Radical Reformation

AND THE
STRUGGLE FOR
FREEDOM OF
CONSCIENCE.

*From Servetus's Sacrifice to the
Modern Social Moral Paradigm
and the American Constitution*

MARIAN HILLAR

Introduction

to

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Introduction

Freedom of Conscience and Social Moral Paradigm

As far as social issues and doctrinal dissent are concerned, the organized church never had any policy for social justice or tolerance; it went until recent times along with and supported anybody in power as long as the ruler guaranteed the supremacy of the church and a free hand. The clergy, though stratified themselves, always belonged to the privileged class. It is no wonder that within the church we find from time to time some reaction in the form of social movements as represented by the early religious "heresies" of the *"fratricelli"* and the Poor of Lyon, Anabaptists, some supporters of Marxism, and in more recent times, Liberation Theology.[1]

The Reformation brought new trends in religious practice: the assertion of individual, personal experience as a basis for religion, an emphasis on biblical studies, and the search for biblical principles. It also underscored in the initial phase the need for tolerance, for its own survival. Unfortunately, the "reformed" churches quickly became as intolerant as the old Roman church and ossified into the old dogmatic tradition.

In an exhaustive study of the history of toleration in Europe around the sixteenth century Joseph Lecler[2] suggested that the question of toleration arose because of the breaking up of the Christendom in the sixteenth century. This created a problem of religious pluralism and tolerance within the state because Lutherans, Zwinglians, Calvinists, and Anglicans not only clashed with each other and the church of Rome, but also with many other religious movements and sects. Before there was no problem within the Christendom

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1.   Gutiérrez, Gustavo, *A Theology of Liberation. History, Politics and Salvation.* Revised Edition with a New Introduction. Translated by Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1988). Segundo, Juan Luis, *Teología de liberación. Respuesta al Cardenal Ratzinger* (Madrid: Ediciones Cristiandad, 1985). Hillar, Marian, "Liberation Theology: Religious Response to Social Problems." In *Humanism and Social Issues. An Anthology of Essays* (Houston: American Humanist Association, 1993), pp. 35-52. William R. Estep, T*he Anabaptist Story. An Introduction to Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), third edition.

2 .   Joseph Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, translated by T. L. Westo, (New York, London:

– there was only one monolithic and centralized obligatory religion, Catholic Christianity. Toleration, quite logically, concerned only those few of other religions that never heard of Christianity. Thomas Aquinas formulated this in a phrase: *"Utrum ritus infidelium sint tolerandi?"* ("Whether the rites of the infidels should be tolerated?"). The rest *nolens volens* had to adhere to the way of thinking and customs imposed by the dominating institution of the church. They were baptized in the infancy "voluntarily" and this was evidence enough that they accepted the domination of the church: "Acceptance of faith is voluntary, but maintaining it is obligatory." Lecler blames for the "disorder" the Reformation which promoted at the beginning freedom of inquiry, and later all these other movements and sects which did not submit to the domination of either Catholic or Protestant churches. Thus there was no disorder in the Nordic Countries where Reformation established itself very rapidly without causing any diversity. Similarly, there was no disorder in the countries like Spain and Italy that remained dominated by the Catholic totalitarianism.

Relation between Church and State in Christendom

And this brings us to other two questions – that of relation between church and state and that of the freedom of inquiry, thought, moral decision, and religion which we classify as freedom of conscience. From the fourth century there was a totalitarian rule of ecclesiastical institution with theology controlling every aspect of human social life. This situation is defined by historians as Christendom. Christendom, accordingly, did not know the term of toleration within its own system, and the more so, of the freedom of conscience. There was no separation between church and state. On the contrary, state was only an auxiliary secular institution executing the orders and decisions of the ecclesiastical institution.[3]

Thomas Aquinas, who still remains the chief ideologue of the Catholic Church, granted freedom of conscience in such an ambiguous way that at the same time he eliminated it completely. By freedom of conscience he correctly meant that we could freely choose between moral evil and moral good. But at the same time we are obligated to choose the

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Associated Press, Longmans, 1960. Original first publication in 1955).

3.   We discussed the abuses of power of the papacy and establishment of the totalitarian ideology of the Catholic Church and the Magisterial Protestant churches as it is referred to Michael Servetus in in *Michael Servetus. Intellectual Giant, Humanist, and Martyr.* (Lanham, New York, US, Oxford, UK:

moral good. And among moral goods Thomas placed the adherence and belonging to the Catholic Church as the only morally good and true institution and religion, the position, which is, even today maintained by the church. We have to admit, however, that such exclusivity is maintained by other major religions such as Judaism and Islam. Thus automatically, rejecting any of the church's premises, teachings, dogmas, assertions, rituals, its domination, etc., one committed a sin or moral evil in secular term, and not only a sin, it was the gravest sin possible. Therefore, Thomas argued, if society punishes by death the wrong doers the more so it should punish by death anyone who disagrees with church's dogmas, teachings, administration, rules of social behavior, etc., and especially those who reject church or God altogether, an "apostate," and an "atheist."

> With regard to heretics there are two points to be observed, one on their side, the other on the side of the Church. As for heretics their sin deserves banishment, not only from the Church by excommunication, but also from the world by death. To corrupt the faith, whereby the soul lives, is much graver than to counterfeit money, which supports temporal life. Since forgers and other malefactors are summarily condemned to death by civil authorities, with much more reason may heretics as soon as they are convicted of heresy be not only excommunicated, but also justly be put to death.[4]

And Aquinas maintained

> Clearly the disbelief is greater than other sins which occur in the perversion of morals … and it is the worst of all sins … resistance to the things of faith … is the most grave sin.[5]

There are several assumptions and errors in the theology of Thomas Aquinas: 1. He granted all the powers and authority of moral, political, and social judgment to the institution of the clergy organized in the Catholic Church; 2. He equated ideology or system of thought with morality; 3. He equated with morality belonging to a specific religious organization and

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University Press of America, 2002).
4   Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* (Blackfriars in conjunction with McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, and Eyre & Spottisewoode, London, 1963-1972), 2a, 2ae, 11,3
5.   *Ibidem,* 2a, 2ae, 10,3

following its customs, rites etc; 4. He equated with crime any thought not conforming with that of the ruling church institution; 5. He equated with crime any deviation from the customs and rites of the ruling church institution; 6. He classified such deviations as the highest crime deserving the capital punishment.

Lecler in his analysis realizes that toleration from a theological and sectarian point of view was formulated in terms whether one can "permit" or "tolerate" two or more religious denominations within one Christian state? Theologians specified within that formulation that "permission" or "toleration" does not mean "approval." And he is cautious about efficacy of such attitude, because he considers precarious and fragile such a solution everywhere in countries, which were divided by religious revolution. And rightly so because the concept of toleration automatically entails domination or rule as it is clearly seen in the case of theological speculations of Thomas Aquinas.

Reformation and the Opposition to the Catholic Church

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.[6] The reformers opposed the moral corruption and power of the popes and the clergy, the prostitution of the ecclesiastical offices for money,[7] the selling of religious "rewards" (e.g. indulgences) for financial benefits, the idolatry of saintly images, the worship of saints, and superstitious worship of relics proliferated to astronomical figures.[8]

The Reformation brought also new trends: the assertion of 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. But all discussion related to toleration was based on the authority of the scripture, church fathers and to a

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6. Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand. A Life of Martin Luther,* (New York, Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1940).
7. For example Pope Agapet II became Pope at the age of 18, Pope Benoit IX at the age of 10; he archbishop of Reims was nominated at the age of 5; Jean de Lorraine became bishop of Metz at age of 4, and, at the same time, had benefices from 39; Odet de Chastillon, brother of Coligny, became cardinal at the age of 9. Marian Hillar, *The Case of Michael Servetus (151-1553) – the Turning Point in the Struggle for Freedom of Conscience*, (Lewiston, Quenston, Lmapeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1997).
8. Doumergue, Émile, *Jean Calvin. Les hommes et les choses de son temps.* (Lausanne, Paris:

degree of the medieval theologians.

The few leaders of liberal religious thought within the Magisterial Reformation who did emerge did not attempt to develop a systematic formulation of the Christian faith from this new approach. Their assertions were partial, limited, and concerned more with the new structure of religious organization and only to a limited degree with dogmata.

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. Any real investigation of the accepted dogmas or dogmatic assertions was persecuted by both Roman Catholic and Protestant churches.[9] 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 the unity of the church and state to the vindication of God's honor.

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 developed his own doctrine of persecution of the "heretics" and formulated it in a treatise attempting to defend the punishment of Servetus in his *Defensio orthodoxae fidei* (Geneva 1554).[10] Here 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."[11] Calvin's doctrine is representative not only of his own views; he

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1899-1927; Slatkine Reprints: Genève, 1969). Tome I, pp. 32-49.

9.   Alan Eyre, *The Protesters*, Birmingham: The Christadelphian, 1975, 1985. Alan Eyre, *Brethren in Christ. A Stirring Record of Faithful Believers of the Truth During the 16th and 17th Centuries,* (Torrens Park, Australia: Christadelphian Scripture Study Service), 1982.

8.   *Defensio orthodoxae fidei* in Calvini, in *Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia. Ad fidem editionum principium et authenticarum ex parte etiam codicum neam scriptorum additis prolegomenis literaris, annotationibus criticis, annalibus calvinianis indicibusque novis et copiosissimis ediderunt Gulielmus Baum, Eduardus Cunitz, Eduardus Reuss theologi Argentoratenses,* volumen VIII, Brunsvigae Apud C.A. Schwetschke et filium. M. Bruhn 1870. Reprinted by Johnson Reprint Corporation, New York, London, and Minerva G.M.B.H, Frankfurt a. M., 1964, abbreviated as *Calvini J. Opera*, Vol. VIII, pp. 480-481.

11.   Ibid. pp. 478-479.

was a spokesman for the entire Catholic and Protestant Christianity as well. His arguments to justify this conclusion were derived from the Old Testament and ran against the spirit and letter of the New Testament.

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

To understand why Reformation failed in bringing peace among various denominations and sects we propose to introduce the concept of social moral paradigm as a summary description of conditions, traditions, and laws which decide how a given society is structured and how it operates. We borrow the concept of paradigm from the studies of the history of natural sciences. Thomas S. Kuhn[12] defined it in these terms: "These [paradigms] I take to be universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners." Of course, in natural sciences these "paradigms" do not have social normative character and do not entail intellectual obligation of acceptance without demonstration of evidence, and the differences are resolved in a process of rational inquiry, which is commonly described as scientific method. Moreover, scientific theories are constantly subjected to verification, by further research and by their application in practical technological use. This process involves, according to Kuhn, three classes of problems – identification of significant facts, comparing the facts with theory, and formulation of the

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12. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, second edition, enlarged (Chicago,

theory. Paradigms are subject to new modifications and articulations and the new ones in the process of evolution of natural sciences replace the old ones. Though the modifications are additive and cumulative, the change in paradigm is an abrupt step, and for that reason Kuhn talks about "scientific revolutions." The entire process of the evolution of scientific ideas may be compared to the biological evolution as occurring without a set goal or a fixed and absolute truth. The scientific community operates by reaching a consensus through a rational process. One should emphasize, however, that existence of natural sciences as an organized and structured enterprise is a relatively new phenomenon and a part of modern societies. The development of natural sciences and philosophical thought has always been linked to the possibility of free inquiry and thus we observe the explosion of science only in modern societies where it is determined by the prevailing social paradigm.

The concept of the paradigm is even more suitable for analysis of the moral social situation than for the history of science. 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.[13]

From the historical perspective we can differentiate three types of social paradigm:

1. The humanistic social paradigm based on the recognition of natural moral principle as operating in human societies. Under such a paradigm societies are governed by referring to reason and critical analysis, though in antiquity they could still adhere to a mythical worldview.

2. Theocratic social paradigm where the system of law, governance, morality, and worldview are centered around the idea of supernatural being as the sole ruler and the source of norms, power, knowledge, institutions, etc. The worldview is dominated by the mythical religious stories and concepts.

3. The ecclesiastical social paradigm in which the institution assumes the role of absolute control of society as a lawgiver, teacher, and judge. This institution assumes the function of an intermediary between the Supreme Being and humanity. It explains the natural world, imposes rules of behavior, decides what is morally good and bad, and passes

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London: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. viii.

the judgment. It hides usually under the pretense of being divinely instituted and given the supernatural powers.

The Paradigm of the Greco-Roman Society

Greco-Roman pre-Christian society enjoyed toleration, freedom of religion, of conscience, and of thought. The ancient western world did not have a concept of "heresy" or "heretic." Greco-Roman society tolerated all religions and rarely imposed restrictions on free thought. Acts of intolerance were rare, and if they occurred, deviations from one doctrine or another never justified them. This was due to the lack of state sanctioned theological doctrine though the people and the centers of power were highly religious. The ancient people operated under the principles of *humanistic social paradigm* whose main feature was freedom: freedom of thought, inquiry, and expression, which left us a rich heritage of ancient scientific, philosophical, and religious ideas.[14]

The Paradigm of Ancient Hebrew Theocratic Society

The ancient Hebrew society is an example of the system governed by the theocratic social paradigm. This is how Flavius Josephus, Jewish historian, general and priest of the first century C.E. described it:

> Our legislator … ordained our government to be what … may be termed a theocracy, by ascribing the authority and the power to God, and by persuading all the people to have a regard to him, as the author of all the good things enjoyed either in common by all mankind, or by each one in particular, and of all that they themselves obtained by praying to him in their greatest difficulties.[15]

Josephus continues stressing that the main characteristics of the Jewish legislature was that it made virtues like justice, courage, temperance, the common agreement among the members of the community, a part of religion. It united the two methods of arriving at the learning and moral conduct of life by joining the verbal instruction with the legal

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13. Thomas S. Kuhn, *op. cit.,* p. 175.
14. W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy,* (Cambridge, New York, Cambridge University Press), Vol. I – VI, 1962-1981. Margherita Isnardi Parente, a cura di, *Gli Stoici. Opere e Testinonianze*, (Milano, TEA), 1994, Vol. I-II.
15. Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion*, Bk II.17. In *Josephus. Complete Works.* Translated by William

prescription and "left nothing of the very smallest consequence to be done at the pleasure and disposal of the person himself."

Thus everything to the smallest detail was regulated and legislated by the divine law and the presumed will of God. The piety entails the obedience to this law and its administration is granted to the priests who entrusts the governance of other priests to the chief high priest. They are the curators of the law and the people's conduct, "they are inspectors of all, and the judges in doubtful cases, and the punishers of those that were condemned to suffer punishment." The fundamental principle was conformity in conduct with the prescriptions of the Jewish Law. Those who do not submit to the priest are subject to the same punishment as if they had been guilty of impiety towards God.

In such a system there is no distinction between temple and state. The Bible designates the Israeli state as "priestly kingdom" (Exod. 19:6). The king of Israel or the high priest blended all the spiritual, temporal, civil, and religious authority. Every political or social act was at the same time a religious act, e.g., the anointing of the king (1 King 16:13). Moses consecrated his brother Aaron as the high priest (Lev. 8:6-13) and established a hereditary priestly caste. Thus, king does not give the priestly authority to the priests, he regulates their rights and jurisdiction, and priests are the state officials. But the king also has an exclusive privilege of the priestly function. E.g., the king Josiah organized a reform of the worship according to the requirements of the Law in 621 B.C.E. (4 Kings 22-23).

In such a system there is no room for independent critical thinking or any deviation from the religious rite – every thought and ideology have to be conformed to the governing ideology and any deviation was considered a criminal offense punishable by the prescribed law. Thus Hebrews did not have the concept of freedom of conscience or toleration and appropriately there is no equivalent of the Greek word *"conscience"* (συνείδησις) in the Hebrew language. However, in situations when the Hebrews wanted to express the inner attitude or feelings, the will or moral reflection of a person, they used the term "heart" (לֵבָב) or "thought," "knowledge" (מֹדַע) in this broad meaning (e.g. Job 27:6; Jer. 31:33; Eccles. 10:20; 2 Chron. 1:10; Daniel 1:4)). The key offense was to *"blaspheme"* (נָקַב). It referred to

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Whiston, foreword by William Sanford LaSor, (Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI), 1981.

any abusive or impious use of the divine name and was punishable by death (Lev. 24:15-16). In the Christian era this term was used for any deviation from the official doctrine by church fathers, Catholic Church and later by the Protestants as well, especially by Calvin. Equally severe crime was the so-called "idolatry," (from "idol" = פֶּסֶל) that is worship of alien god or gods (Num. 25:1-9). The law was so severe that it ordered

> If anyone secretly entices you – even if it is your brother, your father's son or your mother's son, or your own son or daughter, or the wife you embrace, or your most intimate friend – saying, 'Let us go worship other gods,' whom neither you nor your ancestors have known, … you must not yield to or heed any such person. Show them no pity or compassion and do not shield them. But you shall surely kill them; your own hand shall be first against them to execute them, and afterwards the hand of the people" (Deut. 13:6-9).

The Protestants used this argument against Radical Reformers and against Catholics, and Catholics against all their competition each even in the XVIth and XVIIth centuries. Another offense was to be a "false prophet" (שֶׁקֶר נָבָא). He had to be exterminated (Deut. 13:6). Also it was incumbent on the parents of the false prophet to kill their own son (Zech. 13:3).

The Catholic Church and Protestants used all these prescriptions and laws as arguments against the so-called "heretics" and those who showed independent theological and political unorthodox thinking.

The Ancient Jewish Reformation Ends in Christianity

The political and social upheaval of the first century in Palestine produced a strong Messianic apocalyptic movement.[16] A part of this movement was the program of a moral renewal, which can be deduced from the text of Paul's letters and the synoptic Gospels. It arose from a clash of two cultures, the Greek universal one and the Hebrew, tribal, and

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16. *Qumran-Messianism. Studies on the Messianic Expectations in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, edited by James H. Charlesworth, Hermann Lichtenberger and Gerbern S. Oegema, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998).

breakdown of the old Jewish moral system. This movement can be described as the Ancient Jewish Reformation and which was first described by Paul in his letters. It clearly intended to break with the superficiality and formality of the Jewish moral system based on the performing external rites and to convert it into a system of following the internalized moral precept (for example Luke 14:3-6).

Though the Gospels are not using the term "conscience," the moral system of the Gospels is more or less in accordance with the Greek teaching and moral outlook where the personal conscience is emphasized. The Gospels are using the Hebrew concept of moral guidance and thus they use the term "heart" ($\kappa\alpha\rho\delta\iota\alpha$). But the difference between the Law and the reformed Judaism of the first century is clearly defined in Matt. 15:2-7 when Jesus demands actual fulfillment of the moral precepts and not just verbal or ritual worship of God. "For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile" (Matt. 15:19-20).

The concept of conscience was widely used in the ancient Greco-Roman world as a remorse resulting from rational analysis of the past actions.[17] For example Philo of Alexandria ascribed to the inner conscience what the Stoics attributed to the "wise man" – the moral counsel, exhortation and reprobation.[18]

Similarly, Paul, thoroughly Stoic in his moral outlook,[19] made conscience an internal light that acts as a judge of the past actions and also as a guide. Moreover, Paul taught that one should act out of personal conviction and not out of fear.

> For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Do you wish to have no fear
> of the authority? Then do what is good …. But if you do what is wrong, you should
> be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain! … Therefore one must
> be subject, not only because of wrath but also because of conscience (Rom. 13:3-

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17. Cicero, *De finibus*, 11:7; Seneca, *Epist.* 43:5; 97:16; 105:8.
18. Émile Bréhier, *Les idées philosophiques et religieuses chez Philon d'Alexandrie*, (Los Angeles: University of California Libraries, 1908), pp. 296-300. Marian Hillar, *From Logos to Trinity. The Evolution of Religious Beliefs from Pythagoras to Tertullian, (* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012, chapter on Philo of Alexandria, pp. 47-48.
19. Seneca, *Epist.* 7:6.

5).

Though Paul makes numerous appeals to "conscience," it is not for him an autonomous human moral quality but behavior determined by God. Paul, making reference to Old Testament story of Sarah and Rebecca, explains that God has a purpose in "election" not in "works." Thus salvation "depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy" (Rom. 9:16).

Paul treats also the problem of a the so-called "bad" conscience which he calls a "weak" ($\alpha\sigma\theta\epsilon\nu\acute{\eta}\varsigma$) conscience. It is contrasted with the knowledge. He discusses it at the occasion of relating the issue of eating by Christians, the meat which was offered to the Hellenistic gods (1 Cor. 8). To a Christian who is well informed and has knowledge, eating the meat offered to the Greek gods cannot do any harm because he knows that they do not exist. However, to a "weak conscience," that is to a person who still thinks that that food is offered to real gods, eating of such meat would mean a betrayal of Christian faith. He draws the following conclusions from this example: 1. When the conscience presents an objectively good or indifferent action as a bad one we commit a sin if we do not follow this conscience; 2. One should not do violence to conscience of others even if they are in error. Therefore he recommends not to eat the sacrificial meat, at least in the presence of persons with the "weak conscience" to avoid scandalizing such persons. Thus, we are bound in our conduct by our subjective and personal conscience as long as we are convinced, even if we are objectively wrong and erroneous. "Let all be fully convinced in their own minds" (Rom. 14:5). Moreover, at the same time we are not to pass judgment on others or to despise them because "each of us will be accountable to God" (Rom. 14:12).

In Gospels we find no defined concept of the freedom of conscience. There is, however, in them a powerful drive to convert all people including the Jewish believers to the messianic message – acceptance of the belief in the coming of the Messiah and initiation of the new messianic era. The means for this "conversion" or rather spreading the message are preaching and example (Matt. 28:19; Luke 24:47). There are given detailed instruction how to proceed and in case of being unwelcome one has to leave without reservation (Matt. 10:5-15; Luke 10:10-12). The use of violence in convincing others about the messianic message is

strictly prohibited (Luke 9:51-55). On the contrary it is expected that the messengers will be harassed and persecuted. But even in that case they are not allowed to use violence or resist (Matt. 10:16-23).

Distortion of the Christian Freedom Message by Organized Religion

Proponents of violence in Christian religion, especially against those who do not think as the ruling class of clergy does, cite the Gospel of Matt. 21:12-13 (John 2:13-16) as an injunction for using force and physical constraint. But this is obviously a wishful thinking, because the event described of overturning "the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves" is not a general teaching to use violence in spreading or teaching religion, a specific doctrine or ritual. It is a specific event of condemnation of abusing the temple precinct for secular activities, nothing more! The interpretation of this passage in other sense is a classical example of distortion of Christian message by organized religious institutions.

The other famous quote when Jesus is supposed to say "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father," etc. (Matt. 10:34-36) was again misinterpreted and perverted by wishful thinking. If it were to mean exactly what it says it would represent, indeed, very devilish morality. What this passage means is clear from the following text: "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me…. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it" (Matt. 10:37-39). Thus, Jesus predicts future conflicts produced by faith in him either in families or in societies, nothing more. The author of the Ephesian (6:16-17) preached such an interpretation for whom the "the sword of the Spirit" was the word of God: "take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one [understood Satan]. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." In a similar quote (Luke 14:26-33) Jesus as represented by the author of the Gospel demanded absolute devotion to his messianic cause and his movement in the political situation and struggle in Palestine, it has nothing to do with the morality.

One becomes the member of the congregation of believers or Jesus movement by ritual baptism on the condition of expressing a faith in the messianic message. The belief has to be

unconditional, because even the presence of miracles may not convince the witnesses (John 12:37, 12: 44-50). But it is not a condition or requirements for the salvation as expected blissful living in the ideal kingdom of God. It is stated that only fulfillment of the specific moral precepts is required: "You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor you father and mother." Also the fulfillment of the universal humanistic moral precept is needed "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 19:18-19), but following of Jesus is not necessary (Matt. 19:21-22).

Again, the institution of clergy, the church, developed later an attitude of compelling people to join the Christian congregation, conversion to the Christian ideology and rituals, based on the parable of the "dinner guests" (Luke 14:15-24), especially on one statement "compel people to come" (*impelle intrare*). This parable was also used to justify persecution of "heretics," "schismatics" and "apostates." The parable deals with a host who prepared a dinner for invited guests. And when the time came all of them found excuses not to come to dinner. So the host ordered his servant to "bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame." But there was still room in the house, the host ordered: "Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled." The Greek terms used for "compel to come" are ἀνάγκασον ἐ'ιθελσεῖν. According to the Walter Bauer's dictionary[20] this term means in this case "urgently invite" or "urge strongly," something like "encourage and insist on coming." It would be ludicrous and highly unethical to force people by violence or any other means than persuasion to come to dinner. Therefore, if this parable is supposed to refer to who is going to participate in the kingdom of God, as the previous context of the text indicates, we may surmise that many were invited and offered participation, but through their own unwillingness they refuse the offer, others are invited though they are not deserving the invitation in the first place, but may be in a dire need of it, still others who are neutral, they too are strongly invited. Door is open to everyone; all will be blessed at the messianic feast. This parable has nothing to do with the "heretics,"

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20. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, a translation by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, second edition, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1979). p. 52.

"schismatics" or "apostates."

The developing community of the believers, the saints, did not take lightly those who did not follow their moral rules. In such matters if one member of the congregation (church) sinned against the other, the admonition was in order. In case it did not work, one could bring two or three other members of the congregation and try to persuade the offender. If the offender refused to listen even to the whole congregation, then he should be treated as "a Gentile and a tax collector" (Matt. 18:15-18). Moreover, the process of reaching a consensus in a church should be a democratic one:

> Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, … if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them (Matt. 18:18-20).

There is nothing here about the clergy or institution and about doctrines, only about reaching a democratic consensus among the members of the church of believers, and the whole context refers to the moral infractions against each other. Moreover, in the next paragraph it is explained that one should forgive the offender "Not seven times, but … seventy-seven times" (Matt. 18:22).

Pauline and Gospel Message of Toleration

Paul develops a detailed procedure for treatment of people who either sin in general, act against other saints or even are having other beliefs, i.e. are "idolaters." He advises removal of such a person from the congregation and severing the association: "But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of the brother or sister who is sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard or robber. Do not even eat with such a one" (1 Cor. 5:11). The treatment of ideological quarrels is explicitly discussed in the letter to Titus (3:10-11): "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 division, since you know that such a person is perverted and sinful, being self-condemned."

The final judgment and punishment will be, however, meted by God at the "day of the

Lord." Paul elevates the punishment to the spiritual level, away from the corporal punishment prescribed by the Torah (Deut. 17:2-7; 22:22; 24:7). The grievances among the saints Paul advises to solve between themselves, the believers (1 Cor. 6:1-6), and not referring to the state authorities.

Especially important is the parable of weeds and wheat (Matt. 13:24-30). It refers to moral action of mankind and patience for waiting for the punishment meted by God at the end of days. Contrary to later interpretations by the Catholic Church and Protestant leaders[21] it has nothing to do with the doctrinal issues and punishment of the so-called "heretics." On the contrary it prohibits any violent, physical action, in accordance with all the other admonishments found in the Gospels. It is similar to the advise given by Gamaliel in Acts (5:34-39) not to persecute the "heretic" apostles by the orthodox Jews. Even the advise of Paul to excommunicate the sinners from the community is not a permanent and total exclusion.

The whole New Testament is filled with moral admonitions to meekness and humbleness (Matt. 11:29-30), to forgiveness and mercy ("Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy not sacrifice,' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners," Matt. 9:13; Luke 15:1-31; 7:36-50; Matt. 7:14-15; Luke 6:37-38). The whole moral basis of its teaching is the humanistic moral principle presented in a theistic version expressed by Jesus when asked by a lawyer what is required for eternal life: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself " (Luke 10:27-28; also 1 John 3:7-8; John 13:34-35). And in a general universal and positive form: "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Luke 6:31). This command especially extends to the enemies: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies an pray for those who persecute you …" (Matt. 6:43-44).

Moreover, in the new moral order there will be no domination by any power: "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your

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21. R. Bainton, "The parable of the tares as the proof text for religious liberty to the end of the XVIth

servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all" (Mark 10:42-44). But this principle was misinterpreted by the developing messianic communities, which separated and isolated themselves from the rest of the society thus producing a basis later on for a conflict.

Establishment of Ecclesiastical Paradigm and Struggle for Freedom of Conscience

All this was dramatically changed with the establishment of Christianity as a state religion. By the fourth century it became the religion of the emperors controlled by the coterie of clergy and established itself as the exclusive and obligatory state religion. Initially it was imposed forcefully by the emperor and formulated by the clergy; later it became a tradition established by a system of laws (state and ecclesiastical), theological doctrines (e.g., the doctrines of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas), and its preservation was scrupulously supervised by the ecclesiastical authority, institutions (e.g., infant baptism, canon law), and courts, e.g., Inquisition).

From the fourth century on, the profession of religious, mythical beliefs became the touchstone of morality, reversing the humanistic principles of ancient Greco-Roman morality. Thus, the totalitarian system was established with a religious hierarchical organization as the exclusive ideological, political party and with a secular state power as its executive branch. Laws were introduced that legalized religious, dogmatic assertions, imposed obligatory adherence, and prohibited any deviation in thought. The people of Western Europe were born and baptized into it. Their whole lives were controlled on earth and their destiny in the hereafter was determined. This ecclesiastical state reached its peak during the Middle Ages and lasted for about fifteen centuries.[22] Opponents were punished –

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century," in Church History, Vol. I (1952), pp. 67-88.

22. Literature on church history is extremely abundant. The reader will find, however, a good and objective introduction to the field with extensive lists of sources in: Flick, Alexander Clarence, *The Rise of the Mediaeval Church and its Influence on the Civilization of Western Europe from the First to the Thirteenth Century.* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1909); Johnson, Paul, *A History of Christianity.* New York: Atheneum, 1976; Cairns, E. Earle, *Christianity Through the Centuries. A History of the Christian Church.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervaan Publishing House, 1982). Twenty-eighth edition. A good source of selected original documents, in English translation, pertaining to the subject can be found in Barry, J. Colman, editor, *Readings in Church History.* (Paramus, N.J. and New York, N.Y.: Newman Press, 1960), Vol. 1-3

too often by death, torture, and confiscation of property – their only "crime" being that of daring to speak out against the scheme imposed by a totalitarian, ecclesiastical party. In this theocratic society the designation of "heretic" became the catch word for the elimination of any inconvenient person or group. Bloody persecution of any deviation in thought was declared a moral virtue and a divine command.

Thus, from the fourth century a switch took place at the moral social level: *the humanistic social paradigm of antiquity was replaced by the ecclesiastical paradigm of the church institution.* The Reformation failed because just like Thomas Aquinas its leaders operated within the framework of the ecclesiastical social paradigm. The general rule of the Reformation *"cuius regio eius religio"* only replaced the Catholic church global monopoly by the local state churches. The implementation in practice of the persecution of the so-called heretics depended on the actual political situation in a given country or state.

There were, however, two factors that worked toward the recovery of the ancient humanistic social paradigm. One was the control of the local churches in their operation by secular power, which allowed for introduction of certain measures based on practical and rational premises in opposition to the religious-theological speculation of the sectarian theologians who dominated societies in the Middle Ages and in the countries where Reformation was repressed. The persecution continued until the rulers liberated themselves from the domination of the clergy and realized that they had to separate the 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 the use of economically and politically oriented secular arguments.

The Radical Reformation and Struggle for Religious Freedom

The other factor was the parallel religious movement spawned by the Lutheran Reformation in the beginning, but it went much further and therefore is classified as Radical Reformation.[23] The radical reformers took seriously moral precepts of Christianity perverted

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23. George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation*. (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, Inc.), third edition, 1992.

by the church institution and intended to implement them in everyday life of an individual or a society. They defended religious freedom arguing first from the biblico-theological point of view and later using rational philosophical arguments. Anabaptists rejected infant baptism, the oath, a paid ministry, legal suits, military service, and a union of church and state. They were regarded as menace to society – ecclesiastical and political – and were banished on penalty of death by both the Catholic Church and by the reformed churches.

Anabaptists 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).[24] He wrote the treatise, *Concerning Heretics and Those Who Burn Them* (1524), defending the complete freedom of religion. He argued that the Gospel precludes coercion and claimed that the state has no jurisdiction in religious matters. He extended liberty even to law abiding "unbelievers" (godless), "It is fitting that the secular authority puts to death the wicked (Rom. 13:4) who cause bodily harm to the defenseless. But the enemy of God can harm no one, unless [that person] would not have it otherwise and would forsake the gospel." And "It follows that the inquisitors are the greatest heretics of all, because counter to the teaching and example of Jesus they condemn heretics to fire."[25] 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.[26]

The Case of a Biblical Scholar Michael 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 a lonely scholar, Michael

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24. H. R. Guggisberg, *op. cit.*, p. 140. William R. Estep, ed., *Anabaptist Beginnings, 1523-1533: A Sourcebook*, (Nieuwkoop: B. de Graaf, 1976. Balthasar Hubmaier,*Balthasar Hubmaier Theologian of Anabaptism,* translated and edited by H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder, (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press), 1989.
25. Balthasar Hübmaier, *op. cit.,* p. 62, p. 63.
26. Sebastian Franck, *Chronica,* [Zeitbuch und Geschichtsbibell von anbegyn bis indisgegenwertig 1536 jar verlegt. Reprograf. Nachdr. d. Orig.-Ausg. Ulm 1536].Reprinted, Darmstadt,

Servetus (1511-1553). It does not mean that there were no voices even before the Reformation arguing for religious tolerance.[27] For the early humanists the model of argumentation was the Erasmian[28] 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 historical circumstances of his martyrdom. Servetus was *the first Christian thinker 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.

Just like in natural sciences where the accumulation of new data and scientific facts makes it necessary to reevaluate the old paradigm and establish a new one.[29] 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.

The idea of punishing "heretics" was so pervasive in the society that it did not occur even to most thinking Protestants that the whole concept of repression of thought was evil and against the spirit, and the letter, of the Gospels. No Protestant religious leader was against the punishment of heretics in general. Even Sebastian Castellio, recognized champion of rational tolerance and a precursor of the French Revolution and the *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme*, could not avoid these contradictions. Only later did he develop, through the experience of the fraternal religious war in France, the concept of mutual toleration and freedom of conscience. Though he still recognized the scripture as the source of valid statements, the concept of *"liberum arbitrium"* became the foundation of human

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Wissenschaftliche Buchges., 1969. Originally published in 1531 in Strassburg.

27. For example the writings of Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499); Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494); or Nicholas of Cusa (1400-1464); Joseph Lecler, *Histoire de la Tolérance au siècle de la Réforme*. (Paris: Aubier, 1955, 2 Vols.

28. Johan Huizinga, Erasmus and the Age of Reformation, (Peabody, MA: Benediction Books, 2009*)*

29. Thomas Kuhn, *op. cit.,* p. 175.

rationality and natural moral principle. The trap of contradictions and theocratic mentality were so pervading that even in the eighteenth century Jean Jacques Rousseau wrote in 1762 in his *Contrat social,* that in the future ideal state, one who did not believe in the religious truths decreed by the legislator should be banished from the state or even, one who, after having recognized them, would cease to believe should be punished by death.[30]

A month after the publication of Calvin's *Defensio* which he published immediately after Servetus' martyrdom in order to justify his murder, there appeared in Basel an anonymous, eloquent pamphlet against intolerance entitled *De haereticis, an sint persequendi...* (*Concerning heretics, whether they are to be persecuted ...*) A few weeks later there appeared a French translation of this treatise entitled *Tracté des hérétiques, a savoir, si on les doit persecuter, etc.*[31] This treatise was later translated into German and Dutch (1620, 1663), and English (1935).[32] 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* (*Against the pamphlet of Calvin*).

The movement for tolerance grew out of the influence of Castellio and his associates in Basel. Servetus's martyrdom gave a stimulus to the rise of religious toleration as a general policy, as a 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

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30. Rousseau, Jean Jacques*, Oeuvres immortelles du contrat social. Du Contrat social ou principes du droit politique.* (Genève: Consant Bourquin, Éditeur, 1947). p. 370.

31. Sébastien Castellion, *Traité des hérétiques, a savoir, si on les doit persecuter, et comment on se doit conduire avec eux, selon l'avis, opinion, et sentence de plusieurs auteurs, tant anciens, que modernes.* 1554 ; Édition nouvelle publiée par A. Olivet, préface par E. Choisy; (Genève: A. Julien, Libraire-Éditeur, 1913).

32. Bainton, Roland H., *Concerning heretics; whether they are to be persecuted and how they are to be treated; a collection of the opinions of learned men, both ancient and modern; an anonymous work attributed to Sebastian Castellio now first done into English, together with excerpts from other works of Sebastian Castellio and David Joris on religious liberty by Roland H. Bainton.* (New York: Columbia University Press), 1935.

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 Legacy: Italian Humanists and Polish Brethren

Servetus's legacy was first spread by the Italian humanists and reformers 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 Church or Polish Brethren. After their expulsion from Poland they developed into the Unitarian movement in England and America. Socinians were the first who demanded and fully understood 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).[33] 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, still in another treatise, *On the Law of the Christian Magistrate and Private*

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33. Hillar, M.,"From the Polish Socinians to the American Constitution," *A Journal from the Radical Reformation. A Testimony to Biblical Unitarianism,* 1994, no. 3, pp. 44-51.

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.

Moral, social, and political doctrines of the Socinians/Polish Brethren eventually led to the development of the Enlightenment. Their ideas were perfected, extended and popularized by writings of philosophers John Locke (1632-1704), Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677), Pierre Bayle (1647-1706), Voltaire (1694-1778), and David Hume (1711-1776). The arguments used by John Locke in his famous four *Letters on Toleration*, published in Holland between 1683 and 1689, coincide with 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 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 Polish Brethren (Socinians) were transplanted 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.[34]

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34. Marian Hillar with Claire S. Allen, *Michael Servetus: Intellectual Giant, Humanist, and Martyr.*

Today biblical scholars confirm the discovery of Servetus and his universal understanding of the divinity, which breaks with tribal or ecclesiastical particularism.[35]

Philosophers and religious scholars develop further Servetian understanding of the divinity, which manifests itself and evolves in a historical process in the new concepts of process theology.[36] However, others reject the ontological concept of divinity but recognize the importance of human values and make them the center of a new "religion," a religion of the "highest values" as the one propounded by a philosopher of religion, Stanisław Cieniawa.[37]

All these intellectual ideas and movements can flourish only in the environment of unhindered and free exercise of inquiry.

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*(*Lanham, New York, Oxford: University Press of America, 2002), p. 257. Hillar, "From the Polish Socinians," *op. cit.*

35. Edmund J. Fortman, *The Triune God* (New York: Baker Book House, 1972).   Anthony F. Buzzard and Charles F. Hunting, *The Doctrine of the Trinity. Christianity's Self-Inflicted Wound* (San Francisco, London, Bethesda: International Scholars Publications, 1999). Karl-Josef Kuschel, *Born Before All Time*: *The Dispute over Christ's Origin.* (New York, 1992). Marian Hillar, *From Logos to Trinity, op. cit.*

36. M. 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.

37. Stanisław Cieniawa, "The Plurality of Confessions and one Religion," in *Essays in the Philosophy of Humanism*, Houston, Humanists of Houston, 2003, pp. 13-20.