

The Legacy of Michael Servetus: Radical Change in the Thought Pattern, Freedom of Conscience, and the Switch to the Humanistic Social Moral Paradigm

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Freedom of conscience is every man's natural right.

John Locke

Thomas Jefferson

*To uphold a tenet that contradicts reason is to undermine one's
credibility; to contradict empirical evidence is a still greater
fallacy.*

Buddhist dictum

Prologue

The United States is probably a unique country in that it was founded on a specific ideology. It was a coincidence of many factors that allowed the founding fathers to introduce a humanistic social moral paradigm which became the basis for the Constitution and moral ethos of the country. The new paradigm was developed slowly and many thinkers, political activists, and movements were involved. The whole process culminated in the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century but it was initiated in the sixteenth century with the dramatic events of the Reformation. Among the unsung heroes who contributed most in the initial phase, one has to list Michael Servetus, a lonely Spanish biblical scholar, philosopher, and scientist who brought together what was best in the cultural renewal of the Renaissance and in the attempt at the moral renewal programmed by those later described as Radical Reformers.

He discovered through the study of the bible, which was made possible by Reformation trends that its truth contrasted with official Christian practice and official doctrinal formulations. He saw that Christianity was corrupt morally and ideologically, and, inspired by the rising spirit of reform, he envisioned a plan to restore Christianity to its original simplicity and integrity as suggested by Erasmus (1466-1536).¹

The German theologian Adolf von Harnack thus described the importance of Servetus's role in the history of human thought: "... the Spanish thinker who is distinguished also for his profound piety. In him was found the fusion of all that was best in sixteenth century development if one puts aside the evangelical

Reformation. Servetus equally distinguished himself as a learned experimenter, as a critical thinker, as a speculative philosopher, and as a Christian reformer in the best sense of the word."² Auguste Dide, the French Senator and president of the International Committee for the Monument to Michael Servetus, in his inaugural speech at the unveiling of a statue to Servetus in Annemasse in 1908 said: "The day when Servetus, tortured, captive, and facing death, opposed the arrogant absolutism and pride of his persecutors and executioners, with the doctrine of the never ending progress, Servetus placed himself in league with the emancipators who would create a new secular Europe and who prepared the French Revolution."³

Undoubtedly the title of his major work *The Restoration of Christianity* is reminiscent of the proposal by Erasmus which was based on three major premises:⁴ 1. studying the original texts of the Gospels, the first apostolic writings, and the first Christian theologians still operating in the Greco-Roman social paradigm as the source of religious assertions; 2. that sophisticated theological speculations should be abandoned; 3. that this was necessary in order to reduce the religious beliefs to a small number of fundamental and essential doctrines.

While Erasmus satisfied his interests with philological studies and made no effort at reforming the old system of thought, Servetus, in the realm of intellectual inquiry, demanded a radical reevaluation of the entire ideological religious system of assertions and dogmas imposed on Western Europe since the fourth century. Servetus's theological inquiry initiated the study of scriptural

tradition in an attempt to uncover the real religious doctrines contained in it. In the process he developed a new more humane religion and a new understanding of divinity and divine matters closer to the realities of the human condition. It evolved eventually into biblical Unitarianism and in modern times into Universalist Unitarianism.⁵ This is one major legacy of Servetus which is important for the evolution of religion. At the intellectual level it led to the development of critical biblical studies and to comparative studies of religions of the nineteenth century with great consequences for the modern understanding of religion. Today biblical scholars confirm the discovery of Servetus and his universal understanding of the divinity.⁶ Philosophers and religious scholars develop further the Servetian understanding of the divinity which manifests itself and evolves in a historical process into the new concepts of process theology.⁷ Others, however, reject the ontological concept of divinity but recognize the importance of human values and make them the center of a true religion, a religion of the “Highest Values” or secular Humanism as the one propounded by a philosopher of religion, Stanisław Cieniawa.⁸

The other legacy has been consequential for the development of the Enlightenment and recovery of the ancient humanistic social paradigm. It concerns the function of society at the moral level. Servetus recognized the full potential of human nature, its capabilities and rationality. Thus he demanded freedom of intellectual inquiry, thought, conscience, and expression that was denied to millions on doctrinal theological grounds. At the same time he remained deeply devotional. He believed in a personal divinity to whom access was granted

to every believer without an ecclesiastical intermediary. By his sacrifice Servetus set into motion a process of change in the entire social moral paradigm and recovery of the long lost humanistic principles.

Establishment of a paradigm of ecclesiastical dominion.

Servetus's role as the central figure in history who initiated the process of recovering the social humanistic paradigm becomes obvious if we put it in historical perspective.

Greco-Roman pre-Christian society enjoyed toleration, freedom of religion, of conscience, and of thought. The ancient western world did not have the concept of "heresy" or "heretic." Greco-Roman society tolerated all religions and did not impose restrictions on free thought. Acts of intolerance were rare, and if they occurred, they were never justified by deviations from one doctrine or another. This was due to the lack of a state religion and state sanctioned theological doctrine though the people and the centers of power were highly religious.

All this was dramatically changed with the advent of state supported Christianity. Ever since the fourth century Christianity became an institution of organized clergy and was fused with the political power in the Roman Empire and later in the rest of Western Europe.⁹ Christianity triumphed only because it evolved into a rigid, totalitarian theocracy.

The Emperors Valentinian II and Theodosius I established on February 28, 380, the Christian religion of the Roman pontiff as obligatory in the Empire declaring those who would not embrace it "demented and insane," and therefore,

“shall be smitten first by divine vengeance and second by the retribution of Our own initiative, which We shall assume in accordance with the divine judgment” (*Cod. Theod.* 16.1.2). This decree may be considered an official declaration of the first forced adherence to a state religion and the official initiation of persecutions for the convictions of conscience.

In a short span of time Christian emperors accomplished the elimination of free thought and the imposition of a totalitarian theocratic system so that they could congratulate themselves in 423 on a job well done:

The regulations of constitutions formerly promulgated shall suppress any pagans who survive, although We now believe that there are none [left] (*Cod. Theod.* 16.10.22).

Constantine the Great who issued an edict against them already on September 1, 326, persecuted “heretics” and schismatics from the beginning. The fundamental principle on which the persecution was based was deviation from the official state religion. Heresy was considered "a public crime, since whatever is committed against divine religion amounts to the detriment of all" (*Cod. Theod.* 16.5.38-39). The definition of a "heretic" left no doubt that a theocratic society could not tolerate any free thought:

Those persons who may be discovered to deviate, even in a minor point of doctrine, from the tenets and path of the Catholic religion are included under the designation of heretics and must be subject

to the sanctions which have been issued against them (Arcadius and Honorius, September 3, 395; *Cod. Theod.* 16.5.28).

In the sixth century Emperor Justinian incorporated explicitly the Catholic creed, including the doctrine of the Trinity, into Roman state law.¹⁰ Chapter 1 of Book I, entitled *De Trinitate et Fide catholica*, confirms establishing the Catholic faith as the official state religion and forbids any critical thought under penalty of being burned at the stake. Justinian defines faith in the Trinity in terms of the Nicæan creed ("trinitatem consubstantialem"), and ordains that any deviation from it should be punished as well as any so-called heretical views. It is interesting too, that the law promulgated in 413 declares the death penalty for the crime of rebaptism.

Thus in the fourth century a switch took place in the social paradigm, if we may borrow the concept from the history of science,¹¹ from the humanistic principles of ancient morality to the new ecclesiastical one. The social paradigm can be defined as an entire constellation of beliefs, values, and worldview which is shared by the community and has a normative character. Since the third century church fathers developed the theological doctrine of persecution culminating in the doctrine of Thomas Aquinas.¹² Persecution was initially imposed forcefully by the emperor; later it became a tradition established by a system of laws (state and ecclesiastical), and theological doctrines (e.g., the doctrines of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas).

It is important to emphasize, however, that neither the violent persecution practiced from the fourth century nor the Inquisition introduced in the thirteenth century have any biblical or theological justification. The Catholic church and the Protestant churches as well, nevertheless, attempted, by twisting the meaning of certain selected parables (e.g. Matt. 13:30; Luke 14:23), to use them for justification. Paul proclaimed “So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.” Faith will provide protection and the weapon to fight the influence of others; “With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Rom. 10:17; Eph. 6:17-18). Against the people who had different beliefs (at that time they were Jews and were *causing divisions*) Paul had only this advice: “But avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. After a first and second admonition, have nothing more to do with anyone who causes divisions (*hereticum hominem*), since you know that such a person is perverted and sinful, being self-condemned ” (Titus 3:9-11). Later this term *heretics*, divisive persons, was applied to all those who were not aligned with the church ideology. Belief was a matter of voluntary acceptance which Thomas Aquinas also confirmed. Thus the violent persecutions initiated since the fourth century and the violent laws introduced in the Roman society were a result of the perversion of the original Christian faith, of the fusion of the secular power of the state with the spiritual authority of the religious leaders.

Similarly only through the distorted interpretation of selected New Testament texts could the church justify the Inquisition. The peak of arrogance and absurdity was reached by Luis de Páramo in his *De origine et progressu Officii Sanctae Inquisitionis, eiusque, dignitate et utilitate* (Madrid, 1598). He claimed that God was the first inquisitor by dealing with Adam and Eve and showing the procedure to be followed by the inquisitors of heresy.¹³

Freedom of religion was slowly recognized in many countries after the Reformation as going against the teaching and practice of the Catholic and Protestant churches.¹⁴ This freedom became guaranteed in most of the western countries and upheld by practically all political ideologies. The church is the last organization to recognize freedom of religion, however severely limited, for tactical reasons only, after almost fifteen centuries. One of the most important acts of the Vatican II Council (1962-1965) is undoubtedly the Declaration on Religious Freedom (*Dignitatis Humanae Personae*).¹⁵

The essence of this conciliar statement is freedom from coercion. Even atheists, according to the Catholic commentator of this declaration, have the right to be free of coercion in matters religious. However, Vatican II document does not show any tolerance or respect for atheism which "must be counted among the most serious problems of this age" and calls atheism in an official church document in quite an un-Christian manner "these poisonous doctrines." Moreover, the Catholic church, however, has never recognized the separation of church and state.

The Reformation

The Reformation arose in the sixteenth century aiming at correcting financial abuses of the ecclesiastical institution and a competition for political power by local centers.¹⁶ It brought also new trends: the assertion of the individual, personal experience as a basis for religion, and an emphasis on biblical studies. It also underscored the need for tolerance, at least in the initial phase, for its own survival. Unfortunately, as soon as the “reformed” churches gained independence they, too, quickly became as intolerant as the old Roman church and ossified into the old dogmatic tradition. There were a few leaders of liberal religious thought who opposed the moral corruption and power of the popes and the clergy, though any real investigation of the accepted dogmatic assertions was persecuted by both Roman Catholic and Protestant churches. Protestants accepted the theological arguments of the Catholic church for the persecution of those who differed in their views based on the Hebrew Laws expressed in the book of Deuteronomy. The so-called heretics, apostates, and non-believers were considered sinners of the highest degree and their punishment was justified by a wide range of arguments ranging from the political necessity of maintaining unity of the church and state to the vindication of God’s honor.

The implementation in practice of the persecution of the so-called heretics depended on the actual political situation in a given country or state.¹⁷ The general rule was “*cuius regio eius religio*” which replaced the Catholic Church monopoly. The persecution continued until the rulers liberated themselves from the domination of the clergy and realized that they had to separate matters of

religion from the practical task of running a country or state. They realized that religious pluralism was not only not dangerous to the state but, on the contrary, brought significant advantages. This change in politics coincided on the pragmatic level with a change in the type of argumentation for tolerance and religious freedom from the biblico-theological to the economically and politically oriented secular ones. This was achieved with the help of writings produced by members of a Unitarian-type church known in Western Europe as the Socinians, who prepared the intellectual environment with their philosophical argumentation.

The only reformers who defended religious freedom were members of the Radical Reformation movement who argued for tolerance mostly on the political level, of religious minorities. Anabaptists rejected infant baptism, the oath, a paid ministry, legal suits, military service, and a union of church and state. They were regarded as a menace to society – ecclesiastical and political – and were banished on penalty of death. They were convinced that a worldly authority does not have power over the religion of its subjects and if they are to be brought to consensus this should be done only with spiritual means. Such a view was postulated by a baptist scholar, Balthasar Hübmaier (1480-1528).¹⁸ He wrote the treatise, *Concerning Heretics and Those Who Burn Them* (1524), defending the complete freedom of religion. He argued that the Gospels preclude coercion and claimed that the state has no jurisdiction in religious matters. He extended liberty even to law abiding atheists, “It is well and good that the secular authority puts to death the criminals who do physical harm to the defenseless, Romans 13. But no one may injure the atheist who wishes nothing for himself other than to forsake the

gospel.” Another prominent representative of the Radical Reformation was Sebastian Franck (1499-1542), a German independent preacher and spiritualist who, for the first time, expressed the idea that only God knows who the heretic is, and who granted everybody universal tolerance, even to the unbelievers.¹⁹

The Case of Servetus

The pivotal event in the history of Europe which brought to the fore the absurdity and moral turpitude of the whole ecclesiastical paradigm was the case of our lonely scholar. It does not mean that there were no voices even before the Reformation arguing for religious tolerance.²⁰ For the early Renaissance humanists the model of argumentation was the Erasmian hope for a religious consensus based on the reduction of theological assertions to an essential minimum.

Servetus’s role, however, is unique because of the depth of his humanism and the historical circumstances of his martyrdom.

Servetus was sought by the Catholic Inquisition ever since the publication of his *De Trinitatis erroribus* in 1531, but he was able to evade capture by disguising his identity under the assumed name of Michaelis Villanovanus, and refraining from publicly expressing his ideas. Calvin, however, upon learning about the book *Christianismi restitutio*, which Servetus undertook to publish secretly in 1553, designed an intricate scheme to condemn Servetus and denounce him to the Catholic Inquisition in Vienne. Servetus managed to escape from prison, but was tried and condemned *in absentia* on June 17, 1553. The list of charges was as follows: “the crime of scandalous heresy, dogmatization;

elaboration of new doctrines, publication of heretical books; sedition; schism and disturbance of unity and tranquility by public rebellion; disobedience against the decree concerning heresies; breaking out and escaping from the royal prison.”²¹

Calvin himself, being a “heretic” by Catholic standards, strongly supported capital punishment for those who deviated from imposed doctrines—his own doctrines in the region under his control. He later defended the punishment of Servetus in his *Defensio orthodoxae fidei* (Geneva 1554)²² where he attacked freedom of conscience and justified the right to condemn to death the so-called heretic based on his own doctrine of persecution “by the mandate of God.”²³

Calvin’s doctrine is representative not only of his own views; he was a spokesman for the entire Catholic and Protestant Christianity as well. His arguments to justify this conclusion were derived from Deuteronomy and other Old Testament texts and ran against the spirit and letter of the New Testament.

When Servetus showed up in Geneva in August of 1553, Calvin seized the moment to realize his promise of February 13, 1546, not to let him leave Geneva. The arrest was made at the explicit demand of Calvin who admitted it in several documents. The whole trial in Geneva and its procedure were orchestrated by Calvin who, as leader of the church, was considered superior to everyone except God (which is attested by his biographer Théodore de Bèze²⁴). Moreover, Calvin was motivated by his own Christian thinking. The supporters of Calvin take this fact as an excuse for his action. They say Calvin was doing only what the whole of Christianity approved: “Unanimously, all the churches of Switzerland

replied: ‘Servetus ought to be condemned to death.’”²⁵ There was no law in Geneva under which Servetus could be condemned to the death penalty for the denial of the Trinity and the repetition of baptism. The sentence was carried out immediately on October 27, 1553.

The Religious Humanism of Servetus

The Christianity Servetus found in his lifetime had little in common with the scripture and its practice produced disastrous results in societies. He was primarily a biblical scholar and dared to question fundamental religious premises and single-handedly developed an alternative Christianity closer to the letter and spirit of the scripture. He also combined his religious doctrine with the naturalistic world view of his time in a unifying system of thought. He was unequalled in his time and remains one of the greatest minds in human history, one who contributed to universal culture.

With the rediscovery of Renaissance humanism in the first half of the fifteenth century, Servetus became one of its most prominent representatives. His understanding of humanism was much more profound than the one propagated by the Renaissance humanists who were focused primarily on the study of ancient literature and culture, and limited to the secular interests in everyday life. They still retained a religious condemnation of human nature. The humanism of Servetus went much deeper as he understood it as a defense of human dignity, liberty, and potential for self-redemption through the good works which were to be the highest values in Christian life. He remained a deeply religious person with

Christ as the central motif of his existence and guide for his personal and professional conduct.

Man, according to Servetus, occupies a special place in the world. His soul is produced by the inspiration of the divine element and mixing it with the elements of blood. All this is in accordance with Plato's contention²⁶ that man is made of a mixture of the elements and the substance of divinity and with the views of Trismegistus²⁷ that man was born of divine substance, the light, and life, mixed with earth, air, water. Even more, making reference to Pythagoras and to Philo of Alexandria, Servetus claimed that man is basically divine: "In his book *On Agriculture*, Philo as well said that the soul of man was made and figured in the form and image of the first model, the Word. There according to the model, the form, the figure, and the image of Christ, Adam was made in terms of body and soul."²⁸ Man is analogous to Christ in composition. The spirit of man is a hypostasis of the Spirit of God, so man is a hypostasis of the Word of God, and both communicate with us. Servetus's insistence on our closeness to God, even after the Fall, is the most outstanding characteristic of Servetus's humanism and differentiates him from other humanists. God still communicates with us and this is done through the natural physiological process. This is an innate gift of grace available to all humans. From such an understanding of a natural physiological process comes Servetus's interest in pulmonary circulation.

Servetus placed great value on human natural spontaneity, reason, and capability to do good works, and through this he emphasized human dignity and autonomy in moral decisions. Catholics could not agree with him because he

eliminated the role of the church and the papacy for justification and salvation, and Protestants disagreed with his concept of faith and accepting the works of love. Though he states that faith is first a precondition of secondary grace, he confirms that love is the greatest and supports this statement with several arguments. “Faith then, to conclude, if considered in its pure and essential property, does not contain such perfection as love ... Love is superior to everything ... durable, sublime, more resembling God, and closer to the perfection of the future age.”²⁹ Here Servetus followed Paul’s teaching (1 Cor. 13:1-13). Even faith now from the act of mental assent to the credible propositions became an act of will, and is “a creative act of the soul.” Luther, Calvin, and other reformers denied man any spontaneity and moral impulse.

Human nature cannot be depraved, condemned, utterly corrupt, and helpless, claimed Servetus in opposition to the reformers and Catholics. There is no inherent necessity for sin in man, no state of sin and depravity. Though Servetus justified this state by constant communication with God through God’s innate Spirit and inner light, he believed that we have knowledge of good and evil, and that we act with a free will. Sin thus becomes qualified, conditioned by historical, cultural and personal factors. And from this Servetus was able to deduce a universal and humanistic moral principle:

Natural righteousness is to give everyone what is his: that is, to help everybody in need and harm nobody; to do what conscience and natural reason dictate so that whatever you want others to do to

you, do to others. In such righteousness ... nations are justified and saved, including the Jews.³⁰

Thus, all nations and peoples are taught from nature. Israelites were capable of righteousness through the Law and all other people through an inner natural light. Servetus granted all men dignity and recognized equal endowment in their ability to recognize good and evil. However, why Israelites were a special case and needed the Law, Servetus does not explain.

The Struggle for Freedom of Conscience

Servetus was among the first Christian thinkers in modern times who proclaimed in clear terms the right of every individual to follow his own conscience and express his own convictions. He was the first to express an idea that it was a crime to persecute and kill for ideas. His argument was rational based on a humanistic principle of morality – freedom of expression.³¹

Servetus clearly stated already in 1531 that persecution and killing for ideas is contrary to the teaching of the apostles and the original church doctrine, in a letter addressed to Iohannes Oecolampadius, leader of the Reformation in Basel, Servetus stated:

If you find me in error in one point you should not on that account condemn me in all, for according to this there is no mortal who would not be burned a thousand times The greatest of the apostles were sometimes in error. Even though you see Luther erring egregiously on some points you do not condemn him in the

rest Such is human frailty that we condemn the spirits of others as impostors and impious and except our own, for no one recognizes his own errors ... I beg you, for God's sake, spare my name and fame ... You say that I want all to be robbers and that I will not suffer any to be punished and killed. I call almighty God to witness that this is not my opinion and I detest it, but if ever I said anything it is that I consider it a serious matter to kill men because they are in error on some question of scriptural interpretation, when we know that the very elect may be led astray.³²

This assertion of Servetus was later fully elaborated by Sebastian Castellio in his famous defense of Servetus and condemnation of Calvin, *Contra libellum Calvini* (1554):

To kill a man is not to defend a doctrine, but to kill a man. When the Genevans killed Servetus they did not defend a doctrine, they killed a man. The defense of a doctrine is not the matter to be resolved by the judges, it is an issue only to be solved by teachers. What has the sword to do with the matter of teaching?³³

In a letter to judges in Geneva dated August 22, 1553, Servetus defended the right to freedom of conscience and expression. He accused the court of instituting "a new invention unknown to the apostles, to their disciples, and the ancient church of initiating criminal procedure for the doctrines of the scripture or for the theological themes derived from it." Even the Arians in the time of

Constantine the Great were not handed over to civilian tribunals in accordance with the ancient doctrine, but the church alone decided such questions and the only possible punishment for “heresy” was banishment. Such a punishment was used against heretics in the primitive church. On the basis of these precedents he demanded to be set free from the criminal accusations.³⁴

Servetus’s struggle for freedom of conscience was a part of his program for the restoration of Christianity and one of the “heresies” for which he was condemned. Servetus attempted to discuss the issue with Calvin in one of his letters to Calvin sent with *Christianismi restitutio*. He approaches a problematic subject in his time and rhetorically asks himself whether it is permissible for the Christian to fulfill the duties of a magistrate or to be a king, or to kill. And Servetus answers to himself that: “While there is the world, regardless whether we want it or not, we have to preserve the worldly order, especially the one which is safeguarded by the administration of justice.” And he admits the death penalty for some especially malicious crimes, but categorically rejects such a penalty for schism or heresy:

In other crimes ... we must hope for correction through other forms of chastisement rather than applying the death penalty. Among the methods of correction, we praise exile ... as excommunication is approved in the church. In this way schisms and heresy were punished while the trace of apostolic tradition survived.³⁵

In his religious program, Servetus, inspired by the rising spirit of the reform foresaw a plan for the restoration of Christianity to its simplicity and integrity. His basic premise is that faith is a free, voluntary and spontaneous act, an impulse or élan of the heart and only as secondary aspects it brings with itself an act of rational approbation. From this he concludes that the infant baptism and forceful indoctrination or forced conversion are abuses of human rights and dignity. In his doctrine of justification, Servetus differentiated the first justification by faith from the justification obtained by posterior works and this justification by works derives from the recognition of natural justice shared by all mankind as was taught by Paul (Rom. 2;14-17). And he links this doctrine to the Neo-Platonic and Stoic thought and explains its psychological mechanism in naturalistic terms. In terms of the practice of religion Servetus recognizes three ministries: preaching, baptism, and dominical supper. The church is not a divine institution as the Catholic church claimed, but a union of believers.

Setting in movement a process of change in the social paradigm

Just like in science where the accumulation of new data and scientific facts makes it necessary to reevaluate the old paradigm and establish a new one, so personal sacrifice of a pious scholar became a turning point inducing thinking people to rethink the morality of the prevailing church ideology and mental framework of how religion and society treated the issue of intellectual inquiry and its repression.

A month after the publication of Calvin's *Defensio* there appeared in Basel an anonymous, eloquent pamphlet against intolerance entitled *De haereticis, an*

sint persequendi... A few weeks later there appeared a French translation of this treatise entitled *Tracté des hérétiques, a savoir, si on les doit persecuter, etc.*³⁶ This treatise was later translated into German and Dutch (1620, 1663), and into English (1935). The book contained extracts promoting toleration taken from the writings of some twenty five Christian writers, ancient and modern, including Luther and Calvin himself and was authored by Castellio, perhaps with some collaboration from Laelius Socinus and Celio Secondo Curione. Castellio wrote also a rebuttal to Calvin's *Defensio*, in the already mentioned *Contra libellum Calvini*.

The movement for tolerance grew out of the influence of Castellio and his associates in Basel.³⁷ Servetus's martyrdom gave a stimulus to the rise of religious toleration as a general policy, and moral principle. But the process was very slow and lasted for several centuries before the switch in paradigm could take place.

The figure of Servetus stands out at the beginning of the movement. In the later phase Castellio deserves more ample recognition than he received. He continued to point out that most important is the principle of absolute tolerance of differing views. This position was an outgrowth of an entirely new concept of religion initiated by Servetus as centered not in dogma but in life and character. It is the very essence of this kind of religion to regard freedom and reason not as incidental but as fundamental conditions of a thoroughly wholesome existence of religion.

Servetus's legacy was first spread by the Italian humanists and reformers Matteo Gribaldi, Francesco Stancaro, Giorgio Biandrata, Gianpaolo Alciati, Valentino Gentile, Bernardino Ochino, and Lelio and Fausto Sozzini in Poland and Transylvania, and led to the development of the Antitrinitarian or Unitarian movement represented by the Unitarians of Transylvania and the Socinians of Poland. In Poland they were known as the Minor Reformed Church or Polish Brethren. After their expulsion from Poland in 1660 they developed into the Unitarian movement in England and America. The Socinians were first to demand and fully understand the moral imperative of the complete separation of church and state. Such ideas were developed by Faustus Socinus (1539-1604), John Crell (1590-1633), Christopher Ostorodt (d. ca 1611), Andrew Wojdowski (1565-1622), John Sachs (1641-1671), and particularly by Samuel Przypkowski (1592-1670) and Jonasz Szlichtyng (1592-1661).³⁸ They published numerous treatises in Poland and in Holland and defended their rights against the machinations of Jesuits who eventually succeeded in the destruction of the Reformation in Poland.

Przypkowski, for example, argued in six points in a pamphlet entitled *Brotherly Declaration* (1646), the importance of guaranteeing freedom of conscience: 1. It is a fundamental right on which is based the integrity and freedom of the republic; 2. It is a foundation of the unity of the republic composed of many ethnic and religious groups; 3. It is a foundation of the social equality of citizens; 4. it is a foundation of all civil liberties; 5. It is a guardian against religious and ecclesiastical jurisdiction; 6. It is the highest law. Przypkowski, in another treatise, *On the Law of the Christian Magistrate and Private Person in*

War and Peace (1650), and Szlichtyng in *Apology for the Truth* (1654), developed a complete modern and secular doctrine of the separation of church and state.

The moral, social, and political doctrines of the Socinians eventually led to the development of the Enlightenment. Paul Tillich, who is considered as the outstanding thinker and theologian of the twentieth century, in these words characterized the precursor role of Socinianism for the development of the Enlightenment:

Here we are in good position that the Enlightenment appeared very early as theology. The movement which did it is called Socinianism, from Faustus Socinus, who fled from Italy to Poland where he found a haven of security against the Counter-Reformation and at the same time against the persecution-complex of some of the Reformation churches; he wrote a book called “Catechism of Raków,” where he developed the first fully rationalistic Protestant theology. Everything later is partly dependent on his ideas, and partly a restatement of the same ideas on the basis of similar sources.³⁹

The ideas of the Socinians were perfected, extended and popularized by writings of philosophers John Locke (1632-1704), Pierre Bayle (1647-1706), Voltaire (1694-1778), and David Hume (1711-1776).⁴⁰ The arguments used by John Locke in his famous four *Letters on Toleration*, published in Holland between 1683 and 1689, repeat those used by the Polish philosophers. Locke

possessed in his library a complete set of Socinian works and certainly read them. He presented a detailed analysis of toleration and church-state relations from a political point of view, obviously suitable for the circumstances in England. A severe weakness of Locke's statements in which he contradicted himself, as well as of some statements of the Polish Brethren, was the exclusion of atheists from religious liberty. Pierre Bayle made numerous references to the Socinians and introduced one more element for the change of the social paradigm: namely, *he was the first in the Christian world who argued for the separation of ethics and morality from religion. He also defended atheism on a rational basis.*

The ideas of John Locke were transplanted directly to the American continent by James Madison (1751-1836) and Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), who implemented them for the first time in American legislation. They were philosopher-statesmen who shared a strong conviction of absolute freedom of conscience and distrusted any kind of established ecclesiastical institution. Their conviction was that the established churches create only "ignorance and corruption" and introduce the "diabolic principle of persecution." The exercise of religion should be completely separated from government. Toleration was not enough; only absolute freedom could be acceptable. For them democracy was the best guarantee of religious freedom. It was an institution that erected a "wall of separation" between church and state, and protected the liberties of minority groups against the imposition of majority views. Both were broadly educated and Jefferson had a keen interest in studying religions, especially Servetus and the Socinians.⁴¹ Jefferson must be counted among the best educated and intellectually

oriented presidents of the United States. He was a keen biblical scholar and followed the theology and philosophy of the Servetian and Socinian schools. In 1803 Jefferson prepared an extract from the Gospels' passages that would best present the ethical teaching of Jesus and arranged them in a book titled "the Philosophy of the Jesus of Nazareth" which he also labeled in another letter as "Syllabus" or "Morals of Jesus."⁴² It represented his views and his Christian religion which he characterized in a letter to William Short of April 13, 1820:

But while this Syllabus is meant to place the character of Jesus in its true and high light, as no impostor himself but a great Reformer of the Hebrew code of religion, it is not to be understood that I am with him in all his doctrines. I am a Materialist, he takes the side of spiritualism; he preaches the efficacy of repentance toward forgiveness of sin. I require a counterpoise of good works to redeem it &c. &c. It is the innocence of his character, the purity & sublimity of his moral precepts, the eloquence of his inculcations, the beauty of the apologias in which he conveys them, that I so much admire; sometimes indeed needing indulgence to Eastern Hyperbolism. My eulogies too may be founded on a postulate which all may not be ready to grant. Among the sayings & discourses imputed to him by his biographers, I find many passages of fine imagination, correct morality, and of the most lovely benevolence: and others again of so much ignorance, so much absurdity, so much untruth, charlatanism, and imposture, as

to pronounce it impossible that such contradictions should have proceeded from the same being. I separate therefore the gold from the dross; restore to him the former & leave the latter to the stupidity of some, and roguery of others of his disciples. Of this band of dupes and impostors Paul was the great Coryphaeus, and firm corrupter of the doctrines of Jesus. These palpable interpolations and falsifications of his doctrines led me to try to sift them apart. I found the work obvious and easy, and that his part composed the most beautiful morsel of morality which has been given to us by man. The Syllabus is therefore of his doctrines, not all of mine. I read them as I do those of other antient and modern moralists, with a mixture of approbation and dissent.”⁴³

All these developments and trends in religious movements are a result of a natural process which could be initiated and become possible only after the reversal of the paradigm of ecclesiastical dominion and recovery of the ancient Hellenistic humanistic paradigm. The key figure who symbolizes this turning point is Michael Servetus. Though we may not agree with all of his postulates he remains a beacon on the horizon of history.

As long as the traditional religion remains in the sphere of personal and private relation of an individual to the supreme being, there is little danger to the society as a whole. The danger appears when the religious tenets become institutionalized, declared to be an absolute truth which is to be supported, taught, and spread by an army of professional clergy and when they dominate or

influence the secular organs of the governing body with legal and physical means of coercion. In pluralistic societies, and they are increasing in number in the era of globalization, the only remedy for avoiding religious ideological conflicts is the realization in practice that all religious faiths are only subjectively true and none can be designated objectively true on a rational basis.

For humanity to reach this conclusion will probably require a new stage of struggle, a new Servetian era, and the development of a new paradigm.

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