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On the relationship between the Antitrinitarians in Poland and in Nürnberg: a letter addressed to Ernst Soner

The activities of the so-called Crypto-Socinian group emerging in Altdorf near Nürnberg at the Academia Altdorfina constitute a special episode in the early modern religious history. The group centred around professor Ernst Soner (1572-1612), who taught medicine and metaphysics, and secretly tried to spread the beliefs of the Socinian wing of Antitrinitarianism before the Lutheran community. Though the movement did not last long, being revealed and abolished shortly after Soner's death, during its short history a number of local students joined, and many foreign Antitrinitarian students visited Altdorf predominantly from Poland and Transylvania.¹ Due to its clandestine character they handled their correspondence with great care and the communication within the group was limited. This lends importance

¹ The history of Ernst Soner and the Cryptosocinianism at Altdorf was accurately described by Gustave Georg Zeltner, *Historia Crypto-Socinismi Altorfinae quondam Academiae infesti Acana*, Leipzig 1729. For modern summary, see e.g.: S.F. von Scheurl, *Die theologische Fakultät Altdorf im Rahmen der werdenden Universität 1575-1623*, Nürnberg 1949; D. Caccamo, *Ricerche sul Socinianismo in Europa*, "Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance", 26 (1964), pp. 573-607; K. Braun, *Der Socinianismus in Altdorf 1616*, "Zeitschrift für Bayerische Kirchengeschichte", 8 (1933), pp. 65-150; M. Balázs, *Altdorf und die Siebenbürger Unitarier*, in: *Radikale Reformation. Die Unitarier in Siebenbürgen*, ed. U.A. Wien, J. Brandt, F.A. Balogh, Köln-Weimar-Wien 2013, pp. 11-36, *Studia Transylvania*, Bd 44.

to this previously unknown letter addressed to Soner from Poland. The letter was composed in 1610 and provides insight into the practical activities of the Crypto-Socinian group, as well as into certain questions of theological nature, which testify to conflicts between the German and Polish Antitrinitarians. Therefore in the following pages my aim is to expose this letter.

The manuscript of the letter was discovered in the Unitarian archives of Kolozsvár (today Cluj-Napoca)² which already reveals the intensity with which contemporary Antitrinitarians sought to correspond and communicate. The sample is not the original letter, but its copy, which has been inserted into a volume with other documents collected with the intention to follow the most important events concerning their German and Polish fellow-Antitrinitarians. According to the date, the letter was written at Raków, in the centre of the Polish Socinianism, on 10 April 1610. The author's name is missing, thus we can only make assumptions. Nonetheless, it seems certain that the author was an important person, an active church leader, because he dares to express his opinion in serious questions in the name of his entire community, and he is well-informed regarding the situation of many Socinian thinkers and leaders. For instance, according to the letter, he was in contact with Adam Gosławski (ca 1577-1642), one of the most educated and most respected Socinians of the time,³ and he knew Michael Gittich (arriving back to his Lithuanian home from Altdorf in the same year),⁴ and Georg Ludwig Leuchsner.⁵ The author's account of Krzysztof Stoiński (Christophorus Statorius) is worthy of notice not only because of its rather personal tone, but also because it contains nothing but private information on him – in sharp contrast with information about other people mentioned in

² Magyar Unitárius Egyház Kolozsvári Gyűjtőlevéltára, a Lengyel Unitárius Egyház Levéltára (Archive in Kolozsvár of the Unitarian Church in Hungary, Archive of the Unitarian Church in Poland) 12.

³ About him, see e.g. A. Kossowski, *Gosławski Adam*, in: *Polski Słownik Biograficzny* (hereafter: PSB), vol. 8, 1959-1960, pp. 354-355; O. Fock, *Der Socinianismus*, Kiel 1847, p. 193; F.S. Bock, *Historia Antitrinitariorum maxime Socinianismi et Socinianorum*, Regiomonti et Lipsiae 1776, pp. 404-413.

⁴ M. Schmeisser, *Martin Ruarus – eine Zentralfigur des Altdorfer Antitrinitarismus*, in: *Religiöser Nonkonformismus und frühneuzeitliche Gelehrtenkultur*, ed. F. Vollhart, Berlin 2014, p. 86; R. Wallace, *Antitrinitarian Biography II*, London 1850, pp. 506-516.

⁵ See: F.S. Bock, *Historia antitrinitariorum*, pp. 430-431; G.G. Zeltner, *Historia Crypto-Socinismi*, pp. 129-144, 147, 250-252, 496.

the letter; it is also significant that he calls him simply *frater*, while other brethren are addressed as *frater in Domino*. On these grounds it is likely, though by no means certain, that the unknown author is one of Statorius' two brothers, Jan and Piotr (probably the former, because we know that he was still a pastor at Raków, while Piotr already lived at Czarniechów in 1610).⁶

Concerning the relationship of the author and the addressee, it is obvious from the letter's personal tone that it was not their first exchange. Based on this, the letter's author could have been Hieronim Moskorzowski (1560-1625), one of the most prominent leaders of the movement at Raków after Socinus' death, who had good rapport with Soner.⁷ Another likely candidate is Christoph Ostorodt,⁸ who successfully converted Soner during his earlier Western journey, and the exchange went on later too – we know of a letter to Soner from Ostorodt dated 1607, three years earlier.⁹ Despite the doubts about the letter's authorship, the importance of the document is unquestionable, because it addresses Soner in the name of the entire community of Raków.

The document published here could be the next piece of the correspondence between Soner and the Polish Brethren (from the latter side), because it replies to Soner's – now lost – letter written in April of the previous year. In the lost message the German professor excuses himself for not writing for years (“per aliquot ferme annorum spatium”) to the Polish Brethren, therefore it cannot be ruled out that after 1607 there was an opportunity to send a letter only at that time. We know that the communication between the Socinian groups was highly restricted and they used messengers in order to avoid discovery. The letters exchanged between Altdorf and Raków were delivered to the addressees by the Italian Giambattista Cettis and Georg Ludwig Leuchsner. Cettis lived near Krakow, Leuchsner was probably

⁶ About these three brothers, see S. Lubieniecki, *History of the Polish Reformation and Nine Related Documents*, transl. and interpr. by G.H. Williams, Minneapolis 1995, pp. 713 fn. 712, 719 fn. 806, 733 fn. 941; Ch. Sandius, *Bibliotheca Antitrinitariorum*, Warszawa 1967, p. 175.

⁷ See e.g. Ch. Sandius, *Bibliotheca Antitrinitariorum*, pp. 105-106; F.S. Bock, *Historia antitrinitariorum*, pp. 511-521; G.G. Zeltner, *Historia Crypto-Socinismi*, pp. 272-275.

⁸ See e.g. Ch. Sandius, *Bibliotheca Antitrinitariorum*, pp. 90-92; F.S. Bock, *Historia antitrinitariorum*, pp. 558-580; G.G. Zeltner, *Historia Crypto-Socinismi*, pp. 30-33, 281-286.

⁹ D. Caccamo, *Ricerche sul Socinianismo*, p. 587.

among the first converted by Soner's heterodox ideas.¹⁰ Thus it can be securely stated that there were interruptions in the exchange between the two communities even at that time, although Soner had plenty of opportunity as he was promoted to the Academy's rectorship in 1607/1608.

The letter deals with two subjects: one is the secret nature of the Altdorfinian community, and second is Soner's views on ancient philosophers, especially Aristotle with regard to the immortality of the soul. Concerning the former, the author expresses his own view which is presumably the condemnatory opinion of the entire community at Raków: "Scio quid sit, Clarissime Sonere, versari fidelem inter infideles, sibi multa, quae non deberat, tribuit, multa committit, quae Christianum minime decent." He wants to persuade him to leave the Academy and move to Poland, fearing that the Lutheran community harmfully influences the faith of the Antitrinitarian brethren at Altdorf.

This passage fits well into the context of what is called "Nicodemism" in modern research, a phenomenon peculiar to 16th and 17th century Reformation.¹¹ The expression comes from Calvin who, basing on Nicodemus, a Jew from the New Testament who had secretly worshipped Christ, applied it to those with heterodox ideas aiming to hide their religious beliefs for some reason. But the phenomenon is somewhat earlier: one might find hints in the writings of Erasmus of Rotterdam who propagated implicitly such religious attitude stating that only the inner religious conscience matters, the external formalities can be neglected.¹² Nevertheless, in the following decades authors expressing their opinions about the question tended to prefer Calvin's view who sharply reproached any kind of "pretence" and

¹⁰ Ibidem, pp. 579-580.

¹¹ About Nicodemism, see e.g. C. Ginzburg, *Il nicodemismo. Simulazione e dissimulazione religiosa nell'Europa del Cinquecento*, Torino 1970; L. Ronchi de Michelis, *Nicodemo e nicodemismo: testimonianza e dissimulazione*, "Fogli Campostrini", 6 (2014), no. 1, pp. 17-28; J.-P. Cavaillé, *Nicodemism and Deconfessionalisation in early modern Europe*, downloaded from <http://dossiersgrihl.revues.org/4499> (accessed on: 9 April 2015); G. Almási, *Politikai színlelés, vallási színlelés és a császári udvar nikodémusai a konfesszionalizáció korában* (Political Simulation, Religious Simulation and Nicodemites of the Emperor's Court in Time of Confessionalisation), in: *Színlelés és rejtőzködés. A kora újkori magyar politika szerepjátékai* (Simulation and Hiding. Political Roleplaying in Early Modern Hungary), ed. G.N. Etényi, I. Horn, Budapest 2010, pp. 33-66.

¹² G. Almási, *Politikai színlelés*, pp. 42-43.

“dissimulation,” and censured the Nicodemites as coward and careerist people.¹³ Erasmus himself was harshly criticized from both sides for not taking up a position in the controversy around Luther. Nobody wrote a work approving religious simulation, in the fashion as, for example, Machiavelli legalised political simulation, some authors tried to defend this attitude only implicitly.¹⁴ But the phenomenon, as the great number of anti-Nicodemite works demonstrate, was relatively widespread in Europe. Nonetheless, we have to notice that Nicodemism was not a unified system of ideas, but a conduct forced by practical circumstances which people of different religious background pursued, but they had only one thing in common: they did not want to abandon their beliefs, but they deemed it too risky to demonstrate it in their actual circumstances. Soner and members of the Crypto-Socinian community at Altdorf undoubtedly belonged to this group.

The letter written from Raków expresses the generally accepted view concerning Nicodemism when it is condemning the attitude of Soner and his fellows, but neither the expression (which became by then a quite negative attribute), nor the usually harsh tone connected to it is present here. The letter differs from the anti-Nicodemite works, because it does not talk about a group, or about the phenomenon itself, but addresses a person with whom the author maintained an especially close relationship, so confrontation was not sought for. The author emphasises the hazards being present in the situation, but did not accuse the addressee: the aim was to separate the behaviour from the person doing it.

The author is surely right that Soner painstakingly concealed his real beliefs: he shared his thoughts only with the small circle of his most trustworthy students, while publicly he behaved like a professed Lutheran, participating even in the Holy Communion – until his death, Soner’s proper beliefs did not come to light.¹⁵ Nevertheless, Soner’s actions aimed at concealing his conscience did not influence his real beliefs, and he continuously and successfully gathered new

¹³ J.-P. Cavaillé, *Nicodemism and Deconfessionalisation*, pp. 8-17; Ronchi de Michelis, *Nicodemo e nicodemismo*, pp. 21-25; J. Calvin, *De vitandis superstitionibus, quae cum sincera fidei confessione pugnant*, Genevae 1549.

¹⁴ G. Almási, *Politikai színlelés*, pp. 45-46.

¹⁵ About Soner’s Cryptosocinian activity, see G.G. Zeltner, *Historia Crypto-Socinismi*, pp. 35-45. He also says that the crypto-Socinian circle (extending the work *Homonymoscopia* of a certain Johann Moller) elaborated a cryptic code-system, finding out false names for every member of the circle.

members for the movement, and wrote works treating his theological ideas, though his most important work, a catechism written in German was published only after his death. Therefore, the author's anxieties in this respect seem to be overemphasized, which is also revealed by the fact that he does not refer to any personal examples, and maintains a rather general tone when describing the dangers of life among the unfaithful. The real danger for the Soner group was not the entanglement with Lutheran beliefs, but disclosure, which in fact happened after Soner's death. Interestingly enough, the author does not warn the German professor against this danger.

As for the second subject of the letter, the author mentions a work about the immortality of the soul written by Soner and published under a pseudonym in Poland, which became highly popular in Antitrinitarian circles. Since the author makes only a few references to this work, further details about the text's nature cannot be defined. Perhaps it is Soner's most popular work entitled *Demonstratio theologica et philosophica*,¹⁶ which focuses on questions of other-worldly punishment, or the *De unitate animarum*, which likewise deals with the subject of the soul;¹⁷ it is also arguable that the mentioned work is the mysterious polemical treatise about which there is only indirect evidence at our disposal. In the first volume of the *Bibliothecae Baumgartnerianae*, item no. 238 mentions under the name of Soner a certain manuscript entitled *Ratio qua probatur immortalitas animae* which has been identified by Bock as a treatise against Mathias Radecius.¹⁸ As far as we can conclude from this title and the letter's text, Bock's assumption can be reinforced, because the letter's author later suggests that Soner wrote about the individual immortality of each human soul in the work under discussion. In this case thus the letter is an additional evidence for the existence of the *Ratio qua probatur immortalitas animae* and the letter also refers to the content of the work.

¹⁶ However, as far as we know, this work came into light only in 1654 (see Ch. Sandius, *Bibliotheca Antitrinitariorum*, p. 96).

¹⁷ Nevertheless, this work remained in manuscript form (Ch. Sandius, *Bibliotheca Antitrinitariorum*, p. 97), while the letter speaks about a printed document.

¹⁸ F.S. Bock, *Historia antitrinitariorum*, vol. 1, part 2, pp. 894. See also: E. Achermann, *Ratio und oratio mentalis – zum verhältnis von Aristotelismus und Sozinianismus am Beispiel der Philosophie Ernst Soners*, in: *Nürnberg's Hochschule in Altdorf: Beiträge zur frühneuzeitlichen Wissenschafts- und Bildungsgeschichte*, H. Marti, K. Marti-Weissenbach, Köln-Weimar-Wien 2014, pp. 98-157, 118.

Before we try to canvass the work of Soner under discussion based on the references in the letter, it is worth investigating what do we know about Soner's ideas on the subject from other sources. For the available information is to some extent contradictory. In his *Demonstratio*, the German professor, following Aristotle and Averroes, criticised the traditional view on the soul almost in a materialist manner¹⁹ and he thought that the human *intellectus agens* is nothing else but the divine intellect separable from the human body which is part of the general soul.²⁰ This splits into parts due to the fact that it is being connected to matter, therefore after death it melts into the common intellect again. This idea is Soner's probably most irregular and audacious statement from which his Aristotelianism is evident, which is at any rate the most important characteristic of his philosophy, influenced partly by general philosophical currents of his age, partly by his teachers. Aristotelianism was popular at a number of universities, such as Padua, which Soner visited with great enthusiasm during his travels between 1597 and 1602, and Philipp Scherbe, Soner's predecessor, was the follower of the Italian Aristotelianism at Altdorf.²¹ Therefore Soner's doctrine, with its Aristotelian roots reviewed above, seems fairly radical, since it opposes the orthodox views about the immortality of the soul to the extent that it would have been condemned not only by the Catholic, but by the Protestant party as well. In contrast with this, in one of his other works, in the so-called "Soner catechism," he follows a more conventional standpoint and acknowledges not only the individual existence of the soul after death, but also the eternal punishment.²²

It is difficult therefore to collect Soner's thoughts about the immortality of the soul into a coherent system, nor can we be certain about what the author of the letter thinks of when he claims about the treatise under discussion that *perplacuit sane*. The author's opinion explained in a few sentences mirrors the official position at Raków on the subject, announced not only in the catechism, but

¹⁹ Quoted by E. Achermann, *Ratio und oratio mentalis*, pp. 119-120.

²⁰ D. Caccamo, *Ricerche sul Socinianismo*, pp. 585-586.

²¹ See e.g. R. Bröer, *Antiparacelsismus und Dreieinigkeit. Medizinischer Antitrinitarismus von Thomas Erastus (1524-1583) bis Ernst Soner (1572-1605)*, "Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte", 29 (2006), no. 2, pp. 137-154; W. Mährle, *Academia Norica: Wissenschaft und Bildung an der Nürnberger Hohen Schule in Altdorf (1575-1623)*, Stuttgart 2000, pp. 218-227.

²² E. Achermann, *Ratio und oratio mentalis*, p. 121.

some years earlier in 1601 in the *Colloquium* of Raków: “Mortui in nihilum redacti sunt, corpus evanuit, spiritus ad eum rediit, qui ipsum dederat, hoc est Deum.”²³ Resurrection and eternal life, thus immortality only falls to one’s share, if he truly believes in Christ and follows him (*p̄ii, fidentes*); the others remain dead forever.²⁴ Therefore if we consider the positive view of the letter’s author, then Soner’s work about the immortality of the soul could have contained something similar. Another statement in the text though seems to contradict this: “demus etiam omnium hominum animas esse immortales.” It can be assumed from the context that with these words the author thinks of Soner’s view in a concessive manner, the German professor thus could have taught the immortality of all souls. Even if it holds, it cannot be argued solely based on the expression of approval that this ‘immortality’ did not contradict the Polish system opposing the tenet according to which in the true resurrection and eternal happiness only the true believers might partake.

Therefore, as it ensues from the text, Soner had orthodox views about resurrection from the Socinian point of view, but at a certain point he surpassed the limits accepted by the letter’s author and his brethren at Raków: “ea Platoni, Aristoteli et luci naturae tribuere videris, quae sacrae literae non nisi Domini Jesu Christi Evangelio aperte tribuant.” Of course it is not explained here that Plato and Aristotle reached immortality solely with the help of natural law and their philosophy, but rather that with regard to the topic of immortality they recognized such important motives which one might perceive only with the help of divine revelation, as the letter’s author emphasized. The author therefore insinuates that according to Soner the doctrine of the philosopher of Stagira is completely essential to be saved and to perceive what is salvation. This “charge” seems to be bolstered by a recently found oration of Soner in which the main argument is that it is essential for a theologian to study Aristotelian philosophy.²⁵ But for the brethren at Raków “Plato, Aristoteles, et eorum similes... veram immortalitatem, quam primus Dominus Jesus Christus

²³ *Epitome colloquii Racoviae habiti anno 1601*, pp. 3443-3444.

²⁴ *Katechizm zboru tych ludzi, którzy w Królestwie Polskim i w Wielkim Księstwie Litewskim i w innych państwach do Korony należących twierdzą i wyznawają...*, Raków 1605, pp. 66-67.

²⁵ E. Soner, “An Organon Aristotelis studioso theologiae sit necessarium?”, Budapest, Országos Széchényi Könyvtár (National Széchényi Library), MS Quart. Lat. 752, fols. 92v-94r.

manifestavit, non viderunt.” Therefore “non indigebimus, nec Platonis nec Aristotelis, sed unius tantum Domini Jesu Christi auxilio, ut nos suo tempore immortales et haeredes Regni paterni faciat.”

The Polish position is not the rejection of philosophy or of Aristotle. Though in Antitrinitarianism philosophy was treated with ambivalence, even with rejection using the word *philosophus* as a disparagement for their opponents and branding branches of (Platonic) philosophy as which had corrupted true Christianity, it referred only to a making of a certain kind of philosophy, while its proper application was acceptable, even entirely beneficial.²⁶ The letter itself acknowledges Aristotle’s merits: “Quis enim in artibus liberalibus, rebus politicis terrenis hisce, contemneret vel parvi faceret saltem Aristotelem, qui tanquam singulare lumen aliquod in omnium est ore et oculis?”

Therefore, it was the limits of philosophy and not its existence that is under discussion here, for apparently there were some elements in Soner’s Aristotelianism which his Polish Brethren, less inclined to Aristotle, did not share. Despite the fact that the German professor himself emphasized in his oration *De libertate philosophandi* that it is not wise to cling immoderately to a certain authority, and that Aristotle himself thought so (since he himself made mistakes),²⁷ in practice his writings prove the opposite. Soner always thought about Aristotle as a starting point and practically he always tried to argue for his theses. Thus, without knowing the Soner’s work mentioned in the letter in its actual details, it is safe to say that this overestimation of Aristotle surpassed the limits which the Polish Socinians draw between philosophy and theology, and though the Altdorfian professor’s views were not to be rejected in itself, the method which lead to them was to be criticised.²⁸

In conclusion, the letter gives insight not only into the difficulties which arose in maintaining a correspondence between the

²⁶ The antitrinitarian opinion about philosophy is described in a series of articles by J. Simon, *A filozófia státusa az erdélyi antitrinitarizmus tradíciójában* (Status of Philosophy in the Tradition of Antitrinitarians in Transylvania), 1-3, “Keresztény Magvető”, 116 (2010), no. 2, pp. 163-171; no. 3, pp. 258-275; no. 4, pp. 377-385. He focuses on Transylvania, but analyses also general characteristics.

²⁷ E. Soner, “De libertate philosophandi oratio”, Budapest, Országos Széchényi Könyvtár (National Széchényi Library), MS Quart. Lat. 752, fols. 1r-8v.

²⁸ About Soner’s Aristotelism, see G.G. Zeltner, *Historia Crypto-Socinismi*, pp. 24; W. Mährle, *Academia Norica*, pp. 385-387, or the aforementioned articles of Achermann and Caccamo; also S. Wollgast, *Philosophie in Deutschland zwischen Reformation und Aufklärung, 1550-1650*, Berlin 1988, pp. 381-407.

Antitrinitarian groups of Nürnberg and Raków, but it also draws attention to the theoretical and practical discords between these communities: the Polish Brethren did not approve of the behavioural patterns forced by the secret nature of the crypto-Socinian group, or of Soner's excessive Aristotelianism. Nevertheless, the letter's author did not attribute crucial importance to these conflicts with respect to the good relationship between the two groups: vis-à-vis Soner the author retains a polite tone throughout the letter, and though he tries to point out the direction ideal according to his own view to Soner, it is evident from the text that their friendship did not depend on the acceptance of the author's opinion. As it is known from later events, this situation did not change until the movement's demise. Soner did not leave the Academy of Altdorf, nor did he cease to respect Aristotle's doctrine, and he maintained a good rapport with the Polish Brethren; moreover, they helped Soner's pupils after the movement was discovered. The brethren from Raków sent a deputy to Altdorf for the defence of Soner's imprisoned students,²⁹ and Crell³⁰ and Ruar,³¹ the two most committed pupils, moved to Poland and became important figures of the Socinian movement.

²⁹ K. Braun, *Der Socinianismus in Altdorf 1616*, "Zeitschrift für Bayerische Kirchengeschichte", 8 (1933), pp. 65-81, 129-150, 140-141.

³⁰ About him, see: Ch. Sandius, *Bibliotheca Antitrinitariorum*, pp. 115-121; F.S. Bock, *Historia antitrinitariorum*, pp. 116-138; G.G. Zeltner, *Historia Crypto-Socinismi*, pp. 188-198.

³¹ About him, see: Ch. Sandius, *Bibliotheca Antitrinitariorum*, pp. 114-115; F.S. Bock, *Historia antitrinitariorum*, pp. 713-735.

Christo Domino nostro, ex animo precor, et paratissima mea studia et obsequia reverenter defero.

Clarissime et Excellentissime vir, Domine, amice et frater in Domino nostro Jesu Christo reverenter colende et honorande. Literae Excell[entiae] V[estrae], quas superiore anno, die prima Mensis Martii, scribere ad me coeperat, die 21 Aprilis tandem finierat, mihi ante aliquot dies, vix bene scio a quo, redditae fuerunt; quibus te nobis purgas, quod per aliquot ferme annorum spatium nihil literarum ad nos dederis; quam nos excusationem et quae in ea continentur, facillime accipimus, sed interim tamen monemus et rogamus, ne vobis ipsis deesse, verum illorum Domini Jesu verborum meminisse velitis: *quemcunque puduerit mei et sermonum meorum in generatione hac adultera et peccatrice, pudebit illius et filium hominis, cum venerit in gloria patris sui, cum illis Angelis sanctis suis.*¹ Danda sedulo nobis opera est, ne talentum a Domino concreditum in terram defodiisse accusari possimus. Multum tibi, mi frater Sonere, datum, quinque talenta concredita sunt, fac, quaeso, ut alia quinque lucratum, te Dominus, in adventu suo, meritis laudibus efferat, et hoc elogio ornet: *Euge serve bone et fidelis, in paucis fuisti fidelis, super multa te constituam, ingredi in illud gaudium Domini tui.*² Quid nos juvaret, carissime frater mi, etiamsi maxime per omnem vitam nostram, nos ab hominibus quasi abscondere, latere, et vitam, ex sensu vulgarium hominum, placatam, tranquillam, quietam et beatam prorsus, vivere, et omnium ventorum verbera vitare possemus, omnes nos homines in manibus gestarent, et summis, etiam Regio honore et nomine afficerent, propterea non essemus beatiores. Non hos enim beatos et felices Dominus Jesus praedicat, sed persecutionem patientes propter justitiam; cum maledixerint nobis homines et persecuti fuerint, et propter nomen Domini Jesu Christi nos convitiis, mentientes, prosciderint: *Illis, ait, gaudete et exultate, quoniam merces vestra multa est in caelis.*³ Scio quid sit, Clarissime Sonere, versari fidelem inter infideles, sibi multa, quae non deberat, tribuit, multa committit, quae Christianum minime decent. Verum cum nemo sit, qui in ipsum et eius mores animadvertat; quod, per Dei gratiam fideles cum fidelibus habitantes faciunt; sibi indulget, existimat in portu jam navigare; cum interim in vasto illo carnalium cupiditatum

¹ Mark 8:38.

² See Matthew 25:14-30.

³ Matthew 5:10-12.

pelago adhuc fluctuet, et quomodo emergat vix viam aut modum inueniat; saepissime non inueniat, sed in mediis insanis istis fluctibus (quod Deus, pro sua bonitate, a vobis omen auertere dignetur) pereat. Arcta via est, mi Sonere, quae ad vitam ducit, quam pauci inueniunt, inventam paucissimi insistunt et conficiunt.⁴ Non omnia tam anxie pensitanda et examinanda sunt, utrum hic, quae in gloriam Christi et aedificationem hominum facimus, admissurus, ille non admissurus sit; Domino fidendum et libere agendum est, etiamsi maxime Amplissimus Senatus Norimbergensis, Nobilissimi Domini Scholarchae, et nescio qui non alii, invidia rumpantur, dummodo nos Domini Jesu Christi causam syncere et fideliter agamus, nihil erit periculi, ab omni malo nos liberabit ille Dominus. Uxor is etiam habenda est ratio, sed major Domini Jesu Christi; quem qui constituit sequi, necesse est ut abneget semetipsum. Tollat crucem suam et ita Dominum sequatur. Si quis enim ad eum venit, et *non odit patrem suum, matrem et uxorem, et filios, et fratres et sorores, insuper et animam suam, non potest ejus esse discipulus*.⁵

Dominum Gutichium⁶ non puto habuisse, quod in Domino Goslavio⁷ tantopere improbaret, non vult enim Dominus Goslavius Excellentiam Vestram latere, sed in propatulo versari, atque ita, si Altorfii vel Norimbergae forte non possit, alibi, et liberius, atque longe commodius, secundum Christum, vivere. Viro forti et cordato universus terrarum orbis patria est, modo in aliquo orbis angulo, salva conscientia vivere, et salutis suae rationem eam habere possit, quam nobis Dominus Jesus Christus dictavit.

Christophorus Statorius⁸ frater, non tantum, Domino Jesu Christo bene iuvante, respicit, sed in Volhinia, ducta nobilis viri, fratris in Domino nostri, filia, Ministrum agit, et talem se praebet, ut omnino

⁴ See Matthew 7:14.

⁵ Luke 14:26.

⁶ Michael Gittich: he went to the University of Altorf in 1607, accompanied by a young Polish Nobleman, of whose education he had the charge; about the beginning of the year 1610, having become known to the Curators, as a man devoted to heresy, he received a peremptory command to quit the town. About his life, see: S. Szczotka, *Gittich Michał*, in: PSB, vol. 8, 1959-1960, pp. 9-10.

⁷ Adam Gośławski (1577-1642); by that time he had become one of the most distinguished among the Socinians for his erudition. See also A. Kossowski, *Gośławski Adam*, pp. 354-355.

⁸ Krzysztof Stoiński, son of Piotr Stoiński (senior), between 1608 and 1612 he was priest at Lachowce. See A. Matuszewski, *Stoiński Jan*, in: PSB, vol. 49, 2013-2014, pp. 637-639.

speremus, id omne, quicquid agit, cessurum in Domini nostri Jesu Christi gloriam, Ecclesiae ipsius aedificationem et piorum omnium summam consolationem.

Non est quidem ex praescripto doctrinae Domini nostri Jesu Christi, sacrum dandum canibus, nec margaritae objiciendae porcis;⁹ sed non omnes etiam in eorum numero habendi sunt. Si qui sint qui renitantur, admonitionem grato animo non admittant, sed toto pectore, dediti prophanis rebus, abhorrent ab iis quae sapiunt sanctimoniam: toti immersi obscaenis voluptatibus execrantur puram castamque Evangelii doctrinam; hos merito fugimus et aversamur; sed si qui tales non sint, immerito etiam in canum et porcorum numero habebimus. De caetero Excellentiam Vestram Dominus pater noster, et Jesus Christus Dominus noster, in agnita veritate confirment, stabiliant, pectus ita muniant, ut superatis omnibus Satanae technis, mundi hujus illecebris, et carnalibus cupiditatibus, ita se componat et talem praebeat, ut Domini Jesu Christi totus sit, et ille te pro suo totum agnoscat et habeat, et nunc et in perpetua Secula.

Tuae litterae mihi nullum attulerunt taedium, sed summam voluptatem, et summum gaudium. Quarum utinam plures, etiamsi prolixiores, brevi videam, nullum me earum capiet taedium, sed quantum omnino per aetatem, affectam valetudinem, et otium licebit, libenter iis persolvam, et omnia faciam quae vobis grata esse omnino cognovero.

Responsio illa tua, de animae immortalitate, quae sub meo nomine, signi impressione non oclusa, integram ferme Poloniam, per integri ferme anni spatium longe lateque pervagata est, antequam mihi cum litteris redderetur, perplacuit sane, uno tamen excepto, quod ea Platoni, Aristoteli et luci naturae tribuere videris, quae sacrae litterae non nisi Domini Jesu Christi Evangelio aperte tribuant. Ita enim ait Paulus ad Timotheum scribens: *Ne igitur erubueris testimonium Domini nostri, neque me vinctum ejus, sed compatere afflictiones Evangelio secundum veritatem Dei, servantis nos et vocantis vocatione sancta, non secundum opera nostra, sed secundum proprium propositum et gratiam datam nobis in Christo Jesu ante tempora secularia: Manifestatam autem nunc per apparitionem Salvatoris nostri Jesu Christi, destruentis quidem mortem, illuminantis autem vitam et incorruptionem / immortalitatem / per Evangelium* (non Aristotelem vel

⁹ See Matthew 7:6.

naturae lucem). Timoth. 1. 8-9-10.¹⁰ Quod etiam ipse fateris, dum ais, Deum sua mysteria revelare tantum suis, quod quidem verum sit, sed particulariter, nempe de misteriis spiritualibus, ad quae certum sit lucem naturae non penetrare. Sed, meo iudicio, inter nos non fuit actum, nisi de misteriis spiritualibus, nempe de immortalitate, qua quid possit esse magis spirituale non video. A qua me vero abducere conaris, ad syderum magnitudines, Archimedem, Chimistas et id genus. Quos libenter fateor, ea exactius forte ex ingenii viribus a Deo naturaliter concessis, cognovisse, quam ipsos Domini Jesu Christi Apostolos. Si Plato, Aristoteles, et eorum similes, non viderunt immortalitatem eamque spiritualem, nihil illos vidisse certum est, nisi ea, quae sibi ex suo cerebro, in campis Elysiis, finxerunt; veram immortalitatem, quam primus Dominus Jesus Christus manifestavit. Roma 16. 25. Ephes. 3.9. Coloss. 1.26. Tit. 1.3. / I. Pet. 1.20. non viderunt. Et disputemus sane, carissime frater mi, et scribamus de immortalitate animae, quantum ejus omnino fieri poterit; demus etiam omnium hominum animas esse immortales, nisi tamen quis ita fuerit agglutinatus Domino, ut cum eo sit unus spiritus,¹¹ imo nisi quis Spiritum Christi in se inhabitantem habuerit, qui illum ad omnes Christianas virtutes, ultro et sua sponte exequendas, impellat, frustra de immortalitate verba faciet; in quo enim non invenietur Christi Spiritus, ad immortalitatem nulla ratione perveniet, etiamsi maxime animam esse immortalem sciverit, crediderit. Unus enim tantum Dominus Jesus Christus in vitam revocatur, ille tanquam caput, illi qui ejus Spiritu fuerunt participes, ita ut eum in se inhabitantem habuerint, tanquam corporis membra, omnes enim illi unus sunt in Christo Jesu: *primitiae Christus, deinde ii, qui Christi sunt in adventu ejus,*¹² praeter illos nemo. Enitamur igitur, mi Sonere, ut noster Spiritus fiat et sit revera particeps Spiritus Domini nostri Jesu Christi, tum bene nobiscum agetur; non indigebimus, nec Platonis nec Aristotelis, sed unius tantum Domini Jesu Christi auxilio, ut nos suo tempore immortales et haeredes Regni paterni faciat, in quo aeternum vivamus, et Deum altissimum, una cum electis omnibus, et sanctis ejus Angelis, in omnem deinceps aeviternitatem concelebramus, meritis laudibus efferamus, et pro infinitis ejus beneficiis immortales gratias agamus. Sed nescio, quisnam tibi persuaserit, Aristotelem

¹⁰ 2 Timothy 1:8-10.

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 6:17.

¹² 1 Corinthians 15:23.

a nobis vel contemni et posthaberi, vel parvi saltem fieri. In scholis, rebus politicis terrenis hisce (quamvis unde illae originem traxerint isto suo acumine cernere nequiverit) magni a nobis fit Aristoteles. Quis enim in artibus literalibus, rebus politicis terrenis hisce, contemneret vel parvi faceret saltem Aristotelem, qui tanquam singulare lumen aliquod in omnium est ore et oculis? Non immerito is diceretur cum ratione insanire. Sed in Ecclesia, rebus divinis et vere spiritualibus, merito illi praefertur Dominus Jesus Christus, qui a Deo Magister venit, et apud Deum, in ipso coelo, vidit, audivit et ea didicit, atque hominibus manifestavit, quae acutissimi philosophorum numquam viderunt, neque ipse Moses, aut ante Christum prophetarum aliquis. Ad juventutem nostram quod attinet, ea per Dei gratiam, ita instituitur, ut eam cum Adversariis quibuscunque et paribus et dispariis armis tuto committere queamus; imo ipsi summi apud vos philosophi et Doctores, illos (cum ad vos mittantur) paulo liberius disputantes non sustinent, quod praeter Aristotelis aliud et praestantius quoddam lumen admoveant, quod Aristotelicum, tanquam sol stellas, longissime superat. Quod lumen ita perstringit illorum oculos, ut illos, qui illud inferunt, ferre nulla ratione possint, fuga sibi miseri consulere cogantur, quod verendum non esset, si Aristotelem tantum spirarent, et ea quae in ipso cerebro enata sunt, posthabito praestantiori lumine, amplecterentur. Sed jam tibi longiori scriptione molestus non ero, dum fraterne saltem adhuc monuero, memor esse velis, nullam esse participationem justitiae et iniquitati, nullam communionem luci ad tenebras, nullam conventionem Christo ad Belial, nullam partem fideli cum infideli; nullus consensus templo Dei cum idolis; nos esse templum Dei viventis, ideo exeundum de medio eorum,¹³ qui puram Domini Jesu Christi doctrinam non ferunt, carnalibus cupiditatibus delectantur et indulgent, et immundum non attingendum, si velimus a Deo nostro recipi. Quomodo potest, quaeso, hominis Spiritu Christi illuminatus animus in iis acquiescere, quae nihil praeter terram et carnem sapiunt. Si homines quotidie tecum conversantes loquentes saltem audias, nihil audis nisi vana insipida, carnem tantum et ejus cupiditates spirantia, quae hominis Christiani spiritum non erigunt, sed deprimunt, immo opprimunt potius. Si illos quid facientes videas, non vides, nisi plerunque prava, perversa, iniquissima quaeque, quae cum corrigere non possis, ita te justitiae et aequitatis amantem torquebant, ut mori

¹³ See 2 Corinthians 6:14-17.

quam vivere et ista tam iniqua videre malis; durare te tamen oportet, si illorum consortio perfrui volueris. Si ab illis invitaris ad prandium, caenam, solennia nuptiarum, Academica, urbica et id genus alia, non propterea id fit, ut tecum de rebus divinis colloquantur, et tempus illud in timore Domini transmittant; quin potius, ut carnalibus cupiditatibus indulgentes, commessemini, et caenam in multam nostram producat; nimio potu, in honoratiorum praecipue gratiam, sollenniter assurgentes, multa et ornata habita oratione; oppleti et obruti, vix inde pedem aliquando efferre possitis; quamvis vobis videamini egregie sobrii. Haec vero si quem forte non juvent, saltationi se, multarum deliciarum comiti, immiscet, quamvis sobrius (iuxta ipsorum Ethnicorum sententiam) nemo saltet,¹⁴ ut ita tempus, se potius ipsum, fallat; et conscientiam, quae mille testium loco est, stimulantem interim ita solatur; non fuisti tamen plane ebrius, saepe, cum reliquorum more potuisses, non bibisti, sed quod visum fuit superfluum famulo clam ebibendum vel effundendum, vel in partem saltem seponendum, tradidisti. Et cum id non quotidie etiam, sed aliquando saltem, idque non in vulgo, sed inter honoratiores fiat, quis id nobis vitio verterit? Et quamvis conscientiam ea ratiocinatione exonerare non possit, existimat tamen, optime siti consulere, atque ad eum modum hominum ejusmodi consortio tuto perfrui, et sine aliqua labe inter nos versari posse. Si etiam non videri velit Arianus, necesse est, si non semper, aliquando tamen ipsorum fana adeat, se ipsorum similem esse ostendat vel fingat saltem, veritatem mendacio contaminari audiat, illorum sacramenta, quasi divina aliqua virtute praedita, ita admiretur, ut ea aliquando nutu saltem aliquo in honorem adducat. Sed dies me deficiet, si omnia persequi velim. Ad forum vos conscientiae remitto, quae vobis pluris esse potuerit, quam omnium sermo, et haec qualiscunque scriptio mea. Sed dices, unde haec ad te? Ab experientia rerum magistra, et mihi ipsi, cum post agnitam, Domini Jesu Christi beneficio, veritatem, inter hujus seculi homines aliquamdiu adhuc vixissem, ejusmodi non pauca evenerunt, a quibus liberari vix et ne vix quidem potui, nisi cum ex eorum medio exirem et me piis adjungerem, cum quibus Deum patrum nostrum et ejus filium Dominum nostrum Jesum Christum, et abjectis curis, et fucatis istis mundanis ineptiis, pie viverem. Quod ut et vos faciatis, propter salutem vestram, opto et Dominum ex animo precor.

¹⁴ See Cicero: Pro Murena 6.

Vale vir Clarissime et praestantissime, et te ex istis tricis tandem extrica, ut inter pios, absque conscientiae scrupulo pie vivere, et animi istum malum tandem abstergere possis, quod ut quam primum fiat, Deum ex intimis animi praecordiis iterum iterumque oro, cui te mi frater, cum charissima conjuge tua, in Domino sorore nostra, et charissimis atque reverendis in Domino fratribus, Amplissimis, Clarissimis et Spectabilibus viris, Dominis Fuerero,¹⁵ Leuchsnero¹⁶ et Domino affine tuo, si bene memini, et si qui sunt Dominum timentes, et Dominum Jesum Christum reverentes alii, ex animo commendo, eumque rogo, ut vos Spiritu suo Sancto rogat, ut faciat ex animo, quod ipsi placitum est, atque ita Regnum, quod omnibus sibi obedientibus per Jesum Christum filium suum unigenitum, Dominum nostrum promittere dignatus est, haereditario jure possidere possitis. Eos vero omnes, ut nomine nostro quam diligentissime salutare, et paratissima nostra studia et obsequia deferre digneris, majorem in modum rogamus, eorumque nos ad Dominum precibus et fraterno amori commendare. Ad conjugem etiam tuam, quod velle visus es aliquid scripsi. Adsit vobis omnibus Domini nostri Jesu Christi favor. Dabatur Rakoviae die decima mensis Aprilis. Anno a Christo nato MDCX.

Epistola Racoviae scripta A. 1610 fasc. III. 11.

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¹⁵ Probably Christoph Frer Jr., son of Christoph Frer von Hammendorf, *duumvir* of Nuremberg. He was one of the students Soner escorted in their peregrination from 1597 to 1602 (G.G. Zeltner, *Historia Crypto-Socinismi*, pp. 26-27).

¹⁶ Georg Ludwig Leuchsner: an early convert of Ernst Soner's at Altdorf; at that time, from 1607 to 1616, he was one of the advocates of Nuremberg. See G.G. Zeltner, *Historia Crypto-Socinismi*, pp. 129-144.