

Michel Servet. *Restitution du Christianisme: Édition bilingue.*

2 vols. Ed. Rolande-Michelle Bénin. Textes Littéraires de la Renaissance 8. Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2011. 1,752 pp. €250. ISBN: 978-2-7453-2301-9.

These are the two volumes of the bilingual edition and translation of the last and major work of Michael Servetus, *Christianismi restitutio*, which he printed in 1553. Professor Bénin previously published, also by the same publishing house, the earlier works of Servetus, *Sept livres sur la Trinité*, translated with Marie-Louise Gicquel (2008), originally published in 1531, and *Dialogue sur la Trinité en deux livres et De la Justice du royaume du Christ en quatre chapitres* (2009), originally published in 1532. Professor Bénin made an extraordinary contribution to universal

culture by translating Servetus's works, making it available in beautiful French to all French-speaking people and to all francophones. To my knowledge there is only one more work of Servetus translated into French, that by Jean Dupèbe, *Discussion apologetique pour l'astrologie contre un certain medecin* (2004), originally published in 1538.

This publication is a welcome addition to a growing number of editions and publications of Servetus's works. The most abundant are translations into Spanish: *Geography of Ptolemy*, 1932; *Syrups*, 1943, 1995; *Astrology*, 1981; *The Restoration of Christianity*, 1981. The most recent is a monumental bilingual edition (Latin and Spanish) of all the works of Servetus together with the historical documents and writings related to the life and death of Michael Servetus in six volumes, *Obras completas*, edited by Ángel Alcalá (2003–06).

There were translated into English Servetus's *On the Errors of the Trinity* in 1932, by Earl Morse Wilbur, and excerpts from his geographical and medical works in 1953 by Charles D. O'Malley. His *Christianismi restitutio* was translated in four separate volumes by Christopher A. Hoffman and Marian Hillar, corresponding to the five parts of Servetus's treatise (2007, 2008, 2008, 2010). The last part still remains to be translated: *On the Mystery of the Trinity and the Teachings of the Ancients, Apology against Philip Melancthon and his Colleagues*.

When Servetus was burned alive in Geneva on 27 October 1553, all copies of his major work, *Christianismi restitutio*, went up in smoke together with him. Today only three surviving copies of the original publication are known: one in the National Library of Austria in Vienna; one in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (this copy was most likely used by Germain Colladon, attorney acting on behalf of Nicolas de la Fontaine during Servetus's trial in Geneva); and one copy in the library of the University of Edinburgh. The latter lacks the first sixteen pages and the title page. These were replaced by manuscript pages reproduced in the sixteenth century from another manuscript.

*Restitutio* was circulated after Servetus's death in the form of copied manuscripts. In 1790 the German erudite, Dr. Christoph Gottlieb von Murr, a follower of Unitarianism, made a handwritten copy of the exemplar from the National Library in Vienna and published almost an exact replica of the original book in Nürnberg. There are about fifty-three exemplars of this publication in various libraries. The Murr reprint was reproduced in 1966 by a new photographic technique and serves today as the research tool for Servetian studies. A reprint of selected fragments from *Restitutio* concerning the kingdom of Christ, the kingdom of the Antichrist, pedobaptism and circumcision, was also published by Giorgio Biandrata in Transylvania in 1569. The first translation of a small tractate attached to the *Restitutio* and titled "Sixty Signs of the Antichrist" was made by Grzegorz Paweł in Poland in 1568. The book was translated into German in three volumes by Bernhard Spiess from 1892 to 1896 and into Spanish by Ángel Alcalá in two separate volumes in 1980 and 1981.

This translation in two volumes includes two parts of the work in volume 1: part 1, "Seven Books of the Divine Trinity," covering an extended version of

Servetus's first work, *On the Errors of the Trinity*, and *Two Dialogues on the Trinity*. Part 2 includes "Treatise on Faith and Justice of Christ's Kingdom." Volume 2 contains part 3, "Treatise Concerning the Supernal Regeneration and the Kingdom of the Antichrist," part 4, "Thirty Letters to Calvin, Preacher to the Genevans," part 5, "Sixty Signs of the Antichrist and His Revelation which is Now at Hand," and part 6, "Apology to Philipp Melanchthon and his Colleagues on the Trinity and the Teachings of the Ancients." This translation is supplemented by an introduction describing the history of the book and characteristics of the work. To volume 2 are added an index of topics and names, an index of biblical verses, a glossary, a bibliography of original works of Servetus, their translations, and various publications on Servetus.

Servetus remains an obscure figure in history mainly due to the fact that his memory was erased from the historical annals by his opponents. He is, however, a key figure in the evolution of culture and religion in Western Europe. Unsatisfied with the Reformation, Servetus demanded a radical evaluation of the entire ideological religious system of assertions and dogmas imposed on Western Europe since the fourth century. He built singlehandedly a new Christian religion closer to the Christianity of the first century. Among the theological doctrines that Servetus propounded there are two that stand out, especially from the perspective of our position and our hindsight. One is his antitrinitarianism based on a critical evaluation of the doctrine of the Trinity as having no biblical, historical, or rational basis and as being a Greek religio-philosophical accretion to the Christian story; the other is his doctrine of justification, which emphasizes human natural capabilities of recognizing moral values and making moral judgments. His lasting contribution to the universal culture is his struggle for freedom of conscience, free inquiry, and expression. This is the outstanding expression of Servetus's humanism in realizing that human nature is not depraved or corrupt. This trait of Servetus's thought unites him with the ancient optimistic humanism as well as with the modern outlook on the human condition supported by modern studies in the history of ethics and its rational and natural origin.

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