

The Trial of Michael Servetus in Calvin's Geneva

Nicholas de la Fontaine

(1553)

Nicholas de la Fontaine asserts that he has instituted proceedings against Michael Servetus, and on this account he has allowed himself to be held prisoner in criminal process.

1. In the first place that about twenty-four years ago the defendant commenced to annoy the churches of Germany with his errors and heresies, and was condemned and took to flight in order to escape the punishment prepared for him.
2. *Item*, that on or about this time he printed a wretched book, which has infected many people.
3. *Item*, that since that time he has not ceased by all means in his power to scatter his poison, as much by his construction of biblical text, as by certain annotations which he has made upon Ptolemy.
4. *Item*, that since that time he has printed in secrecy another book containing endless blasphemies.
5. *Item*, that while detained in prison in the city of Vienne [in France], when he saw that they were willing to pardon him on condition of his recanting, he found means to escape from prison.

Said Nicholas demands that said Servetus be examined upon all these points.

And since he is able to evade the question by pretending that his blasphemies and heresies are nought else than good doctrine, said Nicholas proposes certain articles upon which he demands said heretic be examined.

6. To wit, whether he has not written and falsely taught and published that to believe that in a single essence of God there are three distinct persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, is to create four phantoms, which cannot and ought not to be imagined.

7. *Item*, that to put such distinction into the essence of God is to cause God to be divided into three parts, and that this is a threeheaded devil, like to Cerberus, whom the ancient poets have called the dog of hell, a monster, and things equally injurious. ...

9. *Item*, whether he does not say that our Lord Jesus Christ is not the Son of God, except in so much as he was conceived of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the virgin Mary.

10. *Item*, that those who believe Jesus Christ to have been the word of God the Father, engendered through all eternity, have a scheme of redemption which is fanciful and of the nature of sorcery.

11. *Item*, that Jesus Christ is God, insomuch as God has caused him to be such. ...

27. *Item*, that the soul of man is mortal, and that the only thing which is immortal is an elementary breath, which is the substance that Jesus Christ now possesses in heaven and which is also the elementary and divine and incorruptible substance of the Holy Ghost. ...

32. *Item*, that the baptism of little children is an invention of the Devil, an infernal falsehood tending to the destruction of all Christianity. ...

37. *Item*, that in the person of M. Calvin, minister of the word of God in the Church of Geneva, he has defamed with printed book the doctrine which he preached, uttering all the injurious and blasphemous things which it is possible to invent. ...