

# Laelius and Faustus Socinus, Founders of Socinianism: Their Lives and Theology

## Part One

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### **Introduction**

Laelius Socinus is considered to be the founder of the anti-Trinitarian intellectual movement and Faustus Socinus the main theoretician of the established Unitarian (Socinian) church in Poland. They belong, respectively, to the first and second generations of Italian reformers.<sup>1</sup> Faustus Socinus was among the second generation of Italian religious refugees that, in contrast to the first generation, was represented by individuals isolated from the rest of the Italian emigrants in search of a place to live and to express their religious convictions. They found such a place in Poland and in Transylvania. He was successful in finding a supportive group and gaining recognition. However, he refused to be considered a heresiarch or a leader of the group; rather, he thought of himself as a teacher of a method of inquiry for understanding the Scripture.

### **Reformation versus Radical Reformation**

The Reformation, initiated by Martin Luther in 1517, had as its scope only a limited purpose, namely to oppose the power of the pope, both political and regulatory within the church, and to redress the moral corruption of the church. Emendation of the moral standing of the church included abolishing many money-making religious schemes, ending persecution for free thought in religious matters (heretics), and abolishing many regulatory decrees clearly designed to control society and individuals. Unfortunately, as soon as the reformed churches gained power, the new leaders forgot their original goals, and relishing with gusto the taste of power, embarked on the same path they had originally condemned. They quickly abolished free religious thought, introduced their own inquisitorial procedures, and persecuted anyone whom they considered non-compliant with their own dogmas and religious and political designs.

But there was another trend in the Reformation, the so-called Radical Reformation, which was produced by many thoughtful people, though not all of them attained the same level of sophistication and advancement. This movement

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<sup>1</sup> Delio Cantimori, *Eretici italiani del Cinquecento. Ricerche storiche*, Firenze: Sansoni, 1967.

was represented by two variations: a. The Anabaptist movement with its emphasis on moral conduct and battle with social injustice, and propagation of the return to the original, communal way of life of the Christian church, and b. The anti-Trinitarian or Unitarian movement that sprang from the evangelical and rationalistic tendencies and posited for itself as a goal an analysis of the entire Christian doctrine and search for its original meaning in the Scripture.

The term Radical Reformation was introduced by George Huntston Williams<sup>2</sup> to describe the movements that went further than the Wittenberg reformers and aimed at the restoration of the primitive apostolic church. The exponents of the radical movement reproached the major reformers for stalling the Reformation and keeping the religious and the worldly reforms separate. They wanted to expand the Reformation theologically and sociologically into the transformation of man and of the world. In the tense eschatological atmosphere their hopes were expressed often in the expectation of the imminent kingdom of God.

These two movements within the Radical Reformation were not clearly separated and they overlapped significantly. They themselves were not uniform but had one most characteristic common trait, i.e., a tendency to separate the church from temporal power. The Anabaptist movement derived not so much from the theological differences with the Wittenberg reformers as from the disagreement over social policy. Although initially in his writings Luther aimed at the reformation of the secular society and its order, he was faced on the one hand with the profound belief and demands of the Anabaptists which derived directly from the genuine gospel, and on the other with the revolutionary peasants. He found recourse in the Old Testament authority and called on the rulers to implement the power given to them by the divine will. Thomas Münzer (b. ca 1490 in Stolberg-on-the-Harz, executed after the Frankenhausen massacre on May 27, 1525) and his followers, together with a variety of groups that developed later, represented the Anabaptist movement emphasizing the application of Christian doctrines to social life. He is described as a “theologian and revolutionary, a single whole.”<sup>3</sup>

The anti-Trinitarian movement resulted from a broader theological conflict over the interpretation and meaning of the Scripture. This movement assumed its most advanced form in the Unitarian Church that developed independently in Transylvania and in Poland, variably called Unitarians, Minor Church, Polish Brethren, Arians, and Socinians. The last name derives from the name of Faustus Socinus (Fausto Sozzini), the Italian theologian and scholar who systematized the doctrine of the church of the Polish Brethren. His writings were compiled into a nine-volume edition of the Socinian treatises published in Amsterdam in 1656 as volumes 1-2 of the *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum*. Many of his other works were published in Raków or in Kraków.

<sup>2</sup> George Huntston Williams, *Radical Reformation*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962.

<sup>3</sup> Hans-Jürgen Goertz, “Thomas Müntzer. Revolutionary in a Mystical Spirit,” in Hans-Jürgen Goertz, ed., Walter Klaassen, *Profiles of Radical Reformers. Biographical Sketches from Thomas Müntzer to Paracelsus*, Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1982.

### Pioneers of Anti-Trinitarianism

Michael Servetus (1511-1553) is considered the most prominent exponent of early anti-Trinitarianism. But he also is a central figure in Western history, marking a drastic turn and change in mentality away from the imposed totalitarian ecclesiastical rule over all aspects of society.<sup>4</sup> He was not, however, the only one and certainly not the only initiator of the anti-Trinitarian movement. Four more names are usually quoted in this regard: Martin Cellarius (Borrhaus), Ludwig Haetzer, Hans Denck, and Jacob Kautz.<sup>5</sup> Martin Cellarius (Borrhaus, 1499-1564) was originally from Stuttgart. He studied classical languages, Hebrew, Chaldaean and Syriac in Wittenberg where he embraced Lutheranism. During the debate with Anabaptists he changed sides and even later developed anti-Trinitarian views. Thus in 1536 he had to flee to Basel where he assumed the name of Borrhaus (which is a Greek translation of his name), and became professor of rhetoric and philosophy. He made friends with Laelius Socinus and Michael Servetus.<sup>6</sup> Ludwig Haetzer (b. ca 1490) was a former priest in Zürich, who knew the biblical languages and worked together with Denck in Worms on the translation of the prophets (1527). He, according to Sandius,<sup>7</sup> was an Arian and wrote a manuscript against the deity of Christ which fell into the hands of Zwingli and was never published. He was put to death by decapitation by the magistrate of Constance in 1529.

Hans Denck was born ca 1500 in upper Bavaria and attended the University of Ingolstadt from 1517 to 1520 where he learned Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. He reacted positively to the Reformation unleashed by Luther in 1517. In 1522 he arrived in Basel where he was a corrector for a printing press and was linked for some time with Oecolampadius, a distinguished reformer and leader of the clergy there. We find him in 1523 in Nuremberg teaching at St. Sebald's school. Denck slowly developed ideas that were in conflict with the Lutheran camp and after an inquisition presided over by Andreas Osiander he was exiled from the city. His movements after exile from Nuremberg are not clear. He probably was invited to Mühlhausen and after the collapse of the rebellion he is found in the canton of Schwyz where he was imprisoned for his negative view of pedobaptism. Next he contacted the Anabaptists in St. Gall, but was expelled from there for his universalism – the teaching that all men would eventually be saved. In 1525 we find him in Augsburg where he met Balthasar Hubmaier and became a practicing Anabaptist. Here he baptized Hans Hut and had a confrontation with the Lutheran ministers. In 1526 he was in Strassburg where, after a debate with Martin Bucer, he was expelled. He traveled then to Worms where he joined Ludwig Haetzer in translating the Old Testament prophets and where they contacted the radical factions of the city and converted Jacob Kautz to their Anabaptism in 1527.

<sup>4</sup> Marian Hillar, *The Case of Michael Servetus (1511-1553) – The Turning Point in the Struggle for Freedom of Conscience*, Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Adolf von Harnack, *Lehrbuch des Dogmengeschichte*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1890, T. III, 658 ff.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Rees' *Historical Introduction in The Racovian Catechism* translated from the Latin by Thomas Rees, London, 1818. Reprinted by Christian Educational Services, Indianapolis, IN, 1994. V.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Sandius, *Bibliotheca antitrinitariorum*, Freistadii, 1684, 16, quoted by Thomas Rees, *Historical Introduction*, V-VI.

Denck's influence was visible in the "theses" which were publicly defended by Kautz. As usual, suppression followed and Denck moved to Augsburg where he participated in the synod of 1527 animated by the apocalyptic teachings of Hans Hut. Denck then asked Oecolampadius for permission to settle in Basel, but before he could move, he fell victim to the plague. These three radical reformers represent a link between Unitarianism and Anabaptism.

Denck was a pioneer of Unitarianism and a champion of undogmatic, ethical Christianity. His principal work was *On the Law of God*. The most salient points of his doctrine were that God's law can and should be fulfilled; if Christ could do it so can we; Christ fulfilled the law by leading the way; man can fulfill the law when he has the truth. Denck, however, underemphasized the fall of man and rejected Luther's holistic view of human sinfulness and emphasized the power of man. Man's inner divine connection makes it possible for him to participate in the spiritual realm. The human Jesus is a great teacher and the difference between him and man is in degree. His true followers were expected to practice his teaching. But Christ had taught that God was love and love was the fulfillment of law; thus love of God and one's neighbor were the only proper relationships within the divine economy. In the interpretation of the Scripture, Denck opposed it as an external letter to the internal influence of the Holy Spirit on man. The new life for each man begins independently of the preaching of prophets and apostles. It begins with the direct influence of the Spirit. The Scripture remains only a testimony of the truth, an external work, a historical revelation of little importance. The internal revelation he called "the internal Word." It is a special experience acquired by the special influence of God. "The light which is the invisible Word of God shines into the hearts of all men . . . It is in our very hearts not idle, but active to do the will of the Father."<sup>8</sup>

From such a principle it follows that there is no need for the sacraments, ceremonies, rites, sects, and religious authorities. Every individual was free to seek his own salvation. Moreover, since the accessibility to the "inner Word" is universal and individual, nobody holds a monopoly on truth. The differences arose, according to him, through appeal to isolated parts of the Scripture. It was more Christian to leave others in error than to compel them against their conscience. Thus he became an advocate of tolerance because of concerns for religious truth, moral right and social justice. In this aspect, too, he was a precursor of the Socinians. For him infant baptism was not ordained by Christ but was of human origin. Thus the Christian community had the freedom to reject it or to use it. The Lord's Supper he interpreted as a spiritual union with Christ. As to the swearing of oaths, which caused a lot of problems for the Anabaptists, he took the position that the Scripture was neutral on this issue. Denck harshly criticized the hypocritical ecclesiastics who reduced faith to the externals: a belief in systematized deductions about the nature of God and man, and a mechanical observance of inherited superstitious rites.

The Diet of Spire (1529) and the Diet of Augsburg (1530) condemned

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted by Werner O. Packull, "Hans Denck. Fugitive from Dogmatism" in Goertz, 68.

Anabaptism and its followers, prescribing for them the death penalty. Anti-Trinitarianism was not emphasized in the doctrines of these early Anabaptists – they did not seem to attach much importance to the “superstition of the divinity of Christ.”<sup>9</sup> Adolph von Harnack, a nineteenth-century theologian, evaluated the development of Anabaptism from the critical ideas of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries by mixing them with the elements of the Renaissance. This process bridged the Middle Ages with modern theology, bypassing the Reformation. “In Anabaptism and Socinianism the Middle Ages and modern times join hands above the Reformation.” Both Anabaptism and anti-Trinitarianism were expressions of the Radical Reformation. Anabaptism was concerned with radical political reform, and anti-Trinitarianism with doctrinal reform.

The Radical Reformation reversed the formal principle of the Reformation, i.e., the authority inspired by the Bible. The radical reformers believed that the legalistic usage of the Bible as practiced by the Catholic and Protestant churches restricted religion to the external authority of the church. The radical reformers substituted in the place of the Bible the spirit, the “internal Word,” the religious conscience. They affirmed the direct action of God on man beyond the facts of the Revelation. They also insisted on rejecting the substantive divinity of Christ and returning to moral divinity. To them Christ was a man just like other men; the only difference was between sinners and a non-sinner.<sup>10</sup>

Criticism initiated by theologian Michael Servetus of the traditional doctrines, for which he was condemned by the Catholic Inquisition and by Calvin, was taken up by the Italian humanists who, in northern Italy, proceeded independently of Luther, Calvin, and other reformers to think out their own liberal theology.<sup>11</sup> During the Reformation in Italy the “religious” and moral corruption among the clergy and high officials of the church reached a peak and some exposed it and fought it. For example, Pierre Bembo (1470-1547), a future cardinal, preached persuasion rather than faith, did not believe in the immortality of the soul, and instead of God’s grace put forth “the benefit of the immortal Gods.” Lorenzo Valla (1407-1457), an Italian humanist, proved the falsity of Constantine’s “Donation.” Erasmus labeled this trend as rising paganism: “*Caput erigere conatur paganismus*” (*Paganism attempts to raise its head*).

New ideas were also arriving from abroad, particularly from Germany through evangelists, merchants, and soldiers, especially after the sacking of Rome in 1527. There were obviously attempts to correct the situation, but the pious people who attempted it differed in their methods of approach. Some arrived at justification by faith like Contarini, a future cardinal, who organized in Bologna a center for studies and innovation with professor Giovanni Mollio who taught the doctrine of Paul of Samosata and died a martyr. In Milan we find Celio Secondo Curione. In Naples there was Juan Valdès, a Spaniard (1500-1544) about whom a Catholic wrote: “He himself made more souls perish than thousands of heretical

<sup>9</sup> Harnack, 663.

<sup>10</sup> É. Doumergue, *Jean Calvin. Les hommes et les choses de son temps*, Lausanne, Paris: 1899-1927; Slatkine Reprints: Genève, 1969, Vol. VI, 450.

<sup>11</sup> Frederic C. Church, *The Italian Reformers 1534-1564*, New York: Columbia University Press,

soldiers before him.” A Protestant, Jules Bonnet, described him as, “One of those souls of the élite who could not pass on earth without causing an alteration that soon became an apostolate.” Valdès was able to gather around himself many prominent people of the epoch who developed unorthodox religious ideas, such as the famous noblewomen, Vittoria Colonna and Giulia di Gonzaga, as well as Bernardino Ochino<sup>12</sup> and Peter Martyr Vermigli.<sup>13</sup>

### Socinus’ Family Background

Faustus Socinus came from distinguished families in Siena, a city and once a republic in Tuscany, on both his paternal and maternal sides.<sup>14</sup> On his father’s side he came from a prominent family of lawyers in Siena. His great-great-grandfather, Mariano Socinus, his grandfather, Mariano, and his father, Alexander, were known lawyers. His grandfather, Mariano, was related by marriage to the powerful family of Salvetti in Florence.<sup>15</sup> Paolo Salvetti helped a magnate from Siena, Pandolfo Petrucci (1452-1512), who was forced to emigrate from the city in 1487, to return and by armed force to take power in the city. He ruled this city first with his brother, Giacoppo, and after his brother died in 1497, alone. Pandolfo Petrucci, grateful to Paolo Salvetti for his aid, offered him citizenship in Siena and convinced him to settle there. Paolo Salvetti had a daughter Camilla who married Mariano Socinus, junior (1482-1556), professor of law (in Siena, Pisa, Padova, Bologna), called *Princeps Iurisconsultorum*, and they had seven sons. The oldest was Alexander Socinus, junior (1509-1541), professor of civil law in Padova and Macerata, the future father of Faustus Socinus. The famous uncle of Faustus, Laelius Socinus (1525-1562), was their sixth son. After the death of Pandolfo Petrucci in 1512 the rule in Siena fell to his son Borghese Petrucci who, however, was not able to keep his power and had to leave Siena in 1516.

Faustus’s mother was Agnes Petrucci, a daughter of Borghese Petrucci, who once ruled over the Republic of Siena, and Victoria Piccolomini who originated from the prominent noble family of Piccolomini, and was a

<sup>12</sup> Bernardino Ochino (1487-1565), originally from Siena, was a vicar general of the Capuchin order 1539-1541. To prevent his investigation by the Inquisition he fled Italy to Switzerland and broke with the Catholic Church. He was famous for his inspiring sermons. He moved in Europe from city to city (Zürich, Geneva, Basel, Augsburg, London). He had to leave England when Mary Tudor ascended the throne, and found refuge in Poland. But here he could not stay for long because of the edict of Parczów in 1564 which expelled foreign religious reformers. He went to Moravia where he died shortly after.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Martyr Vermigli (1500-1562) was accused of heresy in his native Italy and was forced to flee. He taught the Old Testament in Strassbourg, Oxford and Zürich.

<sup>14</sup> Biographical data come from a monograph by Samuel Przytkowski, *Fausti Socini vita descripta ab Equite Polono*, written in 1631, first published in 1634 (no place indicated). There were further editions in 1636, 1663, and in 1664. It also was translated into German (1637), English (probably by John Biddle, 1653), and Flemish (1664). It is included in the collection *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum* (BFP), edited by Andreas Wiszowaty (Irenopoli = Amsterdam, 1656-1668), Vol. 1, *Fausti Socini Senensis Opera Omnia, Vita Authoris (Fausti Socini) conscripta ab Equite Polono*. The Polish translation is included in the publication, *Faust Socyn, Listy (Letters)*, ed. Ludwik Chmaj, translators Tadeusz Bieńkowski, Irmina Lichońska, Zdana Matuszewiczowa, Walerian Preisner (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1959), Vol. 1, 11-30.

<sup>15</sup> See page 37 for Genealogy of the Socinus Family

granddaughter of Popes Pius II (Eneas Silvius Piccolomini, 1405-1464, pope since 1458) and Pius III (Francesco Tedeschi Piccolomini, 1440-1503, pope for 26 days only in 1503). Agnes Petrucci married Alexander Socinus, junior, and they had three children, Faustus Socinus being the second.

### **Laelius Socinus**

The Italian religious refugees fleeing the Catholic Inquisition formed centers in the cities where they fled, chiefly in the Grisons and Basel before the death of Servetus, and afterwards in Geneva and Zürich. Among the most important Italian refugees one must list Lelio Sozini, better known in history by his Latinized name Laelius Socinus. (He spelled his name in Italian with one “z” unlike his more famous nephew, Fausto Sozzini [Socinus]). Laelius is the founder of the anti-Trinitarian intellectual movement that originated from his rational inquiry and doubt. He was born in Siena on March 25, 1525.

Laelius Socinus was a pious man who made his faith the subject of his research. He studied law at Padova as he was expected to follow the family tradition. He believed that jurisprudence required a divine base which he found in the revealed and written word of God. Consequently he began to study the Bible with such ardor that he learned Greek, Hebrew, and even Arabic. He quickly discovered that the commonly received dogmas of the church were plainly opposed to the biblical text and that the church’s teaching was inconsistent with reason. From these studies he began to doubt Catholicism and considered divinity from a critical and juridical perspective. At the age of 21, he abandoned his studies, left Siena and went to Venice where anti-Trinitarianism was already implanted. Tradition connects his name with the legendary meeting of the reformers that took place in Vicenza in 1546. He left Italy for the Grisons, probably out of fear of the Inquisition, in 1547.

People who knew him had a very high opinion of him. Melanchthon was impressed with his talents and Bullinger<sup>16</sup> said that he was worthy to advise a prince in handling difficult affairs.<sup>17</sup> But being rich he devoted all of his time to studying theology. He traveled continuously — Switzerland, France, England, the Low Countries. In 1548 he arrived in Geneva where he met Calvin. He was for a while in Zürich, where he stayed with Pelikan, traveled to Basel where he stayed with Sebastian Münster,<sup>18</sup> professor of Hebrew, and developed contacts with Myconius, Grynaeus, Castellio,<sup>19</sup> and Curione. In 1548 we find him in England where he met Vermigli, then a professor at Oxford, and Ochino, who arrived there with Vermigli

<sup>16</sup> Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575), a Swiss theologian and the head of the church in Zürich from 1531. He was the author of the second Helvetic confession published in 1562.

<sup>17</sup> Philippi Melanchthoni, *Opera* (ed. Bretschneider), 382.

<sup>18</sup> Sebastian Münster (1489-1552), a Franciscan monk and reformer, professor of theology in Heidelberg (1524-1527) and of Hebrew in Basel (from 1536). He translated the New Testament into Hebrew.

<sup>19</sup> Sebastian Castellio (1515-1563), a French classical scholar and theologian. He was invited by Calvin in 1540 to head the Geneva College. He did not agree with Calvin on the issue of predestination and had to leave Geneva for Basel in 1547. He was a strong supporter of religious tolerance and after the death of Servetus he wrote several treatises on the subject, propagating religious tolerance and freedom of faith.

in 1547. Finally in 1549 he made Zürich his second home where he was well received. Here he lodged with Pelikan, professor of Hebrew, and interacted especially with Bullinger who was to him like a father. Laelius easily gained friends due to his courtly manners, profound culture, frank and attractive character, irreproachable morals and deep piety.

He was, however, deeply skeptical in matters of religion, always looking for the fundamental reason for a doctrine before he could accept it. He rarely expressed his own convictions but continued his inquiry. The method of inquiry developed by Laelius is in the form of letters asking for opinions of prominent reformers rather than writing treatises.<sup>20</sup> He first addressed them to Calvin whom he treated with admiration. In the first letter of May 14, 1549, he asked about the rightfulness of a marriage of a Protestant with a Catholic and of a Protestant attending Catholic services.<sup>21</sup> Calvin responded on June 26, 1549, indicating that a Christian should espouse only a woman “who would be his companion in all the tasks of a pious life.” The smallest infraction of this rule makes the marriage vicious. So a Christian commits a profanation espousing a Catholic woman. As to baptism performed by Catholics, Calvin considered it not less effective. “Though,” Calvin wrote, “we refuse to the Papists the name of the Church, still there are among them some remnants of the Church.”<sup>22</sup>

In another question Laelius posed, he brought all the arguments against the resurrection of the body which could be gathered by reason. Calvin was very careful not to get into a long discussion of this topic; rather, he concluded: “As for me I accept the testimony in such a way that I do not allow the thought that could shake my faith.”<sup>23</sup> Laelius, however, was not satisfied with such an answer and declared that he did not “believe in anything that opposes reason.” He claimed it was difficult not to give faith to the word of God, but at the same time “it is not less difficult to be persuaded about the impossible future.” He insisted on a clear demonstration by Calvin of divine justice, of the resurrection and transformation of the perishable body. He wrote that he doubted and demanded precise answers which are incompatible with religion and consequently he would never obtain them. Calvin insisted on blind faith in the Scriptures (according to his interpretation), emphasizing the will to believe. Calvin claimed that he had his reason for believing, but he also knew the limits of human intelligence and where the investigation must stop. Laelius, on the contrary, was a doubting character, searching for rational justification of all claims made by religion.

Not having received a satisfactory answer from Calvin, Laelius left for Wittenberg where he spent the winter of 1550-1551 studying at the university. Here he made acquaintance with many Polish students, especially with a certain J.

<sup>20</sup> Faustus Socinus explained the method of his uncle in one of his writings, BFP, Vol. 1, 782.

<sup>21</sup> J. Calvini, *Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia*. (M. Bruhn, 1870; reprint by Minerva, G.m.b.H, Frankfurt a. M., 1964). Vol. XIII, 273.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 311.



Maczynski, and became interested in Poland. He briefly visited Kraków, at that time the capital of the country, via Prague and Breslau. Kraków was the center of Italian culture which was imported there by Queen Bona Sforza, wife of the Polish king. Laelius found there many Italian friends, among them Francesco Lismanini,<sup>24</sup> an Italian Franciscan who was the confessor of the queen and whom he advised to leave the Catholic Church. Lismanini was to become later a prominent figure in the Polish Calvinist Church. After returning to Switzerland he took the side of Bolsec in the Bolsec affair, and accused Calvin of obscuring the doctrine of salvation by convoluted discussions.<sup>25</sup> Bolsec got into trouble with Calvin and was imprisoned for rejecting Calvin's doctrine of predestination. Laelius also objected to the treatment given to Bolsec. Calvin, his feelings hurt, first explained in his letter to Laelius of January 1, 1552, that he would always follow his rule of wisdom: to acquiesce in the simple doctrine of the word of God, and asked that Laelius not bother him any more. Calvin regretted that Laelius allowed himself to be corrupted by "pernicious fictions" and warned him to cure his curiosity of investigating religious matters before Calvin's indulgence was exhausted and "before he brings on himself big trouble."<sup>26</sup> The threat was not empty as the events of the Servetus trial the following year clearly demonstrated.

Now Laelius turned his questioning to Bullinger, asking him why Jesus forbade his apostles to say that he was the Christ? Bullinger was as embarrassed as Calvin and gave similar advice. He found Laelius "very curious" and able in pinpointing questions. But Laelius only got evasive answers such as: "Without doubt theology is theoretical but nevertheless it is above all practical."<sup>27</sup>

Again Laelius turned to another minister, Gualtero, a colleague of Bullinger, asking him to define *metanoia* (repentance). Why does one have to repent? Again, after a long explanation, Gualtero advised him to respect the simplicity of the Scriptures rather than the inextricable enigmas of human philosophy.<sup>28</sup> In his travels Laelius met with Vergerio in Zürich, and Matteo Gribaldi in Bologna. The day of Servetus's martyrdom he spent in Padova. Naturally he blamed Calvin for the *fait accompli*, but he continued his relations with people in Geneva and allowed his views on the Trinity to be expressed. The Genevans now were convinced that he collaborated with Castellio against Calvin.

Laelius began his inquiry and interrogation of others as a method of learning, but soon it became a way to spread his own ideas while avoiding offending his adversary and always pretending to be a disciple, not a master. This

<sup>24</sup> Francesco Lismanini (1504-1556) studied in Italy and became a Franciscan priest. He came to Poland as the confessor of the queen, Bona Sforza. He was influenced by Laelius Socinus and Bernardino Ochino and got interested in the Reformation. In 1553 he traveled in Europe and under the influence of Calvin he left the Catholic Church. He returned to Poland and became assistant superintendent of the Calvinist Church there in 1555. After the death of the superintendent of the church, Cruciger, Lismanini lost his influence among the Polish Calvinists who tilted then toward anti-Trinitarianism. He left Poland for the court of the prince, Albrecht in Königsberg, where he died.

<sup>25</sup> Calvini, *Opera*, Vol. XIV, 229-230.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted by Doumergue, Vol. VI, 463.

<sup>28</sup> Doumergue, Vol. VI, 464.

technique could not succeed indefinitely. After his last visit to Geneva, Calvin made a judgment about him to Bullinger: “He is a man of insatiable curiosity” but Calvin was afraid that he might be frenetically irritating.<sup>29</sup> Bullinger replied that he tried to calm Laelius as much as he could,<sup>30</sup> but Calvin was not reassured: “Up to what point Laelius is calm in there [Basel], I do not know, but in the end he will, as he did here [in Geneva], vomit the venom which he nurtured. I have always smelled that his spirit was strange . . . .”<sup>31</sup>

Accusations were now coming against Laelius from all sides. Gratarolus, a physician in Basel, showed that he was in agreement with the defenders of Servetus.<sup>32</sup> Vergerio talked about a conspiracy of the Italians; Bullinger tried to talk to him like a father. Laelius protested these accusations and handed to Bullinger his confession of faith which he based on the symbol of the apostles.

This is a skillfully written document in which Laelius avoids a direct statement of his belief. He states only that he honors the three great creeds (i.e., Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Calvinism) as far as he ought, and allows that the doctrine of the Trinity existed for many centuries. He declares that he reviewed all the doctrines for which he was accused and declares that he does not want to profess any new doctrine; on the contrary, he wants to be firmly attached to the doctrines taught unanimously by all theologians. He wants to stay close to the simplest truth of God, abandon discussions, debates on opinions, thorny questions, and inextricable labyrinths. Bullinger, upon reviewing this confession, proposed some corrections and declared that he was satisfied. But the affair had no effect on Laelius; he now became reserved and did not question the known theologians. He was content to write down his doubts and communicate his thoughts only to his Italian compatriots. Moreover, bad news was arriving from Italy: Siena was losing its independence in 1551; his mother died in 1554, his father in 1555. His property was confiscated by the Inquisition, and the rest of his relatives were forced to flee or were imprisoned. He moved to Zürich and lived in retreat, his modest resources not allowing him to travel, but he remained on good terms with Calvin.<sup>33</sup>

In 1557 he again undertook travel to Poland, first securing letters of introduction from, among others, Calvin to Prince Radziwill and to Jan Laski

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<sup>29</sup> Calvini, *Opera*, Vol. XV, 208.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 318.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 354.

<sup>33</sup> Calvini, *Opera*, Vol. XVII, 604, 652.

(John a Lasco), the latter one of the main reformers in Poland. He was received in Poland with honors and undoubtedly met Biandrata<sup>34</sup> and Alciati who encouraged the beginning of the anti-Trinitarian movement in Poland.

Upon returning to Zürich through Italy he described the Reformation in Poland in his letter to Calvin.<sup>35</sup> His nephew, Faustus Socinus, who emigrated from Italy to Lyon in 1551, came to visit him several times in Zürich. Laelius died on May 14, 1562 at the age of 37. His nephew came to Zürich when he was informed about the death of his uncle and inherited his uncle's manuscripts. They inspired the nephew and gave direction for his own studies which are well documented.<sup>36</sup> Eventually Faustus Socinus formed the foundations of what subsequently developed into the mature Socinian church in Poland. Laelius left very little published material: only two short treatises are preserved under the name *Tractatus aliquot theologici*, containing the dissertations *De Sacramentis* and *De resurrectione corporum*, published in Amsterdam in 1654.<sup>37</sup> Italian investigator Cantimori published from a manuscript preserved in the library of the University of Basel fragments of another treatise *Theses on the Son and the Divine Trinity (Theses de Filio Dei et Trinitate)*.<sup>38</sup> He also established that Laelius Socinus was the author of the treatise *Commentary on John 1 (Brevis explicatio, in primum Joannis caput)*, published in a collection of the writings authored by Polish and Transylvanian Unitarians and edited by Biandrata and Dávid in 1568 as Chapter 11, Book II of *Two Books on the False and True Knowledge of the One God the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit*. It is also suggested that the so-called "rhapsodies" mentioned by Socinian tradition in Poland as written by Laelius were the notes of Laelius on various topics, some of which were probably edited by Biandrata and published as Chapter 15, Book II of the publication mentioned above under the title,

<sup>34</sup> Giorgio Biandrata (1515-1588), Italian physician from Saluzzo and anti-Trinitarian activist. He studied medicine in Montpellier. In 1552 he returned to Italy to organize Protestant congregations and was forced to flee Italy in 1557 to Geneva. Here he conducted discussions with Calvin who broke all relations with Biandrata. Being afraid of the fate of Servetus, Biandrata left Geneva in 1558 for Poland where he became the physician of Queen Bona Sforza. He joined the Calvinist Church but he was one of the most active promoters of anti-Trinitarian agitation. After the separation of Trinitarian Calvinists from the Unitarians, Biandrata left Poland in 1562 for Transylvania, becoming the physician of Queen Isabella, widow of John Zápolya. Here he enjoyed the support of the king of Hungary, John II (also the prince of Transylvania called John Sigismundus). Biandrata was active in religious matters and promoted Francis Dávid to the office of the superintendent and court preacher. Both developed a significant anti-Trinitarian movement which remained in close contact with the movement in Poland. They edited and partially wrote one of the first significant anti-Trinitarian publications, *De falsa et vera Unius Dei Patris, Filii, et Spiritus Sancti cognitione, libri duo* (Albae Juliae = Gyulafehérvár, 1568). When Catholic Stefan Báthory became king and Biandrata lost his influence on the court, he opposed Dávid's propaganda against the adoration of Christ and invited Socinus in 1578 to discuss the issue with Dávid. Biandrata managed to unite ministers against Dávid and accused him in the Diet of blasphemy. As a result Dávid was sentenced by the princely Diet in Alba Julia (Weissenburg) to life imprisonment where he died in 1579. The affair of Dávid caused an uproar against Biandrata and Socinus. Biandrata, disgraced, left for Poland in 1580 to join the court of Stefan Báthory where he died.

<sup>35</sup> Calvin, *Opera*, Vol. XVII, 609, 650.

<sup>36</sup> Calvin, *Opera*, Vol. II, 118; Vol. I, 362, 423, 433, 476, 508, 782; Vol. II, 505, 625, 640.

<sup>37</sup> Reproduced by Trechsel, *Die protestantischen Antitrinitarier vor F. Socin*, Heidelberg, 1839, 438-446.

<sup>38</sup> Delio Cantimori and Elizabeth Feist, eds., *Per la storia degli eretici italiani del secolo XVI in Europa*, Roma: Reale Accademia d'Italia, 1937, 57-61.

<sup>39</sup> *De falsa et vera Unius Dei Patris, Filii, et Spiritus Sancti cognitione, libri duo*, Albae Juliae, 1568. Reprint edited by Robert Dán, introduced by Antal Pirnát, Utrecht: Bibliotheca Unitariorum, 1988, 297-

“Ambiguous Words in the Holy Scripture” (*Voces ambiguae, quae passim in Scripturis reperiuntur*).<sup>39</sup>

The influence of Laelius was much greater after his death than during his lifetime. He created a new outlook on theology, demanding rational answers to theological questions. Such a position did not allow for dogma; the Scripture alone was viewed as testimony and not as a repository of invented dogmas. The role of the human will and intellect was elevated to a higher level; man became able to control his own moral decisions made on a rational basis. Human spirit found its proper place and authority. The church lost all of its supernaturalism and became a society of believers. Sacraments were stripped of their magic powers and became ceremonies. Some evaluated the concepts of Laelius as the doctrine of Servetus but without his metaphysics; once Servetus’s philosophical metaphysics, which served as an instrument for radical negation of the Christian dogmas, was suppressed, it developed with both Laelius and Faustus into a new religion.<sup>40</sup> Laelius was the leader and one of the founders of anti-Trinitarianism. He sowed the seed of a new approach to religion, to religious dogma, which was to flourish in the Socinianism of his nephew and his school.

### **Life of Faustus Socinus**

Faustus Socinus<sup>41</sup> is considered today the main leader of the Socinian church. He was born in Siena (Tuscany), Italy, on December 5, 1539. He early lost his parents and very little is known about his young years. It seems that he acquired mainly a literary education in a Sieneese school, Accademia degli Intronati. He cherished during his life a love for literature and wrote poetry.<sup>42</sup> We know that he expressed his profound antipathy toward the study of law and practical matters. His uncle visited Siena between 1552-1553 and educated his nephew in religious matters. In 1561 Faustus left Italy for Lyon, probably to acquire some experience as a merchant. He spent two years there and became acquainted with the radical religious movement and especially with the thought of his uncle, Laelius Socinus. He later wrote in a letter to his physician friend in Transylvania that he did not have any other human teacher in his life except the writings and notes of his uncle.<sup>43</sup> After the death of his uncle in 1562, Faustus left Lyon for Zürich where he acquired the manuscripts and notes of his uncle. He probably met here another Sieneese, Bernardino Ochino, and wrote his treatise *Commentary on the First Part of the First Chapter of John’s Gospel (Explicatio primae partis primi capiti Evangelii Joannis)*. This treatise derived from the analogous work written by his uncle. In 1563 Socinus returned to Italy. On his way back he traveled through the Grisons, an

<sup>40</sup> Doumergue, Vol. VI, 454. Trechsel, *Die protestantischen Antitrinitarier*. T. II. Hillar, “From the Polish Socinians to the American Constitution.” in *A Journal from the Radical Reformation*, Vol. 3:2 (1994), 22-57.

<sup>41</sup> Samuel Przytkowski, in Chmaj, ed., Vol. 1, 11-30. Zbigniew Ogonowski, “Faustus Socinus (1539-1604)” in Jill Raitt, ed., *Shapers of Religious Traditions in Germany, Switzerland, and Poland 1560-1600*, translated by Zofia Grzybowska, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989, 195-210. Zbigniew Ogonowski, Faustus Socyn (1539-1604). “Zycie, umyslowosc, mysil religijna,” in *Wolna Mysl Religijna*, No. 3-4 (25-26) 1999, 3-14. Delio Cantimori, 340ff.

<sup>42</sup> Faustus Socinus, *Listy*, Ep. III\*, 37-40.

<sup>43</sup> A letter to Marcelli Squarcialupi in *Listy*, Ep. XII, 143.

active center of the Reformation, and probably met there a friend from his school years, Castelvetro, with whom he shared hopes for changes in the church such as moral reform, emphasis on spontaneity in congregations, individual freedom in the discussion of religious matters, and individual profession of faith. These hopes were associated with the expected opening of the third part of the Trent council. He first came to Siena, then to Florence where he joined the court of the Grand Duke Cosmo I of Tuscany, as secretary of a court dignitary and a relative of the Duke, Paolo Orsini. He remained in this position for twelve years and during this time he composed poems and sonnets on various topics such as politics, love, and morals. At the same time he kept close contact with Italian heterodox emigrants in Switzerland, Poland, and Transylvania. He considered the idea of retiring from the court and devoting his life to studying subjects of interest to him. His decision was prompted by the death of the Grand Duke Cosmo I in 1574, when Socinus again left Italy, never to return. As he explained in the introduction to his work, *On Jesus Christ the Savior (De Jesu Christo Servatore)*, he left Italy in order to be able to devote himself to the study of the Scripture in a more comfortable and safe environment.

He went first to Basel, which was at that time a meeting place for many religious reformers. The clergy in the city were more tolerant under the leadership of Basilius Amerbach and Theodore Zwinger. He spent three years there studying the Bible and especially the problem of redemption. A great help to him were a few writings and many notes left by his uncle. Here he wrote two treatises which were for many years unpublished and circulated in manuscript form: 1. The above-mentioned *On Jesus Christ the Savior (De Jesu Christo Servatore)* written in 1578 and printed eventually in Kraków in 1594; 2. *On the Condition of the First Man Before His Fall (De statu primi hominis ante lapsum)*, also written in 1578 and published, only after his death, in 1610. The first of these works, *On Jesus Christ the Savior*, is Socinus's main treatise which comprises the core of his doctrine. It was written as a result of his discussions with Hieronimus Marliano, John Baptist Rota (later pastor of the Italian church in Geneva), Manfred Balbanus, and Jacob

<sup>44</sup> Francesco Pucci, an Italian humanist and reformer, was born ca 1540, son of a Florentine noble family. At the age of 27 he found himself in Lyon for commercial practice where he was caught in the turmoil of ideological discussions and changes that pushed him "to the study of celestial and eternal things." He went from Lyon to Paris and then to Oxford to study theology. In 1578 he distributed a manifest in which he invited everybody to discuss with him the issue of the natural innocence of man. His thesis was that all men are born innocent because Christ redeemed all people by a cosmic act, and the eternal condemnation applies only to adults, who when reaching the age of reason disobey the moral law. Thus baptism, though he did not reject it, becomes useless for salvation. Salvation as a return to immortality is available to all men through natural faith in God (religion) and obeying His moral rules. Pucci opposed the Calvinist and Protestant concept of divine justice, claiming that God created man good, but through his wicked habits he incites God's anger and punishment. Moreover, man is regenerated or reborn in spirit not in some mystical sense but in an intellectual and moral sense. The essence of religious life is observance of the natural law in accordance with reason. Therefore, paramount for this purpose is good education. He even wrote a letter to De Bèze in Geneva presenting his theses, but did not receive any response. Socinus corresponded with Pucci and they exchanged treatises. Pucci continued discussion and even went to Kraków in 1582 to visit Socinus. Pucci also believed in the doctrine of millenarianism and expected a soon coming of Christ, his rule and convocation of a universal council for unification of all peoples. As for the views on the Trinity, his own opinion was closer to that of Servetus – namely that invisible God manifested Himself to men through the *logos* or divine wisdom that inspired every man, including the prophets, and eventually in the person of Jesus Christ. Pucci, tired of his disputes and frustrated by an inability to convince the reformers, returned to the Catholic Church ca 1585. He died in 1593 in Salzburg on his way to Rome. Selected letters and writings of Pucci in Cantimori and Feist, 113-170.

Covet (evangelical minister from Paris). The second treatise is a result of his correspondence with Francesco Pucci from Zürich on the question of the immortality of the human soul. Pucci was one of the Italian reformers who left Italy and wandered across Europe.<sup>44</sup> Pucci claimed that the first man was immortal and lost his immortality due to the original sin, but all men were redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ. Thus he denied the validity of baptism for salvation and emphasized the importance of good behavior for salvation. All men will be saved regardless of their religion if they believe and obey God's moral commands. To this Socinus responded with his treatise.

In November 1578 Socinus traveled to Kolozsvár, Transylvania (today Cluj in Romania), invited by Italian physician and religious reformer, Giorgio Biandrata, in order to discuss the issue of the dignity and power of Christ with the Calvinist minister there, Francis Dávid. Francis Dávid came from a Catholic family in Transylvania, studied in Wittenberg and after his return from Germany accepted Lutheranism, became the superintendent of the local church, and eventually switched to Calvinism. Through the reading of Servetus and Erasmus, Dávid developed doubts about the dogma of the Trinity. In 1562 Giorgio Biandrata came from Poland in order to cure the princess Isabella, widow of prince John Zápolya; both Biandrata and Dávid embarked on the propagation of Unitarianism. Enjoying the support of prince John Sigismundus, they were able to induce the Diet of 1571 to recognize Unitarianism as the third religion with equal rights in Transylvania. Upon the death of the tolerant prince in 1571, however, a Catholic, Stefan Báthory, became prince. After being elected king in Poland, Stefan left the princely title to his brother Christopher. The princes brought in Jesuits in order to counteract the spread of anti-Trinitarianism and the situation was changed. Dávid lost his position as superintendent of the Unitarian church and Biandrata lost his influence in the court. In spite of the increasing danger, Dávid became more radical and vocal in propagating his ideas, especially reviving the old dispute on the non-adoration of Christ. Biandrata, fearing persecution, intended to diminish the danger and avoid further alienating the opponents and pressed Dávid to end his practice and change his views. He invited Socinus to a discussion with Dávid and financed his travel. He asked both of them to submit their opinions which were to be decided by the synod. Dávid's Christology led him to categorically deny any equality of the Father and the Son. Socinus wrote his arguments in the form of a treatise *On the Invocation of Jesus Christ (De Jesu Christi invocatione disputatio)* which was published in Kraków in 1579.<sup>45</sup> His main argument was that the invocation of Christ from which his adoration derives is necessary as a cognition of his rule and power over men that he obtained directly from God. Just as the power given by God to man over nature constitutes his resemblance to God, so the power given by God to Christ constitutes his divinity. For this reason Christ should be adored, though otherwise he remains a true man. For Socinus the non-adoration of Christ would be equivalent to a return to Judaism. However, adoration is not expressly prohibited or ordered by the Scripture. It is a practical matter due to human weakness, a result of a necessity to

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<sup>45</sup> Faustus Socinus, *De Jesu Christi invocatione disputatio*, in BFP, Vol. 1, 709-766.

pray for our comfort and consolation.

As an unexpected result of this discussion, Dávid was accused of blasphemy by Biandrata and some members of the church in April 1579, but the preliminary proceedings of the Diet in Torda were postponed to June 1, 1579. In the meantime Socinus left Transylvania for Poland in May, and in June 1579, the princely Diet at Gyulafehérvár sentenced Dávid to life imprisonment as an innovator. There are contradictory reports concerning the details of the affair and chronology of the request for the opinion of the Polish Brethren. Probably they were asked as early as November 1578. Nevertheless, the preserved documents indicate that the letter from Biandrata is dated June 17, 1579 and the reply from the Brethren August 27, 1579 with no mention of the trial of Dávid, but urging Dávid to recant his views, recall his ministers, and to settle the matter without involving the magistrate. Dávid died in prison in Déva on November 15, 1579. Such an event was not to be expected in sixteenth century Transylvania and produced a reaction among the Transylvanian and Polish Unitarians. As a result of such polemics, a collection of materials relating to the Dávid-Biandrata-Socinus dispute, the reply of the Polish ministers, the polemical refutation of the Polish ministers by Palaeologus, and the denunciation of Biandrata's ways by the Transylvanians was published as *Defense of Francis Dávid Concerning the Question of Non-Invocation of Jesus Christ in Prayers (Defensio Francisci Davidis in negotio de non invocando Jesu Christo in precibus)*.<sup>46</sup> This collection was published in several editions. One probably in Frankfurt am Mein in 1580, of which there is no copy preserved, the second bearing an imprint "In Aula Basiliensi 1581," copies found in Cluj, and the third, amplified, without date or place, probably printed in 1582, copies found in the libraries of Cluj, Sibiu, Budapest, and Oxford. The last two editions were most certainly printed in Kraków in the Rodecki press.

On his way to Kolozsvár, Socinus briefly visited Kraków and probably decided that Poland was a good place for him to settle down because the next year he came to Poland where he stayed until his death in 1604. He found here a large Italian colony of merchants and artisans with anabaptist orientation who offered support to their compatriot. Also he found here a religious movement congruent to his own religious ideas and which was already prepared by his uncle Laelius, by Giorgio Biandrata, Gianpaolo Alciati, and Valentino Gentile. It was characterized by a general tendency to emphasize the moral element over the doctrinal one and in the historical part of Christianity, the rational and intellectual exegesis prevailed that led to the humanization and moral elevation of the church. In Kraków Socinus asked the minister Szymon Ronemberg for admission to the Unitarian church. But

<sup>46</sup> *Defensio Francisci Davidis in negotio de non invocando Jesu Christo in precibus*. Reprinted together with the work of Francis Dávid, *De dualitate tractatus Francisci Davidis* (Cracoviae 1582), edited by Robert Dán and introduced by Mihály Balzás, (Utrecht: Bibliotheca Unitariorum, 1983).

because he refused to accept the second baptism by immersion, he was not officially admitted. He thought baptism should be required only for converts from religions other than Christianity. Not discouraged by this rejection Socinus remained associated with the church all his life, participated in synods and eventually became its scholar and main theoretician. Only at the end of his life was he admitted to the common celebration of the Eucharist. He could thus declare that he never was a head of any sect and cannot be called a “heresiarch.”

While in Kraków Socinus became involved in the disputes and discussions within the church and defending the church against its enemies.<sup>47</sup> His major role was in unification of various tendencies in the movement: anti-Trinitarian, ditheistic, tritheistic; a question of adoration and non-adoration of Christ; the problem of negation of civil authority and negation of participation in civil life; justification of faith against rationalistic and antireligious views.

Soon Socinus was asked to respond to Jacobus Palaeologus, a former Greek monk from Chios and religious refugee from Italy, concerning the issue of social property and political authority.<sup>48</sup> This was a part of the ongoing discussion among the Polish Brethren on the use of the “sword” (*ius gladii*). The Polish Brethren were divided on this issue – some supported full participation of true Christians in the political life of the country and war, and others supported prohibiting active participation in political life and military service, since this, by necessity entailed the use of violence which was against the letter of the gospel. The issue was especially acute in Poland, a country that considered itself a “bulwark of Christianity.” In the early years 1569-1570 after the Racovian community was founded, some Brethren, influenced by the Moravian Anabaptists, and led by Grzegorz Paweł (1525-1591) and others, advocated radical pacifism and withdrawal from the political life of the country. They even abolished the institution of ministers and introduced a radical communist rule. However, Szymon Ronenberg, a senior in the congregation in Kraków, after visiting Moravian Anabaptists, eradicated this radicalism and reintroduced the governance of ministers. On his request Palaeologus wrote in 1572 his treatise criticizing the early Racovians and supporting the view that it was the duty of a Christian to participate in the defense of his country and protection of its laws. The main congregations of the Polish Brethren rejected radical pacifism and actively participated in the political life of the country. But in 1580 the manuscript of Palaeologus was printed by Szymon

<sup>47</sup> Socinus’ response, *Responsio fratrum qui in Poloniae et Lithuaniae de uno Deo Patre unoque Dei Filio consentiunt* (published in 1588) (cf. BFP, Vol. II, 375-422), to a pamphlet by a Calvinist minister in Lithuania, Andrew Wolan, *Paraenesis ad omnes in Regno Poloniae et MDL Samosatiniacae vel Ebioniticae doctrinae professores* and further writings. Another discussion Socinus had with Jan Niemojewski, a Polish nobleman and religious reformer with radical social views, on the issue of the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. Socinus explained his position in a short piece *Scriptum, in quo breviter ostenditur, Paulum Apostolum in Ep. ad Rom. cap. 7 sub sua ipsius persona de seipso ut renato non loqui* (cf. BFP, Vol. I, 89-90). Socinus maintained further correspondence in *De loco Pauli Apostoli in Ep. ad Rom. cap. septimo* (BFP, Vol. I, 89-113) and a defense, *Defensio disputationis suae de loco septimi capituli Ep. ad Rom.* (BFP, Vol. I, 115-137).

<sup>48</sup> Faustus Socinus, *Ad Jac. Palaeologi librum, cui titulus est Defensio de verae sententiae de magistratu politico (in ecclesiis Christianis retinendo, contra quosvis eius impugnatores), etc. pro Rocviensibus responsio*, in BFP, Vol. 2, 1-114.



Budny (1533-1593), a radical minister in Kleck, Lithuania, without the approval of the congregation, and the discussions among the Brethren were renewed again. Palaeologus misrepresented the views of Racovian anti-Trinitarians who already abandoned those radical social tendencies. Radical views could represent danger to a country and they were used now to misrepresent and distort the ideas of the Polish Brethren by their enemies and as a pretext for the new king, Stefan Báthory, to repress the church. On the special and explicit request from the Brethren, Socinus agreed to write a clarification and to defend the position of the Racovians. His reply was approved by the synod in Chmielnik in 1581 and published anonymously. Socinus was a theoretician who now faced a practical problem and need to reconcile the exigencies of a concrete situation with an abstract theoretical speculation.

In the first part of his *Response*, Socinus reviews the doctrine of the Racovians based on the Sermon on the Mount. The State has no need of Christians for its military activity and has no right to force Christians to participate. Evil is won only with spiritual force. And there can be no war desired by God. But he approves armed resistance against a government that would persecute the religious opinions of one group of its citizens. At the same time he condemned religious doctrines that would support armed destruction of some forms of political power. Religious life is separate from the political and must never use political or military means.

In the second part Socinus addresses the question of participating in the function of the civil authority through the use of swearing and tribunals. Socinus does not deny the authority the right to exact swearing and to punish the malefactors. But at the same time he contends that true Christians should not ask for justice from the civil authority but should resolve their problems among themselves. Socinus does not accept the argument that by not punishing injustice one commits a graver injustice and points to the example of indulgence of the pagans. Detachment from civil life for Socinus meant only avoidance of interaction with the impious and nonreligious. A Christian can practice in a civil office provided it does not require the shedding of blood of another Christian. In the case of a war in the defense of one's homeland, Socinus claims that prohibition against violence and bloodshed does not apply to the government but to individual Christians. A Christian should obey the authority as well as God, but in no case should one act against an expressed precept of Christ. One can obey the order to go to the war but must not kill. Similarly in the case of self-defense, one can terrorize the enemy by all means but must not kill. Also, a Christian can go to the court but only for the restitution of his property, never for punishment. These are ambiguous views and they were forced on Socinus by the actual political and social situation in the country. Socinus's true thought was a total disinterest in the matters of the world, a rejection of the political and social life. Being pressed, however, to defend the Racovians

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<sup>49</sup> The theses were entitled *Assertiones Theologicae de Trino et Uno Deo adversus novos Samosatonicos* (1581). Socinus' reply, *Animadversiones*, published in 1583. Material collected in *Opera Socini*, in BFP, Vol. 2, 423-492.

against the attacks of the enemies and the king, he found recourse in a detailed casuistry. Moreover, to avoid conflict with the State he insisted on the supremacy of the civil authority and the religious duties of the individuals. An attack against the Unitarians came in the form of written theses from the so-called Collegium Posnaniensis against the Unitarian doctrine to which Socinus replied with his rebuttal.<sup>49</sup>

In 1580 he wrote in Kraków his fourth main treatise, *On the Authority of the Holy Scripture (De Sacrae Scripturae auctoritate)* originally in Italian, on the suggestion of Andrew Dudith, a Hungarian dissident cleric and a former bishop of Pécs who found refuge in Poland.<sup>50</sup>

With time Socinus drew the attention of the Catholic opposition and was reported to King Báthory as a trouble maker. On the advice from his friends he moved in March of 1583 to the village of Pawlikowice (today Roźnowa) near Kraków, which was owned by Krzysztof Morsztyn, former student at Wittenberg and supporter of the church of the Polish Brethren. Socinus married his host's daughter, Elizabeth, in 1586 with whom he had a daughter Agnes in 1587. But he lost his wife in the same year.

With the death in 1587 of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Francis II, Socinus's protection by the Duke and his sister Isabella Medici ceased and his family property was confiscated as owned by a dangerous heretic. Thus Socinus lost his income and means of livelihood, but with the death of the Duke he could now come into the open with his doctrines as he once promised the Duke that he would not publish in his own name anything opposing the doctrine of the Catholic Church.

He returned to Kraków in 1588 and, for the first time, began to speak in public at the synod in Brześć (in Lithuania) on such issues as the death and offering of Christ, justification, corruption of human nature, and invocation of Jesus Christ. This was the year when Piotr Stoiński, Jr., son of Pierre Statorius from Thionville, an immigrant from France in 1559, was nominated minister of the congregation in Luślawice and then in Raków.

Socinus now gained more and more supporters for his ideas among the Polish nobility, e.g., Hieronimus Moskorzowski, Stanislaus and Christopher Lubieniecki, Elias Arciszewski, Piotr Stoiński, Valentinus Schmaltz, Jan Völkel, Christopher Ostorodt, Matthew Radecke, and others. His standing with the Polish Brethren became more appreciated to such a degree that in 1596 he became the leader of the church. Now he decided to publish a collection of his lectures, which were probably delivered in Kraków during his stay there between 1579-1583.

Due to the vicious attacks on the heterodox organized and promoted by the Jesuits, toleration in Poland deteriorated significantly and Socinus was subjected to such attacks as well. University students organized by the Jesuits in 1598 invaded his apartment while he was sick in bed. They dragged him half-clothed to the city hall where his books, papers, and correspondence were burned. Socinus himself

<sup>50</sup> *Listy*, Ep. XIV, Vol. 1, 157.

<sup>51</sup> *Listy*, Ep. XIV, Vol. 1, 157.

was threatened with death unless he revoked his doctrines. He naturally refused, and the assailants dragged him to the Vistula River in order to drown him. Only the intervention of university professor Martin Wadowit, who happened to be there, saved Socinus's life.<sup>51</sup>

After this incident, Socinus, fearing for his life, left Kraków for Lusławice, a small village near Tarnów, and property of Abraham Błoński, which was a center of the Polish Brethren. He would visit Kraków for synods and conferences. With time the Unitarian Church accepted the theoretical elaborations of Socinus which became their official doctrine. The role Socinus played in the Unitarian church may be compared to the role which Thomas Aquinas played in the Catholic Church. Polish anti-Trinitarians, imitating the Protestant reformers, attempted to draw up the main points of their religion in the form of a Catechism or Confession. The first such work was a publication printed in Kraków in 1574 by Alexander Turobińczyk and authored by minister George Schomann, *Catechism or Confession of Faith of the Congregation Assembled in Poland, in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord Who was Crucified and Raised from the Dead (Catechesis et Confessio Fidei Coetus per Poloniam congregati in Nomine Jesu Christi, Domini nostri crucifixi et resuscitati)*. Socinus attempted to write such a work and left two unfinished treatises: *Christianae religionis brevissima institutio, per interrogationes et responsiones, quam catechismus vulgò vocant*; and *Novum Fragmentum catechismi prioris*.<sup>52</sup> There are indications that he was asked by the Racovian community in 1592 to write the catechism together with Piotr Stoiński, Jr.<sup>53</sup> He could not, however, continue his work being busy with other publications. He came back to it in 1603 though his death prevented him from finishing the work. The catechism was finished by Piotr Stoiński, Hieronimus Moskorzowski, and Jan Völkel and published first in Polish in 1605. It was subsequently translated into German by Valentinus Smalcus (Schmaltz) and published in 1608, and then in 1609 into Latin by Moskorzowski, published under the title: *Catechism of the Churches, which in the Kingdom of Poland and in the great Dukedom of Lithuania, and in other Provinces belonging to that Kingdom, affirm that no other Being besides the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the one God of Israel; and acknowledge and confess that the Man, Jesus of Nazareth, who was born of a Virgin, and no other besides or before him, is the only-begotten Son of God. Four years ago published in Polish, and at present also published in Latin (Catechesis Ecclesiarum quae in Regno Poloniae et magna Ducatu Lithuaniae, et aliis ad istud Regnum pertinentibus Provinciis, affirmant, neminem alium, praeter Patrem Domini nostri Jesu Christi, esse illum unum Deum Israelis: Hominem autem illum Jesum Nazarenum, qui ex Virginenatus est, nec alium, praeter aut ante ipsum, Dei Filium unigenitum, et agnoscunt et confitentur. Ante annos quatuor Polinice, nunc verò etiam Latine edita)*. To this publication was attached a dedication to King James I of England. This work was reprinted in 1651 in London and the following year it was burned on

<sup>52</sup> Published in BFP, Vol. 1, 651-689.

<sup>53</sup> *Listy*, Ep. CX, Vol. 2., 292-293

the sixth and eighth of April by the order of the British Parliament. The first English translation, probably executed by John Biddle, was published in Amsterdam in 1652 and entitled *The Racovian Catechisme*. It has been known from that time by this name.

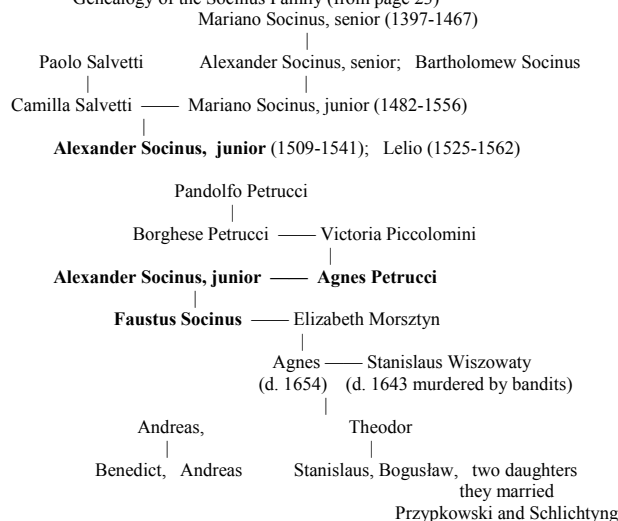
Socinus died in Luślawice on March 3, 1604. The funeral speech was delivered by Piotr Stoiński, his faithful collaborator. He was buried at the bank of the mountain river Dunajec and the simple rectangular tombstone placed on his tomb bore the inscription in Italian: *The one who sows virtue reaps fame and true fame overcomes death* (*Chi semina virtù, raccoglie la fama, e vera fama supera la morte*). With time the river changed its course a few hundred meters. Eventually his tombstone was located on the side of a country road. In 1936 the international Unitarian Community decided to erect a mausoleum to Socinus on a nearby property to which the tombstone was transferred.

Socinus was a person of unusual wisdom and qualities of character, humble and modest, benevolent toward others, always self-critical. The main principle in life which Socinus followed was to nurture the hope for immortality through morally good and just conduct. Both Laelius and Faustus, according to Przytkowski, were characterized by a profound faith for which they sacrificed earthly riches and dignities, were exposed to injustice and insults. Their sacrifice can be compared to that of the first Christian martyrs who lost all earthly hopes, and contrasted with the later saints and heroes of the Roman church who sacrificed riches and even lives to gain recognition by their church.

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<sup>15</sup> Genealogy of the Socinus Family (from page 23)





Mausoleum of Faustus Socinus  
in Luslawice



Faustus Socinus  
(Fausto Sozzini)