The Trinity in the Theology of Michael Servetus

Michael Servetus'un Teolojisinde Teslis

Talha Fortacı

Dr. Arş. Gör., Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey Üniversitesi

talhaforta@gmail.com & https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6539-9302

Öz

Hristiyanlığın en temel dogması olan teslis, Baba, Oğul ve Kutsal Ruh şeklinde temsil edilen üçlü bir Tanrı tasavvurunu ifade eder. Mevcut haliyle teslis, Hristiyanlık tarihinde çok önemli yeri olan konsillerde alınan kararlar doğrultusunda Hristiyanlığın resmi inanç esası halini almıştır. En genel izahla teslis inancı, Baba, Oğul ve Kutsal Ruh olarak ifadelendirilen bu üç uknumun her birinin Tanrı olduğuna, tanrısallık bakımından aralarında herhangi bir üstünlük veyahut farklılık bulunmadığına iman etmektir ve bir Hristiyan olabilmenin en temel şartı bu dogmayı kabul etmektir. Bununla birlikte, Hristiyanlık tarihinde kendilerini "Hristiyan" olarak tanımlamalarına rağmen teslisi reddeden bazı kişi ve grupların varlığı da bir hakikattir. Bu isimlerden en önemlisi bugün Üniteryanizm olarak bilinen hareketin de kurucusu kabul edilen Michael Servetus'tur. Servetus, teslis hakkında ciddi eleştiriler yaptığı bazı eserler yazmıştır. O, teslisin Kutsal Kitap'ta geçmediğini söylemekte ve Hristiyanlığın özünde bu dogmanın yer almadığını iddia etmektedir. Servetus'a göre teslis, Yunan felsefesinin etkisiyle şekillenmiş bir kavramdır ve Hristiyanlığı tahrif etmektedir. Döneminde oldukça ses getiren bu itirazlar zamanın Protestan ve Katolik ilahiyatçılarını oldukça kızdırmıştır ve Servetus 1553 yılında Katolik-Protestan iş birliğiyle Cenevre'de yakılarak öldürülmüştür. Bu çalışmada Michael Servetus'un dinî düşüncesi özellikle teslise bakışı bağlamında incelenmiş ve geleneksel teslis anlayışına getirdiği eleştiriler analiz edilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Dinler Tarihi, Hristiyanlık, Teslis, Michael Servetus, Üniteryanizm.*

Abstract

The Trinity (taslīs in Arabic), which constitutes the most fundamental dogma of Christianity, expresses a triune conception of God represented as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In its current form, the Trinity has been made the official belief basis of Christianity following the decisions taken in the councils, which occupy a significant place in the history of Christianity. In the most general terms, Trinity is the belief that each of these three entities, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is God and that there is no superiority or difference between them in divinity. Acceptance of the Trinity is necessary for becoming a Christian. Nevertheless, it is well-known that in the history of Christianity, some individuals and groups rejected the Trinity despite identifying themselves as "Christians". The most notable of these names is Michael Servetus, who is also considered the founder of the movement known today as Unitarianism. Servetus wrote some books in which he seriously criticized the Holy Trinity. According to Servetus, the Trinity is not mentioned in the Holy Bible, and this dogma has no place in the essence of Christianity. The Trinity is a construct fashioned by Greek philosophy and falsifies Christianity. These objections, which made an overwhelming impression in his time, greatly angered the Protestant and Catholic theologians. Servetus was burned to death in Geneva in 1553 due to Catholic and Protestant collaboration. This study examines the religious thought of Michael Servetus, particularly his interpretation of the Trinity, and analyzes his challenges to the traditional understanding of the Trinity.

Key Words: *History of Religions, Christianity, Trinity, Michael Servetus, Unitarianism.*

Özet

Teslis (İngilizce Trinity, Grekçe Trias, Latince Trintas ve Arapça Teslis) Hristiyanlıkta Baba-Oğul-Kutsal Ruh şeklinde formüle edilmiş üç unsurlu ilâhlık anlayışını ifade eder. Teslis (triados) kavramı, miladi 180 dolaylarında ilk defa Antakya Patriği Teofilos tarafından kullanılmıştır. Günümüzdeki şekliyle sistematik bir dogmayı kastetmeyen Teofilos, 'Triados' ile Tanrı, Tanrı'nın kelimesi ve Tanrı'nın hikmeti (ruhu) gibi anlamlara işaret etmiştir. Dördüncü asırda doktrinleşecek olan teslis akidesini çağrıştıracak biçimde yorumlayan kişi ise ilk Latin kilise babası Tertullian'dır (ö. 225).

Muhteva itibariyle bakıldığında teslis, en genel tanımıyla Baba, Oğul ve Kutsal Ruh şeklinde formüle edilen bir Tanrı tasavvurudur ve bu bakımdan Hristiyanlığın en temel dogmasıdır. Geleneksel Hristiyan inancına göre, tanrısal doğada Baba, Oğul ve Kutsal Ruh olmak üzere üç uknum yer alır. Bu üçlü, kendi aralarındaki ilişkileri bakımından farklı olsalar da asıl itibariyle bir tanrıdır. Baba, babalık itibariyle Oğul'dan, Oğul, oğul olması dolayısıyla Baba'dan, Kutsal Ruh ise hem Baba hem de Oğul'dan geldiğinden diğer ikisinden farklıdır ve teslisin unsurları arasındaki farklılık sadece bundan ibarettir.

Hristiyanlık tarihinde yukarıda açıklanan teslis anlayışından farklı olarak Oğul İsa ile Kutsal Ruh'un tanrısal bir öz taşımadığını savunan ve dolayısıyla bu iki unsurun ilahlığını reddeden bazı kişi ve gruplar vardır. Bu isimlerin en önemlilerinden biri, Üniteryan Kilise'nin de kurucusu kabul edilen İspanyol hekim ve teolog Michael Servetus'tur. O, dinî görüşlerinden dolayı Calvin ve Katolik Kilisesi iş birliğiyle katledilmiştir.

Servetus'un teslis düşüncesi incelendiğinde onun bu doktrine kategorik olarak temelden karşı olduğu görülür. O, ilk eserine İsa Mesih'in bir hipostaz değil,

Summary

The Trinity (Trias in Greek and Trinitas in Latin) describes a three-element concept of deity as Father-Son-Holy Spirit. The Trinity (triados) was first used by Theophilus, the Patriarch of Antioch, around 180 AD. Theophilus, who did not mean a systematic dogma as it is known today, was referring to God, the word of God, and the wisdom (spirit) of God by the word 'triados.' Tertullian (d. 225), the first Latin church father, was the first to interpret it in a way that evoked the doctrine of the Trinity, which would evolve into a doctrine in the fourth century.

In terms of its content, the Trinity is, in its most general definition, a conception of God formulated as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, constituting Christianity's most fundamental dogma. According to traditional Christian belief, there are three entities in the divine nature: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Even though these three are distinct in their relations, they essentially consist of one God. The Father differs from the Son in his paternity, the Son differs from the Father in his sonship, and the Holy Spirit differs from the other two in coming from both the Father and the Son. This is the only difference between the elements of the Trinity.

Some individuals and groups in the history of Christianity denied the divinity of the Son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, arguing their lack of divine essence. One of the most influential of these figures was the Spanish physician and theologian Michael Servetus, who is regarded as the founder of the Unitarian Church. He was murdered for his religious opinions as a result of the collaboration between Calvin and the Catholic Church.

Examining the trinitarian thought of Servetus reveals that he is categorically

bir insan olduğunu ve bunun hem ilk dönem kilise Babaları tarafından hem de Kutsal Yazılar tarafından açıkça anlatıldığını söyleyerek başlar ve geleneğe karşı farklı bir savunma mekanizması geliştirmiş olur. Mesih, mucizevi bir şekilde doğan Tanrı'nın oğludur. Bir hipostaz değil, gerçek bir oğuldur. Kutsal Ruhun ayrı bir Tanrı olarak tesis edilişi de büyük bir hatadır. Kutsal metinlerde buna dair herhangi bir bilgi bulunmamaktadır. Evet Kutsal Kitap'ta Baba'dan bahsedilmektedir, Oğul'dan bahsedilmektedir ve hatta Kutsal Ruh'tan da bahsedilmektedir fakat mevcut haliyle var olan kurumsal teslis doktrinini destekleyecek formatta herhangi bir ima yoktur. Bu bakımdan teslis ne mantıkla bağdaştırılabilir ne de Kutsal Kitap'la temellendirilebilir bir doktrin değildir.

Servetus, kiliseyi baştan aşağı yozlaştıran ve onu gerçek temelinden uzaklaştıranın Baba ve Oğul'un eş-tözsel olup olmadığına ilişkin metafizik Yunan spekülasyonlarının Hristiyanlığa girişi olduğunu düşünmektedir. Ona göre ilahi doğadaki şahısların birliği anlayışı Kutsal Kitap ile çelişkili ve karmaşık bir icattır. Kutsal Kitap'taki açıklamalar birden fazla Tanrı'yı değil, yalnızca Tanrı kelimesinin farklı kullanımlarını ima eder ve açıkça Tanrı ve Mesih'i ayrı varlıklar olarak gösterir. Kutsal Kitap'ın çeşitli pasajları Kutsal Ruh'un ayrı bir tanrısal varlık olmadığını; bilakis Tanrı'nın kendisinin bir faaliyeti olduğunu gösterir. Skolastik ilahiyatçıların ileri sürdüğü argümanlar Kutsal Yazılarda belirtilmeyen temellere dayanmaktadır. Kutsal Kitap tamamen saf ve yalın anlamıyla anlaşılmalıdır. Böyle bir okuma Eski ve Yeni Ahit'in açıkça bir Tanrı'yı (Baba) ve bir Mesih'i (Oğul) öğrettiğini ortaya koyar. Eski Ahit tekrar tekrar tek bir Tanrı'ya vurgu yapar. Geleneği körü körüne takip eden bazı ilahiyatçılar ise anlamadıkları kavramlar hakkında tartışarak bunları Kutsal Kitap'a tamamen aykırı bir anlamda/şekilde kullanırlar.

and profoundly opposed to the trinitarian doctrine. He begins his first work by stating that Jesus Christ is human, not hypostasis. Arguing that the humanity of Jesus was demonstrated by the early Church Fathers and the Scriptures, Servetus developed a different defense mechanism against tradition. The Messiah is God's miraculously born son. But he is not a hypostasis but rather a true son. Establishing the Holy Spirit as a separate God is also a gross error and not supported by scripture. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all mentioned in the Bible. However, it does not contain any statements supporting the institutional doctrine of the Trinity in its current form. Therefore, trinitarianism is a doctrine that contradicts logic and cannot be justified biblically.

According to Servetus, the introduction of Greek metaphysical ideas into Christianity about whether the Father and the Son have the same substance contaminated the Church from top to bottom and pushed it away from its genuine foundation. The conception of the unity of persons in the divine nature is a complex invention, contradictory to the Bible. Biblical explanations do not imply more than one God, but only different uses of the word God and reveal God and the Messiah as separate beings. The Bible also demonstrates that the Holy Spirit is not a separate divine being but an agency of God Himself. Scholastic theologians justified the notion of the Trinity with arguments based on sources other than the Holy Scriptures. The Bible must be understood in its most basic and literal sense. Such a reading reveals that the Old and New Testaments teach one true God (the Father) and one true Messiah (the Son). The Old Testament repeatedly emphasizes one God. However, some theologians, blindly adhering to tradition, argue about concepts they do not understand and utilize them in a

Servetus'un teslisi reddediş sebebinin bazı düşüncelerden etkilenmiş olması hasebiyle vuku bulduğu akla gelebilir. Yaptığımız okumalar bağlamında ifade etmek gerekirse, Servetus'un bir kişi veyahut gruptan etkilenerek teslisi reddettiğini söylemek pek makul değildir. Hukuk okumak için Fransa'ya gidişi ve burada yaptığı detaylı Kutsal Kitap okumaları onu teslis hakkında şüpheye düşürmüştür. Akabinde yaptığı daha kapsamlı okumalar sonucunda kesin bir biçimde Hristiyanlıkta teslis diye bir dogmanın olmaması gerektiği kanaatine sahip olmuştur. Eserlerinden anlaşıldığı kadarıyla, önce bu konuda kesin bir kanaate sahip olmuş ve ardından bu düşüncesini ispat etmek için çok farklı yelpazede kaynağa referans yapmıştır. Bunlar arasında yer yer Yahudi ve İslam kaynakları dahi bulunmaktadır.

İlk eserinden son çalışmasına kadar Servetus'un Hristiyanlık düşüncesi incelendiğinde, onun en temel kabullerinden birinin, Tanrı'nın tek ve eşsiz bir Tanrı olduğu doktrini olduğu görülür. Görüşlerinin birçoğu zaman zaman değişme ve gelişme gösterse de İsa Mesih ve teslis hakkındaki doktrini tüm yazıları boyunca tutarlılığını korumuştur. Servetus'un teslis hakkındaki bakış açısı esasen çok yönlüdür. Örneğin De Trinitatis Erroribus'da teslis dogmasının mantıksız olduğunu vurgulayarak rasyonel bir temelde tartışırken, Christianismi Restitutio'da Mesih'in misyonuyla ilgili farklı bir manzara ortaya koyar ve teslisin gereksiz kılındığı alternatif bir soteriolojik sistem geliştirir. O'nun Tanrı tasavvurunda şahıs temelli bir ayrım yoktur; yalnızca vahiy temelinde bir ayrımı kabul eder. Servetus'un teslis eleştirisi tek bir sebebe bağlı değildir. Gerek asli günah görüşü gerekse vaftiz ile ilgili kabulleri de gelenekle çatışmaktadır.

way that is entirely contrary to the Holy Bible.

One may suspect that the reason for his rejection of the Trinity is that he was influenced by some previous opinions. In light of the readings I have done, it is not reasonable to conclude that Servetus rejected Trinity because he was influenced by some individuals or groups. He became skeptical of the Trinity because he went to France to study law and did extensive Bible readings there. Subsequently, from his more comprehensive readings, he concluded that there should be no such dogma as Trinity in Christianity. As far as can be understood from his works, Servetus first had a solid conviction on this issue and then referred to a wide range of sources to support his opinion. Among the sources were even Jewish and Islamic texts.

Examining the Christian thought of Servetus from his first to his last work reveals that one of his most fundamental assumptions is the doctrine that God is one and unique. Although many of his ideas have changed and evolved over time, his doctrine of Jesus Christ and the Trinity has remained consistent throughout his writings. Servetus' view of the Trinity is essentially multi-dimensional. For example, *De Trinitatis Erroribus* emphasizes the irrationality of the trinitarian dogma and discusses it rationally. In contrast, *Christianismi Restitutio* paints a different picture of the mission of the Messiah. He devises an alternative soteriological system that renders the Trinity obsolete. In his conception of God, Servetus does not recognize a distinction based on persons but only on revelation. The Trinitarian criticism of Servetus does not depend on a single reason, and his views of original sin and baptism also contradict tradition.

Introduction[*]

Taslīs is derived from the Arabic word salāsah (three), which means Trinity, making three and calling as three. Trias is the Greek equivalent of this term, which expresses the understanding of divinity with three elements, formulated as Father-Son-Holy Spirit in Christianity. Trinitas is its Latin equivalent.[1] Theophilus, the Patriarch of Antioch, used the concept of the Trinity for the first time around 180 AD. Theophilos, who did not mean systematic dogma in its modern sense, defined 'Triados' as God, God's word, and God's wisdom (spirit).[2] Tertullianus (d.225), known in church history as the father of Latin theology, systematized the Trinity for the first time, and it was indoctrinated in the 4ᵗʰ century.[3] As a result of the new doctrinal divisions that emerged from the 4ᵗʰ century onwards, it is clear that the Trinity gained an *orthodox* character and transformed into the general acceptance of Christians through councils convened by the state.[4] Since then, it has been asserted that while the Christian understanding of God expresses a relative monotheism, it actually corresponds to a trinitarian meaning.[5]

The Trinity is a conception of God formulated as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and it is the most fundamental dogma of Christianity in this regard. According to traditional Christian belief, the divine nature is divided into three uknūms: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Although they have different relationships with one another, they are all gods. The Father is distinct from the Son in paternity, and the Son is distinct from the Father in that he is the Son. The Holy Spirit is different from both the Father and the Son. This is the only distinction among persons of the Trinity. The generation of the Son and Holy Spirit should not be interpreted as from non-exist-

---

[*]   This paper is based on the findings of my Ph.D. dissertation, *Michael Servetus as a Monotheistic Christian and His Understanding of Christianity*, which was submitted to the Social Sciences Institute of Bursa Uludağ University in 2022.

[1]   Jacques Waardenburg, "Teslis", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)* (İstanbul: Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 2011), 40: 548; Mehmet Bayrakdar, *Bir Hıristiyan Dogması Teslis* (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2007), 36-37.

[2]   Waardenburg, "Teslis", 548

[3]   J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 4ᵗʰ ed. (London: Adam&Charles Black Press, 1968), 112-115; Waardenburg, "Teslis", 548.

[4]   Waardenburg, "Teslis", 58.

[5]   Zafer Duygu, *Hıristiyanlık ve İmparatorluk* (İstanbul: Divan Yayınları, 2017), 83.

ence but rather as a process that occurs within God. The Son, the Word, descended from the Father through the divine mind; the Holy Spirit descended through the divine will.[6]

There have always been theologians and groups who reject the doctrine of the Trinity because it undermines the principle of monotheism. In Ancient and Late Antiquity, examples include Ebionites, Dynamic Monarchians, and Arians.[7] Michael Servetus, the 16th-century Spanish physician, and theologian, is also a meaningful name.[8] Because he rejected the doctrine of the Trinity, he was executed due to the collaboration of Calvin, a key figure in the Reformation process, and the Catholic Church. Servetus' views are still held by the Unitarian Church today, and he is regarded as the Church's founder.[9] Servetus, who began studying the Bible in his twenties, claimed that none of the fundamental faiths, such as the traditional doctrine of the Trinity, child baptism, and original sin, were founded on the scriptures and were misinterpreted. Defending the falsity of the Trinity, Servetus proposed that there is a god[10] and that the current religious understanding and other theological assumptions in Christianity should be revised.

---

6   Muhammet Tarakçı, *St. Thomas Aquinas* (İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2006), 129-130; Jon Hoover, "İslâmî Monoteizm ve Teslîs", trans. Zeynep Yücedoğru, *Oksident* 1/1 (2019): 131.

7   For detailed information about these groups, see Turhan Kaçar, "Ebioniteler'den Arius'a: Eskiçağ Doğu Hristiyanlığında İsa Teolojisi Tartışmaları", *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 44/2 (2003): 187-206; Bilal Baş, *Bir Hıristiyan Mezhebi Olarak Aryüsçülük* (İstanbul: Arkeoloji ve Sanat Yayınları, 2016); S. G. F. Brandon, "Ebionites", *A Dictionary of Comparative Religion*, ed. S. G. F. Brandon (New York: Scribner, 1970), 253; Zafer Duygu, "Hıristiyanlığın Erken Yüzyıllarındaki İsa Teolojisi Tartışmalarında 'Dinamik Monarşiyanist' Akıma Özgü 'Monoteist' Kristoloji ve Bunun 'Ebionit' Kristolojiyle Mukayesesi", *Pamukkale Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 31 (13 Nisan 2018): 329-343.

8   Information regarding Michael Servetus' life and works will not be provided here because it would greatly broaden the scope of this study. For more information, see William Hamilton Drummond, *The Life of Michael Servetus* (London: John Chapman Press, 1848).

9   Unitarianism is a theological belief based on a 'monotheistic' concept of God that aims to largely alter the Trinity doctrine, which forms the basis of Christianity. The Unitarian movement has always emphasized the importance of reason and the ability to think independently about religious matters. Rather than the traditional doctrine of Trinity, it accepts a monotheistic idea of God based on the Bible. For more details, see Earl Morse Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism: Socinianism and Its Antecedents* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1945); İsmail Yılmaz, *Üniteryanizm'in Doğuşu ve Bunu Etkileyen Dini Faktörler* (Ph.D. Thesis, Bursa: Uludağ University, 1994).

10   Michael Servetus, *RC*, trans. Christopher A. Hoffman & Marian Hillar (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), 106.

When we look at the works written about Servetus in the modern period, we can see that they are mostly biographies. Some works, however, deal with Servetus' view of Christianity and his general understanding of theology.[11] However, no study that mainly addresses Servetus' views on the Trinity has been conducted. From this point, this article aims to fill this gap. In other words, it investigates Servetus' views on the Trinity as a fundamental Christian doctrine. It attempts to fully reveal Servetus' thoughts on the Trinity on the one hand and determine how these thoughts differ from traditional Christian teaching on the other. It also discusses Servetus' criticism of the Trinity.[12]

1) Servetus' Conception of the Trinity

Servetus was baptized with the popular Spanish name Michael.[13] Although Servetus is commonly known as *Miguel Servet*, his full name is Miguel Serveto Conesa.[14] Servetus came from a Christian family and is considered to have been raised as a Catholic.[15] Servetus received his primary education

---

[11] The most important of these works is Jerome Friedman's Ph.D. dissertation, Michael Servetus: The Theology of Optimism, finished in 1971 at the University of Wisconsin. This thesis aims to provide a comprehensive examination of Servetus' theology. Elisabeth Feist Hirsch's article "Michael Servetus and the Neoplatonic Tradition: God, Christ, and Man," published in Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance, is also significant. The most notable feature of this study is that it illustrates the extent to which Neoplatonist ideas influenced Servetus' theology.

[12] Michael Servetus has written two works about the trinity and the general understanding of Christianity. All three books in question were written in Latin. The first of these three works that are the most important sources for our study is *De Trinitatis Erroribus Libri Septem* (Seven Books on the Errors of the Trinity), published in 1531 in Haguenau, near Basel. The second is *Dialogorum De Trinitate Libri Duo* (Dialogues on the Trinity: Two Books), published in 1532. Earl Morse Wilbur translated these two works into English in 1932 as *The Two Treatises of Servetus on The Trinity* (abbreviated as TTT). Third, his most important work is *Christianismi Restitutio* (Reconstruction of Christianity). This book was published in Vienne on January 3, 1553, in five separate volumes and translated into English by Christopher A. Hoffman and Marian Hillar in 2007 under *The Restoration of Christianity* (abbreviated as RC).

[13] Allwoerden Heinrich Von & Mosheim Johann Lorenz Von, *Historia Michaelis Serveti* (Helmstad: Stanno Buchholtziano, 1728), 4; Drummond, *The Life of Michael Servetus*, 4; Carl Theophilus Odhner, *Michael Servetus, His Life and Teachings* (Philadelphia: Lippincott Company, 1910), 12.

[14] Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism*, 1: 64

[15] Roland Bainton, *Hunted Heretic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1953), 2; Robert Willis, *Servetus and Calvin* (London: Henry S. King & Co, 1877), 5; Mark. W. Harris, *Historical Dictionary of Unitarian Universalism* (Lanham, Md.: The Scarecrow Press, 2004), 425-426. González Ancín argued that the Servetus family was the Converso (the name given to Jews and Muslims or their descendants who converted to Catholicism in the 14th and

from his father, then studied theology at Montearagón Monastery[16] before enrolling at the University of Zaragoza in 1520.[17] He studied natural philosophy, moral philosophy, logic, metaphysics, and occasionally astronomy, as well as art, at this university.[18] Servetus quickly learned Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and Arabic and was appointed as secretary to Quintana, one of Emperor Charles V's abbots, in 1525 due to his language skills.[19]

His father desired him to study law. In 1528, he sent Servetus to the University of Toulouse, France, for this purpose.[20] Toulouse's law school was regarded as one of the best in Europe, and the inquiring spirit of the Renaissance was stronger there than in Zaragoza or Barcelona at the time. The university had 10,000 students and 600 professors.[21] Servetus spent much time there studying the law and the scriptures. His studies on the Bible there provided him with profound theological depth and allowed him to discover

---

15th centuries under Spanish and Portuguese rule). As a result of his research in some notary documents, he stated that Servetus was born with a congenital genital defect, which caused the family to experience extreme anxiety. If this defect were observed, it could create a perception that the family adheres to the tradition of circumcision in Judaism. Thus, although they appeared to have become Christians, they remained crypto-Jews, which would have been the reason for their trial at the inquisition. Ancín also stated that Servetus was a member of the Villanueva family and that this surname was commonly given to Jewish converts in that region. For detailed information, see Miguel González Ancín, *Miguel Servet en España* (1506-1527) (Tudela: Imprenta Castilla, 2017), 24-25.38-40. However, Ancín's views on this matter do not seem correct.

[16] Robert Wallace, *Antitrinitarian Biography* (London: Whitfield, 1850), 1: 420; Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism*, 1: 64; Peter Hughes, "The Early Years of Servetus and the Origin of His Critique of Trinitarian Thought", *JUUH* 37 (2014 2013): 43.

[17] Miguel González Ancín, "Miguel Servet: Su Educaciön y los Médicos con los que Conviviö a Través de Nuevos Documentos", *Revista de la Reial Acadèmia de Medicina de Catalunya* 33/1 (2018): 30-31; Odhner, *Michael Servetus, His Life and Teachings*, 12-13; Willis, *Servetus and Calvin*, 7-8.

[18] Ancín, "Miguel Servet: Su Educaciön y los Médicos con los que Conviviö a Través de Nuevos Documentos", 31.

[19] Odhner, *Michael Servetus, His life and Teachings*, 12-13; John F. Fulton, *Michael Servetus* (New York: Herbert Reichner, 1953), 26; Hughes, "The Early Years of Servetus and the Origin of His Critique of Trinitarian Thought", 55-56; Ephraim Emerton, "Calvin and Servetus", *Harvard Theological Review* 2/2 (1909): 142. Servetus was appointed Quintana's secretary at the age of 17, according to Odher, and 19, according to Drummond. This difference arose because the authors disagreed about Servetus' date of birth.

[20] Drummond, *The Life of Michael Servetus*, 3; Odhner, *Michael Servetus, His Life and Teachings*, 13; Charles D. O'Malley, "The Complementary Careers of Michael Servetus: Theologian and Physician", *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences,* 8/4 (1953): 379; Willis, *Servetus and Calvin*, 10; Fulton, *Michael Servetus*, 26.

[21] Bainton, *Hunted Heretic*, 7; J. Trueta, "The Contribution of Michael Servetus to the Scientific Development of the Renaissance", *BMJ* 2 (1954): 508.

many conflicts between Roman Catholic doctrines and the scripture.[22] He also noticed that some Protestant reform doctrines lacked scriptural support.[23] At this stage, Servetus experienced a turning point in his life and came to the conclusion that it was necessary to thoroughly consider the doctrines of the Bible, rejecting traditional faith.[24]

When Servetus' Trinity thought is examined, it is clear that he is fundamentally opposed to this doctrine. He begins his first work (*De Trinitatis Erroribus Libri Septem,* 1531) by stating that Jesus Christ was a human being, not a hypostasis, as both the early church Fathers and the Scriptures clearly explained. Thus, he developed a different defense mechanism against tradition.[25] Some counter-arguments, however, claim that Servetus did not reject the doctrine of the Trinity but was only opposed to concepts borrowed from philosophy and incorporated into Christianity and that he specifically intended to correct the Nicene formulation's errors, but these should be approached with caution. It is unlikely that they directly applied to the Servetus sources. On the other hand, some researchers comment that the most accurate concept describing Servetus' theology is not 'anti-trinitarian' but 'anti-traditional.'[26] Christ is God's miraculously born son. He is a real son, not a hypostasis. It is also a grave error to regard the Holy Spirit as a separate God. There is no mention of it in the sacred texts. Yes, the Bible mentions the Father, the Son, and even the Holy Spirit, but there is no implication in the format to support the existing institutional Trinity doctrine.[27] In this

---

[22]   Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism*, 1: 65-66.

[23]   Drummond, *The Life of Michael Servetus*, 3-4; O'Malley, "The Complementary Careers of Michael Servetus: Theologian and Physician", 379; Odhner, *Michael Servetus, His Life and Teachings*, 13; John Daintith (ed.), "Servetus, Michael (1511–1553)", *Biographical Encyclopedia of Scientists* (Florida: CRC Press, 2009), 688-689; Wallace, *Antitrinitarian Biography*, 1: 420-421.

[24]   Odhner, *Michael Servetus, His Life and Teachings*, 13; Bainton, *Hunted Heretic*, 29-46.

[25]   Michael Servetus, *TTT*, trans. Earl Morse Wilbur (London: Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), 3.

[26]   George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: West Minster, 1962), 57-58. Peter Hughes, "The Face of God: The Christology of Michael Servetus", *JUUH* 40 (2016/2017): 23-24.

[27]   Servetus, *TTT*, 3, 49-50, 58; Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 5-11; S. C. Mitchell, "A Stricture on Schaff's Account of Servetus", *The American Journal of Theology* 1/2 (1897): 452-453; María Tausiet, "Magus versus Falsarius: A Duel of Insults between Calvin and Servetus", *Reformation & Renaissance Review* 10/1 (2008): 76-77. According to some assessments, Servetus' critiques of the trinity were not malicious from a Christian point of view, either. All his zeal sprang from his devotion to Christ and his sincere piety. So he criticized the existing doctrines and tried to correct them so that everyone could be connected to Christ. See Goldstone Lawrence & Goldstone Nancy, *Out of the Flames* (New York: Broadway Books, 2002), 71-72.

regard, the Trinity is neither logically nor biblically reconcilable. He says in one of his pivotal statements:

> Those who maintain that there are three substantial persons or hypostases in God, insinuate three Gods, equal by nature. For they propose to us three distinct and different substantial things and they insist that each one of these things, (or hypostases, as they call it) is God. Hence necessarily they make three equal and distinct Gods... For when these persons or hypostases, different as to thing and number, are one by one predicated of God, it necessarily follows that there are as many subjects as three are predicated, and that according to the number of the persons, so also the number of the gods are multiplied. And though in words they predicate one such God to us, yet in effect and fact they represent to us three Gods in the understanding. For every acute and sincere intellect must see that there are three things proposed for the worship. But how these three, of whom each one is God, make one God in number, no one has ever been able to say or to teach. It is therefore left in the spirit and in the understanding an insoluble perplexity and inexplicable confusion that the three are one, and the one is three. But to set up three Gods equal by nature, this is the highest blasphemy and impiety.[28]

The Trinity, according to Servetus, is the most challenging barrier for Jews and Muslims to overcome in becoming Christians. Names like Jesus and the Holy Spirit are terms designed to reflect different aspects of God to us, just as God introduces himself to us in the Bible with various names such as *El Shaddai* and *Elohim*, each of which expresses a different message. Furthermore, none of the concepts used to explain the Trinity doctrine, such as hypostasis or ousia, are found in the Bible. Biblical references to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit point to various images or manifestations of God.[29] Ac-

---

[28] Servetus' speech before his trial in Geneva. See Heinrich Von & Johann Lorenz Von, *Historia Michaelis Serveti*, 131.

[29] Martin I. Klauber, "Servetus, Michael (1511-53)", in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, ed. Trevor A. Hart (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2000), 521; Udo Thiel, *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*, ed. Daniel Garber & Michael Ayers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1: 872; Bainton, *Hunted Heretic*, 8-9. Timothy George states that Calvin also knew that words such as ousia, hypostases, persona, and even trinitas were not used in the Bible. However, he nevertheless defended the trinity and fiercely opposed the anti-trinitarians. See Timothy George, *Reformcuların Teolojileri*, trans. İbrahim Elbeyli (İstanbul: Haberci, 2019), 316-317. Moreover, Servetus' concept of 'manifestations' in relation to the trinity is an ap-

cording to Servetus, the Trinity is the most damaging doctrine to Christianity. It has created countless evils and perversions, filling the Church with inextricably illogical doctrines. Because of this 'nonsense,' the Christian faith became an object of ridicule for Jews and Muslims.[30] The following statements on the subject are noteworthy:

> Pray what Turk, Scythian, Barbarian could bear these disputes of words, without laughter? Furthermore, and worse than all this, how much this tradition of the Trinity has, alas! been a laughing-stock to the Mohammedans, only God knows. The Jews also shrink from giving adherence to this fancy of ours, and laugh at our foolishness about the Trinity; and on account of its blasphemies they do not believe that this is the Messiah who was promised in their law. And not only Mohammedans and Hebrews, but the very beasts of the field, would make fun of us did they grasp our fantastical notion, for all the works of the Lord bless the one God.[31]

Servetus takes a sarcastic tone, comparing the three persons in the Trinity to a silhouette of a demon, a three-headed Kerberos,[32] a terrible beast, and a game devised by the devil to tamper with people's minds to distract them from the true Messiah's knowledge.[33] The introduction of Greek metaphysical speculations about whether the Father and Son are co-substantial or not into Christianity thoroughly corrupts the Church and separates it from its true foundation.[34] In his opinion, understanding the unity of persons in divine nature is a complex invention that contradicts the Bible. Holy scriptures do not imply more than one God but merely different

---

proach that has recently been discussed by several authors. For an example, see Frithjof Schuon, *From the Divine to the Human: Survey of Metaphysics and Epistemology*, trans. Gustavo Polis & Deborah Lambert (Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 1981), 37.

[30]   Michael Servetus, *The Two Treatises of Servetus on the Trinity*, trans. Earl Morse Wilbur (London: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2013), 66-67.

[31]   Servetus, *TTT*, 66-67.

[32]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 166; Matteo Gribaldi, *Declarationis Jesu Christi Filii Dei*, trans. Peter Hughes & Peter Zerner (New York: Blackstone & Michael Servetus Institute, 2010), 5; Walter Nigg, *The Heretics*, trans. Richard Winston & Clara Winston (New York: Alfred A. Knopf., 1962), 324-325. In Greek mythology, Hades' three-headed dog guards the entrance to the underworld, where the dead reside. The Kerberos is a venomous dog with a snake tail and several snakeheads on its back. Its job is to keep the living out and to keep anyone who enters from ever leaving. See. Stephen P. Kershaw, *Yunan Mitolojisi Rehber Kitabı*, trans. Şefik Turan (Konya: Salon Yayınları, 2018), 203-205.

[33]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 30,87-88.

[34]   Odhner, *Michael Servetus, His Life and Teachings*, 68-69.

uses of the word God, clearly showing God and Christ as separate entities.[35] Various Biblical passages indicate that the Holy Spirit is not a separate deity but an activity of God himself. The arguments advanced by scholastic theologians are based on foundations not stated in the Scriptures. The expressions of the Bible must be understood in its pure and simple sense so that when such a reading is done, the Old and New Testaments clearly teach about a God (Father) and a Christ (Son). The Old Testament repeatedly emphasizes one God. Some theologians, who follow the tradition blindly, argue about concepts they do not understand and use some concepts in a sense/way that is utterly contrary to the Bible.[36]

Servetus believes that the entire Christian world has accepted a false concept of God and that some theologians have attempted to justify the Trinity using philological explanations of certain Latin concepts. The three hypostasis, three persons, or three substances undoubtedly give rise to three distinct Gods, indicating polytheism.[37] Servetus devotes all his energies to understanding the nature of God from the perspective of gradual revelation but pays little attention to the soteriologically based issues that concern another aspect of the Trinity.[38] His rejection of the Trinity ultimately rests on two grounds. First, God's nature does not allow for a triple subdividing. Second, such a traditional formulation is unnecessary for human emancipation because Christ did not save humankind with a ransom but united him in God.[39] Original sin had no effect on the human personality, so humans do not need to be saved by a Savior. Both of these seemingly unrelated points are highly interconnected and are based on Servetus' distinctive Neoplatonic dialectic thinking.[40]

---

[35]   Servetus, *TTT*, 4.

[36]   Servetus, *TTT*, 5; Jerome Friedman, "The Reformation Merry-Go-Round: The Servetian Glossary of Heresy", *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 7/1 (1976): 76-77.

[37]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 41-42.

[38]   Jerome Friedman, *Michael Servetus: The Theology of Optimism* (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1971), 211.

[39]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 340-341. Therefore, understanding Servetus' denial of the Trinity requires a consideration of both the context of salvation and baptism.

[40]   Friedman, *Michael Servetus: The Theology of Optimism*, 216.

1.a) The Father

Servetus' doctrine of God is based on two theological premises: the unity and immutability of God. God is eternal,[41] one,[42] indivisible and incomprehensible, but He reveals his existence through creation. As a result, living and inanimate beings are, in a way, manifestations of God. He existed before creation as God, but he was not the Light, the Word, or the Spirit. It was something else that could not be expressed in any other way. However, God is indefinable. Light, Word, and Spirit are all reflections, images, or manifestations of the eternal God in some way.[43] These divine manifestations are available to us in our worldly state. On the other hand, there will be others too numerous to count and more subtle after the resurrection.[44]

The following sentences of Servetus seem to reflect his modalism:

> God has revealed Himself to us, making Himself outwardly visible through the Word, yet internally perceptible through the spirit.[45]

According to Servetus, there is no before or after when talking about God. Such expressions lose their meaning when used about God. The Father in the Trinity is the only God from whom all existence emanates and is the essence of all matter. God's universal and all-forming essence has had an indescribable number of divine essences and forms since eternity, encompassing the designs and forms of all things.[46] God never has a physical body. He created matter and the universe and made it suitable for humans. He also created matter and the universe and made them suitable for humans. God is distinct from the realm of objects in this regard. Concepts like the Word, the Son, and the Spirit describe God's existence, power, giving life to

---

[41]   Michael Servetus, *RC*, trans. Christopher A. Hoffman & Marian Hillar (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007), 33-34.

[42]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 39, 43.

[43]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 233-234; Odhner, *Michael Servetus, His Life and Teachings*, 72-73. Servetus explains the Word and the Holy Spirit as manifestations or images of God, but interestingly, he also includes light in this explanation. Light is substantively equivalent to the Word and Spirit for Servetus. He associates these three divine forms of existence with three supreme elements following the ancient cosmological theory: Word is associated with water, air or breath with spirit, and fire with light. Also, fire and light are associated with the body and spirit of Christ. This notion that God is both fire and light is also present in the Old Testament and Hermetic literature. Additionally, the Gospel of John describes God as "Light." See John 1:5.

[44]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 180-181.

[45]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 1-2.

[46]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 180.

beings, and moving them.[47] He gives his essential existence or vitality to creatures, animate or inanimate, and especially to man.[48] The statements below show Servetus' vision of God:

> For what could a man ever conceive about God before He made Himself visible? The mind that thinks about God fails because He is incomprehensible; the eye does not see Him because He is invisible. The ear does not hear Him nor has it ever heard Him unless He has spoken in a human voice. The hand does not touch Him because He has no body. The tongue does not explain Him because He is ineffable. A place does not contain Him because He is not circumscribed. Time does not measure Him because He is immeasurable. Finally, He transcends everything and surpasses every intellect and mind. Certain people have taught that God can be defined by denial alone. For, if you consider this light and these other things that are known to us, you will say, "of course," because God is not the light, but above light, nor is He essence, but above essence, nor spirit, but above spirit, above everything that you can think of. This is not an accurate conception about God because it fails to teach just what God is and instead it teaches what God is not. No one knows God save someone who knows the way in which He has chosen to manifest Himself to us.[49]

For Servetus, the Father is the one, eternal, and omnipotent God. However, he does not consider the Father an element of the Trinity. Not believing in the Trinity, he does not need to make a comparison among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. According to him, the Father is the only God who created everything; through creation, He revealed himself to the creatures. The Father manifests himself not only in living but also in inanimate beings.[50] Father, like Jehovah and Elohim, is one of God's names but unique to Him alone. The Father thoroughly pervades life, and all beings are filled with it. He is omnipresent but also above all space and all time. The forms and beings emerging from Him are mortal; therefore, finite beings should not be confused with the Infinite. Servetus' view of God is clear in his own way. He does not make long explanations about the "Father." In order to persuade followers of the tradition, he focused primarily on the Son (Jesus Christ) and the Holy Spirit in his critique of the Trinity.

---

[47] Servetus, *TTT*, 45,182.
[48] Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 182.
[49] Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 156-157.
[50] Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 33-34, 39-43, 233-234.

1.b) The Son

The Christological problem underlying the doctrine of the Trinity is the nature of Jesus Christ. On the one hand, Jesus was a human being sent by God to do the Father's will. On the other hand, the divine Word (Logos), which was initially with God, became incarnate in Jesus, and Jesus Christ became God's will. This difficulty hinges on whether the notions that he is one with the Father by being equal to the Father and that he shares the titles 'Lord and God' with the Father can absolutely coexist.

Before proceeding to Servetus' explanations for the Son, it is essential to note that he did not approach this question from the standpoint of the Trinity. Within Servetus' theological framework, the concept of the son as it is presented in the Bible has a distinct role to play. Additionally, it is essential to understand the meanings Servetus assigned to words such as the Word, the Son, and Jesus Christ. Like all the other names he has used for himself in the past, the Word is a notion for him that alludes to the way God reveals himself. Messiah refers to the human Jesus, who came into this world to carry out God's will. The Son, on the other hand, refers to Christ's birth from a divine father and a human mother.[51] This indicates that Mary became pregnant as a result of the heavenly seed. In other words, the Son appears as a being who has divinity in himself. The union of God and man through God's adoption of Jesus Christ, his resurrection after the crucifixion, and the conversion of the Word of God back to God all refer to distinct processes. It gets complicated only when Christ is both man and God. If a Divine name refers to a being lower than God, the term corresponds to the manifestation rather than the very nature. When speaking of Jesus Christ while referring to the Word as a name of God, this fact is significant to keep in mind. To resolve this issue, Servetus states that the Word purged itself of all divinity before becoming incarnate in Jesus and descending to a human level.[52]

In Servetus' Christology, Jesus can be described as both a man and a God. Depending on context or perspective, Jesus could be both or neither. Alternatively, He may be the combination of God and man, as Servetus calls the 'mixture.'[53] However, both biblical narratives and Patristic theology allow for all these deductions. In this context, two issues should be addressed. The first is what is embodied. The second question is what happens to this

---

[51]   Friedman, *Michael Servetus: The Theology of Optimism*, 112-113.
[52]   Servetus, *TTT*, 28-29.
[53]   Servetus, *TTT*, 211; Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 363.

entity when it incarnates. Servetus responds as follows: "Before the Incarnation, there is no such entity as the Son; only the existence of a Word can be mentioned. Following the incarnation, we have the Son of God, with the Word putting an end to its own existence."[54]

The presence of two natures in Christ is acknowledged in the traditional Christian perspective for achieving redemption. Servetus also recognizes this but does not evaluate the process in question in light of the two-nature relationship. The traditional understanding and Servetus' idea of mixing and mixing are superficially similar in that both speak of a dual-natured Christ. However, this interpretation permits the composition in Christ to remove the divine element by discharge.[55] When comparing Servetus' ideas on the Son Jesus Christ in his first book, *De Trinitatis Erroribus*, with his final work, *Christianismi Restitutio*, it is evident that there are significant shifts and changes. In his early works, he nearly never explains man's position and original sin, and he stresses Jesus Christ as the Son of God in a very generic sense.[56]

In this regard, Friedman is not satisfied with Servetus' thoughts on redemption.[57] However, in his last book, *Christianismi Restitutio*, Servetus offers his own interpretations of Jesus Christ and develops an original Christology. One may wonder what and how he based the Messianic theology he constructed here. When both of his works are scrutinized, it is possible to say that the common theme of his unique doctrine of the Messiah is shaped on the axis of the gradual understanding of revelation.[58] While it is impossible to find any remark in *De Trinitatis Erroribus* that reflects this viewpoint, his Christological opinions contained in *De Trinitatis Erroribus* constitute his first effort to resolve some theological issues. Although this early attempt at theological research was somewhat flawed, it provides a solid foundation for comprehending the opinions he ultimately evolved. Servetus focuses mainly on Old Testament Hebrew names. Even though it is not expressly mentioned in the Old Testament, he strives to distinguish Christ from God as a distinct being with a different role.[59]

---

[54] Servetus, *TTT*, 123-125,144. Servetus' Christology is regarded to be similar to that of Paul of Samosata, who lived in the third century AD. See Mark Mattison, "Michael Servetus: Fountainhead of Anti-Trinitarianism", *A Journal from the Radical Reformation: A Testimony to Biblical Unitarianism* 1/1 (1991-1992): 34-35; Bainton, *Hunted Heretic*, 43.

[55] Friedman, *Michael Servetus: The Theology of Optimism*, 114.

[56] Servetus, *TTT*, 127.

[57] Friedman, *Michael Servetus: The Theology of Optimism*, 115.

[58] Simply, God's manifestation to humanity at various times throughout history..

[59] Servetus, *TTT*, 190.

Servetus also attempts to demonstrate a relationship between Christ and Wisdom. The titles given to God in the Old Testament did not differ significantly, and this similarity determined Servetus' approach to the distinction between the Father and the Word. Servetus had trouble establishing the relationship between Jesus Christ and God the Father, given that the Word is always regarded as a being inside the Father in the context of creation. Instead of presuming that the Word and Christ are identical, he attempts to demonstrate the nature of their connection and relationship.[60] Just as gradual revelation, the relationship between the Word and Christ is based on time and succession. Christ existed before the beginning of time and will exist till the end of the world. There is no distinction between the eternity of the Word and that of Christ in terms of time. The Word existed before all creatures because they were all created through the Word. Additionally, according to the Law, Christ existed before the beginning of all time. Nevertheless, in most instances where Servetus discusses the relationship between the Word and Christ, he emphasizes openly that the successive relationship is not the same as complete identity. He ironically draws a clear separation between the Son and the Word.[61]

To fully comprehend Servetus' Christology, his treatment of some biblical concepts should be analyzed. For instance, when the Bible states *El Shaddai*, God is mentioned in a particular context. Again, *Elohim* could refer to the same God, but because two separate titles, *El Shaddai* and *Elohim*, are employed, we must consider that they have a different, albeit subtle, meaning. For example, if the Word is not mentioned during the time of Moses, there is a reason for it. If God refers to Himself in the Bible as a Word, a Christ, and a Son, there must be a purpose for these variations.[62] Just as the name El Shaddai was used for a certain period, so is the use of the Word confined to a limited time. The Bible uses *El Shaddai* during the patriarchal period but prefers different names for other times. When Moses asked for God's name, God named his name *Jehovah* instead of *El Shaddai* because it was a different era. These names are chronologically consecutive; there are slight differences among them, and they all ultimately foretell the Messiah.[63] God has revealed himself in many different ways at different times. For example, He is the God of Adam before the fall, the Word in creation, a burning bush or a cloud in the Old Testament, *El Shaddai* for Abraham, and *Jehovah* for Moses. Although these titles all imply various attributes of God,

---

[60]   Servetus, *TTT*, 143.
[61]   Servetus, *TTT*, 143-144.
[62]   Servetus, *TTT*, 191.
[63]   Servetus, *TTT*, 193.

they all ultimately point to God Himself. His names are distinct because God reveals himself in various ways.

In light of the preceding considerations, it is easier to comprehend how Servetus addresses discussions regarding the eternity of the Son. According to Servetus, Jesus is merely an instrument through which God reveals himself to humanity. Thus, Jesus became eternal when God manifested Himself in Jesus. As just a form of manifestation or a stage, Christ is temporal, not eternal. So, there is only a lineage tie between previous manifestations and Christ. Servetus warns us to be content with perceiving God as He chooses to reveal Himself to humankind.[64]

According to Servetus, Jesus Christ is merely a human being, even if certain Christological doctrines acknowledge that Christ possesses some sort of human nature as well. At the beginning of *De Trinitatis Erroribus*, he asserts that ignoring the person of Christ has led many people astray.[65] Jesus is the name of an ordinary person. Christ, on the other hand, means anointed, and only a human can be anointed. Consistent with this conception of Jesus as a man, Servetus vehemently opposes the idea that Jesus is both man and God.[66] He thinks that the interaction between divinity and humanity (communication of idioms) splits the being of Christ into two separate parts.[67] Two natures imply two Christs, while the Bible only mentions one Son.[68] He also claims that not only the Bible but also early authorities like Clement, Justin, Irenaeus, and Tertullian stated that the term "Christ" referred to human nature.[69] The Trinitarians lack the understanding of the early Christians and instead speak in a wholly different style unknown to the ancients.[70] At the same time, there are some places where Servetus also claimed that Jesus was, in a sense, divine, although he undoubtedly thinks that Jesus was a human being.[71]

The key concept here is the Word that comes from God to man. Does the separation of the Word from God in this circumstance imply that it has

---

[64] Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 312.
[65] Servetus, *TTT*, 6.
[66] Servetus, *TTT*, 6-7, 16, 142.
[67] Servetus, *TTT*, 202.
[68] Servetus, *TTT*, 203.
[69] Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 7, 26.
[70] Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 47-48.
[71] Servetus, *TTT*, 143. The Servetus' connotation to the term 'person' used for the elements of the trinity is remarkable. He redefined the word' person' to signify a 'disposition' or 'temperament' of God rather than its usual meaning. It creates ambiguity that he uses the name Messiah both for the son Jesus and the pre-existing Word. Still, this ambiguity resolves when we recall that he declared Jesus and the Word were identical. See Servetus, *TTT*, 144-145.

ceased to be divine? Or, what precisely occurs when the Word leaves God and reaches humanity? Servetus, on the one hand, rejects those who assert that Christ possesses two natures, while on the other, he maintains that Christ is both human and partially divine. To draw accurate conclusions regarding Servetus' dilemma, one should comprehend what Servetus means by the concept of the mixture.[72] While rejecting two natures in Christ, Servetus believes he is a God-man and uses the concept of the mixture. Jesus is not both man and God but a man of divine lineage. *He will be called the Son of God because he is the power of God rather than the seed of man… The seed of the planter is the Word of God.*[73] This is also what Servetus implies when he asserts that the Word pre-formed the Messiah. Since he does not accept the existence of the Son as a separate relational person within God, he also rejects Son's eternal existence.[74] Regarding Son's eternity, Servetus believes that the Son may only exist as a seed in the Word. Before the Son was born, he was only a seed in the Word, which would be the original form of his body, and a seed in the Spirit, which would be the image of his soul.[75]

Christ was fully human, yet his father was divine. The Word was not the sperm of a man but rather the fertile seed in Mary's womb. Servetus did not interpret this physical union between man and God as a metaphor. He regarded God as the father of Christ, just as any man is called a father.[76] Christ is both God and man in relation to his Father and himself, respectively. What, then, is the actual effect of the Word on the union of man and God? What is the condition of the Word, which is separated from the father and becomes a human being? Although Servetus' concept of mixture or mixing theoretically exposes a being that is divine in some respects and human in others, he actually believes that the final combination is human, not divine. Christ possesses the potentials of both man and God. However, when the Word descended to join a man, his divine nature left the Word, and he remained wholly human.[77] Consequently, *Jesus is the "Son of the Eternal God," not the "eternal son of the Eternal God."*[78]

---

[72]   Servetus, *TTT*, 209.
[73]   Servetus, *TTT*, 13.
[74]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 170.
[75]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 110.
[76]   Servetus, *TTT*, 16-17; J. A. Dorner, *History of the Development of the Doctrine of the Person of Christ* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1890), 2: 164.
[77]   Servetus, *TTT*, 32, 143-144; Dorner, *History of the Development of the Doctrine of the Person of Christ*, 2: 164-165.
[78]   Nancy Roberts, "Trinity vs. Monotheism: A False Dichotomy?", *The Muslim World* 101 (2011): 81.

Servetus affirms Christ's eternity in both *De Trinitatis Erroribus* and *Christianismi Restitutio*. As in *De Trinitatis Erroribus*, he discusses the biological relationship between Christ and the Father here.[79] Also, Christ is presented as a representation of all that is in God, and Servetus uses special terms, such as *form* and *hypostasis*, to describe this.[80] In addition, based on Tertullian's writings, he asserts that Christ's existence is fundamentally that of a human being while elevating Christ above other people.[81] Jesus has two natures, human and divine, as stated in De Trinitatis Erroribus, and Servetus describes Christ as a *mixture*. Christ's nature is truly divine and derived from God's essence through various mechanisms. As a created being, Christ is attached to the Creator, mingled and united with Him in spirit and body. He is hypostatically one with God.[82]

According to Servetus, divine and human elements coexist in Christ. Tradition clearly teaches that Christ had a dual nature, one divine and one human. God and man are truly united in one substance, Christ.[83] In Mary's womb, the Word assumed the form of a son by transforming from an incorporeal to a corporeal state. This allowed the Messiah to become the son of God. With his resurrection, Christ *once again* became the Son of God.[84] Jesus' spirit, like that of every other human, is derived from the Father, while his body comes solely from his mother.[85] Also, it is possible to see the traces of Servetus' ideas approaching the pantheistic understanding, as he calls all human beings sons of God because everyone is made of his substance. In this context, Christ, too, is superior to us only in degree, not in kind, which was given to him by divine grace.[86]

As a formative force, the Word of God constructed a body in Mary's womb.[87] Christ, like other people, takes his body from his mother; that is, only the earthly body comes from the mother.[88] However, Mary's pregnancy with Christ is unlike those of other women. The natural droplet/seed,

---

[79]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 330.
[80]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 163-164.
[81]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 8.
[82]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 360-361.
[83]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 382-383.
[84]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 86-87.
[85]   Servetus, *TTT*, 202; Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 111; Trechsel Friedrich, *Michael Servet und Seine Vorgänger* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1839), 131.
[86]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 22. According to Servetus, The Church has exalted Christ's person to such an extent that Christ can no longer have a genuine relationship with the human species. See Emerton, "Calvin and Servetus", 147-148.
[87]   Odhner, *Michael Servetus, His Life and Teachings*, 79; Dorner, *History of the Development of the Doctrine of the Person of Christ*, 2: 163-165.
[88]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 363-364.

created for Christ's conception in the virgin's womb, contained essentially all productive power in itself and was God's Word.[89] The Divine Word, united with the mother's blood in the embryo, substituted the Father's seed and merged with the virgin's blood to transform human matter into God.[90] The Word did not achieve this formation at once during the incarnation in Christ's human body. The glorification of the human body progressed gradually because the mother's body contained perishable elements that were not entirely eliminated until the resurrection.[91] Servetus considers the Word's incarnation as the culmination of God's self-destruction and Christ's resurrection as the ultimate level of exaltation.[92] Although the Word was incarnate, it retained its identity as the Word. The Word's existence did not vanish through incarnation or transform into a body through self-transformation. Instead, the body itself was transformed by the Word into a *Body-Word* (caro-verbum) union.[93]

Saying that the Messiah is both divine and human, Servetus emphasizes the Messiah's humanity since, in his view, the divine part of Christ's God-human composition vanishes with his incarnation.[94] This point of view appears in both *De Trinitatis Erroribus* and *Christianismi Restitutio*, where he explains the incarnation in agreement with Tertullian's view.[95] Christ was a man and died on the cross, but that should not make us think that he remains mortal forever. Christ again assumed his divine position in the resurrection.[96] In the body of Christ, God and man became so intertwined and inseparable that even the animal nature of the body became part of the divine essence. In Christ, the divine and human natures exist in the same essence.[97] Jesus Christ is the only person with both divine and human natures within himself. In addition, not only the body but also the spirit of Christ embodies an inseparable unity in itself, both divinely and humanly.[98] As a result, Servetus completely rejected the Nicene Creed, which advocates the existence of two separate natures, one human and the other divine, in Christ.[99] According to the Nicene Creed, these natures, which are eternally

---

[89]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 226-227.
[90]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 357-359.
[91]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 404-405.
[92]   Servetus, *TTT*, 219-220; Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 333-334.
[93]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 25,377-379.
[94]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 29-30.
[95]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 126.
[96]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 279.
[97]   Servetus, *TTT*, 196-198.
[98]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 234.
[99]   Servetus, *TTT*, 197; Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 35,106,304.

separate and of different sexes, exist in the same body and are expressed as "Hypostatic Unity." Odhner describes Servetus' approach as a doctrine whose primary arguments are exceedingly reasonable and scripturally grounded in comparison to the prevalent theology at the time.[100] Although Servetus denied the divinity and eternity of Jesus, he did not see him as a mere human being because Jesus is a private person who communicates directly with God.[101]

> Just as God made one angel foremost among angels, one beast foremost among beasts, and one star foremost among stars, so He made one human being foremost among humanity and Christ.[102]

1.c) The Holy Spirit

Like other Christian theologians, Servetus presented his own theories regarding the Holy Spirit. The idea of a three-person dogma like the Trinity does not make sense to him, so the Holy Spirit is not a divine person or entity with independent existence.[103] In this regard, he is unconcerned with the disagreements between the Orthodox and Catholic churches on whether the Son comes from the Father alone or both the Father and the Son.[104] Nor is the Holy Spirit a purported metaphysical relationship between the Father and the Son or an "immanent movement" within the nature of God. It is only a simple divine form that is in harmony with the created universe on the one hand and the human and angelic souls on the other.[105] By generalizing, Friedman asserts that Servetus' approach and response to this topic are unsatisfactory. He further asserts that Servetus believed he was the exclusive recipient of God's wisdom through the Holy Spirit.[106]

Servetus needed to present obvious ideas about the Holy Spirit since the most crucial features of his theological system, such as the concept of inner light and gradual revelation, demanded it. Thus, the inner light[107] that enables salvation even for the unbaptized was somehow connected to the Holy

---

[100] Odhner, *Michael Servetus, His Life and Teachings*, 77-78.
[101] Harold O. J. Brown, *Heresies* (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday & Company, 1984), 330.
[102] Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 8.
[103] Christine Schulte am Hülse, "The Holy Spirit in the Theological Work of Michael Servetus", *Church History and Religious Culture* 101/2-3 (2021): 218-219.
[104] Servetus, *TTT*, 48-49.
[105] Servetus, *TTT*, 131-135.
[106] Friedman, *Michael Servetus: The Theology of Optimism*, 191.
[107] According to Servetus, the divine impulse that enables man to find the truth.

Spirit. Again, the gradual revelation theory, which explains such things as pre-Christian knowledge of God or the names of God, required an explanation of the Holy Spirit in these regards. Servetus was well-versed in Hebrew and recognized that the languages of the Old Testament and the New Testament about the Holy Spirit are distinct. He argued that the Hebrew Word רוח (Ruach), which means "wind" or "spirit," did not mean anything other than "breath" or "breathing" and that the Bible talks about it in a strange and almost unintelligible way.[108]

Servetus notices that the term "Holy Spirit" is not used much in the Old Testament but is frequently used in the New Testament. He explains this by noting that Jews emphasize external purity over interior purification.[109] Essentially, the Holy Spirit existed before the birth of the Lord (Jesus Christ) but always took the shape of an angel and only acted in God's name.[110] However, although he appears to be an angel throughout, the Holy Spirit is by no means an angel himself. The angel himself is not the Holy Spirit but only a servant of the Spirit.[111] According to Servetus, divine knowledge can be received through the Bible and the Holy Spirit. The role that he allocates to the Holy Spirit is significant at this stage because the Holy Spirit's manifestation as one of the means for acquiring this knowledge indicates that He has an epistemic function:[112]

> I always say that without the gift of the Holy Spirit, and without knowledge of Adam and the law, no one can understand what a redemption has been made through Christ; nor without these is any one able to know that he has been justified, and that he has become a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem, all of which things faith in Christ has conferred by justifying us.[113]

Servetus defined the Holy Spirit as a heavenly messenger and God's power. However, this power cannot be said to exist independently of God, that is, as a separate person.[114] Servetus also refers to it as an *instinct*, *divine inspiration*, or *mental impulse*.[115] In figurative words, the Holy Spirit is a rep-

---

[108]   Servetus, *TTT*, 35.
[109]   Servetus, *TTT*, 100-102; Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 274-275.
[110]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 93-100.
[111]   Odhner, *Michael Servetus, His Life and Teachings*, 87.
[112]   Christine Schulte am Hülse, "The Holy Spirit in the Theological Work of Michael Servetus", *Church History and Religious Culture* 101/2-3 (2021): 219.
[113]   Servetus, *TTT*, 256.
[114]   Servetus, *TTT*, 47-48.
[115]   Servetus, *TTT*, 35.

resentation of inner truth. His conceptual use of the term Holy Spirit appears coherent in terms of the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit is frequently sent somewhere and even more often commissioned with a divine mission in the Bible. Servetus merged and called these two kinds of events acts of the Holy Spirit. God reveals Himself through various manifestations. The same is true of the Holy Spirit, i.e., the Holy Spirit assumes or will assume various forms.[116]

Servetus employed many expressions for the Holy Spirit in various contexts. For instance, it is remarkable that, unlike the Old Testament, Servetus defines the Holy Spirit as a person or substance/essence that comes to us through Christ.[117] This seems consistent with Christ sending another comforter in his place.[118] However, it is not easy to place Servetus' views on the Holy Spirit within a comprehensive framework. Friedman expresses this difficulty with clarity.[119] Servetus distinguishes sharply between the *Holy Spirit* and *the Spirit of God*.[120] When the Spirit operates eternally, it is widely referred to as *the Spirit of God*. However, it is called the Holy Spirit when it works internally to illuminate and sanctify the human soul.[121] In other words, when God's essence/spirit manifests itself to the world, this spirit is referred to as *the word*. When this same spirit communicates with the world, it is referred to as *Spirit*.[122] The Holy Spirit is the breath of life (*halitus or flatus vitae*), the revitalizing element behind creation. Without this breath of life or the inhalation of the breath of life, it is impossible to

---

[116]   Servetus, *TTT*, 35.
[117]   Servetus, *TTT*, 219-220.
[118]   Servetus, *TTT*, 71,102.
[119]   Friedman, *Michael Servetus: The Theology of Optimism*, 197.
[120]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 378-379. Servetus appears to dispute the New Testament depiction of the Holy Spirit. According to the New Testament, since God is a spirit (John 4:24), Jesus always supported on earth by the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:14, 18; Acts 1:7), and Mary conceived Jesus through the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35, 41). During the incarnation of the divine word, Jesus was anointed by the Holy Spirit and became the Messiah, the Son of God (Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10-11; Luke 3:22). This suggests that the spirit of God and the Holy Spirit are synonymous in the New Testament, yet Servetus clearly separates the two.
[121]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 300-301, 393-394.
[122]   Odhner, *Michael Servetus, His Life and Teachings*, 85-86.

speak of life.[123] The Holy Spirit is only mentioned in the Bible in the context of an action.[124]

These explanations may suffice about Servetus' views on the Holy Spirit. He is unlikely to suggest that the Holy Spirit emerged as a separate person after rejecting the idea that the Son is a separate person inside God. He interpreted the Holy Spirit only as an activity and power of God.[125] His approach to the Holy Spirit seems consistent with other areas of his theology, despite containing certain problems. The Holy Spirit is not a distinct person from the Word. Both are manifestations of God, and the difference between them is more contextual than substantive.[126]

2) Criticism of Servetus

The Reformation represents the most significant historical development in the Christian world during Servetus' lifetime. Reform and Reformation are derived from the Latin *reformare* and *reformatio*, which mean "to reshape." As a concept, Reformation refers to the 16th-century movement that advocated a return to the essence of Christianity by referencing the Bible.[127] Since the 16th century, this religious movement has spread to various countries in western and eastern Europe, including Germany, Switzerland, France, England, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. It is known historically as *the Reform Movement*. *Reform* here indicates the religious movement that freed a large portion of Europe from the bondages of the papacy and

---

[123] Servetus, *TTT*, 92-94; Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 265-266. The energy and animating spirit of divinity are constantly present in the air and the wind. Man perpetuates life by inhaling it. See Servetus, *TTT*, 92-95. Servetus seems to have used the ideas of Greek philosophers such as Empedocles, Aristotle, Hippocrates, and Galen about the four elements to develop a physiological view of the Holy Spirit. Air, water, and fire are the higher elements, and earth is the lowest. Latin word spiritus, Greek pneuma, and Hebrew ruach mean breath or that which is inhaled. The notion that creatures must breathe in the atmosphere's vital component to exist is old. Servetus has demonstrated that he is a skilled observer here because the true meaning of breathing and the role of the atmosphere can only be explained when the oxidative processes in living organisms and the biochemical mechanisms for the utilization of oxygen in the atmosphere (air) have been discovered. See Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 239-241; Joan Torello, "Michael Servetus on 'Pneuma'", *Journal of Psychology & Clinical Psychiatry* 2/2 (2015): 2-4.
[124] Servetus, *TTT*, 126-128,133-134,139-140.
[125] Servetus, *TTT*, 3,44.
[126] Marian Hillar, "Process Theology and Process Thought in the Writings of Michael Servetus", *The Sixteenth Century Studies Conference* (San Antonio: Center for Philosophy and Socinian Studies, 2002), 7.
[127] Jacques Waardenburg, "Reform", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi (DİA) (İstanbul: Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları)*, 34: 530; Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology* (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 125-126.

paved the way for the development of Protestantism.[128] Whereas destiny, free will, and baptism dominated the theological discussions, the Trinity as an independent topic was not discussed during this period.

Trinitatis Erroribus Libri Septem (Seven Books on the Errors of the Trinity), in which he expressed his critical views on the Trinity, elicited severe responses from the prominent reformers of the time. It is assumed that the prominent theologians of the time read the works of Servetus. Initially, most criticisms were made with a defensive reflex of traditional acceptance. For instance, Philip Melanchthon (d. 1560) is said to have read the text and predicted that there would be many future discussions on related topics.[129]

As Servetus' ideas became more widely known over time, Catholics and Protestants were profoundly disturbed. Heinrich Bullinger (d. 1575), Johannes Oecolampadius (d. 1531), and Huldrych Zwingli (d. 1531) organized a meeting about Servetus in which they discussed some matters such as Servetus' contradictory behavior in religious issues, his stubbornness, and the danger of the spread of his theological errors.[130] At the meeting, Zwingli emphasized the importance of "bringing him to the truth" with sound argumentation, stating that every effort must be made to discourage Servetus from his errors. In response, Oecolampadius (d. 1482) stated that he attempted it but that nothing he said was effective because Servetus was so arrogant, daring, and obstinate. He believed the case of Servetus was pathological.[131] One of the period's most prominent figures, Martin Bucer (d. 1551) is narrated to have stated that Servetus' intestines should be ripped out and shattered.[132]

John Calvin was the first in his era to provide an academic critique of Servetus' views. Before it was published, Servetus sent manuscripts of some parts of his latest work, *Christianismi Restitutio* (The Reconstruction of Christianity), to Calvin. He is also known to have first sent Calvin a letter

---

[128] Hakan Olgun, *Luther ve Reformu: Katolisizm'i Protesto* (Ankara: Fecr Yayınları, 2001), 11.

[129] Odhner, *Michael Servetus, His Life and Teachings*, 14.

[130] Drummond, *The Life of Michael Servetus*, 4; Jeff Fisher, "Housing a Heretic: Johannes Oecolampadius (1482–1531) and the 'Pre-History' of the Servetus Affair", *Reformation & Renaissance Review* 20/1 (2018): 39; Joao Chaves, "The Servetus Challenge: Eisegesis and the Problematic of Differing Chronologies of Ecclesiastical Corruption", *Journal of Reformed Theology* 10/3 (2016): 201; Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism*, 1: 70.

[131] Willis, *Servetus and Calvin*, 33-34.

[132] Odhner, *Michael Servetus, His Life and Teachings*, 215; Drummond, *The Life of Michael Servetus*, 8; Stefan Zweig, *Vicdan Zorbalığa Karşı ya da Castellio Calvin'e*, trans. Zehra Kurttekin (İstanbul: Can Sanat Yayınları, 2014), 105.

containing his theological views in 1546.[133] Calvin's first reaction to this letter was to "show the truth to a man who has lost his way" and, as a church leader, to "return the stray to the flock," and he attempted to show Servetus his mistakes. Nonetheless, Calvin was enraged by Servetus' *sinful* theses and *arrogant* tone.[134]

After a period of correspondence, Calvin directed Servetus to his work, *the Institutes of the Christian Religion*, because he did not want to continue (1535). Servetus then sent Calvin a copy of his notes and attempted to demonstrate that Calvin's arguments could not be logically maintained, using quotations from the Bible and pre-Nicene Church Fathers.[135] Calvin was highly concerned by Servetus' focus on the pre-Nicene Church Fathers because it posed a severe threat to the legitimacy of the Geneva Church. Additionally, the majority of Servetus' argumentations were biblical.[136] Calvin's letter to a friend is noteworthy to illustrate his viewpoint on Servetus:

> Servetus lately wrote to me and sent me with his letters a great volume of his ravings, saying that I would see there things stupendous and unheard of until now. He offers to come here if I approve, but I will not pledge my faith to him. For should he come, if my authority avails, I should never suffer him to go away alive.[137]

---

[133]   Michael Servetus, *Thirty Letters to Calvin, Preacher to the Genevans: And Sixty Signs of the Kingdom of the Antichrist and His Revelation Which Is Now at Hand*, trans. Christopher A. Hoffman & Marian Hillar (Lewiston, N.Y: Edwin Mellen Pr, 2010), 1-2.

[134]   Zweig, *Vicdan Zorbalığa Karşı ya da Castellio Calvin'e*, 107. Servet, muhtemelen Calvin'i din ve felsefe üzerine tartışarak bir fikir birliğine varabileceklerine veya birbirlerine fayda sağlayabileceklerine inanıyordu. Eğer durum buysa, Calvin hakkındaki değerlendirmesinde ne kadar yanıldığını çok geçmeden anlayacaktı.

[135]   Geoffrey M. Sill, "The Authorship of 'An Impartial History of Michael Servetus'", *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America,* 87/3 (1993): 304; Mattison, "Michael Servetus: Fountainhead of Anti-Trinitarianism", 31.

[136]   Irena Backus, "Theological Relations: Calvin and the Church Fathers", trans. Gerrit W. Sheeres, *The Calvin Handbook*, ed. Herman J. Selderhuis (Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 133.

[137]   Odhner, *Michael Servetus, His Life and Teachings*, 22; John Macdonell, *Tarihi Davalar*, trans. Mehmet Osman Dostel (İstanbul: Arkadaş Basımevi, 1941), 175; Daintith, "Servetus, Michael (1511–1553)", 688-689; William Barry, "John Calvin", *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: The Encyclopedia Press, 1908), 3: 197; Wallace, *Antitrinitarian Biography*, 1: 432; Bainton, *Hunted Heretic*, 97; Emerton, "Calvin and Servetus", 152-153. Some scholars think that the arguments between Calvin and Servetus show more than just a personal theological rivalry. These two figures may show the tensions between the Renaissance and the Reformation. See Chaves, "The Servetus Challenge", 198.

Calvin primarily criticizes Servetus' conception of the Son.[138] Since Calvin and other reformers adopted the traditional doctrine of the Trinity, Calvin rejected Servetus' idea of a "created son." Again, Calvin believes that Servetus erred in dismissing the "three substantial persons" in the Trinity. He argues that Servetus wrongly condemned the concept of "person" by approaching it unfairly.[139] Calvin claims that Servetus' statements regarding the Logos also contain significant errors. Servetus abolished the eternity of the Logos, and this constituted an innovation in God's nature.[140]

When discussing Servetus' ideas, Calvin alluded to the possibility that he was a disciple of Arius or Sabellius.[141] This accusation was continued after Servetus' death, and his theology was sometimes presented as Modern Arianism.[142] However, it was not easy to define Servetus as an Arian because he harshly criticized the views of Arius and his followers in his work.[143]

Supporting evidence should exist to assert that Servetus was influenced by Arius or Sabellius. In discussing the relationship between the Son and God the Father, Arius argued against the assumption that both were equal and that the Son shared the same essence (homoousios) as the Father. In addition, Arius affirmed the absoluteness and uniqueness of God the Father and maintained that the Son was subordinate to God the Father and did not exist apart from God the Father but was created by him.[144] At first glance, it may appear that Servetus and Arius are almost at the same point. However, the distinction becomes more evident when it is remembered that Servetus believed that divinity entered the nature of the Son after incarnation. As previously stated, Servetus is precisely opposed to the Trinity. Still, when explaining the nature of the Son, he refers to the God-human

---

[138]   Servetus, *Thirty Letters to Calvin, Preacher to the Genevans*, 1-2.
[139]   John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 122-123.
[140]   Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 130.
[141]   Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 127.
[142]   Elgin Mozer & Earle E. Cairns, *Wycliffe Biographical Dictionary of the Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 366. Craig S. Harbison, "Counter-Reformation Iconography in Titian's Gloria", *The Art Bulletin* 49/3 (1967): 244-246. E. Calvin Beisner, *God in Three Persons* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1978), 17-18; Alfonso Maria de' Liguori, *The History of Heresies and Their Refutation*, trans. John T. Mullock (Dublin: James Duffy, 1857), 350-351; Goldstone Lawrence & Goldstone Nancy, *Out of The Flames* (New York: Broadway Books, 2002), 68; Hans J. Hillerbrand, *A New History of Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 314.
[143]   Servetus, *RC*, 2007, 30.
[144]   Kaçar, "Ebioniteler'den Arius'a: Eskiçağ Doğu Hristiyanlığında İsa Teolojisi Tartışmaları", 201-202.

combination as a "mixture," which demonstrates that he does not share Arius' views. Furthermore, Servetus calls Arius' statement that the Son does not have the same essence as the Father "a foolish opinion" and criticizes him for not giving Christ the value he deserves.[145]

In reality, Servetus seems closer to Sabellius in their approaches to the Trinity. Jesus is one of God's manifestations in Sabellian theology, also known as Modalist Monarchianism. According to Sabellius, God manifests himself as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit at various times, but these forms of manifestation are not separate gods. Each of these parts cannot independently be thought to possess the divine quality. It is impossible to speak of the Father and the Son as two distinct persons in the Sabellian explanation of the Trinity. He manifested Himself as the word in creation, the Son in the incarnation to save humanity, and the Holy Spirit for the Church's guidance and blessing.[146] Like Sabellius, Servetus uses the concept of "manifestation" for the persons of the Trinity. He interprets the Son and the Holy Spirit as manifestations of God and attributes separate deity to none of them. However, it is not easy to say that Servetus and Sabellius had the same opinion on every issue or claim that Servetus was a follower of Sabellius. There is no evidence that Servetus drew inspiration from Sabellius when developing his theology. Moreover, it is evident that he diverged from Modalist Monarchist thought regarding the nature of Christ. Modalist Monarchianism did not mention Jesus' human nature, whereas Servetus points to his divine and human natures.

Conclusion

Michael Servetus was declared a heretic because of his thoughts on the Trinity and burned to death in 1553 by the order of Calvin. However, his understanding of Christianity continues to exist even today. People gathered around *the Unitarian Universalist Church* accept Servetus as their leader today and, like him, defend the unity of God within Christianity.

From his earliest to last works, examining Servetus' Christian theology reveals that one of his most fundamental assumptions is the one and unique God. His theory of Jesus Christ and the Trinity remained consistent throughout his writings, although many of his insights changed and im-

---

[145]   Servetus, *TTT*, 22.
[146]   Bilal Baş, "Monoteist Bir Hıristiyanlık Yorumu: Aryüsçülük Mezhebi", *Dîvân* 9/2 (2002): 176; Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 115-123; K. R. Hagenbach, *Compendium of the History of Doctrines*, trans. Karl W. Buch (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1846), 1: 262-266.

proved through time, as seen by his subsequent works and other texts. Servetus' understanding of the Trinity is multifaceted. In *De Trinitatis Erroribus*, for example, he discusses the irrationality of the Trinity with rational arguments. In *Christianismi Restitutio*, on the other hand, he gives a distinct interpretation of Christ's mission and develops an alternative soteriological theory in which the Trinity is declared unnecessary. He makes no distinctions between God's persons and accepts only differences based on revelation. Servetus' critique of the Trinity is not based on a single argument. Moreover, His views of original sin and baptism also clash with tradition.

When discussing his understanding of the Trinity, several problems surrounding who or what influenced him must be addressed. His rejection of the Trinity, in particular, may indicate an external influence. According to what can be gleaned from Servetus' writings, it seems improbable that a person or group inspired him to reject the Trinity. His travel to France to study law and in-depth Bible study caused him to question the Trinity. As a result of his subsequent, more thorough research, he concluded that the Trinity should not be a Christian dogma. According to his published works, he first held a definite opinion on this topic and then cited various sources to support this viewpoint, including Jewish and Islamic ones.

From the standpoint of traditional Christianity, Servetus has been identified as an Arian, Sabellian, Modalist, Anabaptist, Neoplatonic, Millennialist, Humanist, Monophysite, Pantheist, Dualist, and Gnostic. All of these appear to be incorrect definitions for him. On the contrary, one could argue that the terminology and methods he employed to develop his theology impacted all these currents of thinking. The assertions of these movements are prevalent in the works of Servetus. His extensive study of various books from a young age may have been an essential factor in this. However, if a definitive name is necessary, he should be identified as an anti-trinitarian Christian.

Bibliography

Ancín, Miguel González. "Miguel Servet: Su Educaciön y los Médicos con los que Conviviö a Través de Nuevos Documentos". *Revista de la Reial Acadèmia de Medicina de Catalunya* 33/1 (2018): 30-32.

Ancín, Miguel González. *Miguel Servet en España (1506-1527)*. Tudela: Imprenta Castilla, 2017.

Backus, Irena. "Theological Relations: Calvin and the Church Fathers". Translated by Gerrit W. Sheeres, in *The Calvin Handbook*, edited by Herman J. Selderhuis, Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009.

Bainton, Roland. *Hunted Heretic*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1953.

Barry, William. "John Calvin". In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York: The Encyclopedia Press, 1908, 3: 195-198.

Baş, Bilal. *Bir Hıristiyan Mezhebi Olarak Aryüsçülük*. İstanbul: Arkeoloji ve Sanat Yayınları, 2016.

Baş, Bilal. "Monoteist Bir Hıristiyanlık Yorumu: Aryüsçülük Mezhebi". *Dîvân* 9/2 (2002): 167-199.

Bayrakdar, Mehmet. *Bir Hıristiyan Dogması Teslis*. Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2007.

Beisner, E. Calvin. *God in Three Persons*. Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1978.

Brandon, S. G. F. (ed.). *A Dictionary of Comparative Religion*. New York: Scribner, 1970.

Brown, Harold O. J. *Heresies*. Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday & Company, 1984.

Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translated by Ford Lewis Battles, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.

Chaves, Joao. "The Servetus Challenge: Eisegesis and the Problematic of Differing Chronologies of Ecclesiastical Corruption". *Journal of Reformed Theology* 10/3 (2016): 195-214, https://doi.org/10.1163/15697312-01003001.

Daintith, John (ed.). *Biographical Encyclopedia of Scientists*. Florida: CRC Press, 2009, 688-689.

Dorner, J. A. *History of the Development of the Doctrine of the Person of Christ*. 15 volumes, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1890.

Drummond, William Hamilton. *The Life of Michael Servetus*. London: John Chapman Press, 1848.

Duygu, Zafer. "Hıristiyanlığın Erken Yüzyıllarındaki İsa Teolojisi Tartışmalarında 'Dinamik Monarşiyanist' Akıma Özgü 'Monoteist' Kristoloji ve Bunun 'Ebionit' Kristolojiyle Mukayesesi". *Pamukkale Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 31 (13 Nisan 2018): 329-343, https://doi.org/10.30794/pausbed.414973.

Duygu, Zafer. *Hıristiyanlık ve İmparatorluk*. İstanbul: Divan Yayınları, 2017.

Emerton, Ephraim. "Calvin and Servetus". *Harvard Theological Review* 2/2 (1909): 139-160.

Fisher, Jeff. "Housing a Heretic: Johannes Oecolampadius (1482–1531) and the 'Pre-History' of the Servetus Affair". *Reformation & Renaissance Review* 20/1 (2018): 35-50.

Friedman, Jerome. *Michael Servetus: The Theology of Optimism*. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1971.

Friedman, Jerome. "The Reformation Merry-Go-Round: The Servetian Glossary of Heresy". *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 7/1 (1976): 73-80.

Friedrich, Trechsel. *Michael Servet und Seine Vorgänger*. Heidelberg: Winter, 1839.

Fulton, John F. *Michael Servetus*. New York: Herbert Reichner, 1953.

George, Timothy. *Reformcuların Teolojileri*. Translated by İbrahim Elbeyli, İstanbul: Haberci, 2019.

Gribaldi, Matteo. *Declarationis Jesu Christi Filii Dei*. Translated by Peter Hughes & Peter Zerner, New York: Blackstone & Michael Servetus Institute, 2010.

Hagenbach, K.R. *Compendium of the History of Doctrines*. Translated by Karl W. Buch, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1846.

Harbison, Craig S. "Counter-Reformation Iconography in Titian's Gloria". *The Art Bulletin* 49/3 (1967): 244-246.

Harris, Mark. W. *Historical Dictionary of Unitarian Universalism*. Lanham, Md.: The Scarecrow Press, 2004.

Heinrich Von, Allwoerden & Mosheim Johann Lorenz Von. *Historia Michaelis Serveti*. Helmstad: Stanno Buchholtziano, 1728.

Hillar, Marian. "Process Theology and Process Thought in the Writings of Michael Servetus". San Antonio: Center for Philosophy and Socinian Studies, 2002.

Hillerbrand, Hans J. *A New History of Christianity*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012.

Hoover, Jon. "İslâmî Monoteizm ve Teslîs". Translated by Zeynep Yücedoğru, *Oksident* 1/1 (2019): 117-143.

Hughes, Peter. "The Early Years of Servetus and the Origin of His Critique of Trinitarian Thought". *JUUH* 37 (2014 2013): 32-99.

Hughes, Peter. "The Face of God: The Christology of Michael Servetus". *JUUH* 40 (2017 2016): 16-53.

J., Trueta. "The Contribution of Michael Servetus to the Scientific Development of the Renaissance". *BMJ* 2 (1954): 507-510.

Kaçar, Turhan. "Ebioniteler'den Arius'a: Eskiçağ Doğu Hristiyanlığında İsa Teolojisi Tartışmaları". *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 44/2 (2003): 187-206.

Kelly, J. N. D. *Early Christian Doctrines*. 4th edition, London: Adam&Charles Black Press, 1968.

Kershaw, Stephen P. *Yunan Mitolojisi Rehber Kitabı*. Translated by Şefik Turan, Konya: Salon Yayınları, 2018.

Klauber, Martin I. "Servetus, Michael (1511-53)". In *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, edited by Trevor A. Hart, Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2000, 520-522.

Lawrence, Goldstone & Goldstone Nancy. *Out of the Flames*. New York: Broadway Books, 2002.

Liguori, Alfonso Maria de'. *The History of Heresies and Their Refutation*. Translated by John T. Mullock, Dublin: James Duffy, 1857.

Macdonell, John. *Tarihi Davalar*. Translated by Mehmet Osman Dostel, İstanbul: Arkadaş Basımevi, 1941.

Mattison, Mark. "Michael Servetus: Fountainhead of Anti-Trinitarianism". *A Journal from the Radical Reformation: A Testimony to Biblical Unitarianism* 1/1 (1992 1991): 27-43.

McGrath, Alister E. *Historical Theology*. New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.

Mitchell, S.C. "A Stricture on Schaff's Account of Servetus". *The American Journal of Theology* 1/2 (1897): 450-459.

Mozer, Elgin & Earle E. Cairns. *Wycliffe Biographical Dictionary of the Church*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1982.

Nigg, Walter. *The Heretics*. Translated by Richard Winston & Clara Winston, New York: Alfred A. Knopf., 1962.

Odhner, Carl Theophilus. *Michael Servetus, His Life and Teachings*. Philadelphia: Lippincott Company, 1910.

Olgun, Hakan. *Luther ve Reformu: Katolisizm'i Protesto*. Ankara: Fecr Yayınları, 2001.

O'Malley, Charles D. "The Complementary Careers of Michael Servetus: Theologian and Physician". *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 8/4 (1953): 378-389.

Roberts, Nancy. "Trinity vs. Monotheism: A False Dichotomy?". *The Muslim World* 101 (2011): 73-93.

Schulte am Hülse, Christine. "The Holy Spirit in the Theological Work of Michael Servetus". *Church History and Religious Culture* 101/2-3 (2021): 214-233.

Schuon, Frithjof. *From the Divine to the Human: Survey of Metaphysics and Epistemology*. Translated by Gustavo Polis & Deborah Lambert, Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 1981.

Servetus, Michael. *The Restoration of Christianity (RC)*. Translated by Christopher A. Hoffman & Marian Hillar, Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007.

Servetus, Michael. *The Two Treatises of Servetus on the Trinity*. Translated by Earl Morse Wilbur, London: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2013.

Servetus, Michael. *Thirty Letters to Calvin, Preacher to the Genevans: And Sixty Signs of the Kingdom of the Antichrist and His Revelation Which Is Now at Hand*. Translated by Christopher A. Hoffman & Marian Hillar, Lewiston, N.Y: Edwin Mellen Pr, 2010.

Servetus, Michael. *The Two Treatises of Servetus on The Trinity (TTT)*. Translated by Earl Morse Wilbur, London: Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932.

Sill, Geoffrey M. "The Authorship of 'An Impartial History of Michael Servetus'". *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 87/3 (1993): 303-318.

Tarakçı, Muhammet. *St. Thomas Aquinas*. İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2006.

Tausiet, María. "Magus versus Falsarius: A Duel of Insults between Calvin and Servetus". *Reformation & Renaissance Review* 10/1 (2008): 59-87.

Thiel, Udo. *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Torello, Joan. "Michael Servetus on 'Pneuma'". *Journal of Psychology & Clinical Psychiatry* 2/2 (2015): 1-5.

Waardenburg, Jacques. "Reform". *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* (*DİA*), İstanbul: Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 2007, 34: 530-533.

Waardenburg, Jacques. "Teslis". *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, İstanbul: Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 2011, 40: 548-549.

Wallace, Robert. *Antitrinitarian Biography*. 3 volumes, London: Whitfield, 1850.

Wilbur, Earl Morse. *A History of Unitarianism: Socinianism and Its Antecedents*. 2 volumes, Boston: Beacon Press, 1945.

Williams, George Huntston. *The Radical Reformation.* Philadelphia: West Minster, 1962.

Willis, Robert. *Servetus and Calvin*. London: Henry S. King & Co, 1877.

Yılmaz, İsmail. *Üniteryanizm'in Doğuşu ve Bunu Etkileyen Dini Faktörler*. Doktora Tezi, Bursa: Uludağ Üniversitesi, 1994.

Zweig, Stefan. *Vicdan Zorbalığa Karşı ya da Castellio Calvin'e*. Translated by Zehra Kurttekin, İstanbul: Can Sanat Yayınları, 2014.