SOCINIANISM #2

Prayer:  
SCRIPTURE: Matthew 22:34-40  
Hymn: 648 "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"

About the middle of the sixteenth century and throughout most
of the latter half of this century Poland offered the largest measure
of religious freedom to be found anywhere in Europe, except in its
neighbor, Transylvania. These two countries became havens of refuge
from religious persecution for many peoples of many different religious
convictions from many different places. One important factor that helped
bring about this liberty of conscience was the liberating influence of
the Renaissance that spread among the educated and ruling class. Another
factor was the wealth, power and independence of the nobles who were
powerful enough to resist any attempt of the central government to
enforce uniformity. Many nobles opened their estates to persecuted
people and offered them a measure of protection. The church on one
estate might differ greatly from that on another estate. Churches
that enjoyed their own liberty could be very intolerant of anyone who
differed from them. Poland was filled with a multitude of differing
groups and the whole country was filled with religious discussions.

Often at the forefront of the religious movements and discussions
in Poland were men from the Radical Reformation in Italy who had sought
refuge from the Italian Inquisition. One of the most important and
distinctive of the products of the religious ferment in Poland and
Transylvania was the Socinian movement, sometimes called Polish Unit-
tarians and sometimes called Polish Brethren. The movement took its
name from two of the Italian Radical Protestants, Lelio Francesco Maria
Sozzini, and his nephew, Fausto Paulo Sozzini. Their name was latinized
as "Socinus."

LELIO FRANCESCO MARIA SOZZINI

Laelius Socinus (1525-1562) was born in Siena into a family that
had produced a long line of patrician lawyers. The most famous in the
line was Mariano Sozzini, the elder, who founded an academy that
influenced the young Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini who became Pope Pius II.
The family moved in the Renaissance circle strongly influenced by the
humanistic Rationalism of Lorenzo Valla. Laelius was the sixth son of
Mariano Sozzini, the younger. Laelius received a good legal education
in Padua. His interests turned toward religion and he studied Hebrew,
Greek, and Arabic. He later told Melancthon that his desire to dis-
cover the fountain of all law led him to the study of the Bible. Studying
the Bible led him to reject the idolatry of Rome. Converted to Protestant-
imism he made his way to Venice which was considered the headquarters of
Protestantism in Italy. In 1546 he met spiritualizing Anabaptists and
became interested in the various radical trends and their exponents.
In the summer of 1547 he set out for Basel. On the way he stopped at
Chiavenna where he came under the influence of Camillo Renato, the
founder of Italian Anabaptism, and his associate, Francis Negri, another
early Italian Anabaptist. They were in the midst of their controversy
with Mainero over the nature of the soul. Camillo Renato was the
champion of psychopannychism, the idea that the soul is mortal and dies
with the body; only the souls of the righteous will be recreated at the
resurrection. Also Laelius became interested in Camillo Ranato's doctrine
that the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are inner and spiritual signs only, not requiring any external elements or ceremonies.

Laelius registered in the University of Basel in the fall of 1547 and formed congenial friendships with Castellio, Ochino, and Curio. He studied Hebrew under Sebastian Munster and made the acquaintance of Boniface Amerbach who had been a colleague of his father's.

At the end of 1547 Laelius began extensive travels. He seems to have briefly visited Geneva and then the court of Margaret of Navarre at Nerac in France. In England he made the acquaintance of Peter Vermigli. In Holland he visited John Laski and the Fleming John Utenhove and made the acquaintance of Dutch Anabaptists. He was back in Geneva in the winter of 1558-59. Calvin was vexed by the many questions Laelius put to him concerning predestination, baptism and the resurrection. Calvin scolded him for his "darling vice of curiosity" and urged him to "lay aside the foolish itch for inquiry" and warned him against meddling in theological abstrusities. Laelius returned to Basel for a time and then moved to Zurich where he lodged with the Hebraist Conrad Pelliccan. He visited Wittenberg from July, 1550, to June, 1551, staying for a time with Melanchton, and then with Johann Forster, studying Hebrew. With the Lutherans he vigorously defended Bullinger's views of the sacraments. In spite of Laelius' spiritualism Melanchthon spoke favorably of him.

Laelius traveled on to Breslau, then to Prague, and on to Cracow where he stayed in the home of Francis Lismanino, head of the Polish Franciscans and confessor of the queen. From Poland he wrote Calvin giving him a description of the state of Protestantism in Poland and relating that rationalist opinions were beginning to challenge the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity.

Laelius returned to Zurich where he learned Calvin had had Bolsec imprisoned for questioning Calvin's doctrine of predestination. Laelius carried on extensive correspondence with Reformation leaders, especially Calvin and Bullinger, in which he asked many questions. He raised questions about predestination, the resurrection and the nature of the resurrection body, the doctrinal basis of the original gospel, the ground of salvation, the nature of repentance, and the nature of the sacraments. He asked Calvin whether a Turk just converted to Christianity should have his children baptized at once, questioning whether circumcision and baptism were correlative ordinances. He asked Calvin detailed questions about the organs, members, and functions of the resurrected saints. There was a growing suspicion among the Reformers that Laelius' questions were an expression of his convictions rather than an honest seeking for truth.

In 1552 Laelius returned to Italy where he hoped to win the Republic of Siena for Protestantism. With Vergerio he preached in Viccosopano and spent the late summer traveling through Valtellina. He went to Bologna. He spent two months in the fall in Padua with the crypto-Protestant professor of law, Matthew Gribaldi. He spent the winter with his father in Siena. On his way north he seems to have visited Camillo Renato in Rhaetia where he made the acquaintance of the Hebrew scholar, Francis Stancaro, who supported Camillo Renato against Mainardo in the controversy over the nature of the soul. Stancaro went on to Poland where he established the first Reformed parish in Poland.

Laelius was in Padua at the time of the execution of Servetus (October 27, 1553). Both Calvin and Beza suspected that Laelius collaborated with Castellio in De haereticis in which Castellio strongly condemned Calvin for having a man executed for following his conscience. Laelius' role in the De haereticis has never been proved. He did
strongly disapprove of the burning of Servetus, and the burning of Servetus did focus his attention on the problem of the Trinity.

By January 1554 Laelius was back in Basel. He was in Geneva in April, 1554, where he made incautious remarks about the doctrine of the Trinity that aroused Calvin. Laelius moved to Zurich. Calvin urged that Bullinger conduct an investigation of his orthodoxy. Laelius was sufficiently evasive and skillful enough to convince Bullinger of his orthodoxy. He spoke respectfully of the great creeds, declared that he abhorred the errors of Servetus and of Arian theology, and the errors of the Anabaptists, without saying what these errors were. On the sleeping of the soul and the Renatian Golden Age he was equivocal. He did reserve the right to modestly and reverently inquire of the elders to enhance his knowledge of divine things. He willingly signed an orthodox confession (Confessio de Deo) on July 15, 1555, and further pleased Bullinger with a declaration, "May all my desire be directed to this end—the resurrection of the righteous from the dead, that caught up in the clouds I may meet my Lord in the air and ever live with him, praising our God and Father world without end." Bullinger assured Calvin of his orthodoxy. Julius of Milan questioned the genuineness of his orthodoxy declaring that once one had imbibed the doctrines of Servetus, Renato Camillo, and the Anabaptists, it was impossible to ever get rid of their indelible impressions. Jerome Zanchi, a fellow Italian described him as a man full of divine heresies.

It seems that Laelius' own father disinherited him. When the father died in 1556 the Inquisition impounded the inheritance and arrested his brother, Cornelio and accused two other brothers, Celso and Camillo, and his nephew, Faustus, of Lutheranism. Laelius traveled to Wittenburg where he secured letters from Melanchthon, and then visited the courts of German, Polish and Hapsburg courts preparing an appeal to Cosimo of Florence for the recovery of the family estate. He was even received by Maximilian of Austria.

Having failed to secure the return of the estate he settled in Zurich in August 1559, living with a silk manufacturer, and working on his religious books. He was visited several times by his nephew Faustus who lived in Lyons. At his death on May 14, 1562, he left his books, papers, and library to his nephew. His main works were A Confession of Faith (1555) and A Dissertation on the Sacrements where he gave expression to his anti-Trinitarianism and the doubts about orthodoxy that for years he had been putting in the form of questions. When he died his neighbors were unaware of his real theological convictions.

FAUSTO PAOLO SOZZINI (1539-1604)

Faustus Socinus, the nephew of Laelius, was the founder of the Socinian Church. He was born in Siena, December 5, 1539, the only son of Alexander Sozzini and Agnes Petruci. The father and his grandfather had been famous jurists. Faustus' father died when he was two years old, leaving him and two sisters to be reared by the mother and grandmother. His boyhood was spent at the family villa. He spent considerable time in casual reading. An uncle, Celso, a nominal Catholic, founded a short-lived Academy and Faustus was enrolled as a student. He became interested in religious questions—perhaps through the efforts of his uncle, Laelius. When the Inquisition turned its attention on the family in 1559, Faustus found it advisable to move to Lyons where he entered business. He paid several visits to his uncle in Zurich. In 1562 he identified himself with the Italian congregation in Geneva. When Laelius died in 1562, Faustus went to Zurich to gather up his uncle's papers and to settle his affairs. He returned to Lyons and later that year pub-