



## **Heresy and Authority in the Thought of Théodore de Bèze**

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Article abstract

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# Heresy and Authority in the Thought of Théodore de Bèze\*

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*This article offers a comprehensive account of Théodore de Bèze's views on the punishment of heretics and a reflection on their broader significance. The core of its analysis focuses on Bèze's earliest political work, the Anti-Bellius. It provides an assessment of five aspects of Bèze's discussion: the legal basis for the punishment of heresy; the respective roles of civil and ecclesiastical authorities in disciplining heretics; the definition of heresy; the consensus of all relevant authorities on the matter; and the possibility of grounding justifications for coercion on absolute claims to religious truth. The concluding section examines the enduring role played by these ideas both in Bèze's own later writings and in subsequent Reformed discussions of the subject. The historical import of Bèze's formulations is shown to lie in their lasting influence and in the deeper reflections on the nature of political authority on which these formulations rested.*

*Cet article propose une étude détaillée des positions de Théodore de Bèze concernant la punition des hérétiques et fournit des pistes de réflexion sur leur portée globale. Le cœur de cette analyse porte sur la première œuvre politique de Bèze, l'Anti-Bellius. Elle évalue cinq problématiques sur lesquelles Bèze s'interroge, à savoir les fondements légaux de la punition de l'hérésie ; les rôles respectifs des autorités civiles et ecclésiastiques au sein de l'action punitive contre les hérétiques ; la définition de l'hérésie ; le consensus rassemblant toutes les autorités présidant à la question ; et la possibilité d'ancrer les justifications de la coercition dans une revendication inconditionnelle de vérité religieuse. La dernière partie de l'article examine le rôle que ces idées ont joué à long terme, à la fois dans les écrits ultérieurs de Bèze et dans les discussions qui ont émergé dans les années d'après à propos de ces problématiques au sein du protestantisme réformé. Il y est démontré que la portée historique des thèses de Bèze réside dans leur influence durable et dans les réflexions plus profondes sur la nature de l'autorité politique sur lesquelles elles reposent.*

## I

Perhaps no other comment better reflects the fortunes of Théodore de Bèze's first political work, *De haereticis a civili Magistratu puniendis* (That heretics should be punished by the civil Magistrate) or *Anti-Bellius* (1554),<sup>1</sup>

\* I am extremely grateful to Aurélien Bourgaux, Annabel Brett, Mary Laven, Ben Platt, Magnus Ryan, and the two anonymous reviewers for suggestions and comments at various stages of my work on this article.

1. The full title is *De haereticis a civili Magistratu puniendis libellus, adversus Martinii Bellii farraginem, et novorum Academicorum sectam* (That heretics should be punished by the civil Magistrate, against

than that offered by the Flemish humanist Dominicus Lampsonius in a letter of 18 December 1582 to the French Reformed theologian Antoine de la Roche Chandieu. Sharing his reflections on religious disagreement, Lampsonius stated: “I am not fully satisfied [...] with those Bezan [theses] of yours on how heretics are to be punished by the civil magistrate, for they are deeply intricate, and contain nothing that I can easily understand.”<sup>2</sup> The pronoun “yours” (*vestra*) suggests that, nearly thirty years since the first publication of Bèze’s treatise, its arguments had come to be widely regarded as the standard expression of the Reformed position on the subject. The label of “Bezan” (*Bezana*) is revealing of the canonical status achieved by the work itself: no other Reformed thinker produced so clear, comprehensive, and lengthy a justification for the suppression of religious dissenters; in the eyes of his contemporaries, these ideas were indelibly associated with Bèze’s name. The appraisal of its contents as “deeply intricate” (*perplexiora*) may appear unfair to anyone familiar with such a highly systematic and forceful text, a work which was acknowledged even by Bèze’s adversaries as a masterpiece of eloquence.<sup>3</sup> One might suppose this to be Lampsonius’s polite way of telling his correspondent that he thought the Reformed stance on religious coercion to be highly objectionable. Yet Lampsonius’s words contain something of a prophetic element: arguably no other aspect of Bèze’s thought has been an object of greater misunderstanding and misrepresentation on the part of scholars than his position on the coercion of heretics.

To account for such distortions is no hard task. Scholars who have ventured to discuss Bèze’s work on heresy have generally approached it from one of two angles. The first, most common approach is reflected in accounts underpinned by a more or less openly Whiggish interest in the history of ideas on religious toleration.<sup>4</sup> In the best of cases, this has resulted in claims that the value of the

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Martinus Bellius’s hodgepodge and the sect of the new Academics). Following common scholarly practice, I shall henceforth refer to this work by the shorter title *Anti-Bellius*.

2. “Bezana illa uestra de hereticis a ciuili magistratu puniendis, ut perplexiora, & in quibus nihil est facile quod apprehendam, non usquequaque mihi [...] satisfaciunt.” Dominicus Lampsonius, letter to Antoine de la Roche Chandieu, 18 December 1582, Ms. Dupuy 268, fol. 153<sup>v</sup>, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. All translations are my own.

3. See Sebastian Castellio’s comments in *De l’impunité des hérétiques*, 18–20, 45–46, 196.

4. The label of “Whiggish” is borrowed from the work of Alexandra Walsham, who offers a helpful critical survey of developments in literature on early modern toleration; see Walsham, “Toleration,

*Anti-Bellius* lies in its role as an emblematic expression of the standard views on religious coercion of its age.<sup>5</sup> At worst, it has given rise to unapologetically hostile interpretations, aptly exemplified in Perez Zagorin's dismissive comment that "Beza's was a strong but conventional mind whose book offered no new reasons for its intolerant position."<sup>6</sup> Yet more problematically, this approach has often resulted in a tendency to read Bèze's position through the lens of that of his adversaries. In particular, widespread interest in the thought of the Savoyard humanist Sebastian Castellio, the principal target of Bèze's attacks in the *Anti-Bellius*, has led some scholars not only to take Castellio's account of Bèze's views at face value but also to read Bèze's work with an eye to his statements on those aspects that were prevalent in Castellio's work, thus disregarding Bèze's own framing of the issue of heresy as fundamentally political.<sup>7</sup>

A second group of scholars, on the other hand, has acknowledged the importance of the *Anti-Bellius* as a piece of political thinking; but their interest has largely been limited to its status as an early expression of Bèze's better-known views on the right to resistance. In an attempt to insert Bèze within wider narratives about how "Calvinism supplied one of the roots of modern democracy,"<sup>8</sup> or to portray him as "the leader of a new reformation of rights,"<sup>9</sup>

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Pluralism, and Coexistence." Walsham is among the leading proponents of a revisionist turn that has shifted scholarly focus from a circumscribed number of well-known texts and their authors to widespread attitudes and practices of religious coexistence. While valuable in its own right, this shift has not resulted in a substantial reassessment of early modern justifications of religious persecution; the few existing treatments of theories of persecution are in the form of broad surveys and focus solely on the English context. See Goldie, "Theory of Religious Intolerance"; Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration*, 22–41; Walsham, *Charitable Hatred*, 40–49.

5. This is the view put forward, for instance, by Alain Dufour, author of the most recent intellectual biography of Bèze; see Dufour, *Théodore de Bèze*, 47.

6. Zagorin, *How the Idea*, 123.

7. Perhaps the clearest example of this tendency to focus on Castellio's point of view is Michael Bruening's recent study, *Refusing to Kiss the Slipper*, 156–79. In offering an account of Castellio's challenge to Genevan orthodoxy, Bruening makes no attempt to discuss the actual content of the works to which Castellio responded, limiting himself to remarking that Bèze disparagingly labelled Castellio an "Academicus" (Bruening, *Refusing to Kiss*, 162). The result is an analysis that emphasizes questions of epistemology and Biblical hermeneutics; while true to Castellio's own positions, this account results in a one-sided reading of the debate on religious coercion that downplays questions of politics.

8. Kingdon, "First Expression," 88.

9. Witte, *Reformation of Rights*, 89 (cf. 81–141).

they have thus either neglected some equally crucial aspects of his thought, or sought to claim that Bèze later shifted towards more tolerant positions.

Responding to the shortcomings of both these approaches, the present article aims to offer a comprehensive account of Bèze's views on heresy and of their broader significance in the context both of his own political thought and of Reformed ideas on religious coercion. The core of my analysis will be centred on the *Anti-Bellius*, Bèze's fullest statement on the subject. After a brief outline of the circumstances that led to the work's composition, I will bring into focus five aspects of Bèze's discussion: the legal basis for the punishment of heresy, in terms of both divine law and civil law; the respective roles of civil and ecclesiastical authorities in disciplining heretics; the definition of heresy; the consensus of the Church on the matter as shown by the testimony of the Fathers, historical example, and contemporary authorities; and finally, the question of whether or not it is possible to determine the truth of most doctrinal statements with certainty, and on this basis to punish those who fail to adhere to this truth. In the process of examining each of these issues, Bèze laid the foundations of a coherent system that clearly defined, on the basis of divinely determined principles of law, the nature, function, and obligations of civil authority, as well as the limits of its jurisdiction. These themes occupied the overwhelming majority of the text, and are therefore of greater importance in understanding the true essence of Bèze's contribution than his better-known attack on Castellio's views regarding the importance of doubt in matters of religion. I conclude with a reflection on the enduring role played by these ideas, both in Bèze's own later thought and in subsequent Reformed discussions of the problem of heresy in Switzerland and beyond. Not only did Bèze stay true to his earlier views for the remainder of his life, but he was further assisted by his successors in enshrining them within the mainstream of Reformed discourse on the problem of religious dissent. Bèze's defence of coercion may have little to offer to present-day advocates of toleration and civil rights, but its historical worth is no less because of it.

## II

Although Reformed Protestants had been implicated in discussions over the legitimacy of coercing religious dissenters since the very beginning of movement itself, the debate reached a new high point following one of the most

momentous executions for heresy in modern history: the burning at the stake of the Antitrinitarian heretic Michael Servetus in Geneva on 23 October 1553. Servetus's arrest and condemnation had been carried out at the instigation of the Genevan clergy and had received the support and validation of the Swiss churches of Basel, Bern, Schaffhausen, and Zurich; yet many across Switzerland responded with outrage to an act that they perceived as a betrayal of the principles of the Reformation. Widespread indignant protests culminated in the publication, in March 1554, of an anonymous anthology of excerpts from authorities both ancient and contemporary addressing the question of punishment for heresy. This text, entitled *De haereticis, an sint persequendi* (On heretics, whether they should be persecuted), and commonly known by the nickname *Farrago Bellii*, is widely regarded by scholars as the first systematic treatment of religious toleration in Western thought; its chief compiler, as the Reformed leaders immediately deduced, was the Savoyard scholar Sebastian Castello, the most prominent representative of a group of heterodox opponents of religious coercion centred in Basel.<sup>10</sup> The work never mentioned Servetus explicitly, but its target was obvious to all: it was a scathing indictment of the stance adopted by Reformed leadership in Geneva and Zurich. As early as 29 March, Bèze, at the time a young professor of Greek at the Academy in Lausanne, wrote to Heinrich Bullinger, leader of the Zurich church, to express his horror at the contents of the work and to announce his intent to produce a response.

Bèze's correspondence with Bullinger between March and August 1554 offers us an insight into the development of the plan behind his work. In his

10. The full title of the work is *De haereticis, an sint persequendi, et omnino quomodo sit cum eis agendum, Luteri & Brentii, aliorumque multorum tum veterum tum recentiorum sententiae* (The opinions of Luther and Brenz, and of many others, both ancient and more recent, on heretics, whether they should be persecuted, and in general on how they should be dealt with). Again, following common scholarly practice, I will henceforth refer to this text as *Farrago Bellii*. I have used the 1954 reproduction published by Sape van der Woude. For reasons of clarity, throughout the paper I refer to all arguments put forward in the text as Castello's own; it is worth specifying, however, that the only parts of the work that can actually be attributed to Castello himself are the extract from the preface to his Bible translation of 1551 and a number of pieces presented under various pseudonyms, namely the introduction by "Martinus Bellius," the concluding pages by "Basilius Montfortius," and possibly the contribution of "Georgius Kleinbergius." The remaining extracts, drawn from the works of authors including Augustine, Luther, Johannes Brenz, Erasmus, and Sebastian Franck, can more properly be described as having been reappropriated by Castello for polemical purposes.

first letter, he highlighted those aspects of Castellio's text that, in his eyes, undermined the foundations of Christian knowledge: that most doctrinal matters were indifferent, that the meaning of Scripture was uncertain, and that we must await new revelations. The intended response would address these points while seeking to avoid offending those contemporary Protestant authors who were cited in the text.<sup>11</sup> On 7 May, he promised he would soon send a draft of his response.<sup>12</sup> By 14 June, however, he declared that he would still require more time: upon closer inspection, he had detected some parallels between some of Castellio's arguments and "the ravings of the Anabaptists"; it would therefore be necessary to produce a far lengthier and sharper refutation. "I don't think such blasphemies have been heard since the Gospel began to be preached," he lamented.<sup>13</sup> The meaning of this reference to the Anabaptists was clear to both correspondents: Castellio's arguments were seditious; they threatened the foundations not merely of doctrine but of political order. The resulting response, the publication of which was finally announced by Bèze on 11 August,<sup>14</sup> was thus framed within a broader discussion of the aims and limits of political institutions. An introduction clarifying Bèze's working definition of "heretic" and outlining the role of magistrates in matters of religion was followed by a systematic refutation of Castellio's arguments; these were grouped under three sections addressing, respectively, the questions of whether heretics should be punished, whether this punishment pertains to the civil magistrate, and whether they may be punished by death, complemented by three further sections in which Bèze defended his own response to each of these questions.

Bèze's characterization of Castellio's ideas as "blasphemies" was more than a rhetorical flourish. As Bèze's words suggested, Castellio's arguments against the coercion of heretics implied a fundamentally corrupt view of the nature of both religious knowledge and the divinely instituted political order as understood in Reformed theology; in other words, they were not merely false or

11. *Correspondance*, vol. 1, n. 42, p. 123.

12. *Correspondance*, vol. 1, n. 44, p. 127. Bèze's progress on the work was followed with eager anticipation by his close associates; see Guillaume Farel's letter to Pierre Viret of 26 April (*Ioannis Calvinii opera*, vol. 15, n. 1945, col. 121), and Viret's letter to Calvin of 15 May (*Ioannis Calvinii opera*, vol. 15, n. 1955, col. 140).

13. "Anabaptistarum furores"; "non puto ab initio praedicati Evangelii tales exauditas esse blasphemias." *Correspondance*, vol. 1, n. 45, p. 129.

14. *Correspondance*, vol. 1, n. 46, p. 133.

dangerous but *themselves* heretical, theologically untenable. The central aim of Bèze's response was thus to establish the theological basis for the punishment of heresy, proving that it was approved of, and indeed mandated, by God; and the bulk of the work was taken up by discussions of Scriptural evidence. The Old Testament offered numerous passages to support the suppression of religious dissent: defenders of coercion had long pointed to commands to destroy false prophets and seducers in Deuteronomy 13 and 17, to the prescriptions in Exodus 31:14 and Numbers 15:32–36 against those who violated the Sabbath, and to the precepts of Leviticus 24:15–16 on blasphemers.<sup>15</sup> These passages had been addressed by Castellio through the argument that Mosaic Law was not a valid model for contemporary Christian magistrates. The coming of Christ, in his account, had brought about a radical transition from the letter to the spirit. The physical punishment of blasphemers and idolaters in the Old Testament was a prefiguration (*figura*) of the spiritual punishments laid out in the New Testament for those Christians who worshipped the idols of sin; to reinstitute Mosaic Law was to take a step backwards.<sup>16</sup> Nor did contemporary heretics correspond to the false prophets indicted in the Old Testament, who drew others to the worship of false gods; for in contemporary times, no one, not even the Turks, worshipped any God other than that of Moses.<sup>17</sup>

Bèze set out to counter these claims by showing how far Mosaic Law on the punishment of religious dissent retained its validity. Contrary to Castellio's claims, Bèze reassured his readers, his allies were not trying to reinstitute the Mosaic polity altogether: rather, their aim was to ensure that the spirit of justice underlying Mosaic laws on matters of religion be preserved. Mosaic Law, Bèze postulated, was to be divided into three parts: moral, ceremonial, and judicial. Moral law, represented by the norms of the Decalogue, corresponded to natural law and to the inner testimony of conscience of each individual, and it was to be universally followed in all ages. Ceremonial law pertained to a specific

15. In the Reformed context, these passages had been invoked by Heinrich Bullinger in his *Sermonum decades duae*, fol. 99<sup>r</sup>. Bullinger's work was a key source of inspiration for much of Bèze's discussion, and the direct target of Castellio's critique in the *Farrago Bellii*, 139–65. References to Deuteronomy 13 were likewise included in Calvin's brief treatment of the question of the coercion of heretics in the introduction to his justification of Servetus's execution, another important source for Bèze's work; see Calvin, *Defensio orthodoxae fidei*, 23–24.

16. Castellio, *Farrago Bellii*, 54–56, 98–99, 139–40, 143–44, 148.

17. Castellio, *Farrago Bellii*, 140–44.



time and place and was no longer binding for Christians, as Jewish ceremonies had indeed been abolished with the coming of Christ. Judicial law, on the other hand, was a different matter. This law applied the general spirit of the Decalogue to individual cases falling under arbitration; consequently, although it was originally written for the Jews, all peoples were bound to follow it insofar as it expressed the Decalogue's universally valid principle of equity (*aequitas*). Proof of this could be drawn from a comparison between Mosaic, Greek, and Roman laws; the profound similarities between the three legal systems pointed to their sharing of an underlying end: "natural equity."<sup>18</sup> That the magistrate should punish heretics was in accord with the spirit of the first table of the Decalogue, which pertained to the proper worship of God;<sup>19</sup> consequently, Mosaic judicial laws on religious infractions remained valid, although the mode of punishment could be adapted to contemporary customs.<sup>20</sup> By the same line of reasoning, contemporary heretics were comparable to ancient false prophets: what mattered was not the literal definition of "false prophet," but the spirit it embodied; any form of religious infraction could be traced back to the same matrix, and thus fell under the same norms.<sup>21</sup>

Although Bèze was certainly not the first Protestant thinker to appeal to natural law in order to counter arguments by religious radicals,<sup>22</sup> to supply Scriptural precepts with normative legal value by treating Mosaic Law as a juridical system offering a particularly fitting expression of natural law was a bold move. As Christoph Strohm has pointed out, even Calvin did not move beyond discussions of the enduring value of the Decalogue as an expression of eternal moral law and showed little interest in Mosaic judicial law;<sup>23</sup>

18. "ad eundem naturalis aequitatis scopum fuisse accommodatas" (they were directed to the same end of natural equity); Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 223.

19. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 30, 77–78, 196–97.

20. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 217–24.

21. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 225–27, 231, 236.

22. Fundamental in laying the ground for this approach was the work of Philipp Melanchthon; see especially Strohm, "Melanchthon"; Jensen, *Humanist*, especially 53–96, 101–3. Bèze acknowledged his debt to Melanchthon from the very introduction, where he cited Melanchthon's *De officio principum* in support of the position that the magistrate should enforce the first table; see Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 30.

23. Strohm, "Philosophical," 244; cf. Backus, "Calvin's Concept," 25. Walter Kickel offers a helpful analysis of the relationship between Bèze's views and those of Melanchthon and Calvin (see Kickel, *Vernunft und Offenbarung*, 271–80), but he fails to recognize the extent to which Bèze departed from

Calvin's own treatment of the question of religious coercion in the wake of the Servetus affair had offered no attempt at justifying the legitimacy of appeals to Old Testament mandates.<sup>24</sup> Further, arguments for the enduring relevance of Old Testament law lent support to Bèze's interpretation of the parable of the tares at Matthew 13:24–30, the classic New Testament *locus* in discussions of religious coercion. The parable, which tells of a farmer who instructed his servants not to gather the tares from his field until the time of the harvest lest they accidentally also uproot the wheat, had been presented by Castellio as an injunction not to suppress heretics until the Last Judgment due to the risk of mistaking true Christians for heretics.<sup>25</sup> Bèze elaborated on Calvin's interpretation of the parable as applying not to heretics but to the wicked in general, who were to be tolerated in the Church due to the impossibility of removing all sin from its midst.<sup>26</sup> The argument that heretics were hard to discern, Bèze added, was ineffective: this risk had already existed in ancient times, yet it had not prevented God from mandating the killing of blasphemers and false prophets. And the claim that God had been harsh under Moses and merciful under Christ was irrelevant to the matter at hand, for God could not be supposed to care less about violations of the Decalogue or the vindication of His glory after the coming of Christ.<sup>27</sup>

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his predecessors. While Kickel is right to point out that Calvin had already divided Old Testament law into moral, ceremonial, and judicial, and that he had equated the Decalogue with moral law, it should be noted that Calvin's treatment of the issue ultimately downplayed the enduring relevance of Mosaic judicial law, in a clear attempt to counter contemporary sectarians' calls for the rejection of all non-Scriptural law. Cf. Calvin, *Institutio Christianae religionis*, 20.13–15, fols. 200<sup>v</sup>–201<sup>r</sup>, which would have been the latest version of the *Institutes* definitely available to Bèze when composing the *Anti-Bellius*, based on the edition of 1550 (in the final edition of the work, the version most commonly referenced by present-day scholars, the relevant section is *Institutes* 4, 20.14–16).

24. Calvin treated the need to follow certain Scriptural precepts as self-evident; see Calvin, *Defensio orthodoxae fidei*, 23–24.

25. Castellio, *Farrago Bellii*, 50–51, 74–79, 85–88, 97–98, 109–11, 113–16, 119, 130, 142.

26. Cf. Calvin, *Defensio orthodoxae fidei*, 20.

27. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 140–55. For an account of the role of the parable of the tares in discussions of religious coercion from antiquity to the Reformation, see Bainton, "Parable of the Tares"; Bainton offers only a limited discussion of Bèze's text, however. See also Kohler, "Das Unkrautgleichnis," especially 260–61, where Kohler points out that in the passage of the *Anti-Bellius* dedicated to the parable of the tares, Bèze claimed "[e]r wolle [...] nicht die Frage nach der Gültigkeit des mosaischen Gesetzes im neuen Bund erörtern" (he did not want to discuss the question of the validity of Mosaic Law under the

Bèze's arguments on the relationship between natural law and Mosaic Law may well have been a product of his tendency to approach problems with the eye of a jurist.<sup>28</sup> But it is in his attempt, in the introduction to the *Anti-Bellius*, to define the proper remit of secular authorities in matters of religion that his legal training truly came to the fore. He postulated that in the whole world there was only one true Church or Christian commonwealth, made up of citizens of different societies; each member of these individual societies was subject to two types of law: "civil law" (*ius civile*) and "municipal law" (*ius municipale*). The former consisted of the written word of God, to which all groups across the universal Church or Christian commonwealth were subject, and of that which jurists called the law of nations (*ius gentium*), a set of laws born of common consensus, to which all of mankind was subject. Municipal law consisted partly of external religious ceremonies, which varied with time and place, and partly of the specific laws instituted by each polity with regard to civic coexistence and human intercourse.<sup>29</sup> This time, Bèze's argument rested on a direct manipulation of Roman law. In *Digest* 1.1.9, the ancient jurist Gaius had likewise stated that all peoples were governed in part by laws specific to each commonwealth, in part by a universal and pre-political common law; in Gaius's account, these two sets of laws were labelled *ius civile* and *ius gentium* respectively. By interposing the universal Church between the universal community of mankind and individual polities, and by treating it as a single commonwealth ruled by its own *ius civile*, Bèze had elevated Scriptural law to the status of a legal system common to all Christians, to which each individual legal system (in his account, *ius municipale*) was subordinate.<sup>30</sup>

The upshot of this move was that any distinction between spiritual and worldly remits effectively broke down. Both civil and municipal law pertained partly to the knowledge and worship of God, partly to human intercourse and external life: the distinction was simply one between universal and particular.

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new covenant). It should be noted, however, that Bèze's argument here must be understood in relation to the more detailed account of Mosaic Law offered later in the same work; Bèze himself explicitly indicated this by referring his readers to this later discussion (*Anti-Bellius*, 144).

28. On the influence of Bèze's legal training on his thought more broadly, see Strohm, "Wirkungen der juristischen Schulung."

29. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 25–26.

30. I am indebted to Magnus Ryan for clarification on Bèze's relationship to his sources of inspiration in this passage.

Human life, Bèze stated, comprised two elements, an external, political one and an internal one pertaining to conscience; both of these were to be guided by God. With regard to the external element, the magistrate of each individual polity established political laws that could not conflict with the general *ius civile*; if they did, he became a tyrant. Concerning the internal element, magistrates had no authority to establish laws: the only laws were the ones dictated by God Himself through Scripture. The interpretation and teaching of these laws had been assigned by God to ministers; the magistrate's duty was to be concerned with their vindication.<sup>31</sup> The implications for the issue of heresy were obvious. With Scriptural law as the basis for all legal systems in Christian polities, and with religious and secular concerns falling equally within the magistrate's purview, Bèze's adversaries' claim that religious error was fundamentally distinct from other forms of crime, and that it therefore lay beyond the magistrate's remit, became untenable.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, the ministers' role as interpreters of Scriptural law gave them the upper hand in defining what constituted heresy; the magistrate's role was limited to coercing heretics in individual cases.<sup>33</sup> The practical outcome of this scheme may have been to turn the magistrate into an instrument in the hands of the clergy, but this was not Bèze's view: he clearly regarded it as a way of guaranteeing a balance between two institutions working towards the same goal.<sup>34</sup>

31. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 26–29.

32. Castellio had insisted that heresy could not be equated to other forms of crime on the basis of the distinction between spiritual and temporal infractions; see Castellio, *Farrago Bellii*, 47–50, 122, 127, 130–31, 152.

33. Cf. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 128.

34. In spite of Bèze's efforts to construct a balanced scheme, his solution has continued to attract criticism even from present-day commentators. In offering an account of Bèze's views on the relationship between "Staat und Kirche" (state and church) centred largely on the *Anti-Bellius*, Walter Kickel concludes an elucidation of Bèze's argument for the shared goal of religious and civil institutions with the following statement: "Der Staat als unmittelbarer Diener der Ehre Gottes—das ist im Grunde eine schwärmerische Staatsidee. Eine Christianisierung des Staates in der eben geschilderten Weise übersieht das Wesen der Macht und ihrer unlösbaren Verbindung mit der Sünde. Sie vermischt praktisch geistliches und weltliches Reich und fanatisiert sowohl die staatliche Gewalt als auch die Kirche, wie sich das in der Verbrennung Servets deutlich abzeichnet" (The state as direct servant of God's honour—this is basically a fanciful conception of the state. A Christianization of the state in the manner just described overlooks the nature of power and its indissoluble tie with sin. It effectively mixes up the spiritual and worldly kingdom and fanaticizes both civil authority and the Church, as is clearly apparent in the burning of

Undoubtedly, this account provided a sophisticated response to Castellio's insinuation that the Reformed divines failed to maintain the proper distinction between Church and commonwealth, between spiritual and secular jurisdictions:<sup>35</sup> for Bèze, this distinction was merely one of roles, not of aims.<sup>36</sup> In the same section of the *Anti-Bellius*, he offered a thorough discussion of the foundations of civil authority that both lent support to this view of the magistrate's purpose and laid the ground for much of his later argument. He defined the magistrate's role both "philosophically" (*philosophice*) and "on Christian grounds" (*Christiane*). In the first instance, he drew explicitly from classical thought.<sup>37</sup> The aim of human society, Bèze wrote, was "to live as happily as possible";<sup>38</sup> but the happiest commonwealth was the one that was made up of the most excellent citizens. The magistrate, whose role it was to promote the commonwealth's ends by guaranteeing public peace and guarding the laws established for the furthering of these ends, had therefore to provide for the excellency of each citizen in both the public and the private sphere. And since this excellency was defined as the performance of one's duties towards God and other men, a concern with citizens' religious behaviour had to be among the magistrate's duties. The second point Bèze put forward was the idea that the world had been created with the aim that all men may serve God's glory: all public and private duties were to be determined in relation to this aim; this, even more than human happiness, was to be the magistrate's priority

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Servetus) (Kickel, *Vernunft und Offenbarung*, 276–77; but see more generally 258–80). Whatever one may make of this position, it is true that, as Scott Manetsch has noted, Servetus's trial and execution offers a particularly apt example of how the Reformed envisioned the practical application of this model of "complementary, yet distinct, roles" for ministers and magistrates: throughout the trial, Calvin acted as a theological advisor to the Genevan civil authorities, who nonetheless were responsible for ordering Servetus's arrest, interrogating him, prosecuting him, and commanding his execution (see Manetsch, *Calvin's Company*, 27–28). For an attempt to situate the account of the respective roles of ministers and magistrates presented in the *Anti-Bellius* within Bèze's broader ecclesiological thought, see Maruyama, *Ecclesiology of Theodore Beza*, especially 31–35.

35. Castellio, *Farrago Bellii*, 29–31, 34–38, 57, 63–64, 79, 150, 157.

36. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 114.

37. Although Bèze did not directly name his source here, his contemporaries would certainly have recognized this passage as drawing on Aristotle, especially book 1 of *Nicomachean Ethics* and book 7 of *Politics*.

38. "vt quàm felicissime viuant." Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 22.

in implementing laws and passing judgment.<sup>39</sup> The point of this dual account of the magistrate's purpose was clear: both the higher end of God's glory and the common concern with public welfare demanded that the religious standing of the commonwealth be among the magistrate's paramount concerns.

Having established this fundamental premise, Bèze could tackle a number of Castellio's objections with no difficulty. In response to the claim that the coercion of heretics failed to promote their conversion, Bèze insisted that the aim of coercing individual heretics was not to convert them but to avenge God's glory and to guarantee the preservation of general public tranquillity by preventing the spread of heretical ideas and by serving as a deterrent.<sup>40</sup> To the argument that theologians should be no different from practitioners of any other discipline in defending their doctrine without the magistrate's assistance, Bèze answered that in fact the magistrate was to actively promote correct teaching in all disciplines that were necessary to the good of the commonwealth.<sup>41</sup> The protest that the coercion of heretics was inconsistent with the example of Christ's gentleness was dismissed with an appeal to distinctions of role: Bèze admitted that the imitation of Christ was a universal duty but added that each person imitated Christ in the measure in which they fulfilled their divinely established role; indeed, Christ himself had never passed judgment only because it was not his role, as he fulfilled the function of mediator and minister, not of magistrate.<sup>42</sup> Finally, a number of New Testament passages invoked by Castellio could be explained away through this same appeal to differences in role: Paul's mandate that heretics be avoided, not killed, was addressed to the apostle Titus, not to a magistrate;<sup>43</sup> Paul's injunctions not to judge others before their time likewise referred to private, not public judgments;<sup>44</sup> and Christ's casting out of the moneylenders from the temple, Peter's killing of Ananias and Sapphira,

39. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 22–24.

40. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 108–9; cf. Castellio, *Farrago Bellii*, 33–34, 83, 105–6, 131, 159–63.

41. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 118–20; cf. Castellio, *Farrago Bellii*, 131.

42. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 100–102; cf. Castellio, *Farrago Bellii*, 7, 10–11, 27–28, 81–82, 108–9, 119, 129–30.

43. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 171; cf. Titus 3:10; Castellio, *Farrago Bellii*, 51, 79, 109, 157.

44. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 81–82, 173; cf. Romans 14:10–13, 1 Corinthians 4:5; Castellio, *Farrago Bellii*, 120–21, 173.

and Paul's blinding of Elymas all lent support to the legitimacy of executing heretics, for these acts had clearly been performed in a public capacity.<sup>45</sup>

Among Castellio's most powerful arguments was the claim that by arming the magistrate against heretics, the Reformed potentially empowered their own adversaries, for a mad or impious magistrate might invoke the same arguments on the magistrate's duty to wield the sword against heretics in order to justify his own authority in suppressing orthodox Protestants.<sup>46</sup> Bèze's response emphasized the absolute value of divinely instituted political order: in expressly mandating the punishment of religious infractions, God had been perfectly aware of the dangers it would entail. The risk of tyranny was inescapable; indeed, corruption affected all manifestations of power, from the authority of ministers to that of judges. This did not warrant, however, "depriving the magistrate of the principal part of his jurisdiction."<sup>47</sup> If a good magistrate followed his duty, the Church would thereby count on the support of one of those invaluable instruments with which God ordinarily supplied it; but if a bad magistrate was sent by God as a punishment for sin or in order to put believers to the test, all one could do was submit to God's will. Impious commands on the magistrate's part were to be disobeyed, but with no sedition; the appropriate response was to pray for divine intervention, and to leave it to inferior magistrates to resist this higher magistrate in accordance with their role.<sup>48</sup> Scholars have already noted how these points were being made twenty years before the publication of Bèze's major political work, *De iure magistratuum* (The right of magistrates): what first prompted serious reflection on resistance to tyranny in Bèze's thought was not the condition of Huguenots in France and the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572, but the debate over heresy in the 1550s.<sup>49</sup> That these early arguments were grounded upon a broader account of the magistrate's role,

45. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 103, 123, 253–58; cf. John 2:13–16, Acts 5:1–10, and Acts 13:6–11 respectively. Bèze further offered a detailed response to Castellio's own treatment of the case of Ananias and Sapphira, and that of Elymas (see *Farrago Bellii*, 146–52; *Anti-Bellius*, 244–61).

46. Castellio, *Farrago Bellii*, 38–40, 57–58, 152.

47. "Magistratum suae iurisdictionis praecipua parte spoliare"; Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 190.

48. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 131–33, 189–90.

49. For a fuller discussion of Bèze's early formulation of ideas on resistance and its possible sources, see Kingdon, "First Expression," and especially Zwierlein, "L'importance," which includes a wealth of references to further scholarship situating the *Anti-Bellius* within the history of Protestant resistance theory.

however, justifies taking this point a step further: by 1554, Bèze had laid the outlines not merely of his theory of resistance, but of that understanding of the nature and limits of civil authority that would henceforth frame his thinking on all political matters.

Bèze's treatment of law and of the magistrate's role would also be instrumental in his discussion of another fundamental point: the proper definition of the heretic. This theme deserves close attention, as it is arguably one of the aspects of Bèze's thought on heresy to have been most often and obviously misrepresented. Hans Guggisberg, for instance, states that "Beza's definition of heresy was much more wide-ranging than [Castellio's]: for him, the heretic was anyone who threatened the peace and harmony of the Church."<sup>50</sup> Even more emphatic is Perez Zagorin, claiming that "Beza gave heresy a very wide meaning [...]. The kinds of heretics were almost limitless; among them he included infidels, the ignorant, apostates, those who departed from the truth, disturbers of the church, and others."<sup>51</sup> Such assertions distort Bèze's position on a theme that he regarded as so fundamental to any proper understanding of the question of heresy as to warrant a lengthy discussion in the very introduction of the work. Even a superficial look at this part of the text reveals that Bèze's aim was in fact to circumscribe the definition of "heretic" as far as possible, in response to what he perceived as the excessively wide and deliberately confusing definition offered in Castellio's *Farrago*. In the process, he carefully outlined those specific features that distinguished the case of heretics from that of infidels such as Muslims or Jews; perhaps even more surprisingly for a present-day reader, his account even led to the exclusion of Catholics from the category of "heretic." Scholars of religious toleration reading this text as an expression of an intolerant attitude, of an intransigent and exclusionary attachment to dogma, run the risk of overlooking these distinctions. For Bèze, the fault line determining who was liable to punishment fell not between true believers and everyone else, but between those who were within the (Protestant) Church and those who were without; the problem was fundamentally one of jurisdiction.

Castellio had defined the heretic in two ways. The first, in his account, reflected the common understanding of the term: a heretic was "anyone who disagrees with us" on doctrinal matters.<sup>52</sup> This definition had enabled him to

50. Guggisberg, *Sebastian Castellio*, 111.

51. Zagorin, *How the Idea*, 123.

52. "quisquis à nobis dissentit"; Castellio, *Farrago Bellii*, 19.



put forward one of his favourite arguments: that most of these doctrinal matters were irrelevant to salvation and should not make one worthy of condemnation or punishment.<sup>53</sup> The second definition Castellio proposed was based on Scripture: here, he contended, the notion of “heretic” applied to the obstinate, those who didn’t comply in the face of repeated admonishment.<sup>54</sup> Bèze dismissed the first point very quickly by pointing out that Castellio’s list of supposedly irrelevant matters in fact included some of the fundamental tenets of Christianity: the nature of Christ’s mission, free will, the state of souls after death, and so on. Disagreement on these matters, for Bèze, was self-evidently important and had to be taken very seriously.

For the second definition, Bèze formulated a more elaborate refutation. First, he took issue with Castellio’s collation of certain Scriptural passages, namely Titus 3:10 on avoiding heretics, Matthew 18:17 on avoiding those who do not heed to admonishment, and Matthew 10:14 on avoiding those who do not embrace the Gospel message. Titus 3:10 and Matthew 18:17, he argued, could not be collated, for they addressed different problems: Matthew 18:17 referred to those who committed private offences, not public ones; heresy, on the other hand, was a public offence, insofar as it represented an attempt to challenge Church authority by publicly disseminating heterodox views and converting others. Likewise, Matthew 10:14 referred to those who rejected the Gospel when it was offered them, not to heretics, who erred after embracing it: in other words, it pertained to those who were outside the Church, and was therefore irrelevant to the discussion.

On the other hand, Bèze pointed out, Castellio ignored the Scriptural passage offering the most explicit definition of heresy, 1 Timothy 6:3–5. Here, Paul insisted not merely on obstinacy in erring but also, specifically, on this error being one of doctrine. This same distinction was again overlooked by Castellio when he later posited two categories of heretical or obstinate people, the obstinate in bad mores and the obstinate in doctrine.<sup>55</sup> Those who erred in mores, Bèze retorted, could be considered heretics only if they also grounded their bad mores in false doctrine, as in the case of the Anabaptists, whose doctrine led them to oppose legitimate forms of matrimony and defend wicked deeds. This was more than an effort to score points against his adversary by

53. Castellio, *Farrago Bellii*, 19–20.

54. Castellio, *Farrago Bellii*, 20–21.

55. Castellio, *Farrago Bellii*, 21–22.

showing Castellio's analysis to be inaccurate and unreliable: for Bèze, Castellio's attempt to muddle the definition of "heretic" was deliberate.<sup>56</sup> Among the central claims of the *Farrago* was that those who defended religious persecution were all too ready to label others as heretics, punishing them for any form of disagreement on any sort of light matter.<sup>57</sup> The punishment of heretics was to be rejected because it would result in excessive cruelty: if people were to be punished for the violation of even a single sacrament, or if ancient laws were to be followed in identifying and punishing heretics, too many people would be killed.<sup>58</sup> Bèze was thus at pains to show that, contrary to Castellio's claims, those who punished heretics were not "tormenters and persecutors"<sup>59</sup> who believed that the Gospel should be propagated with the sword, or that anyone deviating from their moral and doctrinal standards deserved immediate and harsh punishment. His response was to draw what might be described as a taxonomy of religious deviance in order to arrive at a limited definition of "heretic."

Bèze began with a distinction applying to all people. There were, he wrote, two types of men: infidels (*infideles*), "who openly reject the one true religion, namely Christianity," and "those who, having embraced the Christian faith, claim to be citizens of God's kingdom."<sup>60</sup> Within the latter category, few were true believers; the majority were false Christians. Some wanted to appear to be Christians, but in fact conducted their life in an un-Christian fashion: these were the hypocrites (*hypocritae*), or those who erred in mores. There were then those who lived well, but who caused divisions in the Church; of these, those who gathered disciples caused schisms and were therefore to be considered schismatics (*schismatici*). Schismatics could act either out of private hatred or some personal grievance, or out of disagreement with the orthodox Church on some point of doctrine. In turn, those who erred in doctrine (*errantes in fide*) were to be split into two further groups: those who erred but "allow themselves to be taught" and who did not "cause any disturbances in the Church," whom Scripture called the weak in faith (*infirmi in fide*); and the obstinate who "not

56. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 8–9, 15.

57. Castellio, *Farrago Bellii*, 12, 119, 138.

58. Castellio, *Farrago Bellii*, 69, 103–4.

59. "carnifices & persequutores"; Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 15–16.

60. "qui veram & vnicam, id est Christianam religionem palàm repudiant"; "qui Christianam fidem amplexi, regni Dei ciues se esse profitentur"; Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 16.

only resist the truth, but also destroy the peace and concord of the Church,” whom Scripture called heretics (*haeretici*).<sup>61</sup> Bèze thus arrived at a concise definition of the heretic, one to which he returned insistently throughout the text: “The heretic is he who feigns piety, yet in fact not only does not obey after having been repeatedly admonished through the edifying words of the Church, but even breaks its peace and concord by putting forward a false doctrine.”<sup>62</sup> Malicious deceit, obstinacy, contempt of ecclesiastical authority, and the desire to convert others were thus as necessary as doctrinal waywardness in warranting the label of “heretic.”

Once again, this had a number of important consequences for the question of whether or not heretics should be punished. First, the fact that the heretic at least formally belonged to the Church meant that the disciplining of the heretic’s actions fell within the remit of those Christian institutional authorities whose duties Bèze so clearly outlined. At several points in the text, Bèze insisted on this point. A clear example is offered by the passage in which he responded to Castellio’s claim that it was absurd for Christians to kill those who invoked Christ’s name while permitting Jews, Turks, and all sorts of sinners to live among them. Christian magistrates, Bèze answered, had no jurisdiction in punishing Jews, Turks, and sinners. Jews and Turks were outsiders; they did not belong to the Christian commonwealth discussed in Bèze’s introduction and were therefore not subject to its norms. They could be legitimately punished only in four cases: for especially notable blasphemies against Christ, as the magistrate could not tolerate contempt of Christ in his jurisdiction; if a Christian committed apostasy by knowingly and intentionally converting to Judaism or Islam; if “someone were found to urge the Christians among whom he lives” to abandon their religion; and if “someone were to obstinately oppose one of the magistrate’s just edicts,” as this would make him seditious.<sup>63</sup> In short, so long as they did not interfere with the Church and the life of the Christian community, non-Christians were excluded from the Christian magistrate’s

61. “doceri se patiuntur”; “adeò sibi non placent vt in Ecclesia turbas vllas excitent”; “non modò veritati resistunt, sed etiam Ecclesiae pacem & concordiam lacerant”; Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 18.

62. “Hæreticum eum esse qui pietatem quidem prætexit, sed tamen non modò sanis Ecclesiae sermonibus semel atque iterum admonitus non acquiescit, verumetiam falsa proposita doctrina, Ecclesiae pacem ac consensionem dirimit.” Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 20.

63. “nisi quis Christianos inter quos versatur, ad defectionem sollicitare compertus esset”; “nisi quis denique iusto Magistratus edicto sese pertinaciter opponeret”; Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 106.

remit. Heretics, on the other hand, were “domestic enemies” (*domestici hostes*): they troubled the Christian community from within and were therefore to be judged and punished by those institutions that were in place to protect and discipline this same community.<sup>64</sup>

The case of sinners likewise entailed distinctions of jurisdiction: sinners, Bèze argued, did not fall within the magistrate’s remit, because the magistrate’s role was to punish crimes, not vices. Vices were a purely internal form of error, and were to be eradicated through teaching. Heresy, on the other hand, was not merely an internal error: according to Bèze’s classification of religious errors, as we have seen, the label of “heretic” could not apply to just anyone who erred in doctrine, but must entail an external act of contempt and sedition. Such an external act was properly to be deemed a crime and was to be treated like any other form of crime, be it theft or murder; the point was not to police thought, but to punish infractions against divine law.<sup>65</sup> Nor was any crime to be punished in the same measure: as Bèze asserted when discussing the magistrate’s role in vindicating the laws, punishment was to be meted out “according to the magnitude of the crime,”<sup>66</sup> and in treating the definition of heresy, he specified that “although the crime of heresy cannot but be most serious, some degrees [of magnitude] can nonetheless be defined based on the circumstances.”<sup>67</sup> Those who played a leading role in putting forward novel heresies or reintroducing ancient ones erred more seriously than those who had been “led to heresy through the deception of others,”<sup>68</sup> and those who disseminated heretical views everywhere by means of written books committed a greater crime than those who corrupted only a few people through conversation. Further, “the longer [their] obstinacy, the greater the crime,”<sup>69</sup> and errors pertaining to lighter matters were not as serious as those pertaining to fundamentals of religion. Finally, the magistrate was to take into account not only the error itself but also any consequences this error may lead to.

64. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 106.

65. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 107–8.

66. “pro criminis magnitudine”; Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 28.

67. “quanuis non possit non esse grauissimum hæreseos crimen, quosdam tamen illius gradus ex circumstantiis constitui posse”; Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 21.

68. “qui aliorum fraude in aliquam hæresin est impulsus”; Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 21.

69. “quo diuturnior fuit peruicacia, tanto atrocius est crimen”; Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 21.

This same concern with countering accusations of cruelty by insisting on the importance of drawing proper distinctions reappeared later on in the text, where Bèze returned in more detail to the claim that admitting capital punishment for heretics would entail the execution of the vast majority of people. He discussed several categories of error, but primarily those of blasphemy and of idolatry; in both cases, he aimed to stress that not all instances of religious infraction warranted harsh punishment. Blasphemy against God, he wrote, could be of three types. Sometimes “it is joined with heresy,” in which case it did indeed warrant strict punishment. But “sometimes [it] derives from ignorance” rather than malice, as in the case of Jews, Turks, and Papists; this form of blasphemy was not excusable and did deserve God’s wrath, but it could be responded to only through prayers and teaching. Finally, “some blasphemies derive from rage” or a sudden and inconsiderate impulse; this form of blasphemy should not go completely unpunished, but was to be assessed on a case-by-case basis, lest a harsh form of punishment exacerbate the blasphemer’s behaviour instead of correcting it.<sup>70</sup> Once again, extreme forms of punishment were applicable only in a very limited number of cases, and this depended on the act being committed knowingly and maliciously by someone who professed to be a member of the Church. “Tell us then,” Bèze concluded, “what there is in this that you might deservedly censure, and stop calumniating us, as if, when we defend the law brought by God against blasphemers, we were conspiring for the ruin of virtually all mortals.”<sup>71</sup>

Already in this treatment of blasphemy, Bèze made clear that the “Papists” were excluded from the Church, and from the remit of Christian magistrates, to the same extent as Jews and Turks. This point became even more prominent in his discussion of idolatry. He differentiated between two forms of idolatry: the worship of “simulacra fabricated out of some material,” and that of “whatever reigns in someone’s soul instead of God,” be it a figment of one’s imagination

70. “Interdum enim cum hæresi coniuncta est [...] interdum hæc blasphemia ab ignorantia proficiscitur [...] quædam blasphemie ab ira & inconsiderato animi impetu proficiscuntur”; Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 165–66.

71. “Dicite igitur quid tandem sit in istis quod à vobis meritò reprehendi possit, & calumniari nos desinite, quasi quum legem à Domino in blasphemos perlatam tuemur, in omnium penè mortalium perniciem coniurauerimus.” Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 166. For a discussion of blasphemy in Bèze’s thought, see Summers, *Morality after Calvin*, 143–62, which draws on a range of other sources, from the poem “Against perjurers and blasphemers” (In periuros et blasphemos) in the *Cato censorius Christianus* (8) to Bèze’s Biblical commentaries, and which relates Bèze’s views to those of other Reformed thinkers.

or a false good such as honour or riches.<sup>72</sup> The worship of false goods, he stated, affected basically everyone, but insofar as it was a vice and not a crime, it did not concern the magistrate. The worship of a fictional deity was closely related to that of a material object and was therefore to be treated in the same manner. The worship of simulacra was one of the worst possible offences to God and was severely condemned in Scripture. The Scriptural law against such infractions, however, had not been mandated by God for all idolaters, “but only for those who had tried to introduce [idolatry] among His Jewish people, for whom alone He prescribed laws.”<sup>73</sup> Contemporary magistrates were therefore to punish those who tried to drive people from the true Church “to Pagan or to Papist idolatry,” but they could not punish Catholics who did not actively interfere with the Church; such people were to be left to God’s judgment.<sup>74</sup> “By what right,” Bèze wrote, “would the magistrate assail foreign subjects? For although it is his duty to valiantly and prudently defend and maintain Christ’s religion within his dominion against all even with the sword, when there is no other way, nevertheless no one can, nor should, propagate [true religion] through arms.”<sup>75</sup>

Bèze’s careful treatment of the definition of heresy was among the most novel aspects of his thought. One need only turn to Bèze’s immediate source of inspiration, Bullinger’s *Sermonum decades duae*, to appreciate the extent to which Bèze refined the Reformed position on the subject: in discussing punishment for religious infractions, Bullinger had lumped together “apostates, idolaters, blasphemers, heretics and false teachers, and finally mockers of religion” into a single category.<sup>76</sup> It is worth stressing, on the other hand, that Bèze saw himself as anything but an innovator. If the central goal of his work was to show that the punishment of heretics was mandated by God, almost equal room was given

72. “simulacra ex materia quapiam fabricata”; “quicquid in alicuius animo pro Deo regnat”; Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 166–67.

73. “in eos demum qui in populo suo Israelitico, cui vni leges præscribebat, illum inuere essent conati”; Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 166.

74. “ad Paganicam vel Papisticam idololatram”; Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 167.

75. “Quo verò iure Magistratus in alienos subiectos inuaderet? Etsi enim eius officium est, Christi religionem in sua ditone etiam gladio, quum aliter non licet, aduersus omnes fortiter & cordatè tueri ac retinere, armis tamen eam propagare nec potest quisquam, nec debet.” Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 167.

76. “apostatae, idololatrae, blasphemae, haeretici & falsi doctores, religionis denique irrisores”; Bullinger, *Sermonum decades duae*, fol. 99<sup>r</sup>.

throughout the *Anti-Bellius* to confirming this interpretation of the message of Scripture by showing that consensus on the matter had reigned since before the time of the Apostles and of the Fathers and up to contemporary Protestantism. This aspect had acquired especial urgency in light of the strategy adopted by Castellio in the *Farrago*, where Patristic sources were brought forth alongside extracts from the works of prominent Protestant thinkers to show that religious coercion was incompatible with true Christianity and with the principles of the Reformation, and where references to Roman imperial laws and historical examples, both ancient and contemporary, were mobilized in order to prove that the persecution of heretics was not warranted by historical precedent and was the product of a gradual process of degeneration.

Without offering a detailed discussion of Bèze's use of non-Scriptural sources, it is worth noting at least its most prominent features. With regard to Patristic sources, it will come as no surprise that Bèze repeatedly drew arguments from the writings of Augustine, the most notorious ancient advocate of religious coercion.<sup>77</sup> Among the few scholars to have attempted surveys of early modern justifications for religious persecution, there has been a tendency to present Augustine as "the patriarch of persecutors," insisting on the role his writings played in offering both arguments and authority.<sup>78</sup> Justified as this tendency may be, to overstate Bèze's reliance on Augustine would be a mistake. Not only did he draw on a far wider range of Patristic authors than Bullinger or Calvin before him, rebutting Castellio's use of Lactantius, Chrysostom, Jerome, and Hilary and invoking citations from Ambrose and Origen,<sup>79</sup> but his use of Patristic sources was also careful, selective, and consistently guided by the principle that "the Fathers' authority is valid to the extent to which they agree with the word of God."<sup>80</sup> He acknowledged the Fathers' disagreements in interpreting the

77. See, for example, Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 72, 82–83, 86–87, 110, 126–27, 137–38, 163, 174, 180–82, 190–91.

78. Walsham, *Charitable Hatred*, 2–3; cf. especially 40–49. Walsham goes so far as to speak of an "Augustinian theory" or "ideology of persecution" (Walsham, *Charitable Hatred*, 228, 287, 322), or of an "Augustinian consensus on persecution" (Walsham, *Charitable Hatred*, 247). But see also Goldie, "Theory of Religious Intolerance"; Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration*, 6, 24, 26, again referring to the "Augustinian consensus" (see, more generally, the analysis at 22–41).

79. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 37, 135.

80. "hactenus [...] valere Patrum auctoritatem quatenus cum verbo Dei consentiunt"; Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 135.

parable of the tares, explicitly departing from the readings of Chrysostom and Augustine;<sup>81</sup> and he even went so far as to critique Augustine for “following [the tendencies of] his times a bit too far in pursuing allegories.”<sup>82</sup> To speak of Bèze’s position as “Augustinian,” in short, would be both to distort the nature of the text and to downplay Bèze’s originality, subtlety, and independence of thought. As with its use of Roman law, so too in its manipulation of Patristic sources does Bèze’s work stand as a reminder of the creative potential of early modern thinkers in employing past intellectual resources to serve their own ends.<sup>83</sup>

The Fathers’ position was discussed by Bèze alongside that of ancient Roman emperors under the general label of “the authority of the ancient Church.” The classic examples of Constantine, Constantius, Theodosius, Valentinian, Marcian, Gratian, and Justinian were repeatedly put forward, drawing both on Nicephorus Callistus’s *Historia Ecclesiastica* and on the *Codex Justinianus*.<sup>84</sup> Castellio’s claim that Gratian and Theodosius, among others, had passed laws in favour of religious freedom was dismissed on the grounds that the Greek historians on whom he drew were manifestly unreliable, as their accounts conflicted with the testimony of Roman law.<sup>85</sup> On the other hand, Bèze admitted, not all ancient emperors, amidst so much political turmoil and ambition on the part of the clergy, had been able to properly understand and perform their duty; as in the case of the Fathers, so too here one was to follow only those examples that conformed with the word of God.<sup>86</sup> To be sure, this

81. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 145–47; cf. 162.

82. “in allegoriis persequendis plusculum seculo suo indulsisse”, Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 231.

83. As Irena Backus has noted, Bèze’s engagement with Patristic and historical sources remains among the most understudied aspects of his output; see Backus, “Introduction,” 14–17. Backus herself has offered some preliminary assessments of Bèze’s approach to the study and use of the Church Fathers; see Backus, “En guise d’appendice”; Backus, “Church Fathers”; and especially Backus, “Reformed Orthodoxy,” 101–10. All of these studies, however, are limited to Bèze’s New Testament annotations or to his activities as editor of Patristic texts; as a result, Backus insists especially on Bèze’s desire to select, organize, and explain Patristic material so as to bring it in line with Reformed orthodoxy. Bèze’s use of the Fathers in the *Anti-Bellius* points to a different side of his treatment of the Patristic tradition; in holding a middle ground between deference to a supposed *consensus patrum* and rejection of the Fathers’ usefulness, Bèze adopted an approach analogous to that attributed by Backus to later Reformed authors (see Backus, “Reformed Orthodoxy,” 92–101).

84. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 121, 136, 179–80, 262–64.

85. Castellio, *Farrago Bellii*, 152–55; cf. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 262–63.

86. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 263–64.



was a point on which the two opponents would have agreed, but underlying Bèze's assertions was an understanding of Church history radically different from that of Castellio: for the latter, among the fundamental markers of the Church was that it had always been persecuted throughout history, and had never persecuted others.<sup>87</sup> For Bèze, conversely, "God does not see fit to always administer His Church in the same way, but sometimes supports it with external aids, sometimes protects it with His word alone as it is simultaneously attacked by all the powers of the world."<sup>88</sup> It was therefore no wonder that the Apostles and early bishops had not invoked the magistrates' aid at a time when Christianity itself was under attack, or that the newly converted Constantine had still been too lenient towards Arius: one had always to take into account differences in historical circumstances.<sup>89</sup>

More reliable than witnesses drawn from early Christianity, at any rate, were, according to Bèze, the historical examples offered in the Old Testament.<sup>90</sup> Here, too, he repeatedly offered a conventional list of models for princely authority: David, Solomon, Asa, Jehu, Josiah, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and others.<sup>91</sup> As with Mosaic Law, the enduring validity of these models was justified by insisting that the coming of Christ had not altered the nature of the magistrate's divinely prescribed role; Bèze invited his readers to seek proof of this in the ecclesiastical histories of Eusebius, Theodoret, and Nicephorus, as well as in the acts of Church councils and in the writings of Augustine, all of which testified to the historical continuity, between pre-Christian and Christian times, of the orthodox stance on the matter.<sup>92</sup> Nor was Bèze afraid of invoking the examples of pagan kings, especially those related in Scripture: the cases of Nebuchadnezzar, Darius the Mede, Cyrus, Darius the Great, and Artaxerxes, Bèze argued, served as a reminder for Christian magistrates to perform their duty; in relaying the deeds of these kings, Scripture indicated that it was shameful for a Christian magistrate to show less zeal in defending

87. Castellio, *Farrago Bellii*, 15–16, 89–92, 100, 130–31, 133–34, 167–72.

88. "Deo non placeat vno semper modo Ecclesiam suam administrare, sed interdum eam externis præsiidiis sustineat, interdum ab omnibus pariter mundi potestatibus oppugnatam solo suo verbo tueatur." Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 178.

89. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 178–80.

90. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 182.

91. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 121, 191–95, 234–35.

92. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 197–98.

religion than a pagan prince.<sup>93</sup> Finally, historical examples and the testimonies of the Fathers were further supported by the consensus of contemporary Protestant theologians: the writings of Luther, Melancthon, Urbanus Rhegius, Brenz, Bucer, Capito, Bullinger, Musculus, and Calvin were invoked in order to prove that leading theologians from Saxony to Switzerland were in full agreement on the matter.<sup>94</sup> Bullinger, in particular, held pride of place among Bèze's contemporary sources:<sup>95</sup> Bèze's manifest aim was to construct a common Reformed front against Castellio's faction.<sup>96</sup> Castellio's own use of the testimonies of Luther, Brenz, and Calvin, on the other hand, was contested as deliberately manipulative; Calvin, in particular, was shown to be disingenuously quoted out of context by Castellio in order to defame him as inconsistent.<sup>97</sup>

This barrage of testimonies from Scripture, Roman law, ecclesiastical history, and contemporary Protestant theology concurred in grounding Bèze's overarching claim that the punishment and even execution of heretics pertained to civil magistrates. The first chapters of the *Anti-Bellius*, on the other hand, comprised what must have been the original draft of the work, addressing those claims about the limits of religious knowledge that Bèze had singled out as so pernicious from his first letter to Bullinger. Bèze grouped the bulk of these arguments under two headings: that "all those matters which are usually investigated do not have to be known, nor can be known other than by those who have a pure heart, and, if they were known, would not make one a better person"; and that "the controversies which have been stirred for so long

93. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 199–200, 243–44.

94. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 7, 201–8.

95. A quote from Bullinger's *Sermonum decades duae* extends over three pages in the very conclusion of the *Anti-Bellius* (265–67).

96. Bèze's reliance on Bullinger throughout the *Anti-Bellius* has been remarked upon above. Alongside the two Reformers' correspondence, a further testimony of Bèze's desire to advance his connection with Zurich can be found in the copy of the *Anti-Bellius* that he personally dedicated to Bullinger, now held at the Institut d'Histoire de la Réformation in Geneva (classmark MHR B 16[59] [3]). The dedication to Bullinger reads, "patrj mihi obseruandissimo, Viro & pietate & doctrina præstantissimo" (To the most venerable father of mine, a man preeminent both in piety and in doctrine). Further copies were sent to other Protestant theologians, including Ambrosius Blaurer (*Correspondance*, vol. 1, n. 52, p. 144) and Peter Martyr Vermigli (*Correspondance*, vol. 1, n. 54, p. 147); Vermigli's copy, again with Bèze's autograph dedication, is now held at the Bibliothèque de Genève (classmark Cth 2291).

97. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 32–37.

in the Church cannot be resolved from the written word of God.<sup>98</sup> Castellio's claim that all Christians worshipped the same God, albeit in different ways, and that they shared this God with Muslims and Jews,<sup>99</sup> was derided as outrageous: the knowledge of God deemed sufficient by Castellio was so limited that even devils possessed it; in fact, "since between [one's] worship of God and [one's] opinion of God there is a perpetual analogy," all forms of worship other than the single true one implied a corrupt understanding of God, and were thus equivalent to the worship of an idol.<sup>100</sup> The notion that points of doctrine such as Christ's role, the Trinity, predestination, or free will were indifferent matters on which anyone could hold a different opinion with no detriment to their salvation, Bèze again insisted, was equally absurd: Scripture did not treat these matters in vain; indeed, it was impossible to understand how salvation pertained to oneself without an appreciation of Christ's mediating and salvific role, or of one's own place in God's predetermined scheme of salvation.<sup>101</sup>

The latter argument, of course, implied a form of *petitio principii*: the need to understand how predestination worked and pertained to oneself could only be obvious to someone who had already accepted the Reformed understanding of how salvation operated. The same could be said of Bèze's critique of Castellio's insistence that a moral life was more important for salvation than any doctrinal commitment: correction of one's life, Bèze retorted, could not be a means of pursuing salvation, for it was possible only for those who had already been predestined to salvation and embraced right doctrine through God's free gift of faith; but once again, this response was a mere restatement of the Reformed position on the matter.<sup>102</sup> Underlying this conceptual weakness, however, was

98. "ea omnia de quibus quæri solet, non sint usque adeo cognitu necessaria, neque sciri possint nisi ab ijs qui sunt mundo corde: & si sciantur, hominem non reddunt meliorem"; "controversiæ quæ tanto iam tempore agitatæ sunt in Ecclesia, non possunt decidi ex uerbo Dei scripto"; Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 39, 63.

99. Castellio, *Farrago Bellii*, 23–25, 140.

100. "quum inter cultum Dei & persuasionem de Deo perpetua sit analogia"; Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 45.

101. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 49–57.

102. Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 57–60. To be sure, it is plausible to suppose that the primary intended readership of the *Anti-Bellius* was, indeed, other Reformed Protestants. In these passages, Bèze might have therefore been counting on his readers' readiness to support his point of view; to the extent that Bèze's aim might at least in part have been that of spelling out the distinction between the orthodox position and that of Castellio to a sympathetic audience, his discussion here may be said to serve his purposes effectively. For a reflection on the rhetorical strategies adopted in the *Anti-Bellius* to construct a community between

a resolute commitment to the notion that there necessarily had to be a single truth, and that this truth could not but be perfectly clear: that the Reformed position was indeed the correct one, for Bèze, had to therefore be obvious to anyone who considered the matter properly. It was for this reason that Bèze found those arguments of Castellio's that he addressed in the second section of the *Anti-Bellius* to be so disturbing. To suggest that certain theological matters remained unresolved due to the obscurity of Scripture, or indeed to its deliberate ambiguity, led to the absurd implication that God was deceptive, that He "might have exercised us in solving enigmas like a Sphynx."<sup>103</sup> Even worse, it undermined Scripture's reliability as an instrument to establish certain truth, and "once the dependability of the word of God is removed, what foundation will the Church ground itself upon?"<sup>104</sup> By depriving Scripture of its function as a source of certainty, in other words, Castellio put forward a form of religious scepticism, undercutting the possibility of attaining any truth in theological matters, and thereby also subverting all those things that were founded upon such truth, from the institutional Church to the personal hopes for salvation of each individual.

Bèze's attack on Castellio's arguments about the need to tolerate disagreements over disputed matters undoubtedly constitutes the best-known aspect of the *Anti-Bellius*. This is largely a consequence of the fact that the work has most often been read with a greater interest in Castellio's views than in those of Bèze himself: Bèze's infamous charge that Castellio aimed at reintroducing the inability to attain the truth (ἀκαταληψία) posited by ancient Academic sceptics has drawn the interest of scholars seeking connections between Castellio's thought and the spread of scepticism in the sixteenth century,<sup>105</sup> or aiming to uncover the supposedly humanist underpinnings of Castellio's positions.<sup>106</sup> Undeniably, the early chapters of the *Anti-Bellius* are as valuable to those

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author and readership, and to thereby define the contours of orthodoxy and heterodoxy, see Bourgaux, "Exclure l'hérésie." I am grateful to Aurélien for sharing his unpublished work with me.

103. "tanquam altera Sphynx in soluendis ænigmatum nodis nos exerceret"; Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 69.

104. "sublata verbi Dei firmitate, quo tandem fundamento nitetur Ecclesia?" Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 66.

105. See, for example, Schmitt, *Cicero Scepticus*, 62–66; Popkin, *History of Scepticism*, 11; Backus, "Issue of Reformation," 71–85; Salvadori, "Socrate contre Aristote"; Erdozain, *Soul of Doubt*, 34–68. Even Bèze's biographer, in discussing the *Anti-Bellius*, claims that "pour nous, l'essentiel est qu'il a mis le doigt sur la plaie: Castellion est un sceptique" (Dufour, *Théodore de Bèze*, 48).

106. Zahnd, "Tolerant Humanists?"

concerned with the development of Castellio's thought as to scholars of Bèze's.<sup>107</sup> The very fact that Bèze found Castellio's positions on religious knowledge so shocking, and that his response was arguably the weakest element of the *Anti-Bellius*, is an indicator of the novelty of Castellio's approach: critiques of religious coercion based on the role of political authorities or on the unassailability of conscience had been put forward since antiquity, and Reformed thinkers had an arsenal of authorities and arguments to deploy in order to reject them; but to suggest that the problem of heresy might entail questions of epistemology was to frame the issue in a radically new way, shifting the terms of the debate itself. At the same time, it must be noted that Bèze's treatment of issues relating to knowledge amounted to less than a fifth of the whole work. In focusing almost exclusively on these sections of the *Anti-Bellius*, one risks losing sight of the multifaceted nature of his attack and of the originality and sophistication of his contribution. From a Reformed perspective, as Bèze's work reminds us, heresy was primarily a *political* problem; and in this respect, Bèze succeeded in putting forward one of the most compelling justifications for religious coercion in the history of Western thought.

### III

The *Anti-Bellius* remained Bèze's fullest treatment of the theme of heresy, but in subsequent decades he returned to the subject on a variety of occasions, both in his printed output and in his personal correspondence. His influential annotated edition of the New Testament included a direct jab at Castellio among the notes on 1 Timothy 2:2, which raised questions about the role of magistrates in matters of religion, and on Titus 3:10, which addressed the

107. A notable example is Bèze's critique of Castellio's suggestion that one could still be numbered among the faithful without knowing certain matters; this, from Bèze's perspective, was absurd, for true faith necessarily entailed knowledge (see Bèze, *Anti-Bellius*, 67, 92–93). Once again, this response presupposed prior acceptance of the Reformed interpretation of faith as an instrument generating knowledge in the elect; further, it drew conclusions from Castellio's work that were never explicitly stated in the *Farrago Bellii* itself. Yet this disturbing inference led Castellio to revisit his position on the relationship between faith, understanding, and certitude in subsequent years, eventually leading him to elaborate those rationalistic theses for which, after his views on tolerance, he is best known (see Backus, "Issue of Reformation," 71–85).

proper way of dealing with heresy more specifically.<sup>108</sup> There followed a further heated exchange with Castellio over the correct translation of these passages, which carried on into the early 1560s.<sup>109</sup> Beyond his direct confrontation with Castellio, Bèze's views on the respective role of ministers and magistrates in dealing with heresy were reiterated in letters and pieces of advice sent over the years to a range of correspondents, from Church leaders in Poland and England to the Huguenot general Gaspard de Coligny.<sup>110</sup> Perhaps the most notable among the items in his correspondence is a letter of 18 June 1570 to the Hungarian scholar Andreas Dudith, which was written in response to Dudith's

108. Commenting on 1 Timothy 2:2, where Paul prescribes prayers “[f]or kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty,” Bèze reiterated his point from the *Anti-Bellius* (30) that Paul's reference to “godliness” (εὐσέβεια, or, in Latin, *pietas*) served to indicate that civil authorities should play a role in guaranteeing religious orthodoxy. With regard to Titus 3:10, “A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject,” Bèze newly insisted that the passage did not pertain to the public duties of magistrates and dismissed Castellio's interpretation of “heretic” as “obstinate.” See Bèze, *Novum*, fols. 273<sup>r</sup>, 283<sup>r</sup>. First published in 1556, this work saw four successive revised editions in 1565, 1582, 1589, and 1598 (Dufour, *Théodore de Bèze*, 35–36). In the first edition, Bèze directly denounced “Bellio & Academici,” but referred to Castellio simply as “quidam.” In the subsequent edition of 1565, his attack on Castellio became more explicit, with the indefinite pronoun “quidam” being replaced by Castellio's name (491). Bèze's personal copy of the 1565 edition also bears heavy marks of annotation, including references to Ambrose and Tertullian in the margin of Titus 3:10, which served as the basis for his expansion of these notes in the 1582 edition (Geneva, Institut d'Histoire de la Réformation, classmark MHR O4cd[565]a). Clearly, Bèze felt the enduring need to refine his treatment of the matter in the decades following the Servetus episode.

109. Castellio, *Defensio suarum translationum Bibliorum*, 204–6 and 207–11 on 1 Timothy 2:2 and Titus 3:10 respectively; Bèze, *Responsio ad defensiones*, 168–72 on 1 Timothy 2:2 and 197–201 on Titus 3:10. Castellio's response to the *Anti-Bellius* itself, a lengthy treatise entitled “De haereticis a civili Magistratu non puniendis,” was completed by 1555 but remained in manuscript form, alongside a French translation by an unknown author, until its discovery and publication in the twentieth century: see Castellio, *De l'impunité des hérétiques*.

110. See Bèze's letters to the Polish Reformed leaders Christoph Thretius and Stanislaus Sarnicki of 1 November 1565 (*Correspondance*, vol. 6, n. 428 and 429, pp. 188–92); his advice slip to the Strangers' Churches in London of 10 April 1568, written on behalf of the Genevan Company of Pastors (*Correspondance*, vol. 9, Appendix 3a, pp. 220–30); and the piece he addressed to Coligny in 1571 (*Correspondance*, vol. 8, Appendix 7, pp. 270–78). But see also, for instance, the comments exchanged between Bèze and Bullinger in the context of the scandal that broke out in Heidelberg concerning the Antitrinitarian Johannes Sylvanus, especially Bèze's letter of 27 August 1570 (*Correspondance*, vol. 11, n. 800, p. 263), as well as the opinion on Sylvanus's case expressed by Bèze in a letter to the Reformed theologian Petrus Dathenus of 6 February 1571 (*Correspondance*, vol. 12, n. 819, pp. 34–35).

complaints about the Reformed party's intolerant attitude. Bèze addressed in brief many of the usual arguments put forward by followers of Castellio, and referred Dudith to the *Anti-Bellius* for a more detailed examination of the matter.<sup>111</sup> This letter would reach readers across Europe after featuring in Bèze's edited correspondence of 1573; that Bèze selected it to appear as the very first item in the collection is indicative of the importance the theme still held in his eyes.<sup>112</sup> The *Anti-Bellius* itself appeared in a French translation by Nicolas Colladon in 1560 and was subsequently reprinted in the first volume of Bèze's *Volumen tractationum theologiarum*, first published in 1570 and reissued in 1576 and 1582 with Bèze's own emendations; here too the treatment of heresy and coercion held a prominent position, coming immediately after the two confessions of faith that opened the work.<sup>113</sup>

If it is possible to detect any development in Bèze's thought on the matter over the course of the years, it lies perhaps in his growing interest in the role

111. *Correspondance*, vol. 11, n. 780, pp. 169–80. On this exchange, see Dufour, *Théodore de Bèze*, 131–36.

112. Bèze, *Epistolarum theologiarum*, 1–23. This volume, too, was reprinted under Bèze's supervision in 1575 and again in 1597; see Gardy, *Bibliographie*, 160–61. The first edition also included the above-mentioned letter to Dathenus on the Sylvanus case (*Correspondance*, vol. 12, n. 819, pp. 34–35; Bèze, *Epistolarum theologiarum*, 214–17). That this letter was subsequently removed from the work was due not to a change of mind on Bèze's part regarding the issue of heresy, but to his concern that the first part of the letter, which treated unrelated controversial matters, might cause offence to the Zurich theologians. See Bietenholz, "Limits to Tolerance," and the editors' note in *Correspondance*, vol. 12, n. 819, p. 35. The letter to Dudith was also republished in 1577 by Bèze's adversaries in an appendix to Mino Celsi's *In haereticis coërcendis quatenus progredi liceat*, which included Dudith's subsequent response of 1 August 1570. Although the leaves bearing this appendix were subsequently removed from most copies of the first edition of Celsi's work, perhaps for fear of censorship, the two letters were again included in the subsequent 1584 reissue of the text under a new title, *De haereticis capitali supplicio non afficiendis*. Celsi's work itself, first published posthumously, was largely an attempt to refute the *Anti-Bellius*.

113. Bèze, *Traite de l'authorite du magistrat*; Bèze, *Volumen tractationum theologiarum*, 85–169. See Gardy, *Bibliographie*, 144–46. Colladon's French translation included an additional preface (fols. \*2<sup>r</sup>–\*8<sup>r</sup>) that insisted on the difference between the Catholic and the Reformed use of religious coercion and on the errors of Academic scepticism. The former emphasis reflected an enduring concern with accusations of lending arguments to the Protestants' enemies, a theme to which the edition's French audience would have been particularly sensitive. The latter was in part an attempt to explain to a less educated readership the polemical force of Bèze's reference to the Academics; but it may undoubtedly also be read as an indicator of how Castellio's arguments about uncertainty remained, for his adversaries, among the most problematic aspects of his thought.

of ecclesiastic discipline in policing heresy, a theme which the *Anti-Bellius*, with its focus on civil authority, treated in lesser detail.<sup>114</sup> The overwhelming impression one is left with, nonetheless, is that Bèze's position on the subject never fundamentally changed; indeed, he actively sought to promote his earlier ideas whenever the occasion arose. In an analysis of the evolution of Bèze's political thought from the *Anti-Bellius* to *De iure magistratuum*, John Witte has claimed, on the contrary, that the later work represented "a striking departure from Beza's earlier defence of the execution of Michael Servetus for heresy." In Witte's account, while Bèze had originally called for the punishment of anyone who had been judged a heretic by the Church, the trauma of the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre highlighted with painful clarity the risks of empowering magistrates with the right to punish subjects for heresy alone; this, according to Witte, led Bèze to revise his stance, shifting to the position that "[h]eresy coupled with crime was actionable," but "heresy alone was not a crime."<sup>115</sup> Yet nothing in the text of *De iure magistratuum* warrants such an interpretation; not only did Bèze make explicit reference to "the crime of heresy" (*crimen haereseos*),<sup>116</sup> but he also echoed many of the central motifs of his earlier work,<sup>117</sup> with the aim of reiterating that it was "the principal duty of an excellent and pious magistrate" to defend the practice of true religion, and therefore "not only to exercise all the powers of his jurisdiction and authority of

114. This growing interest in the role of ministers in dealing with heresy was possibly driven by Bèze's concomitant preoccupation with the theme of ecclesiastic discipline in other contexts, from the protracted confrontation with the heterodox Huguenot Jean Morély, a fierce critic of the Genevan presbyterial model, to the clash with Thomas Erastus in Heidelberg (on the "affaire Morély," see in particular Denis and Rott, *Jean Morély*, especially 51–70; on Erastus, see Gunnoe, *Thomas Erastus*, especially 163–260). But this interest certainly also stemmed from the need to formulate advice for Reformed clergy operating in areas, such as Poland, where they could not count on the support of the local civil authorities (see Bèze's aforementioned letter to Thretius, *Correspondance*, vol. 6, n. 428, p. 188–90).

115. Witte, *Reformation of Rights*, 129.

116. Bèze, *De iure magistratuum*, 75.

117. See Bèze, *De iure magistratuum*, 87–88, where Bèze recalled, first, the command of Deuteronomy; second, the example of the Biblical kings David, Solomon, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah, and even Nebuchadnezzar and Darius; third, the usual precepts of Paul; and fourth, the example of early Christian emperors. To these he added the argument that even Catholics manifestly regarded the suppression of heresy as one of the magistrate's duties, alongside the contemporary examples of England, Denmark, Sweden, Scotland, Germany, and Switzerland.



the laws against the despisers or subverters of true religion (who leave no room for ecclesiastical censure and admonishments), but even to punish by arms those who cannot otherwise be held back from impiety.”<sup>118</sup> Once again, Bèze was at pains to show that the case of tyrants impeding “the free exercise of true religion” detracted nothing from the duties of pious magistrates in suppressing heretics.<sup>119</sup>

The importance of the *Anti-Bellius* extended well beyond the evolution of its author’s own thought: Bèze’s early work left an enduring mark on Reformed discussions of the problem of heresy. As conflicts over the legitimacy of punishing heretics continued to rage in Switzerland in the decades following the execution of Servetus, Reformed theologians across the region turned to the *Anti-Bellius* in search of arguments to counter the claims of Castellio’s followers.<sup>120</sup> Emblematic is the case of Graubünden, in the southeastern corner of Switzerland, where, in 1570, the local authorities issued an edict mandating

118. “praecipuum optimi pique magistratus munus esse [...] non solum omnes iurisdictionis suae vires legumque auctoritatem adversus verae religionis contemptores perturbatoresve (qui censuris admonitionibusque ecclesiasticis nullum locum relinquunt) exeret, sed armata etiam manu in eos animadvertet, qui aliter ab impietate cohiberi nequeunt.” Bèze, *De iure magistratuum*, 86.

119. “purae religionis liberum exercitium”; Bèze, *De iure magistratuum*, 87. The only real novelty introduced in this work lies in Bèze’s inclusion of Catholics within the category of “heretic”; see Bèze, *De iure magistratuum*, 88, where he refers to “pontificios, anabaptistas aliosque haereticos” (Papists, Anabaptists and other heretics). How Bèze would have justified this shift, or whether he had put much thought into it at all, is impossible to assess.

120. The controversy over Servetus’s execution was itself followed closely by Protestants across Europe. Examples of the enthusiastic response encountered by the *Anti-Bellius* can be found in Girolamo Zanchi’s letter to Bullinger of 24 September 1554 (*Ioannis Calvinii opera*, vol. 15, n. 2015, col. 238); Charles Dumoulin’s letter to Calvin of 1 March 1555 (*Ioannis Calvinii opera*, vol. 15, n. 2129, coll. 466–67); Wolfgang Waidner’s letter to Bullinger of 30 March 1555 (*Ioannis Calvinii opera*, vol. 15, n. 2171, coll. 534–35); and Johann Haller’s letter to Bullinger of 6 August 1555 (*Ioannis Calvinii opera*, vol. 15, n. 2263, col. 719). Zanchi had originally planned to publish his own contribution to the heresy debate (alongside his own letter to Bullinger, see Guglielmo Grataroli’s letter to Bullinger of 26 May 1554, *Ioannis Calvinii opera*, vol. 15, n. 1957, coll. 141–42); but, as he admitted to Bullinger, he found Bèze’s work to be so comprehensive as to make his own efforts superfluous. A reflection on the coercion of heretics can nonetheless be found in a commentary on Isaiah 2:4 included in Zanchi’s posthumously published *Operum omnium theologorum libri octo*, vol. 7.2, coll. 166–84. Although this commentary was based on lectures delivered by Zanchi in Strasbourg in the spring of 1554, it must have been revised in light of his reading of Bèze’s work: not only did Zanchi borrow several of Bèze’s arguments, he even cited Bèze’s text directly (col. 171).

that all residents of the region subscribe to either Roman Catholicism or Protestant orthodoxy as defined by the local Reformed synod, under penalty of banishment. Following vehement popular backlash on the part of local Anabaptists and Antitrinitarians, Bullinger sent a copy of the *Anti-Bellius* to local pastors, who cited it in their dispute with the Castellionean Johannes Gantner.<sup>121</sup> The Zurich theologian Josias Simler intervened in support of the orthodox Reformed faction with a compilation of ancient sources against Antitrinitarianism, prefaced by a defence of the magistrate's role in coercing heretics that drew heavily on Bèze and referred readers to those "entire books" written on the matter by his predecessors.<sup>122</sup> And shortly thereafter, the pastor of the Italian-speaking village of Morbegno, Scipione Calandrini, issued a vernacular treatise on the coercion of heretics, this time explicitly modelled on the work of "M. Theodoro Beza."<sup>123</sup> Beyond Switzerland, as interest in these themes resurfaced in the context of controversies in the Netherlands, the *Anti-Bellius* was published in a Dutch translation of 1601,<sup>124</sup> and a set of theological theses published in 1602 for the benefit of students of the Reformed College in Leiden was described by local opponents of religious coercion as "a sort of compendium of Theodore Beza's verbose treatise on the magistrate's punishment of heretics."<sup>125</sup> As late as the 1640s, the Puritan John Cotton, clashing with fellow minister Roger Williams on the question of religious coercion, still referenced Bèze in support of his views.<sup>126</sup>

121. See the letter sent to Bullinger by one of the leading local pastors, Tobias Egli, on 27 November 1570, and Bullinger's response of 1 December, both in *Bullingers Korrespondenz*, vol. 3, n. 230 and 231, pp. 228–29.

122. Simler, *Scripta veterum Latina*, fol. \*4<sup>r</sup>: "integri libri"; cf. fols. \*2<sup>r</sup>–\*5<sup>v</sup>.

123. Calandrini, *Trattato dell'origine*, fol. ¶3<sup>v</sup>.

124. Bèze, *Een schoon tractaet*. This translation was issued by the ministers of Sneek, Goswinus Geldorpheus and Johannes Bogerman, with a preface addressed to the local civil authorities (fols. \*2<sup>r</sup>–\*\*4<sup>r</sup>) in which they targeted contemporary Anabaptists.

125. "Breviarium quoddam [...], prolixæ Disputationis. The: Bezæ de puniendis a Magistratu hereticis." The statement appears in the appendix to the first printed version of Castellio's *Contra libellum Calvinii*, fol. M6<sup>r</sup>. Alongside Castellio's work, which had formerly circulated only in manuscript form, this text contained an extract from the incriminated theses. The source of this extract was Verhoftius, *Theses theologicae de legitimo homicidio*, later reprinted in Kuchlinus, *Ecclesiarum Hollandicarum*, 754–63.

126. Cotton, "Answer of Mr. Iohn Cotton," 52; Cotton, *The bloody tenent*, especially 100.

All subsequent discussions of the issue insisted to a different degree on each of the fundamental motifs treated by Bèze, from Scriptural law and its enduring validity, to the proper definition of heresy, to the testimonies of the Church Fathers and the model of Biblical kings and early Christian emperors. But what all of them shared was an underlying concern with the nature and limits of civil authority; it was in these terms that the problem of heresy had been understood by Reformed Protestants since well before the execution of Servetus, and it is here that the true force of Bèze's contribution lies. In the process of seeking justifications for the punishment of radical dissenters within the Church, the *Anti-Bellius* provided the outlines of a highly coherent political theology that could integrate spiritual and secular concerns while concurrently preserving the boundaries between Church and polity, ministers and magistrates, the inner sphere of conscience and external conduct within society. Not only did this system enable Bèze to refute his adversaries' claims through a sustained chain of logically consistent and mutually reinforcing arguments, but it also proved flexible enough to endure the test of time, lending itself to the new challenges and exigencies confronted by its author as he came to succeed Calvin in the role of intellectual leader of the transnational Reformed movement. To be sure, not all of Castellio's arguments were confronted by Bèze with equal vigour; indeed, as Lampsonius's testimony reminds us, even the most sophisticated aspects of his treatment left many unconvinced. Yet in its status as both outstanding and paradigmatic expression of the Reformed position on the coercion of heretics, the *Anti-Bellius* remains a fundamental historical document for scholars today, be they interested in the history of toleration, of Reformed political thought, or of the intellectual trajectory of an individual whose many lives—theologian, philologist, poet, jurist, politician, pastor—embody with exceptional clarity the creative and spirited character of his age.

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