

# THE RELIGIOUS PROGRAM OF MICHAEL SERVETUS IN HIS MAJOR WORK, *CHRISTIANISMI RESTITUTIO* (*THE RESTORATION OF CHRISTIANITY*)<sup>1</sup>

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Michael Servetus, because of his ideas and his fate, was a central figure who represented a culminating moment in the struggle for freedom of conscience, which includes freedom of investigation, of thought, and of expression of beliefs. From the fourth century the western world underwent a change from the humanistic principles of ancient morality, designated as the humanistic social paradigm, to a new ecclesiastical paradigm which lasted till the end of the eighteenth century. This long process preceded the reestablishment or recovery of the ancient humanistic paradigm. Among the stages of this process one can distinguish the writings of Sebastian Castellio who spread the legacy of Michael Servetus among the Italian humanists and reformers, especially Laelius Socinus (1525-1562) and Faustus Socinus (1539-1604). The latter organized an anti-Trinitarian or unitarian movement in Poland and Transylvania. The Socinians, as the members of the movement were called in the West, were the first who demanded and understood completely the moral imperative of the complete separation of religion and state. The moral and political doctrines of the Socinians eventually led to the development of the Age of the Enlightenment. Their ideas were perfected, expanded, and popularized by the writings of philosophers such as John Locke (1632-1704), Pierre Bayle (1647-1706), Voltaire (1694-1778), and David Hume (1711-1776). The ideas of John Locke were transplanted directly to the American continent by James Madison (1751-1836) and Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826). The latter implemented them in the American legislature, creating the American Constitution which since then has served as a model for modern political organization.

This article presents the religious program of Michael Servetus which he laid out in his magnum opus, *Christianismi restitutio* — *The Restoration of Christianity*.<sup>2</sup> I am going to present selected aspects of the religious doctrine of Michael Servetus, namely, his doctrine of the Trinity, his unifying metaphysics

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<sup>1</sup> Based on a lecture delivered at the International Congress Clausura del Año Servetiano, Zaragoza and Villaneuva de Sijena, Spain, October 22-23, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Miguel Servet, *Christianismi restitutio*, Vienne, 1553. Reprint by Minerva G.m.b.H., Frankfurt a. M., 1966.

of the world, the fundamental aspects of the Christian religion, and the basic aspects of its practice.

The purpose of Servetus in writing *The Restoration of Christianity* was to advocate a return to original Christianity as he understood it, and not only to promote the reform of Christian practices in order to eliminate abuses and corruption. Such ideas were popular among the Anabaptists such as Campanus, Rothman, Urbanus Rhegius and David Joris.

The complete title of the work is: *The Restoration of Christianity. The Whole Apostolic Church is Summoned to Return to Its Origin to Restore a Complete Knowledge of God, of the Faith of Christ, of Our Justification, of Regeneration by Baptism, and of Participation in the Lord's Supper. And Finally, to Restore to Us the Heavenly Kingdom, to End the Wicked Captivity of Babylon, and to Destroy the Antichrist with His Host.* The book ends with the initials M.S.V.

## \* I N D E X.

De Trinitate diuina, quod in ea non fit inuisibilis  
lium trium rerum illusio, sed vera substantiæ Dei manifesta-  
tio in verbo, et communicatio in spiritu, Libri septem.

De fide et iustitia regni Christi, legis iustitiam supe-  
rantis, et de charitate, Libri tres. Pagina. 287.

De regeneratione ac manducatione superna, et de re-  
gno Antichristi, Libri quatuor. Pagina. 355.

Epistolæ triginta ad Ioannem Caluinum Gebennen-  
sium concionatorem. Pagina. 577.

Signa sexaginta regni Antichristi, et reuelatio eius  
iam nunc præfens. pagina. 664.

De mysterio Trinitatis, et veterum disciplina, ad Philip-  
pum Melancthonem, et eius collegas, apologia.  
Pagina. 671.

De Tri-

Table of Contents of *Christianismi restitutio*, original Latin version

This book in its Spanish translation by Ángel Alcalá and Luis Betés<sup>3</sup> is divided into four parts: **The First Part** contains five books *On the Divine Trinity*. These five books cover the same topics as are covered by the seven books of *De Trinitatis erroribus* published in 1531. **The Second Part** contains *Two Dialogues on the Divine Trinity*.<sup>4</sup> It constitutes a more detailed exposition of Servetus' assertions presented in *Dialogorum de Trinitate libri duo* of 1532. These two parts of the Spanish edition form the first part of the original Latin text. **The Third Part** contains *Three Books on the Faith and Justice of Christ's Kingdom which is Superior to the Law and on Love*.<sup>5</sup> These books too are an expanded version of the chapters treating the same subjects which were added to the *Dialogorum de Trinitate* of 1532. **The Fourth Part** contains *Four Books on Supernatural Regeneration and on the Kingdom of the Antichrist*.<sup>6</sup> This part deals with the practical aspects of Christian preaching, faith and grace, baptism, and the Lord's supper.

The other parts of the original Latin text — the fourth, fifth and sixth — were translated as a separate tome.<sup>7</sup> The original Fourth Part contained *Thirty Letters to John Calvin, Preacher of Geneva*.<sup>8</sup> The original Fifth Part listed *Sixty Signs of the Kingdom of the Antichrist which is already present*.<sup>9</sup> The Sixth Part contained an *Apologia against Philip Melanchthon and his Colleagues Concerning the Mystery of the Trinity and Ancient Beliefs*.<sup>10</sup> In this treatise Servetus defended himself against the attacks of Melanchthon, published in his second edition of *Loci communes*, on the earlier writings of Servetus. This part constitutes a compendium of Servetus' thought.

Without doubt the title of the most important work of Servetus, *The Restoration of Christianity*, recalls the program of Erasmus (1466-1536) which was based on three principal premises: 1. Erasmus studied the original texts of the gospels, the first works of the apostolic writers and the first Christian

<sup>3</sup> Miguel Servet, *Restitución del Cristianismo. Primera traducción castellana de Ángel Alcalá y Luis Betés*. Edición, introducción y notas de Ángel Alcalá, Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 1980. Referred to as Alcalá y Betés.

<sup>4</sup> *De Trinitate divina, quod in ea non fit invisibilium trium rerum illusio, sed vera substantiae Dei manifestatio in verbo, et communicatio in spiritu, Libri septem*. 3-286.

<sup>5</sup> This constitutes the second part of the original Latin text. *De fide et iustitia regni Christi, legis iustitiam superantis, et de charitate*, 287-354.

<sup>6</sup> This constitutes the third part of the original Latin text. *De regeneratione ac manducatione superna, et de regno Antichristi*, 355-576.

<sup>7</sup> Miguel Servet, *Treinta cartas a Calvino. Sesenta signos del Antichristo. Apología de Melanchthon*. Edición de Ángel Alcalá, Madrid: Editorial Castalia, 1981. Referred to as Alcalá.

<sup>8</sup> *Epistolae triginta ad Ioannem Calvinum Gebennensium concionatorem*, 577-663.

<sup>9</sup> *Signa sexaginta regni Antichristi, et revelatio eius iam nunc praesens*, 664-670.

<sup>10</sup> *De Mysterio Trinitatis et veterum disciplina, ad Philippum Melanchthonem, et eius collegas, Apologia*, 671-734.

theologians who still operated in the Greco-Roman social paradigm, as the source of religious assertions. 2. Erasmus purposed to abandon sophisticated theological speculations. 3. This was necessary in order to reduce religious beliefs to a small number of essential teachings.<sup>11</sup>

These postulates define exactly what Servetus did in his studies of the Christian religion. Inspired by the rising spirit of reform he foresaw a plan for the restoration of Christianity to its original simplicity and integrity. “He never intended to be an innovator. He wanted only to fulfill in his conscience what he believed was his inevitable obligation, namely, to defend the truth of the Scripture in the face of scholastic manipulation, and to contribute his efforts to the restoration by the Church of Christianity, usurped since the time of Constantine and Sylvester,” wrote Dr. Luis Betés.<sup>12</sup> Servetus considered himself a participant in the heavenly cosmic fight between the angels.<sup>13</sup>

The focus of Servetus’ involvement was expressed in his critical and radical thought. He investigate the Scriptures with the intention of discovering the true doctrines contained in them. In this process Servetus developed a new, more humane religion, and a new understanding of the divinity and divine matters which is closer to the realities of the human condition. This methodology of critical thinking constitutes one of his two great legacies.<sup>14</sup> The other legacy has to do with the function of society at the moral level. Servetus came to understand the total potential of human nature, its capacity and rationality.

### **The Doctrine of the Trinity Before Servetus**

Servetus is known primarily for the results of his critical studies. One of his exhaustive studies of the Scriptures demonstrated that there is no basis for maintaining traditional Trinitarian doctrine.<sup>15</sup> One has to recognize that the

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<sup>11</sup> Hans R. Guggisberg, “Wandel der Argumente für religiöse Toleranz und Glaubensfreiheit in 16.

and 17. Jahrhundert,” in Michael Erbe, ed., *Querdenken Dissens und Toleranz im Wandel der Geschichte*.

*Festschrift zum 65 Geburtstag von Hans R. Guggisberg*, Manheim: Palatin, 1996, p. 139.

<sup>12</sup> Luis Betés, “El pensamiento teológico de Miguel Servet,” in *Turia, Revista Cultural*, no. 63-64, 2003, 254-264.

<sup>13</sup> *Christianismi restit.*, 388-390. *Carta No. XX*, in Alcalá, 142.

<sup>14</sup> Ángel Alcalá, “Los dos grandes legados de Servet: el radicalismo como método intelectual y el derecho a la libertad de conciencia,” in *Turia, Revista Cultural*, no. 63-64, 2003, 221-242.

<sup>15</sup> Miguel Servet, *De Trinitatis erroribus, libri septem. Per Michaelem Serveto, alias Reves ab Aragonia Hispanum, Haguenau, 1531; Dialogorum de Trinitate libri duo. De Iustitia regni Christi, capitula quatuor. per Michaelem Serveto, alias Reves, ab Aragonia Hispanum, Haguenau, 1532; “Cinco libros de declaración sobre Jesús el Cristo hijo de Dios, Manuscrito de Stuttgart,” in Miguel Servet, *Obras Completas*, Zaragoza: Prensas*

problem of the Trinity had never been resolved in a satisfactory manner. In spite of many decrees promulgated by the church councils, theologians and philosophers were still striving to demonstrate its existence. Thus in the Middle Ages there developed three schools dealing with the issue. One of the factors that contributed to their development was probably the necessity of confronting a new opposition in the form of Islam, which was ideologically allied with Judaism.

**The First School** is usually classified as illustrative and it originated with Augustine. He asserted that though the doctrine of the Trinity could not be demonstrated, at least it could be illustrated. Augustine affirmed that the doctrine can be known through revelation but not directly. It can be deduced from the Scriptures. It can be illustrated by analogy to the human constitution. Therefore he developed a series of similitudes or analogies, three of which are most frequently cited: the loved one, the lover and love; the mind, love and knowledge; memory, intellect, and will. He treated such a psychological interpretation of the Trinity as a proof, because he considered the internal human constitution as an image of God (*imago Dei*). This approach was continued by Boethius, Lombard, Anselm, Albert the Great, Thomas of Aquinas, and Scotus.

**The Second School**, the demonstrative, was begun with Richard of Saint Victor (d. 1173) and it asserted that the doctrine of the Trinity could also be demonstrated. The basis for such an interpretation was grounded in the metaphysics which considered God a dynamic being (*Bonum diffusivum sui*) — a position similar to the Hellenistic Neoplatonic views which considered God as diversified within His own being.

**The Third School**, the fideist, began with William of Ockham (1280-1349) who denied that the doctrine of the Trinity could be either illustrated or demonstrated. He postulated that the doctrine could only be believed by the authority of the Church. He represented the school which at that time was supported by Modernists who took a nominalist philosophical position. Accordingly, the existence of universals was denied and reality was considered as composed of unrelated particulars. Thus, if one retains the concept of a substance that unites the three persons, then it represents a fourth entity and the Trinity becomes a quaternary being. This was postulated by Joaquin of Fiore (1132-1202). If, however, the three persons are not united by one substance, then they constitute three distinct and separate entities — thus representing tritheism. Neither the concept of “relation” identified by Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) nor the concept of “person” would constitute the “universal” which would unite these three entities. Thus from the philosophical point of view Ockham asserted that there are three absolutes: “The syllogism: God is the Trinity, the Father is God, and thus the Father is the Trinity, is solid in accordance with Aristotelian logic, but it is false from the point of view of the faith.” And, “The diverse scientific

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Universitarias de Zaragoza, 2004, Vol. II, tome 1, 1-113 (text in Spanish translation), tome 2, 534-625 (text in original Latin).

(*scientiis*) disciplines are not able to establish that God is one and three. This can only be asserted in theology through faith.”

The other member of the school of Modernists, Pierre D’Ailly (1350-1420), admitted on the basis of the decrees issued by the councils that certain decisions of the Church do not derive from deductions made from the Scriptures but from a special revelation offered to the Catholics by a gift of God. He affirmed that the doctrine of the Trinity presents only a verbal inconsistency and not a real one. Thus we could say that as to persons, there are three gods, but at the same time he asserts: “Such an expression, though true and proper among the experts, is not, however, customary and should be avoided for the benefit of the simple believers.”<sup>16</sup>

The affirmations of D’Ailly were repeated by John Majors (1469-1550) and by Erasmus: “In accordance with dialectic logic it is possible to say that there are three gods, but to announce it to the inexpert would offend them much.”<sup>17</sup>

### **Divine Manifestations in History**

Servetus read all the available ancient and contemporary literature and refined the skepticism of the fideist school, but he did not accept the authority of the institution of the Church in defining the faith. Though he embraced empirical epistemology, his destruction of the orthodox point of view was based on biblical arguments and not on philosophical analysis. Roland Bainton in his magisterial essay reconstitutes the train of thought of Servetus in this way:

Was then this doctrine [the doctrine of the Trinity] which must be accepted under the penalty of banishment or death really true and essential to the Christian faith? Preoccupied with this question, Servetus examined the New Testament and was enormously surprised to discover that this principle so rigorously required and repeated so obstinately really did not appear in the Holy Scriptures. There is, no doubt, something about the Father, something about the Son, and something about the Holy Spirit, but the traditional formulation of the three persons and one substance are absent there. The word, the Trinity, does not appear there. The key word *homoousios* which means that the Son is consubstantial with the Father is lacking as well. And though the Son is declared to be the one uniquely engendered by the Father, the Spirit in no part appears as proceeding from the Father or from the Son. The major part of this formulation was the work of the Council of Nicea

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<sup>16</sup> Roland Bainton, “Michael Servetus and the Trinitarian Speculation of the Middle Ages,” in *Autour de Michel Servet et de Sébastien Castellion*, B. Becker, ed., New York: H.D. Tjeenk Willink & Zoon, 1953.

<sup>17</sup> Latin version is found in *Opus Epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami*, re-edited and revised by P.S. Allen and H.M. Allen, Oxonii in Typographeo Clarendomiano, 1924. English version in Erasmus, *Collected Works IX*, 1217.

which openly admitted that the doctrine implied in the Scriptures cannot be expressed without doubt in biblical terms. Servetus remained convinced that nothing should be considered essential for the Christian faith that was not in the Scriptures.<sup>18</sup>

The doctrine of Servetus concerning divine manifestations can also be traced to the analysis of Scripture in light of the Neoplatonic point of view represented by Galenism and using the concept of substance. Let me explain this point of view in more detail because it has implications for Servetus' entire theology. Servetus always tried to explain all processes and spiritual or noetic phenomena through physical processes which involve underlying substances. I can trace an analogy to the declaration of the Pope in 1996 which stated that evolution is a natural phenomenon though it contradicts the word of the Scripture. The biblical description of the formation of the world, in addition to recognizing God as the creator, represented the natural philosophy of the current epoch. The Pope felt obligated to this gesture, adopting the results of contemporary science, as one can no longer oppose the scientific worldview. He, nevertheless, recognizing God as the creator, does not accept the modern concept of the "soul" and sticks to the old Egyptian, Orphic, and Platonic concepts. In a similar way, Servetus, accepting the Galenic system as the explanation of natural processes, combined the middle and neo-Platonic ideas with Hebrew ideas of the divinity and postulated a progressive historical interpretation of the terms found in the Scriptures. In this way the Trinity becomes a true **manifestation of the essence of God** first in the **Word which is understood literally in the Hebrew sense of the expression of God, as His pronouncement**, and in the **Hellenistic sense as the essence of God, then in the human Jesus, the natural son of God**, and finally after the resurrection of Jesus, in the **Spirit which is nothing other than the way in which God communicates with humanity**. The Son of God and the Spirit are the two modes of divine manifestation in the historical context, the body of Christ being external, and the Spirit being internal. These diverse forms of divine manifestation, according to Servetus, occurred in the context of human history and were revealed through the names of God, the various forms of visions and voices, and finally in the corporeal manifestation of God. Servetus thus can be considered a precursor of modern process theology.<sup>19</sup>

### **The Unifying Metaphysics of the World**

The other result of the studies of Servetus was his discovery of the circulation of blood 82 years before William Harvey (1578-1657), and of new capillary vessels in the lungs and brain. He gave a detailed description of

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<sup>18</sup> Roland Bainton, 29-46.

<sup>19</sup> *Christianismi restit.*, 3-285. Marian Hillar, "Process Theology and Process Thought in the Writings of Michael Servetus," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference, October 24-27, 2002, San Antonio, TX.

pulmonary circulation. It is no accident that he described his discovery in his principal theological work. Servetus' view of the soul was not related to Greek Platonic doctrine, but to Hebrew doctrine. He believed that the human soul is a vivifying agent coming directly from God. Thus the fetus lives with the soul of the mother until the moment when the child takes his first breath. Then the vital human spirit is maintained in the circulating blood in accordance with the concept of the soul described in the Scriptures (Gen. 9:3; Lev. 17:11; Deut. 2:7). It is derived from the "breath of lives" (Gen. 2:7) and in the description of Servetus: "This unique 'breath of lives' makes man live his corporeal and spiritual life, the vegetative, sensitive, and intellectual life. God said that there were many lives, but only one 'living soul.'"<sup>20</sup> This idea could be explained in naturalistic terms through the physiology of Galen who taught that it was the liver that generated the vital spirit (*pneuma psychicon*).

In this manner Servetus reasoned that there is a "triple spirit" which derives from the substance of the three higher elements: the natural, the vital, and the animal. But in reality it is one "spirit" of God which by combining with diverse elements in the body produces these three specific functional forms. The **vital spirit** is produced in the lungs by mixing the inspired air and the divine spirit with the elements of the blood coming from the right ventricle. The blood returns to the left ventricle through the capillary vessels in the lungs and later the vital spirit is distributed in the body and communicated to the veins through the *anastomoses*, becoming the **natural spirit** located primarily in the veins and in the liver. The circulating spirit searches for the highest regions, especially in the *plexus retiformis* at the base of the brain, in the **animal spirit** due to the action of the violent force of the mind located in the *plexus coroides*. This vital spirit is spread into the sensory organs and nerves causing sensation and movement.<sup>21</sup>

The publication of the scientific discovery of Servetus represents a **reflection of his unifying vision of the world**. For Servetus theology was most important and with it he could explain all natural phenomena. For him this particular anatomical and physiological study represented only an empirical method and an illustration for understanding how the divine spirit operated. According to him, his empirical studies supported the biblical affirmations which were the first source of all knowledge.

The extension of Servetus' unifying vision of the world was his theistic theory of cosmic evolution. In the fourth book of his *Restoration of Christianity*, Servetus developed a theistic and evolutionary model of the formation of the universe. This model is quite elaborate and because of its complexity we shall not

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<sup>20</sup> *Christianismi restit.*, Alcalá y Betés, 449.

<sup>21</sup> *Christianismi restit.*, 169-198.



discuss it in detail.<sup>22</sup> The starting point is his interpretation of certain biblical affirmations (Gen. 1:2; 2:4; Heb. 1:3; John 1:4) principally in the light of the middle Platonic (Philonic) thought that throughout eternity there existed in God **ideas of all things which radiated in his Wisdom or Word** as in the archetypal world. This word of God sent to earth is the seed of the generation of Christ and his generation is a **model and prototype for all other generations of the natural world**. “*Thus all things are propagated, generated, and produced by analogy to Christ.*”<sup>23</sup> This is the key formula of the Servetian system which we can summarize in the following manner:

1. All things exist through the forms which are only in God and by virtue of Christ who does not have mediation; that is, he exists hypostatically as the first and one with God. **The epistemological principle of this formulation** is that the **entire natural reality is developed by analogy with Christ himself** (*analogía ad caput ipsum Christum*).

2. As to God Himself, Servetus postulates that **the manifestations and creations of God are historically conditioned** to the **second epistemological principle** which explains our concept of the divinity **by means of various modes and subordinations of the divinity** (*varios divinitatis modos et subordinaciones*).

In this way Servetus can affirm that the opinions of Parmenides of Elea (b. ca 515 B.C.E.) and of Melissus (b. in the first quarter of 5th century B.C.E.) concerning the unique principle are true. And it was openly declared by Xenophanes (b. ca 570 B.C.E.), the teacher of Parmenides, that **this unique principle is God**.<sup>24</sup>

Thus Servetus deduced a cosmological and cosmogonical vision from the biblical texts and searched for its confirmation in other philosophical systems. He declared that in the final analysis the physical world evolved from the created elements, in particular from disorganized water, and in this way the world has a certain degree of creativity expressed in its self-creation.

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<sup>22</sup> *Christianismi restit.*, 151-162. Marian Hillar, “The Cosmology of Michael Servetus (1511-1553): The Unity of the World and the Unity of Knowledge,” paper read at the meeting of The Sixteenth Century Studies Society, Pittsburgh, Oct. 28-Nov. 2, 2003.

<sup>23</sup> *Christianismi restit.*, Alcalá y Betés, 309.

<sup>24</sup> Servetus refers here to the affirmation of Sextus Empiricus *Pyrrhonic sketches* or *Pyrrhonic hypostases* I. 223. “Theophanes doubted everything, dogmatizing only by saying that everything is one and this is God.” Servetus also refers to Anaximander, Anaxagoras, Democritus, as well as to Trismegistus, all postulating one single substance of various principles. He rejects the Aristotelian system.

**Fundamentals of the Christian Religion:  
The Doctrines of Faith, Justification, and the Kingdom of Christ**

**A. Faith**

In the doctrine of faith and justification Servetus follows the teachings of Paul. The foundation of Christianity consists in faith, that is, the belief, trust, and consensus that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God who preached the gospel of salvation, died and was resurrected for our salvation. Jesus proclaimed the future kingdom and salvation for all who believed in him. He received a mandate to declare this faith and for this reason he died. Thus having faith in him one is purified, justified, and saved. “This is the new law of the heart, the law of faith which, in contrast to the Mosaic Law of the Decalogue, ‘does not need to be written in an eternal manner [in stone tables], nor through papal decrees.’”<sup>25</sup> Such is also the message of the entire New Testament and this faith produced in Antioch the first Christians.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, Servetus says that the revelation of the Old Testament was not given to the prophets but to us, and for that reason the prophets had an enigmatic vision of the future (“shadowy and metaphorical”). Neither was there at that time liberty nor regeneration by baptism and the Lord’s supper. As to salvation in a future age after the final resurrection, Servetus follows the opinion of Paul that God will pay to all, including Jews, Greeks, and barbarians, according to their deeds.<sup>27</sup>

Servetus attaches great importance to the spiritual inspiration and freedom of the believer. He opposes regulation of the faith by means of decrees and laws: “The spirit of Christ shows us how to behave not according to the flesh, but according to the spirit: the free spirit which teaches us and helps us to conduct ourselves with freedom...We do not need written documents...nor faith to be implemented in writings, but to be imprinted...in the heart...The Scriptures were a supplement in order to have exhortation and a reminder so that the whole doctrine would not be lost due to the fault of the Antichrist.”<sup>28</sup> When the apostles were teaching there were no legal precepts nor laws to be followed under penalty of anathema.<sup>29</sup> The essence of faith is that it is a voluntary and spontaneous act, an impulse of the heart, and only as a secondary aspect it brings an act of rational approbation (*intelligendi actum*). Servetus explains the origin of faith by means of an analogy with other internal acts of the human soul. Faith comes from the information and understanding which we receive through preaching. By faith one is redeemed and justified from the curse of Adam’s sin, and given additional gifts. But faith does not deprive love nor good works of their own reward. “Thus faith is connected to knowledge, enters through one’s

<sup>25</sup> *Christianismi restit.*, Alcalá y Betés, 513.

<sup>26</sup> *Christianismi restit.*, 291-291.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 319-321.

<sup>28</sup> *Carta No. XXIV*, 175 in Alcalá.

<sup>29</sup> *Apología a Melanchton*, VI in Alcalá.

hearing, is a gift of God, and resides in the heart.”<sup>30</sup> As examples of free will, Servetus cites the sins of the first angel and of the first man.<sup>31</sup> He summarizes his point of view by stating that faith requires understanding and the motion of the holy spirit, but there is never faith without free will. As usual, Servetus utilizes a naturalist psychology in order to explain the mechanism which operates when one acquires faith. In the brain resides the faculty of understanding which is the principal faculty of the soul and it perceives that which is true. In the heart resides the faculty of the deliberating will which perceives that which is good because it participates in the deity but is controlled by reason. The natural organs serve only as the location of certain movements and are the instruments through which the soul can operate.<sup>32</sup>

Faith carries with itself penitence and rejection of sin, and should be accompanied by love and works. Servetus justifies penitence as necessary for erasing “all that for which suffered” the son of God.<sup>33</sup> Faith, too, should be accompanied by love in order to be effective.

### **B. Justification**

Servetus distinguishes two types of death as a result of original sin. The first is the physical death of the body and hell, that is the grave, which means that souls remain in the tomb as if asleep waiting for the resurrection. All those who died before the death of Christ are subject to this death, including children. Also, the result of original sin is the dominion of Satan over men. Original sin will be forgiven all by Christ. The second death will be the death after the final judgment, irremissible, spiritual death and eternal condemnation which Servetus calls *gehenna* and which is produced by sin committed after learning what is good and evil. But the sin of Adam did not spiritually affect those who are not granted the freedom of sinning. Servetus cites the Old Testament to document that at 20 years of age the knowledge of good and evil and the true sins of the second death begin. Children will be saved after the general resurrection and thus Servetus denies the eternal condemnation of children who were not baptized.<sup>34</sup> Jews will be judged according to the Law and Gentiles according to natural law.<sup>35</sup>

Servetus differentiates between justification by faith before God, who forgives original sin, and justice by good works before man. In his doctrine of justification Servetus teaches, following Paul, that we are justified from the moment when we believe in Christ, that is, we become justified before God and

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<sup>30</sup> *Christianismi restit.*, Alcalá y Betés, 497.

<sup>31</sup> *Christianismi restit.*, 301.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 302-303.

<sup>33</sup> *Christianismi restit.*, Alcalá, 490.

<sup>34</sup> *Christianismi restit.*, 364-368.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 357-360

we become “sons of God” by grace, not by nature like the natural son, Jesus.<sup>36</sup> This justification is freely given by the grace of God and not as a result of the believer’s works. Acceptance depends on the will of God, but God sent His son so that we may believe in him and in his promises. Paul taught also that one has to do works as God ordered us in the Law. The Israelites reached the promises of God in the Mosaic Law according to the flesh, that is physical; in Christ the other spiritual promises were fulfilled, namely, that the just will live by faith.<sup>37</sup>

### C. The Kingdom of Christ

Servetus continues by explaining that justice given by faith introduces us into the kingdom of Christ which is also called the kingdom of God or the heavenly kingdom, which is one of the three other gifts supplementing redemption from original sin.<sup>38</sup> This is not the future kingdom promised after death, but the one that exists within us, the spiritual one. This original formulation of Servetus constitutes his interpretation of the New Testament. This kingdom of Christ is related to the interior man, is produced within us through regeneration and has communication with Christ. According to Paul we die mystically with Christ and are resurrected with him in baptism to the new life of the Spirit within us (Rom. 6:3; 8:5; 8:11). Paul also justifies rejection of sin because he asserts that one cannot live in sin if the justified one died for sin (Rom. 5:2, 6:11).

But Servetus amplifies this concept of “being in Christ,” understanding it in the ontological sense. The Christian is engendered as “a new man,” that is, a son of God by grace due to the power of the resurrection of Christ. This grace is not a quality of the soul, but a substantive fact.<sup>39</sup> Referring to 1 John 4:15-17 Servetus writes: “Those of us who truly are in Christ are already now in this world ruling in the heavens, since Christ himself who is within us is the one who is the cause of it.”<sup>40</sup> Faith in Christ and the divinizing spirit of love make a Christian equal to Christ. Servetus also insists that Christians who interpret the gospel as the promise of the future eschatological kingdom are in error. The gospel announces that the ancient promise has been fulfilled. It announces eternal life actually present, which is given to believers who are new creatures. Only on the day of the final resurrection will Christ hand over to the Father the saints who are his true kingdom.<sup>41</sup>

In summary, Servetus argues against others who conclude that, because entrance into this kingdom is not achieved by human power but requires the grace of God, our free will is enslaved. On the contrary, says Servetus, grace

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 304.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 325-326.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 343.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 355.

<sup>40</sup> *Christianismi restit.*, Alcalá y Betés, 505.

<sup>41</sup> *Christianismi restit.*, 311-313.

does not annul the freedom of man and his natural gifts. True grace enables us to reach that which we could not obtain in our own strength.<sup>42</sup>

### **Justice by Good Works and Natural Law**

Paul teaches that in the Law given to the Jews man is justified by good works and not by faith (Gal. 3:12; Rom. 10:5; Lev. 18:5). In the case of Christians, Christ by his grace fulfilled the Law, a thing which is impossible for men. Thus through faith Christians have access to justification by grace without the merit of good works. One might ask then, Why do good works? Servetus differentiates initial justification by faith from the justification obtained by later works which permit us to acquire additional rewards in accordance with Catholic doctrine and contrary to Luther and Calvin.<sup>43</sup> This pertains to justice before men defined in the gospel (Matt. 5:44-6:6) and by John the evangelist (1 John 3:7)<sup>44</sup> which will be recompensed to a certain degree in the future: “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For in the way you judge you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get” (Matt. 7:1, 2). Or, “For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done” (Matt. 16:27). This justice by good works is necessary because it contributes to the integral glorification of man on the basis of acts performed by the physical, corporeal man, while justification by faith glorifies the soul. The advantage of justification by faith is that those who have faith will not be judged in the final judgment but will be the judges.<sup>45</sup>

Justification by works, both in Paul and in Servetus, derives from the recognition of the natural justice shared by all mankind. Paul says that when the Gentiles do by nature that which is ordered by the Law, they have the Law inscribed in their hearts, and by giving testimony to their conscience and to their reasoning, they will be judged and saved equally as the Jews if they follow their works (Rom. 2:14-17). And God will give to everyone according to his deeds. Thus Servetus develops this humanist idea: “Natural justice is to give to everyone that which is his own and do good to all and not to harm anybody, and do what proper conscience and natural reason dictate to everyone, in such a way that you do to others as you would like others to do to you...Those who do evil submit themselves to injustice; for those who do good there will be glory, honor, and peace.”<sup>46</sup> In his metaphysical system, Servetus then links this doctrine of Paul with Neoplatonic and Stoic thought: “The Gentiles, instructed by nature itself, thanks to the deity which they have innately, are capable of working for justifications similar to those of the Law, or, so to speak, those works which were

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 337.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 328-331.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.

<sup>46</sup> *Christianismi restit.*, Alcalá y Betés, 529.

dictated to them by natural reason.”<sup>47</sup> As for the psychological mechanism of works, Servetus emphasizes the effort in the action which is free and which leads to the result. Though Christ gave *a priori* the disposition to do good, he did not eliminate the process to effect it. And this effort will be confirmed *a posteriori*. Moreover, there is a mutual effect: good works originate from a good attitude, and the attitude becomes good through the good works.<sup>48</sup> It is interesting that in the final analysis Christ himself, according to Servetus, is the one who sustains this natural justice (Matt. 7:12): “Justice...is an impulse of the souls to action...Natural justice as much as the divine consists in doing to others as you would like them to do to yourself. Such is the natural law according to what Christ himself has taught us, who gave us this norm of nature instead of the Law and the prophets.”<sup>49</sup> Moreover, quoting the example of the “new islands” (newly discovered America), Servetus affirms that any faith in God can be sufficient for justification if one acts justly according to natural conscience and reason. Justice by good works is accessible to all and, in the case of Christians, it contributes to strengthening faith and accumulating additional justice.

### **The Value and Efficacy of Love and of Works**

Love was emphasized by Paul as the most excellent of all. Though it coexists now with hope and faith, in the perfect future age faith will disappear and there will be only love. The argument is based in Christ who had love and not faith. Also love fulfills and sums up all of the Law (1 Cor. 13:1-13; Rom. 13:8-10). Love, according to Servetus, serves to perfect us and make us like God. Servetus explains in this way the value of love and good works:

The first and major fruit that they give us is an increase in the reward of future glory. Secondly, they maintain faith and enrich it, since without good works it would die impoverished (James 2:17). Thirdly, good works of the spirit mortify the flesh and, by revitalizing the spirit more and more, they augment faith more and more, and, in keeping with this increase, they affirm and strengthen justice. Fourthly, every sin corresponds to a determined punishment, penalties which are erased over again by love and by good works. Fifthly, to continue edifying the body of Christ within ourselves, love has the highest energy manifested in the supper.<sup>50</sup>

Comparing love with faith, Servetus explains that, though faith may come prior to love, it cannot persist without hope and without love. Faith is greater because it is the foundation of salvation. Nevertheless, Servetus qualifies love as greater for seven reasons: because there is no merit in grace, but its fruit resides

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 530.

<sup>48</sup> *Christianismi restit.*, 348-349.

<sup>49</sup> *Christianismi restit.*, Alcalá y Betés, 532.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 542.

in love which requires an effort; because love is directed towards God and the neighbor, and the body of Christ is edified by love; because love is the life of faith and gives it efficacy; because it is more difficult to love than to believe; because love is more permanent and is analogous to the future kingdom where there will be only love; because love is perfection while faith is a way and the door; because God is love and His nature is to love and not to believe. Thus “love is sublime and excellent and the most like God.”<sup>51</sup>

Love is the most definitive in our behavior and attitude since Christ by announcing the kingdom of God through faith gave us at the same time a new commandment for his kingdom, that is, to love (Jn. 13:34; 14:21; 15:17). For this reason faith is called the door and love is perfection. In its turn, because love is active and is directed towards God and neighbor, it gives efficacy to faith and moves it towards good works.

So Servetus is opposed to the idea of *sola fide* promulgated by the reformers who thought that only through faith one obtains justification. Without love works would not have their recompense.<sup>52</sup>

### **The Evangelical Ministries**

To the three foundations of the Christian religion correspond the three practical aspects which Servetus designates as ministries: preaching, baptism, and the breaking of bread or the Lord’s supper.<sup>53</sup> The three are the ministries of the Spirit whose action is internal and for that reason in all three of them there is an internal hidden force and a special grace. The external ministries serve only as a sure sign of their efficacy. For that reason Servetus introduces a principal rule to be followed by all the ministries: “one has always to discern in them their spiritual sense.”<sup>54</sup>

**Preaching** constitutes the first and main ministry through which we acquire faith, and faith, as we have seen, opens the door for the other gifts of Christ. Citing Paul (Rom. 10:17) Servetus declares that “faith enters through hearing” and states: “Our internal man has been effectively engendered of the holy Spirit through the preaching of the gospel, in the same way as Christ has been engendered of the holy Spirit by the Word of God.”<sup>55</sup> Within this word of the gospel, which Paul calls “incorruptible seed” pronounced by the minister, the external voice, is the Spirit which enters and works within us. But also the preacher, without any formal institution, has the power to forgive sins. According to Servetus’ doctrine of the universal priesthood which is also Paul’s doctrine (1

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 549.

<sup>52</sup> *Christianismi restit.*, 351-354.

<sup>53</sup> *Christianismi restit.*, Parte IV, Lib. III, 470-524.

<sup>54</sup> *Christianismi restit.*, Alcalá y Betés, 509.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 694.

Thess. 4:8) any believer can be the apostle or spiritual minister. It suffices to have wisdom and inspiration of the Spirit.

The internal man is enriched and enlivened by baptism and is nourished by the Lord's supper. **Baptism or regeneration** is an act that has celestial and regenerative power, and, according to Christ himself, is necessary in order to enter the heavenly kingdom understood as the present one: "No one can know the heavenly and can enter the celestial kingdom without being born from above, without being born again" (John 3:3-8). Thus baptism is a gift through which Christians are regenerated and reborn; that is, they receive the new Spirit and their sins are washed in such a way that if they died, they would be saved. As to the particular case of catechumens who die without receiving baptism, Servetus leaves a door open, referring to the hidden judgments of God.<sup>56</sup>

In baptism, through which Christians are justified by faith, comes the kingdom of Christ.<sup>57</sup> And this is, according to Paul's preaching, the mystical result of the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 6:3-4). Through baptism, the regenerated Christian becomes a brother of Christ. The mysteries of the passion and resurrection of Christ produce in us an authentic affiliation with Christ. To be a son of God requires being engendered from the seed of God, as Servetus says: "By virtue of the divine substance innate in the interior man, man becomes a participant of the divine nature. This generation is thus something essential and permits participation in the heavenly kingdom."<sup>58</sup>

But the condition for obtaining this forgiveness is faith. Faith is the foundation of everything, states Servetus. Before it did not regenerate in the Law, but now, "Yes, faith does everything, but enlightened by baptism in which faith recovers life by the holy Spirit and 'Christ is formed within us' (Gal. 4:19)."<sup>59</sup> The act of professing faith should be absolutely voluntary and, therefore, it needs certain information and education. And before they acquire this faith children and adolescents should not be baptized. The other problem is then at what age is one able to commit a mortal sin? According to the Scripture, only those older than 20 are able to commit serious crimes, and only from them the sacrifice of propitiation for sins is exacted.<sup>60</sup> Servetus concludes from all of this on the basis of Scripture that the perfect age for baptism is 30 years.<sup>61</sup>

Based on these premises Servetus is opposed to the baptism of infants, citing 25 definitions of baptism and 20 reasons against the baptism of infants.<sup>62</sup> His arguments are based on the principles of the religious system, but in the modern

<sup>56</sup> *Christianismi restit.*, 496.

<sup>57</sup> Matt. 28:18-19; Lk. 22:28-30; Eph. 2:1-6; Col. 2:12.

<sup>58</sup> *Christianismi restit.*, Alcalá y Betés, 724-725.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 713.

<sup>60</sup> *Christianismi restit.*, 364.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 372.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 570-573, 564-568.



world the problem of freedom of conscience includes also the freedom from association or forceful indoctrination.

**The Lord's supper or breaking of bread or the eucharist** is the third gift of justification by faith and a sign of love. Servetus' theory of the eucharist depends on his concept of the new life of Christians produced by baptism. Just as in baptism Christians are born internally, so in the Lord's supper they are nourished internally. Servetus interprets the bread of the supper as both the true body of Christ and true bread. He classifies this as a great mystery. Christ enters substantively into a communion with Christians in the act of sharing bread. Also by means of the eucharist we enter into a communion with other Christians when we share bread by love. Servetus states that the church is also the body of Christ because Christ by communicating his body to all the members of the church makes from all a body of the church, his body.<sup>63</sup>

As for the adoration of the bread practiced by the Catholic Church, Servetus considers it idolatry. One should express adoration in the spirit and not towards the external symbols. But his interpretation of the eucharist as symbolizing the love of Christ, as a remembrance of his passion in order to give thanks for its benefits, is highly Catholic.

Servetus rejects all other theories concerning the nature of the eucharist: the Lutheran idea by which "the flesh of Christ [is] covered with bread, placed inside the bread"; that of the Zwinglians who represent "bread [only as] a symbol of the body of Christ"; and finally that of the Catholics, of the transubstantiation in which "there is a reduction of bread into nothing else but 'whiteness.'"<sup>64</sup>

The last theme which we shall address is **the theme of mass** in the church.<sup>65</sup> Servetus derives the word "mass" (*missa*) from the Syrian or Chaldean word which means a spontaneous "offering" or "donation" in accordance with the Christian practice of the daily meal which was called in Greek a "reunion of love," documented in the Scripture and Christian tradition. Its purpose was to express a mutual friendship among Christians, to offer gifts and share goods with others. At the same time, the benefits of the passion of Christ were commemorated and thanks were offered to him for his love.<sup>66</sup> Servetus laments the change in the mass of the church from its simplicity into a ceremonious rite where "there is no eucharist with offerings of bread and wine, nor communion of any kind."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 503-524.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 506-512.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 513-524.

<sup>66</sup> Jude 12; Heb. 13:16; Acts 2:46; 6:1; 1 Cor. 11:17-33.

<sup>67</sup> *Christianismi restit.*, Alcalá y Betés, 522.

**Conclusion**

We may conclude that the work of Servetus represents the genius of his thought, a total critique of Catholic and Protestant orthodoxy and the exposition of a new Christianity, his complete religion. In addition, it offers a complete philosophical foundation for religious thought based on the middle and neo-Platonic vision of the world together with his interpretation of patristic and rabbinical literature.

Thus with good reason Professor Ángel Alcalá, translator of *Christianismi restitutio* into Spanish, calls this book “one of the most original books that has ever been written.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Ángel Alcalá, “Nuestra deuda con Servet. De Menéndez Pelayo a la obra de Barón,” in *Revista de Occidente*, Madrid, 113-114, 1972, 234. Alcalá is also the translator of a work on Michael Servetus by Roland H. Bainton, *Servet, el hereje perseguido (1511-1553)*, Madrid: Taurus, 1973. In this book he included an extensive bibliography on Michael Servetus.