

# Tolerant Humanists? Nikolaus Zurkinden and the Debate between Calvin, Castellio, and Beza

Ueli Zahnd

In her *Historical Method and Confessional Identity*, Irena Backus devotes a few pages to Sebastian Castellio and his understanding and appreciation of Classic sources for sacred history.<sup>1</sup> Confronting Castellio's use of pagan authors with Calvin's, these unassumingly written pages have, as it has almost become normal with Irena Backus' accounts, what it takes to change widespread assumptions, this time a common trait in the image of the Savoyard theologian.<sup>2</sup> For, other than Calvin, who adapted pagan concepts to his Christian framework, Castellio, the much vaunted humanist, appears, as early as in his *Moses Latinus* from 1546, reluctant to admit the utility of pagan philosophy for Christian ends. While, from Buisson to Guggisberg and the ongoing German edition of Castellio's works, it has become common to stress, at least for the earlier Castellio, his commitment with Classics in religious matters, too,<sup>3</sup> Irena Backus suggests that he did not even appreciate the utility of ethical pagan conceptions such as pity or magnanimity.<sup>4</sup> In two recent contributions on Plato and Flavius Josephus in Castellio's *Biblia Latina*, she confirms this lack of status of Classical thought, but in her usual modesty, she limits these findings to the specific context analyzed.<sup>5</sup> Yet, given this apparently fundamental nature of

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1 Irena Backus, *Historical Method and Confessional Identity in the Era of the Reformation* (1378–1615), *Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought* 94 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 118–129. I wish to thank Michael O'Leary for his efforts to make this paper more readable.

2 For a reconsideration of Castellio's presumed scepticism, see Irena Backus, "The Issue of Reformation Scepticism Revisited: What Erasmus and Sebastian Castellio Did or Did Not Know," in *Renaissance Scepticisms*, ed. Gianni Paganini and José R. Maia Neto, *International Archives of the History of Ideas* 199 (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009): 63–89.

3 Ferdinand Buisson, *Sébastien Castellion: sa vie et son œuvre* (1515–1563), 2 vols. (Paris: Hachette, 1892 [reprinted Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1964]), 1:319–320; Hans R. Guggisberg, *Sebastian Castellio 1515–1563: Humanist und Verteidiger der religiösen Toleranz im konfessionellen Zeitalter* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 60; Uwe Plath, "Einführung," in *Sebastian Castellio: Gegen Calvin / Contra libellum Calvini*, *Bibliothek historischer Denkwürdigkeiten* (Essen: Alcorde-Verlag, 2015), 14.

4 Backus, *Historical Method*, 122–123.

5 Irena Backus, "Moses, Plato and Flavius Josephus. Castellio's Conceptions of Sacred and Profane in his Latin Versions of the Bible," in *Shaping the Bible in the Reformation: Books,*

Castellio's attitude towards pagan sources, it goes without saying that it must have affected other contexts where his humanist stance is concerned—and there is hardly a question in the modern image of Castellio where this humanism is more put forward than in his statements about religious tolerance in the aftermath of the Servetus affair.<sup>6</sup> Remaining somehow in the long shadow of Stefan Zweig's dichotomic portrayal of Castellio and Calvin, there is still a tendency in modern accounts—decreasing, it is true<sup>7</sup>—to short-out humane concerns with humanism<sup>8</sup> and thus to stress the humanist attitude of the tolerant Castellio, while Calvin's intolerance is seen as a relapse into pre-humanist, medieval conditions the Renaissance should have overcome.<sup>9</sup> In this vein, Calvin and those joining him would have been responsible for the decrease of humanist concerns to the effect that the European culture had to wait two

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*Scholars, and their Readers in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Bruce Gordon and Matthew McLean (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 143–165, and Ead., “Les extraits des *Antiquités juives* dans la Bible latine de Castellion,” in *Sébastien Castellion: des Écritures à l'écriture*, ed. Marie-Christine Gomez-Géraud, Bibliothèque de la Renaissance 9 (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2013), 207–222. For a similar dissociation of religion and politics in Castellio's thought see Maria d'Arienzo, “Deux concepts de tolérance : Sébastien Castellion et Michel de L'Hospital,” in *Michel Servet (1511–1553). Héresie et pluralisme du XVI<sup>e</sup> au XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. Valentine Zuber (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2007), 213–223.

- 6 See, with further references, Uwe Plath, *Der Fall Servet und die Kontroverse um die Freiheit des Glaubens und Gewissens. Castellio, Calvin und Basel 1552–1556* (Essen: Alcorde-Verlag, 2014), 30; see also Guggisberg, *Sebastian Castellio*, 96, 121, and Backus, “The Issue of Reformation Scepticism Revisited,” 72.
- 7 Among the most recent contributions, see Stefania Salvadori, “Sebastian Castellio's Doctrine of Tolerance between Theological Debate and Modernity,” in *New Worlds and the Italian Renaissance*, ed. Andrea Moudarres and Christiana Purdy Moudarres (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 195–223; Maria d'Arienzo, “Théologie et droit dans la pensée et les œuvres de Sébastien Castellion. Aspects méthodologiques,” in *Sébastien Castellion*, ed. Gomez-Géraud, 355–369; and Luca Baschera, “Glaube und Zweifel bei Sebastian Castellio und Johannes Calvin,” *Herme-neutische Blätter* 1/2 (2011): 178–190.
- 8 A contraction already present in Stefan Zweig, *Castellio gegen Calvin oder ein Gewissen gegen die Gewalt* (Wien: Herbert Reichner Verlag, 1936), 282; see also Maurice Baumann, “Calvin und Castellio: eine theologische Kontroverse anlässlich der Hinrichtung von Michel Servet,” in *Johannes Calvin 1509–2009. Würdigung aus Berner Perspektive*, ed. Martin Sallmann et al. (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2012), 121–137, at 135.
- 9 The accusation of Calvin being “medieval” is also present in Zweig, *Castellio gegen Calvin*, 102. See, as well, the statement of Heinrich Hoffmann in Kurt Guggisberg, “Johannes Calvin und Nikolaus Zurkinder. Glaubensautorität und Gewissensfreiheit,” *Zwingliana* 6/7 (1937): 374–409, at 403, and Wolfgang F. Stämmler, “Einführung,” in *Das Manifest der Toleranz. Sebastian Castellio über Ketzer und ob man sie verfolgen soll* (Essen: Alcorde-Verlag, 2013), 12.

other centuries until the Enlightenment would achieve what Renaissance humanism had initiated.<sup>10</sup>

This equation of humanism and humane concerns has also affected the portrayal of other contributors to the debate on tolerance. A particularly interesting case is the one of Nikolaus Zurkinden, the later amanuensis of the State of Bern who, ever since his time as bailiff of Nyon, corresponded with Calvin and was, in one of these letters, among the first to react critically to Calvin's official *Defensio* of the execution of Servetus.<sup>11</sup> Even if Zurkinden was primarily a statesman, his ongoing appeal for clemency with religious deviators, an appeal pervading his impressive further correspondence with—besides Calvin—Beza, Bullinger, but also Castellio, Curio, and others, won him to be labelled a humanist,<sup>12</sup> and his biographer Eduard Bähler was unhesitant to stress Zurkinden's acquaintance with Classic authors such as Ovid, Lucian, and Cicero.<sup>13</sup>

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- 10 The image of Castellio as a precursor of the Enlightenment was settled by Buisson (see, among others, his *Sébastien Castellion*, 2:216, and in this sense Étienne Barilier, "Castellion, précurseur de la tolérance religieuse ?," in *Michel Servet*, ed. Zuber, 335–348). But see now Nadia Cernogora, "Rhétorique et théologie. Castellion et l'exégèse du sens figuré dans le *De arte dubitandi et confidendi, ignorandi et sciendi*," in *Sébastien Castellion*, ed. Gomez-Géraud, 321–344, at 327–330, and, more specifically, Backus, "Les extraits des *Antiquités juives*," 221, as well as Gilbert Vincent, "Protestantisme libéral, tolérance et esprit laïque : l'interprétation de l'œuvre de Castellion par Ferdinand Buisson," *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 85 (2005): 253–277.
- 11 Calvin's *Defensio orthodoxae fidei de Sacra Trinitate* (Ioannis Calvini opera omnia denuo recognita IV.5), ed. Joy Kleinstuber (Genève: Droz, 2009) appeared in the first weeks of 1554, and already on February 10, Zurkinden wrote to Calvin his opinion on the book (CO 15:19–22); see Eduard Bähler, "Nikolaus Zurkinden von Bern, 1506–1588. Ein Lebensbild aus dem Jahrhundert der Reformation," *Jahrbuch für Schweizerische Geschichte* 36 (1911): 215–344 and 37 (1912): 1–106, at 11–14.
- 12 See already Johannes Neuenhaus, "Calvin als Humanist. Dargestellt an seinem Bildungswege und an seinem Wirken," in *Calvinstudien. Festschrift zum 400. Geburtstag Johann Calvins* (Leipzig: Haupt 1909), 1–26, here 25; Henri Meylan et al., "Introduction," in *Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze*, vol. 8 (1567), *Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 146 (Genève: Droz, 1976), 1–12, at 8; and now Alain Dufour, *Théodore de Bèze : poète et théologien*, *Cahiers d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 78 (Genève: Droz, 2006), 39n27. See also Zweig, *Castellio gegen Calvin*, 210–211.
- 13 Bähler, "Nikolaus Zurkinden II," 50; just as liberal protestants in general, Bähler also promoted the idea that Zurkinden and the other defenders of tolerance anticipated the Enlightenment, see *ibid.*, 72, and K. Guggisberg, "Calvin und Zurkinden." For Castellio see Valentine Zuber, "L'invention d'un héros du protestantisme libéral. Castellion aux XIX<sup>e</sup>–XX<sup>e</sup> siècles," in *Sébastien Castellion*, ed. Gomez-Géraud, 33–56.

Yet, in his very correspondence with Calvin, there is a detail that advises caution. For, contrarily to Castellio and despite fundamental dissensions, Zurkinden never broke with Calvin or Beza,<sup>14</sup> but they instead managed to find a culture of airing disagreements—and in one of these airings, Calvin complained about Zurkinden to be known for having said that he, Calvin, was rather a disciple of Cicero than a disciple of Christ: *Ciceronis potius quam Christi discipulum esse*.<sup>15</sup> This is all the more interesting since, at a closer look, similar reproaches can be found in Castellio's and others' arguments not only against Calvin, but also against Beza.<sup>16</sup> In the eyes of the defenders of tolerance, thus, one of the faults of the intolerant party seems to have been to be *too much* engaged with Cicero, the classic champion of Renaissance humanism.

It appears that the modern equation of humanist concerns with tolerance was not an equation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In what follows, after a short look at Zurkinden's early defense of religious tolerance, a few passages dealing with Cicero's status in the tolerance debate are discussed. It is obvious that the appeal to, or, more importantly, the denial of Cicero alone does not decide over one's humanist stance, but it should be sufficient to question any *exclusive* attribution of humanist concerns to one of the parties of the 16<sup>th</sup> century tolerance debate.

Zurkinden's early critical reaction to Calvin's *Defensio* introduces an unusual perspective, namely the one of a layperson. Zurkinden does not argue with biblical verses or rely on Classic resources. Instead he is deeply concerned with his political experience and the cruelties he observed during his time as bailiff of Sumiswald.<sup>17</sup> There, he had to attend to several executions of Anabaptists which he considered completely disproportionate, and this is what leads his arguments in the present case. Preferring a magistrate to

14 Calvin's response to Zurkinden's critical reaction on the *Defensio orthodoxae fidei* is lost, but it must have arrived quickly since, only two months after his first letter, Zurkinden writes to Calvin: "Literae tuae [...] ex omni parte fuere gratissimae. Securum enim redunt de vulgato illo malo pervagante omnium eruditorum animos, ut vel levissima dissentiendi suspicione oborta, protinus omnem amicitiam discerpant ac perdant" (dated April 7; CO 15:115; see Bähler, "Nikolaus Zurkinden II," 14).

15 CO 17:466.

16 See below, note 53.

17 Zurkinden explicitly states: "Neque me tantopere movent loci scripturae quos illi adducent ut gladii aciem a tractanda religionis causa arceant, quam stupenda exempla quae nostro tempore in plectendis Catabaptistis evenerunt" (CO 15:20; cf. Bähler, "Nikolaus Zurkinden II," 5–8). On his time in Sumiswald see Bähler, "Nikolaus Zurkinden I," 227–228.

excess in clemency rather than in rigor,<sup>18</sup> he fears an abuse of executions in inappropriate cases,<sup>19</sup> he adduces their impracticability as soon as whole communities are concerned,<sup>20</sup> he questions their efficacy as a threat,<sup>21</sup> and he warns that the Reformed churches could render no greater service to the Catholics than to reintroduce their cruelty and torment.<sup>22</sup> Hence, as deeply involved these concerns are, they are not brought forward on a principal level:<sup>23</sup> they are neither theological, nor do they reflect on the human condition as such; rather, they give evidence of a grave, but somehow pragmatic, political concern. Zurkinden, the statesman, is worried about the impression a community leaves that enforces a death sentence in religious matters, and he questions the proportionality and practicability of these sentences. This primarily political reasoning is all the more significant since, as a statesman, Zurkinden had his part in the difficult relation between Bern

18 CO 15:20: "Malo [...] et magistratus et me nimia clementia et timiditate ex imperitia uti, quam propensius deflectere ad rigorem gladii" (see also below, the second citation in note 23).

19 Recounting his experience of the disproportionate execution of two anabaptist *mulierculae*, Zurkinden replies to Calvin that this example "adeo me commovet ut verear ne non maneat magistratus intra eos cancellos quibus eos constringis, ut atrocissimos tantum fidei et religionis eversores ad supplicium rapiant. Si hoc optineri posse speras non reluctor, sed vereor [...] ne leves etiam errores pro capitalibus habeantur" (CO 15:20).

20 CO 15:21: "Video paucos aliquot posse hoc modo tolli, totas civitates minime: ego vero cuperem tales esse leges capitales, quarum rigor non acueretur in paucos, obtunderetur a multitudine."

21 Ibid.: "Nescire etiam homines possunt quae momenta resipiscentiae cuique erranti sint praefixa, tollique potest non expectata poenitentia qui propediem non oneri sed ornamento ecclesiae erat futurus. Plerique enim eo sunt ingenio ut duci possint, trahi minime, vidimusque obriguisse quosdam ad supplicii mentionem, qui alioquin non erant omnino intractabiles."

22 CO 15:22: "Addo papistis nos gratius facere nihil posse quam si illorum saevitiam detestati novam ipsi patiamur et domesticam repullulare carnificinam."

23 Even when expressing his deepest commitment, Zurkinden concedes that there are extreme cases that merit a death sentence: he would prefer "meum sanguinem fundi quam cuiusquam non extreme meriti supplicio contaminari" (CO 15:20). Hence, Zurkinden is not principally opposed to executions, but he would like to reduce them to an absolute minimum, see *ibid.*: "Fateor tibi libenter me quoque esse ex eorum numero qui vel imperitia vel timiditate nimia gladii usum rarissimum cupiunt esse in coercendis fidei adversariis, sive proposito sive imperitia errantibus" (see also above, note 19). He was not even against the execution of Servetus, but he (just like Calvin) would have wanted him to be "alio supplicii genere sublatum" (CO 15:20). During his time as bailiff of Nyon, he applied several death penalties, see Bähler, "Nikolaus Zurkinden I," 232.

and Geneva, and one of his very political tasks was to restrict the Geneva influence in the French parts of the Bernese territories.<sup>24</sup> This is not to say that Zurkinder was not serious about his claims for clemency; they would remain an impressive ostinato of his correspondence.<sup>25</sup> Yet, they might also have served him to shape the differences between Geneva and the politics he encouraged for Bern.

That there was a political impact of the tolerance debate definitely became apparent when, first in 1558 after the demission of Beza, and then again in 1561–1562 after the one of Comte, Zurkinder tried to promote no other than Castellio to replace them at the Lausanne academy, at the time the main French school to train protestant ministers.<sup>26</sup> Calvin who in the meantime was at strife with Castellio not only about the question of executing heretics, but also about translating the Bible, and about predestination,<sup>27</sup> was personally offended by such blatant sympathy for one of his personal enemies, and it was in reaction to one of these promotions that he uttered the aforementioned complaint about Zurkinder calling him a disciple rather of Cicero than of Christ.<sup>28</sup> Although we have no other record of this saying, and although there was no consideration of pagan thought in Zurkinder's first criticism of Calvin's *Defensio*, it appears that, even for the Bernese statesman, besides the political dimension, a concern for the status of Classical authors came up. And, as it seems, Zurkinder was not in favor of being too much occupied with Cicero. Yet, how did this concern about the champion of Renaissance Humanism get into the debate?

24 Among others, Zurkinder published in 1551 for the French territories the "*Briefve et chrestienne declaration pour la Jeunesse sur les dix commandemens de Dieu [...] et comme on en use en La Ville de Berne, et en tout le Ressort dicelle*" in order to displace the prevalent Genevan formulars, see Bähler, "Nikolaus Zurkinder," I, 234 and II, 41. This episode was even used by Castellio as an argument against Beza, see Sebastian Castellio, *De haereticis non puniendis*, ed. Bruno Becker, *Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 118 (Genève: Droz, 1971), 40, 98.

25 See Bähler, "Nikolaus Zurkinder II," 3–31.

26 See Bähler, "Nikolaus Zurkinder I," 314–315, and Guggisberg, *Sebastian Castellio*, 204.

27 See Guggisberg, *Sebastian Castellio*, 153–167. As is well known, their very first disagreement happened in the 1540s, when Castellio worked in Geneva and questioned the allegorical status of the *Song of Songs*. Interestingly enough, this "heresy" was later attributed to Zurkinder, see Alfonso Salmeron, *Commentarii in Evangelicam Historiam*, vol. 1 (Madriti: apud Ludouicum Sanchez 1598), 208b.

28 The letter is undated so that it might refer either to the first (as the editors suggest in CO 17:464–467) or the second vacancy at Lausanne (as Bähler, "Nikolaus Zurkinder I," 266, suggests).

A first, but rather incidental mention of the role of Cicero appeared in Castellio's first report to the Servetus affair, his *De haereticis an sint persequendi* published under the name of Martinus Bellius in March 1554. This famous collection of material—his enemies would quickly call it a *Farrago*, a “pot-pourri”<sup>29</sup>—was printed before Castellio was aware of Calvin's *Defensio*, and it contained a short treatise published under the name of a certain Georgius Kleinberg who, today, is most often thought to be another pseudonym of Castellio.<sup>30</sup> In order to unsettle a hesitant reader, Kleinberg's account provided more questions than answers, and its author tried to foreclose any refutation of his suggestions, since, in one passage, he admitted that “hairsplitting malicious sophists ... in opposing the truth according to their trade” might rebut everything, and be it that “to oppress the truth they draw on all the arts of the Aristotles and the Ciceros to throw dust in the eyes of the judges, as their master Cicero somewhere or other boasts that he did.”<sup>31</sup> Far from any appreciation, Cicero appears as the champion of an art that serves to disavow facts and to combat truths such as the one presented by Kleinberg. This is not just a questioning of Cicero as a reliable guide to defend the truth, of course, but in identifying his art with sophistry it is a harsh criticism of rhetoric—and, thus, of a key aspect of Renaissance Humanism. Hence, the presence of this passage has recently been used, among others, to argue that Castellio, the “humanist,” cannot have been the author of this part of *De haereticis*.<sup>32</sup> This argument,

29 See the title of Beza's response, below, note 37. Given the many *De haereticis* written in the debate, we are going to refer, as has become customary, to this first contribution of Castellio as *Farrago*.

30 Buisson, *Sébastien Castellion*, 2:164, suggested that Georg Kleinberg was David Joris. At the latest since Roland H. Bainton's studies (see, among others, his translation *Concerning heretics* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1935], 10), Kleinberg is usually identified with Castellio. In recent times, however, the David-Joris-hypothesis gains new support, see Mirjam van Veen, “Contaminated with David Joris's Blasphemies. David Joris's Contribution to Castellio's *De haereticis an sint persequendi*,” in *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 69 (2007): 313–326. See, however, below note 32.

31 *Farrago*, 135–136: “Si quis erit ita sanguinis sitiens, et Antichristi poculo ebrius, ut velit hae refellere, videat ut et omnia et vere refellat. Sunt enim quidam callidi et malitiosi sophistae, qui dum veritatem oppugnant (id quod ars eorum facere docet) [...] ad opprimendum veritatem depromunt universas Aristotelum et Ciceronum artes, ut tenebras effundant oculis iudicum, sicuti se fecisse magister illorum Cicero alicubi iactat” (the translation is from Bainton, *Concerning Heretics*, 224). On Cicero deceiving the judges see Quintilian, *Institutiones oratoriae*, II, 17.21.

32 Van Veen, “David Joris's Contribution,” 323. This does not question her other arguments to identify Kleinberg with David Joris.

however, presupposes the problematic identity of humanist and humane concerns. By contrast, in what follows, it will become apparent that this criticism of Cicero, and of rhetoric more generally, a criticism that seems to be aimed at a fundamental concern of Renaissance Humanism, is fully in line with later accounts Castellio wrote in his own name.

In his next contribution to the debate, it is true, Castellio seemed to rely more favourably on Cicero. Having taken note of Calvin's *Defensio*, he composed still in 1554 the *Contra libellum Calvini*, a detailed answer to Calvin that was not printed, however, during his lifetimes, but only circulated in manuscript form.<sup>33</sup> In the *Defensio*, Calvin had almost exclusively argued with Biblical and Patristic sources; yet, at one point, he had claimed that the protection of religious matters by the magistrate was a command of natural reason, and he had suggested to read the relevant philosophers whom he all considered to support this view.<sup>34</sup> Castellio, in his answer, completely denied the argument. On the one hand, he refused to follow pagan authors as long as their accounts were not confirmed by others, i.e. Christians;<sup>35</sup> on the other hand, he questioned the pagan's willingness to protect religion with the sword, adducing two passages from Cicero's *De legibus* where the task of punishing religious crimes was attributed to God, not the magistrate.<sup>36</sup> Thus, Castellio did argue with Cicero, indeed, yet he did so only to disavow the reference to Classics by Calvin, and not as a confirmation of his own account. Rather, with his denial of following pagan authors, he appears far more critical of Classic thought than Calvin, who was ready, at this point, to resort to the common natural reason. Once more, thus, pagan thought was not seen, by Castellio, as a reliable guide for Christian ends.

As is well known, the whole debate was reinforced when, in September 1554, Theodore Beza came into action and published his "Anti-Bellius," the

33 A printed version only appeared in 1612 in Amsterdam.

34 *Ioannis Calvini opera omnia denuo recognita* IV.5, 22 (= CO 8:474): "Ac primo quidem hoc dictare naturae sensum, ut in omni politia bene composita principium teneat religio, et legum praesidio integra servetur, testes sunt ipsi increduli. Legantur Philosophi, quicunque hoc argumentum tractarunt."

35 Castellio, *Contra libellum Calvini* §111, G3v–4r: "Praeterea cum Legislatores illi multa vitiosa tradiderint, nolo eos sequi, ne in ijs quidem quae bene tradidisse videantur, nisi ea mihi aliunde constent. [...] Itaque si statuissent illi religionem ferro esse defendendam, nollem eos sequi, nisi aliunde certum testimonium haberem."

36 *Ibid.*, G4r: "Fecerunt enim illi Legislatores duo genera peccatorum, quorum alia Deo puniendi reliquerunt, ut ea quae modo diximus; alia quia laederent homines, hominibus puniendi mandarunt, ut ipse Cicero in eodem loco scribit." The reference is to *De legibus* II, 19 and 22.

*De haereticis a civili magistratu puniendis*, a direct response to Castellio's *Farrago*. Even if Beza explicitly named Cicero only once,<sup>37</sup> the question about the role of pagan thought was reinforced, too, for, already in the subtitle, Beza announced to oppose not only Bellius-Castellio, but the whole sect of "new Academics." This prominent summoning of a presumably reborn pagan philosophical school, a charge already levelled a month earlier by Calvin,<sup>38</sup> is all the more significant since, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the philosophy of the later Academy was almost exclusively known through, again, Cicero, who was himself a fellow traveller of the school.<sup>39</sup> In a certain sense, Beza thus summoned Cicero too, and even if it is true that his references to the "Academics" were, in most cases, unspecific for polemical reasons, at some points Beza nevertheless specified what he thought to be these Academics' misdeeds. It was, of course, their presumed scepticism.

With this charge, Beza focused on a point that was in Castellio's *De haereticis*, indeed, but not yet on a level as elaborated as Beza put it for his attack on it.<sup>40</sup> Bellius-Castellio had argued that, other than in moral behavior that is cognitively good or bad, religious doctrine is far more difficult to judge, i.e. it is far more difficult to say which faith is true and which one is wrong. For, if the truth of particular religious doctrines were knowable in a strict sense, there would be no dissent about religion anymore.<sup>41</sup> In a similar vein, Kleinberg had argued against the prosecution of heretics with the ongoing disagreement about the meaning of certain Scriptural passages, a disagreement that suggested, of course, their virtual inexplicability.<sup>42</sup> These arguments were primarily introduced to show how unjustified it was to kill people—who morally might have

37 Theodore Beza, *De haereticis a civili magistratu puniendis Libellus, adversus Martini Bellii farraginem, et novorum Academicorum sectam* (s.l. [Genève]: Robert Estienne, 1554), 216, where Cicero is simply referred to as a historical source for the sophist Protagoras' scepticism (see *De natura deorum* I, 29).

38 In his preface to the Genesis commentary, dated to July 31 (CO 15:200; see Guggisberg, *Sebastian Castellio*, 107).

39 See Stefania Salvadori, "Socrate contre Aristote: Sébastien Castellion et la discussion sur les modèles rhétoriques," in *Sébastien Castellion*, ed. Gomez-Géraud, 371–392, at 374.

40 Backus, "Reformed Scepticism," 73, suggests that Castellio was not even "aware in 1554 of the full implications of what he said."

41 Castellio, *Farrago*, 22–25: "De doctrina iudicare, non aequae facile est, ut de moribus. [...] Si enim essent haec res tam notae, quam notum est unum esse Deum, tam inter se de his convenirent omnes Christiani, quam omnes nationes fatentur unum esse Deum."

42 Ibid., 127–128: "Non ego hic homicidas, aut adulteros, caeterosque eius generis maleficos defendo: scio, magistratui contra tales datum esse divinitus gladium. Sed propter intelligentiam locorum Scripturae, de quibus nondum certo constat (si enim constaret,

acted irreproachably—for their religious dissent; Beza, however, turned it into a fundamental problem: taking seriously Castellio’s distinction between faith and knowledge, he asked programmatically: “So, what else remains but that you reintroduce Academic *akatalepsia*, so that, since there is almost no hope in certain knowledge, everybody infers what seems probable to him?”<sup>43</sup> For Beza, the consequence of Castellio’s account was to deny the possibility of attaining truth in religious matters; but if there was no certain doctrinal knowledge, this was ultimately going to lead, as he put it at one point, to doctrinal anarchy.<sup>44</sup> In this regard, when identifying his adversaries with the pagan Academics, Beza fought not so much for the right to execute heterodox thinkers, as for the right to define orthodox thinking, an orthodoxy that could not be based, in his eyes, on the weak grounds of approving morally good behaviour and of contemplating mere plausibilities. Yet, in this very regard, Beza criticised thus another fundamental concern of Renaissance Humanism, namely the one of preferring human dignity and beauty to doctrinal rigidity.<sup>45</sup>

Castellio was scandalized at this accusation of being an Academic. During winter 1554–1555 he composed a detailed response to Beza’s *Anti-Bellius*, his *De haereticis non puniendis* that, once more, would not be printed;<sup>46</sup> but while this was his last direct treatment of the question of punishing heretics, the accusation that he was an Academic would incite him up to his last work, the *De*

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disputari desiisset) [...] propter haec inquam, tam multos [...] interfici, hoc vero eiusmodi est, ut qui id non deploret, eum hominis pectus habere non existimem.”

43 Beza, *Anti-Bellius*, 65: “Ergo quid superest nisi ut Academicam ἀκαταληψίαν renovetis, ut quasi desperata certi cognitione, id sequatur quisque quod verisimile videatur?”

44 Ibid., 198: “Peius quiddam hoc est Papistica ipsa tyrannide quod isti Academici in Ecclesia Dei, sub moderationis et clementiae specie, invehere conantur, tanto scilicet peius quanto minus malum est Tyrannis quam ἀναρχία, et quanto praestat Tyrannum etiam crudelissimum, quam nullum penitus Principem habere.”

45 See his discussion of the role of the second table of the Ten Commandments, *ibid.*, 44. For Castellio’s humanist ethics, see Backus, “Reformed Scepticism,” 72, and Guggisberg, *Sebastian Castellio*, 96; more generally for Castellio’s Erasmian heritage see Peter G. Bietenholz, *Encounters with a Radical Erasmus: Erasmus’ Work as a Source of Radical Thought in Early Modern Europe* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 95–101 and 106–108. Even Zurkinden followed, in this regard, a “humanist” approach, see his maxim in an undated letter to Castellio (ed. Buisson, *Sébastien Castellion*, 2: 386): “actio esse debet vita christiani homini potius quam speculatio.”

46 As a matter of fact, it was only rediscovered in the 1930s and published in 1971: Sebastian Castellio, *De l’impunité des hérétiques—De haereticis non puniendis*, ed. Bruno Becker and Marius-François Valkhoff, *Travaux d’Humanisme et Renaissance* 118 (Genève: Droz, 1971).

*arte dubitandi* from 1563.<sup>47</sup> In the *De haereticis non puniendis*, Castellio virtually turned the tables on Beza. To call him an Academic, he argued, was nothing but a rhetorical exaggeration that revealed who of the two disputants actually belonged to a pagan philosophical school: “When you present us as if we want that nothing is affirmed, what else is this than that you exaggerate the cause in a Ciceronian rather than a Christian manner?”<sup>48</sup> Building on the—parenthetically introduced—Kleinbergian adumbration of Ciceronian sophistry,<sup>49</sup> Castellio now fully elaborated on the reproach: what Beza did was Ciceronian, he used all the Ciceronian rhetorical ruse of exaggeration, extravagation, and ridiculing;<sup>50</sup> just as his master, he was skilled in defending both the truth and its opposite;<sup>51</sup> and he knew how to make a case from nothing.<sup>52</sup>

More than once, thus, Castellio finally adduced the saying which, later on, Calvin would attribute to Zurkinden, and called Beza a disciple rather of Cicero than of Christ.<sup>53</sup> Given the context in which it appears, it becomes clear that this saying was intrinsically linked to a criticism of Ciceronian rhetoric. Even if Castellio presented this reproach at some points together with a broadside against Aristotle and seemed thus to prolong the prevalent humanist attacks on medieval scholasticism,<sup>54</sup> it is apparent that, in this context of the *De haereticis non puniendis*, it was even more a criticism of humanist rhetoric itself.<sup>55</sup> Later on, in the *De arte dubitandi*, Castellio would intensify, for the benefit of

47 See Backus, “Reformed Scepticism,” 71.

48 Castellio, *De haereticis non puniendis*, 25: “Quid quod rem ciceroniane magis, quam Christiane, exaggeras, dum nos ita traducis, quasi nihil affirmari velimus?”

49 For direct renewals of Kleinberg’s account see *ibid.*, 45 and 143.

50 See, e.g., *ibid.*, 25, 76 (*exaggeratio*), 113, 176 (*ambages*), 143 (*derisio*).

51 *Ibid.*, 46: “Nullum autem genus esse puto calumniandi, quod praetermiserit in hoc libro Beza. Est enim multum et diligenter in arte disserendi et dicendi versatus, quae quidem ars rationem tradit disputandi non minus contra veritatem quam pro veritate, sicut ostendit istorum vel primarius magister Cicero in libro de oratore [...], unde videre licet Ciceronianum oratorem perfectum esse eum qui possit veritatem aequè oppugnare atque defendere.”

52 *Ibid.*, 132: “Istis tu artibus, Beza, possis haereticos constituere quoslibet. Nos ad alios iudices provocamus, nam vos quidem estis accusatores et quidem magis Ciceroniani quam Christiani, qui et ex non crimine crimen et ex parvo crimine magnum facere didicistis.” See also *ibid.*, 155.

53 Most explicitly *ibid.*, 41 (*Ciceroni cuius vos magis, quam Christi, imitatores estis*); see also *ibid.*, 25, 26, and the previous note.

54 Backus, “Reformed Scepticism,” 75.

55 See, most obviously, *De haereticis non puniendis*, 46, where Castellio locates the *mundanae artis rhetoricae origo prima* in the seduction of Adam and Eve *ab illo oratore perfecto Satana*.

Cicero, his criticism of Aristotle, but even then, a fundamental reservation against Ciceronian rhetoric remained.<sup>56</sup> Fighting Beza's reproach that, as an Academic, Castellio was unable to present anything as the truth, Castellio, in turn, reproached Beza to be able, as a Ciceronian rhetoric, to present everything as the truth. In both cases, however, the result would have been the same.

Both Castellio and Beza—and, presumably, Calvin as well—were thus concerned with similar fears. They believed that the other party was unable to handle truth and falsity; they suspected each other to be more committed with pagan traditions than with Christianity; and, most interestingly for the present purpose, they both questioned fundamental concerns of Renaissance Humanism. While Beza challenged the humanist commitment to practical rather than to theoretical knowledge, Castellio questioned the status of rhetoric. From this perspective, it is significant that the debate took place at the beginning of the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the period, thus, when humanist educational ideals began to be replaced by Reformed Scholasticism.<sup>57</sup> It seems that the debate about tolerance was also part of that discussion which—as we have seen with Zurkinden's promotion of Castellio in Lausanne—was also a political one. Yet, after what has been said, it would be too simplistic to attribute the reintroduction of scholasticism to Beza and Calvin, and to see in Castellio the advocate of a jeopardized Humanism: to a certain degree, both parties built on the achievements of Humanism, but they also questioned, on both sides, fundamental humanist concerns. It is apparent, thus, that the label "humanist" cannot be applied exclusively to either side of the debate.

And Zurkinden? First of all, his correspondence documents that Castellio's writings had an immediate impact on his intellectual surroundings even without appearing in print. Whether or not Zurkinden actually had uttered, as Calvin complained, the saying about the Genevan's Ciceronianism, it is obvious from Calvin's hearsay that the saying circulated; and there are other passages in Zurkinden's correspondence that echo a familiarity with the unpublished treatises of Castellio.<sup>58</sup> Long after the deaths both of Castellio and Calvin, Zurkinden continued to avouch clemency in Castellio's terms, and given his interest for Castellio's side, as an old man he even echoed the debate's ambiguous

56 On Aristotle, see Salvadori, "Socrate contre Aristote," 381–386, and Backus, "Reformed Scepticism," 75f; for Cicero, see already Buisson, *Sébastien Castellion*, 2:217.

57 See Antoine de la Roche Chandieu's most interesting reflections on the advantages of scholasticism over humanism, discussed in Willem J. van Asselt et al., *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), 82–83.

58 See, e.g., the question of the religious papist in Zurkinden's letter to Castellio (ed. Buisson, *Sébastien Castellion*, 2:408; cf. *Contra libellum Calvini*, fol. K2v.).

concern for humanism. In 1573, having consulted Beza's Latin translation and commentary of the New Testament, he considered it to be too scholarly for his personal use, which is why he asked the Genevan to suggest another edition of the New Testament *non omnino asiaticae commentatus*: not overfilled with "Asian" commentaries.<sup>59</sup> This term, Ciceronian in nature,<sup>60</sup> denounced not without malignity an excess of eloquence and adornment, so that Zurkinden, by means of a Ciceronian term that revealed his own humanist affinity, criticised Beza's excess of humanist philology. As if this was not enough, he specified to Beza that he was looking for a Bible with commentaries that focused on difficult parts of Scriptures "whom many—as you in particular know—have tried to explain in vain."<sup>61</sup> According to Zurkinden, Beza "knew" about the virtual inexplicability of certain passages of Scriptures—yet this had been, of course, one of the fundamental arguments of Castellio in the tolerance debate. Even in a delayed reverberation of this debate, it is apparent, thus, that the appeal to or denial of humanist concerns was no sign of one's humane concerns.

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59 Zurkinden to Beza, 31 July 1573, in: *Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze*, vol. 14 (1573), ed. Alain Dufour and Béatrice Nicollier (Genève: Droz, 1990), n. 1009, 162: "Caeterum quia doctis et linguarum peritis magis convenit liber ille, quam iis, qui sententiae verborum Christi servatoris tantummodo intenti, non admodum curiosi sunt in consecrandis proprietatibus singulorum verborum, certi alioquin de fide sui interpretis, rogo te vehementer, ut si quid tu vel alius quispiam tibi probatus in Novum Testamentum non omnino asiaticae commentatus est, mihi per hunc nostrum significes, ut emendum curem."

60 See Cicero, *Brutus*, 325, and *Orator*, 230–231.

61 Zurkinden to Beza, 31 July 1573, 162: "Habentur hic multa multorum hujus argumenti scripta, sed non tam foelici (ut mihi quidem videtur) Minerva [...] maxime ubi prima facie pugnare secum Scriptura videtur, aut nodus aliquis latet, ut in explicanda serie genealogiae Christi [...] et aliis, quae tu multis scis frustra esse tentata."

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# Crossing Traditions: Essays on the Reformation and Intellectual History

*In Honour of Irena Backus*

*Edited by*

Maria-Cristina Pitassi and Daniela Solfaroli Camillocci  
with the collaboration of Arthur Huiban



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Cover illustration: Printer's device: All-subduing Truth (motto: "Alêtheia Pandamatôr"), 112 × 84 mm.  
Source: E-rara (<http://dx.doi.org/10.3931/e-rara-3621>).

Sancti Joannis Chrysostomi archiepiscopi constantinopolitani expositio in divi Pauli epistolas. Græca veronensis editio, locis quam plurimis mutila, integritati restituta ope mss. illustriss. bibliothecæ palatinæ et augustanæ. Divi Joannis Apocalypsis cum commentario Andreæ Cesariensis latine reddito Theodori Peltani opera, (Genève, Heidelberg : Jean II de Tournes for Jérôme Commelin, 1596).

The Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available online at <http://catalog.loc.gov>

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: "Brill". See and download: [brill.com/brill-typeface](http://brill.com/brill-typeface).

ISSN 1573-4188

ISBN 978-90-04-33863-0 (hardback)

ISBN 978-90-04-35679-5 (e-book)

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