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SOCINIANISM AND FREE WILL*

I

Defending the thesis of human free will (*liberum arbitrium voluntatis*) is extremely important in the theological-philosophical reflection of the Polish Socinians. From the very beginning, as early as the second half of the sixteenth century, the Socinians regarded free will as unquestionable.¹ Its existence is confirmed by the Bible, which provides irrefutable proof that when creating man God endowed him with the capacity for beginning new actions and making choices. What is more, the Socinians were profoundly convinced that regarding human will as free is necessary both from the perspective of

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¹ Following the distinctions introduced by Zbigniew Ogonowski and other scholars, we should differentiate between two stages in the history of the Polish Socinians (or the Polish Brethren, or Arians): the pre-Socinian and the Socinian ones, see his “Antitrinitarianism in Poland before Socinus: A Historical Outline,” *Roczniki Filozoficzne* 70, no. 4 (2022): 87–141; see also Konrad GÓRSKI, *Grzegorz Paweł of Brzeziny. A Monograph on the History of Polish Arian literature of the 16th Century* (Kraków: Polska Akademia Umiejętności, 1929); Lech SZCZUCKI, *Nonkonformiści religijni XVI i XVII wieku. Studia i szkice* (Warsaw: PWN, 1993); Lech SZCZUCKI, *Marcin Czechowicz. A Study on the History of Polish 16th Century Antitrinitarianism* (Warsaw: PWN, 1964).

morality and religion. If man were not endowed with free will, he could not be held responsible for his actions and, consequently, he could not be punished or praised. Morality—and religion, too— can only exist provided that human will is deemed entirely free.²

The two beliefs mentioned above—that we have within us freedom of the will and that there is no suggestion on the pages of the Bible that might undermine this truth—were the main reason the Socinians rejected the fundamental dogmas of the Protestant conception of Christianity (despite the fact that what inspired their formation were the writings of Luther and Calvin). This concerns (a), the doctrine of predestination understood as the inevitability of the eternal salvation of the elect and the eternal damnation of the unchosen irrespective of any perceived merits but according to the will of God; (b) the dogma of the original sin from which it supposedly follows that after the Fall of Adam man forfeited his free will; (c) the concept of divine grace which does not depend on merit; (d) the dogma of Redemption and Justification, in line with which through his passion on the Cross Jesus obtained God's forgiveness for all human sins; and (e) the doctrine of the divine pre-cognition which relates to all of man's future decisions.

The present article discusses the Socinian views on free will based on fragments of the treatise by Johann Völkel, *De vera religione* (bk. 5, chap. 18), thought to be the most comprehensive systematic presentation of the Socinian doctrine. We will focus on two questions that are of greatest interest to us here. The first question regards the way in which Völkel argues for the existence of free will. The second, in turn, concerns the manner in which he disproves the arguments of his opponents seeking to demonstrate that free will does not exist.

II

Before we properly discuss the first question, we would like to present several pieces of significant information concerning Völkel himself, the context in which his treatise *De Vera Religione Libri Quinque* was written and published, as well as its content. Johann Völkel (Volkelius) was one of the leading proponents of Socinianism—alongside Christopher Ostorodt, Valen-

² See Jonathan CRELL, *Ethica Aristotelica, Ad Sacrarum Literarum normam emendata*, Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum, in *Opera* (Amsterdam, 1665), 4:168a–169a; CRELL, *Ethica Christiana, seu Explicatio Virtutum, quorum in Sacris Literis fit mention*, Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum, in *Opera* (Amsterdam, 1665), 4:261a–261b.

tin Schmalz, Johannes Crell, Martin Ruar and Joachim Stegmann the Elder—who came to Poland from Germany at the turn of the seventeenth century.³ Völkel was born in Grimma, Meisen. He studied at the University of Wittenberg. He most probably arrived in Poland around 1580. At the synod of Chmielnik in 1585 he officially joined the Arian congregation. He held the position of rector at an Arian school in Węgrów (north west of Siedlce, today in Podlaskie Voivodeship) and later served as a minister of the congregation in Filipów, now Lithuania. Finally, in the period between 1611 and 1612 Völkel served as a minister in Śmigiel where he died in 1618.

The treatise *De Vera Religione Libri Quinque* appeared in print in 1630 in Raków. As already mentioned, it serves as the most comprehensive and extensive depiction of the Socinian religious doctrine. It comprises six books. It should be noted, however, that the first, entitled *De Deo et eius attributis*, was written by Jan Crell. The 1630 edition also has a separate pagination (pages 1–352), and technically, it is a distinct treatise. A reprint of this book was published in 1665, in Crell's *Collected Works*, released as part of the *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum* series (vols. 3–4).⁴ Therefore, Völkel's treatise proper begins with Book 1 and counts the total of 715 pages, size 4⁰.

Völkel completed the first version of *De vera religione* in 1612. Because the treatise was meant as an official presentation of the Socinian doctrine, it was passed on to the main leaders of the Polish Brethren for acceptance. They, however, did not find the first version satisfactory. Pursuant to the decision made at the synod of Raków, Völkel was requested to amend the text of the treatise. His editing work, however, did not proceed fast enough. It was probably for this reason that synods would on several occasions admonish Völkel for not working faster. Unfortunately, he died in 1618. The task of preparing *De vera religione* for publication fell to Daniel Franconius in 1619, who complied and in 1622 submitted Völkel's corrected and neatly rewritten treatise to a special board of the Raków congregation for acceptance. After two years of disputes, a commission comprised of renowned Socinian writers (Hieronim Moskorzewski, Adam Gosławski, Valentin

³ Information on Völkel comes from Ogonowski, *Socynianizm, dzieje, poglądy, oddziaływanie* (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza Aspra, 2015), 130.

⁴ On *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum* cf. Jeroom Verduyn, “‘Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum’: Histoire et bibliographie,” *Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce* 21 (1976): 197–212; *Bibliographia Sociniana. A Bibliographical Reference Tool for the Study of Dutch Socinianism and Antitrinitarianism*, comp. Philip Knijff and Sibbe Jan Visser, ed. Piet Visser (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Verloren–Doopsgezinde Historische Kring, 2004).

Schmalz, Johann Crell, and Martin Ruar) requested Crell to prepare *De vera religione* for printing. Again, this task took longer than expected. Eventually, the final version of *De vera religione* was completed in 1629 and subsequently qualified for printing.

It is worth adding that the second edition of *De vera religione* was published in 1642 in Amsterdam, in the printing house of the Blaeu Family. Unfortunately, after the Amsterdam Senate's ruling a large part of the print run was soon confiscated and publicly burned. The Dutch translation of the treatise, *Van de Ware Religie*, was published in 1663.

De vera religione was subject to frequent condemnation. The most extensive and recognised criticism was written by Samuel Maresius (Desmarets, 1599–1673). It was entitled *Hydra socinianismi expugnata* and published in Groningen between 1651 and 1662 (vol. 1 in 1651, vol. 2 in 1654). Interestingly, in his work Maresius reprinted the complete version of *De vera religione*, which elicited harsh criticism from many Protestant theologians. In the opinion of some of the theologians at that time (see Pierre Bayle's entry "Völkelius" in *Dictionnaire historique et critique*), Maresius did so at the prompting of the printer in order to encourage the highest possible number of readers to buy his book. The deprecated work by Völkel, almost impossible to find at the time, was meant to be a bait. As an interesting side note, the handwritten works by Locke, stored in the so-called Lovelace Collection (held in the Bodleian Library since 1942) include—among the outlines of many other works—also the started outline of *De vera religione*, handwritten by the philosopher himself.⁵

Völkel's treatise, that is, books 2–6 of *De vera religione*, constitutes a true overview of the Socinian doctrine. Book 2, *On the Works of God (De Dei operibus)*, describes the creation of the world, angels, the lower natures and man across twenty-one chapters. Additionally, its author reflects on the very nature of angels, matter and man. A separate chapter is devoted to divine providence understood as God's concern for the whole of creation, which manifests itself in him preserving his creation in existence and guiding it. In most chapters of book 2 Völkel focuses on the questions of religion and religious worship. He discusses religion of the first world, religion passed on to Abraham, and finally the religion of Moses. He draws attention to the rules regarding rituals, the choice and role of priests, the types of offerings made to God, as well as laws and judgements. The entirety of his

⁵ See Herbert J. McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: OUP, 1951), 327.

reasoning relies on numerous references to the Bible, including frequent citations—not unlike in all of the remaining books of the treatise. Book 3 is entitled *On Christian Religion (De religione christiana)*, and across forty chapters it presents, above all else, the figure of Jesus Christ as the one through whom God makes a promise of eternal life to man, and the one who brings eternal bliss and salvation to mankind. Völkel describes Christ as a prophet and a miracle worker. He reflects on his death, Resurrection, Ascension, kingdom, power over angels, demons and the earth, as well as his Second Coming. He speaks of the laws granted by Christ to those who believe, his concern about them obeying the laws, as well as reward for obedience and eternal suffering of the impious. Book 3 additionally offers the depiction of John the Baptist and his work. Book 4, *On Our Duty Set Out in the New Covenant, or the Commandments of Christ (De officio nostro in Novo Foedere praescripto seu de praeceptis Christi)*, composed of twenty-three chapters, can be defined as an exposition of morality. Most of its content serves as a reflection on Jesus's two precepts: "Love the Lord your God" and "Love thy neighbour", as well as the Ten Commandments. What Völkel additionally points out is the knowledge of God and Christ, faith and justification, atonement and prayer, as well as scandal and sin. Book V, entitled *On Aids Necessary to Persevere in Faith and Piety (De adiumentis ad perseverantiam in fide ac pietate necessariis)* and divided into thirty-one chapters, is a collection of various aspects of the Socinian doctrine. The author discusses both the things that drag people away from the path of faith and piety (the body, world, devil) and those helping us to walk this path (the Bible, Tradition). He also reflects on the Holy Trinity, consubstantiality of the Father and the Son, the nature of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and predestination. What interests us is chapter 18 of this book which is devoted to free will and discussed in some detail below. Nineteen chapters of book 6 (final), as suggested by the title—*On the Church of Christ (De Christi Ecclesia)*—address the Church itself, starting with how it is understood, including references to the Greek language as the origin of the term *ecclesia*, as well as providing explanation on the comparison drawn between the Church as Christ's body and his sheepfold, discussing rituals, the power of the Church, and finally the mission of its representatives.

Johann Völkel's considerations included in book 5, chapter 18 of *De vera religione*, which are directly concerned with the freedom of the will, form an unquestionable part of the great dispute over *liberum arbitrium*, started at the beginning of the sixteenth century by Erasmus of Rotterdam in his treatise

On the Freedom of the Will (De libero arbitrio, 1524) and Martin Luther in his work *On the Bondage of the Will (De servo arbitrio, 1525)*.⁶ It is hard to determine the main point of the great dispute over *liberum arbitrium*. This is because it involves numerous religious and philosophical motives, as well a multitude of problem-related aspects, starting with questions regarding the nature of divine providence, issues concerning *futura contingentia* and the role of grace within the mechanism of human action, eventually leading to questions on the will's relationship with what is presented through cognition—the entire sphere of sensual desires and emotions in particular.

What philosophical reflection on free will is primarily concerned with is what should be understood by freedom of the will, whether it is naturally free and if it has the capacity for accomplishing what is morally good. Over the course of sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the above questions were addressed in a variety of ways. This partly resulted from the fact that the very term *liberum arbitrium* was used to denote various things at that time. Moreover, what served as a significant reason underpinning such differences was the context of reflection on free will. On the one hand, this refers to the tensions between the proponents of voluntarism and the adherents of intellectualism (the primacy of intellect) and, on the other, the controversy between thinkers who stressed the depravity of human nature through original sin and those who advocated humanism, proclaiming complete trust in the inherent human nature. The Socinians—no doubt about it—rejected both voluntarism,⁷ which is a doctrine of the absolute dependence of good and evil from the uninhibited decision of God, and the view prevalent among Protestants on which man by himself cannot do anything good—the only thing that can redeem him is grace alone. Socinian thinkers were striving to demonstrate in a variety of ways that moral principles are of an absolute value and are not dependent on God's will but on something else connected with God—His perfection. They believed that thanks to reason man is able

⁶ Both treatises have greatly contributed to the emergence and course of the discussion on the existence of the freedom of the will in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Another author important for the development of the problem of free will was also Lorenzo Valla.

⁷ The opinion that what lies at the root of the Socinian theology is voluntarism was also favoured by Wilhelm Dilthey, who wrote “Der Rationalismus, Auflösung der Kirchenlehre durch Sozinianer und Arminianer [...] Die neue Glaubenslehre der Sozinianer,” in *Das natürliche System der Geisteswissenschaften im 17. Jahrhundert (Weltanschauung und Analyse des Menschen seit Renaissance und Reformation)*, 5th ed. (Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner, 1957), 129–44. This, however, is an erroneous opinion; see Zbigniew OGONOWSKI, *Socynianizm, dzieje, poglądy, oddziaływanie* (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza Aspra, 2015), 130, 507.

to discover these moral principles and thanks to his own endeavours follow their guidance.⁸

III

Let us move on to the main theme, free will, and to the content of chapter 18 *On Human Free Will (De libero hominis arbitrio)* from book 5 of *De Vera Religione*.

Völkel points out that the key objective of his reflection in this chapter is to, on the one hand, defend the existence of free will and, on the other, to contradict the idea that it is “never in the individual power of man to believe in Christ”⁹ and to be able to independently shape his own will in line with Christ’s precepts, even when the teaching of the Gospel is communicated to him and supported with confirmative arguments. Afterwards, Völkel goes on to state that in order to meet this objective one should, first of all, demonstrate that God on creating man granted him free will, which consists in man’s ability “either to choose and approve, or shun and reject”.¹⁰ Secondly, it should be demonstrated (which Völkel deems much more difficult)—contrary to both Calvinist and Lutheran claims—that there is no evidence that man forfeited the freedom of his will as a result of the Fall of Adam.

Already the short definition of free will quoted above makes it quite clear that Völkel identifies it with a power of being capable to choose between particular actions.¹¹ Thanks to such power humans are free with regard to

⁸ See Johann CRELL, *Ethica Christiana, seu Explicatio virtutum et vitiorum, quorum in Sacris Literis sit mentio*, Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum, in *Opera* (Amsterdam, 1665), 4:261a–265b.

⁹ “Nequaquam in ipsius hominis potestate esse [...] in Christum credere”; VÖLKELE, *Johannis Volkeli Misnici De Vera Religione Libri Quinque. Quibus praefixus est Johannis Crelli Franci Liber De Deo et Ejus Attributis ita ut unum cum illis opus constituat* (Raków, 1630), 544.

¹⁰ “Vel eligere approbareque, vel fugere atque improbare”; VÖLKELE, *De Vera Religione Libri Quinque*, 544.

¹¹ It should be noted that Völkel’s propositions concerning human free will overlap with what is stated in the essential book of Socinianism, i.e. the Racovian Catechism, in chap. 10, “On Human Free Will”. Naturally, what we find there is a belief in the existence of free will, but also a statement that the Fall of Adam, as an individual sin, did not deprive humankind of free will. We also find quotes and commentaries on the same fragments from the Book of Genesis and the Book of Psalms that appear also in Völkel’s work. The above-mentioned chapter from the Racovian Catechism also addresses the question of predestination. Völkel, however, expands on the entire argument, devoting separate chapters of his work to reflection on free will and predestination. The first edition of the Catechism was published in Polish (Raków, 1605) under the title *Katechizm zboru tych ludzi, którzy w Królestwie Polskim... twierdzą i wyznawają, iż...* (*The Catechism of the Congregation of People who in the Kingdom of Poland... Claim and Confess that...*). It was edited by Hieronim Moskorzowski, Walenty Szmalc, Piotr Stratorius-Stoiński and

their actions (they can perform an action or refrain from performing it) but also have the liberty to shape their decisions. On these grounds, Völkel states, one can reasonably assume that the human freedom of will granted by God is what distinguishes us from all the other created beings. It is thanks to the freedom of our will that we can be the agents behind our actions, rather than beings whose lives are subject exclusively to the workings of the forces of nature.

The way in which Völkel justifies the belief that God, on creating man, grants him free will is the following. At first, he points to the fact that from the very beginning, when creating the world, God “demanded the will for just action and innocence of life from humans, and punished the haughtiness of spirit with suffering.”¹² Such a demand makes sense only when we allow that humans, as created by God, apart from the ability to think and love, were always endowed with the capacity for choosing between various ways of acting. What is more, only on these grounds can we understand why God commends the spirit of Abraham (see Genesis 26), and condemns “Balaam’s ungodly intention to curse Israelites”¹³ (cf. Numbers 22 and 24:13). If it was the case that the wills of these people were “compelled by a certain immutable necessity”¹⁴ then God’s praise and reproof would make absolutely no sense. Also Christ’s words condemning Jews for refusing to come to Him to have life (cf. John 5:40) make sense insofar as Jews were given the possibility to choose—and their choice was not determined by necessity or fate.

Afterwards, Völkel points out that God left room “for virtue and vice, reward and punishment”¹⁵ also because He wanted us to have the opportunity to make a worthy offering. What we offer is an expression of devotion which is why a fruitful offering relies on the fact that whatever we offer to God remains within our power. God is not pleased with offerings made with what lies within “his power”. Among all the different types of sacrifice, the one

Johann Völkel. For more information see Alodia KAWECKA-GRYCZOWA, *Ariańskie oficyny wydawnicze Rodeckiego i Sternackiego, Dzieje i bibliografia* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1974); George H. WILLIAMS, ed. trans., *The Polish Brethren*, Harvard Theological Studies 30 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1980), part 1, 183–245; OGONOWSKI, *Socynianizm*, 423–27; Rajmund PIETKIEWICZ, “The Significance of Antitrinitarian Translations of the Bible into Polish in the Dialogue between the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Eastern and Western Europe,” *Verbum Vitae* 41, no. 2 (2023): 373–93, <https://doi.org/10.31743/vv.15126>.

¹² “Et recte agendi voluntatem, et vitae innocentiam ab hominibus exegisse, animique contumaciam suppliciiis mactasse”—VÖLKEL, *De Vera Religione Libri Quinque*, 544.

¹³ VÖLKEL, 544: “Nefarium [...] Balaami de Isrealitis maledicendo consilium.”

¹⁴ VÖLKEL, 544–45: “Necessitate quadam immutabili [...] adstrictae essent.”

¹⁵ VÖLKEL, 545: “Virtuti vitioque, praemio ac poenae.”

that is most effective and, at the same time, pleasing to God is one that we make freely, i.e. one that is accompanied with a heartfelt decision to live according to his will.¹⁶ According to Völkel the above finds confirmation in the words of God himself expressed on the pages of the Holy Scripture with regard to offerings where we can read that he has no interest in external rituals or material sacrifice, but in sincere piety, obedience and keeping the moral commandments. For instance, in Psalm 50 (50:9–14 KJV) we come across the following words: “I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds. For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High....”¹⁷

According to Völkel the above interpretation of sacrifice understood as something dependent on us—contrary to what depends and belongs to God—does not in any way reduce God’s dominion over creation. There should be a distinction between the internal acts of our will that God placed in our power as the only one, from the external world whose sole ruler is God and in which nothing can come to be without His decision. Thanks to free will, humans make decisions in accordance with their own thoughts, while the capacity for the full realization of these decisions is determined by divine help. God supports man while additionally allowing him room to act in conformance with his own will. In Völkel’s opinion God assists human intentions in two ways. The first way is the “external” (*externa*) help which, on the one hand, relies on threats and promises, on the other. Promises hold greater power than threats since positive encouragement is more motivating

¹⁶ The idea of freedom holds a particular position in the religious doctrine of the Socinians. At every possible opportunity they would stress that Christian religion is a spiritual religion and that its essence resides in freedom. This assumption also underlies their argument for religious tolerance. See, e.g., Jan Crell’s treatise *Vindiciea pro religionis libertate* (1637).

¹⁷ In Völkel’s opinion a perfect interpretation of the above comes with the words of Flaminius: “Lead your life in a pious and holy way” (*Vitae tuae cursum pie sancteque institute*)—Marcus Antonius FLAMINIUS, *In Librum Psalmorum brevis explanatio* [Paris, 1545], 116; Marcantonio Flaminio [1497/98–1550] was an Italian humanist and poet). It is worth observing that highlighting the role and significance of spiritual or internal offering in Socinian thought is closely connected with their criticism of external religious worship, ceremonies and rites. The true worship of God, they argued, consists in keeping the moral commandments. The Socinians demonstrated that authentic piety does not rely on external religious practices but on internal devotion and leading a moral life in accordance with God’s will.

and inspires people to search for God more strongly. The second type of assistance provided by God is “internal” (*interna*) and more discreet. It consists in strengthening our faith by means of an internal affirmation of God’s promises and a more profound understanding of his plans for us. What is crucial is that God’s help does not take away the freedom of the will—on the contrary, it supports and perfects it.

Nor does obedience to God result from faith alone; it relies on our submitting to his will voluntarily. The quintessence of obedience is acting in compliance with the ethics of the Gospel. This means that what constitutes the true essence of piety is acting in accordance with the teaching of Christ. Adopting a perspective of this kind is linked to putting emphasis on practical actions and reducing the dogmas of faith necessary for salvation to a minimum. Völkel stresses that what is in fact more significant from dogmas themselves are the appropriate moral attitudes following from the Gospel. In this way obedience to God is manifested not only through faith but—above all else—through concrete actions congruent with the teaching of Christ, all of which forms the essence of a truly Christian life.

The second question that Völkel addresses on the first pages of the chapter under discussion (chap. 18) concerns, as has already been mentioned, the fact that there are no grounds to claim that man forfeited his freedom as a result of the Fall of Adam. The view that the sin of Adam destroyed the freedom of human will, rendering man incapable of choosing what is good and becoming worthy of salvation without the grace of God, was commonly accepted, by Lutherans and Calvinists. Both these theological traditions stressed the necessity and centrality of divine grace in the process of redemption and renewal of human will. It was believed that the full freedom of the will is restored only through God’s action, not by means of human endeavours. Völkel regarded this view as incorrect and—not unlike other Socinians—was fully convinced that there are many serious arguments that explicitly contradict such a position.¹⁸

¹⁸ It should be noted that the Socinians accepted the principle of reformed theology which states that our justification happens through faith alone (*sola fide*). However, they gave the principle of *sola fide* their own interpretation. Salvation is neither a consequence of the sanctity of our life, nor of our innocence. It is a gift from God, provided that we believe in the mission of Christ. What is crucial here is that according to the Socinians the possibility of having faith in Christ’s mission is granted to all people that the Gospel is preached to—not only those who are chosen by God by an arbitrary decree. What is even more, faith is not merely a belief that the words of Christs are true; it additionally requires obedience to God’s commands, i.e. acting according to the ethics of the Gospel. See Sozzini’s *Justificationis nostrae per Christum Synopsis [...]*, I, p. 603a, and *De Jesu Christi Servatore*, II, pp. 240b–241 (both published in Bibliotheca

Firstly, the nature of sin itself in no way requires that the sin of man should be punished with him being deprived of free will. God might have given a different punishment for it, which was exactly what he did (see Romans 3:16–19). What is more, we should not overestimate Adam's sin. Having been granted free will by God, Adam committed one sin which should not be regarded as an event with the capability to destroy the entire divine plan for the world. It is also unreasonable to claim that this one act of disobedience on the part of Adam might have deprived the whole of mankind of the capacity for doing good.

Secondly, adopting the position that as a consequence of the sin of Adam God stripped all humans of free will stands in clear contradiction to divine justice. Adam sinned on his own behalf, not as a representative of the entire mankind. Moreover, no one can act unauthorised on behalf of others and, with all certainty, Adam received no such authorisation from future generations. The claim that the sin of Adam is passed on to his descendants is indefensible since neither sin nor punishment can be inherited. Punishing people for what they had no control over is profoundly contrary to the notion of justice. The idea that the sin committed by Adam can form grounds for depriving all men of freedom is nonsense.¹⁹

Thirdly, the punishment suffered by Adam was his exile from paradise and the difficulties relating to living in the natural world. Physical death is not his punishment because Adam was mortal by nature and would have to die—even had he not committed his sin. In reality, physical death is a consequence of natural processes, not a punishment for sins.

Fourthly, one is mistaken in supposing that Christ came to redeem the world on account of the Fall of Adam. Völkel argues that Christ would have arrived even if Adam had not sinned since bestowing immortality upon the obedient was assumed within God's plan. Consequently, there is no necessary connection between the sin of Adam and Christ's sacrifice, which would be meant as compensation for original sin. The sacrifice made by Christ is a blessing that is not directly related to the nature of original sin.

Fratrum Polonorum); see also Ludwik CHMAJ, *Faust Socyn (1539–1604)* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1963).

¹⁹ “Cum enim ... Deum illos, qui cum iusticia minime vivunt, omnino etiamnum punire, et aliquando sempiterni interitus supplicio puniturum esse compertissimum sit; nonne qui opinionem istam defendunt, et peccati autorem, et iniustissimum eum faciunt, qui cum hominis voluntatem tanta necessitate devinctam esse voluerit, nihilominus tamen, quia verbo illius audiens non sit, suppliciiis eum mactare non dubitet.” VÖLKELE, *De Vera Religione Libri Quinque*, 547.

These are the main thoughts presented in the first part of chapter 18. Let us now turn to Völkel's further argument.

IV

In the second part of the chapter entitled "De libero hominis arbitrio"²⁰ Völkel focuses on a critical analysis of arguments invoked by the adherents of the view which states that as a result of the sin of Adam humans became deprived of the freedom of the will. According to Völkel, such arguments can be divided into two kinds. The first kind, in his opinion, relies on false principles. The other, in turn, is founded on true principles which, however, are incorrectly understood.

Let us start from arguments based on false principles. Völkel believes that they rely on a mistaken understanding of the consequences of original sin. They work on the assumption that original sin, consisting in having wicked desires or a proclivity to sin, was passed on from Adam to all of his descendants in a natural way. Following this line of reasoning, it is further assumed that if Adam had not sinned, all of his descendants would have been free from the proclivity to sin. Moreover, it is believed that it is exclusively as a consequence of original sin that the human will was restrained in such a way as to solely desire, decide on and do evil, unless owing to some Divine and concealed will it might turn towards the opposite.

Völkel contradicts all of the above. He believes that such comprehension of original sin and its consequences "is contrary both to common sense" (*contrarium sanae mentis rationi*), as well as the Bible. Most importantly, it is entirely improbable and completely alien to correct judgement for one sinful action to have such strength and to be capable of destroying the whole nature of man. Therefore, a much more reasonable view is one according to which the sin committed by Adam destroyed his nature—and his nature alone. This being the case, we have no reasons to presume that the penalty that God imposed on Adam affected the whole of future mankind.

Nowhere in the Bible is it suggested that the sin of Adam is in fact responsible for the corruption of the human race, nor that as a result of the Fall of Adam all men lost their capacity for doing good. On the contrary, we come across numerous examples and remarks contradicting such a thesis. For instance, Abel, similarly to Cain, was born of Adam but "the paternal sin

²⁰ VÖLKELE, 547ff.

was not implanted in him”²¹ in a way that would ruin his nature and render it incapable of living in accordance with divine commandments. Quite the opposite, we can read in Holy Scripture that Abel “because of his zealous piety was named just”²² (see Matthew 23:35, 1 John 3:12, Hebrews 11:4). Not unlike Enoch, descended from Adam, who had nature and will unblemished by wickedness, which is confirmed by the fact that “he was taken to heaven solely because of his remarkable piety”²³ (see Genesis 5:22–24, Hebrews 11:5). Also Noah, described in the Bible as “a just man and perfect in his generations” (see Genesis 6:9, Hebrews 11:7 KJV), is another example of a person whose nature and will were not destroyed by original sin.

The place in the Bible that is frequently referred to by the proponents of the traditional doctrine of original sin is the fragment of the Book of Genesis: “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth ... etc.” (Genesis 6:5–6 KJV; see also Genesis 8:21). In Völkel’s opinion the above fragment does not in any way support the view that the sin of Adam was transferred to his descendants and that, as a result, people can only dwell on evil. Firstly, it is not stated in the fragment in question that wickedness is an innate trait of the human race. Secondly, through Noah God cautions people against wickedness and, when his admonitions are ignored, he sends destruction in the form of the Flood. Völkel argues that the first of the above actions, i.e. *admonition*, would be unfounded and the second, i.e. the Flood, would be unjust if wickedness was man’s innate trait. After all it is against the law of God to punish someone for not doing something they could not have done. Only the person who is able to obey God’s commands but does not do so and obstinately persists in ignoring them can be punished in accordance with divine law. Only on that condition does the punishment conform to justice. Thus, Völkel concludes, the meaning of the interpreted words is that humans were always inclined to do evil not because of their nature, but at the voluntary urging of the spirit which is why they brought the punishment of the Flood upon themselves through their own fault. They would have been able to avoid it entirely if—like Noah—they devoted themselves to zealous piety, or at least—on being cautioned by him—wished to come to their senses and mend their ways.

²¹ VÖLKEL, 548: “Nec tamen peccatum paternum ei ingeneratum fuit.”

²² VÖLKEL, 548: “Ob pietatis studium, iustum eum appellatum fuisse.”

²³ VÖLKEL, 548: “Propter singularissimam pietatis praestantiam in coelum translatus est.”

Next, Völkel points to another instance from the Book of Moses, where it is stated that “the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth”²⁴ (see Genesis 8:21 KJV). Also in this fragment there is no mention of wickedness being an innate trait of man. Quite the opposite, the fragment speaks of voluntary iniquity that humans, from their youth, are inclined towards of their own free will. What is more, according to Völkel the fragment in question—contrary to what is claimed by some—does not suggest that “the imagination of man’s heart *is* [est] evil from his youth” (italics mine). This is due to the fact that in Hebrew the verb was not expressed, but because of the context we should surmise that the verbal form is not in *indicatīvus* but in *conjunctīvus*. After all, God punished people with the Flood only once, even if the imagination of man’s heart *was* evil from his youth.

Other fragments from the Bible that are often invoked in order to demonstrate that the sin of Adam ruined human nature can be found in the Book of Job (see Job 4:17 et al., 14:4, 15:14–16, 25:4 et al.). They suggest that man is wicked, worthless, or abominable and “drinketh iniquity like water” (Job 15:16b KJV). According to Völkel it does not follow from these fragments that human nature is corrupt, nor that the corruption in question originates from the sin of Adam.²⁵ What is more, as Völkel stresses, what follows from the presented fragments of the Bible, but also from other suggestions included in the Book of Job, e.g. in chapter 4 (verses 17–18) and chapter 25 (verses 4–5), is that not only humans, but also angels, and even heaven and stars are said to bear the mark of impurity that absolutely no one regards as a consequence of original sin.

Yet another verse that the proponents of the traditional doctrine of original sin often invoke contains the words uttered by David: “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5 KJV). However, one cannot assume the validity of the doctrine of original sin based on these words, argues Völkel.²⁶ The question that arises at this point is the following: how should we understand the words uttered by David? Literally or maybe metaphorically? If we take them literally, there is no

²⁴ VÖLKELE, 548: “Figmentum cordis humani malum *est* ab adolescentia” (italics mine).

²⁵ In order for this to be true, Völkel argues, the proponents of the traditionalist doctrine of original sin would have to demonstrate that “something like this does not happen simply because of man but out of necessity and quite naturally, that it does not happen thanks to human free will; and not only that, but also that it springs from the sin of Adam” (cum non simpliciter aliquid tale ab hominibus fieri, sed necessario ac plane naturaliter, non libera hominum voluntate fieri; neque hoc tantum, verum ex Adami peccato id profluere); VÖLKELE, 550.

²⁶ Cf. VÖLKELE, 551ff.

need to apply what David recognizes in himself to all humans. Moreover, David does not suggest in the above verse that the reason why he was born *in iniquity* originates from the sin of the first man. He merely states that he was conceived in sin by his own mother. Also when we take David's words to have a metaphorical meaning, there are no grounds to treat them as a conclusion drawn from the doctrine of original sin. The manner of speech commonly used in the Bible to emphasize a particular person's wickedness and ungodliness—so encompassing that it appears entirely innate to them—is exactly the one that we can also detect in the case of David's words. Examples can be found, for instance, in the following fragments: Psalm 58(57):4, Isaiah 48:2–8, 49:1, and John 9:34.²⁷

Let us now move on to Völkel's criticism of the arguments that rely on true principles which are, however, understood wrongly. All of the above arguments, in his opinion, are designed to prove that our salvation resides exclusively in the hands of God and we have no say or freedom in this respect. Some of these arguments, Völkel says, speak of "divine decrees" (*de divinis decretis*), and others of "divine acts" (*de divinis factis*).²⁸ Arguments relating to Divine decrees are discussed by Völkel in the chapter on predestination.²⁹ As far as arguments relating to divine acts are concerned, he addressed the question in the following manner.

According to Völkel the adherents of the traditionalist doctrine of original sin often maintain that it is God who converts people and that it is him who opens their hearts and imprints his will on them. The story that is supposed to serve as a confirmation of this claim is that of Lydia whose heart was opened by God (Acts 16:14). However, Völkel believes that there is nothing in the story that might compel us to concede that the conversion of Lydia occurred through the power of a hidden force that Lydia could not resist.³⁰ It is much more plausible that it happened thanks to the strength of the words uttered by Paul that were put in his mouth by the Lord and which appeared Divine to the righteous woman. Deeming his speech as the most worthy, Lydia focused all of her attention on it and then accepted it. What is more, even if we assume that Christ—wishing to lead this religious woman to true

²⁷ According to Völkel a similar manner of speaking—but to express something opposite—is used by Job with respect to himself, who says: "For from my youth he was brought up with me, as with a father, and I have guided her from my mother's womb" (Job 31:18 KJV).

²⁸ Cf. VÖLKEL, 552.

²⁹ Cf. VÖLKEL, 523ff. (chap. 17, "De aliis quibusdam dogmatibus, et primum de praedestinatione").

³⁰ Cf. VÖLKEL, 552–53.

faith in a place where His name was not yet known and where there were no examples of true faith—used miraculous power and stirred her spirit with mysterious force to focus on Paul’s speech, it still does not follow that the power was of such strength that Lydia could in no way resist it or behave differently. It demonstrates even less so that the power was great enough for Lydia not to have been able to reject the faith that she had once adopted. Furthermore, Lydia’s example should not be superimposed on everyone who believes in Christ but should be treated as exceptional.

In turn, while invoking fragments of the Letters of Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians (2:8) and to the Philippians (1:29), it is often stated that faith is a gift from God. Völkel thinks, however, that the fragments in question by no means serve as evidence that in accepting or rejecting faith man “does not make use of the choice of his will and freedom”.³¹ Obviously, there are reasons why faith should be called a gift from God since it was given to us without any merit on our part and exclusively thanks to God’s benevolence. It does not follow, however, that faith was placed in us against our will or with us being completely passive. This is visible in Paul’s Letter to the Philippians, where he speaks thus: “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake” (Philippians 1:29 KJV).

In a similar way, the words of Paul the Apostle that “God has mercy on whom He wills and others, conversely, He hardens”³² (Romans 9:14–18) should also not be set against the doctrine of free will. It does not follow from them that man was deprived of all freedom of believing or not believing, or of being obedient to God or not. After all, hardening of heart is a heavy punishment. And punishment requires the preceding guilt of man. There can be no guilt, however, without the freedom of will. Pharaoh, from the example (see Exodus 11:10) used by the Apostle while uttering his words regarding the hardening of heart, earned his punishment with his most grave wickedness.

St. Paul’s subsequent words referring to “the potter and his vessel” (cf. Romans 9:21 KJV) should not be interpreted to mean that God created some people for destruction whereas others to benefit from eternal happiness. According to Völkel, what is meant by these words is that just as a potter is free to create one splendid vessel and one unsightly with the same clay, it is also in God’s power to “confer His saving grace on those who believe on their

³¹ VÖLKELE, 554: “Voluntatis suae arbitrio ac libertate non uti.”

³² VÖLKELE, 555: “Deum, cuius velit, misereri, quem contra velit, indurare.”

own, whatever their situation and state; and to remove it from those who themselves do not want to embrace faith, and to harden them".³³ Additionally, Völkel believes that fragments in which one can read that "God did not give man a heart to understand, and eyes to see, and ears to hear"³⁴ (see Deuteronomy 29:3) do not allow one to draw conclusions regarding the "servitude of human will" ([concludere] humani arbitrii servitatem).³⁵

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These are the most characteristic and crucial arguments presented by Völkel in chapter 18, book 5 of *De vera religione* in order to defend the thesis of human free will (*liberum arbitrium voluntatis*). In Völkel's opinion, what serves as the main justification for adopting the existence of free will are arguments drawn from the Bible. Based on these one can have no doubt that the existence of free will belongs among the fundamental theses of Christian religion. Therefore, whoever negates the freedom of the will, not only undermines one of the truths of Christian theology, but also attacks the entire intellectual orientation centred around the teaching of Christ.

It is worth stressing that Völkel was well aware of the problem of divine precognition (*praescientia divina*), which emerges in the context of presenting the defence of free will. After all God is, by definition, omniscient, hence knows also the future. Does it not undermine the idea of human free will?

Völkel, similarly to other Socinians, rejected the solution to this problem proposed by St. Augustine, Boethius and St. Thomas Aquinas, in line with which God resides outside of time—that is, not only is He eternal, but also entirely atemporal. Völkel was of the opinion that the solution to this problem lies in the correct understanding of what divine omniscience is. And the way the omniscience of God should be understood is that God knows everything that is possible to be known (*omnia quae scibilia sunt*). Some things, for instance man's free decisions, are by their nature unknown to God. When stating that, on the one hand, God is omniscient, i.e. His cognition spans both the past, the present, as well as the future, but that, on the other hand, God does not know future free decisions made by humans, we are not self-

³³ VÖLKEL, 556: "Salutarem suam gratiam in illos conferre, qui ipsi confidunt, cuiuscunque tandem loci ordinisque sint; et eandem ab illis, qui fide ipsum complecti nolunt, remove, eosque indurare."

³⁴ VÖLKEL, 557: "Non dedisse Deum hominibus cor ad intelligendum, et oculos ad videndum, atque aures ad audiendum."

³⁵ VÖLKEL, 557.

contradictory. After all, we cannot demand of God to know what is not possible to be known.

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SOCINIANISM AND FREE WILL

Summary

The present article discusses the Socinian views on free will based on fragments of Johann Völkel's treatise, *De Vera Religione Libri Quinque. Quibus praefixus est Johannis Crelli Franci Liber De Deo et Ejus Attributis ita ut unum cum illis opus constituat*, published by Typis Sebastiani Sternacii, Raków, 1630 (bk. 5, chap. 18). This work is considered the most comprehensive systematic presentation of the Socinian doctrine. The article focuses on two questions: first, the way in which Völkel argues for the existence of free will; and second, the manner in which he disproves the arguments of his opponents who claim that man forfeited the freedom of his will as a result of the Fall of Adam.

Keywords: Völkel; Socinian; free will

SOCYNIANIZM A WOLNA WOLA

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł omawia poglądy socyniańskie na temat wolnej woli, opierając się na fragmentach traktatu Jana Völkela, *De Vera Religione Libri Quinque. Quibus praefixus est Johannis Crelli Franci Liber De Deo et Ejus Attributis ita ut unum cum illis opus constituat*, wydanego przez Typis Sebastiani Sternacii w Rakowie w 1630 roku (księga V, rozdz. XVIII). Dzieło to uważane jest za najobszerniejsze systematyczne przedstawienie doktryny socyniańskiej. Artykuł koncentruje się na dwóch zagadnieniach: w jaki sposób Völkel argumentuje na rzecz istnienia wolnej woli, oraz w jaki sposób obala on argumenty swoich przeciwników, którzy twierdzą, że człowiek utracił wolność woli w wyniku grzechu Adama.

Słowa kluczowe: Völkel; Socynian; wolna wola