

From the Polish Socinians to the American Constitution*

MARIAN HILLAR, Ph.D.

La société païenne a vécu sous le régime d'une substantielle tolérance religieuse jusqu'au moment où elle s'est trouvée en face du christianisme.
[Pagan society enjoyed substantial religious tolerance until it had to face Christianity.]

—Robert Joly¹

Un Anglais comme homme libre, va au Ciel par le chemin qui lui plaît.
[An English man, as a free person, chooses his own way to Heaven.]

—Voltaire²

The Reformation, established in Poland relatively late, ca. 1550, inspired the most advanced legislation in Europe of its time in regard to freedom of conscience and equality of religious denominations. However, it did not last long since it was met with the fierce and ruthless Counter-Reformation organized by the Catholic Church that succeeded in destroying the reformed churches and eliminating religious freedoms. Just as Spain distinguished itself for expelling Jews and Moslems in 1492, so Poland has the dubious distinction of expelling some of its best sons

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¹ Robert Joly, *Origines et évolution de l'intolérance catholique*, Bruxelles: Éditions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1985, 26.

² Voltaire, *Lettres philosophiques*, édition critique avec une introduction et un commentaire par Gustave Lanson, Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier, Vol. I, 61.

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and daughters, a group known under various names as the Polish Brethren, Antitrinitarians, Arians, Unitarians, or abroad as Socinians. This was justified to support King John Casimir's religious vow to the Holy Virgin to avenge the denial of the Divine Trinity by "heretics," an act deemed most blasphemous according to Catholic ideology.

The doctrines of the Polish Brethren represented a humanistic reaction to a medieval theology based on submission to the Church's totalitarian authority. Though they retained the Scripture as something *supra rationem*, they analyzed it rationally and believed that nothing should be accepted *contra rationem*. Their social and political thought underwent a significant evolutionary process from the very utopian trend condemning participation in war and holding public and judicial office to a moderate and realistic stand based on mutual love, support of the secular power of the state, active participation in social and political life, and defense of social equality. They spoke out against the enslavement of peasants, a recurring issue in Poland not solved until the twentieth century. They were the first to postulate the complete separation of Church and state, an idea never before discussed in Christian societies. Their spirit of absolute religious freedom expressed in their practice and writings, "determined, more or less immediately, all the subsequent revolutions in favor of religious liberty."³ Their rationalism set the trend for the philosophical ideas of the Enlightenment and determined the future development of all modern intellectual endeavors. After expulsion they were forced into oblivion for three centuries, forgotten in a country that continued to be dominated by the Catholic Church.

I. ARRIVAL OF THE REFORMATION IN POLAND

The first major innovative movement brought to Poland was Hussitism introduced by Hieronymus of Prague (1378-1416). At the instigation of the bishops, King Władysław Jagiełło issued the edict of Wieluń in 1424 which declared Hussitism treason against the state and condemned to death every heretic caught.⁴ The secular and religious lords organized a

³ F. Ruffini, quoted in Anson Phelps Stokes, *Church and State in the United States*, introduction by Ralph Henry Gabriel, New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1950, Vol. 1, 115.

⁴ Szymon Starowolski, *Braterskie napomnienie ad dissidentes in religione*, 1644, in Zbigniew Ogonowski, *Filozofia i myśl społeczna XVII wieku, część 1-2*, Warszawa:

private war in 1439 and massacred a Hussite nobleman, Melstinus, and his followers. The bishop of Poznań, Andreas Bninski, arranged an *auto-da-fé* in the town of Zbonszyń, burning five Hussite ministers.

The first attempt at reform by the burghers in Gdańsk in 1526 was bloodily suppressed by King Zygmunt August I (1508-1548); another by the Anabaptists failed due to an edict issued by the king on September 27, 1535, expelling them from Poland. The Senate urged the king to issue the edict because the Anabaptist doctrines “undermine the obedience of serfs to their masters.” They were labelled a “godless sect” and “monsters.”⁵

The situation in Poland became ripe in the 1540’s for reform. In contrast to the situation in Germany, the Reformation in Poland was an affair of the gentry, and as in France, it coincided with the opposition of the feudal lords to the centralization of the monarchy. Strong feelings prevailed among the gentry against the moral degeneracy of the clergy and hypocrisy of the Church. Already the Sejms of 1501 and 1505 had attempted to curtail ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the nobility by preventing the loss of civil rights and property, which followed whenever a nobleman was excommunicated by the ecclesiastical court. Nobility studying abroad brought religious news from the West and introduced many theological and social issues that needed to be discussed publicly. The most educated gentry saw in the Reformation a weapon against the accumulation of extreme wealth and estates by the clergy, against their totalitarian power, against the domination of a foreign sovereign, the Pope, over the country, and on the theological level, against the distorted interpretation of Scripture.

King Zygmunt August II (1548-1572) was initially keenly interested in reforming the Church and in religious movements. He sent messengers to the West in order to collect books for his library on various forms of religion. He read Calvin’s *Institutes* with his advisor, Francesco Lismanini (who was born on the island of Corfu, brought to Poland as a boy, and became confessor of Queen Bona Sforza). In the years 1555-1556, together with John Laski and Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski, prominent Polish reformers, he considered calling a national synod in order to establish a uniform national Church.⁶

Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1979; (*Philosophy and Social Thought in the XVII Century*, part 1-2, Warsaw: Polish Scientific Publishers, 1979), part 1, 520. Jan Sachs, “*De scopo reipublicae polonicae . . .*” 1665, in Ogonowski, *op. cit.*, part 1, 585.

⁵ Stanislas Kot, *Socinianism in Poland. The Social and Political Ideas of the Polish Antitrinitarians in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, translated from the Polish by Earl Morse Wilbur, Beacon Hill, Boston: Starr King Press, 1957, 11. The first Polish edition in 1932.

Intellectual trends and prominent personalities from abroad shaped the Polish Reformation. German influence dominated in Greater Poland where it introduced Lutheranism. This influence was strengthened by events in Prussia where Albert Hohenzollern embraced Lutheranism in 1525, forming a secular state on the ruins of the Teutonic dominion. Königsberg became the center for diffusion of Lutheran doctrines. The Italian influence brought to Poland literature of humanism and the Renaissance creating an intellectual environment from which the ideas of Reformation could grow. Several Italians participated in the development of Antitrinitarianism in its early stage⁷, such as Francesco Stancaro, Giorgio Biandrata, Gianpaolo Alciati, Valentino Gentile, and Bernardino Ochino. Other Italians, from the Catholic Church—such as Nuncios A. Lippomani and F. Commendone—fought fiercely for the cause of Rome. The third influence was that of the Bohemian Brethren who, after being severely persecuted and expelled by King Ferdinand, emigrated to Poland. The French influence was mediated through Pierre Statorius, who after studying at Lausanne with Théodore Bèze, was nominated first rector of the Calvinist college at Cracow in 1551. He introduced books published in Paris, Lyon, and Geneva. Switzerland influenced Poland primarily through Polish young noblemen who studied in Geneva, Zürich, and Basel.

⁶ Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski (1503-1572), one of the most prominent Polish philosophers, promulgated advanced ideas for the reformation of the Catholic Church which were the basis of demands submitted by the naïve king and the Sejm to Pope Paul IV in 1556. These demands were very modest: mass to be performed in the national language; communion to include bread and wine; marriage of priests; abolition of the Annates (a special Church tax for the Crusades still in force); convocation of the national council for the reform of abuses in the Church and the union of the different sects. The honest king hoped to unite all Christians and establish a reformed Church, a hope shared by John Laski (or John Alasco, 1499-1560). The Pope suspected the king of heresy, rejected all proposals and wrote orders to the king and the Sejm demanding restoration of absolute Church supremacy and abolishing all previously introduced laws of religious freedom. Moreover he threatened the king with excommunication. But, alarmed, the Pope decided to deceive the king, promising to convene the national synod, and at the same time sent his Nuncio Aloysius Lippomani (1500-1559) to organize a conspiracy and combat any reforms. Łukasz Kurdybacha, *Ideologia Frycza Modrzewskiego*, Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1953; Valerian Krasinski, *Historical Sketch of the Rise, Progress, and Decline of the Reformation in Poland, and of the Influence which the Scriptural Doctrines Have Exercised on That Country in Literary, Moral, and Political Aspects*, London: Murray et al., Vol 1, 1838, Vol. 2, 1840. Vol. 1., 216ff.

⁷ For details of the early Antitrinitarianism see George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), 615-669, 685-707, 733-763.

The most important factor in the introduction of Church reform was the formation of a society, initially secret, of Catholic scholars in Cracow whose purpose was to study theological subjects. One of the leaders of this group was Francesco Lismanini, noted above, who openly embraced Protestantism during his stay in Geneva and Zürich. Their aim was to reform the Church without affecting its orthodoxy. Members of this society recommended reading and discussing the Gospels and attacked the Church's tenets that did not have scriptural justification, such as the mystery of the Trinity, in light of the antitrinitarian doctrines of Michael Servetus,⁸ and opposed the idolatry and worship of saints. Under the reign of the tolerant King Zygmunt August II, specific denominations evolved: Calvinist with its first synod in Słomniki in 1554, prevailing among the nobility; Lutheran, predominating among burghers in the towns of Royal Prussia which was granted full freedom in 1557-1558 by the King; Bohemian Brethren who arrived in Poland in 1548 with their views on social issues too advanced for the times. They were the remnants of the Hussite branch of the Taborites who ca. 1456 organized their own separate congregations.

Once the Reformation took root in Poland the Church hierarchy unleashed a strong campaign excommunicating many clergy and noblemen, condemning them to death and confiscating their property for heresy. Encyclicals from the Pope ordered the extirpation of heresy. The first martyr of the Counter-Reformation was a priest, Nicholas, rector of Kurow, who was starved to death in prison. The intentions of the Church were often thwarted by the refusal of magistrates to carry out the decrees of the ecclesiastical tribunals, but many murders were committed clan-

⁸ Michael Servetus (1511-1553), Spanish physician and theologian, during his stay in Italy became disappointed and distressed by papal pomp and its wordly domination. He moved to France, matriculated in medicine at Paris in 1538 and finally settled in Vienne under the protection of Archbishop Palmier as Dr. Villanovanus. He developed his own theological ideas and communicated them to the Italians who visited Europe, e.g., Lelio Sozzini, Bernardino Ochino, Matteo Gribaldi, Giorgio Biandrata. His major works: *De Trinitate erroribus libri VII*, *Dialogorum de Trinitate libri II*, *Declarationis Jesu Christi filii Dei libri V*, *Biblia sacra ex Santis Pagnini translatione*, and *Christianismi Restitutio*. In the last work he also published his discovery of pulmonary circulation. Servetus attempted to separate Church and state and return to the theological formulations of original Christianity. He was tried by the Inquisition in France, escaped from prison, but was seized again in Geneva and tried now as a "heretic" by John Calvin. He was condemned and burned alive at Champel on Oct. 27, 1553, for his denial of the Trinity, his belief in the celestial flesh of Christ, in anabaptism and in psychopannychism.

destinely in convents.⁹ The laws in Poland allowed for absolute jurisdiction of ecclesiastical courts over the inhabitants.

The nobility, horrified by the attempts of the clergy, openly questioned the extent of the bishops' authority at the Sejm of 1550. The Sejm decided that "no one but the monarch had the right to judge citizens [i.e., nobility], and to condemn them to any penalty whatsoever." During the elections to the Sejm in 1552, the nobility demanded the abolition of the ecclesiastical jurisdiction altogether. Consequently the king issued a decree stating that the clergy would retain the right to issue condemnation of and judge heresy, but had no power to inflict civil or criminal penalties. Further, the clergy could decide only matters of religion and such decisions would have no consequence on civil or political life. Angered by this decision, the bishops, members of the Senate, left the hall. This established *de jure* freedom of conscience in Poland. Moreover the Sejm of 1556 enacted a law guaranteeing everyone the right to worship in one's house as one wished. These laws were reconfirmed subsequently in 1563 and in 1565.¹⁰

After the death of the heirless King Zygmunt August II in 1572, the Polish throne became a target of the machinations of foreign powers and the Catholic Church. The papal Nuncio Francesco Commendone intrigue to install a Catholic candidate on the throne. At the Sejm of Convocation, the so-called Warsaw Confederation that met in Warsaw on January 6, 1573, the nobility, aware of the religious wars in Germany, were anxious to safeguard the guarantees of internal peace and equality of religious confessions based on the Treaty of Augsburg of 1555. They enacted the *pax dissidentium* on January 28, 1573, which contained the term *dissidentes* designating all groups, including Catholics, that differ in religion.

⁹ Krasinski, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, 177.

¹⁰ It is interesting that Stanislaus Orzechowski (1513-1566), a nobleman and priest who oscillated between Protestantism and Catholicism, was the most instrumental in the enactment of these laws. He was a very colorful and talented character, but an opportunist without principles. His views on the Popes and bishops were expounded in *Repudium Romae*. He denounced the bishops as traitors of Poland since they were senators and at the same time took an oath of fidelity to the Roman See. Most bishops were devoid completely of patriotic feelings and protected only their wealth. One of the bishops is quoted as saying: "Let rather the whole kingdom perish than the treasury of the Church, being the heritage of the Pope and not of the king, should give one single penny to the wants of the public." Quoted in Krasinski, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, 196.

In *De primatu papae* (1558) he wrote: "It is necessary to enact a law which would preserve to the clergy only their spiritual duties, and deprive them of political government. Let them baptize and preach, but not direct the affairs of the country. If, however, they risk to retain senatorial dignity, let them renounce the allegiance to Rome." Quoted in Krasinski, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, 197.

Thus Protestants in Poland now gained not only freedom but also complete legal equality with the Catholic Church. However, even here a special stipulation guaranteed the nobles authority over their subjects in religious matters as well. Thus Catholics preserved their domination over the serfs and could prevent the spread of reform.

These statutes were vehemently opposed by Cardinal Stanislaus Hosius, and all bishops except Franciszek Krasinski of Cracow, but they were approved by majority vote of both chambers of the Sejm and became fundamental law in Poland, the most liberal in Europe. But this law was censured and opposed vigorously by Rome. It was a product of Protestant philosophical thought and the Polish Catholic Church has never recognized it.¹¹ Prince Henri de Valois was elected the next king, but only after taking an oath in the Cathedral of Notre Dame on September 10, 1573, which included the support of religious liberty.¹² The prince had to retake the oath at his coronation. The Warsaw Statutes of 1573 were reaffirmed every time a king swore to respect these so-called Henrician Articles and again by the senators and deputies to the Sejm in 1607, 1609, and in 1632.

II. THE DEVELOPMENT AND ESTABLISHMENT OF ANTITRINITARIANISM

At the roots of Polish Antitrinitarianism are the theological ideas transplanted from Italy and social ideas borrowed initially from the Anabaptists and Moravian Brethren. Discussions at the meetings of the secret society of Catholic scholars in Cracow since 1546 included the works of Michael Servetus. In 1551 Lelio Sozzini visited Poland and propagated similar doctrines. About the middle of the sixteenth century a variety of Antitrinitarian sects emerged. They called themselves Christians or Brethren, hence Polish Brethren, also Minor Reformed Church. Their opponents labelled them after the old heresies as Sabellians, Samosatians, Ebionites, Unitarians, and finally Arians. They were also

¹¹ Jan Sachs (1641–1671) wrote in *De Scopo reipublicae polonicae* published in 1665: “. . . though the clergy during the successive interregna made every effort and were ready to move hell to destroy the peace awarded to religious dissidents, thanks to God’s grace, peace was preserved. . . .” In Ogonowski, *op. cit.*, part 1, 587.

¹² These conditions are known as the Henrician Articles: *Pacem inter dissidentes de religione tuebor, nec quenquam offendi opprimique causa religionis permittam. And Nec ullo modo vel iurisdictione nostra, vel officiorum nostrorum et statuum quorumvis autoritate quenquam affici, opprimique causa religionis permittam, nec ipse afficiam, nec opprimam.*

known abroad as Socinians, after the Italian Faustus Socinus (Fausto Sozzini, nephew of Lelio Sozzini) who at the end of the sixteenth century became a prominent figure in the Raków congregation for systematizing the doctrines of the Polish Brethren.

Peter of Goniądz (Peter Gonesius, Piotr Giezek z Goniądza), a Calvinist minister, is credited as being the founder of the group. He, like many Poles of his time, studied abroad. In Wittenberg he abandoned Catholicism; in Switzerland and in Padua he was introduced by his professor Matteo Gribaldi to the writings of Michael Servetus and embraced the Italian Antitrinitarian doctrines, eventually himself becoming a professor of logic at Padua University. Upon returning to Poland he initially joined the Helvetian Church. At the Helvetian synod in Secemin, on January 24, 1556, he delivered a speech about his theological beliefs: a critique of the Athanasian credo and rejection of the Trinity as a human invention. At another Calvinist synod at Brest on December 15, 1558, he presented his complete doctrine including his treatise against the baptism of infants. This synod silenced him in order to avoid a schism, threatening him with excommunication. Peter, however, refused to obey, found many followers (e.g. John Kiszka, Hetman of Lithuania) and established an Antitrinitarian church with its own printing office, becoming a minister at Węgrów (in Podlasie). His social doctrines were borrowed from the Anabaptists whom he visited in Moravia. They were characterized by pacifism, belief in communal property and refusal to use arms or hold civil office.

The issue of the Trinity was subsequently hotly debated at the synods and soon several opinions about the meaning of the Trinity appeared. Several foreigners made contributions to the discussion. An Italian physician, Giorgio Biandrata (1515-1588), became a superintendent of the Helvetian Churches in Poland. In 1563 he moved to Transylvania as a physician of the prince, John Sigismundus Zápolya. After the prince’s death he returned to Poland as physician to King Stefan Batory. One of the most prominent promoters of Antitrinitarianism was Italian Francesco Stancaro (1501-1574), first professor of Hebrew in Poland, who arrived in Poland in 1558 and launched a discussion against Calvinists claiming that their doctrine represented Christ as an inferior God. He proposed to solve the theological problem by assuming that the expiatory mediating work of Christ took place according to his human nature. Pierre Statorius, a Frenchman who arrived in Poland in 1559, became a naturalized citizen and assumed the name of Stoinski. He was the author

of the first Polish grammar. Nobleman Olesnicki in Pinczów converted a Roman Catholic parish into a Protestant one and the group published its Antitrinitarian confession in 1560 and in 1561. After Biandrata left for Transylvania, Gregorius Paulus (1525-1591; Grzegorz Pawel of Brzeziny, also called Pauli, hence thought to be of Italian descent) became the leader of the movement. He rejected the Nicean creed, denied the deity of Jesus and claimed that death does not separate the body from the soul, but that both will have a common resurrection. The Antitrinitarian doctrines assigned to orthodox Christianity a human rather than divine, origin thus threatening the Catholic, Helvetian and Bohemian Churches. Calvinist synods at Pinczow (1561) and at Cracow (1562) admonished the Antitrinitarian reformers and rejected the doctrines of Biandrata, Lismanini, and Stancaro.

Both sides appealed to the Italian minister and former general of the Capuchin Order, Italian refugee self-exiled in Zürich, Bernardino Ochino (1487-1564), for mediation.¹³ Ochino, however, did not take sides and in a dialogue on the Trinity included in his book, *Trenta Dialoghi*, gave an explanation of the Trinity based on the Augustinian interpretation. The Trinity remained for him a mystery but it was a necessary consequence of *autodispiogamiento di Dio*, or *bonum diffusivum sui* [self-effusion of God]. To the second problem which was stirred by Stancaro's inquiry into the nature of Christ's atonement—human or divine, Ochino answered that there was no need for atonement since God does not become angry. Such a reaction of God would be incompatible with His impassibility and love. If the death of Jesus had any expiatory character, it was only because God consented to consider it as an act of expiation. This was not the integral part of the salvation plan. Christ came not in order to change God, but in order to change us. Such a theory found its final place in the *Catechism* of Raków published in 1605.

Catholics as well as Protestants were indignant at the influence of the Antitrinitarians and the agitation they caused. When King Zygmunt

¹³ Lismanini wrote to his friend expressing his wish that Ochino explain the views on the Trinity: "Vorrei che il chiarissimo Bernardino Ochino in breve ti spiegasse l'opinione degli scolastici circa la trinità e l'unità di Dio; e dovreesti domandargli anche se la dottrina promulgata dagli scrittori del nostro tempo è conforme, o no, alla dottrina degli antichi ortodossi e a quella degli scolastici." ["I would like the illustrious Bernardino Ochino to explain in short the opinion of the scholastics on the Trinity and the unity of God. You should ask him also if the doctrine promulgated by the writers of our time conforms, or not, to the doctrine of ancient orthodoxy and to that of the scholastics."] In Roland H. Bainton, *Bernardino Ochino Esule e Riformatore Senese de Cinquecento 1487-1563*. Versione del manoscritto Inglese di Elio Gianturco (Firenze: G.C. Sansoni—Editore, 1940), 158.

August II considered expelling them, Cardinal Hosius convinced him that this would amount to approval of the other sects. The king resolved the problem by issuing a decree in 1564 in Parczów expelling all non-Catholic foreigners. The decree expressly excepted the Bohemian Brethren and since all other foreign groups were already well settled and naturalized, only the Italians were affected by this decree.

During the Calvinist synod-debate at Piotrków in March of 1565, a final separation of the Antitrinitarians took place. Paulus presided over the congregation in Raków until his death in 1591. The Antitrinitarian synod at Węgrów, on December 25, 1565, united 45 ministers who rejected the baptism of infants and agreed on the principal tenets of the faith formulated in the first catechism of 1574, *Catechesis et confessio fidei coetus per Poloniam congregati in nomine Jesu Christi*. The Antitrinitarian Church was spread over several congregations established under the protection of various noblemen. The main center that gained recognition was established by Nicholas Sięniński on his estate in Raków. Initially the group did not have any uniform religious system. At the Antitrinitarian synod at Skrzynna in 1567, several divisions were visible but all parties adopted a resolution maintaining an external union based on a unitarian doctrine.

According to Stanislas Kot, the theological leader of the group who initially set the theological and social doctrines was a Dominican Greek monk, Jacob Palaeologus, who escaped from a convent in Rome and found refuge in Cracow. During the years 1571-1574 we find him in Kolozsvár (modern Cluj) in Transylvania. He accepted and propagated the theological unitarian doctrine but rejected the original utopian social ideas of Peter of Gopiadz and Gregorius Pauli. He was eventually captured in Moravia in 1582 by order of the Hapsburgs and brought to Rome to be burned at the stake by the Catholic Inquisition in 1585. His manuscripts are kept in the Vatican library but are not available for study. His ideas are known from a collection of excerpts entitled *Contra Calvinum pro Serveto*. He was opposed by a faction of Antitrinitarians who advocated the divinity of Jesus Christ. Among the opposition was Giorgio Biandrata who actually brought the Italian Faustus Socinus to Transylvania from Basel in 1579.

Antitrinitarianism was eventually developed into a uniform religious system—the Antitrinitarian Church, by Faustus Socinus (1539-1604) who arrived in Poland in 1580 and established his influence during the Antitrinitarian synods of 1584 and 1588. He resolved the differences

among the various groups and codified the doctrines. He did not develop the final catechism, which was written by Valentinus Smalcus (1572-1622) and Hieronymus Moskorzowski (d. 1625) in 1605. For about twenty years Socinus was not admitted to the ecclesiastic community by the Polish Brethren as they did not agree with some of his tenets, such as his rejection of the baptism by immersion which the Anabaptists introduced, an overemphasis on the role of Christ as the Son of God, and his radical social views. Finally in 1600 he was asked to come to Raków where he attained a position of high authority and provided the printing press with a stream of manuscripts. Since these works were disseminated throughout the Western world, the Polish Brethren became known in the West as Socinians. Samuel Przymkowski wrote his biography.¹⁴ Polish Antitrinitarianism reached its mature state in the beginning of the seventeenth century under the leadership of Jan Crell, Jonasz Szlichtyng, Samuel Przymkowski, Martin Ruarus, Andreas Wiszowaty, great grandson of Socinus, Valentinus Smalcus, Johannes Völkel, Hieronymus Moskorzowski, and others.

In the Socinian theological system, revelation was accepted since human reason alone is deemed insufficient to work out salvation. Jesus was on earth a mortal man by the power of the Holy Ghost, and on that account he was the only begotten Son. He became God by his martyrdom and resurrection and as such he is to be worshipped. The Holy Ghost is a gift of God bestowed on the faithful. Christ was not the Logos by which all things were created but was the founder of a new religion, and by redeeming mankind he became the creator of a new world. However, he did not atone for the sins of mankind. He only showed the manner in which divine mercy was to be obtained. The social doctrines of Socinus, the doctrines of social passivity, were eventually rejected by the Antitrinitarian synods of 1596, 1597, 1598, and changed to active participation in society. They strongly defended social equality. Jan Ludwik Wolzogen (1599-1661), an Austrian baron who settled with the Polish Brethren in Gdańsk, wrote about serfdom: "I doubt, however, whether one may be a Christian and such a master as the Poles who hold serfs, not only because they load their serfs with excessive labor and do not set them free every seven years as God commanded, but also because they allow them no appeal from their masters, nor any refuge or right to complain of grievances."¹⁵

¹⁴ Samuelis Przymkowskius, *Vita Fausti Socini Senensis, Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum*, Eleuthropoli, 1692, Vol. 9, 417-425.

The most brilliant period for the Polish Brethren was between 1585 and 1638 with the center at Raków which won the honorable name of the Sarmatian Athens. They founded a world-renowned school in 1602. Its rector until 1621, Jan Crell, codified the ethical system of the Brethren. Their famous printing press filled Europe with treatises written in Polish, Latin, Dutch, and German. They were well praised and read by people like John Locke, John Stuart Mill, Isaac Newton, and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz. They represented a small number but held high ethical values. The Polish Brethren lasted in Poland for about 100 years from the time when Peter of Goniądz delivered his credo at the Calvinist synod in Secemin on January 22, 1556, to the death of Samuel Przymkowski in 1670. But they made an outstanding contribution to Polish literature and had the most advanced and pioneering ideas in social, political, and religious fields. They left about 500 treatises largely unexplored and still waiting to be examined. They were inspired by a sincere application of original Christianity to personal, social and political relations. Their ideology was characterized from the beginning by:

1. propagating freedom of religious thought
2. the principle of applying reason to the interpretation of the Scriptures, revelation, and theological matters in general
3. absolute tolerance of all creeds
4. the struggle for social equality among people.

At their first synod, the Polish Brethren settled the matter of freedom of conscience: "Everyone has the right not to do things which he feels to be contrary to the word of God. Moreover, all may write according to their conscience, if they do not offend anybody by it."¹⁶ Protestant and Catholic reaction termed freedom of conscience and tolerance propagated by the Socinians as "that Socinian dogma, the most dangerous of the dogmas of the Socinian sect."¹⁷

¹⁵ In Stanislas Kot, *op. cit.*, 175.

¹⁶ In Stanislas Kot, *op. cit.*, XXII.

¹⁷ Jurieu, Protestant professor of theology at Rotterdam, cited by H. John McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951, 9. Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627-1704), bishop of Meaux, called the universal tolerance "cette théologie de l'impie des sociniens [that impious Socinian theology]." (*Oeuvres Complètes de Bossuet*, ed. F. Lachat, Paris: Librairie de Louis Vivès, 1862-1863, Vol. XVI, 151.)

III. THE COUNTER-REFORMATION AND ITS IMPACT ON ANTITRINITARIANISM

The first measures taken by the king, the ecclesiastical synods, and the Sejm in order to prevent the spread of the Reformation had little effect since the nobility acquired many liberties that allowed them initially to circumscribe ecclesiastical jurisdiction. However, the aggressive attitude of the Church required more legal guarantees (the laws of 1552, 1556, and 1573) to safeguard the liberties of the nobility, and to prevent imminent atrocities.

The synod convened in Piotrków in 1552 ordered all Roman Catholics to submit to a test of orthodoxy of their faith designed by Stanislaus Hosius, then Bishop of Warmia. Pope Paul IV sent Nuncio Aloysius Lippomani who suggested the most sanguinary methods to eradicate heresy, arguing that violence was justified, and recommended seizure of the leaders and their execution.¹⁸

Stanislaus Hosius (1504-1579), cardinal since 1561, was the single individual who contributed most to the defeat of the Reformation.¹⁹ Hosius proposed exile of all priests embracing Reformation ideas and expulsion of all Protestant ministers, Polish and foreign. He held a special grudge against the Antitrinitarians and the Bohemian Brethren, whom he considered the most dangerous.

Hosius suggested bringing in the Jesuits. At his request the first group arrived in 1564 and was settled and endowed in Braunsberg. Slowly the Order was spread to all Poland, endowed with churches, hospitals and schools. Its goal was to restore Papal supremacy regardless of Polish national interests, individual human rights, and moral principles. Hosius, with other Jesuits, argued that the Warsaw Statutes of 1573 were a “criminal conspiracy against God”²⁰ and should be abolished by the king. He openly recommended that King Henri de Valois retract his oath,

maintaining that an oath given to “heretics” may be broken even without an absolution. He even commissioned the king’s confessor, William Ruzeus, to explain to the king his “duty” to break the oath. Papal Nuncio Gratiani advised the king to crush religious and political liberties, offer offices only to Catholics, and to engage in a war with Muscovy to keep the nation from religious discussions and intellectual pursuits.

Beginning with the reign of Stefan Batory (1575-1586), the clergy and Jesuits launched a continuous and methodical campaign against Protestants and the law of the *pax dissidentium* that lasted until the complete success of the Counter-Reformation in the middle of the seventeenth century. Several methods were used by Jesuits to achieve their goals.²¹

The most primitive was to use brutal physical force. The Jesuits and Hosius openly instigated mobs, school pupils and university students to organize pogroms, attacks, desecrations of burial grounds, and murder against Protestants. Influenced by Jesuits, King Batory was involved in the expulsion of the rector of the Socinian school at Chmielnik, Christian Francken. He also imprisoned Alexis Radecki, a Socinian printer.

Jesuits strove to gain control of education. They achieved it by the end of the reign of King Zygmunt August III (1587-1632). They used schools as a training ground for their puppets who were then promoted to political and civil offices, to the Sejm and to the courts. By control of education Jesuits were able to indoctrinate youth with hatred towards Protestants. The students who organized the pogroms defended themselves on the ground that it was their duty to destroy the Protestants just as the clergy had taught them.

Jesuits destroyed the concepts of law and individual rights, replacing them with prejudice and corruption.²² The king allowed himself and the country to be controlled by Jesuits with total disregard for national

²¹ For a detailed description of the Jesuits’ tactics see Krasinski, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, 43 & ff; 195 & ff; 356 & ff.

²² Piotr Skarga (the king’s Jesuit preacher) wrote a pamphlet in 1591 on the occasion of the destruction of the Protestant church in Cracow, *Adnotatio ad Euangelicos et Alios A catholicos, ex parte fani Cracoviensi eversi*. He highly approved of the destruction, maintaining that he spoke through the inspiration of the Divine Spirit, and justified the act as legal because the Protestant Church according to him existed unlawfully. He argued that the local bishop by the authority of God is the only judge of the truth about religion; therefore no church can be lawfully established that is not approved by the Catholic clergy. Moreover, he commended as worthy of imitation the acts of Louis IX of France, who ordered the tongues of “blasphemers” to be cut out, and to see that all those who approved of religious liberty were treated as blasphemous. Krasinski, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, 102ff.

¹⁸ The Catholic synod of Lowicz in 1556 illegally sentenced to death and burned at the stake a lower-class woman, Dorota Lopecka, with a group of Jews, accusing her of selling the communion wafer to the Jews who in turn desecrated it by piercing it with needles. At the same time the synod, in view of the spreading Antitrinitarian opinions, claimed that the wafer was the real body of Christ—flesh and blood, because the wafer supposedly emitted some blood. Krasinski, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, 304ff.

¹⁹ He confessed in his congratulatory letter to the cardinal of Lotaryngia on the occasion of the murder of Coligny in France that he felt joy and comfort, and thanked God for the slaughter of St. Bartholomew’s night, imploring God for the same “mercy” on Poland. Krasinski, *op. cit.*, Vol 1, 402.

²⁰ Krasinski, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, 31.

interests. He achieved more by corruption than by open persecution. Abolishment of the laws was instituted methodically, step by step. It began with the Sejm of 1588 which allowed action to be brought by the Catholic Church for recovery of its former property, thus abrogating the law of 1556 granting the nobles freedom of worship.

Another method of exterminating Protestants was open impunity for all aggression against them. To the Jesuits every act of persecution and depravity committed against a Protestant was proof of piety. In 1611 a young Italian named Franco, who proclaimed that the Catholic Eucharist was nothing but idolatry, was condemned to death in Wilno and hastily executed in the courtyard of the castle. In Bielsk which belonged to the Queen Constantia, Archduchess of Austria, John Tyszkiewicz, a Socinian, was executed on November 16, 1611 by her order, for refusing to swear in the name of the Trinity. These examples clearly illustrate the power exerted by the clergy and the breakdown of the moral sensitivities of Poles.

Through skillful manipulation and intrigue, Jesuits were able to convince a few Greek Orthodox bishops to enter into union with the Catholic Church at the end of the sixteenth century. The Catholic Church initiated a ruthless and bloody persecution of members of the Greek Orthodox Church in the eastern territories of the Commonwealth.²³

In 1617 Bishop Piasecki of Cracow published the first *Index librorum prohibitorum*. The clergy established by the royal decree of 1621 a censure on publication of books, libraries, booksellers, etc. All books published by Protestant printing houses were burned without any regard to their contents.

Institutions in the country became subservient to the persecution and interests of the clergy, Rome and Jesuits. When in 1641 students attacked a Protestant minister and King Władysław IV (1632-1648) asked the bishop to punish the perpetrators, the bishop answered: "How can I punish the students, when it is my vocation to extirpate heresy by every means: the Pope has sent me solemn thanks that heresy was ejected from Wilno during my rule."²⁴

²³ Litynski, a nobleman, predicted the future insurrection of the Cossacks under Władysław IV: "Disregarding ancient privileges, the temple was taken by the most flagitious violence, and a great insult was offered to the Greek Church. God, who surely punishes every wickedness, will raise a nation which will take for one a hundred churches." Krasinski, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, 243.

²⁴ Krasinski, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, 240.

The final defeat of church reform took place during the reign of King John Casimir (1648-1668), former Cardinal and Jesuit. The Pope decided that the Cardinal would serve the Church better as king of Poland. Therefore he dispensed him from the vows, allowing his coronation and marriage to the widow of the former king, the Cardinal's half-brother. The country was ravaged by the Cossacks, and their leader, Chmielnicki, summoned for help the Tsar of Muscovy in 1654. The Swedish king, Carolus Gustavus, invaded Poland in 1655, partially provoked by the Polish king himself.²⁵ During these tumultuous times, the Catholic clergy organized a campaign accusing Protestants of having brought on the disaster by their impious religious doctrines.²⁶ They were an easy target since the Swedes were Protestants, and some of the Bohemian Brethren who escaped to Poland from persecutions in Moravia and Bohemia did seek refuge under the Swedish king.²⁷ A wave of bloody persecution ensued and forced many Protestants to flee the country, leaving their churches and property. The treaty of Oliwa in 1660 theoretically restored religious rights to all, though only on paper. The country's morals were already totally destroyed by the efforts of the Jesuits; laws ceased to function. In 1663 a motion was introduced by deputies from Mazovia to officially abolish the Statutes of Warsaw of 1573; this was done in 1668. An amoral law was introduced in 1668 that prescribed the death penalty for a baptized Catholic who would convert to Protestantism. That was the end of the Reformation and freedom of thought and conscience in Poland.

Jesuits especially attacked the Polish Brethren. Piotr Skarga called upon the king to exterminate them. They were falsely accused of siding with foreign powers against Poland, e.g., inciting the Turkish Sultan to attempt to conquer Poland in 1595. They were blamed as blasphemous for

²⁵ In 1655 John Casimir provoked a war with Sweden by his stubborn claim to the Swedish throne. Carolus Gustavus was prompted to war by the king's Vice-Chancellor Hieronymus Radziejowski who sought revenge on the king after he was personally humiliated and unjustly treated. The king wanted to sacrifice his honor by taking his wife and later sentenced him to death.

²⁶ Szymon Starowolski (1588-1653) in Ogonowski, *op. cit.*, 516ff, 550ff.

²⁷ Jan Amos Komenski (1592-1670), a Bohemian, in his *Panegyricus Carolo Gustavo, magno Svecorum, Gothorum, Vandalorumque Regi, incruento Sarmatae Victori, et quaqua venit Liberatori, Pio, Felici, Augusto* (1655) expressed his hope that the Polish nation would preserve its freedoms under the reign of the Swedish monarch who would liberate Moravians and Bohemians from the yoke of Hapsburg domination. Ogonowski, *op. cit.*, 281-298. His pamphlet was not anti-Polish; it expressed his patriotic and political orientation. He sincerely thought that the reign of Carolus Gustavus would be beneficial for Poland.

bringing the wrath of God upon the country in the form of a “deluge” (a term used by Poles to describe the Swedish invasion in 1655).

The true reasons for the calamities affecting Poland in the seventeenth century were explained by Stanislaus Kazimierz Koźuchowski, a deputy to the Sejm since 1653, in his treatise *Veritas quatuor causis demonstrata calamitatem Regni Poloniae* (1661).²⁸ Among them he listed excessive mistrust of the reigning monarch, preoccupation of the gentry with their own private interests, appointment of inappropriate people to government offices, and excessive openness of political life. We might add also that Poland was pushed into expansive territorial wars in the east by the Pope and Jesuits who hoped to conquer Russia for Roman Catholicism. Even Catholics themselves admitted corruption produced by Jesuits, their machinations, manipulation of the kings, and disregard for the national interests as the sole reasons for troubles in the seventeenth century.²⁹ Hieronymus Moskorzowski answered the calumnies in a patriotic refutation to Jesuits, *Oratio qua continetur brevis calumniarum depulsio*. . . : “You cannot weaken our devotion to the Republic. Whatever we are, we shall not deem that we are driven out by our Lord the King, or by our dearly beloved native land, but only hunted and driven away by you [i.e., Jesuits].”³⁰

Raków was the chief object of the hostility of the Jesuits and there were several attempts to destroy it. It was finally destroyed in 1638. Bishop Zadzik organized a campaign against the school in Raków under the pretext that two pupils of the school had thrown stones at a wooden cross, thus committing a sacrilege and an offense against God. At the same time absurd political accusations were published in a pamphlet *Tormentum Throno Trinitatem Deturbans*. The Sejm argued that the Socinians were not Christians, since they denied the Trinity, and should be excluded from protection of the *pax dissidentium* Statutes of 1573. It is interesting to note that other Jews, Moslems, and non-Christians were included. Still, the

²⁸ Ogonowski, *op. cit.*, part 1, 347-364.

²⁹ Bishop Piasecki of Cracow stated in a work published in 1648, *Chronica gestarum in Europa, ad anno 1616*, that corruption, machinations of Jesuits, and their influence on the councils of Zygmunt III were the sole causes of the errors committed in the public and international affairs of the country: *Haecque causa unica fuit errorum, non in domesticis solum sed in publicis, ut Moschicis, Suecis, Livonicisque, regis rationibus et tamen pene sacrilegii crimen reputabatur, si quis tamen eorum dicta factave reprehendisset, et nemini qui non ipsis applauderet, facilis ad dignitates aditus patebat*. Krasinski, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, 207.

³⁰ Stanislas Kot, *op. cit.*, 137.

Senate ordered on May 1, 1638, without inquiry, that the church be abolished and the school and printing press at Raków be destroyed. Moreover, it prohibited the school from being restored under penalty of death and ordered banishment of its professors. Kazimir Sieniński, the Catholic son of the aged founder of Raków, accused his own father! In 1648 the Sejm attempted to introduce a law excluding from the *pax dissidentium* those who did not acknowledge the Trinity. The attempt did not pass but the deputy Niemierycz, a Socinian, was not allowed to sign the acts of the Sejm.

On April 1, 1656, in the cathedral of Lwów, the bigoted King John Casimir, distressed by the wars, solemnly committed his kingdom and himself to the special protection of the Holy Virgin, vowing in exchange to protect her from the insults of the “heretics” to the Holy Trinity and divinity of the Son of God, and to remove the grievances of the lower classes.³¹ The king repeated the vow under pressure from the Jesuits at the camp near Warsaw on June 15, 1656, promising this time to expel the Arians from Poland. The king did nothing for the lower classes, but was most successful in exterminating the scapegoats among the Protestants — the Socinians.

The king proceeded after the victories to fulfill his vow. At his request and in order to express in deeds his gratitude to God, the Sejm on July 20, 1658 expelled the Socinians from Poland. The *liberum veto* exercised by the Socinian deputy, a privilege already in effect since 1652, was conveniently disregarded in this case. The Sejm also enacted a law prohibiting profession or propagation of Socinianism in the Polish dominion, and everyone who did so was to be punished immediately by death. But the Sejm granted a grace period of three years for Socinians who retained their beliefs to allow them to sell their property and emigrate. Security was promised to them during this time, but their exercise of religion was forbidden and they could not hold office. On March 22, 1659, the term was reduced to two years, declaring that all the Socinians who did not embrace Roman Catholicism by June 10, 1660 must leave the country under penalty of death. They were not allowed to join any faith except Roman Catholicism. This enactment was based entirely and explicitly on the king’s religious vow of glorifying the Holy Virgin. The reason for the expulsion cited by the Sejm was because the

³¹ Mikołaj Cichowski, *Namowa do ich Mościow Panów Koronnych, aby przy konstytucyjnej przeciw aryjanom, na dwu sejmach uchwalonej, statecznie stali i do egzekucyjnej przystępowali* (1660), in Ogonowski, *op. cit.*, part 1, 575.

sect did not recognize the preexistence of Jesus Christ (*quoniam . . . nominata secta [Ariana vel Anabaptistica] . . . dilatari capit quae filio Dei praeterternitatem adimit . . .*). As stated earlier, the Jews and Moslems were not affected. The law against “heretics” enacted by Wladyslaw Jagiello in 1424 against the Hussites was cited as the basis for the decree, even though it was nullified by the law of 1573. However, the Hussites accepted the dogma of the Trinity; the Socinians denied it.³²

After their expulsion from Poland in 1660, the Antitrinitarians scattered to Hungary, Prussia, Germany, Holland, England, and even to America. Settlers in Holland compiled their works in *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum* published between 1666 and 1692.³³ Stanisław Lubieniecki (1623-1675), a pastor and diplomat who settled in Hamburg, wrote *Historia Reformationis Polonicae*, which was published by Benedict Wiszowaty, the great grandson of F. Socinus, in Amsterdam in 1685. The same Wiszowaty published and edited *Bibliotheca Antitrinitariorum* (Amsterdam, 1684) of Christopher Sandius, a compilation of valuable historical and theological documents. Socinians were “discovered” by Alexander Brückner in his work titled *The Polish Dissidents*, which he published in Berlin in 1905. In 1919 a Society for the Study of the History of the Reformation in Poland was organized. The pioneering work on the Polish Brethren was the already noted study by Stanislas Kot (see footnote no. 5), followed by the work of Earl Morse Wilbur.³⁴ Zbigniew Ogonowski continued the studies by publishing monographs and editing the translation of excerpts from the literature of the Polish Brethren and related publications (see footnote no. 4). The English translation of selected documents and theological works of the *Bibliotheca Antitrinitariorum* by George Huntston Williams appeared in 1980 in the series of

³² The whole text of the decree can be read in Krasinski, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, 397.

³³ *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum quos Unitarios vocant, Instructa operibus omnibus Fausti Socini Senensis, nobilissimi Itali, Johannis Crelli Franci, Jonae Slichtingii à Bucowietz, Equitis Poloni, exegeticis & Johannis Ludovici Wolzogeni Baronis Austriaci, quae omnia simul juncta totius Novi Testamenti explicationem complectuntur*, Irenopoli: Frans Kuyper Post Annum Domini 1656, 92. (BFP) Nine volumes are listed in the University of Amsterdam Library under the catalogue number D 83940652 * 266 A 1-9. The front page table of contents does not reflect all the works contained in the series, e.g., the works of Przytkowski published in the 9th volume.

³⁴ Earl Morse Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism: Socinianism and its Antecedents*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1947.

Harvard Theological Studies,³⁵ and in 1991 the translation of Lubieniecki’s work was published.³⁶ Some of their theological traditions are maintained and propagated by Atlanta Bible College (affiliated with the Church of God General Conference) in *A Journal from The Radical Reformation: A Testimony to Biblical Unitarianism* (published since 1991). In 1991 a small group of Polish Brothers who continue living the faith of the Socinians was formed in Cracow.

IV. CATHOLIC OPPOSITION TO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

A lively discussion developed at the beginning of the seventeenth century between the Jesuits and clergy on one side and the proponents of the religious freedom guaranteed by the Warsaw Statutes of 1573 on the other. This exchange arose during the debate on the implementation of legal executive instructions for the Statutes. Mateusz Bembus (1567-1645), a Jesuit who succeeded Piotr Skarga as preacher to the king (between 1612-1618), in a pamphlet *Pax non pax est seu rationes aliquod, quibus confoederationis evangelicorum cum catholicis pacem, nullo modo veram esse pacem, breviter ostenditur* published in 1615, called the Warsaw Statutes “peace with the devil,” declaring that a “breach of faith and heresy find their founder in the devil,” and wrote that “heretics are a special type of beast.” According to him, “to allow freedom of conscience . . . is indeed a diabolic concept.”³⁷ He propagated the supremacy of the clergy and of the Church’s power over secular authority and concluded that the Statutes were not sanctioned and established by law.

Bembus’s pamphlet met a strong and reasoned reply from an anonymous Protestant, probably Jan Tyniecki, one of the Moravian Brethren. This was published in Raków in 1615 and entitled *Vindiciae pacis seu confoederationis*.³⁸ The author demonstrates point by point the absurdity,

³⁵ George Huntston Williams ed., *The Polish Brethren. Documentation of the History & Thought of Unitarianism in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and in the Diaspora, 1601-1685*, Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, Harvard Theological Studies, Part I, II, 1980.

³⁶ George Hunston Williams, ed., *History of the Reformation. Stanisław Lubieniecki and Nine Related Documents*, Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1991.

³⁷ Mateusz Bembus in Ogonowski, *op. cit.*, part 1, 460, 466, 469.

³⁸ Anonymous, *Vindiciae pacis seu confoederationis inter dissidentes de religione in Regno Poloniae, iura breviter asserta adversus rationes aliquot, quibus ea Pax non pax audit, nec ullo modo eam esse pacem, quidam conatus est ostendere*, Raków, 1615, Ogonowski, *op. cit.*, part 1, 473ff.

ill intentions, and viciousness of the Bembus arguments. He points to the enormous wealth of the Church, maintaining that according to calculations “the number of estates owned by the clergy is significantly higher than those owned by the king and the gentry. Also according to the country’s laws you [the clergy] have no right to the tithes: there never was any legal procedure initiated for this purpose nor was any statute ever approved.”

In 1632 Fabian Birkowski (1566-1636), a Dominican monk, published his sermon, *O egzorbitacyjach przeciwnych kościołowi katolickiemu i stanowi duchownemu, zwłaszcza o braterstwie z niewiernymi kazanie na konfederacyjnej warszawskiej pod interregnum*.³⁹ His opinions are in agreement with those of the Jesuits Skarga, Bembus *et al.* The accord given to the Statutes is equal to approbation of the heresy, i.e., it is a sin and crime against God and a moral depravation. He used colorful and rude language against Protestants, calling them “rabid dogs,” “serpents,” “dragons,” “basilisks,” “wolves,” “bears”; Luther was “stinking rabble,” “the devil incarnate,” etc.

Jesuit Szymon Starowolski (1588-1653) wrote in 1644, *Braterskie napomnienie ad dissidentes in religione, aby się skromnie i w pokoju zachowali*, and in 1646 a reply to a reply of Przypkowski, *Prawdziwe objaśnienie Braterskiego napomnienia ad dissidentes in religione, przed dwiema laty wydanego, które opaczny wy tłumaczeniem teraz świeżo wydanym, anonimus deklarator jakiś znosić usiłuje*.⁴⁰ He praised the murders and brutal religious persecution of the Hussites. He declared and warned the Protestants that the Church never would agree on any rights for the “heretics.” He called the Statutes of Warsaw a “pact with death and hell,” claiming that Franciszek Krasiński, the lone bishop who signed it, did so under “the threat of sword.” The future legal acts containing the articles of the Confederation were signed by bishops with the note: “*excepto articulo confederationis*.” Another bishop, Wawrzyniec Goślicki, was excommunicated for signing the acts of the Sejm of 1587. Moreover, Starowolski inaccurately stated that the Statutes were forced and therefore not legal. At the same time he attested that Catholics and clergy always were against granting the Protestants *libertatem conscientiae inter libertates regni* whenever it was demanded from the king. The apostates from the Catholic religion he called “sons of the devil” who

³⁹ Ogonowski, *op. cit.*, part 1, 493 ff.

⁴⁰ Ogonowski, *op. cit.*, 519ff.; 550ff.

should be punished according to the Edict of Wieluń for “betraying the state”; others should be considered “infidels,” not Christians, and should be classified with Jews and Moslems. He claimed that the Church would never recognize the Statutes and maintained that the Edict of Wieluń of 1424 was still valid and in effect. He justified the closing of the Protestant schools (in 1638 and in 1640), Protestant centers and printing presses (in 1638 the press in Raków) as a “duty of good pastors,” an act of the king and the republic.

Jesuit Mikołaj Cichowski (1598-1669) was the *spiritus movens* instigating expulsion of the Polish Brethren from Poland. He wrote dishonest and vitriolic pamphlets against the Socinians, ascribing to them imaginary ideas and views. For example, he claimed that the Socinians worshipped the devil. The title of one of his pamphlets was *Program diabła ariańskiego (The Program of the Arian Devil, 1659)*. In 1661 in his *Obrona zacnych i pobożnych ludzi, którzy zbrzydziwszy się bluźnierstwami sekty aryjańskiej albo socyńskiej do kościoła się świętego katolickiego udali*, he glorified the infamous attempts of the Polish Crown to interfere in the succession of the tsars on the Russian throne at the beginning of the seventeenth century. He praised the crude, primitive militarism of the Polish gentry as an expression of their piety and obedience to God. He accused the Socinians of worshiping “millions of gods, among them Nero, Pilate, all *principatus et potestates*, and immortal spirits including the devil,” and of “blaspheming together with the Turks and Jews the Holy Trinity and the eternal Sonship of God.”⁴¹ He said that just as the Israelites in the Old Testament suffered whenever they turned away from their God, so did the Poles due to the blasphemies perpetrated by the Socinians, Jews, Turks, and Gypsies. He falsely accused the Socinians of joining the Swedes in Cracow.⁴² Cichowski urged the members of the royal council and government to promptly implement the decrees of the Sejm of 1658 and 1659. He explained the decision of the Sejm: “For a long time now it was a desire of the Polish Crown to get rid of those not only new Christians but also those non-Christians, stubbornly keeping to the Turkish faith.”

⁴¹ Mikołaj Cichowski, *op. cit.*, in Ogonowski, *op. cit.*, part 1, 576.

⁴² In December of 1655/January of 1656, in the region of Sądecz and Czarków in the Carpathian foothills, Jesuits under the influence of Cichowski himself mobilized thousands of peasants to destroy the towns and murder Socinians. Many families had to emigrate to Hungary or Silesia. About 30 Socinian families *volens nolens* sought refuge in Cracow, occupied at that time by King Carolus Gustavus.

V. SOCINIAN PHILOSOPHERS ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Antitrinitarians in the seventeenth century asserted the principle of freedom of religious inquiry and emphasis on reason, and absolute tolerance in matters of faith. That attitude stemmed from the development of humanism (based on the neo-Platonic idealism) and the study of the Bible itself. Probably the first to formulate these ideas was Sebastian Castellio (1515-1563), friend of Faustus Socinus and professor of Greek at Basel. He was the author of *De haereticis, an sint persecuendi* (1554) and *Contra libellum Calvinii* (written in 1562, published in 1612). His work was popularized by Giacomo Aconzio (ca. 1520-ca. 1566) in the treatise *Satanae stratagematum libri octo* (1565). On Polish soil the first Antitrinitarian synod at Wegrów in 1565 firmly established freedom of conscience, confirmed later by the Catechism of Raków. Socinus himself was the first to claim on theological grounds that Church and state should be separated. He was not, however, as tolerant as later Socinians.⁴³

Polish Brethren Krzysztof Ostorodt (d. ca 1611) and Andrzej Wajdowski (1565-1622) were persecuted during their stay in Holland in 1598. After returning to Poland in 1600 they published an *Apologia ad decretum Illustrium et Amplissimorum Ordinum Provinciarum foederatarum Belgii, editum contra Christophorum Ostorodum et Andream Voidovium, die tertio Septembris anno MDXCVIII*. They forcefully spoke against accusations by theologians whom they described as guided by a “subversive diabolic spirit,” zealous in spreading idolatry and in implementing tyranny. They condemned persecution, claiming that the state does not have any right to control the religious beliefs of individuals or impose any religion at all. They passionately appealed for peace and mutual toleration among various religious groups and freedom in the exercise of all religious practices. They pointed to the inevitable danger: if one of the groups gains the favor of the state, it will attempt to influence it in order to exterminate all other groups.⁴⁴

Jan Crell (1590-1633), the aforementioned rector of the Socinian school, an immigrant from Franconia, a philosopher and minister at Raków, in his *Junii Bruti Poloni Vindiciae pro religionis libertate* (a book published in Amsterdam in 1637) called for complete freedom of con-

⁴³ BFP, Vol. 1, 13, 700.

⁴⁴ Ogonowski, *op. cit.*, part 1, 455.

science for everybody.⁴⁵ He stated that coercion is against the nature of Christianity and morality. On the contrary, religious coercion and persecution leads to the stifling of conscience. If religion is forced upon people, they only pretend to be believers. Coercion thus leads to atheism. Crell argued for peace among various believers, making an appeal to common sense and nature. He supported his arguments with quotes from the New Testament (Heb. 12:14; Mt. 5:9), proving that coercion is against its spirit and teachings. He maintained that religious coercion represents the severest form of slavery, suppression of conscience; that persecution of dissidents is a form of theft of someone else’s property and domination by the clergy. The action of the Catholic Church was contradictory to the advice given by Gamaliel to the Jewish community to stop the persecution of the Apostles (Acts 5:38). To the argument of Catholics that there is no need for any legal guarantee of peace, Crell answered with the historical evidence of persecution by the Catholic Church in Poland and other countries. “There is no true peace where there is no security. And there will be no peace as long as Catholics refuse dissidents a legal guarantee or agreement and simultaneously act against them and threaten the peace.”

The most prominent among the Polish Brethren was Samuel Przykowski (1592-1670). In his treatise published in 1628 in Amsterdam (second edition, enlarged in 1630), *Dissertatio de pace et concordia ecclesiae*, he demonstrated the absurdity of intolerance among Christians and called for mutual love regardless of religious differences: “We must not impose spiritual censure on anybody, for each of us has a right to his own individual evaluation. . . . We do not grant anyone the liberty to violate, in private or in public, the freedom of conscience, nor the liberty to propagate religion by force and violence.”⁴⁶

In 1646 he wrote a magnanimous response to a pamphlet of Jesuit Starowolski (noted previously, written in 1644) and entitled it *Braterska deklaracja na niebraterskie napomnienia od autora pod imieniem szlachcica polskiego ad dissidentes in religione uczynione*.⁴⁷ Przykowski calmly and rationally argued that the law guaranteeing peace among

⁴⁵ BFP, Vol. 7, 521-531; Ogonowski, *op. cit.*, part 1, 540. This treatise was translated for the first time into Polish only in 1957, *O wolności sumienia (On the Freedom of Conscience)*.

⁴⁶ BFP, Vol. 9, 371-386; Stanislas Kot, *op. cit.*, XXV. This treatise was translated into German in 1651 and into English in 1653.

⁴⁷ Ogonowski, *op. cit.*, part 1, 527ff.

dissidents in religion (the Statutes of 1573) was a constitutionally approved law of the nation and the basis for liberty and equality, and that freedom to dissent:

1. "Is not only the right but also the fundamental right on which is based the integrity and the freedom of the Republic." He made reference to official statutes and decrees that confirmed this right.
2. "Is a foundation of the unity of nations" since the Republic is composed of various nations and various religions that need tolerance, equality and peace.
3. "Is a foundation of the *praesentis status Reipublicae*" as a guarantee of the equality of its citizens (i.e., nobility). Abolishing the freedom of conscience would destroy equality if one could *imponere iugum et servitutem conscientiae*.
4. "Is a foundation of liberty." A foundation of the true liberty is a guarantee that people can do what they consider useful and needful without fear of any persecution or punishment. Everybody has the right to choose his way to salvation. In hell or in heaven everybody will answer for himself.
5. "Is a fundamental guardian of liberty." Civil rights and liberties are safeguarded in Poland by law. A religious pretext is the only one that can completely ruin and eradicate these liberties. With the abolishment of the *libertas conscientiarum* will return the ecclesiastical jurisdiction and religious pretext to eliminate the rest.
6. "Is equal in importance and stature with the highest laws." It was confirmed by at least 30 other laws. It is specifically listed three times in the inaugural vows of the Polish kings. These laws cannot be changed by any other decree or any institution. Under the influence of foreign Jesuits, Catholics attempted to destroy the Republic and civil liberties. He argued that as long as liberty is preserved in Poland the Catholic religion will flourish as well.

Przykowski continued: It is absurd to give the Catholic Church and clergy in a free country dominion and power over everyone else. This leads only to such inhuman and barbaric laws as the decrees of the Korczyn Confederation of 1438. Under the pretext of piety other European countries were turned into ashes. He pointed out the phony piety of a king who does not fulfill his obligations when he swore to respect the Henrician Articles. He ended his reply with a sincere and passionate

Christian appeal to his Catholic brothers for honesty, sincerity, good faith, and peace.

In a work published ca. 1650, *De iure Christiani magistratus et privatorum in belli pacisque negotiis*, Przykowski developed a novel concept of complete separation of Church and state which had not been discussed before in Christian societies: "As one should not mix together matters of religion with matters of state, so one should not allow for religion and state to be in opposition to one another," and "Thus one should not bring into conflict religion and state nor should they be mixed together."⁴⁸

Przykowski clearly distinguished two authorities: that of the Church and that of the state. Dominion and coercive authority are forbidden in the Church, but not in the positive law of the state which limits natural freedom and equality. Both are mutually incompatible:

The Church did not take the place of the State but strengthened it. The rise of the authority of the Church did not set aside the secular authority, but brought about the establishment of such mutual limits that the one did not encroach on the sphere of the other. Both, when the State with compulsory authority encroaches on the government of the Church, and when the Church takes the sword out of the hands of the civil authority, which God himself has entrusted to it, there is a violation of justice.

And further:

But kingdoms so different in kind as a spiritual one without compulsion and a secular one with coercive authority may exist in the same nation without conflict of jurisdiction; if both so separate, remain within their own limits, each may exercise its functions without hindrance.⁴⁹

According to Przykowski both authorities, the spiritual defined in a very broad sense and not identified with any organized Church, and the political authority of the state, may have points of contact and should

⁴⁸ *BFP*, Vol. 9, 683-736; in Ogonowski, *op. cit.*, part 1, 540 & ff.

⁴⁹ Samuel Przykowski, *Animadversiones in Libellum cui titulos De qualitate Regni Domini nostri Jesu Christi, ubi inquitur, an Christiano sive Regni eius subdito terrenae dominationes convenienti* (written ca. 1650), published in Amsterdam in his collected works in 1692. *BFP*, Vol. 9, 619-681; quoted in Stanislas Kot, *op. cit.*, 185-186.

serve each other. The political authority should not be subject to the spiritual in that which would destroy it, i.e., which would undermine the spiritual authority itself as its essence is to direct the “inviolable freedom of minds.” But political authority can be of service by securing to each man his rights, safeguarding the goods of the human spirit—peace, liberty, defense against oppression, and especially liberty of conscience. In addition, it would be absurd to exclude a man from political public life because of his religious association.

For Przymkowski the fundamental criterion in judging people should not be adherence to the invented dogmatic or ritual demands of the Church, but to the fulfillment of moral evangelical precepts. Those who demand blind belief in the dogmas of their religion and blind obedience to their orders in fact protect their own interests. Being aware that their absurd interpretations and views cannot be defended by the light of reason, they slyly hide behind the protection of authority, deceptively usurping it from Christ himself. At the same time they forbid inquiry into the truthfulness of this authority and impose blind obedience and servitude under the false pretext of obedience to God, praised as a virtue. The devil could not invent anything more mischievous since in that way our conscience is destroyed. Przymkowski advised that whenever we find in the presented doctrines and views anything that contradicts reason, it is our obligation to inquire, especially in matters concerning our behavior and actions. False dogmas, like a disease, destroy the Church and piety. We can give up our rights and liberty only in matters which are morally indifferent. However, we cannot restrict the rights of others, and the Church particularly has no authority to interfere with the rights of individuals or the rights of other groups or societies. Such an interference works against the well-being of mankind, contradicts divine justice and wisdom. Following the example of monks, the essence of piety is placed in external gestures, dress, lifestyle. This is a false piety, easy to practice and more wicked than pagan superstition. Such a piety leads to the most perilous suppression of conscience, persecutions and even wars.

Jonasz Szlichtyng (1592-1661), another leader of the Polish Brethren, traveled abroad as a mentor to Zbigniew Sienieński, the son of the owner of Raków. He studied at Altdorf University and settled in Raków where he became minister and lecturer in the lyceum. He was sentenced in absentia in 1647 by the Sejm to infamy, confiscation of his estate, and to death for publishing a book in Holland containing a confession of faith of the Polish Brethren (*Confessio fidei Christianae*, 1642, translated into

French, German, and Dutch). The sentence in 1647 applied not only to Szlichtyng but to all the members of the Brethren community. He had to hide and in 1655 during the pogroms organized by the clergy in the Sadez region, he found refuge in Cracow under the protection of the Swedish garrison. In 1650 Szlichtyng published *Epistola apologetica* as an answer to a pamphlet of the Jesuit Cichowski and his defense against the illegal sentence.⁵⁰ This letter is a clear and dramatic presentation of the violation of law and justice, and a defense of the Socinian credo. It ends with a passionate appeal to the gentry nation for truth and justice. After 1657 Szlichtyng sought refuge in Silesia and Pomerania.

In his work published in 1654 in Amsterdam under the pseudonym “Eques Polonus,” *Apologia pro veritate accusata ad illustrissimos et potentissimos Hollandiae et West-Frisiae Ordines, Conscripta ab Equite Polono*, Szlichtyng postulated, just as Przymkowski, the novel concept of complete separation of Church and state jurisdiction as incompatible institutions.⁵¹ His treatise was prompted by an edict issued in Holland in 1653, under the influence of Calvinist theologians, which forbade the propagation of Socinianism under penalty of banishment. The treatise was a defense of the Socinian doctrines against accusation of heresy. He argued:

To be a heretic is not a political but ecclesiastical infraction. The matters concerning the Church are different from matters concerning the state. Their fusion leads to disasters and wars. The function of the State is protection of all religious groups—pagans, idolaters, heretics, apostates. . . . The State flourishes when an accord and harmony reigns among the citizens as it was recommended by Moslems and not by Christians. Among Christians, the clergy use the pretext of God’s glory and salvation in order to satisfy their own interests, obtain offices and wealth. They defend dogmas since they are afraid of the truth. If their dogmas are true, they should stand on their own and not be supported by tyranny and armed force. According to the parable of the weeds and wheat the Catholics should allow the weeds to grow until harvest. But the civil authorities did not follow the message given in the parable: “They murdered untold multitudes of innocent people as heretics, and instead of pulling out the weeds they extirpated the wheat.” Szlichtyng warned, “A similar thing may happen if the heretics grow in number and consider themselves the

⁵⁰ Ogonowski, *op. cit.*, part 1, 656-673.

⁵¹ Ogonowski, *op. cit.*, part 1, 570.

wheat.” The gravest heresy invented is the harassment of heretics with civil punishment. The civil authority seeing the quarrels among the church groups in matters of faith and dogmas should not support any, but should judge all according to the same law and watch so that they behave honestly, and should safeguard peace in the state. The Scripture itself gives examples of such an attitude (Acts 5:38-39; Acts 18:14-15).

We find arguments used by Przyrkowski, Szlichtyng, and Crell repeated later in the works of John Locke, Pierre Bayle and even Voltaire, and their echo in the writings of James Madison and Thomas Jefferson. Przyrkowski’s ideas were the most original and his work the most exhaustive Polish study on the mutual relations of Church and state.

Another Socinian, Jan Sachs (1641-1671), studied political science abroad. From 1670 he was in the service of Holland. He died in a shipwreck. His ideas on religious freedom and Church-state relations were formulated in a scholarly manner and thus are very close in form to those of John Locke. He wrote in 1665 a treatise *De scopo reipublicae polonicae . . . dissertatio*⁵² in which he described the history of religion in Poland. He postulated that religion was the foundation of the state. At the same time, however, he stated that Christianity is not necessary for a state. Moreover, since religion is a matter of reason which cannot be dictated by laws, the state and the Church have no right to impose it or force citizens to follow it. Even Christ forbade his apostles the use of any force or coercion; the less so should they be used by bishops or clergy. The state can promote religion only in its natural, general form, as a basis for morals. This can be done only by persuasion in order to eliminate atheism. It cannot decide which particular religion the citizens are to select and which rituals they are to follow. He concluded that diversity in religious beliefs is not only harmless but is beneficial for the state. As an example, he cited the Republic of United Provinces (Holland) where religious freedom guaranteed peace and prosperity. Disturbance is produced not because of diversity and discord between religions, but because of the suppression of religious freedom and punishment of dissidents.

He considered the expulsion of Socinians by the Sejm in 1658 a breach of the law and a bad omen for religious freedom. It “reveals the secret that not only can one deprive the right to public peace to a certain group of dissidents, but also that it depends on the whim of the clergy who have the decided majority in the jurisdiction, which group of dissidents should be

⁵² Ogonowski, *op. cit.*, part 1, 584ff.

deprived of this right.” He prophetically warned not to ask about the secrets of government operations in Poland: “It is dangerous in the Commonwealth to try to fathom the secrets, even if you tried very hard, rarely would you succeed; and having succeeded it is better to remain silent.”

VI. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE POLISH BRETHERN’S IDEAS IN HISTORY

Although the spirit of religious liberty was one of the elements of the Socinian doctrine, the persecution and coercion they met as a result of the Counter-Reformation led them to formulate the most advanced moral and political ideas in the realm of human freedom and Church-state relations. And it is in this respect that they made their great contribution as they broadened the impact of the Reformation into the political arena as well. These novel, rational ideas were opposed by both the reformed churches and the Catholic Church.

The ideas propagated by the Antitrinitarian Church and so convincingly expressed in their writings were very credible, as noted by Stanislas Kot, for political reasons as well. They had the advantage of coming from a small church that could not aspire to influence the government, and at the same time they were free from any sectarian spirit or bias. They were characterized only by independence of rational thought, absolute religious liberty, and profound patriotic devotion to the state. The intellectual ferment Socinian ideas produced in all of Europe determined future philosophical trends and led directly to the development of the Enlightenment.

The precursor ideas of the Polish Brethren on religious freedom were later expanded, perfected and popularized by John Locke (1632-1704) in England and Pierre Bayle (1647-1706) in France and Holland. Their ideas on religious freedom and toleration, and their philosophical and religious arguments, coincide with those used by the Polish philosophers. Locke possessed in his library works of earlier Antitrinitarians, works of Szlichtyng, Socinus, Smalcus, Wolzogen, Wiszowaty, *BFP*, the Racovian Catechism, Przyrkowski’s *Dissertatio de pace* and others. He certainly read them and was influenced by them.⁵³ The grandson of Jan Crell, Samuel Crell, was a friend of Locke. Locke presented a detailed analysis of toleration and state-Church relations from a political point of view, obviously influenced by circumstances in England. Bayle made numer-

⁵³ H. John McLachlan, *op. cit.*, 327 ff.

ous references to Socinians and their rationality. He was the first in the Christian world to separate ethics from religion and to defend atheism on a rational basis: “*la foi n’influence pas sur la moralité*” and “*la moralité est indépendante de la religion.*”⁵⁴ Locke’s views on religious freedom were expressed first in 1667 in an *Essay on Toleration* that was not published during his life, and later in his four *Letters on Toleration*.⁵⁵ His first *Letter Concerning Toleration* was written in 1685 in Amsterdam and published by his friend from his stay in Holland (1683-1689), Filip van Limbroch, in 1689. The same van Limbroch edited the compilation of Przytkowski’s works in the last volume of the *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum*. Locke, however, did not develop the concept of a theistically neutral state. The other severe weakness of Locke’s thought, as well as of some statements of the Polish Brethren, was the exclusion of atheists.

Luke ascribed the persecutions and miseries produced by religious differences to “narrowness of spirit.” Though he recognized that “everyone is orthodox to himself,” toleration should be the chief characteristic of the true Church. The interests of the public should be placed before those of a party. The true religion was “not instituted in order to the erecting an external pomp, nor to the obtaining of ecclesiastical dominion, nor the exercising of compulsive force; but to the regulating of men’s lives according to the rules of virtue and piety.” He claimed that “absolute liberty, just and true liberty, equal and impartial” is what is needed. Such was the religious message of the Gospel (Luke 22: 25-26). All those who persecute others commit a manifest sin against the precepts of the Gospel.

Locke clearly distinguished between the sphere of the interests of civil government and that of religion and put a boundary between them. No man has any authority over another to compel him to a religion. There can be no law with regard to convincing the mind. Belonging to a given church is free and voluntary and no one is born as a member of any church. Moreover, churches are voluntary societies organized for the public worshipping of God.

⁵⁴ Pierre Bayle, *Pensées diverses écrites à un Docteur de Sorbonne à l’occasion de la Comète de 1680* (1682). In André Lagarde, Laurent Michard, *XVIIIe Siècle. Les Grands Auteurs Français du Programme*, Paris: Les Éditions Bordas, 1969, 19. Also *Commentaire philosophique... ibidem*, 21. Selection of writings in English—*The Great Contest of Faith and Reason*, translated and edited with an introduction by Karl C. Sandburg. (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1963).

⁵⁵ *Letters on Toleration I - IV*, published between 1689 and 1704, in *The Works of John Locke in Ten Volumes*, London: T. Tegg, 1823, reprinted in 1963, Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1963, Vol. VI.

No edict of Christ imposed the law of succession of ruling authority in the Church (Matt.18: 20). No one has the right to impose his own interpretation and inventions as if they were of divine authority. Unlike Thomas Aquinas, Locke could not find in the books of the New Testament any precept that the Church should persecute others. Only persuasion and advice could be used. Moreover, churches are not required to keep those who do not conform in their congregation, but their rejection should not have any effect on one’s standing in the state or on civil rights and property. All members of a society should have the same civil rights regardless of their religion or church association.

All churches should exercise mutual toleration and should be treated equally by the jurisdiction. No magistrate can give any power to any one church. There is no mixing of Church and state. No religion can be imposed by the prince under any pretense. Man is free from all dominion over others in matters of religion. The clergy have only ecclesiastical authority and only within the bounds of their church. The ecclesiastic’s duty is to promote peace and good-will towards all men—orthodox and dissenters. The Church should act through charity, meekness and toleration, and has no right to revenge or any force. Men, on the other hand, “May worship God in that manner which they are persuaded is acceptable to them and in which way they have the strongest hope of eternal salvation.” If the churches persecute others, they do it by desire for temporal dominion: “For it will be very difficult to persuade men of sense, that he, who with dry eyes, and satisfaction of mind, can deliver his brother unto the executioner, to be burnt alive, does sincerely and heartily concern himself to save that brother from the flames of hell in the world to come.”

Being a theist and admitting as possible a religious outlook on the world, Locke believed that all men know and acknowledge that God ought to be publicly worshipped in religious societies. Though he recognized a national religion, but as nothing more than a general acknowledgment of God’s existence, no difference in rights should exist between the national Church, to which the ruler belonged, and other separated congregations. A magistrate can legislate only indifferent things for the public good, but he cannot legislate anything in religious matters—for example, he cannot mandate pedobaptism. A magistrate has no power to impose by law the use of any rites and ceremonies, and neither has he any power to forbid the use of such rites and ceremonies.

Civil power has to take care that no man receives any injury in life or estate. The religion of any prince is orthodox to himself so he cannot have any spiritual power. Even in a conquered country, the prince has no power to impose his own religion: “Neither pagans there, nor any dissenting Christians here, can with any right be deprived of their worldly goods by the predominating faction of a court-church; nor are any civil rights to be either changed or violated upon account of religion in one place more than another.” Specifically, even if some might say that idolatry is a sin—it does not follow that it should be punished by the magistrate. Locke explained that idolatry is not prejudicial to other men’s rights nor does it break the public peace of societies. Moreover, many other sins like lying, perjury, covetousness, idleness, etc., are not punishable by laws. In the Mosaic religion an absolute theocracy was instituted. The priest was the legislator. No such thing is possible under the Gospel in a Christian commonwealth. However, even in the Mosaic law no foreigner or stranger could be compelled by force to observe the rites of the Mosaic law. Neither was anyone brought to execution for idolatry. The state cannot impose any article of faith, nor can it forbid one to be preached or professed.

Locke insisted on every man’s absolute and supreme authority to judge for himself temporal things and absolute liberty in taking care of his own eternal life, provided he does not violate the rights of others. Every man should do what his conscience tells him to do. Government, on the other hand, has no right to impose laws that lie outside its authoritative boundaries, such as imposing a specific religion. Moreover, government should protect society from the secret evil and religious sects that attempt to arrogate to themselves some peculiar prerogatives, covered with a specious show of deceitful words, but in effect opposed to the civil rights of the community.

Locke maintained that we cannot find any sect that expressly and openly teaches that men are not obliged to keep their promises, that princes may be dethroned by those who differ from them in religion, or that the dominion of all things belongs only to themselves. But some say the same things in other words, e.g., if they say: “Faith is not to be kept with heretics,” or “Kings excommunicated forfeit their crowns and kingdoms.” By these deceitful statements the sect arrogates to itself power over the minds of people and power over the civil authority; and upon pretense of religion challenges any manner of authority over such as are not associated with them in their ecclesiastical communion. Locke forcefully stated that such groups have no right to toleration from the

magistrate; similarly so for those who do not own and teach the duty of tolerating all men in matters of religion. For what all these “doctrines” signify is “That they may and are ready upon any occasion to seize the government, and possess themselves of the estates and fortunes of their fellow subjects; and that they only ask leave to be tolerated until they find themselves strongly enough to effect it.” Moreover he wrote: “That church can have no right to be tolerated by the magistrate, which is constituted upon such a bottom, that all those who enter into it, do thereby *ipso facto*, deliver themselves up to the protection and service of another prince. For by this means the magistrate would give way to the settling of a foreign jurisdiction in his own country, and suffer his own people to be listed, as it were for soldiers against his own government.” These general statements of Locke were interpreted by Catholic writers e.g. by Frederick Copleston,⁵⁶ as excluding the Catholic Church from the churches to be tolerated in a civil society. Evidently they recognized the characteristics of their own church among the civil and moral deficiencies listed by Locke, that could not be accepted by a civil society.

The severe limitation of Locke’s thought, as well as of some statements of the Polish Brethren, was the exclusion of atheists from religious liberty. “Lastly, these are not at all to be tolerated who deny the being of God.” It was based on the false assumption that “promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist” and is contrary to his other statements, especially his own law of conscience. Locke clearly stated that all opinions should be tolerated if they do no restrict the rights of others and do not establish domination over others: “As for other practical opinions, though not absolutely free from all errors, yet if they do not tend to establish domination over others, or civil impunity to the church in which they are taught, there can be no reason why they should not be tolerated.” Any objection to the doctrine of toleration “would be settled if the law of toleration were once so settled that all churches were obliged to lay down toleration as the foundation of their own liberty and that liberty of conscience is every man’s natural right equally belonging to dissenters as to themselves; and that nobody ought to be compelled in matters of religion either by law or force. The establishment of this one thing would take all grounds of complaints and tumults upon account of conscience.” By outlining the beneficial, prac-

⁵⁶ Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1959, Vol. V, 122.

tical implications of universal toleration Locke demonstrated the unusual strength of his rationality and common sense. Granting all the subjects and churches the same privileges would neutralize the element of danger to the state since only oppression raises ferments, and often seditious movements, under the pretense of religion. Moreover, all will watch each other to safeguard peace. The cause of social evils is not religion itself or the diversity of opinions, which is unavoidable, but the refusal of toleration to those who are of different opinions. This intolerance produced wars and strife in the Christian world on account of religion. "The heads and leaders of the churches, moved by avarice and insatiable desire of dominion, making use of the immoderate ambition of magistrates, have incensed and animated them against those that dissent from themselves, by preaching unto them, contrary to the laws of the Gospel, and to the precepts of charity, that schismatics and heretics are to be outed of their possessions and destroyed. And thus have they mixed together, and confounded two things, that are in themselves most different, the Church and the commonwealth."

The ideas of John Locke were transplanted directly to the American continent by James Madison and Thomas Jefferson, who implemented them for the first time in American legislation. They were philosopher-statesmen who shared a strong conviction of absolute freedom of conscience and distrusted any kind of established ecclesiastical institution. Their conviction was that the established churches create only "ignorance and corruption" and introduce the "diabolic principle of persecution." The exercise of religion should be completely separated from government. Toleration was not enough; only absolute freedom could be acceptable. For them democracy was the best guarantee of religious freedom. It was an institution that erected a "wall of separation" between Church and state, and protected the liberties of minority groups against the imposition of majority views. Both were broadly educated and Thomas Jefferson had a keen interest in studying religions, including the Socinians. Their writings follow Locke and quite echo the Socinian literature.⁵⁷

The Polish Brethren were forerunners of the later thinkers who developed the ideas of the Enlightenment and humanistic modern times. Their doctrines, if allowed to develop, would probably have brought true

⁵⁷ *Thomas Jefferson: Revolutionary Philosopher. A Selection of Writings*, edited by John S. Pancake with N. Sharon Summers, Woodbury: Barron's Educational Series, 1976. *The Complete Madison. His Basic Writings*, edited with introduction by Saul Padovan, New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1953.

enlightenment to Poland. Their achievements are the highest in Europe of their times and originated all modern trends in political, social and moral sciences, in biblical and religious studies, and in concepts of the absolute freedom of intellectual inquiry, liberty of conscience and complete non-antagonistic separation of Church and state. They put into practice the highest ethical ideals. Their weakness lay in the neglect of political application. Stanislas Kot summed up their role in these words:

They did not live to see the time in which their ideas, principles, and methods of thought began to exert an influence on the intellectual life of the world. They died out while dispersed as exiles, grieving that their own nation had rejected them, although to them its spiritual and moral elevation was of the greatest consequence. Only after centuries of oblivion have students of the Polish past discovered them. But the consciousness is precious to us that in the remote past such an unusual flower grew up on Polish soil, that the nation produced within itself a group of such moral elevation, such critical spirit, and such gravity of life.⁵⁸

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⁵⁸ Stanislas Kot, *op. cit.*, 219.