and pests and all the affairs of men depended on the heavens and on the stars, and he imposed on the public by confounding true and judicial astrology. The Dean goes on to state that, accompanied by two of his colleagues, he tried to prevent Villanovanus from publishing the apology, and met him leaving the school where he had been

⁷⁶ See CR, 169-70. Servetus continually observes more detail on the vital spirit in 170-1. See also Fulton (1989:36-46). Hirsch (1980:574-5) deals with spirit’s relation to blood. Hirsch.

⁷⁷ See Calvin (*Opera*, 730) on indictments de Fontaine submitted in the arraignment: “Item que l’air est le spirit de Dieu et que Dieu est nommé esprit pource qu’il vivifie toutes choses par son esprit d’air.”

making a dissection of the body with a surgeon, and in the presence of several of the scholars, and of two or three doctors, he not only refused to stop the publication, but he threatened the Dean with bitter words.⁷⁸

The faculty and the senate of the university petitioned the Parliament of Paris (a judicial body) to prohibit Servetus from publishing and lecturing.⁷⁹ According to the judges of the court, Servetus was to do as follows (Willis 1877:123-4; see Osler 1909:12):

Villanovanus ordered to call in his pamphlet and deposit the copies with the proper officer of the court; to pay all honour and respect to the Faculty of Physic in its collective and individual capacity, saying and writing nothing unbecoming of it, but conducting himself at all times peacefully and reverently towards its members; the doctors, on their part, being enjoined to treat Villanovanus gently and amiably, as parents treat their children. Villanovanus is then expressly inhibited and forbidden to appear in public, or in any other way, as a professor or practitioner of judicial astrology, otherwise called divination; he is to confine himself in his discussions of astrological subjects to the influence of the heavenly bodies on the course of the seasons and other natural phenomena, and not to meddle with questions or judgements of stellar influences on individuals or events, under pain of being deprived of the privileges he enjoys as a graduate of the University of Paris. Done this 18th of March, 1538.

He had already been apprehended in jail for two or three days once before for fighting with a colleague physician in Paris (Wilbur 1972:126).

2.2.7 Bible of Santes Pagnini

According to his testimony at Vienne, Servetus left Paris unsatisfied with the verdict of the Parliament of Paris, and first went to Avignon and then back to Lyon (*Opera*, 767, 769, 846). In the summer of 1538 Servetus went to Charlieu, a small town about forty miles northwest of Lyon, where he practised medicine for two or three years.⁸⁰ “On account of that which he there stupidly and insolently attempted,” his arrogance again disturbed his stillness (Henry 1849:175). He tried marrying a certain lady. He claimed to have failed because of his physical defect and rupture, obtained at the age of five. The judges at the trial of Geneva questioned this (*Opera*, 765, 767, 769, 781). The reason he failed was because “he could never have found a wife who could be trusted with his secrets” (Bainton

⁷⁸ It was written in his *History of the University of Paris*, vol. VI, in 1537. It was reprinted by Henri Tollin. Wilbur gives a more detail account on his troubled life of lecturing. See Wilbur (1972:121-6). Bainton contains the proposition accusing him. Judicial astrology was forbidden by the Church, but was still taught by some universities.

⁷⁹ Servetus wrote a tract to defend him before the trial of the Parliament in Paris in 1538. See Bainton (1953a:228-33).

⁸⁰ He confessed that he stayed there for two or three years during the trial of Geneva (*Opera*, 767) and three years at Vienne (*Opera*, 846).

1953b:128). He not only hid his real name but also wore a mask because of his heresy. If he married, his wife might have divulged him as a heretic.

In 1539, when Servetus turned thirty, some Anabaptist secretly rebaptized him. They denied that infant baptism was analogous to circumcision (*CR*, 412).⁸¹ He desired to follow Jesus' example, and proclaimed that Christians who followed the example of Christ ought to participate in this bath of Regeneration (*CR*, 412),⁸² and who ever submitted themselves to be baptised would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, promised through this means.⁸³ In the fifteenth letter to Calvin, he suggests that Calvin should follow the same procedure so that he may be fulfilled with the Holy Spirit and be born again (*Opera*, 678; *CR*, 615). In his last book, he insists not only that there is no covenant in infant baptism, and that no person baptised as an infant could become a Christian.⁸⁴

Servetus lived a dissolute life in Charlieu. He was employed as an editor to revise the Bible of Santes Pagnini.⁸⁵ Pagnini had published a Hebrew lexicon a Koran and has translated the Bible into Latin during 1528. The Roman Catholic Inquisition in Louvain and Spain soon banned the edition (Cuthbertson 1912:62).⁸⁶ Servetus wrote a preface and notes to the Pagnini Bible, in which he called for a better understanding of the Bible. Hugo De la Parte from Lyon published it in 1542 (Wallace, d.a.:428). He presented a new exegetical approach to reading the Bible.⁸⁷ He accuses biblical scholars for not reaching for the primary, literal and historical sense of the text, and instead searching in vain for mystical meanings. He addresses his new interpretation of the Bible in his preface to the Pagnini Bible (Willis 1877:140-1):

They who are ignorant of the Hebrew language and history are only too apt to overlook the historical and literal sense of the sacred Scriptures; the consequence of which is that they vainly and foolishly expend themselves in hunting after recondite and mystical meanings in the text where nothing of the kind exists. Before reading the prophets, in particular, he would therefore have

⁸¹ It is likely that he was involved in a secret sect, because on the matter of the Lord's Supper he differed from Protestants and the Roman Catholics (Dyer 1850:305; Levy 1993:64; and *CR*, 710).

⁸² See *CR*, 361, 364, 372, 384, 386, 434, 495, 545-6, 614, 619.

⁸³ "... vera Christi fide ad baptismum accede ut accipias donum spiritus sancti, tibi ita promissi" (*Ibid.*, 615).

⁸⁴ "In pædobaptismo vero non est foedus aliquod, nec efficiuntur Christiani" (*CR*, 440).

⁸⁵ 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. He was 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 was dedicated to the translation of the Bible into Latin, which was first published at Lyon in 1527-8. The Bible took thirty years to translate. See Wilbur (1972:128-9).

⁸⁶ Cuthbertson was a sub-librarian of Edinburgh Library and studied the history of keeping Servetus' books.

⁸⁷ Servetus insisted on the analysis of the historical meaning of the Bible and rejected the prophecies of the Old Testament already fulfilled in the New Testament with a certain interpretation of typology. For example, he rejected the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14. For detail see Bainton (1953b 98-9).

every one make himself acquainted not only with the Hebrew tongue, but with Hebrew History; for the prophets, without exception, followed history to the letter, although they also prefigured future events in their writings, led as they were by inspiration to conclusions having reference to the mystery of Christ. The power of the Scriptures, indeed, is of a fertilizing or prolific kind. Under a waning literal sense, they possess a vivifying spirit of renovation. It were, therefore, well that their meaning, apprehended as pointing in one direction, should not be overlooked as also pointing in another; and this the rather, seeing that the historical sense comes out ever the more clearly when the prospective bearing, which has Christ for its object, is kept in view—veiled under types and figures, indeed, and so not seen of the Jews, blinded by their prejudices, but now revealed to us in such wise that we see, to see the very face of our God.

It is apparent that Servetus maintains that he was working with the original historical meaning. He attempted to determine the original meaning so that the mystical or spiritual meaning could be applied to Christ: “For you must bear in mind that all things that are written of CHRIST took place in Judea, and in the Hebrew tongues; and in all other tongues but this there is a poverty of divine names” (ET 13b. 22-3). However, “in spite of his use of the historical principle in the interpretation of prophecy, it is going too far to herald him as in any serious sense a pioneer of the Higher Criticism two and a half centuries before Eichhorn” (Wilbur 1972:130).⁸⁸ He never mentions Moses as the author of the Pentateuch. He favoured the Psalms and Prophets of the Old Testament, which he believed should be interpreted in accordance with the messianic view (Wallace, d.a.:428). He explained that Psalm 2 should refer directly to David and Psalm 14 to Solomon. He applied Psalms 22:16 (they pierced my hands and my feet) to David, when, fleeing from his enemies, “scrambling like a four-footed beast over rugged and thorny places, his hands and feet were lacerated – *fugiente David per abrupta, instar quadrupedis, manus ejus et pedes lacerabantur*” (Willis 1877:147-8; Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 373-4):

The Jews prate much about the literal sense being purposely and deliberately overthrown, by our rendering the original word by they have pierced: but for this allegation there is no color of truth whatever. What need was there to trifle so presumptuously in a matter where it was altogether unnecessary? Very great suspicion of falsehood, however, attaches to them, seeing it is the uppermost desire of their hearts to despoil the crucified Jesus of his escutcheons, and to divest him of his character as the Messiah and Redeemer. If we receive this reading as they would have us to do, the sense will be enveloped in marvellous obscurity. In the first place, it will be a defective form of expression, and to complete it, they say it is necessary to supply the verb to surround or to beset. But what do they mean by besetting the hands and the feet? Besetting belongs no more to these parts of the human body than to the whole man. The absurdity

⁸⁸ Henry classifies two kinds of reformer: the one had the heart of Elijah who struggled “for the pure evangelical doctrine” and the other is “a would-be reformist” who has “a fantastical–philosophical Bible–system.” Servetus is categorized to the latter (Henry 1849:161).

of this argument being discovered, they have recourse to the most ridiculous old wives' fables, according to their usual way, saying, that the lion, when he meets any man in his road, makes a circle with his tail before rushing upon his prey: from which it is abundantly evident that they are at a loss for arguments to support their view.

The most significant verse indicating Messianic intent, Isaiah 7:14, (Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel - Isa 7:14 KJV) Servetus does not apply to Christ, but claims that “the Aramæans have come up in battle against Jerusalem, and the prophet speaks of a young woman who shall conceive and bear a son, the young woman being no other than Abijah, about to become the mother of Hezekiah – strength or fortitude of God – and Immanuel – God with us – before whose reign the two kings, the enemies of Judah, will have been discomfited” (CR, 69). For nearly ten years after publishing *De Trinitatis Erroribus*, Servetus seemed to forget his dream of correcting Christianity, as he worked on his editorial duties. In this work, the Pagnini Bible, his old antagonism was rekindled (Wilbur 1972:130-1). It was provocative enough for the Roman Catholic Church in Louvain and Spain to forbid it (Henry 1849:176-7).

His arrogance and disregard for his colleagues as well as his careless manner of speaking made him so unpopular that Servetus had to leave Charlieu, as also happened in Paris (Willis 1877:126; Robbins 1846:57).⁸⁹ The Archbishop of Vienne, Pierre Palmier,⁹⁰ heard that Servetus was in Charlieu, and invited him to Vienne. Servetus quietly lived as his personal physician from 1540 until the 1550s. Palmier helped him to settle in Vienne, providing him an apartment in his palace. Nobody suspected Servetus of heresy nor did they know that he was connected to the heretical work *De Trinitatis Erroribus*, because he lived with a prominent man. In fact, Servetus was so cunning that he attended mass regularly, in order to disarm suspicion. Even the archbishop did not recognise his physician as the author of the heretical book until much later. In order to hide his real identity, “Servetus was acting the part of a hypocrite; for he condemned alike the faith and the ritual of Popery” (Killen 1954:9 and Henry 1849:176).⁹¹ Later at the trial of Geneva he admitted

⁸⁹ Even Bolsec says of Servetus' arrogance on page 4 of his book, *Vie de Calvin*, “homme vrayment fort et insolent, comme testifient ceux qui l'ont cogneu à Charlieu, où il demenura chez la Rivoire, l'an 1540. Contrainct de Servetus partir de Charlieu pour les folies lesquelles il faisait, il Servetus retetira à Vienne en Dauphiné” (Quoted by Dyer 1850:305).

⁹⁰ He was one of his former listeners in Paris and received him into his palace.

⁹¹ “The reformers of that day could not conceive how a Catholic Archbishop and an Anabaptist doctor, could live in peace in different apartments in the same palace” (Benedict 1813:185).

that he had behaved so deceptively because he was threatened by death (*Opera*, 789).⁹² He secretly planned his last book, *Christianismi Restitutio*, while living there (Ford 1860:44).

He dedicated a book to Palmier. In the preface of the 1541 second edition of his Ptolemy's Geography he wrote: "Michael Villanouvanus to the most magnificent, illustrious and reverend master Pierre Palmier, distinguished Archbishop of Vienne" (PG 1541:192. Palmier pointed out a couple of errors in the book and Servetus tried to omit them from the publication (Wilbur 1972:128). He added new maps, used better paper and improved its accuracy and elegance. He was encouraged and assisted by several patrons to amend and produce a second edition (PG 1541:192-3):

For under what other leader would it have been fitting for Ptolemy to appear emended and printed in Vienne than under you, the very leader of the people of Vienne? and a student of Ptolemy? ... Above all he will rejoice when he perceives that so many who are learned in his Geography dwell in Vienne. Among those achieving such eminence are your kinsmen, Jean Palmier, prior of Santus Marcellus, and Claude de Rochefort, your vicar-general, both very accomplished men and deserving of commendation in many respects, to whom I owe as much as those who are students of geography owe to Ptolemy himself.

It is interesting that in the second edition of this new edition, Servetus wholly admitted to the improper and incorrect expressions opposed to the Bible's authority regarding the Holy Land. The main reason why he entirely changed them is to be found in his friends' warnings "on the presumption, probably, that he could hardly have been living on terms of intimacy with many persons of note, both lay and clerical, without betraying something of the sceptical element that distinguished him at the outset of his career, and that got the mastery of him with such disastrous consequences at last" (Willis 1877:136).

2.2.8 Correspondence with Calvin

Although Servetus did not discuss any religious issues in public, he nevertheless attempted to broaden his ideas on restoring pure Christianity. He thought that Calvin, the author of *Institutio Religionis Christianae* (1536), was among the great reformers of his age and was achieving the most radical reformation of Christian doctrines and was the most distinguished leader of the Reformation. Calvin was the greatest obstacle to his plans (Henry 1849:179). Thus, Servetus was eager to see if he himself could win Calvin over to a radical reformation of Christian doctrines. He started corresponding with Calvin, sending him copies of his own writings. Servetus eagerly read Calvin's writings and detected errors

⁹² Servetus tries to defend his situation like Paul in Acts 22-19 at trial of Geneva (see *CR*, 563-4).

in his point of view.⁹³ Servetus corresponded with Calvin through Jean Frellon, a printer, publisher, and bookseller at Lyon. Frellon was a Protestant and a friend of both Servetus and Calvin. He employed Servetus as a corrector, and to translate some treatises from Latin into Spanish (Dyer 1850:302-3).⁹⁴

Calvin answered Servetus' questions under the pseudonym of Charles D'Espeville (Dyer 1850:307; Wilbur 1972:133).⁹⁵ Servetus used the pseudonym of Michel de Villeneuve (Willis 1877:158). These letters would eventually be used as vital evidence revealing the identity of Servetus at his trial in Vienne.⁹⁶ Frellon had no idea of Villeneuve's real name, nor that he was the author of heretical books. What Frellon did realise was that Villeneuve was "full of unusual ideas on many of the accredited dogmas of the Christian faith; and, not indisposed, though indifferently prepared, to discuss these himself, he very probably suggested the great Reformer of Geneva as the man of all others the most likely to feel an interest in them, as well as the most competent to give an opinion on their merits" (Willis 1877:158).

The thirty letters or treatises on his favourite theological subjects he sent to Calvin are contained in his last book *Christianismi Restitutio* and also in Calvin's *Opera* (649-714). In his first letter to Calvin, Servetus requested answers to three questions: (1) Is the man Jesus, the Son of God, crucified and how did this filiation come to be? (2) Is the Kingdom of Christ in men? And how does one enter it and how is this regenerated? (3) Should the baptism of Christ be taken in faith like the Lord's Supper and to what end were both baptism and the Lord's Supper instituted?⁹⁷ Calvin wrote to Frellon (13 February 1546) that Servetus was stiff-necked in mind and lacked all theological principle (Calvin, *Letters*, vol. II, 30-1 & *Opera*, 833-4):

⁹³ "Ipse vero quasi hippomanes hausisset, quoscunque meos libros nancisci potuit, non destitit insulsis conviciis farcire" (*Opera*, 481).

⁹⁴ The letters to Frellon of Calvin and Servetus are in Calvin's *Opera* (833-5). Calvin signs the first letter to Frellon on February 13, 1546, "I am your servant and friend – Votre serviteur et entier amy." Servetus also begins and ends his letter to Frellon: "Dear Brother and Friend–Cher frère et amy" (see 834-5).

⁹⁵ The name is not unusual, Calvin had already used it previously and also to Louis du Tillet (January 31, 1538 and October 20, 1538), to Monsieur de Falas (October 14, 1543), the Family of Bude (1546, 1547), a French Seigneur (October 18, 1548), Madame de Cany (January 8 and April 29, 1548), and to Monsieur de Marolles (April 12, 1553) etc.

⁹⁶ During the second interrogation on April 6, 1553, the inquisitors of Vienne examined Servetus on some letters.

⁹⁷ "Prima quaestio. An homo Iesus crucifixus sit filius Dei: et quae sit huius filiationis ratio. Secunda. An regnum Christi sit in hominibus: quando quis ingrediatur, et quando regeneretur. Tertia. An baptismus Christi debeat in fide fieri sicut coena: et quorsum haec instituta sint foedere novo" (*Opera*, 482). Calvin's replies are in 482-3. Servetus omitted them in CR.

SEIGNEUR JEHAN – By cause that your last letter was brought to me at my going away, I had not leisure to reply to what was enclosed therein. Since my return, at the first leisure that I have had, I have been quite willing to satisfy your desire; not that I have had great hope of late of being profitable to a certain person, judging from the disposition in which I see him to be; but in order to try once more if there shall be any means of bringing him back, which will be, when God shall have wrought in him so effectually, that he has become entirely another man. Since he has written to me in so proud a spirit, I would fain have beaten down his pride a little, speaking more harshly to him than is my wont; but I could scarcely do otherwise. For I do assure you that there is no lesson which is more necessary for him than to learn humility, which must come to him from the Spirit of God, not otherwise. But we must observe a measure here also. If God grants that favor to him and to us, that the present answer turns to his profit, I shall have whereof to rejoice. If he persists in the same style as he has now done, you will lose time in asking me to bestow labor upon him, for I have other affairs which press upon me more closely; and I would make a matter of conscience of it, not to busy myself further, having no doubt that it was a temptation of Satan to distract and withdraw me from other more useful reading. And therefore I beg you to content yourself with what I have done in the matter, unless you see some better order to be taken therein. Wherefore, after my commendation to you, I beseech our good Lord to have you in his keeping.

Your servant and hearty friend,

Charles d'Espeville.

Calvin thought that Servetus had become another man who had “no lesson which is more necessary for him than to learn humility, which must come to him from the Spirit of God, not otherwise.” Nevertheless, he did not attempt to speak of him harshly but prayed to God to save him from errors. Calvin did not have enough time to read Servetus’ manuscript, which had come to him via Frelon. He had busied himself with the Genevan Reformation since his return from Strassburg in 1541. He writes “I have other affairs which press upon me more closely; and I would make a matter of conscience of it, not to busy myself further, having no doubt that it was a temptation of Satan to distract and withdraw me from other more useful reading.” On receiving Calvin’s reply, Frelon sent a person to Calvin and also wrote a letter to Servetus to inform him on Calvin’s answer (Willis 1877:161):

Dear Brother and Friend! You will see by the enclosed why you had not sooner an answer to your letter. Had I had anything to communicate at an earlier date, I should not have failed to send to you immediately, as I promised. Be assured that I wrote the personage in question, and that there was no want of punctuality on my part. I think, however, that with what you have now, you will be as well content as if you had had or sooner. I send my own man express with this, having no other messenger at command. If I can be of use to you in anything else, I beg to assure you, you will always find me ready to serve you. Your good brother and friend, Jehan Frelon.

To my good brother and friend, master Michael Villanovanus, Doctor in medicine, Vienne.

After receiving the urgent message from Frellon, Calvin replied to Servetus through Frellon, saying that even though he was too busy to reply fully, he would answer Servetus' questions specifically and faithfully (*Opera*, 482-4; Schaff 1993:727):

1) that Christ is the Son of God both according to his divine nature eternally begotten, and according to his human nature as the Wisdom of God made flesh; 2) that the kingdom of God begins in man when he is born again, but that the process of regeneration is not completed in a moment, but goes on till death; 3) that faith is necessary for baptism, but not in the same personal way as in the Lord's Supper; for according to the type of circumcision the promise was given also to the children of the faithful.

Servetus, however, was not satisfied with Calvin's brief answers. He sent a second letter, forcing Calvin to read his fourth chapter (355-576), and some sections on baptism in his *Christianismi Restitutio*. He also criticised Calvin for making two or three Sons of God (*Opera*, 486).⁹⁸ Calvin informed Frellon that Servetus wanted to correspond with him. The following is a quotation from Calvin's second and last letter to Servetus via Frellon (*Opera*, 833, Willis 1877:159-60; Henry 1849:180-1):

Seigneur Jehan, Your last letter found me on the eve of my departure from home, and I had not time then to reply to the enclosure it contained. I take advantage of the first moment I have to spare since my return, to comply with your wishes; not indeed that I have any great hope of proving serviceable to such a man, seeing him disposed as I do. But I will try once more if there be any means left of bringing him to reason, and this will happen when God shall have so worked in him that he become altogether other than he is. I have been led to write to him more sharply than is my wont, being minded to take him down a little in his presumption; and I assure you there is no lesson he needs so much to learn as humility. This may perhaps come to him through the grace of God, not otherwise, as it seems. But we too ought to lend a helping hand. If God give him and us such grace as to have the letter I now forward turn to profit, I shall have cause to rejoice. If he goes on writing to me in the style he has hitherto seen fit to use, however, you will only lose your time in soliciting me farther in his behalf; for I have other business that concerns me more nearly, and I shall make it matter of conscience to devote myself to it, not doubting that he is a Satan who would divert me from studies more profitable. Let me beg of you therefore to be content with what I have already done, unless you see most pressing occasion for acting differently. Recommending myself to you and praying God to have you in his keeping, I am your servant and friend—

Charles Despeville⁹⁹

⁹⁸ The second letter is three times as long as the first. The first one is paged 482-3 but the second 487-95.

⁹⁹ It was dated February 13, 1546.

Calvin wrote in a friendly manner, but with clear rebukes for the unreasonable demands made upon him. He also rebuked Servetus for his erroneous views and recommended his *Institutio Religionis Christianae*, in which had already discussed all the questions.¹⁰⁰ Gradually, Servetus felt that he could not upset Calvin's serenity, as he had upset Oecolampadius and Bucer. He added about thirty letters to Calvin in his last book.. In the second letter,¹⁰¹ he scrupulously rebukes Calvin for his view as follows (*Opera*, 652-3 & *CR*, 580-1, Schaff 1993:731-2 & Willis 1877:173):

You make three Sons of God: the human nature is as a son to you, the divine nature is a son, and the whole Christ is a son ... All such tritheistic notions are a three-headed illusion of the Dragon, which easily crept in among the sophists in the present reign of Antichrist. Or have you not read of the spirit of the dragon, the spirit of the beast, the spirit of the false prophets, three spirits? Those who acknowledge the trinity of the beast are possessed by three spirits of demons. These three spirits incite war against the immaculate Lamb, Jesus Christ (Apoc. 16). False are all the invisible gods of the Trinitarians, as false as the gods of the Babylonians. Farewell.

In the third letter, Servetus maintains that the Word, who existed before Christ, became the Son of God at the incarnation, so that by him we could see the face of God. To Calvin he says, "You are offended with me for speaking as I do of the human form of Christ; but have patience and I shall lead you up to my conclusion—*te manducam*" (*Opera*, 653-4 & *CR*, 581-2, Willis 1877:173-4). Servetus then demonstrates his pantheistic system in the fourth letter (*Opera* 661-2 & *CR*, 593-4, Willis 1877:174-5):

God is only known through manifestation, or communication, in one shape or another. In Creation God opened the gates of His Treasury of Eternity ... Containing the Essence of the Universe in Himself, God is everywhere, and in everything, and in such wise that he shows himself to use as fire, as a flower, as a stone ... All accidents, further, are in God; whatever befall is not apart from God. Without beginning and without end, God is always becoming – *Semper est Deus in fieri*.

In the twelfth letter Servetus criticises Calvin's teaching on works and faith and his view on total depravity (*Opera* 671-2 & *CR*, 606-8, Willis 1877:175-6):

All that men do, you say is done in sin and is mixed with dregs that stink before God, and merit nothing but eternal death. But therein you blaspheme. Stripping us of all possible goodness you do violence to the teaching of Christ and his Apostles, who ascribe perfection or the power of being perfect to us: 'Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.' (Matt. V. 48) You scout this celestial perfections because you have never tasted perfection of

¹⁰⁰ "Deinde nihil quoeis quod non reperias in mea Istitutione, si illinc petere libeat..." (*Opera*, 494; Audin 1850:433).

¹⁰¹ This letter was three times as long as the first one: the first is two pages (482-3), the second seven pages (487-95).

the kind yourself. In the works of the Saintly, I say, there is nothing of the corruption you feign. The works of the Spirit shine before God and before men, and in themselves are good and proper. Thou reprobate and blasphemous, who calumniatest the works of the Spirit – *Tu improbus et blasphemus qui oper Spiritus calumniaris!*

In the thirteenth letter he reprimands Calvin for his view on Justification and does not hesitate to call him ‘Simon Magus’ (*Opera* 673-4 & *CR*, 610, Willis 1877:176-7):

What do I hear? The spirit of man suffers no change through sin! But if sin cause change, then must there also be change when sin is taken away. He, forsooth, who sits in darkness differs in nothing from him who sits in light! Your justification is Satanic merely if the conscience within you remains as it was before, and your new life of faith differs in nothing from the old death. God grant, O Calvin, that, ridding you of your magical fascinations, you may abound to overflowing in all good things; but Peter’s disputation against Simon Magus refutes you, teaching, as it does, the excellence of works even in the heathen. The justification you preach, therefore, is mere magical fascination and folly.

In the twentieth letter an interesting account of the true Church is introduced. Servetus interprets the church mystically rather than biblically, even though he insists that his system is based on the Bible. The Origin of the true invisible Church was generated by the Holy Spirit and to restore it he, like angel Michael, is anxious to fight against the Papacy (*Opera*, 687-8 & *CR*, 628-9, Willis 1877:181-2):

The true-Church of Christ, indeed, is independent of the Scriptures. There was a Church of Christ before there was any writing—of the Apostles. But where is now the Church? Ever present in celestial spirits and the souls of the blest, it fled from earth as many as 1260 years ago. It is in heaven, and typified by the woman adorned with the sun and the twelve stars (Revelation). Invisible among us now, it will again be seen before long. We with ours, the congregation of Christ, will be the Church. Towards the restoration of this Church it is that I labour incessantly; and it is because I mix myself up with that battle of Michael and the Angels, and seek to have all the pious on my side, that you are displeased with me. As the good angels did battle in heaven against the Dragon, so do other angels now contend against the Papacy on earth. Do you not believe that the angels will prevail? But as the Dragon could not, so neither can the Papacy, be worsted without the angels. The celestial regeneration by baptism it is that makes us equals of the angels in our war with spiritual iniquity. See you not, then, that the question is the restoration of the Church driven from among us? The words of John show us that a battle was in prospect: seduction was to precede, the battle was to follow; and the time is now at hand. Who, think you, are they who shall gain the victory over the Beast? They, assuredly, who have not received his mark. Grant, O God, to thy soldier that with thy might he may manfully bear him against the Dragon, who gave such power to the Beast. Amen!

Calvin was wearied by all these insulting letters to him. Servetus' letters were very 'full of his own logic' and thus Calvin saw little hope of correcting him. Servetus, nevertheless, desired to continue the correspondence. Calvin sent Servetus his *Institutio Religionis Christianae* (*Opera*, 486; see Willis 1877:166-7). Servetus read Calvin's book and returned it with the supposed erroneous notes on the margins of *De Baptismo*. Later a couple of pages with these notes were provided to the Roman Catholic inquisitors at the trial of Vienne as crucial evidence to uncover his mask (*Opera*, 847, 849).

Servetus criticised Calvin thus: "Since you fear I am Satan, I stop. So then return my writings, and farewell. If you really believe that the Pope is Antichrist, you will also believe that the Trinity and infant baptism according to the reading of Papacy are the doctrine of demons. Again farewell" (*Opera*, xxxi, Wilbur 1972:134). Although Servetus wanted Calvin to return the writings, he never did.¹⁰² Servetus sought other pastors whom he could convince. He also sent another letter to Peter Viret to get his writings back, but it was ineffective (Ford 1860:47). He also sent three other letters to another pastor of Geneva, Abel Poupin. The third letter is extant – *Hac tertia epistola*.¹⁰³ This letter would be presented as evidence at the trial of Geneva. In the third letter he criticises the doctrine of the Trinity, again, and blasphemously calls God a watchdog like the three-head monster, Cerberus: "For the one god you have a three-headed Cerberus."¹⁰⁴ He expressed his resolution to die for his doctrine at the end of the letter to Poupin (*Opera*, 751 & Allwoerden, 1727:49):

I know for sure that I shall die in this cause; but my courage does not fail me because of this; I shall show you a disciple worth of my master. I much regret that, through you, I am not allowed to amend some places in my writings now in Calvin's hands. Farewell, and look for no more letters from me. I stand to my post and mediate, and look out what may further come to pass. For come it will - surely it will come, and that without long delay.

In contrast to Servetus' arrogant antagonism, Calvin showed him God's grace and his patience and tenderness, labouring to turn him from his errors to the truth. We can sense

¹⁰² There were certain notes in it: "From your brother and friend Michel Villanovanus, doctor of medicine in Vienne" (Hillar 1997:242). The notes were written in the first draft of *Christianismi Restitutio*.

¹⁰³ He was a pastor in Geneva from 1543-1556 and had been a Franciscan monk (*Opera*, n.1,750). The date of this letter was not recorded, but it must be dated 1548 because the correspondence with Calvin was over in 1548 and then he sent a letter to him. It is contained in *Opera*, 750-1.

¹⁰⁴ "Pro uno deo, habetis tricipitem cerberum..." (*Opera*, 750). According to Greek mythology, Cerberus was a monstrous three-headed watchdog over the world of the dead, Hades. He prevented the spirits of the dead from leaving Hades and the living from entering. His parents are Typhon and Echidna. For the last of twelve labours he was commanded to serve Eurystheus. Hercules went to the underworld to bring Cerberus back to the upper world. Hesiod describes Cerberus in his book, *Theogony*, where Cerberus is "the savage, the bronze-barking dog of Hades, fifty-headed, and powerful, and without pity" (Hesiod, 141).

that Calvin's patience was now exhausted because of Servetus' stiff-necked attitude. Calvin sent a letter (February 13, 1546) to Farel, saying that "Servetus lately wrote to me, and coupled with his letter a long volume of his delirious fancies, with the Thrasonic boast, that I should see something astonishing and unheard of. He takes it upon him to come hither, if it be agreeable to me. But I am unwilling to pledge my word for his safety, for if he shall come, I shall never permit him to depart alive, provided my authority be of any avail" (Calvin, *Letters*, vol. II, 33 on February 13, 1546).¹⁰⁵ He explicated his views on heresy. Simultaneously, it is implied that if he went to Geneva, his safety could not be guaranteed. The last expression – 'I shall never permit him to depart alive' – has given occasion for numerous reproaches against Calvin. It has frequently been assumed that Calvin secretly had a murderous intention to kill Servetus so that he willingly provided the inquisitors of Vienne with the crucial proofs. A pastor of Belfast, Scott Porter (1854:75), alleges that the expression came from Calvin's personal hatred towards Servetus and indicated a seven-year long secret conspiracy:

Neither can I bring myself to believe that Calvin was a man of high honor or a tender conscience. His keeping the vow which he had registered against Servetus in case of his coming to Geneva, for seven years secret from the intended victim, was a piece of deception from which a generous open foe, even in cherishing deadly hostility, would have shrunk. Luther could not have done it. His open-hearted German nature would have revolved at the proceeding of the wily Frenchman. Had he been in Calvin's place, it would not have been to Farel that he would have expressed his murderous intention, if he had unfortunately been prompted by passion to form it for a moment; but to Servetus himself. He would have written to him, '*Come not near me! Keep aloof! For as surely as I can lay my hand upon you I will commit you to the flames!*'¹⁰⁶

Porter (1854:5) also infers a similar allegation based on the last expression in another article:

I have accused Calvin of keeping this murderous intention secret from the intended victim [Servetus] ... There would be some force in this, if the letter expressing his determination to put Servetus to death, had been sent to himself, and not to Farel, a man with whom it is apparent he never had any intercourse till the day of his being committed to the flames; the man, too, who was subjected to the torturing fire."

¹⁰⁵ The following letter is originally in Latin: "Servetus nuper ad me scripsit, ac literas adjunxit longum volumen suorum delirorum, cum trasonica jactantia, dicens me stupenda et hactenus inaudita visurum. Si mihi placeat, huc Servetus venturum receipt. Sed nolo fidem meam interponere. Nam si venerit, modo valeat mea autoritas, vivum exire numquam patiar" (*Opera*, 283). Brown (1815:26) even suspects it to be the genuine letter of Calvin with six speculations.

¹⁰⁶ Porter was junior pastor of the first Presbyterian Congregation, Belfast, as well as professor of Theology in the Association of the Non-Subscribing Presbyterians of Ireland. On the 300th anniversary of Servetus' execution he argued his three lectures against Dr. William D. Killen 1843: who wrote *The Unitarian Martyr-A Defence of John Calvin in the Case of Michael Servetus* in 1854.

The historian Edward Gibbon, like Porter, also claims that the personal animosity of Calvin caused Servetus' arrest in Vienne as well as in Geneva (Gibbon 1932:314):

1. The zeal of Calvin seems to have been envenomed by personal malice, the judges of Vienne, and betrayed, for his destruction, the sacred trust of pretence of a private correspondence. 2. The deed of cruelty was not varnished by the pretence of danger to the church or state. In his passage through Geneva Servetus was a harmless stranger, who neither preached, nor printed, nor made proselytes.

A last example of these accusations can be seen in Ruter, who believes that Calvin not only had "the most impalpable hatred", but was also "bent on revenge, obtained by secret means" (Ruter 1814:10). All the allegations focus on Calvin's personal intention of killing Servetus. Georges Montorgueil rebukes Calvin, arguing that "Calvin killed him ... [Calvin] threatened his own, fearing that the antique beauty of Servetus' pantheism would erode the haughty empire he had carved out, waged a cowardly and hypocritically war against him which, once the gentle dreamer fell into his hands, became refined in its cruelty" (Bungener 1863:242). Bungener (1863:242) suggests that this is a reasonable opinion:

That Calvin should have spoken beforehand of demanding the death of the heretic, should the opportunity occur, is fundamentally better than if he had acted towards him with more circumspection, and concealed from him what awaited him at Geneva. This better, moreover, has the advantage of clearly defining how the question stood in Calvin's mind. If, on the one hand, it is painful and grievous to us to see him ready to ask for the death of a man who has entered into familiar correspondence with him, the fact established, on the other hand, at least the total absence of all personal animosity.

He continues to observe that Calvin did not intend killing Servetus personally, but hated the heretic who should be killed: "Calvin, then, could not hate him personally, and he may therefore have said, with perfect sincerity during the trial, that he had hated, and did hate, the errors, – not the man" (Ruter 1814:10). Bungener seems to discount the allegation that Calvin wanted Servetus killed out of personal hatred, by indicating that it was the heretic and the heresy that he wanted judged. Calvin tried to save him for sixteen years (*Opera*, 460). It is considered that the charge comes from misunderstanding Calvin. Against Porter's allegation Killen points out Calvin's honesty (Killen 1854:n.,13):

If we are to believe these writers, the Reformer must have been an uncommonly candid murderer, for a man who designs to take way the life of his fellow-creature, seldom gives so long notice of his intentions. For many years before Servetus was arrested by the agents of the Inquisition, Calvin knew that he was living at Vienne, and yet permitted him to remain unmolested. The Reformer was extremely unwilling to proceed to extremities, and instead of desiring his death, tried by threats to deter him from coming to

Geneva. Calvin honestly expresses his own feeling in reference to Servetus, when he says, 'I neither hate nor despise you, *nor do I wish to persecute you*; but I would be hard us iron, when I behold you insulting sound doctrine with such audacity.'

Henry gives the best explanation for this misunderstanding of Calvin:

This, among a thousand other matters, was but an outbreak of anger, a threat uttered in passion; the letter, which was sent the same day have to Frelon, containing an expression of hope that Servetus might still be converted. Calvin had probably answered his communication, and now spoke of the circumstance to Farel. His enemies have made the sentence referred to of vast importance, because they can find no worse cause of accusation against him. They do not perceive that their complaint is unreasonable, for had Calvin desired the death of Servetus, he would have encouraged his coming to Geneva. It is incredible how many fables have been founded on this expression; to what ravings even it has given occasion, and that up to the present day. For us it is a matter of no importance whatever, since Calvin subsequently acknowledged with all simplicity, that he considered the death of Servetus necessary (Henry 1849:181-2).

Lingle leads us to think that the statement is reasonable and not blind (Lingle 1900:8-9):

We have just seen that Calvin, after many years of patience, had come to the place where he regarded Servetus as a Satan who was busy with tearing down the kingdom of God. Not only so, if Calvin really had murder in his heart and wanted to destroy Servetus, there were two ways in which he could have done it. He could have allowed him to come on to Geneva; instead of that he wanted to send a little note to the Archbishop of Vienne revealing the identity of Servetus. Vienne was not over one hundred miles from Geneva. Servetus lived there for thirteen years in the palace of Archbishop under an assumed name. Calvin and a few of his intimate friends were probably the only people in all the world who knew Servetus' secret for thirteen years, and kept it. A word from Calvin to the Catholic authorities at any time during all those years would have sent Servetus to the stake, but Calvin never spoke that word.

Of Calvin's attitude, determined from their correspondence, the historian Schaff says, "We must admire his patience and moderation in giving so much of his precious time to the questions of a troublesome stranger and pronounced opponent" (Schaff 1993:728). We are not able to persuade ourselves that there was in this expression, a particle of deliberate malice. If he had desired Servetus' death, he would not have prevented him from coming to Geneva and waited so long until de Trie would make contact with his cousin. Besides, Calvin wrote a similar letter to Viret on September 1, 1548: "I think I once read to you my answer to Servetus. I was at length disinclined from striving longer with the incurable obstinacy of a heretic; and, indeed, I ought to have followed the advice of Paul. He now attacks you. You will see how long you ought to persist in rebutting his follies. He will

twist nothing out of me henceforward” (Calvin, *Letters*, vol. II, n. 2, 33).¹⁰⁷ What we can determine is that the two letters must have been written in similar circumstances.

After Calvin visited Servetus two hours before his execution, he reported of the interview as follows (*Opera*, 460):

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 admonishing, he burst against me in I do not know what type of rage or anger.

This is a reflection of Calvin’s true feelings towards Servetus. Calvin bestirred himself to convert and guide Servetus to the right way, but Servetus not only resisted his good intentions but severely insulted him.

2.2.9 *Christianismi Restitutio*

The correspondence between Calvin and Servetus began in 1546 and ended in 1548 (Macdonell 1983:132). It is with certainty that Calvin felt that he could not persuade Servetus to return back (Luck 1963:198). Servetus ceased sending the further letters when realised he could not convince Calvin of his theories. Servetus prepared his last book between 1546 and 1553, and sent Calvin a copy of *Christianismi Restitutio* through Frelon. On August 17, 1553, during the trial at Geneva, Servetus confessed to sending a copy to Calvin six years earlier (*Opera*, 734; Cuthbertson 1912:40-1). Calvin confirmed that “Servetus lately wrote to me, and coupled with his letter a long volume of his delirious fancies” (Calvin, *Letters*, vol. II, 33 on February 13, 1546). This was in a letter to Farel on February 13, 1546. Calvin sent this copy to Peter Viret at Lausanne (*Opera*, 843),¹⁰⁸ which was used as crucial evidence at the trial of Geneva (*Opera*, n. 2, 734). Thus, it can be concluded that he had completed a draft of his last book by 1546. During the next six years Servetus rewrote and revised his manuscript, hoping to publish it in 1552 (Osler 1909:31).

¹⁰⁷ Pierre Viret was sent a letter in summer of 1553 by Servetus and asked Calvin’s advice on August 25, 1548. See *Opera* (n. 1, 780).

¹⁰⁸ Trie informed Arneys in the third letter on March 31, 1553: “I should indeed have already sent the book [in MS.] which I refer to, had it been in this city; but it has been at Lausanne these two years past. Had M. Calvin kept it by him, I believe: he would long ago, for all it is worth have returned it to the writer; but having lent it for perusal to another, it was, as it seems, retained by him.”

It can be confirmed that he was resolved to spreading his thoughts through publications, rather than through corresponding with the reformers (Allwoerden, 1727:107-10).

Servetus had to find a printer to publish *Christianismi Restitutio*. Servetus was unsuccessful in securing Marrinus, one of his German friends, as a publisher. In a letter, dated April 9, 1552 Marrinus wrote: "But I beg you not to question my friendly feelings towards you. To what you say besides I shall reply at greater length and more particularly on another occasion. Farewell! Thy MARRINUS" (*Opera*, 835). After an intense and painful search, with the help of his patron, the archbishop Palmier, he found some printers in Vienne. Servetus met Balthasar Arnoullet, a businessman and bookseller and Guillaume Guérout, his brother-in-law (Willis 1877:191-2 & Henry 1849:184). He promised them a bonus of 100 *écus* for each of the printings¹⁰⁹ Guérout, the corrector of the press, had been banished from Geneva due to a sexual affair. He was an enemy of Calvin and could easily be induced to do the work. He knew of the risk of publishing it in Roman Catholic France, as well that it was directed against the reformers' doctrines. He must have known that it was heretical, because no author's name nor publisher is shown on the title page. Arnoullet, the printer, like Marrinus¹¹⁰ before him, hesitated to issue a book without the permission of the clergy. Arnoullet must have had misgivings about printing it, though he insisted on his ignorance about the author at the inquisition of Vienne. With a promise of an additional bonus and under Guérout's importunity, Arnoullet finally consented publish it secretly. He confessed that Guérout deceived him about the content of the book (*Opera*, 752). The book appeared with the pseudonymous initials M.S.V. (Michael Servetus Villeneuve) on the last page. Servetus himself corrected the manuscript. It took three months to complete.¹¹¹ The book was printed secretly in a small house outside the printing shop on January 3, 1553. The full title of *Christianismi Restitutio* is written as follows:

Christianismi Restitutio. The whole apostolic church is summoned to the threshold. Once again there is restored knowledge of God, of the faith of Christ our justification, of the regeneration of baptism, and of participation in the Lord's Supper. And finally with the heavenly kingdom restored to us, the wicked captivity in Babylon has been ended and antichrist with his hosts

¹⁰⁹ Silver and gold money used from 13th through the 18th century in France. 1 *écu* seems to be equal to \$3.75, based on the currency of the USA between 1750 and 1965. See & Durant & Ariel (1965:ix). Arnoullet and Guérout agreed to printing the book provided that "Servetus was to bear the expense, make the corrections himself, sell and distribute the book and pay a bonus 100 *écus* to each of the printers" (Hillar 1997:243).

¹¹⁰ He lived at Basel and was one of Servetus' friends. He refused to print Servetus' writing for being heretical suspect and "it was too much opposed to the doctrines of Luther, Calvin, and Melanchthon to run the risk" (Naturæ 1892:19). See Drummond (1848:34).

¹¹¹ Ford (1860:48) observes it was finished on Michael-mass in 1552.

destroyed. And at that time shall Michael stand up. And war broke out in heaven. [Vienne] 1553.¹¹²

He intended to prove that he was superior to Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and to show them out as false. It consists of Servetus' speculations and suggestions on the reformation of Christianity, thirty letters to Calvin, sixty signs of the Antichrist, and an apology to Melancthon and his followers. In the preface Servetus states the aim of his book (CR, 3-4):

The task we have set ourselves here is truly sublime; for it is no less than to make God known in his substantial manifestation by the Word and his divine communication by the Spirit, both comprised in Christ, through whom alone do we learn how the divineness of the Word and the Spirit may be apprehended in Man. Hidden from human sight in former times, God is now both manifested and communicated to the world, manifestation taking place by the Word, communication by the Spirit, to the end that we may see him face to face as it were in Creation, and feel him intuitively but lucidly declared in ourselves. It is high time that the door leading to knowledge of this kind were opened; for otherwise no one can either know God truly, read the Scriptures aright, or be a Christian.

No one in France could make out what the initials M.S.V. stood for. Nor did they know that Servetus was the author. The new book was stealthily shipped to three centres: Frankfurt, Geneva, and Lyon. Frelon who ran the bookstore in Frankfurt (the largest in Europe), sent Calvin a couple of copies in February 1553. These copies might have been destroyed after Calvin informed the pastors of Frankfurt about them on August 27, 1553.¹¹³ Jacques Berthet, owner of the bookstore in Geneva, had no idea of the book's heresy. Robert Estienne (a Genevan printer) supplied him with the books. He destroyed the books quickly (Parker 1954:101). The third shipment, to Lyon, was shipped, via the Rhône River to Pierre Merrin's shop by a priest from Vienne, Jacques Charmier. Charmier was later

¹¹² Fulton 1989: 89. The original title of the book was: *Christianismi Restitutio*. Totius ecclesiae apostolicae est ad sua limina vocatio, in intergrum restituta cognitione Dei, fidei Christi, iustificationis nostrae, regenerationis baptismi, et cænae domini manducationis Restitutio denique nobis regno coelesti, Babylonis impiæ captivitate solua, et Antichristio cum suis penitus destructo. בשה ההיא יעמוד מיכאל השר. καὶ ἐγένετο πόλεμος ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ. M. D. LIII.”; Schaff (1993:733) comments that the Hebrew motto came from Daniel 12:1 and the Greek one from Revelation 12:7. Zweig (1936:103) says the reason for naming it was “in order to demonstrate to the world that Calvin’s *Institutio* must be counter-blasted by a *Restitutio*.”

¹¹³ Calvin, *Letters*, vol. II, 422-3 on August 27, 1553: “You have doubtless heard of the name of Servetus, a Spaniard, who twenty years ago corrupted your Germany with a virulent publication, filled with many pernicious errors ... Many copies of it had been conveyed to Frankfurt for the Easter fairs: the printer’s agent, however, a pious and worthy man, on being informed that it contained nothing but a farrago of errors, suppressed whatever he had of it ... I had rather you should pass sentence on it from reading the book itself ... The bookseller, if I mistake not, will permit them to be burnt. Should anything stand in the way, however, I trust that you will act so judiciously, as to purge the world of such noxious corruptions. Besides, your way will be clear, because if the matter be submitted to your judgement, there will be no necessity for asking the magistrate to interfere.”

sentenced to three years imprisonment, as was Merrin. Merrin was sentenced for hiding the heretical books (*Opera*, n., 853).

At the trial of Vienne, Merrin was interrogated by the inquisitor of Lyon, but did not know what book's contents, written in Latin, were. The copies sent to Lyon were shipped to Vienne and were burned with Servetus' effigy on June 17, 1553. Only a few copies of *Christianismi Restitutio* survive to this day.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Unfortunately, most of the books were returned or burned together with an effigy of Servetus on June 17, 1553. One copy is *Christianismi Restitutio* of Vienna in the National Library of Austria and the second one is in the National Library in Paris. The third one is in the library of the University of Edinburgh; the Vienna edition is almost complete one. See Podach (1953:47-51). The third one is explained in Wright (1989:263-91). The third one lacks the first sixteen pages, which have been abstracted, and eighteen written pages substituted for them. Cuthbertson (1912: 37-8, 40-2, 51, & 63) concludes that the copy of Edinburgh is the original Calvin used.

CHAPTER 3

Servetus' Theology

3.1 *De Trinitatis Erroribus*

This little book, prepared at Toulouse and published at Hagenau by John Setzer¹¹⁵ in May, 1531, consists of seven chapters of 238 small pages (Cuthbertson 1912:12). Servetus' purpose was to attack the traditional views of Christianity and to restore pure Christianity. This version was also embodied in his last book, *Christianismi Restitutio*. He begins with the doctrine of Christ in this first book: "In investigating the holy mysteries of the divine Triad, I have thought that one ought to start from the man[Christ]" (ET, 2a. 6). "Most men tried to find Christianity "without having any fundamental understanding of CHRIST, and they attached little or no importance to the man, and gave the true CHRIST quite over to oblivion" (ET, 2a. 6). Servetus proceeds from the historical Christ, and proves, first, that this man is Jesus Christ, only a man; secondly, that he is the Son of God; thirdly, that he is God (ET, 2a. 6 & CR, 5). He tries to prove it based on certain verses of the Bible.¹¹⁶ In his writing, he focuses on the humanity in opposition to those who begin with the Word, the deity, and the true Christ.

In the second book he describes Christ as the Son of God in light of Word and the person of Christ, based mainly on the beginning of the Gospel of John. He also states that the Holy Spirit is one of three Persons of God as follows (ET, argument, 70):

CHRIST, the Son of God, who descended from heaven, was the Word by uttering that God created the world. He became flesh as God's firstborn, and was the Son of God. He was both human and divine. God's Spirit, moving all things, *Operates* within us as the Holy Spirit, which is a person of the Godhead. It proceeds from the Son, not as separate being but as a ministering spirit. It is holy, one of three persons in the Godhead, and sanctifies us by dwelling within us.

¹¹⁵ He was a Protestant and printed several treatises of Melanchthon and other Reformers. See Gordon (1910:13-4).

¹¹⁶ Servetus insists that the knowledge of the historical Christ is his first concern and that of the Word second. "The historical Christ is my only master, this man is Christ, the Son of God, the Savior. But everything else that concerns the discussion of the person of the Word is secondary, and it would be wise to direct all investigation towards the historical person of Jesus Christ since all depends on the knowledge we might have of the historical Christ"(CR, 78, Hillar 1997:200 & Hebrews 9; Micah 5; John 2).

His concept of the Word, by whom God created the world, is not that of one Person of the Godhead but of God's messenger: "λόγος means not a philosophical being, but an oracle, saying, a speech, a discourse, a declaration of God; for it is derived from the verb λέγω, which means *say*" (ET, 47a. 75 & CR, 48). Unlike in the traditional understanding, he explains the mystery of the Word as "a kind of disposition or dispensation in God, by which it pleased him to reveal to us the secret of his will". He quotes Tertullian and Irenæus who call it *οἰκονομία* and *dispositio* respectively (ET, 48a-b. 76-7).¹¹⁷ He states that the Word became flesh and is now called Christ, who was a voice of God: "Before the speech became flesh the very oracle of God was understood to be within the darkness of the clouds, not being yet manifested; for the speech was God. And after the Word became man, we understand by the Word, CHRIST himself, who is the Word of God, and the voice of God; for, like a voice, it is uttered from the mouth of God" (ET, 48a. 77). God gave Christ the kingdom of God with power, force, might, and strength when God raised him from the dead. Through the resurrection Christ was glorified and given the glorious power, and could then atone and resurrect all creatures (ET, 54b-55b. 86-7). It is followed by the explanation of the Holy Spirit: "With regard to the Holy Spirit, I speak of an appearance in bodily form, in consequence of the Spirit's descending; but I speak of a *disposition* in us, and the former is limited to the latter. Hence I always say that the Holy Spirit is the activity of God in the spirit of man; and that outside of man it is not properly called the Holy Spirit" (ET, 85b. 132).

In the third book, he expounds the relationship between Christ and the divine Word that existed before creation, and was born by the first utterance of God. The Word "*was afterwards incarnate in Jesus as the Son of God*" and "*was not the Son, but a disposition of God*" (ET, 105). He insists that the Word existed as a disposition of God at the beginning of the world but was not extant after having become flesh: "Whoever believes that the Son of God is Christ will be saved, which is not only his chief foundation but the essence of Christian faith and foundation of Church. But the Lutheran departed from the foundation and never understood what justification is" (ET, 82b-84b. 127-130).

In the fourth book, he tries to explain the mysterious relationship between the Persons of the Trinity. The relations in the Trinity are not between individual Persons, but a kind of expression of God by which God lets human beings understand Him (ET, 85a. 131-2):

¹¹⁷ For more detail on dispensation see Tertullian "Against Praxeas" and Irenæus "Against Heresies".

God, in assuming a person in time past, showed us that the Trinity was to be manifold. The Scripture describes his acts now under the appearance of a breath, now under the Person of the Word, the Person of the Deity also appeared afterwards in various way, as under the form of a man, and under the form of a spirit. And God, when he began to employ in himself those dispositions which he was afterwards to manifest to us in various ways, *by his Word created the heavens, and all the powers of them by the breath of his mouth.*

Servetus continually speculates about the distinction between the Persons of the Trinity in his own style – disposition. He insists (ET, 92b. 143) that he believes in the Trinity as follows:

Yet they all then existed only by a *disposition*, but now in very fact; and the appearance of the persons which then in some secret way were *dispositions* with God, has now really taken place in diverse beings, and thus a real distinction of Persons has been made; one Person, that is, with the aspect of Deity, appearing in the Son, another in the Holy Spirit. And the absolute and distinct beings in which the Persons have appeared are, God the Father, a man the Son, and an angel the Holy Spirit. And just as the JESUS of Nazareth who preached in Judaea is the CHRIST, the Son of God, so the flame of fire which appeared was an angel and a sanctifying Spirit. And just as when I speak of the man JESUS CHRIST, I do not separate from him the divinity of the Father; so when I speak of a messenger or ministering spirit, I do not separate from it the character of divinity, that there may be in the Persons on divinity of the Father. For the difference between the Persons is to be judged in their ways of appearing, not just in a metaphysical plurality of beings of one Nature; in which matter all the philosophers have gone astray; for Scripture never pays attention to natures, but to appearances and *dispositions*.

He also expounds on the incarnate Word which “was united to the flesh, but *the Word became flesh*, because a change was made from the Word in flesh; a change was made from a Person into a being, as if the Person of the Word, when it became flesh, withdrew from God and came to man” (ET, 92b; 143). The incarnate man from the Word is called Christ, as John says that the law was given through Moses and the truth came through Christ (John 1.17).

In the fifth book, Servetus examines the names of God in the Old Testament, and then applies two names, יהוה and אֱלֹהִים, to Christ. He speculates on how and why each term refers to Christ (ET, 96b-99a. 148-53). Because אֱלֹהִים has plural forms it implies God and his Word. אֱלֹהִים as used in the Prophets implies Christ and יהוה in the Law implies the Father: “The more notable names of Divinity are *Elohim*, and *Jehovah*; the one the name of Christ, the other that of the Father, and of these we have now to speak with a view to a

fuller knowledge of Christ. I have interpreted Elohim as meaning God and his Word; and I say more plainly that Elohim was in Person man, and in Nature God” (ET, 96b. 149).

In the sixth book, Servetus shows that Christ is the only foundation of knowing the incomprehensible God by faith, but not philosophical speculation: “As by means of a visible likeness of the Word we understand God, so from effects we argue that there is one cause, from movements we reason that there is a prime mover, although of this Aristotle never had any real conception” (ET, 103a. 160). As John says, everyone who sees the Son can see the Father in him and none who sees Him but through the Son of God (John 1.18).

The seventh book contains a renewed attack on the idea of the Trinity, which would have been introduced into theology by the secular power of the Pope. The traditional concept of the Trinity did not come from the Scripture but was influenced by the Greek philosophy of Aristotle (ET, 111b. 173):

If therefore you consider well, an investigation of Paul condemns their metaphysics. But that I may the better explain this matter, I shall relate the origin of these fancies about the Godhead. Paul of Samosata, previous to the Arian and trinitarian philosophers, being entirely ignorant of the mysteries of CHRIST which are hidden in the Hebrew, by maintaining that CHRIST was a mere man, not God, and that he first existed then and not previously, scandalized the Greek philosophers, who were also ignorant of Hebrew, and infected by the contagion of Aristotle, and forced them to ascend to heaven without wings, where any one who would began to hunt for divinities in his own sense; and immediately there arose a countless swarm of heretics. And I suppose it was a sentence of divine punishment that the Pope was made King at the same time at which the Trinity arose; even as God also raised up many adversaries against Solomon at just the time of his sin.

When it first appeared, *De Trinitatis Erroribus*, was the cause of general disturbance within both Roman Catholic and Reformed circles. The speculative nature of the heresies made commentators consider Servetus having travelled to Africa and deriving his dogmas from the Koran. This suspicion is confirmed by the fact that Servetus adduces proofs, passages, from the Koran (Henry 1849:169). He avowed to make the Scriptures the source of all his knowledge and his reasoning, and attributed the corruption of true Christianity to the philosophy of Aristotle and ignorance of the Hebrew language. The origin of true Christianity, he thought, went back to the pre-Council of Nicene: “He realized that the source of the corruption was a false idea of God, introduced as early as the Council of Nicæa when the Godhead was divided into three persons with one nature, and Christ divided into two natures in one person” (Odhner 1910:10-1). This doctrine of the Trinity,

he believed, crept into the church at the same time when the Pope's primacy rose. It came when Paul of Samosata¹¹⁸ first clearly proclaimed the true doctrine. He claims this was but imperfectly comprehended in the time of the Apostles (ET, 111b. 173 & Dyer 1850:299).

The Reformers were especially troubled by the irregularities of Servetus, because he was considered one of them. Oecolampadius evaluates Servetus' thought on his first book (Willis 1877:72-4):

He opposes the orthodox doctors continually, and uses certain words in an arbitrary and unusual sense. He denies the coeterinity of the Father and the Son, a doctrine hitherto held sacred by all the Christian churches; and only recognizes the sonship from the moment of the engenderment, or rather of the birth of Christ. He even derides the idea of God having a son from eternity, and asks whence the heavenly father had his wife, or whether he were of both sexes in himself? He will only recognise the eternity of the Son of as an *Idea* in the divine mind: the Son was to be, but was not yet, until he appeared in the flesh. He will by no means concede that the Word of St. John was the Christ; yet he speaks of three persons in the one God; but it is with glossing and an arbitrary meaning attached to the word person, and with reasonings which if they sometimes make for his views, are at other times opposed to them, he neither thinking nor speaking as do the apostles, and writing the words of the fathers—of Tertullian and Irenæus specially—from the interpretation commonly put upon them. 'Along with all this and much more that is objectionable, there are still some things in the book that are good; nevertheless as a whole it could not but offend me. God grant that the writer acknowledge the rashness which has led him to speak so unadvisedly as he has done of matters which transcend our human intelligence, and that he may live to amend what he has said. As to the book, it would be well perhaps that it were either totally suppressed, or were read by those only who are not likely to be hurt by objectionable writings. The errors he has fallen into acknowledged, *he will retract* in his writings—*retractârit scriptis*. Perhaps he was not himself aware of their extent, or they were not seen by him as of such importance as they are in fact. But I leave all to your prudence and discretion, humbly commending myself and my work to your favour.¹¹⁹

In this letter of Oecolampadius we can see that he criticises Servetus for “neither thinking nor speaking as do the apostles, and writing the words of the fathers – of Tertullian and

¹¹⁸ Paul of Samosata studied at the Syrian School and insisted on the oneness of the godhead and the real humanity of Jesus. He was a “heretical bishop of Antioch ... His teaching on the Person of Christ was condemned at two, or possibly three, Synods at Antioch and in 268 he was deposed from his see” (Cross 1977:1052). Servetus might have followed the heresy of Paul of Samosata: “I shall relate the origin of these fancies about the Godhead. Paul of Samosata, previous to the Arian and Trinitarian philosophers, being entirely ignorant of the mysteries of Christ which are hidden in the Hebrew, by maintaining that Christ was a mere man, not God, and that he first existed then and not previously, scandalized the Greek philosophers, who were also ignorant of Hebrew, and infected by the contagion of Aristotle, and forced them to ascend to heaven without wings, where any one who would began to hunt for divinities in his own sense; and immediately there arose a countless swarm of heretics” (ET, 111b. 173).

¹¹⁹ It is likely that Oecolampadius implies what Servetus' next treatise is, *Dialogorum de Trinitate libri Duo*, which would be published in 1532 in light of *retractârit scriptis*.

Irenæus especially – from the interpretation commonly put upon them.” Nevertheless, here Servetus seems to believe in the Trinity based on the Bible as well as the Fathers.

3.2 *Christianismi Restitutio*

In the book, *Christianismi Restitutio*, published in 1553, Servetus attempts to summarise all his theology. It shows his later study and reflects on his thought of his last twenty years. Servetus thought that by restoring the doctrine of the pure Christianity in his book he would be able to bring it back to its pristine simplicity. Monsieur Achille Chéreau negatively evaluates it as follows (Chéreau 1879:11-2, Cuthbertson 1912:32):

Far be it from me to attempt to analyse this book, a motley, confused, crude, and extraordinary collection of theological and scholastic lucubrations, which were in vogue in the middle of the sixteenth century, and which is no longer credited to-day, which makes us shrug our shoulders, but under their shadow human creatures were burnt. What one can discover more clearly is that Servetus, belonging to, the Arian, or Socinian sect, upholds there, with incomparable doggedness and unheard-of developments, their anti-trinitarian idea, denying the sacred Trinity, which he treats as sheer imagination—a myth, a metaphysical deity, a dog of Hades with three heads, a fiendish phantom, a monstrous fantasy, an illusion of Satan, and not willing to, acknowledge Three Persons in God. He declared himself strongly against the Romish Church, considering the Mass as a Babylonian imitation and as a ceremony of Satan’s. He boldly declared himself anti-papist, braving, at the same time, the anger of the Romish and the Calvinistic churches.¹²⁰

Like the title of Calvin’s, *Institutio Religionis Christianae*, he named his book *Christianismi Restitutio* to indicate his desire to restore true Christianity (Bainton 1953b:160, Schaff 1993:733 & Zweig 1936:103). His aims were the perfect restoration “from the slavery to impious Babylon, and the utter destruction of Antichrist” to “the deliverance of the heavenly kingdom” based on the knowledge of God of “the Christian faith, of our justification, regeneration, baptism, of eating the Lord’s Supper” (Cuthbertson 1912:23). Two main streams can be detected: Neoplatonism and Anabaptism. Symphorien Champier influenced his neoplatonic views on the Trinity.¹²¹ They are clearly demonstrated

¹²⁰ It was lectured by him in Paris during 1879.

¹²¹ It was popularised by Symphorien Champier, founder of the Medical Faculty at Lyon, an illustrious physician, theologian, botanist, and astronomer who was a typical man of the Renaissance. After studying medicine in Paris and Montpellier, he settled in Lyon, and became a physician to the duke of Lorraine. Servetus became his *amanuensis* and student. He was certainly influenced by Champier’s philosophical humanism and was eventually prompted to study medicine in Paris. See Schaff (1993:736-7). In Plato’s *Republic*: “The sun is the child of goodness I was talking about. It is a counterpart to its father, goodness. As goodness stands in the intelligible realm to intelligence and the things we know, so in the visible realm the sun stands to sight and the things we see.”

when he uses the Idea of Plato to interpret the Idea of God as the Father of Light.¹²² His Anabaptist views came from Strassburg (Bainton 1953b:130-1).

Like in *De Trinitatis Erroribus* he describes the historical Christ first. He pictures Christ as indeed the Son of God, but, as neither co-eternal, nor of the same substance with the Father. He insists that “if there were in eternity two incorporeal beings alike and equal, then were these Twins rather than a Father and Son; and were a third Entity added, like and equal to the other two, then were there a threefold Greyon produced” (Willis 1877:204; see *CR*, 56-7). He says that Christ combined the Word as pre-existed with the Father and became flesh but was not entirely human (*CR*, 15). Original sin was a misconception and infant baptism was absurd, for mortal sin could not be committed under the age of 20. He never admits that human corruption was inherited due to Adam’s transgression (*CR*, 365; Willis 1877:215-6). This was blasphemous in the eyes of both the Reformers and the Roman Catholics.

The book is subdivided into six parts. Part one consists of seven books,¹²³ the first five of which mainly explain the divinity of the Trinity and is similar to what he writes in *De Trinitatis Erroribus*. The last two books are *Dialogorum de Trinitate libri Duo* published in 1532. In the fifth book, he speculates about the Holy Spirit in light of the human body producing a human spirit. He insists that a spirit is contained in the blood. Maintaining that the blood contains the soul of man, he attempts to establish the relationship between the circulation of soul found in medicine and spirit in the Bible (*CR*, 1553 “The Description of the Less Circulation”, 203 & see *CR*, 169-70):

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 the liver and in the veins of the body. The second is the vital spirit of which the seat is on the heart and in 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

¹²² “quas Plato ideas appellat immutabiles” (*CR*, 138-9). For his idea of God’s light, see Hirsch (1980:571-2).

¹²³ Its original title is “De Trinitate divina, quod in ea non sit inuibilium trium rerum illusio, sed vera substantiæ Dei manifestatio in verbo, et communicatio in spiritu” (*CR*, 3). He used the following titles for each book: *De homine iesu Christo, et simulachris falsis* (5-46); *de Trinitate divina liber secundus, quorundam locorum expositionem continens* (47-91); *de Trinitate divina liber tertius personæ Christi in verbo præfigurationem ostendens, visionem Dei et verbi hypostasium* (92-124); *de Trinitate divina liber quartus, nomina Dei, eiusque effentiam omniformem manifestans, et rerum omnium principia* (125-62); *de Trinitate divina liber quintus, in quo agitur de spiritu sancto* (163-98); *de Trinitate divina quod in ea non sit inuibilium trium rerum illusio sed vera substantiæ Dei manifestatio in verbo, et communicatio in spiritu. Dialogi duo* (199-286).

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 was communicated to the liver. The divine spirit was truly drawn into the mouth and nostrils, but the inspiration extended to the heart.

There is a suspicion that he copied this from Realdo Colombo's book, *De re anatomica* (Fulton 1953:68-71). Bayon (1939:100) says: "Since we have ascertained what Serveto's views were with regard to the passage of the blood across the lungs, they can be compared with the opinion of Colombo, clearly described and recorded in several pages of his *De re anatomica*."

Part two of *Christianismi Restitutio* has three books¹²⁴ and discusses Faith, the Law and the Gospel, Love, the Righteousness and the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. It seems to be an enlarged edition of his second book, *Dialogorum de Trinitate libri Duo* of 1532. Part three has four books¹²⁵ and discusses the Regeneration and the Kingdom of the Antichrist, as well as the practical side of Christian faith. Part four¹²⁶ contains thirty letters sent to Calvin. Part five¹²⁷ lists sixty signs of the Antichrist. It also contains his view on the Holy Spirit. He says that whoever wants to understand the 'Holy Spirit', who communicates with us, has to understand the 'human spirit' that is produced in the human body. The human spirit is made "by a mixture in the lungs of inspired air with blood which the right ventricle of the heart communicates to the left; *but this communication does not take place through the middle partition of the heart, as is commonly believed, but by a grand the blood is driven from the right ventricle of the heart by a long course through the lungs*" (CR, 170, Wilbur 1972:146-7). Such views caused de Fontaine to indict him in the trial of Geneva. Part six¹²⁸ is an apology on his view of the Trinity and on Ancient Discipline, especially regarding Melanchthon.¹²⁹ This defence demonstrates his thought quite fully.

¹²⁴ He named it: "De fide et iustitia regni Christi, legis iustitiam superantis, et de charitate" (CR, 287). He named the three subtitles: De fide et iustitia regni Christi (288-313); de legis et euangelii ac Iudæi et Christiani differentiis (314-36); de Charitate cum fide collata et operibus bonis (337-54).

¹²⁵ Named: "De regeneratione ac manducatione superna, et de regno Antichristi" (CR, 355). The titles of four books are: De orbis perditione, et Christi reparatione (357-410); de circuncisione verra, cum reliquis Christi et antichristi mysteriis, omnibus iam completis (411-69); de ministeriis ecclesiae Christi, et eorum efficacia (470-524); de ordine mysteriorum regenerationis (525-76).

¹²⁶ Its fourth title is: "Epistolae triginta ad ioannem Caluinum Gebennensium concionatorem." (CR, 577).

¹²⁷ "Signa sexaginta regni Antichristi, et reuelatio eius, iam nunc præsens" (CR, 664).

¹²⁸ "De mysterio Trinitatis et veterum disciplina, ad Philippum Melanchthonem, et eius collegas, Apologia" (CR, 671).

¹²⁹ Among the Reformers, he confronted only Calvin and Melanchthon who were still alive. Zwingli, Oecolampadius, Capito, Luther, and Bucer had died before 1552.

whole world because of the Arians concerning invisible persons and about the equality or inequality of natures, was an invention of the devil to alienate men's minds from a true knowledge of Christ, and to make for us some tripartite God" (CR, 22, Friedman 1978:97). He insisted on standing consistently on the Bible,¹³³ but neoplatonic emanationism was his consistent device which "enabled him to describe God in some philosophical sense" (Fridman 1978:46 & Wilbur 1972:143).¹³⁴ Although he insisted that the Bible was an infallible, and claimed that one who did not read the Bible could not really know God nor be a Christian (CR, 3-4). Even so, yet he consistently rested his arguments on Greek philosophy rather than on the Bible.

When he begins with the doctrine of Christ in the first book, Servetus consistently speculates about it in terms of a neoplatonic philosophical system that he learned from Champier (Wilbur 1972:144; Hirsch 1980:561-2). He deserved to be called "a sloppy and inconsistent thinker" (Friedman 1978:12). Hirsch concludes on the neoplatonic influence in Servetus' books thus: "To describe God's relation to the world Servetus uses much more frequently the terms communication and manifestation. They occur already in *Errors* but play a much greater role in *Restitution* ... In *Restitution* Servetus accomplished such a transformation with the strong support from Trismegistus, Plato and the Neoplatonic thinkers" (Hirsch 1980:575).¹³⁵

A number of scholars have pointed out the many pantheist expressions that appear in his works (Schaff 1993:736).¹³⁶ One can conclude that the premises and conclusions of his

¹³³ He confesses as follows: "In the Bible I find all philosophy and wisdom ... Pray read the Bible a thousand times, for if you have no relish in reading it, it is for the reason that you have lost Christ, the key knowledge, which you shall easily get again if you knock without ceasing." In other place he also does, "For I endeavor to learn those things which are contained in the Bible concerning God. But the things that I have acquired through philosophical conceptions are of no value for instructing us" (ET, 79a, 122 & 107b, 166).

¹³⁴ Wright (1806a:73) states that Servetus used this reason to understand Scriptures. Hirsch (1980:571-5 & see 562-3) states that Servetus is influenced by Trismegistus more than Plato, quoting Servetus' CR, (144): "His authority was not Plato of whom one would think first in this connection but Trismegistus because of the then belief that the latter preceded Plato." In fact, he agrees with and quotes Trismegistus' idea (CR, 138, 144, 261).

¹³⁵ Calvin also points out that Servetus was influenced by Trismegistus in his *Institutio*, criticising his views on infant baptism. McNeill (1962, n. 60, 1358) observes the following: "Hermes Trismegistus (thrice greatest Hermes) was the name given by the Greeks to Thoth, the Egyptian god of letters and wisdom. The forty-two Hermetic books (mentioned by Clement of Alexandria) were ascribed to him. These writings perished, but some Neoplatonic imitations were circulated in the Middle Ages.

¹³⁶ For more detail see Saisset (1948:593-8, 605-11). Saisset is a very distinguished philosopher of the 19th century French school. He evaluates that Servetus' doctrine is based on the pantheism in a rational way. Servetus says that God has a thousand essences and an infinite thousand natures. He also insists that God himself manifests his essence as fire, air, stone, amber, a twig, etc. Such views are opposed to the traditional doctrine and express his pantheism; Harnack (1899: n. 1, 133) says: "What distinguishes him from most of the Italian Antitrinitarians is that his opposition to the doctrine of the Trinity was ultimately based on pantheism. Modalistic, Gnostic, and Adoptian elements furnished him aid in building up his Christology, which was constructed on Neoplatonic premises." See CR, 128, 588-9.

speculations on the Trinity are based on pantheistic philosophy rather than on biblical interpretation (Beza 1836:163). When Calvin assailed Servetus with this question: “What, unhappy man! If any one treating your God under this floor should say to not be scandalized at such an assertion?” he replied, “I, on the contrary, do not doubt but that this footstool, or anything else which you may point out, is the substance of God.” When Calvin objected: “Then will the devil actually be God?” he answered, “And can you doubt it?” (*Opera*, 496). He thus adopts the view that God embraces all substances. The deity in the stone is stone as the deity in man is man. Calvin charged him with pantheism in his *Institutio* (I. xiii. 20, 147-8):

For Servetus the name “Trinity” was so utterly hateful and detestable that he commonly labelled all those whom he called Trinitarians as atheists. I pass over the senseless words that he thought up to rail at them. This, indeed, was the sum of his speculations: God is assumed to be tripartite when three persons are said to reside in his essence; this is an imaginary triad, because it clashes with God’s unity. Meanwhile, he would hold the persons to be certain external ideas which do not truly subsist in God’s essence, but represent God to us in one manifestation or another. In the beginning there was no distinction in God, because the Word and the Spirit were formerly one and the same: but when Christ came forth as God from God, the Spirit proceeded from him as another God. But even though he sometimes colors his absurdities with allegories, as when he says that the eternal Word of God was the Spirit of Christ with God and the refulgence of his idea, and that the Spirit was the shadow of deity, yet afterward he annihilates the deity of both, declaring that as God metes out according to his dispensation there is a part of God both in the Son and in the Spirit, just as the same Spirit, being substantially in us and also in wood and stone, is a portion of God.¹³⁷

Henry concludes: “That he here threw a cloak over his real doctrine is certain. Pantheistic and Platonic notions lay at the root of his system: Calvin endeavoured to prove this to him” (Henry 1849:200).

3.3.1 Against the Traditional Doctrine of the Trinity

Servetus’ theology, as developed in his book, *De Trinitatis Erroribus*, and later in *Christianismi Restitutio* deserves a closer look. First, Servetus argues that he can find no term ‘Trinity,’ ‘Essence,’ and ‘Substance,’ in the Bible (ET, 32a. 50):

Whether this article does deserve special mention, when it is the prime foundation of all faith, on which depends knowledge of both God and Christ, you must judge for yourself; and whether it is expressly mentioned, is learned from the reading of the Scriptures, although not one word is found in the whole Bible about the Trinity, nor about one word is found in about an Essence, nor

¹³⁷ Servetus says, “Deus in ligno est lignum, in lapis lapis, in Servetus habens esse lapidis, formam lapidis, veram substantiam lapidis.” – God in wood is wood, He in stone is a stone, having in Himself the being of stone, the stone of stone, the substance of stone (*CR*, 589).

about a unity of the Substance, nor about one nature of the several beings, nor about their other babblings and disputes of words, which Paul says belong to the knowledge which is falsely so called.¹³⁸

The view on God as the prime foundation of faith, he thought had been misinterpreted by the Trinitarians. He contradicted the traditional view of the Trinity. In order to establish his own anti-trinitarianism he called upon some pre-Nicene Fathers. He refers to the voices before the Council of Nicene rather than after, being very critical of traditional Trinitarianists like¹³⁹ Athanasius, Cyprian (ET, 23b-24a. 37-8), Hilary (ET, 24b-26b. 38-41), Augustine, John of Damascus (ET, 39b. 62), Jerome (ET, 27a. 42), Peter the Lombard,¹⁴⁰ and John Calvin. Servetus faults Athanasius for his views on the ‘multiplicity’ of ‘substances’ in God (CR, 39, 396, 399),¹⁴¹ and attacks Augustine and Peter Lombard for the cogency of their logic in the comment on Romans 12:36. He asserts that they were influenced by ‘philosophy’ only, when speculating on the Trinity: “A second authority which, according to Peter Lombard, very evidently supports the Trinity is, *Of him, through him, and in him are all things*. For Augustine explains this as referring to the three being: *of him*, referring to the first; *through him*, to the second; *in him*, to the third. But I do not believe that Paul, had he been questioned about this, would philosophise thus” (Friedman 1976:76; see ET, 26b, 41) He was not only against Augustine’s view on the Trinity, but defies him as follows (ET, 40b. 63):

Moreover, notwithstanding these derivations, they say, in opposition to Donatus, that the three beings are equal and of the same power; so that, according to Augustine, the Son is able to utter a son for himself, and a grandson for the Father; and consequently the third Spirit is able to impregnate a Chimaera, and to breathe forth offspring; yet he says that the Son did not beget because it was not necessary. They say that the third being is ours, but the second is not ours but the Father’s; and they say that the second being is united with the human nature hypostatically, that is, as wise, and that the other two are not in Christ.¹⁴²

Servetus concludes that according to him the Word was begotten and that the Spirit was not begotten. God therefore had “a spiritual wife” or “hermaphrodite,” and that “he was at

¹³⁸ “Again, referring to what is proclaimed in Mark: *Hear, O Israel, they God is one ... and there is none other but him*; and the second commandment is about one’s neighbor, on which two commandments it says that the whole law haugeth, and the prophets. Thus among all the commandments of the Law there is no command to believe in an imaginary Trinity” (37a. 58).

¹³⁹ Servetus attempts to attack each of them throughout Book I.

¹⁴⁰ Servetus deals with him in ET (26b, 27b, 28b, 37a, 39a, 42a) and CR, (26, 28, 30, 39, 41, 46, 77, 510).

¹⁴¹ He boldly criticises Athanasius who formulated the erroneous doctrines of God in the Council of Nicene in 325.

¹⁴² He deals with Augustine in 26b, 40b, and 41b.

once father and mother.” Servetus misunderstood Athanasius and Augustine on the Trinity (ET, 40a. 62). He also disregards Lombard’s view on the Trinity (ET, 28b. 44-5):

Lombard, following others, establishes his triad of beings by the passage: *The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob*. If they were speaking of the Trinity in the proper sense, it might be left pass, even if this passage does not prove it. But it is proved by the passage, *Baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*. In the name of the Father, because he is the prime, true, and original source of every gift. In the name of the JESUS CHRIST, because through him we have the reconciliation of this gift, *neither is there any other name under heaven wherein we must be saved*. And in the name of the Holy Spirit, because all that are baptized in that name receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Just as we say, in the name of his Imperial majesty, in the name of the glory of God. And Peter, in the Clementine Recognitions, speaks not of three equal beings, but of a threefold invocation of the divine name. Because there are three wonderful *dispositions* of God, in each of which his divinity shines forth; and from this you might very well understand a Trinity.¹⁴³

Servetus, who opposed the views of post-Nicene Fathers, relies on the pre-Nicene Fathers to support his views. Among them Irenæus and Tertullian were by far the most important sources for Servetus: “Before I proceed further, in order fully to get at John’s aim we must know that the older tradition of the Apostles understands by the mystery of the Word a kind of dispositions or dispensation in God, by which it pleased him to reveal to us the secret of his will. And Tertullian very often calls, *οἰκονομία*, and Irenæus calls it *dispositio*” (ET, 48a. 76).

Although he cites from a dozen ancient authorities, he fails to interpret them correctly: “Servetus’ use of patristic sources was innovative and eclectic, taking half his Christology from Irenæus and half from Tertullian at the cost of misunderstanding both” (Friedman 1978:111). Calvin pointed out the incorrect citations from Justin Martyr and how Servetus failed to understand the views on the Trinity of Tertullian and Irenæus during the trial in Geneva (*Opera*, 498, 522-30 passim).¹⁴⁴

Servetus seeks to justify his anti-trinitarian views by pointing to the corrupted ideas of the post-Nicene period, which was the watershed of power, and in which Athanasius and the Papal office promulgated the corrupt views of Satan. He dated the corruption to the fourth century, the time of the Emperor Constantine and Pope Sylvester, when the church and

¹⁴³ He deals with the opinion of Peter the Lombard in 26b, 27b, 28b, 37a, 39a, 42a-b.

¹⁴⁴ For Tertullian see 522-530 and for Irenæus see 530-33.

state were united.¹⁴⁵ The result appeared in the Council of Nicene, which promulgated the Persons of the Godhead. He resolved to clean the evil elements in corrupting Christianity, explaining that the trinitarian heresy came about (DT, B7b. 211):

At the instigation of the wicked adversary, with the design invented by someone concerning a confusion of natures, we have been deprived of knowledge of Christ; for in that way there will be confusion in every generation, if you call a mixture of seeds confusion. And consequently this very confusion will prove for me that this is a true generation in which man is mingled with God, and seed of the latter with the seed of the former.

The Reformation was regarded by Servetus as the revival of the ancient heresy holding the Nicene Christology, justification of faith,¹⁴⁶ and predestination,¹⁴⁷ and as the reemergent gnosticism in Irenæus and Tertullian (Friedman 1976:77-80). He likens the trinitarian God to ‘a monster with three heads,’ Cerberus, of the Greek mythology, “the monstrosities”, and “the Tritoités” (ET, 38a. 59). He also has no scruples about calling all Trinitarians “Tritheist” and “Atheist” (ET, 21b. 34).¹⁴⁸ Servetus’ own view of the Trinity seems very Arian and Unitarian, and even Atheist (*Institutes*, I. xiii. 20, 147).¹⁴⁹

He avowed to the ‘Persons’ of the Trinity and the ‘eternal personality’ of Christ during the trial of Geneva. But, he understood the term ‘Person’ as ‘disposition’ in the original sense of a mask used by players on stage, and not in the traditional sense of a distinct hypothesis or real personality that has its own proper life in the Divine essence from eternity and was manifested in time in the man of Jesus (ET, 85a-b. 132). When he addresses the Trinitarians, who believe in the real distinction of Persons of the Trinity, he scolds them (Henry 1849:262):

You say that the Jews and the Turks do not worship God aright. But what is the notion you yourself have formed of the hell-hound? To what a monster do you not pray! Calvin is drunk when he teaches that man has no power of free action, and yet expects him act as if he had. You too are drunk, when you

¹⁴⁵ “Quod totum plane a Constantini et Syluestri tempore factum videmus...” (CR, 398).

¹⁴⁶ He emphasises justification by nature rather than by faith and explains it in detail in his book, CR (328-33). For example, “People are said by nature and indiscriminately observe the justification similar to Law from innate divinity with works which natural reason teaches” (331). Servetus maintains that even Elizabeth and Zacharias were justified because they were the parents of John. See 329.

¹⁴⁷ He criticises the errors of the predestination but also defends human free will more violently than justification by faith: “Potestatem, optionem, et electionem liberam nobis dat Deus. Deut. 11. et 30. Iosue. 24. et Iere. 21. et Ecclesiastici. 15... Exemplum aliud liberatatis clarum habes in peccato primi angeli et primi hominis, quod mere liberum suit” (CR, 301).

¹⁴⁸ “Athei vere sunt trinitarii omnes” (CR, 31). Cf. Rilliet (1846:215). Rilliet, a Unitarian clergyman and impartial historian, was influenced by Dr. John McCrie. He tries to re-establish the life of Calvin, investigating carefully all the manuscripts and correspondence of the times, which have a bearing on this case of Servetus. He published his study in 1844 to restore Calvin’s fame.

¹⁴⁹ He describes his view on the Trinity based on Arian views. See CR (22, 37). Mattison (1991:32-6) argues that Servetus was not an Arian.

exhort to the true love of God, and at the same time say that it nowhere exists. But most of all do you show your error and drunkenness in your belief in the Trinity, in your false conclusions respecting the two natures, which so drive you into a corner, that you are compelled to allow that the Holy Ghost might die in a mule, since you have asserted that your invisible Son of God died in a man.¹⁵⁰

He not only rejects the Trinity as both the Jews and Islam did, but also regards this doctrine an obstacle to spreading the Gospel (ET, 42b-43a. 66-7; see Friedman 1978 18-9, 100-1):

How much this tradition of the Trinity has, alas! been a laughing-stock to the Mohammedans, only God knows. The Jews also shrink from giving adherence to this fancy of ours, and laugh at our foolishness about the Trinity; and on account of its blasphemies they do not believe that this is the Messiah who was promised in their law. And not only Mohammedans and Hebrews, but the very beats of the field, would make fun of us did they grasp our fantastical notion, for all the works of the Lord bless the one God. Hear also what Mohammed says; for more reliance is to be given to one truth which an enemy confesses than to a hundred lies on our side. For he says in his Alcoran that CHRIST was the greatest of the prophets, the spirit of God, the power of God, the breath of God, the very soul of God, the Word born of a perpetual virgin by God's breathing upon her; and that it is because of the wickedness of the Jews toward him that they are in their present wretchedness and misfortune. He says, moreover, that the Apostles and Evangelists and the first Christians were the best of men, and wrote what is true, and did not hold the Trinity, or three Persons in the Divine Being, but men in later times added this.

He confessed that he found these errors in Christian doctrine. He found these errors in light of Mohammedan and Jewish literature. He frequently quoted from the Koran (CR, 399). He insists that the disciples of Jesus did not know of the doctrine of the Trinity (CR, 35.). Beza concludes about his view on the doctrine of God as follows: "According to him, God is the infinite ocean of substance – the essence of all things. Not only the devil is in God, as also depraved spirits – but hell is no other thing but God himself. As God is the principle and end of all things, so they return at last to him; and in going into eternal fire, demons shall go to God himself. But it was the doctrine of the Holy Trinity that he set himself chiefly to impugn" (Beza 1836:143).

3.3.2 Inconsistency and misunderstanding the doctrine of the Trinity

3.3.2.1 *On the Persons of the Trinity*

It is not easy to systematise Servetus' doctrine of the Trinity, because he explains his ideas in various places and his thought is not always clear. His rambling explanation of the

¹⁵⁰ Larson (1923:909) also says that Milton, like Servetus, rejects two natures in Jesus and is a pantheist. See

Trinity led John Wesley to claim that he was a Trinitarian (Faulkner 1910:640).¹⁵¹ At first glance Servetus seems to be trinitarian, as indicated by expression such as: “Behold the single, *one*, which you were seeking; and in a most singular way are they said to be one, because in the three there is one and the same Godhead. And so I admit one Person of the Holy Spirit; and I admit Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three Persons in one Godhead; and this is the true Trinity” (ET, 64b. 100). In other places, his view on the Trinity appears different. He does not use the expression ‘Person of the Trinity’ but ‘disposition,’ ‘dispensation,’ or ‘economy’ and treats the Holy Spirit as the same person in God as the Father and the Son (ET, 28b-29a. 44-5):

And Paul in all his epistles says, *God the Father and the Lord JESUS CHRIST; from God the Father and the Lord JESUS CHRIST*. And in the Scriptures there is frequent mention of the existence of God the Father, and of the Son, and of seeing and praying to them; but of the Holy Spirit no mention is made, except where it speaks about doing something, as by a sort of casual statement; which is noteworthy, as though the Holy Spirit denoted not a separate being, but an activity of God, a kind of in-working or in-breathing of the power of God....

... And Peter, in the Clemetine Recognitions, speaks not of three equal beings, but of a threefold invocation of the divine name. Because there are three wonderful *dispositions* of God, in each of which his divinity shines forth; and from this you might very well understand a Trinity. For the Father is the whole substance and the one God from whom these degrees and personations proceed. And they are three, not by virtue of some distinction of beings in God, but through an *οἰκονομία* of God in various forms of Deity; for the same divinity which is in the Father is communicated to the Son, Jesus Christ, and to our spirits, which are the temples of the living God; for the Son and our sanctified spirits are sharers with us in the Substance of the Father, are its members, pledges, and instruments....¹⁵²

He clearly states that the Holy Spirit is not a Person of the Trinity, but part of God’s activity. It is certain that such a view was influenced by the Islamic concept of the one God: “Hear also what Mohammed says ... He says, moreover, that the Apostles and Evangelists and the first Christians were the best of men, and wrote what is true, and did not hold the Trinity, or three Persons in the Divine Being, but men in later times added this” (ET, 43a. 67).

Breuer (1999).

¹⁵¹ Faulkner (1910:640) deals with how Wesley thought about Calvin in the short article: “Wesley makes a reference to Calvin in his defence of lay preachers.”

¹⁵² He insists that it follows the Clementine’s Recognitions. Cf. “Recognitions of Clement”: “Therefore the name God is applied in three ways: either because he to whom it is given is truly God, or because he is the servant of him who is truly; and for the honor of the sender, that his authority may be full, he that is sent is called by the name of him who sends, as is often done in respect of angels: for when they appear to a man, if he is a wise and intelligent man, he asks the name of him who appears to him, that he may acknowledge at once the honor of the sent, and the authority of the sender.”

The term 'disposition', borrowed by Servetus in stead of 'Person of the Trinity', has a different meaning to that of the traditional view. It is a key to understand his view on the Trinity. He asserts that his own view on the Trinity is derived from Tertullian¹⁵³ and Irenæus ("Against Heresies" IV. xx, 487-92), where he explains the Trinity and the relationship of the Father with the other beings of the Godhead (ET, 48a. 76-7). The Greek *οἰκονομία*, 'disposition,' used by Servetus instead of 'Person,' is translated as management, direction, office, arrangement, order, or plan (Bauer 1979:559-60). Servetus uses the terms as aspects or manifestations to describe different 'functions' of the one God, by which, God disposes or manages himself in two different ways for the different forms of his activity: the Son and the Holy Spirit.

There is no thought that the Son and the Holy Spirit are independent or eternal manifestation of God but are 'expressions' of the divinity. He considers the Persons as no less than representative of Being, and they appear in various ways. To Servetus, the meaning of Person is nothing less than a virtual image, not reality (ET, "Heresies", 94a. 145):

For in a way altogether similar we say that the Word in the Person of CHRIST was with the Father from the beginning in the Person of the Word; and CHRIST is the Person of the Word, and the Word is the Person of CHRIST, and there is but one Person and one aspect, because the very thing that shone forth in the Word is CHRIST himself; so that if I have a mirror, although you see me face to face, and also in the mirror, yet you see but one person. And thus it amounts to the same thing when, having mentioned Christ, or having mentioned the eternal Word, you say this: He was the Son from the beginning; because, whatever you may mention, he was from the beginning the Son in Person, not in reality. Indeed, Persons are spoken of because of the absence of beings, and Persons are incompatible with beings.

Consequently, he proclaims (ET, 29a. 45):

"For the Father is the whole substance and the one God from whom these degrees and personations proceed. And they are three, not by virtue of some distinction of beings in God, but through an *οἰκονομία* of God in various forms of Deity ... this is why they are called distinct Persons, that is, manifold aspects, diverse forms and kinds, of deity."

Although he admits that the one God exists, he understands that the different aspects or appearances of the one of God could be called the Son or the Holy Spirit. Willis (1877:64-5) says of his misconception of the term 'Person' of the Trinity:

¹⁵³ Servetus must have borrowed Tertullian's idea here. See Tertullian, "Against Praxeas" (ii. 598).

Had we not our author's explanation of the way in which he understands the word *person*, this would make his conceptions, in so far, not different from the orthodox interpretation of the mystery. But his language here must be regretted, for it is misleading, the word *person* with Servetus not signifying, as we have seen, any real or individual entity distinct from other entities, but property, appearance, or outward manifestation. The second and third persons, therefore, as understood by Servetus, are to be thought of as dispositions or modes of God, the universal Father, and nor as individuals or persons in the usual acceptance of these words, through of them it is that distinct personages have been made, and spoken of as being at once God and other than God, as being three and yet no more than one.¹⁵⁴

3.3.3 On Jesus Christ

Servetus states that Jesus Christ is at the centre of the Bible, of his theology, and all of religions (Odner 1910:18). Historically, Jesus is the starting point of his theology. Yet he is confused with his own explanation of the doctrine of Christ, Jesus, and the Son of God according to philosophy, even though he insists that his theology is based on the Bible.

Servetus explains (ET, 93a. 143) that the Word is Christ Himself: "Reflect upon this continually; for I say that the Word was in the law as a prefigure of CHRIST." In his second book he presents another source to prove that Christ is the Word: "In order to prove that the Word is Christ himself, I was saying that the *λόγος* and *אֱלֹהִים* (ET, 96b-99a. 148-53) were the same thing" (Servetus, "DT", A3a. 190). *אֱלֹהִים* is the name of Christ, and *יְהוָה* is the name of the Father, by which he attempts to distinguish Christ from the Father. Although it seems that Servetus upholds the eternity and deity of Christ when he says the Word is Christ, he also says (ET, 93a. 143 & see 78b-80a. 123-4):

Moreover, John did not say, the Word was the shadow, and CHRIST is the truth. John, both in his Gospel and in his Epistle, says of the Word, *was*; but now, after its being manifested, there is no such Word, but the very being itself of which the Word was a type. For we never read of the Word, *is*, but, *was*. But now there is the Son, JESUS CHRIST, because what was in the Word exists as flesh, and the Word became flesh; that is, the Person became a being, the shadow became light, as Paul says, *Our glorifying became truth*; that is, just as we glorified in the Word, so it was in fact. The Word, which was in the law as a shadow, became the truth.

The Word changed into the flesh and no longer exists in the same mode, but as the Son, Jesus Christ. He goes on, saying that the Word once existed but no longer exists in the same mode (DT, A3b. 191):

¹⁵⁴ The idea of Servetus, who regards the persons of the Trinity as modes, is not invented by him but influenced by modalists – the Sabellians, Photinians, etc. See Harnack (1899:1-113 *passim*).

By the very fact that God speaks, he disposes himself by the very fact of making himself Creator; for he is otherwise than he was before. By the very fact that he is speaking, he is already manifesting himself, who hitherto in the silence was known to no one. By saying, Let there be light, he brings himself forth from the unknown darkness of the ages into light, and presents himself to view in some distinct character. This John calls the Logos, and Moses Elohim; and this itself was Christ with God, and the Word was God, and God himself was the very light itself. Which light, according to that dispensation, represented by the figures of angels, lay hidden until its appearance in the face of Christ. I was right, therefore, in saying¹⁵⁵ that there is now no such Word, because there is now none according to the dispensation under which the oracle was in the darkness of the cloud, in the time of Moses. Again, if there is now such a Word as there once was, where is the oracle, where the tabernacle, where the cloud, where the darkness, where the Cherubim, where the glory of the Lord which appeared there? Is not the fullness of all these in Christ?

If so, the Word seems to be neither eternal nor divine. Christ in the New Testament replaces the Word in the Old Testament (See *CR*, 195). However, as the Word had existed now Christ came in flesh, which means, from a Person to a being or from God to man. He explicitly distinguishes the Word from Christ as well as from the Son who is called man in the Bible (ET, 93b. 144):

“If you show me one iota by which the Word is called the Son, or mention is made of the begetting of the Word, I will confess myself as one beaten, though he has kept my language to the very letter, as Christ says; who when Scripture says the Word will himself also say the Word; when it says the Son, will say the Son; that is, once the Word, but now the Son.”

The same confusion on the relationship between the Word, the Son, and Christ can be detected here (ET, 2a. 6). Who is the Son of God, Jesus, and Christ? He maintains that the Bible consistently calls Jesus a human being.¹⁵⁶ Jesus is “a man’s proper name, and CHRIST is a surname” (ET, 2b. 6). Jesus was anointed by God, which limits Jesus to the human nature (ET, 3a. 7). Jesus is “called the Son of God for reason that the power of God is instead of the seed of man” (ET, 7a. 13). Jesus is the Son of God, who is called the Father of Jesus Christ, but not the Word, because Jesus was designated at baptism and proved to be the Son of God by resurrection (ET, 10a. 18 & 54b. 86).¹⁵⁷ Servetus would distinguish between Christ and Jesus, who would have different origins to becoming Son of God. Christ did not become the Son of God by adoption like us but by “a real begetting by God”

¹⁵⁵ Servetus must imply that “the Word was united to the flesh, but, *the Word became flesh*, because a change was made from the Word into flesh a change was made from a Person unto a being, as if the Person of the Word, when it became flesh, withdrew from God and came to man” (ET, 92b. 143).

¹⁵⁶ “If he were God, he could be God only in a sense in which man is capable of being God” Bainton (1953b, 46).

¹⁵⁷ In the Bible the Word does not apply to the Son of God but Jesus. See *CR* (689).

(CR, 9b. 16-7). Jesus was human, but Christ “took the form or appearance of a servant ... as one among men ... *found in fashion as a man*” (CR, 20a. 32) and “puts the flesh on and off like a garment,” (CR, 68a. 107) quoting Job 10:11.¹⁵⁸ Only Christ revealed in the flesh became “the Son of God because apart from the flesh he could not have been accorded this name” (*Institutes*, II. xiv. 6, 489).¹⁵⁹ “Christ is called a man, since even an earthly king is called Christ” (ET, 3b. 8; cf. 1 Sam. 7.3; 2 Sam. 22.51; Isa. 45.1). Christ is not called God, who is the Father of Christ and greater than him. Following Arian thought, Servetus distinguishes Christ, in his nature, from the Father. He was entirely different from the Father, who alone is God. The implication is that Christ is not God. He also insists that Christ never calls himself God (ET, 12b-13a. 21-2):

If CHRIST is God in that way, there will then be more than one God. Here I propose that CHRIST alone shall be my teacher, in order that he alone may defend me, for out of his words all your arguments can be refuted. To that argument of the Pharisees, the Master himself replies, *I said, Ye are Gods*. CHRIST there makes clear that he is God not in Nature but in appearance, not by nature but by grace. For when he was accused of making himself God, he spoke of gods, ascribing that sort of deity to himself. Also, seeing that he adds, *If he called them gods unto whom the word of God came*, how much more shall the Son of man, whom the Father sanctifies, be called not merely Son, but even God ... For that only the Father is called God by nature is plainly enough shown by Scripture, which says, God and CHRIST, CHRIST and God. It so joins them as though CHRIST were a being distinct from God. Likewise, when it says, God is the Father of JESUS CHRIST, a difference is noted between God and CHRIST, just as between father and son. And also when it says, *the CHRIST of God, the God of our Lord JESUS CHRIST, the head of CHRIST is God* ... For what if I say that Jesus Christ is the great God, and along with this what he himself says in speaking most simply: *The Father is greater than I*; am I therefore an Arian? For when Arius held the very foolish view that the Son was of different Substance from the Father, having also no appreciation at all of the glory of CHRIST, he introduced a new creature, more exalted than man; although he might nevertheless have excluded this and every other distinction, and have admitted, *The Father is greater than I*.

The Father, greater than Christ and the head of Christ, manifested Himself by the Word.

On the incarnation, by which the Word became Christ, Servetus says (ET, 49b. 78):

Let us therefore understand the meaning of John as to how the Word of God became flesh; because God determined his own dispositions to be manifested in the flesh, and all those things which God hitherto wrought by his Word, or by his own voice, are now wrought by the flesh, CHRIST, to whom has been committed the rule and all power, who reconciles, renews, sums up all things in himself. It is also understood in very truth that the Word which was in the beginning became flesh, because this flesh was begotten by a voice uttered from the beginning, not otherwise than as if I, uttering a word from my mouth,

¹⁵⁸ “Thou hast clothed me with skin and flesh, and hast fenced me with bones and sinews” (Job 10.11).

¹⁵⁹ He also says that Christ can be called the Son of God figuratively. See *Institutes* (II. xiv. 7, 491).

produced gold or pearls; for then it might be said, properly speaking, that my voice became gold. For the almighty Word of God was able, without the bond of material things, to change into fleshly substance; and therefore Christ himself is now called, the Word become man, the Word become flesh.

The Word was the mode prior to Christ, in whom God now acted. Servetus consistently argues that Christ is different from God and did not exist before the incarnation. He is not eternal and existed as the Word before the incarnation. The Word before incarnated was eternal, but the Son united with the man Jesus was not eternal (ET, 111a. 172):

There was, then, an oracle, a *hypostasis* of God, a Person of CHRIST, the divinity which was Son to God himself alone. Yet to us CHRIST alone is called Son. The being was future to us; but to God nothing is future. There was in God the very image of a being that is not, but will be tomorrow. For this is the height and depth of the divine *economy*; and the Word, which formerly was with God, has to us become the Son. And it makes no difference, even if you say that the Son was with God; indeed, I say that CHRIST was with God, who afterwards came and was incarnated.

Servetus expounds on the beginning of the Son of God: “The will to beget the Son was begotten in God from the beginning, and extended itself by act to the creation itself” (*Institutes*, II. xiv. 8, 492).¹⁶⁰ The Son of God was born in the beginning as man bearing the essential image of God and became the first-born among creatures. He asserts that the term ‘Son of God’ in the Bible is always used of the man of Jesus, and never of the Word (CR, 689). This is why when Servetus died he shouted: “Jesus, the Son of the eternal God”, but not: “eternal Son of God”.

In a way it appears that Servetus accepted the same God to be the Father and the Son. But this would be as a husband and wife are one in the flesh of their son. In this way God and man are one in Christ and one in Itself (CR, 269). He recognises the divinity of Jesus but excludes his eternity. Like with the Unitarians’ concept of adoptionism he exclaims: “One sole hallucination the philosophers had, which deprived them of this knowledge. They say that the Substance of God can not be mingled with the Substance of man. Oh, pitiable madness! What else is the mystery if the incarnation but a mingling of man with God?” (DT, B6a. 209).

Then how are the two natures of Christ to be understood? He first points out that everyone was blind and confused, because of philosophical thinking (DT, B6b. 209-10):

¹⁶⁰ Servetus speculates whether Christ was an angel from the beginning. Calvin, *The Commentary of the Twelve Minor Prophets, Hosea*, (1845:421).

Besides, the philosophers say that this is a confusion of Natures, because the Nature of God is here confused with the Nature of man. It is to be deplored that we are so imbued with philosophical habits of speaking that we rendered blind in examining the divine mysteries, and wish to seem wiser than God himself. In the first place, this is to be noted: that the term, Nature, is improperly applied to God; for that which is inborn in any being from birth, and is characteristic, is called his Nature. Hence one ought to declare that this flesh of Christ, since it is born of God, has a divine Nature, even until death.

Thus, Servetus is confused in his own speculation about both the divinity of Jesus Christ and his humanity. He expounds the two natures as follows (ET, 92b. 142-3):

From this is discovered the truth of the common opinion by which they say that two Natures united in Christ make one Person, and one Son, because there is one Nature of the Word, another Nature of the flesh; and these two are one Person, because the Word became flesh. In which opinion there are as many errors as there are words; and they do not understand what Person means; and they misuse the term when in this metaphysical fashion they speak of Nature of God, and not, the Nature of the Word; because the being of the Word is a Person assumed in the Nature of God. Indeed, hitherto it ill suggests the Nature of God, which we know not how to call in to court; and we transgress the limits of Scripture. And I shall never take the Nature except for the being itself, which is God.

He says that in ascending into heaven Christ indeed had two natures, although Christ had been only flesh. Therefore, Christ participates in both deity and humanity. His explanation is so speculative that the biblical point of view disappears (ET, 11b. 19-20):

Rejecting these quibbles, then, we with a sincere heart acknowledge the real CHRIST, and him complete in divinity. But since this divinity of his depends upon the Mystery of the Word, let us for the present say roughly that God can share with a man the fullness of his deity, and give unto him the name which is above every name. For if we admit as touching Moses that he was made a God to Pharaoh, much more, and in a way far more exceptional, was CHRIST made the God, Lord, and Master of Thomas and of us all. And because God was in him in singular measure, and because through him we find God propitious, he is expressly called Emanuel, that is, God with us; nay more, he himself is EL. Again, if we are given by God the privilege of being called sons of God, with Christ the privilege will be the broader, not only of being the Son of God, but also of being called and of being our God; for, *Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive divinity, that is, to receive the power, riches, wisdom, might, honor, glory, and blessing.* And there is in him another and a manifold fullness of Deity, and other unsearchable riches of his, of which we shall speak below, which are all qualities that God shares with man.

Both natures of God and man remain in Christ so that Christ can partake in God and man. He is not simply a creature but a partaker with creatures. In Christ, we can be partakers as sons of God. He maintains that there is a difference between the two natures: "But there is this difference, that he is himself partaker of flesh and blood, whose flesh and blood are

nevertheless the flesh of God and the blood of God. Again unless he were partaker with creatures, he could not be said to have become a truly mortal man, though nevertheless his incarnation made him truly mortal” (DT, B8a. 212). At the Incarnation the partaking happened and the Word ceased to exist, but with the resurrection Christ returned to his essential position as the Word as God (DT, B8a-b. 212-3 & CR, 195):

This dispensation of the incarnation was followed by another admirable one in the resurrection, in which the existence of the creature, which he acquired through his incarnation, was laid aside just as if it were an accidental thing. There is nothing now in Christ which is animal. Christ has been wholly perfected and glorified by his resurrection, so that he has returned to the original state of the Word, and exists as God, and is in God, as before. This appears in the figure of the rod, which was taken back into the hand of Moses in the same condition in which it was before it turned into flesh. The return from man to God took place in the same way as the proceeding from the Word into flesh took place before.

The more important event at His resurrection was: “Christ’s body is itself the body of divinity, and His flesh is divine, the flesh of God, the blood of God. Christ’s flesh was generated from the “*cælestis de substantia Dei* [the heavenly substance of God]” (CR, 73-4). The *cælestia* [celestiality] of Christ through the resurrection enables man to regenerate the spirit of man and not to breathe in the incorruptible nature any more like new creature (CR, 227, 232). In Him we can partake in His deity that communicates to us and enjoy with the true participants in Him (CR, 16 196). In order to apply His *cælestia* to each of us the function of the Holy Spirit is required of us who can accept it. Servetus not only would “speak of the Spirit as a divine activity in man rather than as a person of the Godhead or agency of the infrastructure” (Friedman 1978:71) but also would regard the Holy Spirit as a dispensation of God and as not a third person of God (CR, 183).¹⁶¹ Because the Holy Spirit is not a distinct being but an activity of God himself, the Holy Spirit “is called the Spirit of CHRIST, and the Spirit of the Son” (ET, 31b. 49).¹⁶² The Holy Spirit manifests His *cælestia* in various ways (ET, 22a. 35):

“For by the Holy Spirit it means now God himself, now an angel, now the spirit of a man, a sort of instinct or divine inspiration of the mind, a mental impulse, or a breath; although sometimes a difference is marked between breath and Spirit. And some would have the Holy Spirit mean nothing other than the right understanding and reason of man.”

¹⁶¹ “Ergo spiritus sanctus non erat tertia res, sed erat dispensatio Deitatis per Angelum.”

¹⁶² He contends that making the Holy Spirit the third Person resulted from the philosophers who made an imaginary Trinity. See 21a. 33-4.

How can we understand the incomprehensible God? Through the Holy Spirit. Servetus reasons this out in his own way. He begins by speculating on the progressive revelation of God to the world. יהוה, the source of being and parent of beings (ET, 100b. 155), revealed Himself through the Word which was “internal reason and external conversation” of God (CR, 47). Christ comes from the Word as “the Demiurgos, and makes of him the architect and fashioner of the world – *ille mundi Architectus Christus* – Creator, even of the elements from which, intermingled, are educed the substantial forms of things” (Willis 1877:201). This reasoning is based on neoplatonic philosophy. Through Christ we can comprehend God.

Servetus then speculates on the incomprehensible and imaginable knowledge of God who revealed himself to us in four progressive revelations throughout history. The first revelation in creation is “to be premised that God is in all ways incomprehensible, unimaginable; nor can we form any conception of God himself unless he adapts himself to us under some form which we are capable of perceiving; and this the master shows us in John v, 37” (ET, 119a. 184). The second revelation, through His servants, is to be demonstrated in the variety of His names in the Old Testament: יהוה, אלהים, and שדי, all used in the Old Testament, refer to God who expressed Himself through His different names (ET, 100b-101a. 155-6). God, “out of the mere good pleasure of his will, determined to manifest himself to the world through his oracle, as if I were to make my voice heard among those who do not see me; and thus, at the time of the law, he was manifested to all the people” (ET, 119a. 184). The third aspect is similar to the second: “Thirdly: he manifested himself to the Prophets by his oracle more clearly, yet obscurely under the form of a kind of pattern, in whose likeness Adam was formed; since in his oracle there shone forth the original image, or the first figure of the world, namely, CHRIST” (ET, 119a. 184). With His partial knowledge we can understand His nature and being to some extent, though imperfectly. In the fourth or last revelation we see Him clearly and distinctly: “Fourthly: from what has been said above, learn what has been clearly and distinctly manifested to us; for the oracle has come to be flesh, and we have seen him” (ET, 119a. 184). Servetus hardly mentions neither the death nor the public life of Jesus Christ, but theorises about him so as to establish his own system against the contemporary view on the Trinity.

3.3.4 On Anti-Infant Baptism

Servetus also thought that the wrong practice of baptism was a corruption of true Christianity.¹⁶³ He desired baptismal regeneration, but rejected infant baptism, as did the Anabaptists. His rejection of, and views on, infant baptism eventually became the most serious heresies his examiners were concerned with. He was suspected of being an Anabaptist, and of disturbing the peace of the city. According to his argument, baptism should be preceded by the preaching of the Gospel, the illumination of the Spirit, faith, and repentance. It also required the intellectual assent of the individual. To follow Jesus' example, baptism should not be available before thirty years of age (CR, 372, 412-3, 472, 500, 564-5).¹⁶⁴ He maintained that adults of thirty years could be reborn, as Adam had been born as an adult of thirty years (CR, 412). Further reasons for being baptised at thirty years was that David was anointed as king at thirty years, and Joseph was moved from jail to the palace at the same age (CR, 412-3).

Servetus infers that no one was a fit subject for baptism before he had reached the adequate maturity of understanding the significance of his actions. He asserts that there is no relationship between circumcision in the Old Testament and baptism in the New Testament. Circumcision was performed on individuals after expression of faith: He went so far as to say that infant baptism was “an invention of the devil and witchcraft” and “a murdering of the Holy Ghost” (Henry 1849:250; Rilliet 1846:215). Further, he says that infants, like adults who do not believe in Christ, are under condemnation (CR, 534).¹⁶⁵

In the conclusion of the third part of his last book Servetus has no scruples in calling infant baptism “a detestable abomination, a quenching of the Holy Spirit, a laying waste of the Church of God, a confounding of the whole Christian profession, an annulling of the renewal made by Christ, and a trampling under foot of his whole kingdom” (CR, 576, Wilbur 1972:145).¹⁶⁶ He maintains that children who die without being baptised are not allowed to enter heaven (Henry 1849:261).

¹⁶³ Servetus thought that the two roots of restoring the pure Christianity resulted from recovering: “His proposed reconstruction of Christianity springs largely from two roots, the one the speculative doctrine of God, the other the more nearly practical doctrine of baptism” Wilbur (1972:143).

¹⁶⁴ Calvin summarises clearly the baptism arguments of Servetus and answers to them in his *Institutio*. See, *Institutes* (IV. xvi. 31, 1353-58).

¹⁶⁵ Milton also condemned infant baptism (Larson 1923:911).

¹⁶⁶ “Pædobaptismum esse dico detestandam abominationem, soiritus sancti extinctionem, ecclesiae Dei defolationem, totius professionis Christianae confusionem, innouationis, per Christum, factae, abolitionem, ac totius eius regni conculcationem.”

For Servetus, the Trinity was the first root to corrupting true Christianity and infant baptism the second one. The Council of Geneva therefore examined him on his relationship with the Turks, and considered him an Anabaptist (*Opera*, 774). Calvin summarised the reasons why Servetus objected to infant baptism in his *Institutio* (Calvin, *Institutes*, IV. xvi. 31, 1352-8).¹⁶⁷ Against the first argument that he insisted on the perfect baptism, Calvin replies that it would be completed at death and that “it is foolish to seek in a man on the first day that perfection to which baptism invites us to advance by continual steps throughout life” (*Institutes*, IV, 1354; cf., III. xvii. 15, 819-20). On the eighth argument, Calvin replies that “by baptism they are admitted into Christ’ flock, and the symbol of their adoption suffices them until as adults they are able to bear solid food. Therefore, we should wait for the time of examination, which God expressly requires in the Sacred Supper” (*Institutes*, IV, 1355). Calvin answers Servetus’ thirteenth argument, on the matter of infants attending the Lord’s Supper. From the fourteenth to the sixteenth arguments, he points out Servetus’ wrong understanding of the regeneration of infants: “Again, he [Servetus] objects that infants cannot be considered new men because they are not begotten through the Word... the doctrine of the gospel is an incorruptible seed [I Peter 1:23] to regenerate us, if we are indeed fit to receive it; but when we are not old enough to be taught, God keeps his own timetable of regeneration” (*Institutes*, IV, 1357). In the last reply Calvin indicates the following: “In the final place, he [Servetus] reasons that if infants, without understanding, can be baptized, baptism can be administered by children at play as a farce and a mockery” (*Institutes*, IV, 1358). Calvin concludes to Servetus’ objection on infant baptism (*Institutes*, IV, 1358):

Let him quarrel with God over this matter, according to whose precept circumcision was common to infants before they attained understanding. Was it therefore something for children to play with and fool over, so that they could overturn God’s holy institution? But it is no wonder that those reprobate spirits, as if agitated by a frenzy, drag in the crassest absurdities in defence of their errors. For God justly avenges their pride and obstinacy by such irrationality. I trust I have made plain how weakly Servetus has supported his little Anabaptist brothers.

Servetus gave as much offence with his passionate opposition to infant baptism as with his opposition to the doctrine of the Trinity, to both the Roman Catholics and the Protestants. In the conclusion section of the fiftieth book of his *Christianismi Restitutio*, Servetus claims that “whoever accepts the Pope to be Antichrist, may also truly believe that the papistic trinity, Pædobaptism, and the other sacraments of popery are the teachings of

¹⁶⁷ Calvin points out here the twenty objections of Servetus against infant baptism.

demons. Oh! Christ Jesus, Son of God, Oh! Most merciful Redeemer, who has so often delivered your people from this Babylonian captivity of Antichrist, from his hypocrisy, tyranny, and idolatry. Amen.”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁸ “Quisquis vere credit, Papam esse Antichristum, vere quoque credet, Papasticam trinitatem, Pædobaptismum, et alia Papatus sacramenta, esse doctrinas dæmoniorum. O Christe Iesu, fili Dei, liberator clementissime, qui toties populum ab angustiis liberasti, liberanos miseros ab hac Babylonica Antichristi captiuitate, ab hypocrisi eius, tyrannide, et idololatria, Amen” (CR, 670).

CHAPTER 4

The trials

4.1 *The trial in Vienne*

The publication of Servetus' book, *Christianismi Restitutio*, led the Roman Catholic leaders to arrest and condemn him in the town of Vienne. It has been charged to Calvin that he was the occasion of Servetus' trial, but it is clear that this allegation is not based on facts. Before looking at the allegations, it is important to understand what happened before and during the arrest in Vienne, a city under jurisdiction of the district of Lyon. The Cardinal of Vienne, François de Tournon, was elected the Lieutenant General for religion in South-Eastern France. He was a strict Roman Catholic and persecuted reformers, innovators, and heretics (Willis 1877:239). He "was responsible for the murder of thousands of Valdensians and Albigensians during the many years of his rule" (Hillar 1997:265). Matthieu Ory, the Roman who was to become inquisitor of France, was not only trained by de Tournon, who called him from Rome, but "penitentiary of the Apostolic See, and general inquisitor of the kingdom of France and all Gale" (Audin, 429). Servetus was living in their territory and would suffer under them.

4.1.1 De Trie's Letters

A copy of *Christianismi Restitutio* came into the hands of Guillaume de Trie (Macdonell 1983:131).¹⁶⁹ He was a close friend of Calvin, and was living in Geneva as a converted Protestant. De Trie had been a sheriff and a French noble in Lyon before moving to Geneva in 1549. He became a member of the Council of Two Hundred of Geneva.¹⁷⁰ While living in Geneva, his cousin, Antoine Arneys, an ardent Catholic, corresponded with him, hoping to persuade him to return to Roman Catholicism. Considering de Trie's letter of February 26, 1553, it can be seen that Arneys criticised "the lack of church discipline and order at Geneva, and the general abuse of liberty among Protestants" (Wilbur 1972:151). De Trie clarifies the matter, saying that the Genevan church was consistently based on the Word of God and had better discipline than the Roman Catholic Church. As an example, he informs him of Servetus' presence in Vienne. De Trie also tells his cousin about Servetus' heresy. The letter was enclosed with the first eight pages of Servetus' book,

¹⁶⁹ De Trie was surprised that the Roman Catholic authorities of France "tolerated such a blasphemer as its author, Servetus" (Killen 1843:10).

¹⁷⁰ "He was son-in-law of Guillaume de Budé, the noted French humanist and founder of the Collège de France" (Wilbur 1972:150).

Christianismi Restitutio (title page, contents, and the first four pages) (*Opera*, 835-6, Hillar 1997:271-2):

My dear cousin, I express my sincere thanks for your beautiful admonishments which you made trying to brief me on the situation here. I do not doubt that they came from your feelings of deep friendship. Through I am not as versed in letters as you are I would like to clarify the points and articles which you put forward. God gave me enough knowledge that I could answer you this: I am not so ignorant not to know that Jesus Christ is the head of the Church from whom she cannot be separated for her life and prosperity, and that she should be based only on the God's truth contained in the sacred Scripture. Therefore I shall consider all your arguments about the Church a fantasy if they do not have Jesus Christ as the whole authority and the word of God as their foundation and substance. Without this all your statements amount to nothing. I draw your attention to the liberty which use in our correspondence and it is not for the purpose of maintaining my cause, but also give you the occasion to rethink your own. But to make it short I wonder how can you reproach me, among other things, that we do not have here either ecclesiastic discipline or order and those who teach us have introduced a license to bring confusion to everything I see, however, (thank God) that the vices are corrected better here than by your regulations. And as far as doctrine and religion are concerned, though we have more freedom here than you do, nevertheless we would not suffer that the name of God be blasphemed and that the wrong doctrines and opinions be spread without repression.¹⁷¹

Opera, 836-8, Willis 1877:236-8:

And I can give you an instance, which I must say, I think tends to your confusion. It is this: that a certain heretic is countenanced among you, who ought to be burned alive, wherever he might be found. And when I say a heretic, I refer to a man who deserves to be as summarily condemned by the Papist, as he is by us. For through differing in many things, we agree in believing that in the sole essence of God there be three persons, and that his Son, who is his Eternal Wisdom, was engendered by the Father before all times, and has had [imparted to him] his Eternal virtue, which is the Holy Spirit but when a man appears who calls the Trinity we all believe in, a Cerberus and Monster of Hell, who disgorges all the villanics it is possible to imagine, against everything Scripture teaches of the Eternal generation of the Son of God, and mocks besides open-mouthed at all that the ancient doctors of the Church have said—I ask you in what regard you would have such a man? ... I must speak freely: What shame is it not that they are put to death among you who say that one God only is to be invoked in the name of Christ; that there is no service acceptable to God other than that which He has approved by His word and that all the pictures and images which men make are but so many idols which profane His majesty? What shame, say I, is it, not, that such persons are not only put to death in no easy and simple way, but are cruelly burned alive? Nevertheless, there is one living among you who calls Jesus Christ an idol; who would destroy the foundations of the faith who condemns

¹⁷¹ De Trie sent three letters to Arneys, which were discovered by Abbé D'Artigny in 1749. They are written in Calvin's *Opera*, 835-8, 840-4 and in the appendix of Dyer's book, (1850) 545-50; Weiss (1908:23) assumes that the letter was sent when the Genevans were sorry about five French young men who had been condemned by the French inquisitors and burned at the stake on February 18, 1553.

the baptism of little children, and calls the rite a diabolical invention. Where, I pray you, is the zeal to which you make pretence; where are your guardians and that fine hierarchy of which you boast so much? The man I refer to has been condemned in all the Churches you hold in such dislike, but is suffered to live unmolested among you, to the extent of even being permitted to print books full of such blasphemies as I must not speak of further. He is a Spanish-Portuguese, Michael Servetus by name, though he now calls himself Villeneuve, and practises as a physician. He lived for some time at Lyons, and now resides at Vienne, where the book, I speak of was printed by one Balthasar Arnoullet. That you may not think I speak of mere hearsay I send you the first few leaves as a sample, for your assurance. You say that our books, which contain nothing but the purity and simplicity of Holy Scripture, infect the world; yet you brew poisons among you which go to destroy the Scriptures and all you hold as Christianity. I have been longer than I thought; but the enormity of the case causes me to exceed. I need not, I imagine, go into particulars; I only pray you to put it somewhat seriously to your conscience, and conclude for yourself, to the end that when you appear before the Great Judge you may not be condemned. For, to say it in a word, we have here no subject of difference or debate, and ask but this: That God himself may be heard. Concluding for the present, I pray that He may give you ears to hear, and a heart to obey, having you at all times in His holy keeping.

(Signed) Guillaume Trie.

Geneva, this 26th of February [1553].

De Trie could have commenced his letter with an answer as to why he should not return to the Roman Catholic Church. Instead, he immediately brings up how the Roman Catholic Church was lay in the matter of the heretic in their midst. De Trie accuses Servetus as a certain heretic who should be burned alive. Servetus calles the Trinity a three-head watchdog, Cerberus, Jesus Christ an idol, and infant baptism a diabolical invention. He divulges Michael Servetus' real name, that he was using an alias, Villeneuve, and that he came from Spain. Just as his cousin attacked the reformed church of Geneva, so de Trie embarrasses the Roman Church.

Arneys passed the letter from his cousin, along with the pages of Servetus' book, to the authorities of Lyon. De Trie' letter was thus the direct, unsuspecting, cause of Servetus' arrest, having unconsciously supplied information to the court, revealing who Servetus was, what he had done, and where he lived. Arneys divulged "that this was not only a detestable heresy, but that it tended to subvert Christianity itself" (Ford 1860:50). One of the authorities conveyed the letter and attachments to the Inquisitor of Lyon, the Dominican friar, Matthieu Ory, and to Bautier, Vicar-General, who immediately proceeded with the case.

Ory wrote a letter to a subordinate of Cardinal Tournon, sieur de Villars on March 12, 1553. In the letter he asked him to act secretly on the writings (*Opera*, 838-9, Hillar 1997:274):

I want to inform you in a high secret about certain books that are being printed at Vienne and which contain execrable blasphemies against the divinity of Jesus Christ and the Holy Trinity whose author and printer are in the region. The Reverend Vicar and I have seen the book and we have agreed that one of us or we both should go and talk to the Monseigneur in order to give the full account of the affair and on our way back to give the proper orders by Monseigneur de Maugiron, Vice bailiff and the Judge. The Reverend Vicar writes to you about this in such a secret that your left hand should not know what your right hand is doing. We ask you only to ask orally Monseigneur the Cardinal if he knows a certain physician named Vilanovanus and a printer Arnoullet, because the matter concerns them both.

The subordinate of the Cardinal, de Villars, sent for the Vicar-General of Lyon, Bautier and Louis Arzellier, the General Vicar of Archbishop of Vienne, asking for a meeting to proceed on the issue. They determined to proceed with the case secretly after a long conference. They sent a letter on March 15, 1553 to Monsieur de Maugiron, the Lieutenant General¹⁷² of the Dauphiné, who commissioned Arzellier to investigate the case (*Opera*, 839-40, Hillar 1997:274-5):

Monsieur, I have called the vicar of Vienne, the carrier of this letter, to come here and discuss the matter which, as you will see, is of great importance, and I have instructed him to inform you so you could give proper orders which the case merits. And I am convinced, as I have indicated to the vicar, that you should call the vice bailiff so he also would do, from his side, everything what you order and consider necessary. And I have no doubt that he will perform well his duty. And since I have amply discussed the matter and explained my opinion to the vicar, what he will report to you, there is no need for me to make a long discourse, so I will tell only that the matter requires chiefly two things: one is that it requires extreme diligence and the second is that the matter should be kept under the strictest possible secrecy. I am sure of the zeal which you have and that you will not spare even your own son in this matter for the honor of God and his Church, I need say no more.¹⁷³

4.1.2 Servetus suspected

In order to provide all the evidence to the Royal Prospector, Bautier, the Vicar General of Lyon collected Ory's letter, the letter of Cardinal de Tournon, along with the four pages of the *Christianismi Restitutio*. On March 16, 1553 Louis Arzellier and Anthony de la Court,

¹⁷² Its functions "were military, political, administrative, and, on special occasions, judicial also" (Guizot 1868:n. 1, 305).

¹⁷³ The title of this letter is "Lettre du Cardinal de Tournon à Monsieur de Maugiron Lietenant Général en Dauphiné."

Vice Bailiff, of de Maugiron, called upon the Peyrollier, chief official. The Royal Prospector, Bautier, gave him his deposition, saying therein that a certain Michael Servetus, also called Villeneuve, should be detained in Vienne. Furthermore it was expressed that Ory had examined the heretical four pages, and that the Cardinal de Tournon appraised Monsieur de Maugiron to treat this case with secrecy and promptness (Audin 1850:438-9):

That about fifteen days since, certain letters had been received from Geneva, addressed to a person at Lyons, from which it appeared that, at Geneva, they were greatly surprised, that a certain M. Michael Servetus, alias, de Villeneuve, a Portuguese Spaniard, was here tolerated, in face of reasons more fully specified in said letters: that from said Geneva had been received four leaves of a book composed by said Villeneuve; that M. Ory, inquisitor of the faith, having examined them in the presence of himself, (Bautier), had become assured that they are heretical, and had written, in consequence, to the sieur de Villeneuve, auditor of his lordship, cardinal de Tournon; that said deponent was also there present, when the cardinal, having sent for the general vicar of Vienne, recommended to him charged him to give orders for the verification and correction of the above, and wrote concerning it to his lordship, de Maugiron, to aid therein, and send for the vice bailiff, in order that consultation might be had, and measures taken, the most promptly possible.

The judges were ordered to meet at the house of Monsieur de Maugiron. Simultaneously, Louis Arzellier, the General Vicar, and Anthony de la Court, the Vice Bailiff, and the secretary of Monsieur de Maugiron, the Lieutenant General of the Dauphiné, sent a message to Michel de Villeneuve, that they had something important to say to him. They informed him that they had been suspecting him of heresy and ordered him to destroy all his books, documents, and notes. When he was summoned before the Inquisition of Vienne, Servetus, using the name Villeneuve, “replied that he had lived long in Vienne on good terms with the clergy and professor of theology, and had never until now been suspected of heresy” (Willis 1877:243). They gave him two hours to appear and this gave him enough time to destroy all suspicious evidence – books, documents, and notes (*Opera*, 749). Then Servetus allowed Louis Arzellier, Anthony de la Court, and the secretary of Monsieur de Maugiron to search his room. Although they searched his lodging, it was in vain.¹⁷⁴ They could not connect Michel de Villeneuve to Servetus.

The next day, on March 17, the judges summoned the corrector, Guérout, instead of Arnoullet, the printer, who at that time was on business at Toulouse. They asked Guérout

¹⁷⁴ They could only find two copies of *Apologetica Disceptatio pro Astrologia*. See Hillar (1997:275) & Mattison (1991:31).

what sort of books they printed in the last eighteen months. He denied all charges, and after some long interrogations they could not gain sufficient evidence from him. They searched his house and the printing house, but with no success. The servants and their families in the employment of Arnoullet were examined next, but to no avail. Even the workmen of the printing house and their families denied that the four leaves shown to them had been printed there.

The following day, on March 18, Arnoullet, who had returned from Toulouse, was instantly summoned to appear before the judges. He denied that he had printed the pages. Based on the testimonies, “the material supplied did not yet satisfy the inquisitor, because there was no proof that Villanovanus was Servetus, nor that he was the author of the *Restitutio*” (Bainton 1953b:157). The judges queried Pierre Palmier about Servetus, his physician, but he had no idea of his book and identity except his name and profession and suggested Ory travel to Vienne. Palmier invited Ory to discuss the heresy issue and they agreed on the need for more evidence against the physician Villeneuve.

Ory, the inquisitor of Lyon, did not give up the investigation, but demanded that Arneys submit the complete book, which was with his cousin in Geneva. Arneys informed de Trie of this request,¹⁷⁵ De Trie was surprised by the letter of inquiry and must have been confused. He asked Calvin for the complete copy, but Calvin not only refused, but also could not give it to him. Calvin had earlier sent it to Peter Viret in Lausanne two years previous (*Opera*, 843). On March 30, de Trie wrote a third letter, enclosing a copy of Calvin’s book *Institutio Religionis Christianae*, which had Servetus’ notes written in the margins.

De Trie forwarded several autographed letters of Servetus on March 26, adding his thoughts as follows (*Opera*, 840-2, Hillar 1997:275-6):

My dear cousin. When I wrote to you the letter which you communicated to those who are in charge, I did not expect that the matter should go so far. My intention was only to demonstrate to you the zeal and devotion of those who call themselves pillars of the Church in spite of the fact that they suffer such a disorder among themselves and yet persecute so harshly the poor Christians who simply wish to follow God. Since the example was well known and I was aware of it, it seemed to me that the occasion merited mentioning it in my letter and to treat the matter accordingly. Perhaps, since you declared publicly what I intended privately, God wants that it serve to purge Christianity of such trash,

¹⁷⁵ Willis (1877:245), Mackinnon (1962:138) & Bainton (1953b:156) suggest that Ory dictated the letter to Arneys. Unfortunately, it was not extant.

or mortal plague. If the intention is to use the case as you say, it seems to me that the matter should be still easier than to provide you with a copy of the printed book which I cannot give you, since I will place in your hands, to convince you, two dozen pieces of writings by the same person in question where a portion of his heresies is contained. If you put before him the printed book, he could deny its authorship, which he will not be able to do with his own hand written writings. Thus the people you mention, after having the matter proved, will have no excuse if they conceal or differ in providing the evidence. All the rest is proven by the book as well as by the other treatises written by the same hand of the author. But I have to confess that it was with big trouble that I obtained from Monsieur Calvin the material which I am sending. And it is not because he does not wish that such blasphemies were not repressed, but because it seems to him that his duty as one who does not have the sword of justice in his hands, is rather to convince heretics by the doctrine than to persecute them by such a means. But I insisted on him reproaching him for the neglect which he could impart to me if he did not aid me. So in the end he agreed to give what you see. Besides, I hope in the future when the case makes progress, to recover from him a bale of paper with what the fellow had printed. For the time being, however, I think you are well provided with pretty good evidence and there is no need for anything more in order to be able to seize that person and submit him to a trial. As for me, I pray God that he would open the eyes of those who discourse wrongly so that they might learn to judge better the desire by which we are moved. I gather from your letter you do not wish to enter into a discourse on the above matter. I leave it in order not to anger you, hoping nevertheless that God in the end will show you that I did not take lightly the part which I took. Recommending myself to your good grace, and praying that God may have you in his.

Geneva, March 26.

De Trie was surprised that the private correspondences had gone so far. He never intended for his personal letter to be used to arrest Servetus.

There have been several allegations that involve Calvin. It has been argued that Calvin handed over to de Trie the two dozen letters of Servetus which were crucial evidence in the trial of Vienne, in spite of the confidentiality between Calvin and Servetus (Dyer 1850:317-8).¹⁷⁶ Porter sharply criticises Calvin for providing pages 421-424 of *De Baptismo* with the letters (Porter 1854:13). However, Calvin did not break the confidentiality without permission. Killen concludes as follows on the blame directed against Calvin for revealing the private letters (Killen 1843:12):

The letter which passed between such parties must, verily, have been exceedingly confidential. But this is not all. Mr. Porter cannot deny that the very letters which Calvin gave to Trie had been ALREADY PRINTED BY SERVETUS HIMSELF with a view to publication. What then becomes of the

¹⁷⁶ Dyer (1850:317-8) introduces some information in the letters in his book and is in favour of Calvin. But Porter (1854:13) stands against Calvin, exactly introducing the number of letters sent by Servetus as twenty-seven.

charge of betraying ‘the *secret trust* of a private correspondence?’ when Servetus, without the permission of Calvin, published these letters, was not Calvin at liberty, without the permission of Servetus, to make what use he pleased of the autographs? If there was any breach of faith, it was undoubtedly committed by the Spaniard heresiarch.

The reluctantly sent published letters were not confidential. Besides, the letters conveyed were sent to Calvin after he had requested to terminate the communication with Servetus. Calvin did not divulge that the author of the heretical book, *Christianismi Restitutio*, was Servetus or Villeneuve, even though he had published the copy that had been given to Calvin seven years earlier. Calvin also knew that he was in Vienne. It is hard to believe that he was bent on disclosing his identity. He did not intend to reveal the author at all.

Another allegation states that de Trie was not the author of his letters, but Calvin. Willis asserts that Calvin, as the supposed author of the letters, dictated them on the assumption that de Trie had shown him his letters (Willis 1877:235-8):

“Trie would seem to have been in the habit of showing his letters to Calvin, and of having said and advice from him in answering them; Calvin, it was said, upon occasion even dictating the epistles in reply. But now he could use the neophyte in his own as well as the general behalf, and set about the business forthwith under cover of a letter from the convertite Trie to his relation Arneys.”

Wright also imagines that “Trie communicated Arney’s letters to Calvin, who dictated answers to them, so that they are, and Mr. D’Artigny, who published them from originals, calls them, Calvin’s letters under the name of William Trie. By the means of this Trie, Calvin raised a persecution against Servetus at Vienne” (Wright 1806a:132). Another scholar, Tulloch (1860:138-9), also speculates on Calvin’s possible authorship:

The special blame of Calvin in the whole matter is very much dependent upon the view take of his previous relation to the accusation and trial of Servetus by the Inquisition at Vienne. If the evidence, of which Dyer has made the most, were perfectly conclusive, that the Reformer, through a creature of his own of the name of Trie, was really the instigator, from the beginning, of the proceedings against Servetus,—that from Geneva, in short, he schemed, with deep-laid purpose, the rule of the latter, who was then quietly come into his possession, furnished the Inquisition with evidence of the heretic’s opinion,—if we were compelled to believe all this, then the atrocity of Calvin’s conduct would stand unrelieved by the sympathy of his fellow-reformers, and would not only not admit of defence, but would present one of the blackest pictures of treachery that even the history of religion disclose. The evidence does not seem satisfactory, although it is not without certain features of suspicion. There can

be no doubt, however, that Calvin was so far privy, through Trie, to the proceedings of the Inquisition, and that he heartily approved of them.¹⁷⁷

As to Calvin's authorship Dyer (1850:314) examines another aspect of it as follows:

On the other hand, the Abbé d'Artigny¹⁷⁸ goes farther than the evidence warrants, in positively asserting that Trie's letter was written at Calvin's dictation, and in calling it Calvin's letter in the name of Trie. It is just possible that Trie may have written it without Calvin's knowledge; and the latter is therefore entitled to the benefit of the doubt. He cannot be absolutely proved to have taken the first step in delivering Servetus into the fangs of the Roman Catholic inquisition; but what we shall now have to relate will show that he at least aided and abetted it.

However, it was de Trie who started the private correspondence with his cousin Arneys. It is highly improbable that Calvin dictated de Trie's private letter from personal hatred and to have revenge. De Trie did not require Calvin's aid. He was a French noble, intelligent, and a member of the Council of Two Hundred. There is no physical proof that Calvin dictated the letter. Nobody can prove the dictation, except with great presumptions. This is based on the fact that de Trie was a close friend of Calvin, and knew that Calvin knew Servetus' identity.

As Cunningham (1989:322) says, Calvin willingly did what he believed and thought was lawful but did not hide like Servetus:

All that Calvin ever said or did in the case of Servetus, is fully explained by his conviction of the lawfulness and duty of putting heretics and blasphemers to death; and by his uncompromising determination to maintain, in every way he reckoned lawful, the interests of God's truth, and to discharge his won obligations, combined with the too prevalent habit of the age to indulge in railing and abuse against all who were dealt with as opponents.

This is why Guizot (1868:308-9) clearly concludes that the allegations were without proof and are vain as well as erroneous:

His hesitation as to whether he ought to give up the papers and allow them to be sent to Lyons, shows that he had some doubt as to the moral rectitude of his conduct; but it shows an extraordinary misapprehension of his character to imagine that this hesitation was an act of hypocrisy, and that the surrender of the papers was a piece of premeditated perfidy. There are no errors, or rather no vices, with which it is so impossible to charge Calvin as with untruth and hypocrisy. During the whole course of his life he openly avowed his thoughts

¹⁷⁷ Wilbur (1972:153-6) also charges Calvin for dealing with de Trie as Jacob had deceitfully dealt with Esau.

¹⁷⁸ He first found letters of de Trie and texts of the trial of Servetus at Vienne from the Records of the Court in the archives of Vienne in 1749 before the French Revolution on November 21, 1793. He contends that Calvin took materials for Servetus' life from the undoubted archives of the Archbishop of Vienne. See Drummond (1848:31-2).

and acknowledged his actions; he left his native country for ever, and the country of his adoption for a long period, just because he was resolved to assert his opinions, and to act according to his opinions.

Such conjectures result from the premature judgement that Calvin was the direct cause of Servetus' exposure by providing the crucial evidence to the Roman inquisitor. Bolsec argues that Calvin wrote a letter to the Cardinal of Vienne, François de Tournon to report that Servetus was Villeneuve. Castellio also contends that Calvin informed the Cardinal Tournon, who "went through Geneva on September 19, 1552," that Servetus should be burned because he was a heretic (Castellio 1935:n., 38, 283; see *Opera*, vol. XIV, 355). In addition, Wallace alleges that the proofs accusing Servetus were found in the writings of De la Roche, Allowerden, Mosheim, Bock, and Trechsel (Wallace, d.a.:433). Cunningham (1989:324) discharges the allegation against Calvin as follows:

He [Wallace] says that abundant proofs that Calvin was the author and originator of the whole proceedings against Servetus at Vienne, may be found in the accounts of De la Roche, Allowerden, Mosheim, and Bock, and Trechsel. We have not read Mosheim and Trechsel, but we are confident that the proofs to be found in the other three authors are not abundant, and are not even sufficient. De la Roche and Allowerden published before Trie's three letters to his friend at Lyons, which Calvin is alleged to have instigated and dictated, were given to the public, and therefore were scarcely in circumstances to judge fairly on this question.

Allwoerden (1772:45-6) also argues this allegation, but admits that there is no proof.¹⁷⁹ Tulloch, who stands against Calvin, admits: "The special blame of Calvin in the whole matter is very much dependent upon the view we take of his previous relation to the accusation and trial of Servetus by the Inquisition at Vienne," but there is no satisfactory evidence (Tulloch 1860:139). They do not have any direct testimony to prove their assumptions. They are the imaginations that may possibly come from Servetus' petitions at the trial of Geneva, in which he boldly insults Calvin without logical explanation. Cunningham (1989:322; Gibbon, 314) writes against the allegations saying: "Calvin was mainly or largely influenced by personal and vindictive feelings towards Servetus, is destitute of all proof or even plausibility. There is no ground to believe, or even to suspect, that Calvin was connected with originating or instigating the proceeding, which ultimately led to Servetus' apprehension by the popish authorities at Vienne." Cunningham (1989:326) clearly writes concerning the allegation against Calvin:

¹⁷⁹ Allwoerden (1772:45) quotes Bolsec's assumption in the footnote: "In vita CALVINI cap, III. p. 8.: *Nam omnes postea modes perueftiganuit (scilicet CAVINIUS) quibus homini nocere, necemque procurare posset, et scripsit idcirco ad Reuerend. Dominium Cardinalem TURNONIUM....*"

Trie's letters not only afford no evidence, but do not even furnish any plausible ground of suspicion, that Calvin was, in any way, connected with, or cognisant of, the origin of this matter,—that is, it was at his instigation that Trie conveyed information to his popish friend about Servetus, and the book which he had recently published. So far as appears from the correspondence, Trie's statement about Servetus and his book seems to have come forth quite spontaneously, without being suggested or instigated by any one ... In short, there is no ground to believe, or even to suspect, that Calvin was connected with originating or instigating the proceeding, which ultimately led to Servetus' apprehension by the popish authorities at Vienne.

Moreover, Calvin makes it clear in his *Opera* that he was not responsible, denying the accusation that he supplied materials to the Roman Catholic inquisitor in order to destroy Servetus (*Opera*, 479, Willis 1877:502-3):

Nothing less is said of me than that I might as well have thrown Servetus amid a pack of wild beasts into the hands of the professed enemies of the Church of Christ; for I have the credit given me of having caused him to be arrested at Vienne. But why such sudden familiarity between me and the satellites of the Pope? Is it to be believed that confidential letters could have passed between parties who had as little in common as Christ and Belial? Yet why may words to refute that which simple denial from me suffices to answer! Four years have now passed since Servetus himself spread this report. I only ask why, if he had been denounced by me, as said, he was thereafter suffered to remain unmolested for the space of three whole years? It must either be allowed that the crime I am charged withal is a pure invention, or that my denunciation did him no harm with the Papists.

4.1.3 The trial in Vienne

On April 4, 1553, Matthieu Ory, the Inquisitor General, submitted the new materials to de Tournon:¹⁸⁰ a few pages of Calvin's *Institutio*; several of Servetus' autographed letters to Calvin; and further evidence, based on de Trie's latest information. De Tournon summoned a conference with the archbishop of Vienne, Palmier, at the cardinal's palace Château in Rossillon. He sent for the inquisitor Ory, Arzellier, the ecclesiastics, and theologians of the church. The evidence, including the letters of de Trie, two dozen letters of Servetus to Calvin, and a few pages of *Christianismi Restitutio* with Servetus' notes, was sufficient to lead to imprisonment of Villeneuve, known as Servetus, and his printer, Arnouillet.

The archbishops of Vienne and of Lyon agreed to arrest them. On returning back to Vienne in the evening, Palmier and his vicar, Arzellier, called Anthony de la Court,¹⁸¹ Vice Bailiff, to archbishop's palace. In compliance with the command, de la Court arrested the printer,

¹⁸⁰ He was the cardinal at the Chateaux de Rossillon near Vienne.

¹⁸¹ He was a friend of Servetus (Ford 1860:54).

Arnoullet, and ordered him to bring the latest copy of the New Testament, just printed, to his palace. Knowing that Servetus was attending on Madam de Montgiron, de la Court informed him that there were wounded and sick prisoners in the palace of Dauphiné. While visiting the prison, Servetus was told about the charge of heresy against him and was taken to prison immediately. But, de la Court allowed Servetus his servant, Benoit Perrin, who was fifteen year-old, as well as other visitors, ordering them to treat him with respect (*Opera*, 844-5; Wallace, d.a.:434; & Willis 1877:254).

4.1.3.1 The First Interrogation

The next day, April 5, the first interrogation against him¹⁸² was announced in Vienne. The Archbishop Palmier sent for the inquisitor general, Ory, to open the interrogation, notifying him that the judges had confined Villeneuve and his printer. The trial took place in the evening and was presided over by Ory. Bainton (1953b:159-60, *Opera*, 844-5) describes it as follows:

On April 5, 1553, we, Matthieu Ory, Doctor of Theology, Penitentiary of the Holy Apostolic See, Inquisitor General of the Faith in the kingdom of France and for all Gaul, and Louis Arzellier, Doctor of Laws, Vicar General of the Most Reverend Monsignor Pierre Palmier, the Archbishop of Vienne, and Antoine de la Court, Lord of Tour de Buys, Doctor of Laws, Sheriff and Lieutenant General for the district of Vienne, we went to the prisons of the palace at Vienne, and in the criminal chamber caused Michel de Villeneuve to be brought before us Monsieur Michel de Villeneuve, the sworn physician, who was imprisoned by our ordinance in prison of Palace of Delphinal and interrogated him as follows.

After taking the oath, Servetus gave a brief account of his life. He omitted all references on his interactions with the reformers and gave no acknowledgement of knowing any theological writings.¹⁸³ He initially claimed to be Michel de Villeneuve, aged forty-two, a medical doctor, and that he came from Tudéla of Navare (*Opera*, 845). He confessed that he had left Spain twenty-seven or eight years previous, and served under Quintana, the confessor of the emperor, at the age of fifteen or sixteen. He continued, stating that, after serving Quintana, he had gone to Paris where he entered the Collège de Calvi and the Collège de Lombards, majoring in mathematics. Afterwards he went to Lyon and Avignon, but left at once, staying for two or three years in Charlieu, practising his medical skill. He then lived in the house of archbishop, Pierre Palmier, in Vienne. He acknowledged that he had printed *Leonhardum Fuchsium in defensio apologetica pro Symphoriano Campeggio*

¹⁸² It is recorded in *Opera*, 844-7.

¹⁸³ It is likely that the initial trial of Vienne focused on Servetus' personal life rather than his theological views (Osler 1909:16).

(1536), *Syropporum Universa Ratio* (1537), and had commentated on Ptolemy's Geography (1535 and 1541) (*Opera*, 846). He swore that he never printed any other book besides these. He boldly tried to prevent himself from being identified with Servetus. He denied that he had lived in Toulouse, where he had been known under his real name and never admitted to being the author of the heretical book. In the afternoon of the same day, the examination proceeded before the inquisitors. Despite pretending that he was not the author of the heretical book, it was difficult to deceive the inquisitor. What could he say when the inquisitor showed him pages 421-424 of *De Baptismo*, with angry marginal notes? (*Opera*, 847, 849). The inquisitor then asked him several questions about infant baptism (*Opera*, 846-7, Willis 1877:256-7):

If he understood the words that to say that infants had not by their regeneration [through baptism, understood] received the perfect grace of Christ and so were acquitted of Adam's sin, this would be to condemn Christ. He was therefore required to declare how he understood the words. He replied that he firmly believed that the grace of Christ, imparted by baptism, overcome the sin of Adam, as St. Paul declares (Rom. v.): 'Where sin abounds there doth grace more abound;' and that infants are saved without faith acquired, but through faith then infused by the Holy Ghost.

How would infants be saved and overcome Adam's sin without their regeneration? His answers to the question did not satisfy them. His knowledge of infant baptism and his handwriting convinced inquisitors that he was the author. Soon it became apparent that he had to succumb under the weight of the obvious evidence. In the end he admitted that it might have been his handwriting. The inquisitors had found some evidence for heresy in his writings, and decided to report them for the attention of the Church (Dyer 1850:320):

A great part of this deposition is undoubtedly false, and a little reflection on the prisoners' situation will enable us to pronounce pretty confidently what is so. His main object was to prevent himself from being identified as the archheretic, Servetus; and with this view he forbore to mention his residence at the University of Toulouse, where he had passed by his real name of Serveto, or Reves, both of which he had put in the title-page of his first work.

After examining his answers in the first interrogation, the court of the inquisition charged him as "a persistent liar" (Odhner 1910:23), and had proof that he was an Anabaptist.

4.1.3.2 Second Interrogation

For the second interrogation on April 6, 1553, Servetus again swore to tell the truth on the Gospels.¹⁸⁴ When Servetus noticed that two dozen letters from him to Calvin were before

¹⁸⁴ "... lequel apres le serment par luy fait sur les Saintes Evangeles de dire la verité, a esté par nous interrogé comme s'ensuyt." The second interrogation was recorded in *Opera* (847-9).

the inquisitors, he lost all courage and in order to free himself from the dilemma, invented a falsehood, which was as foolish as it was dastardly. The inquisitors asked him the first question based on letter xv (*Opera*, 848, Willis 1877:258):

How he understands a proposition in an epistle numbered xv., wherein the Living Faith and the Death Faith are treated of in terms that seem perfectly Catholic, and opposed to the errors of Geneva, the words being these, *Mori autem sensim dicitur in nobis Fides quando tolluntur vestimenta* – now faith dies perceptibly in us when its vestments are thrown off? To this he answered that he believed the vestments of faith to be works of charity and mercy [*vestimenta fidei sunt Opera charitatis et virtutis.*]

The second question on Free Will – *De libero arbitrio*, coming from the epistle, number xvi, asked how he understood it? Shedding tears he lied although he swore that he was telling the truth – *Messieurs ie vous veulx dire la verité* (*Opera*, 848-9,. Bainton 1953b, 160-1; see Henry 1849:189-90):

My Lords, I tell you the truth. When these letters were written at the time that I was in Germany about twenty-five years ago [they were written from Vienne], a book was printed in Germany by a certain Spaniard called Servetus. I do not know where he came from in Spain, nor where he lived in Germany, except that I have heard it was at Hagenau, where it is said his book was printed. This town is near Strassburg. Having read the book in Germany, when I was very young, about fifteen to seventeen, it seemed to me that he spoke as well or better than the others. However leaving all that behind in Germany, I went to France without taking any books, merely with the intention of studying mathematics and medicine as I have done since. But having heard that Calvin was a learned man, I wanted to write to him out of curiosity without knowing him otherwise, and in fact I did write, requesting that the correspondence should be confidential, and for brotherly correction, to see whether he could not convince me, or I him, for I could not accept his say so ... When he saw that my questions were those of Servetus he replied that I was Servetus. I answered that although I was not, for the purposes of discussion, I was willing to assume the role of Servetus, for I did not care what he thought of me, but only that we should discuss our opinions. On those terms we wrote until the correspondence became heated, and I dropped it. For the last ten years there has been nothing between us and I affirm before God and you, sirs, that I never wished to dogmatize or assert anything contrary to the Church and the Christian religion.

He did not know where Servetus came from, though he looked like Servetus; and acted like Servetus in disguise. Besides, Calvin misunderstood that he was Servetus but he pretended that he wrote to him. The confessions were full of untruths and bold-faced lies. Although he tried to make it clear to the inquisitors that Villeneuve and Servetus were two different persons, he was soon to be revealed as the heretic Michael Servetus and the author not only of the heretical books, *De Trinitatis Erroribus* and *Dialogorum de Trinitate libri Duo* but also of a third book, *Christianismi Restitutio*. Such lying and untruths would continue

throughout this trial and at the trial of Geneva, too. This made the inquisitors treat the trial far more seriously and insisted on him remaining in prison (Guizot 1868:310).

The third question was on Infant Baptism, and was based on epistle xvii. This letter was about infants, mere fleshy beings, that were incapable of receiving the gift of the Spirit – “*Parvuli carnis non erant capaces doni spiritus*” (*Opera*, 849). It was nothing new compared to the last question. When asked the meaning of this sentence, Servetus replied that they were unable to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The fourth question from epistle xviii, regarding the Trinity and the Generation of the Son of God – “*de Trinitate et generatione Filii Dei*”, was, he said, written in the midst of discussions with Calvin (*Opera*, 849). The fifth question was “*de carne Christi glorificata, quae absorbetur a gloria divinitatis,*” of the glorified body of Christ that was carried out of the Glory of the Deity – more fully than it was at the Transfiguration (*Opera*, 849). Although Servetus thought he presented his opinions well to them, he was regarded by his judges as a cunning liar. He did not admit to what was found to be heretical in these writings, but only to what his judges and the church would approve (*Opera*, 849). Eventually he confessed that the writings were his. After hearing his confession the inquisitors adjourned the interrogation until the next day.

Realising how at risk his life was, Servetus resolved to escape. He asked the grand prior to send for his servant, Perrin, to get 300 *écus* from the monastery at St. Pierre. An hour earlier, Ory had ordered the guard to forbid any one from talking to Servetus. However, the cell door of the prison had been left open. Servetus had been free in the prison and was treated with consideration and respect (Dyer 1850:319).¹⁸⁵ During that evening he pretended to take a walk in the garden, searching for a way of escape.

4.1.3.3 Escape and Third Interrogation

On April 7, 1553 he was up at four o'clock, early in the morning and escaped through a window. During the previous day's walk he found a terrace overlooking the courtyard of the palace. He asked the unsuspecting jailer for the key to the garden so that he could take a walk. The Jailer did not suspect him as he was dressed in a bathrobe. Servetus was fully dressed underneath. He went up to the terrace, jumped over to the courtyard, and reached

¹⁸⁵ Guizot (1868:311) tells us that a daughter of Anthony de la Court, Vice Bailiff, was cured by Servetus and he then became one of his friends. Monsieur de Maugiron was another friend.

the Rhône River outside. At about 9 o'clock he was outside Vienne, according to his own confession later at the trial of Geneva (Bainton 1953b:160-1 & Gaberel 1858: vol. II:248.). The jailer's wife was the first to discover his escape, two hours later. She felt that her life was in danger, and thus tore her hair, and beat her children, servants and the other prisoners. The authorities reported the escape, and ordered the town gate be shut down and guarded, but it was too late.

Despite Servetus' escape the third interrogation (*Opera*, n., 850-3) against him and his printer, Arnoullet, proceeded. The trial took ten weeks of examining his books and letters to Calvin. Ory collected new information about the place that printed the books. Thus Ory, Anthony de la Court, and Arzellier met three workmen – Jean du Bois, Calude Papillion, and Thomas de Straton – who confessed that they had printed *Christianismi Restitutio*. They were not aware of the heretical doctrines in the book, because it was written in Latin (*Opera*, n., 852). Straton, one of the workers, revealed that Villeneuve had covered the cost of printing with his own money and had dispatched five bales of the printed books to Pierre Merrin at Lyon (*Opera*, n., 853).

Ory and Arzellier hurried off to Lyon to examine Merrin. He admitted that he had received five bales of books from Michel de Villeneuve of Vienne through a priest of Vienne, a certain Jacques Charmier. He confessed that he did not know of contents of the book. They ordered him to unpack the packages and took them to the palace of the archbishop at Vienne. Ory and Arzellier met with Charmier in Vienne and put him into prison for three years because of his friendship with Villeneuve, although Charmier insisted that he did not to know of the contents of the book. Ory then convinced the judges that the *Christianismi Restitutio*, printed secretly in Vienne, was heretical. Servetus was found to be guilty of heresy and of threatening the public peace. The inquisitors were witnesses to these crimes, as they themselves had heard Servetus' denials and confessions. The civil tribunal added to the sentence a fine of a thousand livres to be given to the king Dauphiné from whose prison Servetus had escaped. The following sentence, containing the names of the inquisitors, was read on June 17, 1553 (*Opera*, 784-7, Allwoerden, 1727:55-7, Wright 1806a:148-51):

Between the Procurator of the King Daupine, pursuer for the crime of scandalous heresy, dogmatisation, composition of new doctrines, of heretical book, sedition, schism, disturbance of union and public peace, rebellion and disobedience to the ordinances made against heresies, breaking and escaping from the royal Dauphineal prisons on the one part, and Mr. Michael de Villeneuve, physician, formerly detained prisoner in the prison of the

Dauphinal palace of Vienne, and at present a fugitive accused of the aforesaid crimes, on the other part.

Having seen the pieces vindicating the said heresies, and even the letters and writings of the said Villeneuve, addressed to Mr. John Calvin, preacher at Geneva, acknowledged by the said Villeneuve, his answers, confessions, and denials; the answers and other procedures concerning Balthazard Arnollet, printer; certain bales and printed books, entitled, *Christianismi Restitutio*; the witnesses examined upon the said Villeneuve's having composed, and caused to be printed, the said book at his own charge; the reports of the Doctors of Divinity and other notable persons upon the errors contained in the said book and epistles; which errors and heresies are evident from the bare reading of them; acts made upon the said Villeneuve's escaping from prison, and diligence used to apprehend him; adjournment for three days, and defaults obtained upon them; re-examination of witnesses, definitive conclusions of the said Procurator of the Daupine King, and every other thing which has been remitted to us; the whole being considered, we have declared, and do declare, the said defaults to have been well and duly obtained for the confirmation whereof, we have debarred, and hereby do debar the said Villeneuve, from all exceptions and defences, declared, and do declare that he is attained and convicted of the crimes laid to his charge; for reparation whereof, we have condemned, and do condemn him as to a pecuniary fine, to pay the sum of a thousand livres tournois of fine to the Dauphin King: and immediately upon his being apprehended, he shall be carried upon a dung-cart together with his books, the first opportunity, from the market at the gate of the Dauphinal places, through the several streets and customary places, to the place called Charneve, and there to be burned alive at a slow fire, until his body be reduced to ashes. And in the mean time the present sentence shall be executed in effigy, with which the said books shall be burned. And we have condemned, and do condemn him to pay all expense and charges of process, the tax whereof we reserve, declaring all the every part of his goods fortified, and cindiscated to the profit of whom it may appertain, the said expense of justice and fine being preferably delivered and paid out of the said goods. De la Court Vice Bailiff, and Judge Dauphinal, Granter assessor, Carier assessor, Pietod assessor, Duprat assessor, A de Bais assessor, Beraud assessor, Philip Morel assessor, De Court assessor, Loys Merd assessor, Christofle assessor; the said sentence published in open court, and hearing of the said Procurator, of the King of Dauphine. We, the Vice Bailiff and Judge of the said session in the hall of the Dauphinal palace of Vienne, the seventeenth day of the month of June, one thousand five hundred and fifty three years. Present Mess. Pillebert Gollin, Alexander Rolland, Claude Margnin, Charles Verency, Peter de Vignes, and a great many other persons of quality of Vienne, being present there and I he underwritten.

Chasalis.

At noon of the same day Servetus was slowly burnt in effigy by a fire built by Francis Berodi, the executioner, at de Charnève along with the five bales of *Christianismi Restitutio*, found at Lyon (Mackinnon 1962:141; Wright 1806a:151-2). His effigy was open to public view. Any book of his found, anywhere, was to be burnt to ash. Arnoullet

was confined in the prison for four months, but because he made it appear that he was assured by Guérout that *Christianismi Restitutio* was a harmless book, and that he did not know Latin, he was set free to go to Lyon. Guérout probably saved himself by fleeing to Geneva, because he was involved in the fraction of Geneva (Henry 1849:191).

The rest of the investigation was continued through until Saturday the 23rd, two days before the Christmas of the 1553. Servetus started life as a wanderer. There are no official records of anything concerning Servetus' escape until his arrest at Geneva, three months and six days later. Guizot thinks that Servetus was wandering about near Vienne until the verdict appeared on June 17, after which he tried to find a safe haven in France or Switzerland (Guizot 1868:311).

4.1.4 The arrest in Geneva

4.1.4.1 Arrival in Geneva

Since his escape from the custody, Servetus may have hidden in different places in France, Italy or Switzerland, before he went to Geneva.¹⁸⁶ He could not find any safe place to live. He thought that the best place to live was Naples, not only because “there was a large settled population of his own countrymen among whom he could find a sufficient field for the exercise of his calling”, but because he found a friend in a certain Anabaptist there (Willis 1877:281-2).¹⁸⁷ Benedict conjectures why Servetus went to Naples: “Being thus hunted by his enemies, this persecuted man next determined on going to Naples, in hope of settling there in the practice of his profession. It is supposed that he was induced to this measure by a Spanish nobleman, named John Valdesius, who was then secretary to the king of Naples, and who had embraced the principles of the Anabaptists” (Benedict 1813:185-6). In his testimony at the trial of Geneva, he said that he stopped in Geneva for a night on his way to Naples. He was supposedly going to study medicine, and wanted to hire a boat to cross the lake, but his confession is hardly to be believed (*Opera*, 770, 782).

¹⁸⁶ Ford (1860:68-9) conjectures a couple of his wanderings after escaping from Vienne. One is that he went to the Pyrenees, the old Waldenses in Spain. Another is that he was seeking a kind shelter in Venice.

¹⁸⁷ At that time that a lot of Spaniards settled in Naples led Servetus to meet the more medical practising opportunities (Dyer 1850:326).

There have been a few suggestions as to why he stopped at Geneva.¹⁸⁸ The best leading proposal of them is that he might have harboured in his heart a kind of conspiracy to overthrow Calvin. Therefore allying himself with Calvin's opponents, the Libertines, through Guérout (Guizot 1868:313). Servetus likely had a personal animosity toward Calvin, because he figured that Calvin had betrayed him to the inquisitors of Vienne. Regardless, he really desired a victory over Calvin in the theological controversy (Lecler 1960:326), which would arise during the course of the trial. He heard that Calvin was experiencing little popularity in Geneva because of political changes. He was informed that the Libertines fostered hostility towards Calvin and intended to act against him (Lingle 1900:11; Holtrop 1993:174). I believe this is why Servetus went to Geneva, even though he had first planned to go to Naples.

When Servetus arrived in Geneva Calvin was midst in a critical, spiritual and political conflict between the Libertines and himself. A specific topic was excommunication. Servetus' trial raised the question on the authority to control excommunication. Was it the Council's or the Consistory's power to excommunicate? (Monter 1967:84). The issue of annulling Philip Berthelier, one of the leaders of Calvin's opponents, who had been debarred by the excommunication of the Consistory was causing a heated controversy. The Council dominated by the Libertines desired to restore him against the Consistory's resolution.

Berthelier, whose trial was still impending, was supposed to appear as an advocate for Servetus. The decision to excommunicated him had happened only three weeks before Servetus was arrested in Geneva. The Libertines, who dominated the Council, were opposed to Calvin, and now tried to use Servetus' affair fully to their own advantage. Thus, the excommunication issue would be argued again by the Libertines during Servetus' trial. Although there is no clear evidence of *co-operation* between the Libertines and Servetus in an effort to weaken Calvin's position, there is no doubt that a conspiracy between the Libertines and Servetus had been agreed upon. Roland Bainton believes: "1) that Servetus plotted with the Libertines for the overthrow of Calvin's régime; 2) that the Libertines

¹⁸⁸ Calvin mentions in a letter to Farel on August 20, 1553: "He intended perhaps passing through this city; for it is not yet known with what design he came" (*Letters*, vol. II, 417). Several reasons have been suggested: Did he want to interview Calvin personally as he had planned to meet Calvin in Paris in 1534? Or, as he maintained at the trial at Geneva, did he merely intend to pass through Geneva on his way to Naples? Or did he intend to conspire to remove Calvin's power at Geneva, siding with his opponents, the Libertines?

endeavoured to bring about the acquittal of Servetus; and 3) that they communicated with him to that end during the course of his trial” (Bainton 1936:141).¹⁸⁹

Guizot (1868:313) is certainly “convinced that Servetus, defeated at Vienne, went to Geneva, relying on the support of the Libertines, whilst they on their side expected to obtain efficacious help from him against Calvin.” Servetus desired to join the party against Calvin so as to not only defeat him but also “propagate his errors in Geneva” (Boettner 1954:416). Besides, Geneva was not on the way to Italy. There is no other reason that he came to Geneva, after he had escaped from Vienne, but the conspiracy with the Libertines. During the entire trial he was consistently supported by and in contact with the Libertines. He was in particular contact with Perrin and Berthelier, as he confronted his judges and Calvin in a very insolent and impolite manner. Lacking the support of the Libertines he would not have dared to go to Geneva, since he himself was a coward, as can be seen in his avoiding Calvin in Paris. The Libertines helped him because they “perceived the advantage they might derive by playing Servetus off against the Reformer” (Wylie 1899:323). At the same time, Servetus might have intended to take over the leadership of Geneva from Calvin (Smyth 1856:103).

Regardless, everyone (*Opera*, 590)¹⁹⁰ agrees that Servetus stayed for roughly one month in Geneva before he was arrested (Dyer 1850:327, Wileman, s.a.:103 & Henry 1849:192).¹⁹¹ The following is from Shields’ play, and focuses on the issue of when he arrived and the conspiracy that transpired (Shields 1898:49):

Colladon. Why came he hither?

Tissot. (*Reads*.) ‘He hath been leagu’d with other heretics, In Frankfurt, Venice, and in Gernoa, And hither comes to sow his heresies.’

Servetus. A trav’ler I was passing through your city, And meant next day to sail across the Lake.

Du Pan. Ha! ha! You spent a month in passing through!!

Colladon. What was he doing at the Inn-of-the-Rose?

Tissot. (*Reads*.) ‘While at the Inn he air’d some vile amours, Which are the natural fruit of heresy.’

¹⁸⁹ Collins 1968:180 also points out that the proposal to consult the Swiss Churches was drawn up by Perrin with some Libertines.

¹⁹⁰ Schaff with several writers observes that Servetus stayed for a month and hired a boat before leaving for Zürich. See Schaff (1993:765-783), Willis (1877:282) & Tulloch (1860:141). When Perrin failed to release Servetus after messages arrived from the Swiss churches, he left the court with a few Libertines; Killen (1843:13) annotates on his conspiracy with the Libertines. “His own statement, that he came to Geneva almost immediately before his arrest, is worthy of little credit, as he evidently wished to conceal his correspondence with the Libertines.”

¹⁹¹ Even apologists of Servetus agrees (Ford 1860:70). A certain Genevan historian from the 18th century stated that Servetus entered and hid in Geneva one month before his arrest (see Killen 1843). The historian John Foxe (1926:187) implies that Servetus stayed several weeks in Geneva before he was arrested.

Servetus. Oh, that was all the merest pleasantry. I could not be a libertine if I would, And have liv'd purely as a Christian should.

Tissot. (*Reads*.) 'With certain traitors here he hath conspir'd; Chiefly that outlaw'd fornicator, Gueroult, the printer of his book'.¹⁹²

According to Willis' description, "the windows of the room he occupied at the Rose *had been nailed up!* What interpretation can possibly be put on this? The nailing up could not have been done to keep anyone *out* of a place of public entertainment. It was therefore to keep someone *in*" (Willis 1877:284). The description presumes that in this boarded up room Servetus and his companies had been secretly planning Calvin's overthrow for an entire month.¹⁹³ It is interesting that though he was a foreigner, he knew the Genevan law well, and tried to be his own attorney throughout the trial.

The one unsolved question that remains in this narrative is how it was that Servetus actually was involved in the conspiracy with the Libertines, or how he became known to them. Servetus had been living in Geneva for one month. Even though Servetus explicitly denied that he had communicated with anyone in Geneva since he had arrived there, including Guérout, the confession was totally untrue, revealing again his blatantly false actions (Shields 1898:10.). Guérout possibly had been informed of his escape from Vienne his sentence, and his arrival in Geneva. We know that Guérout, as one of the Libertines and a native citizen, must have informed the Libertines of Servetus' arrival in Geneva (Willis 1877:381-2).¹⁹⁴ This would be why Rigot interrogated Servetus closely on his relationship with Guérout. He tried concealing the relationship as long as possible during the trial (*Opera*, 731, 734). Osler (1909:16) describes the conspiracy between Servetus and the Libertines as follows:

At that time the Liberals, or 'Libertines', as they were called because of their hostility to Calvin, fully expected to triumph. 'One of their leaders, Ami Perrin, was first Syndic: a man of their party, Gueroult, who had been banished from Geneva, had been corrector of the press at the time when the Restoration of Christianity was published, and thanks to the influence of his patrons, the

¹⁹² During the entire interrogation, it is said that Judges questioned Servetus on his arrival in Geneva.

¹⁹³ According to Shields' drama (1898:9-10), Berthelier informs of Servetus' presence in Geneva and tries to conspire to banish Calvin once more: "*Perrin*. What! Would my lord turn preacher them [Calvin] then? You speak a riddle. *Berthelier*. No:—a simple secret; And a state-secret, if you keep it well. Know you, there is a preacher come to town, Not reverend in title, but disguised, A gallant like ourselves and hidden safe At the Inn-of-the-Rose, across, the Lake,—One Michael Servetus, the physician, Known as a sower of great heresies Through Christendom. *Perrin*. Well? More of this state-secret. *Berthelier*. He much hath writ against our famed divine."

¹⁹⁴ "*Berthelier*. Why, better, then, for us; and worse For them—Dissensions in the folds themselves By two reformers—Power in our hands To drive one at the other or send both Of them where they can never plague us more. *Perrin*. Bravo! Bravo! Not that I care a sou For either doctrine. Anything to put This upstart alien down and keep intact Our civic rights and ancient libertines." Guérout leads Servetus to attend the service of August 13 (Shields 1898:10, 13-5).

Libertines, he had returned to Geneva, and would naturally be the medium between them and Servetus. Taking a comprehensive view of the whole case and the antecedents of all those concerned in it, I am convinced that Servetus, defeated at Vienne, went to Geneva, relying on the support of the Libertines, whilst they on their side expected to obtain efficacious help from him against Calvin.’ He seems to have been nearly a month in Geneva before his arrest on the morning of August 14.

4.1.4.2 Arrest of Servetus

Servetus found his way to Geneva. He lodged for one month at the tiny inn, the Rose d’Or, known probably as the most comfortable inn in Geneva.¹⁹⁵ He travelled like a wealthy man with six gold rings and a golden chain, and ninety-seven gold crowns in his pocket (*Opera*, 735, 831).¹⁹⁶ On Sunday August 13, 1553, weary of hiding for a month in the nailed-up room he decided to do something secret in Geneva. First he would attend an afternoon church service in the cathedral of St. Pierre, where Calvin was supposed to preach. He tried not to attract attention, but was soon recognised by certain people – *par quelques frères*¹⁹⁷ – who knew him from Vienne.

According to Wilbur’s detail description, “Rumor had it that while standing in church, concealed by his cloak and cap, as he listened to the preacher, he was recognized by some whom he had once attended to as physician at Vienne” (Wilbur 1972:162). Realising that he had been recognized, he attempted to leave Geneva for Zürich and then Naples by boat. On the point of departing, however, he was arrested by the sheriff in the name of the Council (Henry 1849:192).¹⁹⁸ Calvin’s secretary, Pastor Nicolas de la Fontaine,¹⁹⁹ went to the prison at the Rue de l’Évêché to see on what charge he could be brought in. He report-

¹⁹⁵ Most inns in Geneva were named by heraldic symbols, for example, stars. The little inn where Servetus lodged was notorious for foreign visitors on less official visits (see Monter 1967:8; *Opera*, 770, 782).

¹⁹⁶ His money and valuables were deposited in the hands of jailer.

¹⁹⁷ According to an extract from the Registers of the Company of Pastors on August 13, he was recognized by certain brothers (see *Opera*, 725, Wilbur 1972:n. 11, 162).

¹⁹⁸ Lyncurius (1965:203-4) accounts about a certain minister or servant [de la Fontaine] who “went to the magistrate and disclosed that the heresiarch Servetus was there, he who denied the most holy Trinity and called it a three-headed Cerberus, and who was continuously contemptuous of Geneva and of its ministers. He persuaded the magistrate of many other things about the man, demanding that he be given the office of summoner that Servetus might be immediately arrested lest he able by any means to escape; and he offered himself to be sent to prison with until judgement should be passed on each.” We have nothing about Alphonsus Lyncurius who identifies himself as coming from Taragona in the title. Villanova. This work first appeared in 1555 shortly after Calvin’s *Defensio* contained in *Opera* (453-644) was published.

¹⁹⁹ He was a French cook of Mousier de Fallais as well as religious refugee. He was also a student of theology. He had been six years with Calvin and was grounded in theological knowledge. many religious refugees came to Geneva in about 1550.

ed back to Calvin. In accordance to the law, Calvin reported Servetus to one of the Syndics. Calvin was mainly responsible for Servetus' arrest in matters of the Criminal Edicts: "When any complaint shall come, let each one of Syndics have power to call those to whom it appertains, and cause imprisonment, if it is meet."²⁰⁰ It was his civil and ecclesiastical duty. What he did was attest that the accused was the heretic, Michael Servetus.

On the arrest, Calvin says in a letter to Sulzer on September 8, 1553 (*Letters*, vol. II, 428):

"He escaped from it some way or other, and wandered in Italy for nearly four months. He at length, in an evil hour, came to this place, when, at my instigation, one of the Syndics ordered him to be conducted to prison. For I do not disguise it, that I considered it my duty to put a check, so far as I could, upon this most obstinate and ungovernable man, that his contagion might not spread farther."

It is clear that Calvin confessed this without any disguise. It is perfectly evident that Calvin felt it his duty to inform the council that Servetus was in the city. Not only his love for the truth, but also, the civil law of the city, which had come down from the previous rule of law of the emperors,²⁰¹ required the infliction of the same punishment upon heretics as imposed on those guilty of high-treason. Thus, he made it his duty to convey this information to the Council. Nicolas de la Fontaine charged him, as we see in this letter from Calvin to Farel on August 20, 1553 (*Letters*, vol. II, 417):

It is as you say, my dear Farel, ... We have now new business in hand with Servetus. He intended perhaps passing through this city; for it is not yet known with what design he came. But after he had been recognized, I thought that he should be detained. My friend Nicolas summoned him on a capital charge, offering himself as security according to the *lex talionis* ... Of the man's effrontery I will say nothing; but such was that his madness that he did not hesitate to say that devils possessed divinity; yea, that many gods were in individual devils, inasmuch as deity had been substantially communicated to those, equally with wood and stone.

Calvin wished only to prevent the evil from taking root and had no malicious designs upon the life of his enemy (Henry 1849:193-4):

"Calvin had no intention to expose Servetus to capital punishment; he only wished to render him harmless, to make him recant his blasphemy, and so preserve Christianity from injury; but we shall see how the Spaniard opposed

²⁰⁰ It was issued as 'Criminal Edicts of January 28, 1543' (see Rilliet 1846:87).

²⁰¹ If the edicts and constitution of Frederick II or the Code of Justinian were in force at Geneva, then heresy was a crime by law in that city, cognisable and punishable by the civil courts and with death (see Henry 1849:194; Minton 1909:219).

himself by his mischievous, obstinate spirit to all the representations of reasons, and thereby excited most men of Christian feeling against him.”

Calvin's ruling motive was neither the lust for power nor the love of strife or personal malice. It was religious belief. Moreover, though Calvin looked like he was taking the whole responsibility upon himself, it can be discerned from the Registers of the Company of Pastors that he shared it with all his colleagues, and he did not act out of personal hatred (Rilliet 1846:80). An extract of the Registers of the Company of Pastors in Geneva states (*Opera*, 725-6, Rilliet 1846:86):

The 13th of August, year aforesaid.—M. Servetus having been recognised by some brethren, it was found good to cause him to be imprisoned, to the end he might not further infect the world (or people) with his blasphemies and heresies; for that is known (to be) wholly incorrigible and desperate. Upon that, there was one who was made criminal party (accuser) against him; the which proposed certain articles, containing a selection of the most notable errors of said Servetus. Some days after, it was commanded by the Council that we should be present when they examined him; the which being done, his impudence and obstinacy were more and more discovered and known; became he maintained, for a principle, that the name of Trinity had not been in use but since the Council of Nice, and that all doctors and martyrs before had not known what it was. But when one produced quite evident testimonies, as well from Justin Martyr as from Irenæus, Tertullian, Origen, and others, so far was he from being ashamed, that he broke out into all absurdities, with injures and outrages. At last, my Lords seeing that the procedure would be endless if means were not found to shorten it, commanded that an extract should be made of the erroneous and heretical propositions contained in his books, and that he having replied by writing, we should show in brief the falsity of his opinions, with the purpose of seeing the whole to the neighboring Churches to have their advice.

In compliance, both Servetus and de la Fontaine were imprisoned by the order of the Lord-Lieutenant,²⁰² Pierre Tissot. Their prison had once been the residence of the bishops of Geneva and was near the Church of St. Pierre. The Council formulated the accusations as follows (*Opera*, 626, Shields 1983:362):

Upon the application of Nicolas de la Fontaine against the said Servetus, prisoner, bearing that he is a sower of great heresies, and for these already imprisoned and a fugitive; and inasmuch as he, having become party against him, has supplicated justice—it is resolved that they give in writing to the lord lieutenant the errors and passages which they profess to prove against him, to the end that he may reply, to be further pursued.

²⁰² The Lieutenant, known as the General Prosecutor, was implemented in 1529 and was in charge of early questioning. The Lieutenant was elected by the Small Council once a year. See Kingdon (1995: 23-30).

Before proceeding further with the trial, the Council was supposed to examine its justification for the arraignment for the next day. Servetus was allowed only paper and ink to defend himself. His valuable property was left in the care of Pierre Tissot (*Opera*, 735, 831, Rilliet 1846:102-3):

After this, “the said Fontaine and the said Servetus were committed as criminals to John Grasset, the keeper of the prison, to be detained, under pain of death. And the said Servetus has declared that he has entrusted to the said Grasset ninety-seven crowns, a chain of gold, weighing about twenty crowns, and six gold rings.” This sliver, and these trinkets, which consisted of a large torquoise, a white sapphire, a diamond, a ruby, a large emerald of Peru, and a single ring of coralline,” were afterwards deposited in the hands of Pierre Tissot, who rendered an exact account of them when the process was concluded.

The trial commenced and would last for more than two months.

4.2 *The trial in Geneva*

4.2.1 First Phase

4.2.1.1 Arrangement

According to criminal law of Geneva, any case was to be examined by the Council twenty-four hours before the case proceeded.²⁰³ Nicolas de la Fontaine was appointed the accuser and Servetus, his opposite, the accused (defence). In accordance to another law, called *pœna tallionis*, both the accuser and the accused were to be kept under private lock and key, so that the accused could be judged fairly (Rilliet 1846:94-5):

“Let the Lieutenant have power of imprisoning, at the request of every one who will make himself a formal party against another, by becoming a prisoner along with him.”—*Edict of November 12, 1542*. “*Item*.—That in a case demanding corporeal punishments, if a party pursue, the said pursuing must become a prisoner himself, and subject himself *ad pœnam tallionis*, &c., according to the text of our Franchises.”—*Ordonnances of 1529, No. 8*.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ The Edict of January 28, 1543. See Rilliet (1846:95-6) & Willis (1877:304-5). (a) The grounds for an arrest had to be declared within twenty-four hours, failing which the person accused was released. (b) All criminal charges had to be made at the instance of someone aggrieved. (c) The prosecutor had to be bound over to prosecute. (d) He also had to go to prison with the person accused and in conformity with the *Lex Tallionis* agree, if the charges were not made good, to undergo the penalty which would befall the accused, if found guilty” (Macdonell, 1083:136).

²⁰⁴ According to Carolinian law promulgated in Germany during the reign of Emperor Charles V, any accuser had to be a prisoner for the truthfulness of his accusation. If the charge proved false, the accuser might have to undergo punishment in the place of the accused. If Servetus were found innocent, Fontaine would have to suffer the punishment by the law (Wilbur 1972:163, and *Opera*, 461, 479).

The trial of Servetus began just and fair (Lyncurius 1965:204). With the official approval of the Company of Pastors, de la Fontaine took on the responsibility of accuser (Rilliet 1846:86). On the afternoon of August 14, 1553, the Lord-Lieutenant, Pierre Tissot, went to the prison where the accused Servetus and the accuser were residing. The initial examination by Tissot was officially recorded as follows (*Opera*, 731, Rilliet 1846:97):

The year 1553, and on Monday, the 14th day of the month of August, pursuant to the criminal action raised at the instance of the Hon, Nicolas de la Fontaine, of St. Gervais au Vixen, a Frenchman, an inhabitant of this city, against M. Servetus of Villeneuve, in the kingdom of Arragon, in Spain—the said de la Fontaine requests that the said Servetus should reply to the questions written below, declaring that he has raised the said criminal action, in his own proper and private name;—the which Servetus has sworn to speak and answer the truth, upon pain.

Then de la Fontaine, brought forward the thirty-eight indictments, which Calvin had prepared, in order to reveal his heresy and to establish conclusively that *Christianismi Restitutio* was authored by Servetus (*Opera*, 479).²⁰⁵ Although, originally, de la Fontaine and Calvin had selected forty articles (*Opera*, 727-31, Whitcomb n.d.:12-6), only thirty-eight articles were presented because “two of them [VI and VII] contained only direction for procedure, and not grounds of charge...”, and were withdrawn (Rilliet 1846:96-7).

The accuser, de la Fontaine, first proposed that Servetus should answer truly to thirty-eight articles of impeachment against him (*Opera*, 727). The main charge against him was that Servetus had published heretical, blasphemous opinions concerning the Trinity and Infant baptism. The formal questioning of Servetus on the thirty-eight articles was initiated by Nicolas de la Fontaine. Servetus replied to each of them. The first and second questions claimed that Servetus fled because of his heresy and errors and that he had experienced trouble with the churches of Germany for twenty-four years. They stated that the first two books – *De Trinitatis Erroribus* and *Dialogorum de Trinitate libri Duo* – infected many people. Servetus answered the preliminary questions as to his name, age, and previous history more truthfully than he had done at the trial at Vienne. However, he denied that had not infected anyone. He also insisted that he had never fled from any country (*Opera*, 727).²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ “Nec infitior meo concilio dictatam esse formulam.”

²⁰⁶ Servetus’ reply to it is: “Respond estre vray quil a faict ung petit livre [*De Trinitatis erroribus*, 1531], mais quil na point trouble les eglises quil saiche. Et nye avoir este condemne. Respond avoir faict ung petit livre [*Dialogorum de Trinitate libri Duo*, 1532] mais ne scant quil aye infecte personne” (*Opera*, 731-2).

He was then examined on the third and fourth questions (*Opera*, 727-8), concerning the books –*Christianismi Restitutio* and *Ptolemy's Geography* – which he had printed stealthily, and which had countless blasphemies in them. Servetus admitted that he wrote annotations to the Bible of Santes Pagnini and also Ptolemy's *Geography* but insisted that they contained nothing but good.²⁰⁷ He further maintained that he fled from the prison of Vienne because the priests there desired to burn him alive. When the seventh article on the Trinity was met with opposition, he professed to believe in a 'Trinity', but understood by the term 'Person' something different from the contemporary doctrine.²⁰⁸ He insisted that he followed the teaching of the ancient Fathers of the Church after Christ and the Apostles – *premiers docteurs apres Jesus Christ et ses apostres* – from whom his book was adduced, but that he disagreed with modern theologians who made the concept of 'Person' of the Trinity (*Opera*, 728).²⁰⁹

The eighth item concerned his insults against the ancient Fathers, St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, Chrisostome, and Athanasius and even calling Melanchthon, a human being without faith and a son of the evil one, Belial, and Satan. He avoided a direct reply on the pretext that he had not insulted Melanchthon in public but in a private letter (*Opera*, 732, 738).

The ninth to the twenty-third questions and the twenty-sixth question were on his theological systems: the Trinity; the relationship between the Son of God, the Word, and Christ. He contended that he followed John in the matter of the Word and Christ to be God or man in a certain respect. Servetus maintained that Jesus Christ was not the Son of God, except as born by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary and did not exist before his Incarnation by which he became the Son of God (*Opera*, 733, 739). The pre-incarnation of the divine Christ was totally denied by him. Furthermore, the term 'Person' should refer not only to image and form but understood as dispensation, mode, or manifestations of the invisible God. Trinitarians are atheists (*Opera*, 733, 739). The twenty-fourth, fifth, sixth and the thirty-fifth questions (*Opera*, 729-31, 733) were focused

²⁰⁷ "Mais quil ne pense avoir rien faict qui ne soyt bon ... Et que sil luy monstre les blasphemes il est pres a emender." *Ibid.*, 732.

²⁰⁸ "Such a division in the being of God makes him into a tripartite God; that is, into a devil with three heads, like Cerberus, which the old poets have called a hell-hound, a monster" (*Opera*, 728, Henry 1849:195) & see Rilliet (1846:234). Servetus' reply to it is "Respond comme dessus prochain et quil cofesse la trinite et troys personnes" (*Opera*, 732).

²⁰⁹ Servetus answer: "Et dict quil est verite quil a declaire ce nom de personne aultrement que nen escripvent les modernes ... et quil confesse la trinite et troys personnes" (*Opera*, 732).

on his view of the meaning of the term Deity. He replied that it should not be simply regarded a hypostases but a number of dispensations or dispositions. As in pantheism, in God there are all creatures in whom He breathes life by air, the Spirit.

In answer to the twenty-seventh, eighth, and ninth questions he denied the allegation of insisting that soul of man was mortal after the Fall but said that the soul was dressed in perishable clothes and was not itself perishable (*Opera*, 730, 733, 739-40). In the thirtieth, thirty-first, and third questions he insisted that infants were not responsible until the proper age. Infant baptism, he claimed, was the main element of destroying Christianity. He answered that not only was infant baptism a diabolical invention—*invention diabolique*—but that none should be baptised until a reasonable age (*Opera*, 733, 739-40). This question was a very dangerous one because the Anabaptist at that time were regarded with dread and suspicion.

To the first thirty-six articles, Servetus answered freely that he was indeed the author of *Christianismi Restitutio*, but he boldly adhered to his opinion that he did not think that he had uttered anything blasphemous. If it could be shown that he had, he would retract this. Then he accused Calvin as the cause of the prosecution at the trial of Vienne.

The most interesting question was the thirty-seventh question about Servetus' personal attack against Calvin. We quote his words here: "37. XXIX. *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." Servetus said further "that M. Calvin had, before that time, injured him and many printed books; that he had answered him, when accused of writing like one intoxicated ... and repeated that Calvin erred in very many passages."²¹⁰ There remained a last question about Servetus' relationship with Guillaume Guérault, the man who had printed Servetus' last book, *Christianismi Restitutio*, and who was even a member of the Libertines of Geneva (*Opera*, 731, 734, 740).

²¹⁰ "Item quen la personne de Mrs. Calvyn, ministre de la parolle de Dieu en ceste Eglise Geneve, il a difamé par livre imprimé la doctrine que s'i presche proninçant toutes les injures et blasphèmes quil set possible dinventer ... 37. Respond que Mr. Calvin la pardevant iniurie par beaucoup de liveres imprimes et quil luy a respondu, et monstrant que Calvin erroit en quelques passages. Et que ledict Calvin quant il escaripvoit quil estoit yvre dolphin, il luy rescripvoit le semblable. Et que ledict Calvin erroit en beaucoup de passages" (*Opera*, 730-1, 734, Rilliet 1846:101).

The books of Servetus were now presented before the court to support the indictments. In addition he admitted that he had called infant baptism an unpleasant invention and infernal falsehood destructive of Christianity, as the seditious opinion of the Anabaptists.

4.2.1.2 First Interrogation

The first interrogation of Servetus before the Council was on the morning of Tuesday August 15, 1553. Servetus had lied the previous day, denying that he was the author of the book *Christianismi Restitutio*. To refute Servetus' denial of the previous day, de la Fontaine now presented his two writings, *Christianismi Restitutio* and a manuscript, which had been sent to Calvin by him. He now had no alternative but to confess to the truth. When he also presented Ptolemy's Geography and the Bible of Santes Pagnini in Latin, Servetus could not help admitting that he was the author. After this examination, de la Fontaine and Servetus were again detained by John Grasset, the keeper of the prison (*Opera*, 735).

The abstracts on the case show how the Council was to be presented with arguments spelling out the legality of the trial (*Opera*, 736-7). With the Lord Lieutenant, Pierre Tissot, presiding, the questions and answers were to be completed.²¹¹ After recording everything he turned it all over to the Syndics (Kingdon 1995:24-5) and the Council for further investigation.²¹² According to the abstracts, the Council appointed Perrin and Vandel to proceed with the questioning and make a deposition of their proceedings. In the meantime, de la Fontaine presented himself to the Council as accuser, addressing his charges with these words (*Opera*, 735-6, Rilliet 1846:103-5):

In your presence, Magnificent, Powerful, and most Redoubtable Lords, Nicolas de la Fontaine declares that he has been constituted prisoner in a criminal prosecution against M. Servetus, for the grave scandals and troubles which the said Servetus has already occasioned in Christendom for he space of twenty-four years, or thereby; for the blasphemies which he has spoken and written against God; for the heresies with which he has infected the world; for the wicked calumnies and false defamations which he has published against Mr. Calvin, whose honour the said *Proposant* is bound to maintain as that of his pastor, if he would be reckoned a Christian; and also in account of the blame and the dishonor which might accrue to the Church of Geneva, seeing that the

²¹¹ In Shield's drama (1898:47), Tissot questions him on his writings: "Some years ago in Germany there was a book of dreadful blasphemies condemn'd ... Again in Strasburg and in Italy there was another execrable book, which caused no end of trouble."

²¹² The Syndics consisted of four members who were elected by the Small Council once a year, on the first Sunday in the new year. They controlled the whole affairs of Geneva, including the Consistory and government. The four members during the time of the trials were: Amy Perrin, Estienne de Chapeaurouge, Domaine Darlod, and Pernet Desfosses (*Opera*, 737).

said Servetus specially condemns the doctrine which is preached there.²¹³ And inasmuch as the said Servetus was examined yesterday, and did not answer to the purpose, but instead of replying pertinently by Yes or No, stated what he pleased, so that the greater part of his answers appear like frivolous stories, may it please you to constrain him to reply formally upon each article without digression, that he may no more mock God and your Lordships, and also that the said *Proposant* be not frustrated of his right. And when the said *Proposant* shall have verified his charge, so that the said Servetus shall be proved to have written and taught the heresies contained in the Interrogatories, the said *Proposant* humbly supplies, that if you judge the said Servetus to be guilty, and deserving to be prosecuted by your Procurator-Fiscal, it may please you to emit a declaration to that effect, and entirely free the said *Proposant* from all expense, injury, and risk; not because he shuns or refuses to prosecute such a cause and quarrel, which all Christians and children of God ought to maintain even unto death, but because he understands that the usages and customs of your city warrant that, and because it belongs not to him to undertake the duty and office of another.

One notes here that de la Fontaine points out that Servetus' cunning avoided direct answers to questions "and did not answer to the purpose, but instead of replying pertinently with Yes or No, stated what he pleased, so that the greater part of his answers appear like frivolous stories." Such an attitude indicated by him continued during the whole trial. The Council considered his address and decided that this accusation was supported by the evidence. As Servetus' crimes were revealed in the sentence of the trial of Vienne, de la Fontaine also charged that he was a scandalous troublemaker who infected the world by his heresy.

Servetus and Fontaine were brought before the Council once more. Several citizens were present.²¹⁴ When de la Fontaine was asked if he desired to proceed with the suit he answered that he did.²¹⁵ As at the first interrogation,²¹⁶ the Council had to confirm the thirty-eight articles before them.

When asked his name, Servetus answered that he was a Spaniard, an Arragonese of Villeneuve, and a physician whose name was Michael Servetus. To the same charges, the thirty-eight questions, that had been presented the previous day, Servetus' answer was

²¹³ Allwoerden (1727:66-7) also records it up to this point.

²¹⁴ The attendance consisted of Aymé Arts, Perrin, Vandel, some citizens, the Lieutenant, and some members of the Small Council. Every year nine citizens chosen from the Council of Sixty and Two Hundred were allowed to sit and hear the proceedings of any trial. See *Opera* (737) for the names of those attending the meeting.

²¹⁵ "Est este demande a maistre Nycolas sil veult persoster a linstance par luy faite contre Michel Servet daragon, il a respondu que puy." (*Opera*, 737).

²¹⁶ The answers are recorded in *Opera* (737-41).

almost the same. He still accused Calvin of saying that the prisoner should be punished (*Opera*, 740). When Servetus was then asked about the issues of the Trinity, the natures of Jesus Christ, and the relationships between the essence of God and created things, he spoke with the same attitude as he had before. He denied that he had taught that sin was mortal but he admitted that no one committed mortal sin before twenty years of age. He denied the practice of infant baptism, declaring it a diabolical invention (*Opera*, 730, 740). When he was questioned about his attacks on the Genevan Church by insulting Calvin he replied (*Opera*, 740, Rilliet 1846:106):

“what he had formerly written against Calvin in his own defence, had not been with the intention of injuring, but to show him his errors and his faults, which he undertook to demonstrate in full congregation, by dives reasons, and authorities of the Holy Scriptures.”²¹⁷

He boldly challenged Calvin in public, in order to gain support from Calvin’s opponents and the public, but the Council did not accept the proposal, although Calvin accepted it.²¹⁸

The reason why the Council refused Servetus’ offer is suggested by Rilliet (1846:107-8):

The Council feared, no doubt, that it would thus dispossess itself of the cognizance of an affair which stood connected with the prerogatives of which it had recently appeared so jealous. On the other hand, the friends of Servetus among the magistrates might fear to see their protégé defeated by Calvin, whose word was much more powerful, and thus have their own hands fettered in the final judgement, by the result of the public discussion.²¹⁹

Thus, Servetus’ bold act of lying about the questions and avoiding the answers resulted in him loosing the confidence and trust of the court members (Cuthbertson 1912:45). Although the issue of the Trinity was beyond the Council’s comprehension, the issue of Infant baptism was different (Willis 1877:316):

What he had said on Infant Baptism in particular was greatly calculated to prejudice him in the minds of his Judges; the doctrine he held being one among the dangerous moral, social, and political principles of the Anabaptists. Throughout all the writings there appears to be nothing in common with the dreaded sect, Anabaptist, but his opinion that Baptism should not be performed

²¹⁷ “Sus le trente sept, Respond que Calvin par devant le premier la iniure et plusueyrs fiys et par liveres publiquement impromes et que ce que luy a escript maintaennat contra Calvin pour sa defence, na point este a intention de liniurier, mais pour luy monstrier ses erreurs et fautes comme il Servetus offre de luy monstreer en pleine congregation par vives raisons et autorite de la saincte excripture” (*Opera*, 740).

²¹⁸ “respondi quod verum erat et initio praefatus eram, nihil mihi fore gratius quam si in tempo et toto populo audiente disceptaretur” (*Opera*, 500).

²¹⁹ Rilliet and Tweedie mainly stand against Calvin, but try to introduce full documents and investigate the full facts of the trial impartially. Guizot has the same opinion (Guizot 1868:315).

until years of discretion, was held, and that furthermore the rite should be solemnised by immersion or affusion, not by merely sprinkling the face with water.

It is likely that the Council's greatest concern was the social trouble these doctrines would cause. This issue was to be treated in the second phase by the public prosecutor, who had been appointed by the Council. At the end of the day the Council decided that this trial should proceed further because of Servetus' criminality.

4.2.1.3 Second Interrogation

During the second interrogation on the next day, Wednesday, August 16 (*Opera*, 741-2), a small change was made to the composition of the court. Two judges, Germain Colladon²²⁰ and Philip Berthelier,²²¹ were added. Colladon was appointed advocate for de la Fontaine. Berthelier looked like "Servetus' champion" (Wilbur 1972:169), being Servetus' attorney, and was "blinded to more remote contingencies" (Willis 1877:318) by his hatred of Calvin. It was as if the two opposing parties at Geneva – the enemies, the Libertines, and friends of Calvin attended the trial (Wylie 1899:329):

"These two—Berthelier and Colladon, were representatives of the two parties into which Geneva was divided, and their appearance indicated that the affair was tending to wider issues than that of Servetus' guilt. In short, it was becoming the battle-ground on which the question was to be determined whether Libertines Pantheism or the Protestant faith should hold possession of Geneva."

Colladon, de la Fontaine's lawyer, was permitted to read the various writings of Melanchthon and the letters of Oecolampadius, whom Servetus criticised and cited from. Servetus was then given opportunity to prove the accuracy of the quotations from Ptolemy, the Bible of Santes Pagnini, and *Christianismi Restitutio* (*Opera*, 741-2). The thirty-eight indictments and answers were reviewed once more.

²²⁰ He was born in Berry, France and studied at the University of Bourges Law School. His brother was Nicolas de la Fontaine, pastor of Geneva, the accuser of the trial. He came to Geneva for religious refuge unlike Berthelier (Kingdon 1995:26-7).

²²¹ He was a patriot, the son of one of the political martyrs of Geneva, who acted against the Duke of Savoy in 1521, leader of the Libertines, and the attorney for the state. On the death of his father for liberty of Geneva in 1521, see Wylie (1899:243-4). In *Opera* (741) his title is "Lieutenant", because he replaced Tissot. He was smarting under the sentence of excommunication by the Consistory and was awaiting the verdict that would reverse this excommunication. He was debarred the Lord's Supper for a year and a half. But at that time he was under excommunication by Calvin. He said of Berthelier, "In truth, I should rather die a hundred times, than subject Christ to such foul mockery" (*Letters*, vol. II, 425).

Then Colladon questioned Servetus in order to ascertain a more accurate meaning of the term ‘Person’ of the Trinity as it was used in *Christianismi Restitutio*.²²² When Colladon and de la Fontaine had gone through the first eleven articles, Berthelier suddenly intervened this discussion, not wanting to see Servetus brought into trouble (*Opera*, 742). The Syndics had to adjourn the court until afternoon. Servetus was confident of his friends among the magistrates.

On the morning of the fourth day, August 17, the Syndics decided that the accusations were substantiated and determined that there had been sufficient proof adduced by de la Fontaine against Servetus. The Court decided to gather more evidence on Servetus’ heresy, and requested to present it and “to visit the prisoner, the better to show him his *errors-affin que myeuz luy puyssent estre remonstrées ses erreurs*: to assist him, *à assister luy*, and to do what he could with him in respect of the interrogatories put to him, *et qu’il voudra avec luy aux interrogatories*” (*Opera*, 743, Willis 1877:323). In compliance, the Council authorised Calvin with a few pastors to visit Servetus in prison and appear during the midday court.

4.2.1.4 Third Interrogation

The third interrogation took place Thursday afternoon, August 17, 1553 (*Opera*, 743-9). Calvin was allowed to appear as a member of the audience. The Council allowed him to “bring with him whomsoever he wished to assist in the investigation in order that the errors of the said Servetus might be the better demonstrated” (Shields 1983:365). The Court now ordered Servetus to swear on the Holy Bible that he was to speak the truth ‘under painful penalty of sixty *solz*’ and commenced the trial (*Opera*, 743-4).

Servetus repeatedly accused and boldly criticised Calvin, desiring to debate him in public (*Opera*, 500). It looked like two opponents were facing each other. This might have “strengthened the impression already received by the majority of the members of the Court, regarding the theological culpability of Servetus, it was of new resolved to persevere in the prosecution, and to endeavour, either to release him, or render his heresies manifest to all” (Rilliet 1846:114). Colladon emphasised the continuance of the previous debates, which had been interrupted by Berthelier. In answer to his severe condemnation of the two German reformers, Melanchthon and Oecolampadius, Servetus replied that their opinions were not a judicial trial upon him in Germany (*Opera*, 744-5). When Colladon

²²² Colladon mentions two pages – 22 and 578 of *CR* (see *Opera*, 742).

turned to the question of the authorship of *De Trinitatis Erroribus*, Servetus indignantly replied that “it was *Iohannes Cessarius de Aganou – Joannes Secerius de Hageunau*” (*Opera*, 745). Once again, Berthelier interrupted the debate, but Colladon continued to question the previous indictments. Now discussions turned to Servetus’ view of Ptolemy’s Geography and his interpretations on the biblical account of Judea. Calvin says in his *Refutatio Errorum* (*Opera*, 496-7, Beza 1836:188-9 & Mackinnon 1962:144-5):

The volume of Ptolemy’s Geography was introduced; in the preface to which, Servetus had admonished his readers, that the scripture account of the great fruitfulness of the land of Judea, was mere boasting; as the testimony of travellers proved it to be uncultivated, barren, and destitute of every pleasant thing. He first said that this was written by another. So bold a cavil was promptly refuted, and by this means he was demonstrated to be a public impostor, reduced to this strait, he defended it as correctly written. He was asked if he was vain enough to suppose any authority was superior to Moses. He said others had written besides Moses. — It was replied, certainly, and they all agree with Moses, who was the most ancient. How great is the crime of the man who would deceive posterity by falsehood? Who was it that said, it was a land that flowed with milk and honey? And it was added, that the land was now a testimony of the righteous judgement of God, formerly threatened against the Jews, as is described in Psalm cvii.33, 34. The senate and many other distinguished persons witnessed, that when he was convicted of impiety against the Scriptures, he slyly rubbed his face and said, there was no evil in all this; and though convicted he made no acknowledgement. Entrusted by the printer of the Bible in Latin, at Lyons, with revising the proof-sheets, he cheated the printer out of 500 francs, adding his polluted notes, &c.

Servetus’ declaration of Moses’ false representation in the Pentateuch, in reference to the fertility of Canaan, was also brought before the Court.²²³ At first, he not merely denied that the expression in Ptolemy’s Geography was from him, but quoted by another writer, he also insisted that there was nothing reprehensible in it, which encouraged Calvin to debate with him.²²⁴ When Calvin criticised the dishonesty of using the works of another without credit, he angrily replied that if he were the author of the passage in question, there was nothing wrong in it. Servetus characterised Judea as “no land flowing with milk and honey, but as meagre, barren, and inhospitable, necessarily inculpated Moses; and that to use such language was egregiously to outrage the Holy Ghost” (*Opera*, 497, Willis 1877:325).

The next grounds for heresy was based on Servetus’ annotations on the Latin Bible of Santes Pagnini, where Servetus says that in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah the servant of

²²³ He said in his book that the ‘Promised Land’ was anything but a ‘promising land’, and instead of flowing with milk and honey, and being a land of a corn, olives and vineyards, it was inhospitable and barren, and the stories about its fertility nothing but boasting and untruth.

²²⁴ According to the Declaration, 1354, it was stated that Calvin took this question (*Opera*, 745).

God does not refer to Jesus Christ, but to Cyrus. “He [Servetus] perverted most wickedly the 53d chapter of Isaiah, stating that the sufferings described - *were the mournings for Cyrus, who had died to take away the sins of the people.* - I omit that when Servetus pretended to have the suffrage of Nicholas Lyranus, (in favour of his false glosses upon Isaiah) the book was brought; and though convicted of falsehood, he did not blush” (*Opera*, 497, Beza 1836:189).²²⁵ Servetus answered, “The ancient doctors have attached a double sense to the Old Testament ... the principal should be understood of Jesus Christ; but the history and the letter must be understood of Cyrus” in chapter fifty-three of Isaiah (*Opera*, 745, Allwoerden, 1727:167, & Rilliet 1846:116). Calvin answered “that never would Servetus have had the hardihood so wretchedly to corrupt a passage so noble, had he not lost all sense of shame, while taking a diabolical pleasure in suppressing the Christian faith” (Rilliet 1846:116; *Opera*, 745-6).

The principal charges against Servetus, however, were based on what he said about the Trinity in *Christianismi Restitutio*.

Servetus’ false interpretations of the Scripture, especially the Messianic portions of the Old Testament, his blasphemous language in reference to the Trinity, his heresies in reference to baptism, his pantheistical views, all passed in review before the tribunal and the consequences of such dogmas were expounded by Calvin and shocked those in attendance.

In Servetus’ opinion Calvin’s doctrine of original sin, total depravity, and determinism reduced man to a ‘log’ and a ‘stone.’ Calvin in turn was convinced that Servetus’ doctrine of the elevation of humanity degraded God and made him subject to vices. The deification of humanity meant for Calvin the extinction of all Christian doctrines, which Calvin could not endure. Regarding Servetus’ pantheistic doctrine Calvin wrote:

“When he asserted that all creatures are of the proper essence of God and so all things are full of gods (for he did not blush to speak and write his mind in this way) I, wounded with the indignity, objected: ‘What, wretch! If one stamps the floor would one say that one stamped on your God? Does not such an absurdity shame you?’ But he answered, ‘I have no doubt that this bench or anything you point to is God’s substance.’ And when again it was objected, ‘The devil then will be substantially God?’ He broke out laughing and said, ‘Can you doubt it? This is my fundamental principle that all things are a part and portion of God

²²⁵ Nicholas Lyranus was one of the most distinguished commentators in the fourteenth century.

and the nature of things is the substantial spirit of God'..." (*Opera*, 496, Bainton, 1953b:186).²²⁶

Colladon presented the thirty letters to Calvin, printed in *Christianismi Restitutio*, a copy of Servetus' offensive notes in the margin of *Institutio*, and also a letter, written in Latin a couple of years earlier by Abel Poupin, a pastor of Geneva, which could divulge his conspiracy with Guérout (Opera, 748-9). It showed that Servetus boldly attacked the doctrines of the Genevan clergy calling God a three-headed Cerberus (Opera, 750-1, Willis 1877:359):

Your Gospel is without the One God, without true faith, without good works. For the One God you have a three-headed Cerberus; for faith a fatal dream, and good works you say are vain shows. Faith in Christ is to you mere sham, effecting nothing; Man a mere log, and your God a chimæra of subject – will. You do not acknowledge celestial regeneration by the washing with water, but treat it as an idle tale, and close the kingdom of heaven against mankind as a thing of imagination. Woe to you, woe, woe!²²⁷

Servetus had no choice but to admit that the letter was his.

On the fourth day of the examination, August 17 after proving the validity of the prosecution against Servetus, Colladon requested that Nicolas de la Fontaine be discharged. The judges agreed with Colladon. He had sufficiently proved his case against Servetus. The petition on August 15 granted Nicolas de la Fontaine his release (Opera, 749).

De la Fontaine was replaced by Calvin's brother, Antoine Calvin, and Servetus was kept under even stricter guard (Opera, 741, Killen 1843:15 & Henry 1849:197). Before the Court adjourned that day a last question was raised regarding his escape from Vienne: The possibility that his flight from the prison in Vienne resulted from his intimacy with de la Court. This then was why de la Court did not order his recapture (Opera, 749). The session was over.

²²⁶ The following sentence is the last one in Latin. "ex tradue Dei orta esse omnia, et rerum naturam esse substantialem Dei spiritum."

²²⁷ "Evangelium vestrum est uno deo, sine fide vera, sine bonis operibus. Pro uno deo habetis tricripitem cerberum... .Vae vobis, vae, vae." Castellio thought that Servetus did not call God the Trinity Cerberus but misunderstood: "The people were persuaded that Servetus called the Trinity a Cerberus, which is, in the Trinity, but he interpreted it differently from them. This interpretation was invidiously exaggerated before the people until they thought that Servetus" (Castellio 1935:286).

Servetus began to realise that the trial would have an unfavourable outcome for him. He recognising that the session was not definitive, “understood that he must now change his system of defence, and recede from his position of aggressor. His policy is no more to cope with Calvin, but only to save his own life. Now aggressiveness yields to moderation, finesse replaces arrogance, and Servetus is about to put forth all his ingenuity to prove himself innocuous” (Rilliet 1846:121). The trial of Servetus was to have a new basis and was handed over to the public prosecutor, the Attorney General.

4.2.2 Second Phase with Rigot²²⁸

4.2.2.1 Fourth Interrogation

The trial was resumed on Monday, August 21. In the morning the Council decided on the following resolution (*Opera*, 751-2, Rilliet 1846:122-3):

“Inasmuch as the case of his trial of heresy of M. Servetus vitally affects the welfare of Christendom, it is resolved to proceed with his trial; and also to write to Vienne to know why he was imprisoned, and how he escaped; and after that, when all is ascertained, to write to the magistrates of Berne, of Bâle, of Zürich, of Schaffhausen, and other Churches of Swiss, to acquaint them with the whole.”

It was a fair resolution (Wileman, s.a.:103). The determination to finalise a decision as well as the further proceedings of the trial was not influenced by Calvin, but was made dependent on the opinion of all the Swiss Churches. The idea of consulting the different churches did not come from Calvin but from his opponents. The proposal to consult with the Swiss Churches was probably adopted because Servetus and the Libertines were in conspiracy (Collins 1968:180).²²⁹ Who now had devised a new way to save Servetus’ life? Willis says of the Council’s resolution that it “suffices to show that Servetus”, who desired to change the mode of the trial, “had really had a chance of escape from the grip of his pursuer at this particular moment” (Willis 1877:339). Calvin’s opponents must have perceived that the Council of Berne had been against Calvin, insisting previously on toleration in the matter of Bolsec.²³⁰ The Council of Berne had reported on the trial of Bolsec (Willis 1877:341-2):

²²⁸ Naturæ (1892:22) contends that he was a friend of Calvin as well as an enemy of Servetus, so that he was in favour of him, but Bainton (1953b:188 & 1953c:147) calls him “a Libertine” and “a Perrinist.”

²²⁹ Guizot (1868:317) says that Servetus with their advice demanded the consult.

²³⁰ Bolsec was, Calvin’s bitter enemy. He was a Carmelite monk but left the Roman Catholic Church in about 1545. He married and settled down in Geneva during 1550. He denounced Calvin’s doctrine on the predestination. When the Genevan Council consulted the Council of Berne on the case of Bolsec, the church in Berne was tolerant. The Genevan Council was under the jurisdiction of Bernese. Due to their request, the Genevan Council acted graciously, although Bolsec’s obstinacy deserved harsh corporal punishment. “Pour

None are reprobate by the eternal decrees of God, save those who of their own choice refuse the election freely offered to all. How shall we believe that God ordains the fate of men before their birth; foredooming some to sin and death, others to virtue and eternal life? Would you make of God an arbitrary tyrant, strip virtue of its goodness, vice of its shame, and the wicked of the reproaches of their conscience?

This sentiment must have been used to their own advantage. Willis suggests that Servetus must have read it so he could use the same words to charge, inculcate and discredit Calvin (*Opera*, n. 1, 342).

A new prosecutor, Attorney General Claude Rigot, and Sheriff, Darlod, were appointed to proceed with the case in stead of Lord-Lieutenant Tissot. The prosecutor represented the city of Geneva. The case changed from a private affair to one of public interest: “there is no mere personal grievance of a theologian that is charged, but grave offences against the public good” (Shields 1983:366). Because he was not ready for new indictments in the first part of the sitting, Rigot resumed the trial by examining a letter of Arnoullet, the printer of *Christianismi Restitutio*, which had been sent to one of Servetus’ friends, Bertet on July 14, 1553 (*Opera*, 752-7). The letter connects Servetus to the authorship of *Christianismi Restitutio*. Through it the relationship between Servetus and Guérout became known. Servetus denied that he knew Arnoullet on the pretext that he could not recognise his handwriting, although they had been imprisoned together in Vienne. The letter that Arnoullet would be released the next week but that he had been deceived by Guérout, corrector of the book, who asked to translate the heretical book into French. Arnoullet forced Bertet to go to Frankfurt and stop selling and exterminate *Christianismi Restitutio*. The letter was read before the Council (*Opera*, 754-7, Willis 1877:342-4):

I asked him whether it was all according to God? And he replied that it was; and further, that it contained a number of Epistles addressed to Mons. Calvin, which he was minded to translate into French. But this I forbade without the permission of the author, which was refused. When last in Geneva, Geroult saw and informed M. Calvin that I had lately been there, without having waited on him. The truth is, that I did not think he would have me in such friendship now as in times past—by reason of my having had anything to do with such a monster, whom God look after! Geroult was in fact in league with the writer, and never let fall a syllable to me until after your departure – for Frankfurt [in charge of the – Bale of the “Christianismi Restoratio” among other book

cela tu ne l’as voulu confesser mais en demeures en ton obstination cas digne de grieve punition corporelle” (*Opera*, 247). As a result of their response, Bolsec was banished from Geneva on December 23, 1551. He returned to the Roman Catholic Church. In his book, *Vie de Calvin* (21-2), published in 1557, he contends that Calvin wrote a letter to the Cardinal de Tournon and Viceroy in France, accusing Servetus of heresy, but this was only his imagination (see *Opera*, 173 197).

merchandise]. This as you know, gave occasion to your speaking to me so seriously as you did about the book in question

... As to what you say about my sending someone else to Frankfurt,—understand me, that I will have no one go but yourself, and that you are to see every copy of the book destroyed, so that there shall be left of it neither a leaf nor half a leaf. Understand, too, that this is to be done without prejudice to anyone. I am only sorry that we have all been so grossly deceived in the business; but if God, our Father, leave us the other goods we possess—more by far than those we shall destroy—it will be well

... As to what you say of my having known that Villanovanus had been rejected by the Christian Churches, and that avarice had something to do with my having undertaken the work, let it suffice that I deny this; and our long intimacy must have made you so well acquainted with me, that you will not doubt I now speak the truth. How the Inquisitor came to have your name, I cannot tell. I can only assure you that in all the interrogations to which I have been subjected by him I never named a living soul; nor indeed was there ever mention made of you in my hearing ...

... Be good enough to say to Mons. Calvin that I shall not be in Geneva again without seeing him; and that if I have not done my duty towards him in all respects, beg him to find some excuse for me. He who is the cause of this [meaning Geroult, doubtless] is now there; and when Monsieur Calvin shall have spoken with me, he will understand the reason of my saying nothing more at present. Make my respects to him mealtimes, and forgive me if I do not now write more particularly of our affairs.

On the afternoon of August 21 the second part of the sitting was commenced with a debate between Calvin and Servetus on his quotations of the Fathers. It was the second encounter between them after August 17. Servetus maintained that he advocated the same doctrine in respect to the Trinity held by the Church Fathers.²³¹ Not only did he declare that there was a real distinction in each essence of the Trinity, whose Persons he believed in, but he also claimed that Tertullian talked only about a 'disposition' of the Trinity. Calvin answered that Tertullian indeed believed in the existence of a real distinction between the persons of the Trinity. Servetus said that the oldest teachers of Church, before the Nicene Council, did not teach the Trinity nor use the term 'Trinity' (*Opera*, 498, 759; Rilliet 1846:125). Calvin took note of these quotations as well as those from Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Origen. When Servetus referred to the Latin translations and the original Greek texts of Justin Martyr, Calvin remonstrated with him about his quotations and his knowledge on Justin

²³¹ The following numbers referring to the Church Fathers were used in his books: Irenæus 108 (*CR*, 34, 52, 687); Tertullian 68, Augustine 54, Clement of Rome 34, Clementine Recognitions 8, Ignatius 36, Athanasius 22, Clement of Alexandria 22, Hillary of Poitiers 16, Basel the Great 10, Origen 14, Justine Martyr 9 (*CR*, 402, 671, 677, 692); Cyprian 7, Cyril 7, Jerome 7, Gregory 6, Periphery 5, John of Damascus 3, Ambrose 3. See Friedman (1978:103).

(*Opera*, 498, 759, Henry 1849:201-2).²³² These arguments were supposedly based on a fragment in Latin not on Greek, although Servetus knew Greek well, and had managed to publish the Greek version in Paris in 1551. Calvin indicated that there was no Latin translation of Justin Martyr.²³³ Calvin demonstrated to the Council that Servetus had not read Justin Martyr closely. He based it on a spurious citation. He judged that Servetus did not know Greek. Calvin says of Servetus' attitude on citations of Justin Martyr (*Opera*, 498, Beza 1836:189-90):

He magnificently boasted, that Martyr, in his *Golden Age*, had not mentioned the fables of the Trinity and persons. I immediately ordered the volume to be brought, and pointed out with my finger certain places, in which that holy man had as openly asserted our faith, as if he had written at our request. But he could no more read the Greek language than a boy learning his A, B, C. Finding himself basely caught, he peevishly asked for the Latin translation to be handed him. How happens this, said I, since there is no Latin translation extant, and you cannot read Greek, that you should yet pretend yourself to have read so familiarly the works of Justin? Whence then did you obtain those testimonies which you indulge yourself in quoting so liberally? He, as he was accustomed, with a brazen front, passed quickly to another subject, without the least sign of shame.

The more significant issue between Calvin and Servetus, was on the Son of God. Servetus did not admit that Jesus Christ was the Son of God from eternity, but only from his appearance on earth. The Son of God was not called Jesus Christ until he was born into the world. Calvin attributed Jesus' deity to the Word before its incarnation in Jesus Christ, as based on the first chapter of John. Servetus replied that "the common interpretation of the language of John was mistaken; the Son, as he declared, having only existed *formally* or as an idea, dispensation or mode in the mind of God previous to the Incarnation and Birth of Christ, not as an entity – a *person*, in the usual acceptation of the word, possessed of distinct individual existence" (Willis 1877:348-9). His interpretation of 'the Word' was based on philosophical thinking. Moreover, "the Word, not being a separate reality in the essence of God, could not unite himself as such to the person of Christ, but that the body of Christ was founded of the very substance of the Divinity; so that the human elements and

²³² In fact, Justin Martyr used the term Trinity before the Nicene Council. See "The First Apology of Justin" (vi, 164 & xiii, 166-7): "And we are confessed that we are atheists, but not with respect to the most true God, the Father of righteousness and temperance and the other virtues, who is free from all impurity. But both Him, and the Son (who came forth from Him and taught us these things, and the host of the other good angels who follow and are made like to Him), and the Spirit, we worship and adore, knowing them in reason and truth, and declaring without grudging to every one who wishes to learn, as we have been taught ... and that we reasonably learned that He is the Son of the true God, Himself, and holding Him in the second place, and the prophetic Spirit in the third, we will prove." Servetus cited Irenæus' *Against Heresies* (IV, xi.2, 474) in *CR* (34) and *Against Heresies* (IV, iii) in *CR* (52 & 687). For Justin, see *CR*, 402, 671, 677, 692; Bainton (1953b:187-8) explains that Servetus' knowledge on Justin came from Irenæus' *Against Heresies*.

²³³ "Quum nulla exstet latina translatio" (*Opera*, 498).

the divine were not distinct, but intimately mingled in a single unity” (*Opera*, 760, Rilliet 1846:127).

Servetus felt victorious over Calvin in the debate, and thought that he positively influenced the Council. Confident that the outcome of the trial would be favourable to him (Kingdon 1995:25), Servetus requested a few books, so that he could prove his assertions, and some paper and ink to formulate a petition. Porter mentions that the Council gave him no more than a single sheet of paper, but that it was enough for him to write a petition on (Porter 1854:22; Killen 1843:15). Calvin consented to give him some books.²³⁴

4.2.2.2 Fifth Interrogation

On August 23, Claude Rigot, drafted thirty new indictments (*Opera*, 763-6)²³⁵ for the fifth interrogation of Servetus. Rigot maintained that some of the doctrines, from a theological and practical point of view, tended to have the effects of heresies. Rigot proposed to accuse Servetus for heresy, blasphemy, and disturbing the peace of Christendom.²³⁶ The new indictments marked a shift in emphasis from the theological issues to the disturbances of the civil peace.²³⁷ They were very different from the last thirty-eight theological charges drawn up by la de Fontaine. Their aim was to demonstrate sedition (Shields 1883:367-8):

“They referred to his personality and former suspicious life; to his conflicts with divines; to his clandestine book and its injurious consequences; to his calumination of the Reformed Churches; his alleged want of chastity; to his revolutionary aims in Christendom; to his seditious designs in coming to Geneva and his secret connections with parties there and elsewhere.”

In looking at his personal history, the Court suspected Servetus of living an impure and immoral life and of making a seditious attempt to disturb the peace of Geneva by intentionally spreading his heresy and going to Geneva. What impressed the members of the Council more than the questions related to his suspect life, was that he was connected to spreading heresies into the entire world. The new indictments “were devoted to the more practical purpose of showing the dangerous effects of such heresies in leading him into a

²³⁴ Calvin brought him Tertullian, Irenæus, Ignatius’ epistles, and Policarp (*Opera*, 760).

²³⁵ N. Chabod, the new Lord-Lieutenant, was not present at the previous examination. He was replaced by Pierre Tissot, the old Lord-Lieutenant (see *Opera*, 766).

²³⁶ “Ce sont les interrogatz er articles sir lesquelz le procureur general de ceste cite de Geneve requiert interrogeur Michel Servet, prisonnier criminel pour blasphemés, heresies et perurbation de la Chrestiente” (*Opera*, 763, Willis 1877:351). “The conduct of the council towards Servetus is easily understood, when it is recollected, what was the then state of affairs, and how involved the very existence of the civil policy was with that of the church” (Henry 1849:194).

²³⁷ “Now the strategy of the court was shifted from the theological debates of little importance to its lay members to the private life of the accused and to the repercussion of his ideas so as to imply a charge of sedition and subversion of the social order” (Hillar 1997:291).

criminal and dissolute life, encouraging the young in crime and immorality, favouring the teaching of Jews and Turks, and reviving ancient heresies long since condemned by the Church” (Wilbur 1972:171 & *Opera*, 765).²³⁸

The Court regarded Servetus as a socially dangerous and turbulent criminal because of his immoral doctrine, his rebellious life, and the publication of his heretical writings (Willis 1877:353).²³⁹ The Court no longer dealt with the theological matters, as Calvin and de la Fontaine had charged. Theology was not a sufficient civil ground for prosecution. Moreover, at this examination, Calvin was excluded from the court proceedings. Shields comments: “It is no mere personal grievance of a theologian that is charged, but grave offences against the public good. It is not even the orthodoxy of the Church so much as the safety of the State that is to be maintained” (Shields 1983:366). The direction the trial was taking was bringing it closer to politics than to theology.

Before Servetus’ arrest, two other heresy trials had taken place in Geneva: Rebert le Moine, who came from Normandy and asserted that God approved of prostitution and fornication had been banished merely three days before Servetus’ arrest. Jean Baudin, who came from Lorraine, argued that “Jesus was a phantom and the Bible was a book like any other” (Naphy 1994:183). The Council was sensitive to Servetus spreading heresies. Therefore, the initial character of the trial was theological and “wore a political aspect only in the broader sense that heresy was always regarded as socially subversive” (Bainton 1953b:178).²⁴⁰ The Court now seemed to be interested in the matter of whether Servetus was a seditious or not.

Furthermore, the judges suspected that there was a conspiracy between Servetus and Calvin’s opponents to disturb the peace in Geneva. Therefore, from the twenty-eighth to thirtieth question they focused on questioning him about how he came to Geneva and what relationship he had with Guérout. In their minds “the questions of heresy will be quite subordinate to that of sedition and conspiracy” (Shields 1983:367). It is necessary to recognise that Servetus’ condemnation did not result from Calvin’s personal grievance and opposition at all but was the consensus of the majority of the Court that considered politics

²³⁸ “Vita autem Serveti magis fuit dissoluta, quam ut suspicari liceat, errore ad turbendam ecclesiam fuisse impulsam” (*Opera*, 496).

²³⁹ Rigot did not understand “how a heretic could be anything else than a profligate” (Rilliet 1846:134).

as more important part than theology throughout Servetus' trial (Rilliet 1846:131).²⁴¹ The trial of Servetus now took on a civil aspect.

The thirty indictments were followed by the Attorney General's interrogation of Servetus to see if he was ever involved in a brawl or if he had wounded anyone while he stayed in Charlieu, where he was imprisoned (*Opera*, 765-6, 769-70, Bainton 1953b:190-2):²⁴²

Had he not been arrested for wounding someone in a brawl?

Servetus in reply related the incident at Charlieu.

Had he ever been married and, if not, how could he refrain so long?

Servetus replied that he was physically unfit because of an *Operation* and a rupture.

Seeing that he had lived a dissolute life and had not had the grace to live chastely as a true Christian, what had led him to write on the fundamentals of the Christian religion?

Servetus answered that he had studied the Holy Scripture with a desire for the truth and that he had lived as a Christian. (The prosecutor reverted to these charges in the second hearing.)

How old was he when he was *Operated* on and ruptured?

Servetus said that he could not remember, but he was probably about five.

Had he contemplated marriage at Charlieu?

Yes, but had refrained because of his incapacity.

He had remarked, had he not, that there were enough women in the world without marrying?

Servetus replied that he did not remember having said it, but he might have done so in jest and to conceal his impotence.

Had he not lived wantonly at Charlieu and elsewhere?

Servetus answered No.

There is no doubt that the prosecutor suspected him of living an immoral life. As to attacking the two respected reformers, Oecolampadius and Capito, Servetus claimed that just as Luther and Melachthon had criticised Calvin about the sacraments and free will, so he too debated with these reformers. He also claimed that he did not tell his ideas to anyone but to the reformers. His correspondents only included Oecolampadius, Calvin, Abel Poupin, and Peter Viret (*Opera*, 764-70 *passim*). Rigot asked Servetus if his doctrines

²⁴⁰ Servetus' trial was now to focus on his conspiracy with the Libertines (Osler 1909:17). "They turned the trial over to the public prosecutor and shifted the accent from heresy to subversion of religion and the general welfare" (Grimm 1973:284).

²⁴¹ According to Shields' drama (1898:50-1, 53), Rigot says to Servetus: "What need of words? He hath condemn'd himself In open court, and to his other crimes, Sedition, blasphemy, conspiracy, Now addeth perjury to cap his guilt. A troubler throughout Christendom; long A secret foe of our republic; here He hides, a lurking spider, with his web Of heresy through Italy and France. Let web and spider both be swept away, As with the avenging besom of the Law ... We charge him with a crime as well as sin: No subtle heresy of thought alone, to rend the minds of men apart; nor yet Mere blasphemy to shock the highest Heaven And jar the base of order here on earth, But that dire scourge alike of Church and State, – Sedition, with wild eyes and flaming torch, And riot, rapine, ruin in its train."

were the truth, and if he thought they would be universally received. He replied that they would be accepted universally, although they were being rejected at present (*Opera*, 765, 767-8). Rigot continued the interrogation of Servetus with the following questions (*Opera*, 764-5, 768-9, Bainton 1953b:192):

Did he not know that his book would greatly disturb Christendom?

No. He thought that Christendom would profit, and the truth would be worked out little by little.

What truth did he think was not already worked out?

Calvin's doctrine of predestination, he retorted, and of the descent into hell.

Did he then think that his doctrine would be accepted and that it was true?

He answered that he did not know whether it would be accepted, but he thought it true, for things often at first reprov'd which are afterwards received. If, then, he thought he would offend God in concealing his opinions why did he not proclaim them in France?

Because, he answered, we should not cast pearls before swine, and there was great persecution among the papists.

Up to this time he had not disowned his own logic. Servetus continued saying that the Reformation of Luther had not reached the point of perfection and it lacked something important he did not completely explain. But he would "enlighten the Court by a reference to the Bible and the Fathers, or explain himself more fully than he had done in his book if they would grant him a conference, in their presence, with one or more men of learning" (Willis 1877:377). This resulted in a worse situation. The Court examined him about why he quoted from the Koran in his book (*Opera*, 765). He replied that he had quoted from it in order to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ more and had selected the good from it. He continued explaining, "even though that book be bad, he might employ the good which it contained" (*Opera*, 770, Rilliet 1846:149).

A next question concerned, *Christianismi Restitutio* about which he stated that his aim in publishing it was to bring back primitive Christianity which had been perverted because of some errors written after the Nicene Council (*Opera*, 764, 768-9). When the Court charged him with having condemned and insulted their doctrines, Servetus claimed that the Churches of Geneva and Germany held mistaken doctrines. He had written about it in a letter to the pastor of Abel Poupin (*Opera*, 769, Rilliet 1846:133-4):

And that he had never thought that either the Churches of Geneva or of Germany would go to perdition for that, but that those who had written might have erred upon certain points; for the epistle produced by M. Abel contains scholastic disputations, in which one uses very vehement language, the better

²⁴² He was imprisoned for three days because of a physician's relatives, driven by jealousy (Hillar 1997:227).

to persuade his opponent—not that he believes, for all that, they have uttered many greater injuries against him, in terms publicly printed, both in Latin and French; and that what he had written to the said Abel, was more that six years ago, while he had written it only to discover the truth, not to publish it, nor to defame him, and still less the Republic of Geneva, and other cities and Churches.

His audacious and deceiving replies were apparently divulged before the Court by a letter to Abel Poupin of an unknown date (*Opera*, 750-1 & Allwoerden, 1727:47-9, Willis 1877:358-60):

Monsieur Abel! – Although it is most plainly shown, in my twelfth letter to Calvin, that the Law of the Decalogue had been abrogated, I shall add a few words that you may the better understand the innovation brought about by the advent of Christ. If you turn to Jeremiah xxxi., verse 31 *et seq.*, you will find it stated distinctly that the law of the Decalogue was to be annulled. The Prophet teaches that the Covenant entered into with the Fathers, when they left Egypt, was to be no longer in force. But this was the Covenant of the Decalogue. For in 1 Kings, chapter viii., it is said that the Covenant or Testimony—the Decalogue, to wit—was in the Ark with the Fathers at their exodus from Egypt, whence the Ark is called the Ark of the Covenant, that is of the Tables, or Ten Commandments of the Law. Now this was the form of the Covenant: God promised the Israelites that they should be his people, if they did according to the words of the Law, and they on their part engaged that they would obey them. Such was the Covenant. And it is of this Covenant that Jeremiah (chapter xviii.) speaks as being repealed, as does Ezekiel (chapter xvi.), and Paul likewise in his Epistle to the Hebrews. If God took us for his own under that Law, we should lie—under the curse, and perish by its pressure. The Law therefore was repealed. God does not now receive us as his children but by faith in his beloved Son, Jesus Christ. See then what becomes of your Gospel when it is confounded with the Law. Your Gospel is without the One God, without true faith, without good works. For the One God you have a three-headed Cerberus; for faith a fatal dream, and good works you say are vain shows. Faith in Christ is to you mere sham, effecting nothing; Man a mere log, and your God a chimæra of subject—will. You do not acknowledge celestial regeneration by the washing with water, but treat it as an idle tale, and close the kingdom of heaven against mankind as a thing of imagination. Woe to you, woe, woe!

This, my third Epistle, is addressed to you with the wish that you may be brought to better thoughts, and I mean not to admonish you any more. It offends you, perchance, that I meddle in those battles of the angel Michael, and seek to bring you into the strife. But study the part I refer to carefully, and you will see that there are men who do battle there, exposing their lives for Christ's sake. That the Angels speak truth is proclaimed by the Scriptures. But see you not that the question is of the Church of Christ fled from Earth these many years? Is it not of division, of difference that John himself makes mention? And who is the Accuser challenging us with transgression of the Law and its precepts? Accusation and seduction of the world, he says, were to precede the battle; the battle therefore was to follow, and the time is at hand, as he also tells us. And who are they who shall gain the victory over the Beast? They who do

not accept his mark. I know for sure that I shall die in this cause; but my courage does not fail me because of this; I shall show me a disciple worth of my master.

I much regret that, through you, I am not allowed to amend some places in my writings now in Calvin's hands. Farewell, and look for no more letters from me. I stand to my post and mediate, and look out what may further come to pass. For come it will, surely it will come and that without long delay.

In the above letter, we can see how Servetus condemned and slandered those who did not agree with his view and how he interpreted the term 'Church' eschatologically, although he insisted that he did not defame either pastors or Geneva. He had no scruples in saying that God was Cerberus and the Beast, and he volunteered, like Michael the angel, to fight against the world's accusations to his own death: "I shall die in this cause."

The next question asked where he had wandered in Italy before arriving in Geneva, and what he had been doing since arriving. In order to gain some credibility before the judges, Servetus told them that he did not intend "to disseminate his doctrines and trouble that Church" but only wanted to pass through to proceed to Naples because of the police in France (*Opera*, 770). The Court called the landlord of the inn, la Rose, where Servetus lodged but without much result (*Opera*, 770). The last question of the fifth interrogation concerned Arnoullet, the printer, and Guillaume Guérout, the editor (*Opera*, ⁷⁶⁶, 771). Despite Arnoullet's letter to Bertet he flatly denied communicating with Guérout, even indirectly, and denied that Guérout had talked to him. Servetus was lying. On his denial the following could be said (Rilliet 1846:147):

"The perseverance of Servetus in denying that fact distinctly proves its reality; and his conduct cannot be explained, except by the fear which he felt lest they should establish between his connection with the Genevese corrector and his own subsequent visit to Genevese an agreement which might disclose the motive of his coming."

He must have thought that he had affected the judges favourably and that they would free him from the dangerous civil charges because of his consistent denial. He might have hoped that his influence would be strengthened by his first petition (Shields 1983:369). Servetus, who was more sure of himself when questions concerning his personal life arose or even regarding his knowledge of Greek, was now trying to avoid portraying himself as a seditious and quarrelsome person. Thus, he aimed at showing them that he was harmless and by no means a disturber of the peace in Geneva. He also offered as a pretext for his behaviour as follows (*Opera*, 768, Rilliet 1846:132-3):

He thought he would offend God, if he did not do it, and that he had published with as much zeal as if it had been to save his soul; for our Lord has command us in St. Matthew, 10th chapter, that what has been revealed to us in secret should not be concealed, but imparted to others; and has also said, in the 5th chapter, that we should not put the light which He has given us under a bench or stool, but in a place where it might enlighten others; and thus, according to God and his conscience, he thought he had accurately followed all the passages of Holy Scriptures which speak of such questions, and also the chief among the ancient doctors of the Church. He wished to say and to do what was right, and still thinks he has not done ill, but good, with an upright intention, as our Lord says in the 5th [6th]²⁴³ chapter of St. Matthew: ‘If eye be good, the whole body is full of light; if the intention be good, the whole deed will be reputed good.’ And that he had never been seditious or turbulent, but had acted with the design of aiding the good.

4.2.2.3 The First Petition of Servetus

On August 24, 1553 the written petition Servetus handed to the Court two days previously was presented to the Council (*Opera*, 771). The petition raised three questions. The petition read thus (*Opera*, 762-3 & Allwoerden, 1727:74-5, Willis 1877:362-4. See Audin 1850:446-7 & Wright 1806a:173-5):

To the most honourable my Lords, the Syndics and Councillors of *Geneva*.

The Petition of Michael Servetus, now lying under a criminal charge, humbly showeth – That it is a thing new and unknown to the Apostles, Disciples, and ancient Churches, to make the interpretation of the Scriptures, and questions thence arising, grounds of criminal accusation. This is clearly seen from Chapters xviii. and xix. of the Acts of the Apostles, where accusers are referred to the Churches, when the matters in question bear upon Religion only. So too in the time of Constantine, when the Arian heresy was broached, and accusations were brought on the part both of Athanasius and Arius, the great Emperor, by his Council and the Councils of the Churches, decided that, according to the old doctrine, suits of the kind could not be entertained by civil tribunals not even in the case of such notorious heresy as that of Arius, – but were to be taken into consideration and decided by the Church. Further, that heretics were either to be brought to reason by argument, or were to be punished by banishment, when they proved refractory and refused to amend. Now that banishment was the award of the ancient Churches against heretics can be proved by a thousand histories and authorities. Wherefore, my Lords, in consonance with Apostolic teaching and the practice of the ancient Church, your petitioner prays that the Criminal Charge under which he lies may be discharged.

Secondly, my Lords, I entreat you to consider that I have committed no offence within your territory; neither, indeed, have I been guilty of any elsewhere: I have never been seditious, and am no disturber of the peace. The questions I discuss in my works are of an abstruse kind, and within the scope and ken of men of learning only. During all the time I passed in Germany, I never spoke

²⁴³ “S. Mathieu, 6 chapitre, Si locuil est bon tout le corps scra lumineux” (*Opera*, 768).

on such subjects save with Oecolampadius, Bucer, and Capito; neither in France did I ever enter on them with anyone. I have always disavowed the opinions of the Anabaptists, seditious against the magistrate, and preaching community of goods. Wherefore, as I have been guilty of no sort of sedition, but have only brought up for discussion certain ancient doctrines of the Church, I think I ought not to be detained a prisoner and, made the subject of a criminal prosecution.

In conclusion, my Lords, inasmuch as I am a stranger ignorant of the customs of this country, not knowing either how to speak or comfort myself in the circumstances under which I am placed, I humbly beseech you to assign me an Advocate to speak for me in my defence. Doing thus, you will assuredly do well, and our Lord will prosper your Republic. In the City of Geneva, the 22nd day of August, 1553.

Michael Servetus, in his own cause.

Servetus gave a close instance that the Arians in the time of Constantine the Great were not handed over to civil trials, and questions were not decided by the civil trial, but by the church alone. Further, the only possible punishment for 'heresy' was banishment. On the basis of these precedents and the doctrine of the apostles and the ancient church, he demanded to be set free from the criminal accusations, saying: "It is a thing new and unknown to the Apostles, Disciples, and ancient Churches, to make the interpretation of the Scriptures, and questions thence arising, grounds of criminal accusation," according to Acts 18 and 19 (*Opera*, 762-3, Willis 1877:362).

Second, he tries to make clear that he did not commit any sedition or disturbance in Geneva. He was aware of being seen as a seditious or disturber. He claims that the theological questions he raised in Germany with Oecolampadius, Bucer, or Capito concerned only scholars. He never talked about them in France, either. As to the question of being like the seditious Anabaptists, he says he had always disapproved of them. He realised that he was suspect of being an Anabaptist and he knew that this was regarded as serious sedition at that time (Miller 1980:1034):

But under all this heresy, like Anabaptists—the celestial prophets—he was seditious and revolutionary. Such men generally aim at the overthrow of existing governments, as well as Christianity. This was the great sin, and the real cause of the persecution of the Anabaptists in those days. They followed the Reformers into every country, and sought to upset their work by affirming that they only went half way, and that Christians—like themselves—should rule the state as well as the church—that the time was come for the saints to take the kingdoms of this world.

Third, he demanded legal counsel since he was a foreigner in the country and did not know its customs or the law. Calvin's enemies tried publicly to take advantage of these petitions and to help him.

4.2.3 Third Phase

4.2.3.1 Rigot's Response and Sixth Interrogation

On August 28, for the sixth interrogation, Rigot replied to the petition with thirty-eight new indictments prepared between August 23 and 27.²⁴⁴ It is necessary that we should evaluate these requests from several points of view. With the above petition Servetus sought a new way of winning the trial because he knew that he was suspected of being a seditious.

Servetus claimed that the basic position of the Council was that the early Church had persecuted the heretics and banished them. He tried to discharge the criminal charge against him: "Wherefore, my Lords, in consonance with Apostolic teaching and the practice of the ancient Church, your petitioner prays that the Criminal Charge under which he lies may be discharged" (*Opera*, 762). However, Rigot claimed that Servetus was wrong about the early Church, since emperors had been executing heretics for dogmatic and doctrinal deviations from the time of Constantine the Great. It was only pagan judges and officials who had said this because they did not care about Jews and their religion and the questions of heresies and blasphemies, and were interested only in preventing defamation of their idols (*Opera*, 772).

Rigot perceived that Servetus had already been condemned by his conscience, because he was trying to annul the punishment of the heretic, and that, although he pretended to recant the wrong doctrines of the Anabaptists, he actually never took this position in any of his books. Rigot could not understand how Servetus did not know the contemporary laws and constitutions in light of his law studies in Toulouse (*Opera*, 773). Regarding this cunning attempt to avert him from the heretical punishment Rigot says of him (*Opera*, 774, Hillar 1997:293):

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

²⁴⁴ It consists of two parts: one is Rigot's despondence to Servetus' petition of August 22 and the other contains the thirty-eight articles (*Opera*, 771-82).

and argues for death. And in order to avoid this punishment he wanted to propound such a false doctrine that the criminals should not be punished by death.

In the second petition Servetus insisted that he was never involved in any turbulence nor violence, anywhere. He was very aware that he was suspected of disturbing the peace in Geneva: “I have never been seditious, and am no disturber of the peace” (*Opera*, 762). Rigot, appealing to Servetus’ conscience, charged his audacious untruthfulness as follows (*Opera*, 774-5, Rilliet 1846:142):

An evident untruth; for he himself has said, under the tenth question, that he had concealed, and not communicated to others, what God had revealed to him. How could any one believe that he had not spoken to a single person during the thirty years that had elapsed since he commenced to discuss and print his horrible heresies? Consider also, his age of twenty when he began, at which period the young are not on their guard against communicating to their companions what they know and study. By this one may easily judge with what kind of conscience the said Servetus has attempted in his answer to pervert justice, and whether he has repented of his horrible misdeeds; for in some replies he says that he offers to be corrected, and cries ‘mercy;’ and afterwards, in many other places, he is confident, and audaciously maintains that he has never spoken or acted amiss.

Servetus had made trouble with the respectable German reformers – Capito and Oecolampadius – and defamed them, as was revealed in Rigot’s questions. Rigot also examined his relationship with the Jews and Turks (*Opera*, 777). In the fifth interrogation, Servetus testified that he had communicated with the Jews and Turks and had read the Koran, which was an evil book, full of blasphemies. He claimed that he had quoted the Koran for the glory of Christ and that the Koran abounded in what was good, and that even in a wicked book one could find some good things (*Opera*, 765, 769-70).

On the third question, in which Servetus claimed to be a stranger in Geneva, and therefore requested an advocate to represent him: it would not be easy to justify the trial if the request were true. Even if Servetus were a heretic, which authority could charge and judge him? Could the Court of Geneva charge a stranger in bounds of the contemporary law?

Servetus was already charged with blasphemy, based on the letter to Abel Poupin (*Opera*, 750-1 & Allwoerden, 1727:47-9). Dyer says that the trial of Servetus was legal because “he adduced the laws of the church which required that heretics should be punished, wherever they might be found” on the basis of the jurisdiction of the Holy Roman (Dyer 1850:333-4 & *Opera*, 773). Because Servetus was condemned by the Roman Catholics in

France and attempted to spread his heresy to Geneva, “it cannot be questioned but that one who from one country, either by himself or his agent, introduces into another country a paper written or printed, is liable for any crime committed by its circulation therein. The crimes charged and proved were against the laws of Geneva and the court of Geneva had the right to try Servetus” (Prime 1910:9). The main reason why Servetus was arrested in Geneva was because “the civil authorities found cause enough for his arraignment, and the trial soon brought to light his connection with turbulent factions in the city. Moreover, even if Servetus were a foreigner he could have been charged with having defamed Calvin, and the Genevan church under the Genevan law.

The Court of Geneva practised the rule of not surrendering any prisoner who was apprehended in its territory, according to the French King’s request in 1550, and the Senate of Chamberry in 1552 (Rilliet 1846:150-3, Bungener, 244-5). Rigot, wearied again with Servetus’ consistent insolence and artful lying, according to the criminal edicts,²⁴⁵ now censured Servetus’ saying (*Opera*, 775, Rilliet 1846:143-4 & see Shields 1983:369-70):

Item, seeing that he knows so well how to lie, there is no need that he should ask a procurator; for who is there that could or would aid him in such impudent falsehoods and horrible purposes? Add to this, that it is forbidden by law, and was never seen that such seducers spoke by council, and the interposition of an attorney. And yet more; there is not one jot of apparent innocence which requires an attorney; wherefore he ought to be instantly denied such a request, as inept and impertinent, and to reply pertinently to the following articles.

Thus, the three points of Servetus’ petition were entirely rejected.. Servetus could not gain the desired credibility through his petition, but again revealed his total dishonesty before the Court. The Attorney General, Claude Rigot, reported to the judges on Servetus’ untruthfulness as follows (Wright 1806a:177; see *Opera*, 772):

Servetus varied in his answer; that they were full of lies, that he made a mock of God and his word, by alleging, corrupting and wresting the passages of the holy scriptures to conceal his blasphemies, and avoid being punished. He added, that Servetus had made a wrong choice of the examples quoted by him, out of the Acts of the apostles; and that what he had said of the emperor Constantine was false. Besides, he alleged against the prisoner the law of those emperors, who condemned heretics to death. He further said that Servetus was condemned by his own conscience, and sensible that he deserved death; and that like the anabaptists, he deprived the magistrates of the right of the sword. Lastly, he concluded, that since Servetus knew so well how to tell lies he should nor have an attorney, as he desired: that such a thing was forbidden by the civil law, and never granted to such seducers.

²⁴⁵ It is written in Ordinances de 1543: “Si le criminel demande setre admis a ses justifications, que le Conseil regarde sil est de raison ou non” (see Rilliet 1846:n. †, 143).

Rigot was aware of his intentions. Subsequently, Rigot presented him another thirty-eight questions (*Opera*, 775-82, especially 777 - questions 26-9, 781 -answers 26-29, & see 771). It looked like an appendix to the seeming bravado of Servetus' petition. First of all, through the first to the third, Rigot questioned him, what was his judgement of who were heretics and he answered 'Constantine the Great.' The rest of the questions were based on the thirty indictments from August 23, on *De Trinitatis Erroribus* and *Christianismi Restitutio*, quotations from Oecolampadius, Capito, Bucer, his relations with Arnoullet and Guérout, and his personal life.²⁴⁶ After two parts of the sixth interrogation, the court adjourned and "the two main charges of sedition and conspiracy appeared to have been proved by the prosecutor, the charge of heresy being still on the hands of the theological experts to whom it was referred" (Shields 1983:371).

4.2.3.2 Seventh Interrogation

A request to the jailer in Vienne had been sent on August 22. On August 31, the seventh interrogation took place with the prosecutor interrogating Servetus on the correspondence from Anthony de la Court, the Vice Bailiff of Vienne. An interlude followed. Servetus was recognised by the jailer from Vienne who said that he had been in their custody for two days (Wilbur 1972:172). He was asked how Servetus could escape from their custody and he explained how it happened. A letter from Vienne expressed appreciation to the magistrates of Geneva for apprehending Servetus. It did not contain the acts of the trial but a copy of the warrant of arrest and the sentence of death against Villeneuve (*Opera*, 783-7).²⁴⁷ It also contained a request that the death sentence might be executed on the living man as it had already been executed on his effigy and on his books. The inquisitor of Vienne begged the Council of Geneva to send him back to France, but the Council refused to surrender Servetus. It seems that not only did the inquisitor of Vienne desire to find "fresh charge against him" (Dyer 1850:335), but the Council determined not to give him up, but for justice to prevail over him. Rigot responded by asking the inquisitor to let Servetus remain with them. The precedent Rigot cited was based on previous cases from April 18, 1550 and July 22 1552: although the King of France requested to extradite a prisoner who have abstracted from the public treasury the Court refused the proposal in 1550; the same refusal was made to the Senate of Chambery in 1552.²⁴⁸ The Council did

²⁴⁶ His two books are dealt from the tenth to fourteenth; questions of reformers from forth to ninth; the questions of Arnoullet and Guérout from fifteenth to twenty-fifth; his life from twenty-sixth to the end.

²⁴⁷ The record of sentence of Vienne is contained in *Opera*, 784-7.

²⁴⁸ For more detail see Rilliet (1846:150-3).

not intend to save him from the hands of Vienne but wanted to conduct the trial based on the law of Geneva (Smyth 1856:106-7):

The magistrates refused to surrender their prisoner. Not that they had any wish, probably, to carry out the trial; it would have saved them much trouble to have resigned him into the hands of those from whom he had fled; but by the laws of Geneva, often, and even recently acted upon, the magistrates were not entitled to surrender an accused prisoner, even though the crime were committed beyond their territory. They were bound to try the case for themselves.

On being given the option to choose, Servetus fell on the ground in tears and begged to be judged in Geneva (Willis 1877:380). Several reasons could be suggested for this choice: he would have been burned in Vienne if he went back; he still hoped for acquittal on the grounds that he had committed no offence within the Genevan territory (*Opera*, 788); he was still sure that he was supported by the Libertines.

As Servetus continued to deny all the facts regarding his escape from Vienne, the reasons for his coming to Geneva and the facts regarding his relations with people in Geneva, the Court started suspecting him all the more. He did not hesitate to ascribe his sufferings to the personal hatred of Calvin. He thought that Calvin's instigation through de Trie caused him to be apprehended and accused in Vienne.

4.2.3.3 Eighth Interrogation

On September 1, another letter from Monsieur de Maugiron, the Lieutenant General of the Dauphiné, was delivered to the Council of Geneva. It said that Servetus had debtors in Vienne, and the amount of 3,000 or 4,000 *écus* had been forfeited by the king of France. It stated the names and sums of those indebted to Servetus.

On the day of the eighth interrogation, the Council again arranged for Servetus to meet with Calvin, because the Council might not have been able of itself to convict Servetus or confirm his crime (*Opera*, 157). They also decided to confer with the pastors, concerning Servetus and through these discussions to arrive at a conclusion on the case.

The manner of debate was changed from oral to written in order to enable Servetus to defend himself more effectively. Calvin's enemies' conspired with Servetus to this effect. They reasoned that there was an easier way of defending him against Calvin. The principal enemies, the leaders of the Libertines party, Perrin and Vandel, were present along with Berthelier. The communications, exchanges and replies were conducted in Latin. These

documents were collected and forwarded to the Swiss Churches for their Judgement (Rilliet 1846:162-3 & Hillar 1997:294).²⁴⁹ This procedure took about a fortnight (Beza 1836:169). By such changing the mode Calvin's enemies attempted to let Servetus defeat Calvin and show his opinions favourably to the Swiss Churches. Furthermore, "Perrin and Berthelier undoubtedly feared that a public disputation with so able a debater as Calvin would mean a popular victory for the reformer,—a result highly displeasing to them; and the preparation of such documents would afford material. Servetus could make the best statement of his case possible for presentation to the Swiss cantons, the advice of which it had been decided to ask" (Walker 1969:336).²⁵⁰ This written argumentation would prove to be crucial and decisive for the trial of Servetus.

4.2.3.4 Final Thirty-eight Articles

While preparing the extracts from Servetus' writings, Calvin met with another issue rising before the Council. Berthelier (still excommunicated) attempted to influence the Council. He boasted that he would be attending communion on the Lord's day. Calvin requested the Council to resist this, saying that such a resolution was contrary to the Consistory. On September 2 the Council held a meeting, during which Calvin appealed to the Council to uphold Berthelier's excommunication, saying that this was the sacred duty of the Church. The Council made no decision and advised Berthelier not to be present at Communion (Rilliet 1846:165). On Lord's day, September 3, Calvin, who did know of his attendance, preached at the Temple of St. Peter (Rilliet 1846:166-7):

As for myself, while God shall keep me here, since he has given me constancy, and I have taken it from him, I will use it, whatever may occur. I will govern myself only according to the law of my master, which is altogether clear and notorious. As we are now about to receive the holy supper of our Lord Jesus Christ, if any one who has been debarred by the Consistory shall approach this table, it is certain that, though it should cost my life, I will show myself such as I ought to be.²⁵¹

We can see Calvin's determination not to yield. An important issue was on the table, the independence of religious matters from civil government. In the afternoon of the Lord's day, Calvin wrote a letter to Viret (*Letters*, vol. II, 425 on September 4, 1553):

I need not record what I said yesterday in both assemblies, as you will get an oral account of it from many. The wicked and the abandoned may now obtain, therefore, what they have eagerly sought. The calamity to the Church grieves

²⁴⁹ The decision to consult the Swiss Churches about this trial, as was the case of Jerome Bolsec two years previously must have come from Berthelier, who was familiar with the case of Bolsec (Shields 1983: 374).

²⁵⁰ Perrin and Berthelier, who desired to beat Calvin, attempted to change the mode of debating between Calvin and Servetus (Wylie 1899:326).

²⁵¹ It was drawn from the unpublished History of Geneva by Gantier.

me, as indeed it ought. But if God yields so much power to Satan, as to strip me of the liberty of my ministry by his violent commands, I am satisfied. Certainly, he who has inflicted the wound, will himself find a remedy. And, indeed, seeing that so much wickedness has now passed with impunity for many years, perhaps the Lord is preparing some judgement which I am not deemed worthy to see. In fine, whatever may happen, it is our duty to submit to his will. Farewell, most worthy brethren. May the Lord be ever present with you, to guide and protect you. Pray him, on the other hand, to look down upon this unfortunate Church.

Calvin extracted thirty-eight propositions from the books of Servetus, adding a reference:

“Articles extracted from the books of M. Servetus, which the ministers of the Word of God in the Church of Geneva produce, being prepared to maintain that these propositions are in part blasphemous, and in part full of errors and profane reveries. Further, that they are utterly repugnant to the Word of God, and the common consent of the universal Church.”²⁵²

The propositions, almost the same as the thirty-eight ones that had been submitted for the arraignment on August 14, were delivered to Servetus requesting him to reply to them on the same day. See Appendix 3 for Calvin’s questions and Servetus’ answers.

Servetus first declared the summary of his theological system before answering to them, offending Calvin as follows (*Opera*, 507, Willis 1877:403):

It is impossible not to admire the impudence of the man, who is nothing less than a disciple of Simon Magus, arrogating to himself the authority of a Doctor of the Sorbonne, condemning everything according to his fancy, scarcely quoting Scripture for ought he advances, and either plainly not understanding me or artfully wresting my words from their true significance. I am therefore compelled, before replying to his *Articles*, to say, in brief, that the whole purpose of my book is to show, *first*, that when the word Son is met with in Scripture it is always to the man Jesus that the term is applied, he having also the title Christ given him; and, *second*, that the Son or second Person in the Trinity is spoken of as a *person*, because there was visibly reluctant in the Deity a Representation or Image of the man Jesus Christ, hypostatically subsisting in the Divine mind from eternity. It is because this *rationale of the Person* is unknown to Calvin, and because the whole thing depends thereon, that I refer as preliminary to certain passages from the ancient Doctors of the Church on which I rest my conclusions.

The main issue between Calvin and Servetus in these thirty-eight articles concerned his views on the Trinity and on the Church Fathers – Tertullian, Irenæus, and Clement of Rome. Servetus asserted that Tertullian never talked about a real distinction between the

²⁵² “QUAS MINISTRI GEVENSIS PARTIM IMPIAS AC IN DEUM BLASPHEMAS, PARTIM PROFANIS ERRORIBUS ET DELIRIIS REFERTAS ESSE ASSERUNT: OMNES VERO A VERBO DEI, ET ORTHODOXAE ECCLESIAE CONSENSU ALIENAS” (*Opera*, 502, Rilliet 1846:163).

Persons of the Trinity (See ET, 29a. 45). Tertullian says of the distinction and the unity of the Trinity (Tertullian, ii, 598 and ix, 603):

Only God in any other way than by saying that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are very selfsame Person. As if in this way also one were not All, in that All are of One, by unity (that is) of substance; while the mystery of the dispensation is still guarded, which distributes the Unity into a Trinity, placing in their order the three *Persons*—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost: three, however, not in condition, but in degree; not in substance, but in form; not in power, but in aspect; yet of one substance, and of one condition, and of one power, inasmuch as He is God, from whom these degrees and forms and aspects are reckoned, under the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. How they are susceptible of number without division, will be shown as our treatise proceeds ... the Father, and the Son, and the Spirit are inseparable from each other, and so will you know in what sense this is said. Now, observe, my assertion is that the Father is one, and the Son one, and the Spirit one, and that They are distinct from Each Other. This statement is taken in a wrong sense by every uneducated as well as every perversely disposed person, as if it predicated a diversity, in such a sense as to imply a separation among the Father, and the Son, and the Spirit.

To Servetus the term ‘Person’ differed from the term ‘Person’ of Tertullian. Tertullian says that all are of One and the three persons are the Unity in degree, form, and aspect, where Servetus asserts that only “the Father is the whole substance and the one God from whom these degrees and personations proceed” (ET, 29a. 45). He entirely misunderstood Tertullian’s views on the Trinity.

Although it seems that Servetus believed in the Trinity in the first four replies, his understanding leads to the possibility that there could be more than three persons in God. This is because he did not understand the concept of ‘Person’ and ‘hypostasis’ theologically. His own understanding of ‘Person’ and ‘hypostasis’ says that they are no other than modes or manifestations of God, which was influenced by Neoplatonism.

A further misunderstanding was the denial of the incarnation and the divinity of Christ, which resulted in him distinguishing between the Word, the Son of God and Jesus Christ. Servetus did not believe in the eternity of Jesus before the incarnation.

With the Libertines support and defence before the Council, and with the changed mode of debate with Calvin, Servetus was again intoxicated with the hope of victory. He directly accused Calvin as if he had no longer any terms to keep with him (Rilliet 1846:171):

“You do not know what you say – you are a wretch, if you persist in condemning what you do not understand. Did you think to stun the ears of the

judges by your barking? You have a confused intellect, so that you cannot understand the truth. Wretch! Perverted by Simon Margus,²⁵³ you are ignorant of the first principles of things—you make men only block of wood and stone by establishing the slavery of the will.”

Although the replies of Servetus did not impress the Court favourably, Servetus thought the victory was on his side. Servetus' replies were not only shorter than Calvin's but “with jottings on the margins and between the lines of Calvin's elaborate refutation! The remarks he makes, moreover, being rarely in the way of answer or explanation” (Willis 1877:425). Later Servetus addressed the additional reply to the twenty-first article to the Council on September 15 (*Opera*, 799-800, Willis 1877:423-4):

To John Calvin, health!—It is for your good that I tell you are ignorant of the principles of things. Would you now be better informed, I say the great principle is this: All action takes place by contact. Neither Christ nor God himself acts upon anything which he does not touch. God would not in truth be God were there anything that escaped his contact. All the qualities of which you dream are imaginations only, slaves of the fields as it were. But there is no virtue of God, no grace of God, nor anything of the sort in God which is not God himself; neither does God put quality into aught in which he himself is not. All is from him, by him, and in him. When the Holy Spirit acts in us, therefore it is God that is in us—that is in contact with us, that actuates us.

In the course of our discussion I detect you in another error. To maintain the force of the old law, you quote Christ's words where he asks: ‘What says the law?’ and answers himself by saying: ‘Keep the commandments.’ But here you have to think of the law not yet accomplished, not yet abrogated; to think further, that Christ, when he willed to interpose in human things, willed to abide by the law; and that he to whom he spoke was living under the law, Christ, therefore, properly referred at this time to the law as to a master. But afterwards, all things being accomplished, the newer ages were emancipated from the older. For the same reason it was that he ordered another to show himself to the priest and make an offering. Shall we, therefore, do the like? He also ordered a lamb and unleavened bread to be prepared for the Passover: Shall we, too, make ready in this fashion? Why do you go on Judaizing in these days with your unleavened bread? Ponder these things well, I beseech you, and carefully read over again my twenty-third letter, Farewell....

What is evident in this petition is that he thought he could defeat Calvin by himself and influence the judges.

²⁵³ Servetus calls Calvin ‘Simon Margus’ about sixty times. See *Opera* (806). “You [Calvin] unclothe God in a corner: I say that He is all in all and that all beings are held up in God” (*CR*, 548).

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).

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions

5.1 Findings

5.1.1 What was Michael Servetus like?

What is Calvin's role in the trial of Michael Servetus? This is the topic of this thesis. We have followed his early life chronologically to comprehend who he was really like. We have also surveyed his theology and the circumstance of Geneva briefly to discover the trail. Afterwards it was followed by two trials of Servetus by which it was obviously demonstrated what his true crimes as well as characteristics in public are. Now we are here to evaluate the long journey and the allegations against John Calvin.

5.1.2 Servetus' Wanderings

Who was Michael Servetus? We can simply say that Michael Servetus was "a wanderer, a rolling stone, an adventurer, a coward, and a malicious blasphemer" (Prime 1910:4).²⁸⁸ He breathed and died in the free spirit of Aragón (Ford 1860:12). Like Don Quixote, he was busy with new discoveries and new adventures and had no hesitation in fighting those who he disagreed with (Zweig 1936:96).²⁸⁹ Not only did he have an illogical mind, an inordinate ambition, and a defective judgement, but he unsettled the minds of men and offended everyone he came in contact with by his pride, self-sufficiency, and dissimulation (Allwoerden, 1727:7, 23-6). He had a never-ending curiosity and desired by himself to know of the Christianity blossoming in the early Reformation. He tried to contemplate and theorise it into his own categories. As the result, he concluded that the Reformers were lacking in truly reforming Christianity in matters of the doctrine of God. He thought that he himself was a truly pious and devoted Christian who was able to restore true Christianity

²⁸⁸ Even Calvin calls him "brain-sick fellow" and "Spanish dog" (*Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, Beveridge 1844:61,257). Larson (1923:898) calls Servetus "a horrible blasphemer."

²⁸⁹ He often called him Don Quixote in the pages of 96, 103, "every Spaniard has some of the traits of a Don Quixote; but certainly the remark applies admirably to Miguel Servetus." Ford (1860:9) describes the historical background of Spain at the time of Servetus: "There is, doubtless, from the extravagance to which it was carried, and especially from the sarcasm of Cervantes, a want of appreciation of chivalry and its effects." Henry (1849:164) calls Servetus "Hamlet". "Soaring above both Romanism and Protestantism, he aimed at substituting a system of his own creation, the corner-stone of which was simple Theism. He aimed his stroke at the very heart of Christianity, the doctrine of the Trinity. Confident in his system, and not less in his ability, he had for some years been leading the life of a knight-errant [Don Quixote], having wandered into Switzerland, and some parts of Germany, in quest of opposers with whom he might do battle" (Wylie 1899:200-1).

and thus perfect the Reformation. In the preface of his last book, *Christianismi Restitutio*, he confesses his own piety for the truth regarding Jesus Christ (CR, 4, Henry 1849:177):

O Christ Jesus, Son of God! reveal thyself to thy servant, that this great revelation may be clear to us in its truth. Give me now thy good spirit and thy mighty word; guide my pen and my soul, that I may be able to describe the glory of thy godhead, and to confess to Thee the true faith! This is thy works, which an inward impulse teaches me to attempt, being anxious for thy truth. I undertook the same in time past, and now again I feel myself urged thereto, for the appointed season is fulfilled. Thou hast taught us that thy light must not remain hidden, and woe to me if I do not proclaim thy Gospel.

However, throughout his life, doubting, lying, denying, insulting, arguing, hiding, and fleeing seemed to be his characteristics. He lived in an atmosphere of doubting anything around him. He began with lying about what he saw, did, and learned and could not help contradicting even his own ideas. He never hesitated to lie when he was in a disadvantageous position even though he took an oath on the Gospel. He had no scruples about arguing against those who held different views from his to the point of insulting them and could not endure different views from his. He was obsessed with a painful sense of rivalry. Consistently hiding his personal life from even his close associates with a new name as well as occupation, he is suspect of all truthfulness concerning everything around him. When threatened and endangered in his own situation, as a coward he was always fled into deceit: “Whenever threatened with any personal danger he exhibited the most childishly abject cowardice” (Prime 1910:5).

Servetus came from minor Spanish nobility and was born in 1509 or 1511. Even as to facts of his birth place it not easy to trust his own story. It is either Villeneuve or Tudéla. He changed and hid his testimonies in some cases. That we get facts of his personal life entirely from his testimony raises some suspicions as to their truthfulness (Lingle 1900:5). About his personal life before twenty little is known. He did not settle down anywhere but fled from place to place (Macdonell 1983:130). His restless and unfettered intelligence drove him to study a variety of topics. In some respects, Servetus, like a Renaissance man, had a wide knowledge, covering contemporary learning in geography, medicine, language, theology, astrology, and philosophy.²⁹⁰ Beza disagrees some of his admirers, however and criticises him as follows (Beza 1836:134):

The learning and services of Servetus in the medical profession, have also been named as aggravating the cruelty of his persecutors. But those writers, who, in

²⁹⁰ Due to the variety of his study, it is said that he has “an encyclopaedic mind” (Lecler 1960:325; see Mattison 1991:27).

their zeal to honor Servetus, have attempted to credit him with a discovery relative to the circulation of the blood, ought to know that Harvey was the author of that discovery. The learned Wotton, in honoring Servetus with this discovery, says that the very learned Charles Bernard could inform him no farther, only that he had it from a learned friend, who copied it from Servetus. The authority is, then, that a learned writer says a very learned writer was told it by a learned friend!

He continuously travelled to study one field after another, having left his hometown at the age of 15 and never returning. Theology, among a variety of topics, was his primary concern in life. The primary source of Servetus' theological ideas was his early Spanish background. He was strongly influenced in his early days by the contemporary Spanish religions: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.²⁹¹ His doctrine of God became based on anti-Trinitarianism. He goes so far as to say that he prefers Jewish circumcision and the Jewish view on the doctrine of God to biblical baptism and doctrine (CR, 443).²⁹² Standing on his opinion, another source of his learning, he contended, was the Bible in which he found true knowledge and the wisdom of God and philosophy, but it was not true (ET, 78b-79a. 121-2 & 107b. 166). He tried to quote many verses of the Bible to prove that the beginning of our faith was to believe in the historical Christ who is Jesus, and the Son of God, insisting that the terms the 'Trinity' – 'Persons', 'essence', 'substance', and 'hypostasis' – were invented by philosophers. It would seem that these two sources heavily influenced his own theology but his doctrine of the Trinity and baptism tended to be cast in the neo-platonic and philosophical thought and pantheism, rather than the traditions and doctrines of the Fathers and Creeds. His theology was based throughout on Greek philosophy rather than the biblical views, as he insisted (Schaff 1993:738 & Friedman 1978:45-6).²⁹³ It is true that one could not find the term 'Trinity' in the Bible, but Servetus seems to have devised the course of its entering into Christianity by himself rather than looking at the historical sources. He denounced the traditional doctrine of the Fathers but misused them to establish his own style. His non-biblical and non-traditional elements of theology were influenced

²⁹¹ The first two religions hold the Unitarianism: "God is here seeking to keep the Jews from believing in more than one God, for to this belief they were prone (even as we ourselves also to-day); and the Jews were wont to multiply their gods in proportion to the number of their cities" (ET, 29b. 46); Servetus often mentions them in his books, see ET (42b-43a. 66-7) & CR, (35, 399). Friedman (1978:17-8) concludes that Servetus' aim of writing his books was "for an additional audience of Jews and Arabs, Marranos and Moriscos." See also Pettegree (1990:43) & McWilliam (1995:195).

²⁹² Calvin calls him "hic bonus Rabbinus" (*Opera*, 620).

²⁹³ He borrowed the platonic philosophy as a tool to explain how to understand the incomprehensible God rather than Aristotle philosophy.

by the heretical thoughts around him.²⁹⁴ He, pretending to be a Protestant, met several of the Reformers like Philip Melanchthon, Martin Bucer, and Wolfgang Capito and even lived in the house of Johannes Oecolampadius. Finally he corresponded with John Calvin through a third person, Jean Frellon. While meeting and corresponding with each of them, he felt hostile to them and felt that he had no affect on them, and gained no support for his thoughts. Afterward, disguising himself as a Roman Catholic, he lived quietly and happily in the house of the Archbishop of Vienne, Pierre Palmier, for roughly twelve years. Throughout his life he suffered from the obsession of restoring pure Christianity.

In his life he left a series of writings and letters. His publications were these: Letters; *De Trinitatis Erroribus*; *Dialogorum de Trinitate Duo*; Ptolemy's Geography; the Bible of Santes Pagnini; *Syroporum Universa Ratio*; *Apologetica Disceptio pro Astrologia*; *Christianismi Restitutio*. The most controversial writings were *De Trinitatis Erroribus* and finally, *Christianismi Restitutio*, published respectively in 1531 and 1553. In these two books he speculates on Christianity, specially on the Trinity and on baptism. In the first book, *De Trinitatis Erroribus*, he simultaneously opposed these traditional doctrines: Original sin, millennium, righteousness, and redemption. In the second book he expresses his whole theology. It seems significant that he wrote so many books, even in so short a life but it is hard to find any consistency in his theology: "Despite this vast literature it is difficult to study Servetus' religious views. Original texts are relatively rare, and once discovered and read, his logic is scattered, and his literary style difficult to follow. Unlike many other radicals, Servetus' eclectic views cannot easily or completely be categorized" (Friedman 1978:14). It is recognized that there was no integrated system in his theology (Bainton 1932:78; Friedman 1978:17, 21-2 & Chéreau 1879:11).²⁹⁵ Sometime readers would be confused with his explanations. Servetus is apt to confuse the usage of terms in his books. The term 'Person,' for example, is not used consistently. It is not easy to see and find a concise concept (Friedman 1973: 91-3). There is no systematic formation in them

²⁹⁴ We can see the Jewish influence in his first book, "I can not here refrain from sighing, when I see the replies that Rabbi Kimchi made against the Christians on this points" (ET, 56b. 89 & see 42b-43a. 66-7). "Pray what Turk, Scythian, Barbarian could bear these disputes of words, as Paul calls them, without laughter?... Hear also what Mohammed says; for more reliance it to be given to one truth which an enemy confesses than to a hundred lies on our side. For he says in his Alcoran that Christ was the greatest of the prophets, the spirits of God, the power of God, the breath of God, the very soul of God, the Word born of a perpetual virgin by God's breathing upon her; and that it is because of the wickedness of the Jews toward him that they are in their present wretchedness and misfortune."

²⁹⁵ "His language and philosophical points are subtle, commanding a healthy respect just to obtain a rudimentary understanding of what he means, let alone how to classify it. That he himself seems to have either changed theological opinions or so revised his earlier articulation of them that they appear contradictory to his later work complicates the matter as well" (Breuer 1999:n.p.).

nor position: “Additionally, no church bears his name and, consequently, no satisfactory conventions of scholarship have developed to provide a framework through which his ideas might be approached and understood. In many circles Servetus has been remembered more for his contribution to religious dissension and controversy than as a builder of new religious forms” (Friedman 1978:14). He was unsuccessful in appealing to the contemporary Reformation and came to be regarded as heretic by both Catholics and Protestants because of his action in spreading errors through writings. In the end his crimes of heresy, blasphemy, and sedition resulted in burning him at the stake by the Council of Geneva on October 27, 1553: Servetus “was condemned, by the majority of his judges, not at all as the opponent of Calvin—scarcely as an heretic—but essentially as seditious. Politics acted a much more important part than theology, towards the close of the trial—they came on the stage with the Attorney-General” (Rilliet 1846:131) Although at his trial he was at first accused in religious matters, it became a civil matter and finally he was condemned by the Council which governed the civil trial. He had committed three grievous crimes, which were punished by the civil government of Geneva that examined his entire case. By contemporary civil law as well as by the Canon Law, the Council seriously weighed these three crimes. We can clearly understand that the trial of Servetus by the Council “was not case of heresy, pure and simple, but one of heresy complicated with the political crimes of blasphemy, sedition and conspiracy” if we investigate the actual contemporary circumstance (Shields 1983: 355-6). The law commanded burning to death by fire for any convicted heretic (Willis 1877:474; Kingdon 1995:30 & Wilbur 1972:179). We must not forget that he was not at all condemned by Calvin, but by the Council of Geneva in accordance with the contemporary law (Minton 1909:220). Calvin’s influence was not allowed in the matters deciding the penalty of the crime at Geneva. In the eyes of the Council his heresy was not only regarded as the civil crime, but by promoting heresy the civil peace was endangered and this was sedition. The independence and peace of Geneva, freed from the tyranny of the Roman Catholic, could be maintained only if there were religious peace. The religious unity was the guaranty of holding the independence and peace of Geneva. This peace was also the precondition for reformation in Geneva. His view on infant baptism was regarded as Anabaptist, and this threatened the civil peace of Geneva like it had Germany and parts of Switzerland (Wylie 1899:329).

5.1.3 Servetus' Heresy

What brought Calvin into the Servetus' trial had to do only with theological matters because he was a heretic and a blasphemer. Why was Servetus condemned a heretic? In which aspect was he a heretic and a blasphemer? Not only was Calvin entirely sure that Servetus was a heretic as well as a blasphemer but so were other Reformers and so were the Swiss Churches. Servetus publicly not only opposed the doctrine of the Trinity but called God a three-head monster and watch-dog of the underworld, Cerberus (Servetus, *CR*, 59, 119), frequently throughout his books: "In more than 100 places he wrote that the Trinity was a three-headed Cerberus (a hell-hound)" (Prime 1910:7). According to the sentence decreed by the Council of Geneva one of his crimes was blasphemy: "He blasphemes detestably against the Son of God, saying that Jesus Christ is not the Son of God from eternity. He calls infant baptism an invention of the devil and sorcery. His execrable blasphemies are scandalous against the majesty of God, the Son of God and the Holy Spirit" (*Opera*, 829). Servetus had no scruples about speculating and describing God basing his thoughts on pantheism, Neoplatonism, and on Islamic belief. He insists that everything around us is full of God's presence as well as a part of God and even the devil will be substantially God, which is an entirely pantheistic point of view (*Opera*, 496).²⁹⁶ In light of Neoplatonism, Servetus describes God like the sun that engages in self-elaboration and self-expression (ET, 102a. 157-8):

Just as God is called the source of being, so is he also called the source of light, the Father of Spirits, the Father of lights; nor do I understand light as meaning here the assertion of a quality. But inasmuch as the rays of being, and shining angels, flow from God, the breach of being comes out of his storehouse, from the Father's breast, as sons from a father's bosom; manifold rays of divinity proceed, which are all Essences of God, and he is them.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁶ Servetus even says that God fills everything and even hell – "Denique Deus omnia implem etiam ipsum infernum implet" (*CR*, 240).

²⁹⁷ Servetus interprets the concept of light in his book in detail. See ET, 145-54, 162 passim. "For that the Word was light does not presuppose that he was a ray really distinct from the Father, but because God is light, the Word was God himself, and the light was with God" (DT, A3b-4a. 192). Milton has the same opinion as Servetus: "God the Father is the material of the cosmos, and also will or destiny – the fundamental (perhaps Servetus means the psychical and physical) law which governs all spirit, matter, and motion—all relations between cause and effect; God the Word is the energetic force in the universe, the power of action, creation, effectual strength – it is God exhibited as power or might; God the Spirit is nothing definite; he is illumination, vitality, irradiance. The three aspects of godhead are found in the cosmos as a whole (where they constitute the Trinity or God) and in every portion of the cosmos—in every rock, stream, tree, animal, man, and angel. In all living things, from the lowliest herb to man, we have substance, energy, and animation. Without these nothing can exist, at least it cannot exhibit the mysterious life-giving principle. Just as my body, my strength, and my warmth or animation are all myself—and none of these more so than any other—just so are the Father, the Word, and the Spirit all the same thing; they are but differing aspects of God in the universe" (Larson 1923:918).

As a rationalist, Servetus' theology based on the platonic philosophy, and Calvin's theology, stand opposite each other.²⁹⁸ He mainly concentrates on the doctrine of Christ based on the neo-platonic philosophy which is his starting point to open his own theology by which he expounds the Trinity: "Again, what is said of light is confirmed by the same John in his Epistle; for that the Word was light does not presuppose that he was a ray really distinct from the Father, but because God is light, the Word was God himself, and the light was with God" (DT, A3b-4a. 192). He speculates that Christ is a mode of God's self-expression, a spiritual being created through wisdom and light by the Father, who became the Son by combining the Word with flesh.²⁹⁹ In order to support this he quotes Trismegistus' view: as Trismegistus tells of the light of the Word as the original light as well as the light of the mind.³⁰⁰ We are surely aware that his view on the light came from the platonic philosophy. Servetus does not consider Christ as separate Person of the Trinity but a mode or appearance of God. He directly denied the eternity and divinity of Christ (CR, 56-7). The three Persons of the Trinity were essentially different manifestations of the same God. Each function is the same but each manifestation depends on the historical context and the circumstance. His expression on Christ is apt to follow Mohammed's conception: "Son was sent from the Father in no other way than as one of the Prophets" (ET, 94b. 145 & see 43a. 67 & Durant 1957:480).

In addition, he completely rejected infant baptism and said that the proper age of baptism was 30 years old because adults only could appreciate the benefit of baptism like a new illumination. He not only rejected infant baptism but went so far to curse it as "an invention of the devil and the witchcraft," and, "a murdering of the Holy Ghost" (Henry 1849:250; Rilliet 1846:215). Such views at that time were heresy as well as blasphemy both for the Roman Catholics and the Reformers alike: "Michael Servetus of Navarre was indeed the veritable effigy for Catholic and Protestant alike of all that seemed execrable in

²⁹⁸ "The Platonic concept of the One reflected in the Many and the mystic notion of the immanence of Christ in the human soul were inherently difficult or impossible to reconcile with the Calvinistic dogma of predestination, sorting out from all eternity the elect and the damned. Impossible too was an attempt to reconcile rationalistic views of the relativity of all human knowledge with theocratic claims to infallibility in the understanding and interpretation of scripture" (Haller 1850:433 & Sill 1993: 308-9).

²⁹⁹ Servetus, CR, 138, 595, 728-9; "There is one brightness of the sun and another of the moon, another of fire and still another splendor of water. All these were disposed in light by Christ, the architect of the corporeal and spiritual. He created the material elements and substantially endowed them with light forms, bringing forth light from his treasurer." 153, trans. Hillar 1997:249.

³⁰⁰ "Ea ipsa verbi lux Trismegisto dicitur archetypa lux, et archetypus animæ, idque rectissime" (CR, 144). Servetus follows Trismegistus in his views on the Trinity and infant baptism. Calvin also acknowledged it: "At length he calls upon Trismegistus and the sibyls to witness that holy washings befit only adults" (*Institutes*, IV. xvi. 31, 1358).

the Radical Reformation” (Williams 1962:3).³⁰¹ On the theological ground of the sixteenth century he deserved to be condemned as a heretic as well as a blasphemer.

5.1.4 Calvin’s Role in the Trial

5.1.4.1 Duty and Passion

What caused Calvin to stand so firmly in the position accusing Servetus of heresy? (Wadkins 1983:431- 41).³⁰² Heresy not only amounts to severing part of the Church, the bride of Christ in the religious matter but also infringe the covenant between God and His people. For the sixteenth century Bainton (1953b:77) sums up the case of Servetus:

... heresy is the supreme crime because it is *lèse majesté* against the divine sovereign, because it destroys souls for eternity rather than merely shortening life in the body. It is worse than matricide because it rends Holy Mother Church, the Immaculate Bride of Christ. It was worse than treason because it breaks the bond of civil society and disintegrates Christendom; it is worse than counterfeiting because it devaluates the truth God.

So Calvin felt it was his duty to eliminate heretics from the world, fearing God’s wrath against them if he did not. He could never ignore those who spread poisonous heresies in Geneva as well as throughout the world and gave himself to the protection of the truth. Neither could he endure blasphemies against God. Servetus had secretly come to Geneva and intended to destroy the establishing of a Reformation there. Calvin’s enemies, the Libertines, knew well that Servetus hated him and they exploited the occasion to defame or harass Calvin, allowing Servetus to do what he desired at Geneva. Such a conspiracy and threat to the peace and the Reformation of Geneva caused Calvin and the Council of Geneva to be concerned about him. According to the duty of pastors as outlined in the Ecclesiastical Ordinances, there were several crimes they never could tolerate with a fraternal heart: heresy, schism, and blasphemy. It was obligatory, that if the pastors found even one of these serious crimes, they should investigate it and then report it to the magistrate: “As to the other crimes of which the first investigation belongs to the ecclesiastical Consistory, the clerks or elders with the ministers are to be watchful for them. And if any one is convicted of them, they are to make a report to the Council with

³⁰¹ In his book there are several new tendencies contained in *Christianismi Restitutio*, for example, the Gnostic influence.

³⁰² Watkins argues that Calvin’s theological system would allow or cause him to accuse Servetus, assuming Calvin’s thoughts: “theology proper, or the doctrine of God; ecclesiology, or the role of the elect in building God’s Kingdom on earth; and hermeneutics, the way in which the Scriptures are interpreted to support a position.” Although he assumes the three reasons based on Calvin’s thought, he admits, “I am hesitant to regard these firmly held doctrinal beliefs as the only influences behind Calvin’s actions.” So he tries to explain, “proper circumstance coupled with these beliefs” and *Operated* them.

their advice and judgement; thus the final sentence of punishment is to be reserved to the Seigneury” (Calvin 1975:232). Calvin followed this regulation when he reported Servetus’ coming to Geneva to one of Syndics who had the authority to arrest Servetus. But he never forgot showing Christ’s love to forgive and wait for the sinner. In the letter to Trie on February 13, 1546 Calvin showed his passion of saving him from errors but Servetus did not accept his love (*Letters*, vol. II, 30-1 on February 13, 1546 & see *Opera*, 833):

SEIGNEUR JEHAN—By cause that your last letter was brought to me at my going away, I had not leisure to reply to what was enclosed therein. Since my return, at the first leisure that I have had, I have been quite willing to satisfy your desire; not that I have had great hope of late of being profitable to a certain person, judging from the disposition in which I see him to be; but in order to try once more if there shall be any means of bringing him back, which will be, when God shall have wrought in him so effectually, that he has become entirely another man. Since he has written to me in so proud a spirit, I would fain have beaten down his pride a little, speaking more harshly to him than is my wont; but I could scarcely do otherwise. For I do assure you that there is no lesson which is more necessary for him than to learn humility, which must come to him from the Spirit of God, not otherwise.

Servetus, on the other hand, had no scruples about insulting Calvin openly at the trial of Geneva because he thought that Calvin accused him of heresy to the inquisitor of the Roman Catholics at Vienne. Calvin’s patience eventually wearied with Servetus his arrogance (Lingle 1900:8). In the last interview with him, Calvin stated as follows (*Opera*, 460, Hillar 1997:310):

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.

This is the true heart of Calvin toward Servetus, who in contrast had such a strong competitive spirit of rivalry and of personal hatred toward Calvin. Calvin regretfully expresses that Servetus did not intentionally repent and was so very distant from any hope of repentance (Castellio 1935:287).³⁰³ He showed no sighs of repentance up to the last

³⁰³. The article is translated from French: *Traité des hérétiques*, into English, which was published by Eugène Choisy at Geneva in 1913. This article is a reply to Calvin’s “Defensio orthodoxae fidei de sacra trinitate contra prodigiosos errores Michaelis Serveti Hispani, ubi ostenditur haeticos iure gladii coercendos esse et nominatim de homine hoc tam impio iuste et merito sumptum Genevae fuisse supplocum (1554)” in *Opera*. In it Castellio uses the pseudonym name of Vaticanus against Calvin.

chance.³⁰⁴ He continued to offer Servetus the heart of Christ for the lost but he still refused it. He concluded about him as follows:

I begged him to ask with all his heart forgiveness of the Son of God whom he had disfigured by his derangement negating that he assumed our body and that he resembled us in his human nature, and doing this he refused to recognize him as our savior. Seeing that I do not accomplish anything by exhortations, I did not want to be wiser than my Master would permit me. Therefore following the rule of Saint Paul I separated myself from the heretic who had condemned himself, carrying in his heart the sign of his condemnation. I have reported this in order that everyone could know that I was directed during the life of Servetus by modesty rather than by fear, and did not invent any dispute against him, hoping even for a favorable outcome of the case.

Calvin laboured with Servetus to lead him to repent and to recant his heretical statements, patiently pointing out his errors in his books, letters and debates. However, Servetus never did repent, knowing full well what the severe consequences of his actions would be (McNeill 1954:175). The historian Beza (Beza 1836:109-200) says of one cause of Calvin's sharing in the trial:

Calvin was not influenced by any feelings of private revenge, or of personal malevolence against Servetus, as many, contrary to all the evidence of the truth of history and biography, have asserted. He was anxious to remove all heretical opinions, and to watch over the purity of the faith of the church at Geneva, as well as of all the Protestant churches. This was one cause of his bringing Servetus to trial, and his desire to convince him of the error of his opinions, and to convert, him to the belief of the truth as it is in Jesus, was another.

We can now recognize that Calvin's real motivation was not personal animosity but the heart of Christ to win his soul from sin. Calvin hoped that the trial would lead him to find his errors and faults and to repent of them.

But the main reason Calvin got involved in the case of Servetus was his zeal for glory of God. He simply could not overlook the spread of heresy as well as blasphemy both of which were like a poison to him. The crimes of heresy and blasphemy had been crimes at Geneva long before Calvin had come to Geneva, indeed before he was born (Waterman 1813:118). The contagious poison of heresy in the Genevan Reformation led him to be willing to be involved in this trial (Wilbur 1972:163). His zeal for God's glory is revealed in detail in his commentary on Deuteronomy 13 (Calvin 1880:85):

Hence, too, we are admonished, that zeal for God's glory is but cold among us, unless true religion is held to be of more value than the preservation of a single city or people. But if so many together are to be dragged to death in crowds,

³⁰⁴ "The wretch man, up to the last, showed no sighs of repentance...." (Miller 1980:1035).

their impudence is more than detestable, and their pity cruelty itself, who would take no account of God's injured majesty, so that one man may be spared. And since we are created to no other end, and live for no other cause than that God may be glorified in us, it is better that the whole world should perish, than that men should enjoy the fruits of the earth in order that they may contaminate it with their blasphemies.³⁰⁵

In light of his zeal for the truth Calvin notes three elements in the case of Servetus (*Letters*, vol. II, 428-9, a letter to Sulzer on September 8, 1553): First, with what monstrous errors he has corrupted every doctrine of religion and what foul inventions he has entangled Christianity, and overturned all the principles of our religion. Secondly, with what obstinacy he has conducted himself; with what diabolical pride he has despised all admonitions and with what inexorable headlines he has spread his position. Thirdly, with what arrogance he this day asserts his abominations. Blasphemy and heresy were serious matters in Geneva in the sixteenth century. They were called poison and seen as the devil killing souls (Junkin 1982: 27-8; Brown 1815:24). Calvin preached about the heretic in October, 1555: "The 'heretic' threatens insurrection in the community... The 'heretic' was a 'scandal'—or 'plague'—in both the church and society. Agitation was the evidence of 'heresy,' and piety required that unrest and falsehood should be rooted out. Finally there was no line between sin and crime—or doctrinal aberration and civil disorder" (Holtrop 1993:220). Sending his second letter to Servetus through Frelon Calvin concluded that Servetus was a virtual Satan or an enemy of God who "was busy with tearing down the kingdom of God" (Lingle 1900:8).³⁰⁶ In a letter to the pastors of Frankfurt, Calvin says that a large number of copies of the work of Servetus, printed at Vienne, were carried by a huckster to the fair of Frankfurt, but a pious man, when he discovered the impiety of the books, suppressed them. When Servetus was retained in prison at Geneva, Calvin instructs them (*Letters*, vol. II, 423 on August 27, 1553):

The author himself is held in prison by our magistrates, and he will be punished ere long, I hope; but it is your duty to see to it that this pestiferous poison does not spread farther. The messenger will inform you respecting the number and the repository of the books. The bookseller, if I mistake not, will permit them to be burnt. Should anything stand in the way, however, I trust that you will act so judiciously, as to purge the world of such noxious corruptions.

³⁰⁵ Bainton (1935:74) criticizes the use of the Old Testament by Calvin: "Zeal for His glory must almost denude us of our nature and make us ready to repudiate the love of wife and child. This was no idle talk. Calvin was not devoid of human feeling, he could be tender and moving; but his ideal was Abraham sacrificing Isaac, save that for Calvin all too often no ram was caught in the thicket."

³⁰⁶ Calvin wrote, "for I have other business that concerns me more nearly, and I shall make it matter of conscience to devote myself to it, not doubting that he is a Satan who would divert me from studies more profitable" (*Opera*, 833, Willis 1877:160).

Calvin's sense of the duty as well as his zeal for the glory of God led him to stand firm at the heresy trial: "Calvin's zeal was founded upon his conscientiousness: this is the key to his whole being ... Both he and the council acted from so deep a sense of duty, that it had a powerful influence on every one, as if, in the pressure of the times, thus it was willed by the Spirit of God" (Henry 1849:229). Cuthbertson says of the reformers' attitude at that time against heresy: "In the minds of the Reformers there were certainly urgent and vital reasons why such a course of libel for heresy should have been pursued but the heresy might have been deviated from its course by even humaner methods" (Cuthbertson 1912:20). In Calvin's mind the pastor's duty is that "the servant of the Church must denounce the heretic, and confute him theologically; but his condemnation is the exclusive function of the magistrate, one of whose most sacred duties is to punish attacks made on the Divine Majesty" (Rilliet 1846:90). Emerton says of Calvin's zeal for the truth in the matter of Servetus' case that "he threw himself into this prosecution of Servetus with all his energy because he believed that upon its success depended the victory of truth over falsehood and right over wrong" (Emerton 1909:158). Calvin's determination in the trial prevented the heresy from poisoning the Genevan Reformation. This is why Calvin was willing to get involved in it. If another person with heresy came to Geneva, Calvin would have acted with the same action as he pursued in the trial of Servetus. The reason for participating in the case of Servetus was his imperative duty as well as zeal for the glory of God with a heart for Christ.

5.1.4.2 Role

In reference to the contemporary circumstances of Geneva, Calvin was not directly involved in the trial of Servetus but only passively. In the matters of deciding the penalty and of leading the questioning in various phases in the trial of Servetus, Calvin was completely absent. The first allegation regarding Calvin's role concerns why he provided the inquisitors at Vienne with the crucial information regarding the authorship of *Christianismi Restitutio*. It was not Calvin but de Trie who initially sent a letter to Arneys expressing his surprise that the French Roman Catholic Church tolerated such a blasphemer as the author of such a heretical book as *Christianismi Restitutio*. And de Trie was surprised that the private letters of Calvin to Arneys were used as the crucial evidence to accuse Servetus of heresy: "My dear cousin," he writes, "When I wrote to you the letter which you communicated to those who are in charge, I did not expect that the matter should go so far. My intention was only to demonstrate to you the zeal and devotion of those who call themselves pillars of the Church in spite of the fact that they suffer such a

disorder among themselves and yet persecute so harshly the poor Christians who simply wish to follow God” (*Opera*, 840; Lingle 1900:9 & Cunningham 1989:326). He made clear in the letter of March 26, 1553 to his cousin not only that such an idea was his, but that furthermore Calvin had nothing to do with this issue: “And it is not because he does not wish that such blasphemies were not repressed, but because it seems to him that his duty as one who does not have the sword of justice in his hands, is rather to convince heretics by the doctrine than to persecute them by such a means. But I insisted on him reproaching him for the neglect which he could impart to me if he did not aid me” (*Opera*, 842, Hillar 1997:276). The book, *Christianismi Restitutio*, was secretly published in January, 1553, when Servetus was living in the archbishop’s house of Vienne as his personal physician. No sooner had about thousand books been printed than it was circulated to France, Italy, and Germany. One of them found its way into the possession of de Trie, the former Roman Catholic, a friend of Calvin and also a cousin to Antoine Arneys, of Lyon. He and Arneys corresponded frequently with each other, and eventually it was Arneys who informed one inquisitor of the Roman Catholic Church, Matthieu de Ory, about it. When Arneys, at the request of Ory, requested the whole book and the more letters, de Trie confessed this: “I have to confess that it was with big trouble that I obtained from Monsieur Calvin the material which I am sending” (*Opera*, 842, Hillar 1997:276).³⁰⁷ It is likely that Calvin was asked to provide some proofs as to the identity of Servetus. However, he only reluctantly handed over part of the information to de Trie (Dyer 1850:314-7, especially, 316-7). De Trie confessed that he did not obtain them easily, even to the extent that he got himself trouble as a result (Weiss 1908:23).

Some would blame Calvin for providing private and confidential letters as evidence of Servetus’ identity as the author of the book. It seemed to be Calvin who broke the mutual privacy between Calvin and Servetus. But it was Servetus himself who had already printed things which Calvin had noted without permission from Calvin and had distributed this. Killen criticises Servetus’ conduct in these words: “If there was any breach of faith, it was undoubtedly committed by the Spaniard heresiarch” (Killen 1843:12). It is likely true that Calvin unwillingly provided the conclusive evidence through de Trie to identify Servetus, but no one can show historical proofs that Calvin accused Servetus directly of heresy and turned him in to the Roman Catholic Church, which decided his sentence and penalty (Prime 1910:2). Calvin’s material was indeed used in evidence to identify Servetus as a

³⁰⁷ This was sent to Arneys on March 26, 1553.

heretic; nevertheless, it is clear that he only grudgingly gave it to de Trie. He never told him to write letters nor conspired with him to accuse Servetus to the Roman inquisitors (Dyer 1850:314).

Calvin's opponents also blame him for reporting Servetus' presence in Geneva to the Council. Even if it be true, the charge is empty. If Servetus was a heretic or blasphemer, Calvin should report him according to the contemporary law, as it was the duty of any citizen to give information to the Council that was in charge of judging whether he was accused or not and whether the accusation proceeded the further or not (Prime 1910:6-7). Moreover, as a pastor of Geneva, Calvin had to investigate a heresy and to report it. When the investigators commanded him to attend the examination or submit the proofs that Servetus is a heretic, Calvin had to obey them. It was his duty. He honestly recollects about it in his letter: "He at length, in an evil hour, came to this place, when, at my instigation, one of the Syndics ordered him to be conducted to prison. For I do not disguise it, that I considered it my duty to put a check, so far as I could, upon this most obstinate and ungovernable man, that his contagion might not spread farther" (*Letters*, vol. II, 428 a letter to Sulzer on September 8, 1553) Calvin's role in this was to bring Servetus before the lawful magistrate who was to proceed to the next action.

Some one has called Calvin "one of the last great figures of the Middle Ages" (Bainton 1953b:210), "Antichrist," or "*par excellence* the medieval scheme of the heretic" (Holtrop 1993:787) but this is hardly the case. Voltaire says the case of Servetus was the first "religious murder" committed by the Reformation (Zweig 1936:138). Fulton calls Calvin "the archinquisitor" (Fulton 1953:19). Especially, in matters of the trial of Servetus, Calvin has been "charged with pursuing him with malevolence and fury,—with brutal and furious treatment of him at his trial, with dissimulation and malevolence towards him after his condemnation,—That he acted in all this affair from motives merely personal" (Waterman 1813:114). Even on the Protestant side, writers, like Frederic W. Farrar, have spoken bitterly of Calvin saying "he ruthlessly burnt Servetus" (Farrar 1961:351).

But such allegations do not do justice to the actual facts and the dates. On the contrary, an investigation into the evidence shows that Calvin was entirely excluded from the civil matter and Calvin's role in treating Servetus was actually very sympathetic. The correspondence between them in 1546 shows it. It was Servetus who grossly insulted Calvin even in the progress of the trial, calling Calvin a 'dog' and 'heretic' (Lingle

1900:11). The personal accusations of Servetus against Calvin to the Council were so severe that the judges were ashamed and disgusted (Collins 1968:177). Servetus on his part “passes the lie direct some sixty times, calls Calvin Simon Magus nearly a score of times, and repeatedly assaults him as impudent, ignorant, know-nothings, ridiculous, sophist, crazy, sycophant, rascal, beast, monster, criminal, murderer. Calvin was wise enough to say nothing in reply” (Wilbur 1972:174). In the dreadful sentencing of Servetus to burning at the stake, his supports, the Libertines, never appealed to the Council to reduce the punishment but exploited him. Calvin disagreed with Servetus in matters of theology but nevertheless he stood by him at the hour of death: “At the supreme hour one man alone comes forward to attempt a mitigation of the punishment of Servetus. Who is that man? He is John Calvin. He earnestly interceded with the Council, not that the unfortunate victim might be spared, but that the sword might be substituted for the fire; but he interceded in vain” (Wylie 1899:334-5). Calvin even visited Servetus with permission shortly after the Council sentenced him, counselling him to turn to God (*Opera*, 460, Hillar 1997:310):

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.

What we must not forget is that “Calvin was one ‘those, who disapproved the burning’ of Servetus, and used his influence with the magistrates to prevent this species of punishments, but without effect” (Brown 1815:20). And we also know that Calvin and the pastors with a heart of love implored the Council for a milder form of execution but in vain (Bouwsma 1992:27). The Council, which was in full control to judge all criminal cases at Geneva restricted Calvin’s role and acted as follows (Shields 1983:356):

This Council ruled Geneva as an oligarchy. Calvin was himself subject to it and but its decree he had once been banished from Geneva, and recalled after three years, only because of a revolution in public opinion. Since his return he had acquired no new control of it, nor was its personal now under his influence. It was largely composed of his opponents. His colleagues, the ministers, as a class, had been disqualified from sitting in it. The presiding judge, or chief syndic and captain of the republic, Amied Perrin, was leader of the party of Patriots, the native Genevese, who hated Calvin as a foreigner and innovator and had lately rendered the Calvinist refugees helpless by depriving them of the of the right to bear arms ... In fact the whole Council was in conflict with Calvin on a point of jurisdiction between the civil and ecclesiastical courts in matters of religious discipline.

Therefore, Calvin was not ‘one of the last great figures of the Middle Ages’ nor ‘the first religious murder’ nor ‘the archinquisitor’: “The question may reasonably be asked, where was possible his dictation and dragooning of a court, a majority of which were his impalpable enemies. There is no evidence at all of the most remote nature to justify the assertion that any influence was exerted by Calvin, or possessed by him with which he could influence that court” (Prime 1910:19). Calvin played no role in the sentencing and the execution of Servetus based on the contemporary circumstance, but was only called as an expert regarding theological points of view as an “expert witness” (Woodbridge 1988:212; Boettner 1954:416) and “religious prosecuting attorney” (Robinson 1959:48; Lingle 1900:12) but not judicial and political prosecutor. In his capacity as an expert theologian he extracted from Servetus’ writings heresy and blasphemy and identified him as the author of them (Cameron 1981:114). Schaff says of his role: “Calvin conducted the theological part of the examination of the trial, but had no direct influence upon the result” (Schaff 1993:767). Calvin himself explains that “from the time Servetus was convicted of his heresy, I have not uttered a word about his punishment, as all honest men will bear witness; and I challenge even the malignant to deny it if they can” (*Opera*, 461, Schaff 1993:768).³⁰⁸ The reason Calvin got involved was that it was his duty to defend the truth against a heretic and blasphemer who would destroy the Church in the theological aspect. Judging the accusation and proceeding with the trial belonged entirely to the civil power.

5.1.5 Fair Trial

Some may wonder if the trial was carried out fairly or if Servetus was mistreated during the trial (Zweig 1936:119-25; Macdonell 1983:142). Was Calvin at an advantage due to it? One must consider these facts. First, both the accuser – de la Fontaine – and the accused – Michael Servetus – were imprisoned at the beginning of the trial. This arraignment was to proceed “before a justice of the peace and grand jury in determining *prima facie* evidence of guilty and the cause for a prosecution” (Shields 1898:361-2). After the arraignment the Council approved the accusation as justified and the trial should proceed further. Secondly, the trial went on in five phases and in all of them Servetus had the ample opportunity to defend himself.³⁰⁹ And he did. In each phase he got ample time to defend himself: “Among other things, he loaned him books out of his own library that he might have every opportu-

³⁰⁸ “Ex quo convictus est, me nullum de poena verbum fecisse, non solum boni omnes viri mihi testes erunt sed malis etiam concedo ut proferant si quid habent.”

³⁰⁹ The documents and records of the trial at Geneva are written in full in *Opera* (725-832).

nity to make the best possible defence” (Lingle 1900:12). He not only defended himself before the judges in writing but openly accused Calvin that he belonged in prison like he was. He petitioned several times to the Council. There were both oral and written charges and counter charges between the accuser and the accused. Thirdly, there is a strong suspicion that Servetus had more than usual access to the Council where Calvin’s enemies, the Libertines, supported Servetus and even instructed him continuously. He not only was given paper and ink and clothes but, through the jailer, communicated secretly with the Libertines in the Council.³¹⁰ Furthermore, according to the court custom, before the final decision “the courts had the right to resort to an additional round of questioning, now under torture” to admit the crimes (Kingdon 1995:25), nevertheless, Servetus never suffered any torture during the trial of Geneva (Durant 1957:482).

Besides, Servetus was asked if he wanted to go back to Vienne but he besought the Council not to send him back. He chose the trial of Geneva rather than that of Vienne. Uncertain as to how to proceed with the final decision of Servetus’ guilt, the Council even consulted Geneva’s allies at Berne, Zürich, Schaffhausen, and Basel. This idea had already been developed in an agreement between the Libertines and Servetus (Collins 1968:180). When the Council sent the churches another thirty-eight charges selected from Servetus’ writings and all the recorded materials processed during several phases, Servetus was permitted to retract any of his opinions, to refute any of the propositions, and to defend himself against anything which he judged to be unjustly alleged. To make his defence he had enough opportunities and as much time as he pleased. We know that Servetus and his supporters anticipated their positive replies, but in their reply there was “no word of toleration, no expression of pity, no plea for mercy” (Macdonell 1983:143). Taking three days, the Council now gathered all the information with the responses of the Swiss Churches to judge the stormy debate, and finally passed down the sentence of Servetus’ death by burning on October 27, 1553. Servetus, to the end held not only to a spirit of victory over Calvin but had an assurance of acquittal until he heard the responses of the Swiss Churches. It was truly a fair trial in which Servetus was always able to express and defend freely his opinions as much as he could. It is unreasonable to argue that Servetus was unfavourably treated in jail and in the process of the trial (Williams 1962:103). His

³¹⁰ According to Shields’ drama (1898), it is said that Claude de Genève was ordered to treat Servetus well. “*Claude. (Bowing low)* I have My orders from the Captain-General To humor thee with certain privileges, That may befit so learn’d a prisoner ... *Claude.* My orders were to grant some privileges:– Here is a most distinguished visitor.” Then he let Berthelier visit Servetus.

trial was just. Even Bolsec, the bitterest of all Calvin's enemies, agrees that the execution of Servetus was just after reviewing the trial (Bungener 1863:239):

Bolsec, speaking of Servetus, declares that he experienced 'No regret at the death of so monstrous a heretic.' Servetus, adds he, was 'unworthy to converse with men;' and as for himself, he would wish that 'all his like were exterminated, and the Church of our Lord well purged of such victim.' Thus, we find the most ardent of Calvin's enemies, the one who seemed to think that Calvin would willingly have sent him to the stake, Bolsec, in short, interrupting his calumnious pages to declare that in his view the death of Servetus was just!

Shields (1983:380-1), who looks through the trial of Servetus, concludes that the trial of Servetus was fair and legal as follows:

The Judges had kept with the law throughout the trial. They had put the accuser in peril with the accused before entertaining the case. Day after day they had listened to the examination of the prisoner on the political charges, as well as to his discussion with an expert divine. They had then impartially excluded the parties, and referred the case to the higher courts, as well as churches, of the Swiss confederations. The judgement of Berne, as their protectorate, was almost mandatory. They also had before them a judgement on the same case by the civil court of Lyons. The State attorney showed them that the imperial code since the time of attorney showed them that the imperial code since the time of Constantine agreed with the existing edicts of the republic as to the penalty due for the crime which had been proved. There could be no question of their jurisdiction; the prisoner himself, after denying it, by his own act concealed it. Finally, they had consulted with the other burgesses entitled to sit with them in a full session of the Senate; and their unanimous sentence was then accepted as final by all parties.

Servetus was indeed treated fairly and justly at his own trial.

5.1.5.1 Civil Trial

The civil Council was entirely in charge of the whole trial and the Consistory had nothing to do with the trial: "The name of Servetus does not even appear in its [Consistory's] records" (Shields 1983:356). It is clear that Calvin was never involved in it but directed to present the proofs extracted from Servetus' heretical writings by the Council. The condemnation, execution, sentence, and execution of Servetus were entirely controlled by the Council (Wadkins 1983:437; McGrath 1990:116). The trial was a civil trial, which was carried out by the Council, not by Calvin (Russell 1814:15). "Servetus was given a court trial lasting over two months and was sentenced by the full session of the civil Council, and that in accordance with the laws which were then recognized throughout Christendom" (Boettner 1954:412). The detailed social and political environment of Geneva at that time can give us ample evidence that Calvin could not direct any procedure at the trial but only attended it as an observer and a debater with permission of the Council. This was

consistent with the independent position and self-government of the church as Calvin wished. After throwing off the yoke of the Duke of Savoy in 1530 and bishop Pierre de La Baume in 1533 Geneva had gained the right to administer civil and criminal justice from them. The full juridical authority and the right to execute criminal sentence was transferred to the Syndics in the Council. Abraham Kuyper said in connection with it: “The duty of the government to extirpate every form of false religion and idolatry was not a find of Calvinism, but dates from Constantine the Great and was the reaction against the horrible persecutions which his pagan predecessors on the Imperial throne had inflicted upon the sect of the Nazarene.”³¹¹

Moreover, the Council did not want any interruption from foreign power nor from Calvin. They were never to tolerate a foreign interference into the central feature of the Genevan administration. Calvin was rigorously excluded from the dispensation of civil and criminal justice which did not belong to the pastors but the magistrates. The pastors’ duty was not to judge heretics but to investigate them and to report them to the Syndics who were in charge of judging them. This is why Calvin reported Servetus’ coming to Geneva, followed the direction of the Council in the trial, and requested the less punishment of decapitation on behalf of him. The Council even entirely disregarded Calvin’s requests of keeping Berthelier, one of Syndics, under excommunication, as well as his request to attenuate the punishment.³¹² Beza speaks of how weak Calvin was in political influence (Beza 1836:183-4):

It may be asked where, and in what respect, Calvin had any influence over the senate that condemned Servetus? It must be admitted, that the senate who refused, at Calvin’s request with ministers, to mitigate and change the punishment of Servetus,³¹³ were under the control of Perrin, and not of Calvin. Calvin, in a letter to Farel, declares, that ‘from the time that the senate pronounced the charges against him (Servetus) to be proved, *I never uttered a word concerning his punishment.*’³¹⁴

Because Calvin’s role was so restricted, his influence as to the sentence was negligible. Shields says of his limited role: “The truth is, that Calvin had been peremptorily set aside by the judges, who were then as anxious to absolve Berthelier as to punish Servetus, and

³¹¹ He, the statesman-theologian from Holland, had never lectured Calvinism in America (Kuyper 1931:129).

³¹² “... this stake was not Calvin’s wish; he had protested, and the Government erected the stake in order to show that it had the power of rejecting Calvin’s request for mercy” (Penning 1954:217).

³¹³ For Calvin’s trying to change the punishment see Smyth, (1856:105 & *Letter*, vol. II, 417 on August 20, 1553).

³¹⁴ “Ex quo convictus est, me nullum de proena verbum fecisse, non solum boni omens viri mihi testes erunt sed malis etiam concedo ut proferant si quid habent” (*Opera*, 461).

even wished by the latter act to enforce their claim to the former” (Shields 1986:381).³¹⁵

McGrath also makes clear that the trial of Servetus entirely belonged to the Council (McGrath 1990:115-6):

The trial and execution of Michael Servetus as a heretic have, more than any other event, coloured Calvin’s posthumous reputation. It is not entirely clear why scholars have singled out the execution of Servetus as somehow more notable or significant than the mass executions carried out within Germany after the abortive Peasants’ War (1525) and after the ending of the siege of Münster (1534), or the ruthless policy of execution of Roman Catholic priests in Elizabethian England ...

... Furthermore, the trial, condemnation and execution (including the selection of the particular mode of execution) of Servetus were entirely the work of the city council, at a period in its history when it was particularly hostile to Calvin.

5.1.5.2 The Libertines

The affairs in the trial of Servetus, which was entirely under the authority of the Council, were totally dominated and exploited by Calvin’s opponents (Latourette 1975:759). The Libertines, his opponents, who had gained power in the election in 1553 with a sweeping victory, were determined to weaken Calvin’s position. They tried to acquit and release Servetus, through an appeal to the Council of Two Hundred. They even plotted to banish Calvin from Geneva once more like in 1538. Throughout the whole trial of Servetus the majority of the Council was personally hostile to Calvin (Walker 1969:333). Berthelier and Perrin, who were leaders of the Libertines and members of the court, supported the accused, Servetus, not because they supported or followed his theology but because they hated Calvin. They attempted to exploit the trial to discredit or annoy Calvin (Pettegree 1990:42). They accorded with Servetus not only to change the mode of trial from oral to written but also to refer the trial to the Swiss Churches. They were already aware that the Bernese had been against Calvin in the Bolsec’s matter. They plotted to change the mode of debating from oral to written on behalf of Servetus. They helped him to petition to the Council several times, informing him of the custom of Geneva. Servetus was totally directed and controlled by them. Yet, when they got into a disadvantageous position they simply withdrew from the front to the back and gave up saving him: “An ill-advised, last-ditch attempt by Ami Perrin to save Servetus collapsed, and Perrin had in the end to comply with a death sentence by burning which was carried out against Servetus late in October 1553” (Mullett 1989:42). We can see how cunningly Servetus was deceived and

³¹⁵ Mullett (1989:42) observes the limits of Calvin’s powers in the Council: “The sentencing of Servetus, when Calvin’s request of a less savage punishment was turned down, provides an apt illustration of the limits of his powers.”

exploited as a trivial tool by the Libertines and why Servetus had no scruples in accusing and insulting Calvin before the Council. Their attempt and plot were in vain, however. In the end Servetus became their victim rather than their tool (Rilliet 1846:201). The Libertines' complicity with Servetus is described well by Wilbur (1972:182):

The whole truth, therefore, seems to be no more than the Libertines had no interest in Servetus or his doctrines as such, but they simply made a tool of him, secretly encouraging his defiant attitude as a means of annoying Calvin, while another case was pending in which they were much concerned. And yet, they had a majority in the Council, they were entirely unwilling to come out into the open and bear the burden of Servetus' heresies, and in the end took not a single effective step on his behalf. Even if some of them voted against conviction, at all events none of them had the hardihood to speak against it.³¹⁶

We can recognize that they were not interested in the theological matter of Servetus and in saving him but used him for their political purpose. Although he might have attempted to escape from Geneva as he had done at Vienne, he could not make it because of their betrayal: "At any time before the passing of the sentence, Servetus might have escaped serious punishment by retracting, as Gentile did five years later. But unfortunately misled by hope of support from Calvin's opponents, and wholly overestimating the extent of it, he assumed an attitude increasingly defiant and insulting to Calvin, and thus threw away whatever chance of mercy he might have had" (Wilbur 1972:185). In the end Servetus, as an orphan deserted on the street, was left alone in prison and could not help waiting for the dreadful sentence that related to threefold crime: "Servetus, though tried for heresy and finally condemned and done to death by slow fire for blasphemy against God, was in some measure also the victim of the political situation" (Willis 1877:299; Smyth 1856:104). In point of fact, Calvin had to follow the decisions of the Council and was not allowed to participate in deciding the punishment during the trial but was bound by the request of the Council (Willis 1877:474). It was only John Calvin who bravely appealed to the Council to reduce Servetus' punishment: "And one alone stands forth to plead for a mitigation of the sentence, namely, that another form of death he substituted for the stake. *That one man was John Calvin*" (Wileman, s.a.:104). We can simply say that Calvin was not involved in the

³¹⁶ "The fact is undoubted that the Libertines perceived the advantage they might have derived by playing Servetus off against the Reformer [Calvin]; and Servetus, on the other hand, was aware of the advantage that might accrue to him from strengthening the Libertines against Calvin" (Wylie 1899:323).

trial of Servetus but the Libertines who were involved in it manipulated Calvin in the affair.

5.1.6 Servetus' Arrogance

Servetus realised that he could not convince the Reformers of his views and thus determined to publish them at his own expense and to spread them, but it was in vain. Although he intended to convince Calvin of his own views in Paris, Servetus did not show up at the place where he was supposed to meet Calvin. In the end he thought that he could have won and annoy Calvin's theological system with letters. He continued to send as many as thirty letters even after Calvin stopped answering and eventually got back but two letters through Frelon. He was full of a strong competitive position against Calvin: "He adhered to his opinions with heroic constancy" (Fisher 1906:200). His fastidiousness did not help him make friends and he only wandered from place to place: "The boldness and pertinacity of his opinions created him enemies, and he left the capital to settle at Lyons, but afterwards he retires to Charlieu" (Russell 1814:9). Even Bolsec says that he was too arrogant to harmonise with the faculties of the University of Paris and had to leave Charlieu, too. Throughout the whole process of the trial of Geneva Servetus had no scruple about attacking and insulting Calvin, though Calvin told him that he disregarded what he did against him (*Opera*, 461, Hillar 1997:311):

Afterwards saying that I disregarded all that concerning my person I begged him rather to think and ask God's mercy, whom he vilely blasphemed by wanting to abolish the three Persons that are in his essence and stating that those who recognize in one God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit with the real distinction, are fabricating an infernal dog with three heads. I begged him to ask with all his heart forgiveness of the Son of God whom he had disfigured by his derangement negating that he assumed our body and that he resembled us in his human nature, and doing this he refused to recognize him as our savior. Seeing that I do not accomplish anything by exhortations, I did not want to be wiser than my Master would permit me.

In contrast, the original attitude of Calvin who began to correspond with him and attended this trial was to demonstrate his faults and heresies so that Servetus could repent of them and find the correct way. What Calvin hoped was not to win or destroy him but save him (*Opera*, 460, Hillar 1997:310, & Wileman, s.a.:103).³¹⁷ If Servetus regretted his ideas and devices and admitted them, he would not have been condemned but released. Even when the Council decided on the affair of Servetus they suggested the flexible option that he

³¹⁷ Unlike Bolsec's insult Calvin made clear that his intention was not thirst for Servetus' blood but save him: "Hoc tantum in praesentia testatum volo, me non ita capiliter fuisse infestum, quin licium fuerit vel sola modestia, nisi mentis privatus foret, vitam redimere" (*Opera*, 480).

would be acquitted of the dread execution if he recanted (Shields 1986:379). Besides, before hearing the horrible sentence, Calvin hoped “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 a letter to Farel on August 20, 1553). Farel mentioned about Calvin’s attitude toward him in a reply on September 8, 1553: “In desiring to mitigate the severity of his punishment, you act the part of a friend to a man who is most hostile to you. But I beseech you so to manage the matter that no one whatever may rashly dare to publish new dogmas, and throw all things into confusion with impunity for such a length of time as he has done” (*Letters*, vol. II, 417 a letter to Farel on August 20, 1553). It is an extremely partial opinion that Calvin was branded as a ‘detestable bigot’, or had ‘personal hatred,’ and was an ‘old enemy of Servetus.’ No! Calvin “acted conscientiously, and did nothing but what he thought it his duty to do, fair and impartial minds will pass a different judgement; for, in that case, so far as he erred, his error was one of the head, not of the heart” (Brown 1815:23).

5.1.7 Allegations

In summary on October 27, 1553, Michael Servetus, an accused heretic, blasphemer, and even seditious, was sentenced to death by burning and was executed on the same day, the Council of Geneva, being wholly responsible for the sentence. The Council was threatened with his spreading heresies and blasphemies and was concerned about the peace of Geneva.³¹⁸ Christians in the sixteenth century, unlike the twentieth century, believed that the heresies were more than simply different views against the traditional dogmas, but were deeply related to the “much broader social and political agenda” (McGrath 1990:117). They lived and judged in an age where civil matters were deeply in connection with religious matters. Geneva was concerned about the civil peace of the city related to religion. Moreover, Calvin was not a man of the twentieth century but the sixteenth century in which he lived and acted. This the historian must realize that “Calvin and the men of his time are not to be judged strictly and solely by the advanced standards of our twentieth century, but must to a certain extent be considered in the light of their own sixteenth century” (Boettner 1954:412-3). Cunningham (1989:318-21) says of Calvin’s behaviour during the trial of Servetus based on the sixteenth century as follows:

1. The doctrine of the lawfulness and duty of putting heretics and blasphemers to death, was then almost universally held, by Protestants as well as papists ...
2. Servetus was not only a heretic and a blasphemer, but one about whom there

³¹⁸ Henry (1849:163) clearly concludes that Servetus was condemned for political crimes by the Council. See Smyth (1856:104).

was everything to provoke and nothing to conciliate ... 3. Servetus had been convicted of heresy and blasphemy by a popish tribunal at Vienne, and had been condemned to be burned by a slow fire ...

... 4. Although Calvin, after having, notwithstanding extreme personal provocation, done everything in his power to convince Servetus of his errors, approved of putting him to death as an incorrigible heretic and blasphemer, he exerted his influence, but without success, to prevent his being burned, and to effect that he might be put to death by some less cruel and offensive process; so that to talk, as is often done, of Calvin *burning* Servetus, is simply and literally a falsehood. 5. The Reformers generally, and more especially two of the mildest and most moderate of them all, both in their theological views and in their general character, – Melancthon, representing the Lutherans, and Bullinger, representing the Zwinglians, – gave their full, formal, public approbation to the proceedings which took place in Geneva in the case of Servetus. 6. Archbishop Crammer exerted all his influence with King Edward, and succeeded thereby, though not without great difficulty, in effecting the burning of two heretics—one of them a woman and the other a foreigner—whose offences were in every respect, and tried by any standard whatever, far less aggravated than Servetus.

In the twentieth century it is hard for us to see why heretics, simply because they had different views on traditional doctrines had to be burned at the stake or decapitated, however the sixteenth century citizen lived in a time of judging, condemning and executing heretics. We know that they judged Servetus for crimes and that the charges against him were not only that he was a heretic but he was also a blasphemer and was spreading poisonous heresy into Geneva (Wilbur 1972:179). When considering the contemporary circumstances, it is clear that it was the civil government that took charge of the trial and that Calvin's role was extremely limited and restricted by the Council that dominated the trial. So D'Aubigne concludes about his responsibility of the trial as follows: "As to the burning of Michael Servetus, with which he has been so much reproached, let it be remembered that the Spanish anti-trinitarian was condemned, not by Calvin, but by the Council of Geneva, composed at that time of men by no means subject to the Reformer's influence, and that condemnation was approved of by all the leading reformers previously consulted" (D'Aubigne 1989:280-1).³¹⁹ The Council, excluding Calvin's influence,

³¹⁹ Lingle (1900:13-4) concludes on the case of Servetus, "1. That all this occurred in the sixteenth century, when the world was just emerging from the dark ages, and not in the light of the twentieth century. 2. That Servetus had been tried, condemned, and sentenced to be burned by the Roman Catholic Church, at Vienne, before he ever came to Geneva. This shows the spirit of the age, and seals the lips of every Roman Catholic. 3. That Servetus deliberately came to Geneva of his own accord, after his escape from Vienne, when he knew the law of Geneva and the attitude of Calvin. Why did he come? It was for a life and death struggle. 4. That in 1553 heresy was a crime punished with death throughout Europe. 5. That the charge against Servetus was not only heresy, but blasphemy. In fact, the emphasis was laid upon the latter. According to the Mosaic law blasphemy was a capital offence. See Leviticus 24:16. John Calvin believed in the Old Testament with all his heart. 6. That John Calvin did not make the law under which Servetus died. It was on the statue books long before he came to Geneva. 7. That the Council which tried and condemned Servetus was anti-Calvin. The Libertines had a large majority. At that very moment John Calvin was in constant danger of being banished

consistently proceeded with the trial in compliance with the contemporary laws. The definitive sentence by the Council “*was just, according to law*. In returning it, the judges believed they were fulfilling a duty; so that it was not from them, it is not from Calvin, it is from their age that we must demand an account of that lamentable error” (Rilliet 1846:208). We can hear Wileman’s (Wileman, s.a.:104-5) answers to three suggestions about Calvin’s role at the beginning of this thesis as follows:

1. That Servetus was guilty of blasphemy, of a kind and degree which is still punishable here in England by imprisonment.
2. That his sentence was in accordance with the spirit of the age.
3. That he had been sentenced to the same punishment by the Inquisition at Vienne.
4. That the sentence was pronounced by the Councils of Geneva, Calvin having no power either to condemn or to save him.
5. That Calvin and others visited the unhappy man in his last hours, treated him with much kindness, and did all they could to have the sentence mitigated.

Some writers may assess a kind of corporate guilt for the deed including Calvin as partially guilty because of his role as witness, but this is hardly fair since Calvin could attend the trial and debate with him only by the permission of the Council. Even the method of debating was not chosen by him but the Council. Any one who is aided by the contemporary factual sources cannot help but conclude that Calvin is not to be defamed by a number of partial allegations and that Servetus was guilty enough to deserve the condemnation he received. We would conclude that Calvin was by no means involved in the trial–condemnation, execution, and sentencing Servetus—that all the prejudiced allegations against Calvin have been full of false assumptions and partial knowledge.³²⁰ The warped opinion on Calvin and misunderstanding him are apt to produce such unfavourable views and serious charges (Cunningham 1989:332). There were no proofs that Calvin influenced Servetus’ sentence and had personal hatred. One last thing that we should know is that the main reason why many opponents of Calvin blamed him for much

from Geneva, and actually preached his farewell sermon. 8. That the case was submitted to the other Swiss cantons and churches, and that they were all in favour of convicting Servetus and getting rid of the pest, as one of them put it. The judgement of these other cantons had great weight with the Council of Geneva. 9. That the final verdict was approved by all the reformers even by the gentle Melanchthon ... 10. That Calvin made every endeavor to have the sentence changed from fire to the sword. He was not able to move the Council. This shows how little real power he had in Geneva at this time. 11. That the whole history of the Christians world would have been changed if Servetus had won in the struggle instead of Calvin. 12. That John Calvin was mortal. ‘The faults of Calvin were the faults of his age. His virtues of all ages’ ...”

³²⁰ “If, aided by all the necessary documents, they could transport themselves to the period when the event took place, and examine those who were eye-witnesses of the proceedings, they would in all probability free Calvin from the charge against him, and pronounce him not guilty. Servetus, on the other hand, they would declare guilty, but with extenuating circumstances.”

of the trial of Servetus was “to bring calvinism into discredit by aiming a blow at the reputation of Calvin”(Brown 1815:21).³²¹

³²¹; Foxe (1926:186) also observes: “It has long been the delight of both infidels and some professed Christians, when they wish to bring odium upon the opinions of Calvin, to refer to his agency in the death of Michael Servetus. This action is used on all occasions by those who have been unable to overthrow his opinions, as a conclusive argument against his whole system. ‘Calvin burnt Servetus!--Calvin burnt Servetus!’ is a good proof with a certain class of reasoners, that the doctrine of the Trinity is not true--that divine sovereignty is Antiscriptural,--and Christianity a cheat.”

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APPENDIX

Thirty-eight Articles

Nicolas de la Fontaine asserts that he has instituted proceedingly against Michael Servetus and on this account he has allowed himself to be held prisoner in criminal process.

1. 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 [*De Trinitatis Erroribus*, 1531], and was condemned and took to flight in order to escape the punishment prepared for him.
2. II. *Item*, that on or about this time he printed a wretched book [*Dialogorum de Trinitate libri Duo*, 1532], which has infected many people.
3. III. *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.
4. IV. *Item*, that since that time he has printed in secrecy another book containing endless blasphemies [*Christianismi Restitutio*, 1553].
5. V. *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.
- VI. Said Nicholas demands that said Servetus be examined on all these points.
- VII. 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.
6. VIII. 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.
7. IX. *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 things equally injurious.
8. X. *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.
9. XI. *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.

10. XII. *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.
11. XIII. *Item*, that Jesus Christ is God, insomuch as God has caused him to be such.
12. XIV. *Item*, that the flesh of Jesus Christ came from heaven and from the substance of God.
13. XV. *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.
14. XVI. *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.
15. XVII. *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.
16. XVIII. *Item*, that those who believe in any distinction of property in the essence of God dissipate His nature and reduce it to fragments.
17. XIX. *Item*, that the word of God is no other thing than the flesh of Jesus Christ.
18. XX. *Item*, that the flesh of Jesus Christ was engendered, out of the substance of God by a word which he calls “seminal.”
19. XXI. That the essence of the flesh and of the soul of Jesus Christ is the divinity of this word and of the breath which God has breathed forth.
20. XXII. *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.
21. XXIII. *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.
22. XXIV. *Item*, that the essence of the angels and of our souls is of the substance of God.
23. XXV. *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.
24. XXVI. *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.
25. XXVII. *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.

26. XXVIII. *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.
27. XXIX. *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.
28. XXX. *Item*, that the Fathers under the Law have never received the spirit of regeneration. 29. XXXI. *Item*, that by the sin of Adam the soul of man as well as the body was made mortal.
30. XXXII. *Item*, that little children are sinless, and moreover are incapable of redemption until they come of age.
31. XXXIII. *Item*, that they do not commit mortal sin up to the age of twenty.
32. XXXIV. *Item*, that the baptism of little children is an invention of the Devil, an infernal falsehood tending to the destruction of all Christianity.
33. XXXV. *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.
34. XXXVI. *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.
35. XXXVII. *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.
36. XXXVIII. *Item*, the soul of man insomuch as it possesses many divine properties is full of an infinity of Gods.
37. XXXIX. *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.
38. XL. And because he knows well that his said book could not be tolerated even among Papists, insomuch 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:

18. 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.

21. *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.

22. *Item*, whether the said book Koran is not a bad book, full of blasphemies.” Merrick Whitcomb, ed., “The Complaint of Nicholas de la Fontaine Against Servetus, 14 August, 1553,”