

Christian Discipline, Church and State, and Toleration: Bullinger, Calvin, and Basel 1530-1555

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The recently published book, «Heinrich Bullinger, Vater der reformierten Kirche»¹, serves to remind us that Bullinger was in many ways the father of the Reformed churches. His legacy lives on even today in covenant theology and federal political philosophy², and in a variety of other ways in churches that trace their origins to sixteenth-century Switzerland. This study, however, focuses on areas in which Bullinger had little lasting impact – church discipline, the relationship of the church to the civil government, and toleration –, and how Bullinger and Calvin related to each other on these topics, especially in connection with Basel.

Bullinger's Position in 1531

Bullinger first clearly articulated his position on discipline and the relationship of the church to the civil community³ in a letter to Berchtold Haller of Bern in July 1531⁴. He made his position crystal clear at the outset: «I see excommunication to be nothing other than the public and Christian guarding of public virtue and Christian morals». He thus defined excommunication broadly to mean simply Christian discipline. Bullinger then turned to the question of who controlled such discipline: excommunication, or «the power of punishing crimes and the guarding of virtue ... is committed to the magistrate». The magistrate, as the minister of God (Rom. 13), had been commanded to guard the good and destroy the evil in the Christian community⁵.

¹ Fritz Blanke, *Immanuel Leuschner*, Heinrich Bullinger, Vater der reformierten Kirche, Zürich 1990.

² See Charles S. McCoy and J. Wayne Baker, *Fountainhead of Federalism*, Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenantal Tradition, Louisville (Ky) 1991.

³ Bullinger's position was a further development of Zwingli's point of view. See J. Wayne Baker, *Church Discipline or Civil Punishment, On the Origins of the Reformed Schism, 1528-1531*, in: *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 23, 1985, pp. 3-18.

⁴ Bullinger's letter was in response to a letter from Haller requesting Bullinger's opinion about excommunication. Haller's letter to Bullinger has been lost.

⁵ HBBW I Nr. 39, pp. 207-208.

Bullinger also considered the method of excommunication or Christian discipline in his letter to Haller. To those who argued that to treat a person «as a heathen» (Matt. 18:17) meant to exclude the offender from the fellowship of the church, he replied, «in all such things Christ only wished that he should be publicly punished who decided to live dishonorably after he had ignored friendly warnings.» To be «a heathen and a publican» was to be counted among the criminals and to be punished as such. The offender should first be warned by a close friend, and then by two or three others. If he was still recalcitrant, he should be called before the overseers of excommunication, that is before the magistrate. If this final warning was ignored, «let him pay the penalty. And this (according to the word of the Lord) is the method and limit of excommunication: punishment, I say, proclaimed and paid»⁶. Bullinger's position was unequivocal: excommunication, which consisted of public punishment for public offences, was the responsibility of the magistrate.

Bullinger then argued against the ban from the eucharist. The purpose of the eucharist was to console sinners. The goal of excommunication was to constrain the evil example; it was not to be employed for the purification of the church. Therefore, since excommunication and the eucharist had separate and distinct functions, they should not be connected with each other. Once the magistrate had inflicted his punishment, the offender had paid his penalty in full⁷. This, in brief summary, was Bullinger's position as he expressed it to Haller in mid-1531.

Bullinger's letter to Haller brought about one of his first connections with Basel, when Haller sent Bullinger's letter to Oecolampadius, the chief pastor at Basel, for his reaction⁸. When Oecolampadius wrote back to Haller, he reacted harshly to Bullinger's position. Oecolampadius interpreted Matthew 18:15-17 to mean that the offender should be warned and admonished, and if necessary, excluded from fellowship and from the eucharist. Punishment by the magistrate was a penalty *in addition to, and separate from*, excommunication⁹.

Oecolampadius felt that those, like Bullinger, who rejected the use of the ban did not understand either the purpose of the eucharist or the nature of the church. It was true that the eucharist was for sinners, but it was not for the enemies of Christ. It served unity, peace, love, and purity in the church; and those who refused to use the ban «hold the church for nothing and do not desire to

⁶ Ibid. pp. 210-211.

⁷ Ibid. pp. 211-214. For further expressions of Bullinger's viewpoint, see «In sacrosanctum Iesu Christi Domini nostri Evangelium secundum Matthaeum, Commentariorum libri XII. per Heinrychum Bullingerum», Zürich 1543, fols. 158, 174b-175; and «In omnes apostolicas epistolas, divi videlicet Pauli XIII., et VII. canonicas, commentarii Heinrychi Bullingeri», Zürich 1539, I:149-151.

⁸ See Briefe und Akten zum Leben Oecolampads ..., bearb. von Ernst Staehelin, Leipzig 1934, vol. 2, no. 901, pp. 636-637, esp. note 2.

⁹ Ibid. no. 925a, pp. 666-668.

increase its holiness.» That was the purpose of excommunication – the holiness of the church. Toward the end of the letter, he struck out at Bullinger: How could anyone be so ignorant of philology that «he does not know what excommunication is?» Why deny the ban when it was used in the ancient church? The ban had been given by Christ to guard against shameless sinners in the church, but Bullinger wanted to open the door to those very sinners!¹⁰

While there were thus two competing theories about Christian discipline within Reformed Protestantism by 1531, there was only one system in operation. All the major Reformed cities in the Swiss Confederation were «Zwinglian» in terms of civil control of the church and the clergy. Each had a Marriage Court and, if excommunication was to be used at all, it was exercised under the watchful eye of the civil magistracy.

Bullinger's Contacts with Basel, 1531-1550

Late in 1531, Bullinger accepted the invitation of the Zurich Council to replace Zwingli as the leader of the Zurich church. During the next twenty years, Bullinger had close relations with the Basel church. Two matters of importance during that period illustrate how Bullinger got along with the Basel pastors.

The First Helvetic Confession

A number of pastors from the Swiss Reformed churches and from Strasbourg assembled at Basel in January 1536 with the intention of drawing up a common confession of faith. Bullinger and Oswald Myconius, the new head pastor at Basel, were the chief authors of the First Helvetic Confession, adopted by the delegates on February 4th. There is no hint in the Confession that there was any disagreement on the matter of Christian discipline – it was to be controlled by the Christian magistracy, the civil government!¹¹

At the same time that Bullinger was writing the Confession, a young Frenchman by the name of John Calvin was living in Basel. He wrote and published the first edition of his «Institutes» in Basel in 1536. During the year or so that he lived in Basel, he became acquainted with the ideas of Oecolampadius on church discipline and became his most important disciple. It is not known whether he met Bullinger or any of the other delegates who approved the First Helvetic Confession in January.

¹⁰ Ibid. no. 925a, pp. 670-674.

¹¹ The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes, ed. by *Philip Schaff*, rev. by *David S. Schaff*, 3 vols., 6th edition, New York 1931 (reprinted Grand Rapids 1983), vol. 3, pp. 229-230.

The Consensus Tigurinus

Toward the end of this twenty-year period, another confession of sorts brought Bullinger and Calvin together, and involved the Basel church. After two years of negotiations, Bullinger and Calvin had finally been able to make an agreement on the Eucharist, the «Consensus Tigurinus» of 1549. The «Consensus» was both a unifying and a divisive document. It was unifying in that it unified Zurich and Geneva on this crucial doctrine of the Eucharist. But it was also divisive because it was not accepted by all the Swiss churches. The Bernese did not agree to the «Consensus», and the Basel church also refused to accept it, apparently because it was not consulted about the agreement¹².

Basel's reaction to the Consensus may have been due in part to the fact that a certain antipathy had been growing between Calvin and the Basel pastors and humanists in the 1540s¹³, and in fact there also seems to have been a cooling between Basel and Zurich in the late 1540s. Therefore, while Bullinger came closer to Calvin with «Consensus», he began to draw away from the Baslers at the same time. This would become more apparent during the controversies in Geneva in the early 1550s – the Bolsec controversy over predestination, the discipline conflict, the Servetus Affair, and the Toleration Controversy. Though Bullinger fully agreed with the Baslers concerning Bolsec and predestination, he agreed with Calvin and drew closer to him when it came to Servetus and toleration.

Bolsec and the Controversy over Predestination

In October of 1551, Jerome Bolsec publicly denounced Calvin's teaching on predestination. He claimed that it was unbiblical and heretical, and that it made God the author of sin. Bolsec was arrested and tried for heresy. He appealed to the judgment of the churches of Bern, Basel and Zurich, and the Genevan Council agreed to request the advice of these churches. The replies of these churches called for moderation and reconciliation. None of them totally supported Calvin's position, and generally they were more favorable to Bolsec than to Calvin¹⁴.

¹² Uwe Plath's contention that there is no evidence that the Basel church accepted the «Consensus» is convincing. Uwe Plath, *Calvin und Basel in den Jahren 1552-1556, Zürich und Basel 1974*, (BSHST 22 / Basler Beiträge zur Geschichtswissenschaft 133), pp. 28, 179 [abbr.: Plath, Calvin].

¹³ See *ibid.* pp. 26-35.

¹⁴ See *James MacKinnon, Calvin and the Reformation*, New York 1962, [abbr.: MacKinnon, Calvin], pp. 116-120 for a summary of the controversy. For the record of the controversy, including the correspondence, see *Registres de la Compagnie des pasteurs de Genève*, publ. sous la direction des Archives d'État de Genève..., vol. 1ff,

The letters from Bullinger are particularly interesting and important. Bullinger clearly disagreed with Calvin, while not openly agreeing with Bolsec. Bullinger expressed his own mild doctrine of single predestination, and he refused to endorse Calvin's harsher doctrine of election and reprobation. He informed Calvin that many people were offended by his doctrine, and that they inferred from it that Calvin made God the author of sin¹⁵.

Calvin was stung by this criticism; he clearly felt unfriendly toward Bullinger because of his lack of support and criticism. He complained to Farel that the Zurichers had been rude in their official letters and that Bullinger himself «haughtily despises our necessities.» Among other things he wrote to Bullinger that it was «extremely absurd» to defend Bolsec¹⁶. It was more than a year later, in April 1553, that the two men repaired their friendship¹⁷.

Calvin also complained bitterly about the Basel pastors' response. In their letter to the ministers of Geneva in November 1552, they practically agreed with Bolsec, giving precedence to faith, rather than election, in the matter of justification¹⁸. Calvin denounced Myconius for being cold and indecisive, and he criticized Simon Sulzer and the other pastors at Basel for failing to support him¹⁹. The Basel pastors thus had no more sympathy for Calvin's position against Bolsec than Bullinger had²⁰.

In late 1551 and early 1552, then, Bullinger and the Basel pastors were united in their opposition to Calvin's teaching on predestination, although no one was willing to defend Bolsec himself. Soon, however, an occasion would arise that brought Bullinger to Calvin's defense. The Servetus Affair was the solvent that dissolved the bonds between Bullinger and the Baslers. In fact, at the climax of Calvin's long battle over discipline at Geneva, Bullinger even defended Calvin's viewpoint on Christian discipline, the point of view that Calvin had learned from Oecolampadius and Bucer. It was not that Bullinger was convinced by Calvin – he continued to oppose any sort of independent church disci-

Genève 1964ff. (THR55ff), pp. 80-128 [abbr.: Registres Genève]; and The Register of the Company of Pastors of Geneva in the Time of Calvin, *Philip Edgcumbe Hughes* (ed. and trans.), Grand Rapids (MI) 1966, pp. 137-186 [abbr.: Register (Hughes)].

¹⁵ CO 14, 208, 210, 214-215. See *J. Wayne Baker*, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant, the Other Reformed Tradition*, Athens (OH) 1980, pp. 34-36 for a fuller description of the correspondence on Bolsec, and pp. 27-54 for Bullinger's doctrine of predestination.

¹⁶ CO 14, 218-219, 252; *Jules Bonnet*, *Letters of John Calvin*, New York 1972, vol 2, pp. 328-329, 333 [abbr.: Bonnet].

¹⁷ CO 14, 510-511, 513-514; Bonnet II 402-404.

¹⁸ CO 8, 235-236.

¹⁹ CO 14, 213; Bonnet II 327. For the correspondence concerning the Bolsec affair, see CO 8, 205-242 (see also CO 14, 191-307 for letters pertaining to Bolsec); Registres Genève I 119-130; Register, (Hughes) pp. 169-185.

²⁰ When Myconius wrote to Bullinger in January of 1552 expressing some doubts about the whole matter, Bullinger responded with a short statement of what he believed and taught on predestination. CO 14, 250, 282-283.

pline –, but he felt that Calvin was beset by enemies who wished to destroy the Reformation in Geneva. Those enemies included the «radical» humanists of Basel who totally disagreed with Calvin's treatment of Servetus and initiated the Toleration Controversy in 1554.

The Discipline Conflict and the Servetus Affair

The Servetus affair began in Geneva on August 14th, 1553, when Servetus was imprisoned. It ended on October 27th with his execution. The discipline conflict came to a head in early September and was concluded in mid-December. The discipline conflict, which had begun years prior to 1553, puts the Servetus affair within its proper framework.

The Discipline Conflict

The conflict between Calvin and the Council over who controlled Christian discipline in Geneva had begun in the early 1540s. In the late 1540s and early 1550s, Calvin's opponents were led by Ami Perrin. This conflict entered its most crucial stage in February 1553 when the Perrinist faction came to power in the yearly elections. They felt that the time was ripe for a serious challenge of Calvin. Their attack was direct: they denied that the Consistory had the power to excommunicate. Philibert Berthelier, one of Calvin's most stubborn enemies, had been excommunicated by the Consistory in 1551 for publicly stating that he was «just as good a man as Calvin.» His excommunication had been repeatedly renewed because of his rebellious attitude and his refusal to accept the authority of the Consistory. In early September 1553 the Council annulled his excommunication and allowed him to communicate if he wished to do so, despite Calvin's vehement protests²¹.

The Servetus case must be viewed within the larger framework of Calvin's continuing conflict with the Perrinist faction in Geneva. In fact, the argument has been made that Servetus counted on the aid of Calvin's enemies, or conversely that the Perrinists meant to use the Servetus Affair to discredit Calvin²². Calvin himself certainly saw a connection between the manner in which the Council handled the Servetus case and its enmity toward him²³.

²¹ Registres Genève I 147; II: 48-49; Register (Hughes), pp. 205, 285-286.

²² For a treatment of these arguments, see *Roland H. Bainton, Hunted Heretic, the Life and Death of Michael Servetus, 1511-1553*, Boston 1960, [abbr.: Bainton, Servetus], pp. 172-181.

²³ He wrote to Bullinger on September 7, 1553, that the Genevan Council would write to him for his judgment of Servetus. «Even with our loud protests they give you this

Others presumed a connection between the Servetus case and Calvin's other problems in Geneva. Bullinger wrote to Johannes Haller at Bern: «I believe that he [Servetus] fled to Geneva by the providence of God so that she [Geneva] might cleanse herself from the charge of blasphemy and heresy among many people by giving him a deserving punishment. But I hear that they [the Perrinists] actually protect that most good-for-nothing fellow out of hatred for Calvin»²⁴. Wolfgang Musculus wrote to Bullinger from Bern that Servetus hoped «to make full use of the ill-will with which the magnates there attack Calvin»²⁵. Haller wrote to Bullinger that dissension and bitterness was increasing at Geneva, and that Calvin's enemies were trying to destroy him because of «the rigor of the ecclesiastical discipline that has been established there... It is oppressive and intolerable to those who are powerful...»²⁶.

At the height of the Servetus case, then, the long conflict at Geneva over discipline was entering its final and most crucial stage. The two issues, the Servetus trial and the crisis over discipline, were closely intertwined. The Perrinist faction maneuvered in the background to attempt to get an acquittal for Servetus. Perrin himself argued for a verdict of not guilty²⁷. Calvin claimed that Perrin had even attempted to secure Servetus' release after he had been found guilty²⁸. The majority on the Council knew, however, that Servetus had to be dealt with severely, especially considering that the Swiss churches unanimously agreed on such a punishment²⁹. He was executed on October 27th.

This was the context, then, in which the Council lifted Berthelier's excommunication in early September. The pastors protested the Council's action, and requested that the magistrates follow the «Ecclesiastical Ordinances». The councilmen answered that they were following the «Ordinances», that the «Ordinances» had never given the Consistory the power of excommunication, and that this authority resided in the Council alone. After a few weeks of continuing disagreement, and one month after the execution of Servetus, the Council wrote to the councils of Bern, Basel, Zurich and Schaffhausen to ask their opinions about discipline and excommunication³⁰.

The reply from Bern was short and to the point: in Bern there was no excommunication³¹. The reply from Basel has a more complex history. The actual

annoyance, but they have come to such madness and rage that everything we say to them is suspected.» CO 14, 611; Bonnet II 427.

²⁴ CO 14, 624.

²⁵ CO 14, 628.

²⁶ CO 14, 625.

²⁷ CO MacKinnon, Calvin, pp. 148-150.

²⁸ CO 14, 657.

²⁹ CO 8, 808-823.

³⁰ Registres Genève II 48-54; Register (Hughes), pp. 285-289, 291-292. For the letter from the Genevan Council to the Zurich Council, see CO 14, 685-686.

³¹ CO 14, 691.

situation at Basel was similar to that in Zurich and Bern. Oecolampadius' plan had never really been implemented; Basel had never had anything like Geneva's Consistory. The magistrates were, in essence, in control of excommunication and it was not often used. Christian discipline in Basel was community discipline in the hands of the civil authorities, more or less along the lines of Bullinger's theory.

What, then, was Basel's response to the Genevan Council's request³² for its opinion on the matter of a church court exercising the power of excommunication? Sulzer wrote two letters to Calvin and the Genevan pastors. His first letter, of December 21st, discovered only recently³³, was never sent to Calvin, but it throws a totally different light on the letter that he wrote and sent to Calvin two days later, on December 23rd³⁴.

In the first letter, Sulzer bragged to Calvin that Basel had a harsher discipline than Geneva because in Basel the offender was excluded not only from the Eucharist but also from the civil community. Sulzer explained that the offender was warned three times by the ecclesiastical judges (*censores*, *Bannherren*), then, a fourth time by the Council. If he continued in disobedience, the judges of the church excommunicated him. Sulzer portrayed the Council's role as simply one of support and protection of the process, so that the offenders «might understand that the magistrate approves of the ecclesiastical laws.» He wanted Calvin to understand that the ecclesiastical judges, not the Council, excommunicated the offender³⁵.

The true purpose of the fourth warning by the Council was, however, quite different from Sulzer's interpretation. It gave the Council the right to supervise ecclesiastical discipline. If there was doubt about that in anyone's mind, the Basel Council decided two days after Sulzer's first letter to Calvin, on December 23, to clarify the Ordinance. According to the «Clarification» (*Erläuterung*), the Council must punish the offender with fines, imprisonment, or exile if he ignored the fourth warning from the Council. Or the Council could «order» the ecclesiastical judges to punish the offender «with the ban»; but the ecclesiastical judges could not exercise excommunication without such a command from the

³² A German translation of the letter is printed in Plath, Calvin pp. 278-279.

³³ Printed in Plath, Calvin, pp. 279-280; see pp. 98-111 for Plath's description of the contents of the letter and its implications.

³⁴ CO 14, 711-713.

³⁵ The situation in Basel is also discussed by *Walther Köhler*, *Zürcher Ehegericht und Genfer Consistorium*, vol. 1: *Das Zürcher Ehegericht und seine Auswirkungen in der Deutschen Schweiz zur Zeit Zwinglis*, Leipzig 1932, (QASRG 7), pp. 300-302, 280. See also *Walther Köhler*, *Zürcher Ehegericht und Genfer Consistorium*, vol. 2: *Das Ehe- und Sittengericht in den süddeutschen Reichsstädten, dem Herzogtum Württemberg und in Genf*, Leipzig 1942, (QASRG 10), p. 611.

magistrate³⁶. There could be no doubt now. All discipline, including excommunication, was in the hands of the magistrate. This was precisely what the Genevan Council wished to have — total control of Christian discipline, community discipline rather than church discipline.

On the same day, December 23, Sulzer wrote the second letter to Calvin, but now his interpretation and the tone were quite different from two days earlier. Rather than boasting of a pure church discipline at Basel, Sulzer now wished that «a genuine discipline» might be established in the Basel church³⁷. The altered tone of his second letter probably reflects a small controversy in Basel over the issue of discipline between the 21st and the 23rd of December.

Sulzer led the church party in this controversy, the party that advocated the sort of church discipline that Sulzer described in his first letter to Calvin. The other party, which favored the Zwinglian type of discipline, was led by Bonifacius Amerbach, a consultant to the Council, and included other enemies of Calvin such as Castellio. Though the details of this controversy in 1553 are unknown, Amerbach had led an earlier fight, in the 1530s, to subordinate the church to the Basel government³⁸. In any case, the Council settled whatever controversy still existed with the «Clarification» of December 23.

Though the Basel Council's own letter to the Council at Geneva was non-committal, favoring neither party, the council enclosed a copy of the Basel Discipline Ordinance, and the recent «Clarification»³⁹. There could now be little confusion about the viewpoint of the Basel magistrates.

The most interesting replies came from Zurich. Surely the Perrinists in Geneva expected support from the Zurich magistrates. But they did not know that Calvin had secretly written to Bullinger and the pastors in Zurich, pleading for their support against that «godless faction» of men «who were not ashamed noisily to defend the cause of Servetus.» His opponents, the Perrinists, were attempting to overthrow true religion and godly discipline. The aid of the Zurichers had been crucial in the Servetus case. But the battle was not over. The same «evil men» who defended Servetus wished to destroy the Reformed church in Geneva. So the Zurich pastors had to persuade the Council in Zurich to give the correct reply to the Council in Geneva⁴⁰.

Astonishingly, Bullinger complied with Calvin's request, despite his own aversion to the idea of an ecclesiastical court with a jurisdiction independent of

³⁶ «Erläuterung der Basler Bannordnung vom 23. Dezember 1553.» Plath, Calvin, p. 281.

³⁷ CO 14, 712; Plath, Calvin, p. 106.

³⁸ Plath, Calvin, pp. 106-108.

³⁹ Ibid. p. 108; for the letter, see p. 282.

⁴⁰ CO 14, 674-677; Bonnet II 441-446. For a fuller treatment of Bullinger and Calvin on discipline and Bullinger's aid to Calvin in 1553, see *J. Wayne Baker, Christian Discipline and the Early Reformed Tradition: Bullinger and Calvin*, in: *Calviniana, Ideas and Influence of John Calvin*, Robert V. Schnucker (ed.), Kirksville (MO) 1988, (*Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies* 10), pp. 107-119.

the magistrate. In a letter of December 12, Bullinger made it clear to Calvin that he had gone to a considerable amount of trouble to avert an unfavorable reply from the Zurich Council⁴¹. The Zurich Council suggested in its letter that the Genevans should retain their present system even though it differed from Zurich's⁴², thus assuring Calvin's victory in the Discipline Controversy.

Why did Bullinger go against all his principles and beliefs on Christian discipline to support Calvin in this controversy? In part because Calvin had convinced him that the same Perrinist party that had attempted to protect Servetus was now attempting to silence the gospel in Geneva. I suspect however, that it also may have been due in part to the Baslers' reaction to the Servetus crisis.

The Servetus Crisis

Calvin received the full support of Bullinger and the Zurich pastors in the matter of Servetus. The Zurich pastors wrote: «We judge that one should work against him with great faith and diligence, especially since our churches are ill spoken-of abroad as if they were heretical and supporters of heretics. God's holy providence has presented this opportunity whereby you may at the same time purge both yourselves and us from this perverse suspicion of evil»⁴³.

Though the Basel ministers said that they agreed with the Zurichers⁴⁴, their reply did not please Calvin entirely. As he put it, «The Baslers were prudent. The Zurichers were the most vehement of all»⁴⁵. All the Swiss Reformed churches agreed that Servetus was a heretic and must be punished. None of the official Swiss replies to the Genevans expressed any doubts about the issue, but there were some individuals who had doubts, even among those who basically agreed with Calvin.

More than six weeks prior to Servetus' execution, Calvin complained to Sulzer about lack of support from some of the Baslers⁴⁶. Three weeks later, Sulzer wrote to Bullinger that there were those who were quite upset by the tactics of Calvin and the Genevan Council toward Servetus⁴⁷. On October 14, Vergerio wrote to Bullinger, «A friend writes to me from Basel that Servetus does not

⁴¹ CO 14, 697-698.

⁴² CO 14, 699-700.

⁴³ CO 8, 558; also quoted by Bainton. Servetus, pp. 203-204.

⁴⁴ CO 8, 820-823.

⁴⁵ CO 14, 657; Bonnet II 436. For the response from Basel, see CO 8, 820-823; for the response of the Zurich pastors, see CO 8, 555-558. See CO 8, 457-872, for all the relevant documents on Servetus (civil and ecclesiastical documents and correspondence).

⁴⁶ CO 14, 615; Bonnet II 429.

⁴⁷ CO 14, 627.

lack supporters there»⁴⁸. One week before the execution, Philip Gallitius reported to Bullinger that a refugee scholar from Italy, whom Gallitius did not name, supported the cause of Servetus⁴⁹. Then, after Servetus' execution, the humanists at Basel attacked Calvin vehemently.

Criticism was widespread enough that Calvin published a defense of the treatment of Servetus early in 1554, in his «Defense of the Orthodox Faith». On December 30, Calvin wrote Bullinger that his book against Servetus would soon be published, and that he intended to include Bullinger's (i.e., the Zurich pastors') letter⁵⁰ about Servetus if Bullinger did not object. In the same letter, he complained about those men at Basel, the radical humanists, who had protested so loudly against the execution of Servetus⁵¹.

All this was happening during the Discipline Controversy in November and December 1553. It seems quite possible, in the light of these reports of support for Servetus, that Bullinger felt compelled to come to Calvin's aid on Christian discipline in order to strengthen the forces of good and godliness against the forces of evil. Despite their differences on the necessity of a Consistory for purposes of Christian discipline, Calvin and Bullinger were of one mind when it came to Servetus: it was absurd to consider tolerating someone who threatened the stability and existence of the Christian community – such heretics should be put to death.

In his «Defense of the Orthodox Faith», published early in 1554, Calvin directly addressed the question, «Whether Christian judges are permitted to punish heretics». His answer was unequivocal – it was the magistrate's God-given duty to put heretics and blasphemers to death. Significantly, Calvin's biblical justification came from Deuteronomy 13, which commands that false prophets be put to death⁵².

In April, Calvin reminded Bullinger that he had encouraged Calvin to write the «Defense». Some might portray him as a «master of ferocity and atrocity», who now «defames with a pen the dead man who perished at my hands.» And there were others who were less critical but wished that Calvin had never dealt with the question of punishing heretics. «But», he went on to Bullinger, «it is well that I have you as the partner in my fault, if indeed there is fault, because you advised me and encouraged me to do it. Therefore, prepare yourself for the struggle»⁵³. It appears, then, that Bullinger had been an instigator in encourag-

⁴⁸ CO 14, 642.

⁴⁹ CO 14, 649.

⁵⁰ CO 8, 555-558.

⁵¹ CO 14, 723; Bonnet II 448. Calvin had written another treatise against Castellio and Curione («De Curione») which he decided not to publish. For Curione, see *Markus Kutter, Celio Secondo Curione, sein Leben und sein Werk (1503-1569)*, Basel 1955. (Basler Beiträge zur Geschichtswissenschaft 54).

⁵² CO 8, 461, 476.

⁵³ CO 15, 124; Bonnet III 86.

ing Calvin to write the «Defense». That fits not only with what we know about Bullinger's attitude toward Servetus, but also with his beliefs about how to deal with heretics. Since the early 1530s, Bullinger had advocated that it was the magistrate's duty to execute heretics⁵⁴. There is no evidence that he ever changed his mind. This letter also demonstrates how far Bullinger had been pulled into Calvin's web by the Servetus Affair, which resulted in a loosening of the ties between Bullinger and the Baslers. Inasmuch as the Baslers were most critical of Calvin's treatment of Servetus and of his «Defense», it was inevitable that there would be a certain estrangement between Bullinger and Basel.

The Toleration Controversy, 1554-1555

The reaction from Basel was not absolutely uniform. Sulzer, who was now the chief pastor of the Basel church, wrote to Bullinger and praised Calvin's opinions on punishing heretics as expressed in the «Defense»⁵⁵. But there was a crescendo of criticism from the humanists in Basel⁵⁶. The most eloquent response came from Sebastian Castellio.

Calvin and Castellio had known each other for several years. Castellio had become Calvin's close friend in Strasbourg in 1540, and then Calvin's colleague in Geneva from 1541 to 1544⁵⁷. When Castellio was denied ordination in 1544 because of disagreements with Calvin⁵⁸, he left Geneva for Basel, where he spent several years as a poor scholar. Then, in 1553, he became Professor of Greek at the University of Basel. In March of 1554, under the pseudonym of Martinus Bellius, he published a book with the title «Whether Heretics Should Be Persecuted» (*De haeticis an sint persequendi*). He included long passages defending religious toleration from Erasmus, several Protestant reformers, including Luther, Castellio himself, and quotations from several church fathers.

⁵⁴ See *J. Wayne Baker*, *Church, State, and Dissent, the Crisis of the Swiss Reformation, 1531-1536*, in: *ChH* 57, 1988, 135-152.

⁵⁵ *CO* 15, 44.

⁵⁶ There were also some outside of Basel who did not agree entirely with Calvin's argument in the «Defense». For instance, Nikolaus Zurkinden, Chancellor of Bern, wrote to Calvin on February 10, 1554, that even though he detested the errors of Servetus, he disagreed with Calvin about using capital punishment for heresy. The use of the sword had been futile with the Anabaptists, and it would be no more useful to employ it now. *CO* 15, 19-22. *Eduard Bähler*, *Nikolaus Zurkinden von Bern 1506-1588, ein Vertreter der Toleranz im Jahrhundert der Reformation*, Zürich, 1912, pp. 133-139. Cf. Musculus' letter to Blarer: *CO* 15, 46-47.

⁵⁷ The standard work on Castellio is *Ferdinand Buisson*, *Sébastien Castellion, sa vie et son oeuvre (1515-1563)*, 2 vols., Paris 1892 (Reprint: Nieuwkoop 1964) [abbr.: Buisson, Castellion].

⁵⁸ See the letter of recommendation for Castellio from Calvin and the pastors of Geneva which describes the disagreements. *CO* 11, 674-676.

Even Calvin appeared in two short quotations. Although Castellio did not even mention the execution of Servetus in the book, no one doubted the connections⁵⁹.

Late in March, Calvin wrote to Bullinger, «a book has recently been published in Basel under false names, in which Castellio and N. [Curione] argue that heretics should not be coerced by the sword.» Then Calvin expressed the wish that the pastors at Basel would finally act responsibly and prevent that evil opinion from spreading further⁶⁰.

Theodore Beza also wrote to Bullinger, guessing correctly that Castellio was the author of the book⁶¹. In August, Beza published a refutation of Castellio's «Whether Heretics Should Be Persecuted». Beza's book, entitled «Whether Heretics Should Be Punished by the Civil Magistrate» («De haereticis a civili magistratu puniendis»), argued that it was the duty of the magistrate to punish heresy, even to death. This response precipitated a long, bitter battle in the Reformed churches over the issue of toleration.

It is evident that Calvin and Beza held a certain enmity toward Basel, an enmity and estrangement that was intensified by Castellio's defense of toleration and by the chorus of criticism from the Basel humanists. Clearly, Bullinger also was estranged. When Castellio died, ten years after the controversy, Bullinger wrote, «The best thing has happened: Castellio of Basel has died»⁶². It is significant that he phrased it, «Castellio of Basel».

Conclusion

Bullinger and Calvin continued to agree on the Eucharist and worked toward universal approval of the «Consensus» in the Swiss Reformed churches. Bullinger and Calvin, and then Bullinger and Beza, also agreed on the treatment of heretics. If heretics were not punished, the entire Christian community would be

⁵⁹ *Hans Rudolf Guggisberg*, *Basel in the Sixteenth Century, Aspects of the City Republic before, during and after the Reformation*, St. Louis (MO) 1982, pp. 57-60; for a summary of Castellio's argument in the Preface, see Mac Kinnon, *Calvin*, pp. 156-157. For descriptions of Castellio's arguments for toleration, see Buisson, I 393-414; *Roland H. Bainton*, *The Travail of Religious Liberty*, New York 1958, pp. 97-124; *Roland H. Bainton, et al.*, *Castellioniana, Quatre études sur Sébastien Castellion et l'idée de la tolérance*, Leiden 1951; Sebastian Castellio, *Concerning Heretics, Whether they are to be persecuted and How they are to be treated*, *Roland H. Bainton (transl.)*, New York 1935, pp. 3-117 (Introduction); *Hans Rudolf Guggisberg*, *Sebastian Castellio im Urteil seiner Nachwelt vom Späthumanismus bis zur Aufklärung*, Basel 1956, (Basler Beiträge zur Geschichtswissenschaft 57).

⁶⁰ CO 15, 95-96; Bonnet III 34-35.

⁶¹ CO 15, 97.

⁶² *Philip Schaff*, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 8: *Modern Christianity, the Swiss Reformation*, Reprint of the Third Edition, Grand Rapids (MI) 1988, p. 626.

tainted and ruined. And they even agreed that it was the Christian magistrate who must punish heretics. So they spoke with one voice on the topic of toleration. But they did not agree on church discipline and the relationship of the church to the civil government within the Christian community. Though Calvin had won his battle over discipline in Geneva with the help of Bullinger in 1553, he and Beza had to fight the battle again in the Pays de Vaud later in the 1550s, and it would again flare up in the late 1560s in Heidelberg after Calvin's death. Bullinger was in the forefront, fighting for the magisterial discipline in which he believed, but it was a battle that the Calvinists would eventually win in the Reformed churches.

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