RESISTANCE, OBEDIENCE AND TOLERATION: PRZYPKOWSKI AND LIMBORCH

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1. Background events

The presence of the affiliates of the Ecclesia Minor on Dutch soil dates to the end of the sixteenth century. It was effectively never interrupted, in spite of the hostilities and open condemnations to which the Socinians were subjected, along with the religious sect which had showed itself most open towards them, the Arminians. Numerous young Socinians completed their cultural training by attending universities outside their own national territory, and in particular in Holland.¹

Beyond this, there was no shortage of missions on the part of Polish Unitarians aimed at seeking political-religious support from the Dutch authorities. One of the earliest of such missions was entrusted to Krzysztof Ostorodt and Andrzej Wojdowski, who arrived in Amsterdam in 1598 with an extensive collection of anti-Trinitarian works. Andrzej Wojdowski was, moreover, also in contact with Jacob Arminius.

The epilogue of their journey was, however, far from happy since, notwithstanding the assurances provided by the letters of introduction from the King of Poland, in the space of a few weeks their books were confiscated; the Faculty of Leiden declared the publications heretical and blasphemous, and the two Socinians were expelled from the country by decree of the States-General.

Having returned to Poland, the two Socinians published, in Dutch, an Apologia against this decree of expulsion, in which they demanded the pacific defence of the diversity of opinions in matters of religion: “Freedom should be allowed to hold sway in the observance of religious practices, while it ought to be forbidden for sects to descend to the level

¹ Classic studies on this topic are Kühler 1912, Socinianisme; Kot 1937, Mouvement; Le Moal 1968, Dimensions.
of reciprocal insults in their arguments, both in their gatherings and in their published writings. All should universally respect the peace.”

This theme was to constitute one of the most fecund conceptual nuclei of Socinian thought in the course of the seventeenth century. The Socinians were foremost—continued the two authors of the Apologia—in not hating or condemning anyone, on condition that they recognised Jesus, the Son of God, as the Saviour, and that they dedicated themselves to his service. In their turn, the Socinians—claimed the two writers—recognised that they did not accept the divinity of Christ and the Holy Spirit since “Christ was in substance generated centuries before by God the Father and the Holy Spirit is a person.”

But it is precisely this point—emphasise Ostorodt and Wojdowski—which “gives rise to the controversy between us and your theologians”.

Concluding the Apologia, the two Socinians exhorted the States General of Holland to reconsider the writings which had been torn from their hands on their arrival in Amsterdam, and which had possibly been burnt or were perhaps still stored away somewhere, significantly recalling that: “Among these was the Dissertation by Fausto Socinus on Jesus Christ the Saviour, written over twenty years ago and set from the very start at the disposal of your theologians, and to which up to this moment no one of them has had the courage to reply”.

Another ten years were to pass before the first replies to Sozzini’s work appeared in Holland. In 1611 Sibrandus Lubbertus came up with a huge confutation in a volume of more than sixty hundred pages in which he opposed the orthodox credo of Jacobus Covetus to the heresy of Faustus Sozzini. The Lubbertus’ correspondent Johannes Fontanus welcome the volume as “necessarius, utilis et solidus”, but the principal merit of this confutation or strong demerit (naturally in the eyes of his contemporaries), was that his comment was in fact an indirect reproposal of the thesis sustained in the De Iesu Christo Servatore by Fausto Sozzini. After reading the Lubbertus’ volume, in 1608, Johannes Wtenbogaert significantly write to the author: “Confutationem Socini tuam valde aveo videre. Ego hactenus Socini libros, quod coram Deo dico,

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5 Woude van der 1963, Sibrandus Lubbertus, p. 145. For the “Anti-Socinus” position of Lubbertus, see more extensively Woude van der 1963, Sibrandus Lubbertus, pp. 139–147.
6 Lubbertus 1611, Jesu.