

Socinian Pacifism from 1581 to 1661

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Faustus Socinus (Fausto Sozzini) was born into a patrician family in Siena in 1539. But the most creative period of his life he spent in Poland as a refugee from religious persecution in his native Italy. Already a respected scholar and prominent figure in the Radical Reformation when he settled permanently in Poland in 1579, he soon gained a position of leadership within the anti-Trinitarian Polish Brethren (Minor) Church, which had broken away from the Calvinists fourteen years earlier. Though he never formally joined their Church, the Polish Brethren under his tactful guidance began to shed their original sociopolitical radicalism while at the same time moving in the sphere of theology toward the adoption of Unitarianism, a position which then represented the extreme left of Protestantism. Apart from the Netherlands then emerging into independence, only in the tolerant Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were its proponents free to propagate such unorthodox doctrines, including pacifism: a freedom, however, that never gained legal guarantees and was to be gradually eroded in the course of the next century by rising religious intolerance.¹

¹The pages of this article covering Socinus' lifetime are largely excerpted from the *Polish Review*, 38:4, December 1993, 441-46. I am grateful to the editor for allowing me to reprint from his journal. The remaining pages are drawn for the most part from my book *Studies in Peace History*, York (U.K.): William Sessions Limited, 1991, 21-32. For background, see my *Pacifism in Europe to 1914*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972, chap. 4 ("The Polish Antitrinitarians").

I. SOCINUS ON PACIFISM

The year following Socinus' arrival in Poland there appeared for the first time in print two treatises against nonresistance which a Greek anti-Trinitarian exile, Jacobus Palaeologus, had composed in 1572-1573. Until then they had circulated within the brotherhood only in manuscript. But in 1580 Szymon Budny, a leading intellectual among the socially conservative Brethren who rejected nonresistance, was responsible for their publication alongside the brief reply to Palaeologus which a prominent pacifist minister, Gregorius Paulus, had written in 1572.² Printing costs were covered by the anti-Trinitarian magnate, Jan Kiszka, with whom Budny collaborated closely.

The church's nonresistant leaders (known widely as the Racovians since their headquarters were at Raków in southern Poland) had realized at once that Palaeologus must be answered speedily if their position in the matter was to continue to enjoy firm support, at any rate among the educated sections of the brotherhood, for the Greek was a skillful polemicist and an accomplished biblical scholar. Indeed, "it was a question not only of defending their own teaching, but also of shielding themselves from the anger of the royal power," since Palaeologus had equated nonresistance with treason.³

Paulus was the first to be asked to undertake the task of rebuttal, but he refused; bad health, he claimed, would not permit him to do this. The Racovians then turned to the recently arrived Italian émigré, whose scholarship and intellectual integrity would surely make him a match for the doughty Greek. So far Socinus, it is true, had not committed to paper his views on the question of the sword. But the Racovians must already have known enough about his views to realize that his standpoint was not far removed from their own, even if they did not coincide exactly on every point. Socinus readily accepted the offer and at once set about composing his *Reply to Palaeologus* (*Ad Iac. Palaeologi librum, cui titulus est: Defensio verae sententiae de magistratu politico, &c. pro Racoviensibus*

² In a single volume under the title *Defensio verae sententiae de magistratu politico in ecclesiis christianis retinendo* (Łosk). The Czartoryski Library, Cracow, possesses the only extant copy of this volume. But the Robarts Library at the University of Toronto now has a microfilm copy (call no. : BX/1780/P26/1580).

³ 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, Boston: Starr King Press, 1957, 82. See also my *Freedom from Violence: Sectarian Nonresistance from the Middle Ages to the Great War*, Toronto: 1991, 81.

Responsio).⁴ He completed the work in less than a year; the book, comprising 371 tightly packaged pages, then appeared in Cracow in 1581 — but without the author's name, so as to give the work a clearly "official" character. After all, Socinus had written it "for the Racovians"; it was meant as their reply to the socially conservative section of the brotherhood that remained staunchly anti-pacifist.

Socinus' lengthy treatise constitutes a work of considerable complexity. He answers his opponent point by point and in immense detail, drawing on his wide theological learning and on his knowledge not merely of Latin but of Greek and Hebrew as well, in order to set forth the case for Racovian nonresistance as comprehensively as possible. Even the indefatigable Kot, while recognizing "the great historical importance of the work and its author," complains of its tediousness.⁵ But although such writing scarcely suits modern tastes, it certainly made a powerful impression on Socinus' contemporaries whether they agreed or not with his viewpoint.

Socinus deals with the question of war in the first chapter of part three;⁶ he also touches on it in several paragraphs in part one. In the remainder of the book he discusses various other aspects of nonresistance: the state, capital punishment, self-defense, etc. The treatment is wide-ranging and covers all the issues raised hitherto by Brethren on either side in the ongoing controversy over the sword.

At the center of his argument the author places the contrast he perceives as existing between the Mosaic Code (*Lex Mosaica*) and the Gospel of Christ (*Evangelium*): For Jesus' followers their Master's precepts had replaced the model of conduct presented in the Old Testament:⁷

Christ commanded his own to be peacemakers and humble; they were not to return evil for evil or repel force by force; and thus, he did not permit them to avenge wrongs done them through the magistrate's court.⁸

The faithful were forbidden to participate actively in government except where that did not involve acts contravening the Gospel pattern of

⁴ Here I have used the reprint in Socinus' *Collected Works*, included in the famous *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum: Fausti Socini Senensis Opera Omnia*, Amsterdam, 1668, Vol. II, 1-114.

⁵ Kot, 89, 91.

⁶ Socinus, Vol. II, 75-84.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 9, 83.

morality, which enjoins love of enemies and prohibits the shedding of human blood.

Unlike the ancient Israelites, the followers of Christ possessed no fatherland on this earth; instead, they dwelt as "strangers in a foreign land" with no frontiers to protect or enemies to repulse.⁹ Their eyes were set on the kingdom of heaven.¹⁰ Naturally, for such people there could be no such thing as "a just war," despite Palaeologus' arguments in favor of this, and governments, therefore, were not to attempt to enlist the faithful in their armies, but seek instead to find recruits among those who could not be considered as "true Christians."¹¹ Indeed, without a clear mandate from God (and this Jesus' stance now precluded), believers were forbidden to take up arms and kill under any circumstances.¹² Their only warfare was spiritual, not with men but with demons and the powers of darkness and with their own evil propensities.¹³

In one passage of his treatise, however, Socinus made a rather surprising concession to the point of view of his opponent, at any rate at first sight. His motive for doing this lay almost certainly in his desire to conciliate the gentry members of the Polish Brethren Church, that is, the section of the brotherhood most directly affected by the problem of military service.¹⁴ Most of them by this date were at best lukewarm nonresistants; support for pacifism in the Brethren Church was beginning to decline even in the Kingdom of Poland, whereas in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania it had never been widespread among the congregations.

So Socinus the conciliator sought now to find a way for Brethren dissenting from the principle of nonresistance to conform at least outwardly with the "official" Racovian stand on war; in this way he evidently hoped to stem the trend toward abandoning pacifism as the generally recognized position of the Church. He wrote:

If it should happen that people suddenly take up arms solely in order to frighten off the enemy and deter them from their [evil] purpose, I do not see why a Christian need be condemned when, clearly with the same

⁹ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 30, 31.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 8, 9.

¹² *Si Deus id expresse ac nominatione mandaverit.*

¹³ Socinus, Vol. II, 29, 81.

¹⁴ See my article, "Conscientious Objectors in the Polish Brethren Church, 1565-1605," *The Slavonic and East European Review* (London), 70:4, October 1992, 670-87.

[peaceable] intention, he too arms himself and joins the enterprise. There is nothing wrong, either, in a Christian appearing in arms after being ordered to do so by the magistrate — provided he first protest publicly that he would only employ his weapons to defend himself and his neighbors in ways otherwise permissible [to a Christian] and that he would on no account use them to kill any of the enemy as they advance. This position the magistrate should find indeed acceptable. . .

I am truly of the opinion that a Christian is not forbidden to carry weapons; what however is impermissible is for him to kill someone with them. Furthermore, I cannot agree with those people who maintain it is wrong to wear a sword for the purpose of protection against savage dogs or wolves or other wild animals, whereas the same persons do not hesitate to cut the throats of entirely harmless beasts, which they have raised in order to slaughter and then feed on their flesh. We should always avoid exaggeration (*superstitio*) . . . Nevertheless, it is preferable to remain defenseless and to expose oneself to attack by men or beasts than to misapply a weapon by killing someone, whatever the reason for doing this may be.¹⁵

In the next decade, Socinus continued — privately — to give his approval to the idea of a sword-bearing pacifism, at any rate in so far as the Brethren nobility was concerned; and in 1601-1602, during a series of lectures presented to a select group of church leaders at Raków, and now as the acknowledged spiritual director of the Brethren Church, he set out *inter alia* his views on the issue as they had matured over the previous two decades.

On war, Socinus repeated his earlier opinion that Christians were not permitted to fight "because in this world no certain land is promised to

¹⁵ Socinus, Vol. II, 83. Immediately after this statement, Socinus, however, hastens to modify his absolutist stand with respect also to personal defense. True, the Christian must never use a weapon to kill, even while his family is under attack from robbers and bandits. "But from that it does not follow that one may not chide and rail at an assailant and do other similar things so as to frighten him. Though such actions include a measure of punishment and vengeance, they do so only to a very small degree." Therefore, he argued, they scarcely infringed the Christian precept of neither returning evil for evil nor seeking revenge for a wrong. We may note that the pacifist New Jersey Quakers at the beginning of the eighteenth century took a different view when four of their young men employed weapons merely to frighten and not to kill. The latter tried — in vain — to win approval from their co-religionists by explaining "that it seemed best for those that had guns to take them, not with a design to hurt, much less to kill, . . . but we thought that if we could meet these [enemy] runaways, the sight of the guns might fear them." Quoted in Sydney D. Bailey, *Peace Is a Process*, London: Swarthmore Lecture Committee, 1993, 28.

them such as was promised under the Old Testament." Yet, at the same time, if no alternative were available, he gave his approval to Brethren of the nobility answering the summons to muster in arms at military review. They might even set out on campaign with the general levy so long as they did their utmost to avoid killing one of the enemy, especially when the latter was a Christian. On the other hand, if a nobleman disobeyed the call to arms, in Socinus' view he would bring disgrace and eventual ruin to his family; for then the authorities would regard him as "a deserter and traitor to his fatherland, all of which things are most diligently to be avoided, so long as no one [by doing so] commits anything against the precepts of Christ." One of the faithful might even take part in battle; only he must "not kill anyone nor think of killing anyone," for homicide was a mortal sin — though not such a grave one as, for instance, adultery was. To kill a Tatar, Socinus concludes, was less sinful than killing a Christian.¹⁶

Faustus Socinus died in 1604. The doctrine he had expounded at Raków in 1601-2 only slowly percolated downwards to rank-and-file members of the Church. Indeed while Socinus had issued these far-reaching concessions on the subject of war within the narrow circle of church leaders, he continued until his death to defend in print a doctrine that differed little from that of the Anabaptist nonresistants who had prevailed in the counsels of the Brethren Church during the early decades of its existence; and this viewpoint found expression in several publications by other Brethren spokesmen at the beginning of the seventeenth century.¹⁷ But sufficient became known of his privately held permissive stance with regard to participation in warfare and in the sword-bearing magistracy to lead fairly soon to the almost complete rejection of pacifism in the practice of the Minor Church. Many members had already abandoned it. This was especially true of those Brethren who belonged to the nobility; for them the pressure to conform to the political and social norms of their class was felt most strongly, especially in the eastern territories of

¹⁶ Lech Szczucki and Janusz Tazbir, editors, *Epitome colloquii Racoviae habiti anno 1601*, Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1966, 83-85. I have used the translation of the section "De Bello" by George Huntston Williams in his two volumes of edited sources, *The Polish Brethren: Documentation of the History and Thought of Unitarianism in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and in the Diaspora, 1601-1685*, Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1980, 125, 126. According to Williams (p. 87), Socinus' "remarks" on war "show how he wriggled through this issue, remaining a pacifist but almost to the point of counseling a deceptive aristocratic show of arms with no intention of using them!"

¹⁷ For example, in Christoff Ostorodt, *Unterrichtung von den vornehmsten Hauptpunkten der Christlichen Religion* (1604).

the state increasingly threatened by Muscovite and Cossack as well as by Tatar and Turkish attack. But we may observe the same trend also in the case of the pastorate and the urban middle class (there were virtually no peasants in the Minor Church).

In the Russo-Polish War of 1632-1634 we find anti-Trinitarian noblemen taking a prominent part in battle and winning high praise from the king himself for their valor and patriotism. An anti-Trinitarian soldier, therefore, unless by chance he were a mercenary, no longer appeared as an anomaly, even in the congregations of the western half of the state where previously the rigorist outlook on state and society had prevailed.

Yet no official renunciation of pacifism on the part of church leaders in fact took place, and the pacifist impulse did not vanish altogether from the anti-Trinitarian movement. However, pacifists in the seventeenth century were now only a small minority; exactly how small it is impossible to say. They consisted in the first place of a section of the pastorate that still adhered to Socinus' publicly expressed viewpoint, a moderate one which allowed members of the Church to hold office, while at the same time it sternly forbade them to cooperate with the state in imposing the death penalty (for Socinus had remained inexorably opposed to capital punishment) or to shed blood in battle, even if they were ordered to do so by their rulers. Secondly, there remained throughout the seventeenth century a few anti-Trinitarian Brethren who continued to adhere to the viewpoint of the rigorists of the previous century, like Gregorius Paulus or Marcin Czechowic. These men persisted in branding the state as an unchristian institution and condemning as guilty of pagan practice all who collaborated actively with it. There was, as we shall see, to be a brief revival of this rigorist stance around the middle of the century, and it can even be found among a handful of anti-Trinitarian refugees who were forced to leave Poland on the suppression of Socinianism there in 1658-61.

For Socinus himself the central issue had been the prohibition of homicide which he based on his reading of the New Testament. But, contrary to many of his more radically pacifist predecessors in the Minor Church, he believed that members might have recourse to courts of law and hold government office as well, provided only that in doing so they did not break any of Christ's commandments. A decade after his death, Valentinus Smalcius, who had been one of Socinus' closest associates and was himself a religious refugee from Germany, had devoted a brief section to his Church's attitude to public life (*De rebus civilibus*) in the

course of a polemic with one of the Minor Church's Lutheran adversaries, Wolfgang Franz.

At the outset of his discussion Smalcius expressed general, though not unconditional, agreement with his opponent as to the compatibility of the political and legal systems with true religion. He wrote:

We believe it is lawful for a Christian to collaborate with the judiciary (*judicia licere exercere*), that is, to bring an accusation or defend oneself before the court, to pronounce and execute judgements in every kind of case, with this one proviso, that nothing is done contrary to the laws of Christ, and above all against the royal law of love (*adversus legem regalem charitatis*), or anything smacking of revenge. For certainly punishments under the New Covenant, which is a time of grace, are less severe than they once were under the Old Covenant, which was a time of fear.

Christian magistrates, therefore, should rule mildly and refrain from imposing on malefactors cruel or harsh punishments. Like Socinus, Smalcius condemned the death penalty without reservation. There were surely more intimidating ways of dealing with crime than taking the life of the criminal; though Smalcius did not explain in detail exactly what he had in mind here.¹⁸

Concerning war, Smalcius was equally definite that this practice had no place in "a time of grace" when "love of neighbor" had supplanted the law of Moses. In his view, it was quite wrong for a Christian ever to engage in battle. Neither religion nor the state should be defended by arms, for there were other — and peaceable — ways by which a Christian government could protect the fatherland — by treaties, for instance, or by winning over the enemy through concessions. Smalcius was indeed ready to concede to pagan rulers the right to defend their kingdoms by war. But Christian kings must never deviate from nonviolence, at any rate in their external relations.¹⁹

Towards the end of his discussion Smalcius deals with the question whether a Christian might in good conscience engage in manufacturing weapons: a problem already debated among the pacifist Mennonites and Hutterites. In Smalcius' opinion:

¹⁸ Valentinus Smalcius, *Refutatio thesium D. Wolfgangi Frantzii* . . . , Raków, 1614, 387-89.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 393-95.

Even though it is unlawful [for Christians] to wage wars, it is not indeed in itself a sin to engage in crafts producing weapons. For it can happen that, although such things are made for, yet they are never actually used [in war]. And it is preferable to do what is not in itself a sin . . . than to die of famine or abandon one's family. We must, however, add a caution: this kind of work should not be done unless a man can support himself in no other way, for at other times it is very wicked for a Christian to work at things destined for the slaughter of human beings. Indeed [ordinarily] for a Christian to learn such a craft would be very unworthy of his faith; we ought always to choose in life what is morally most correct and as distant as possible from any kind of evil.²⁰

We do not know if any Brethren craftsmen followed the learned Smalcius' admonitions in this matter. The communitarian Hutterites certainly refused to make weapons if their prime purpose was the destruction of human beings; the community discipline laid down penalties for infringing this rule. But a regulation of this kind did not exist, to my knowledge, in the case of the Polish Brethren. Smalcius in fact was writing, as it were, for export — to refute arguments launched by the Lutherans against his Church's official policy — and not to expound a program of practical living for his own Church.

The same is true of the more detailed defense of Socinian pacifism published by another leading theologian, Jonasz Szlichtyng, twenty-two years later. His tract, entitled *Two Questions*,²¹ was directed against Balthazar Meisner who, like Franz, was also a professor of theology at the University of Wittenberg. In 1619 Meisner had published a reply to Socinus' public exposition of church doctrine; and in it he had taken particular exception to Socinus' rejection of war and capital punishment.

Why Szlichtyng waited seventeen years before penning an answer to the Lutheran's arguments is not clear. The publication in 1618 of Socinus' collected epistles,²² in which his reservations concerning pacifism surfaced in a few of his letters, must certainly have created confusion among the rank-and-file Brethren as to what his real views had been in the matter, especially since some knowledge of the even greater compromises the Master had made in his unpublished lectures of 1601-2 already existed,

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 396.

²¹ Jonasz Szlichtyng, *Questiones duae . . . contra Balthasarem Meisnerum*, Raków, 1636. See my article, "Dilemmas of a Socinian Pacifist in Seventeenth-Century Poland," *Church History* (Chicago), 63:2, June 1994.

²² *Fausti Socini Senensis ad amicos Epistolae*, Raków, 1618.

too. But an even more compelling reason for Szlichtyng's desire to defend the Master in this area of conduct lay undoubtedly in the increasing impact on the educated elite of the Polish Brethren Church of the Dutch lawyer Hugo Grotius' treatise *De jure belli ac pacis* of 1625.²³ In this epoch-making work Grotius had argued cogently in favor of the just war and self-defense and against the nonresistant position;²⁴ a Christian, he stated bluntly, might undertake both with a good conscience. Many of the Polish Brethren, who still hesitated, were won over by reading Grotius. Clearly Szlichtyng, a warm admirer of Socinus, felt the time for action on his behalf had arrived.

Szlichtyng indeed devoted almost a hundred pages to the problem of war.²⁵ If, he argued, it is wrong for a Christian to hate his enemy, how much more wicked it must be to deprive him of his life, whatever the provocation.

Although he saw nothing wrong in government (even a Christian one) undertaking a war in defense of its subjects, for a Christian actually to kill in battle contradicted the law of love promulgated in the Gospels; it harmed the cause of religion generally. Even though Christ had not expressly outlawed war, his teachings implicitly condemned homicide for whatever cause.²⁶

Szlichtyng displays extensive erudition in defending Socinus' position. He is well versed in the Bible as well as in church history, and marshals his arguments with considerable skill. We shall see, however, that in the next decade he was to abandon Socinian pacifism altogether — very largely under the influence of Grotius. Meanwhile another Dutch scholar, this time a protagonist of the kind of anti-state nonresistance advocated in the previous century by anti-Trinitarian radicals like Czechowic or Paulus, had appeared on the scene. Brenius (Daniel de

²³ See Kot, 140-43.

²⁴ In Bk. i, chaps. 2, 3; Bk. ii, chap. 1.

²⁵ Szlichtyng, 373-460. On pages 334-73 he defends Socinus' rejection of the death penalty and of killing an assailant in self-defense.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 373, 392, 399, 400, 412, 424. Kot, 145, writes: "It should be noted that Szlichtyng carefully passes by the question of a defensive war of the sort that Poland was waging, and hence directs his exhortations at the German Protestants and German religious wars." Though of course Szlichtyng condemns waging wars of religion, I do not think Kot is correct here in implying that Szlichtyng at this time approved Christian participation to the point of actually taking life in a war of defense. The state in his eyes might have the right to wage such a war but the individual Christian was still forbidden to take human life: casuistry perhaps, but an argument not altogether deprived of logic.

Breen) was a member of the pacifistic Collegiant movement in Holland; in the early 1640s he published in Latin (and later in Dutch) a learned treatise entitled *Concerning the Nature of the Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus Christ*.²⁷ There he had argued that, while on this earth, Christians must consider themselves as merely "aliens and strangers." They must remain entirely aloof from the kingdoms of the world. In these, "the mighty ones and those called kings hold dominion over others, whereas in Christ's kingdom they serve them." For his followers Christ had replaced the Mosaic code, based on revenge for injuries and on cruel punishments, with the gospel law of love and mercy towards all. Henceforward this law excluded all hatred towards enemies and evildoers. It forbade participation in government, and above all in warfare, on the part of all who claimed to be disciples of Jesus. "Who indeed would dare to kill a being for whom Christ has died?" In the answer to that question, Brenius believed, lay the difference in spirit between the Old and the New Covenant.

Among those in Poland who were deeply influenced by Brenius' tract in defense of nonresistance was Johan Ludwig von Wolzogen, an immigrant — on account of religion — from Catholic Austria.²⁸ A member of the Austrian aristocracy (he held the exalted rank of *Freiherr* or Baron), Wolzogen had been born around 1599; he left his native land in his early twenties, never to return. Henceforward Poland, a haven we know for heretics because of the wide measure of religious toleration still existing there, became his permanent home until his death in 1661. A prolific writer, the Baron devoted himself to philosophy, mathematics, and above all to theology; due to a modest inheritance it seems he did not have to bother too much about gaining a livelihood. He wrote in German but most

²⁷ Daniel de Breen (Brenius), "De qualitate regni domini nostri Jesu Christi quodque illud totum in spirituali dominio consistat," in his *Opera theologica*, Amsterdam, 1666, pt. 4, 49-62 (especially 51, 53, 54, 56, 58-60, 62). Chap. 8 is entitled "De bellis Christianorum." See Johannes Trapman, "Erasmus Seen by a Dutch Collegiant: Daniel de Breen (1594-1664) and His Posthumous *Compendium Theologiae Erasmi-cae* (1677)," *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* (Leiden), 73:2, 1993, 156-77, for Brenius' career and writings, including both his controversy with the Remonstrant scholar, Simon Episcopius, over office-holding and his reworking of Erasmus' view on war in his anthology so that, in the end, "the Erasmus presented to the public in the *Compendium* was such a pacifist that he would not have recognized himself." "De Breen had supplemented the Erasmian heritage with his own ideas" (177).

²⁸ For instance, Wolzogen's own treatise *De Natura et qualitate regni Christi ac religionis christianae*, printed in his *Opera omnia*, Amsterdam, 1668, Vol. II (*Tomus alter*), pt. I, 239-96, is largely dependent on Brenius' work.

of his works were in fact published in Latin translation. While of course he knew the language of learning well, he does not appear to have acquired sufficient fluency actually to write in it.

Soon after his arrival in Poland Wolzogen had come upon the works of Socinus and, abandoning his previous Calvinist sympathies, he now became a convinced adherent of Socinianism.²⁹ His newly acquired faith seemed to him to be more in consonance with evangelical religion and closer to the teachings of Christ as presented in the Gospels than Calvinism was. Soon, too, he became an ardent nonresistant, exceeding Socinus himself in the uncompromising character of his belief in nonviolence. During the mid-1640s Wolzogen lived for a time in Danzig where he found a kindred soul among the local Brethren in Daniel Zwicker, an oculist by profession and an enthusiast exponent of nonresistance in print. There was also a Mennonite congregation in the city with other Mennonite settlements in the surrounding countryside. Wolzogen can scarcely have failed to have made contact with them.³⁰

Around the middle of the seventeenth century, at a time when the Polish Commonwealth was swept by successive wars and foreign invasions, the Baron commenced the composition of a lengthy tract in favor of nonresistance. He wrote it to refute the opinions of his friend, the anti-Trinitarian minister and former Socinian pacifist, Jonasz Szlichtyng, who now supported not only the idea of a Christian magistracy but also the participation of believers in defensive wars and the right to employ lethal weapons in self-defense and the defense of others. This exchange of views first appeared in print in Amsterdam in 1668, a few years after the death of the two protagonists; it was published as one of the items in Wolzogen's two-volume *Collected Works*, which in turn formed part of the massive multi-volume *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum*. The arguments of the Baron's antagonist, however, are extant only in the form of summaries made by Wolzogen, who included them in his treatise.³¹

We need not linger here over the sections of Wolzogen's tract that deal with the magistracy and individual defense, for his exposition does not

²⁹ "Sese in Polonia Christianis unitariis et eorum Ecclesiae associavit." From the anonymous "Praefatiuncula" printed at the beginning of the first volume of his *Opera omnia*.

³⁰ For Mennonites and the military question under Polish rule, see Wilhelm Mannhardt, *Die Wehrfreiheit der altpreussischen Mennoniten*, Marienburg: B. Hermann Hempels, 1863, chap. 2, sections A-C and appendix IV, sections 1-5.

³¹ The controversy was carried on in two stages. See Kot, 171-81, for a useful summary of the arguments employed on each side.

differ in essentials from that presented earlier by Anabaptist nonresistants like Gregorius Paulus or Marcin Czechowic. For Wolzogen the state in every form remained "outside the perfection of Christ" (to use the striking phrase we find in the Swiss Brethren's Schleitheim Confession of 1527). Christ had taught the precept "Resist not evil"; this meant, too, that even under extreme provocation (such as Socinus had envisaged) the faithful were wrong if they attempted to defend either themselves or others by arms. "Thou shalt not kill," then, remained the rule in all circumstances, even when the assailants were Tatar invaders who spared neither the aged nor children. This stance of course precluded imposition of the death penalty, which Szlichtyng, breaking with his Master, Socinus, had now approved in the case of the most serious crimes.

Concerning war Wolzogen took up a similarly uncompromising stance. He could in no wise reconcile warfare with the Christian ethic. "For," he wrote, "to fight and not to kill promiscuously and plunder and lay waste signifies in fact not to fight at all. It is like washing a garment and not making it wet, burning chaff and not consuming it. Thus it is with wars which we call today defensive and which we are accustomed to contrast with offensive warfare."³² No human law could force a Christian to fight if his conscience told him no; to disobey conscience in such a case clearly indicated weakness of will and an inability to contemplate suffering for righteousness' sake. Wolzogen noted with approval the custom prevailing in the early Church of excluding soldiers from holy communion when they had been guilty of shedding blood. He much regretted that in his day it was no longer possible to do this.³³

Essentially the trouble stemmed, in the Baron's view, from the fact that by that date leadership in the Brethren Church belonged for the most part to members of the Polish nobility; naturally, Wolzogen went on, they strove to defend the privileges of their class and emulate their fellow noblemen in military exploits and in defending the realm from external aggressors. Instead, they should have resigned their rank and lived in the same way as other nonresistant sects like the Mennonites or Hutterites. The important thing at any rate was strictly to obey Christ's love commandment. As he wrote: "It is not lawful for anyone to do anything conflicting with what Christ did. . . . To be a king, or to be a soldier and

³² Wolzogen, *Opera omnia*, Vol. II, pt. 2, 75. See also 114.

³³ *Ibid.*, 76, 78.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

pursue and kill enemies by the sword, is to act quite contrary to the things done by Christ."³⁴

Death came to Wolzogen as the last of his Socinian co-religionists were leaving Poland for exile. His final days were spent on an estate belonging to the family of his intellectual adversary, Jonasz Szlichtyng.

We do not know what support Wolzogen received among the Brethren in his promotion of the nonresistant ideas that had once prevailed in their Church. But it is clear, I think, that by this time the overwhelming majority of church members shared not Wolzogen's, but Szlichtyng's view of the sword and accepted participation in war as at least sometimes necessary and the state as, on the whole, a Christian institution. It is true that the German-speaking congregation in Danzig included both nonresistants of the Wolzogen variety and more moderate Socinian pacifists. But together these trends represented only a small segment of the total church membership.

Around the same time as Wolzogen and Szlichtyng were arguing the case for and against nonresistance, another member of the Brethren Church of German origin, Joachin Stegmann the younger, was pleading the cause of the moderate, Socinian kind of pacifism. Stegmann indeed worked in close association with Wolzogen, and he translated many of the Baron's writings from German into Latin.³⁵ But his own tract on war and the magistracy, entitled *De magistratu politico, bello, etc.*, is no longer extant; we know it only from the excerpts which an anti-Trinitarian author felt obliged to give in his work on the subject in order to refute Stegmann's arguments. This writer was Samuel Przykowski, biographer of Socinus, opponent of Brenius and disciple of Grotius, a formidable polemicist whose collected works were to appear in print in Amsterdam in 1692.³⁶

In these circumstances it is not easy to reconstruct Stegmann's arguments from the fragments left us by Przykowski. Stegmann evidently

³⁵ Stegmann, who died in 1678, may have been responsible for furnishing the editor of the *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum* with the second installment of Wolzogen's controversy with Szlichtyng over nonresistance. At any rate the editor's prefatory note to the reader (*Lector Benevole!*), with which this second — and rather disorganized — installment begins, indicates that as at least a possibility: "Tractatus hic, post absolutam impressionem, at amico inter sua manu-scripta repertus, nobisque communicatus, non potuit, priori auctoris de eadem materia tractatui subjici."

³⁶ With the title *Cogitationes sacrae ad initium evangelii Mattaei et omnes epistolas apostolicas. Nec non tractatus varii argumenti, praecipue de jure christiani magistratus*. The treatise directed against Stegmann — "Apologia prolixior: Tractatus de jure christiani magistratus" — was printed on pages 737-851. It does not appear to have been published before appearing in Przykowski's *Collected Works*.

considered that he was defending the traditional doctrine of his Church on the sword: the Socinian inheritance which did not, it is true, exclude a Christian magistracy or a conditional justification for waging war, provided only that the faithful obeyed Christ's unconditional prohibition of actual bloodshed and strove honestly to love enemies and suffer injuries patiently as their Savior had told them to do. Stegmann cited the abstinence of Christians of the apostolic age from serving in the army as an example for his contemporaries to follow.³⁷ Wars spread devastation and destroyed human lives; soldiers existed for the sole purpose of killing. How then, Stegmann asked, could one accommodate this to the precepts expounded in the Gospels?³⁸ Like Socinus — and the nonresistants — he made a sharp distinction between the ethics of the New and Old Testaments. War and capital punishment, which had been permitted by God to the Jews under the Old Covenant, were strictly forbidden to the faithful under the New. Stegmann indeed perceived no difference between public and private enemies so far as Christian morality was concerned. To distinguish between them in this way he regarded "as an absurdity"; to hate or injure either was "the work of the flesh."³⁹

According to Stegmann, the Christian's warfare was purely spiritual; he could never wield an earthly sword if he were to remain true to his religion. His kingdom was an otherworldly one. (Of course, this was a familiar theme in pacifist hermeneutics.) "The magistracy," declared Stegmann, "was permitted use of the sword but Christians were not. . . . For the essential precepts enshrined in Christ's doctrine are opposed to the vocation of magistrate (*At enim praecepta doctrinae Christi essentialia pugnant cum vocatione magistratus*)."⁴⁰

In Stegmann's argument (at any rate as Przykowski has transmitted it to us) there emerges a note of ambiguity absent, for instance, in Wolzogen's writings. Although Stegmann condemns unreservedly the employment of force in defense of religion, or to protect oneself or one's friends from attack, and he brands war as unchristian and the shedding of blood as a sin, it is not quite clear — in spite of his forthright assertions of principle — how far he thought one of the faithful might go in performing personally the God-approved work of government without endanger-

³⁷ "Nullum exemplum dari potest Christiani homini qui tempore Apostolorum militavit." Cited in *ibid.*, 760. The statement is not historically correct, though.

³⁸ Cited in *ibid.*, 747, 753.

³⁹ In *ibid.*, 767, 769, 770, 775, 776.

⁴⁰ In *ibid.*, 812, 813, 836, 837, 841-47.

ing his soul's salvation.⁴¹ But this was an ambiguity present earlier in Socinus' own exposition of the problem.

In 1660 the Polish Brethren, whose Church had been declared an illegal organization by the Diet two years earlier, began to go into exile, a movement that lasted into the following year. At the time of their departure pacifism—of the Socinian variety—still found a place in their Church's official confession of faith. But in fact, as we have seen, few church members held to this doctrinal point any more, and soldiers were everywhere acceptable members of its congregations. Almost without exception the anti-Trinitarian clergy as well as laity now believed in a Christian magistracy that wielded not the sword in vain and in the obligation of the faithful to defend their *patria* by arms against foreign invaders. True, there were still a handful of members who did not agree, like Stegmann, for instance, or the learned minister Benedykt Wiszowaty. Wiszowaty, in the notes he prepared for the new edition of his Church's *Catechism* appearing in Latin in 1680, referred with approval even to the anti-state and radically pacifist positions of such writers as Wolzogen or Paulus and Czechowic before him.⁴² But men like Wiszowaty remained isolated individuals within a dwindling community of religious émigrés, who were gradually merging with the ecclesiastical establishments of the Protestant lands where they had settled. Socinian pacifism, then, proved slow in dying but the seeds of decay had already existed long before the Polish brethren were forced into exile.

⁴¹ Kot, 202, n. 16, states that "Stegmann, . . . under the influence of the Cossack massacres, changed his uncompromising position with regard to the State." But he does not cite any authority for this assertion; indeed I am not entirely certain that Kot is correct here.

⁴² *Catechesis ecclesiarum polonicarum* . . . , Amsterdam, 1680, 83.