

Servetus (Michael Villaneuve) was a learning Spanish physician just slightly Calvin's junior. He was a humanist, had been educated in France, and had served as court secretary to Charles V. He had also been active religiously as a chaplain in the Emperor's court in Augsburg and seems to have known Calvin to some degree when both were students in the humanist circles in Paris. As a physician, Servetus seems to have been advanced in the science. He seems to have understood the circulation of the blood in an age long before Sr. William Harvey proved it. As a theologian he adopted the position that Christ was merely a man who was progressively deified. This view was circulated in a tract written in Basle in the 1530's and placed Servetus in the Sabellian theological camp. The anti-trinitarian tracts and opinions he elicited cost him favor with the church and he was condemned by a church council at Lyons and sentenced to be burned. Apparently the literature came to the Bishop of Lyons from a Swiss source, often thought to be Calvin or his circle, in response to a request for such information. Servetus escaped but was burned in absentia and was thereafter under the condemnation of the church and the theoretical condemnation of the Empire.

Among other materials used against him was his three-point debate challenge issued to Calvin in 1542. The questions were not so bad, the anticipated answers were problematic. In particular he asked to debate:

Was the man Christ, the Son of God?

When is a man born-again?

Is faith as necessary in baptism
as in the Lord's supper.

In the first, Servetus attacked the Lord's Person, in the second the theology of Augustine, and in the third the concepts of efficacy in baptism. Calvin felt that such debates were profitless and there were none held. He advised Servetus that no purpose could be served and warned him against the consequences of such teaching. Perhaps as Calvin had only recently returned to Geneva, Servetus felt he could gain some temporal advantage over him (and those who believed as he did) in an open city.

But in 1553, fleeing from others, Servetus came to Geneva even though he had been forewarned that he would be prosecuted if found there. He hoped the Geneva council would uphold him in dialogue since at the moment Calvin was in "hot water" over various church policies. He entered Geneva in disguise but