

# Faustus Socinus's *A Tract* Concerning God, Christ, and *the Holy Spirit*

## Introduction, Translation, and Contemporary Relevance

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### *Introduction*

As I pointed out in a recently published book chapter,<sup>1</sup> one of the values of studying historical theology is that it allows us to “pump intellectual iron” with some of the great thinkers of yesteryear. We can learn a tremendous amount from the theological debates of the past because they were often waged by intellectual giants, the likes of whom we typically do not see today. Nor should we think that the orthodox had a monopoly on all of the brains in these disputes. As I noted in that chapter, I commonly tell my students that they simply do not make heretics like they used to! As an example, I often cite Faustus Socinus (1539-1604), well known for his denial of many of the cardinal teachings of orthodoxy, such as the doctrine of the Trinity, the deity of Christ, penal substitution, and God’s foreknowledge of future contingent events. In Socinus “we encounter a mind well versed in the biblical languages, classical literature, logic, philosophy, exegesis, and theology, all pressed into the service of overturning the historic doctrines of the faith!”<sup>2</sup>

Now, there are at least two reasons for engaging the arguments of a “dead and buried” opponent like Socinus, particularly for someone

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called to an apologetics ministry. First, “in this way we may be able to spar vicariously with adversaries tougher than the ones we face in our day-to-day ministries.”<sup>3</sup> This builds up our “theological muscles,” making it easier to deal with less formidable opponents. If one can refute the arguments of Socinus against, say, the Trinity or God’s foreknowledge, then he or she can lay waste to the ruminations of the Watchtower or of the open theists “without shifting out of first gear.”<sup>4</sup> The second reason is that, as a matter of intellectual honesty, it is best to refute a position in its strongest rather than in its weakest form. Again, consider the doctrine of the Trinity. We believe that the doctrine of the Trinity is true. Since it is true, there can be no argument or set of arguments that ultimately disprove it. Yet, it does not follow from this that every argument against the Trinity is as plausible as any other. That is, certain arguments against the Trinity are more formidable than others, even though all of the arguments against it are, in the end, false. But if we refute the strongest arguments then we and others can know that we have been fair to the opposing view, giving the opposition its best shot at proving its case. Furthermore, we ourselves can have confidence that we have dealt solidly with the problem. We should not be reluctant to engage the best the enemy has to offer, for “orthodoxy is sufficiently robust to stand against the worst that heterodoxy can dish out.”<sup>5</sup>

In an attempt to “field test” these ideas and values, the editors of this journal have agreed to publish a translation of a particular treatise against the doctrine of the Trinity by Faustus Socinus (a smart heretic long dead) and then allow Prof. Robert M. Bowman (a smart theologian very much alive) to take a whack at refuting it. The treatise I have selected to translate is Socinus’s *A Tract concerning God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit*,<sup>6</sup> which I think provides a pretty good window into Socinus’s argumentation and thought processes. Although Socinus wrote a good deal more against the Trinity than this, I believe this is a fair specimen and it is one that fits within the confines of an article-length piece.

Since some readers of this article may be unfamiliar with Socinus, I shall provide the briefest of introductions.<sup>7</sup> Fausto Paolo Sozzini (Latinized as “Faustus Socinus”) was born in Italy in 1539 of noble parent-

age. Some of the members of his family had distinguished themselves in the field of law and he, too, pursued legal studies early on. Faustus was influenced particularly by his uncle Laelius, who harbored unorthodox sentiments on the Trinity, the satisfaction of Christ on the cross, and other key orthodox doctrines. Laelius had traveled throughout Europe making the acquaintance of important Reformation figures, sometimes in person and in other cases only through written correspondence. Laelius typically did not assert positively his own views. Rather, he posed questions, which he offered as hypothetical objections to the orthodox view, as though seeking answers in order to defend the orthodox position. Some, such as Calvin, soon became convinced that these “questions” were a thinly veiled ruse by which Laelius sought to cloak and at the same time advance his own heterodox opinions. Others, such as Bullinger, were more hopeful, thinking that Laelius was most probably orthodox albeit particularly inquisitive. In this matter Calvin’s instincts proved correct.<sup>8</sup>

Faustus shared none of his uncle’s tentativeness, and when the time was right he would eventually set forth his views boldly, vigorously, and systematically in his voluminous writings. On the death of his patron, Cosimo I, he resigned his position at the Florentine Court, where he served as a secretary under Duke Paolo Giordano Orsini, husband of Isabella de’ Medici and Cosimo’s son-in-law. Recognizing that Italy would not be a safe abode should his heretical opinions become known, he departed his native land permanently at the age of 35. He, like his uncle before him, traveled through different Reformation territories, studying theology and engaging in occasional written and oral debates, such as his famous dispute in Basle with Jacques Covetus (a French Reformed minister) against the doctrine of Christ’s satisfaction on the cross.

Socinus’s great intellectual gifts and rhetorical power came to the attention of George Blandrata, a Piedmontese physician and one of the leaders of the antitrinitarian party in Transylvania and Poland.<sup>9</sup> In 1578 Blandrata prevailed upon Socinus to migrate to Transylvania, where he greatly helped to systematize the theology of the antitrinitarians in order to defend against polemical attacks from both Catholics and orthodox

Protestants. He was also called upon to address some of the internal conflicts within the antitrinitarian movement, such as the hotly debated issue of whether Christ should receive worship, granting that on unitarian terms he is not God by nature. Socinus eventually settled in Poland, where he became the “theological brain,” as it were, of the Polish Unitarians, also known as the Minor Reformed Church.

As for the theological positions that Faustus held, he is of course well known for his denial of the Trinity, the subject of the present treatise. Naturally, he denied the concomitant doctrine of the two natures in Christ. He did not believe that the Holy Spirit is a person but rather is the power of God. He also rejected the substitutionary atonement, i.e., the doctrine of the Christ’s vicarious satisfaction for our sins. He eschewed the doctrines of original sin, justification by faith alone through the imputed righteousness of Christ, God’s foreknowledge of future contingent events, creation *ex nihilo*, and eternal conscious punishment for the lost.

But Socinus’s theology is not mere negation. He held to the absolute authority of Scripture, which he regarded as a revelation from God, necessary for the salvation of human beings, and the source on which Christian doctrine must be built.<sup>10</sup> In fact, Socinus wrote what may be the first work of modern evidential apologetics for the reliability of the Bible: *De auctoritate sacrae scripturae* (*Concerning the authority of Holy Scripture*). Unlike modern rationalist theologies (such as Deism or modern liberalism), Socinus accepted the supernatural elements in the Bible without hesitation. Regarding Christology, Socinus believed that Jesus was a true man. He did not exist before his conception in the womb of the virgin, but came into being when he was miraculously conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. God brought forth Jesus into the world in order to show us the way of salvation, which we attain by imitating him.<sup>11</sup> After his baptism but before the commencement of his earthly ministry, God literally raptured Jesus into heaven where, in a literal audience with God, he received instruction in the plan of salvation, which he was then sent down to teach to men.<sup>12</sup> Although Jesus is not God, he is to be given divine honor as a man, as God himself requires. He is to re-

ceive religious worship from men and his aid may be invoked in prayer; anyone who denies this cannot be saved.<sup>13</sup> Jesus literally died on a cross to demonstrate his commitment to his teaching, and God vindicated Christ and his teaching by raising him bodily from the dead to immortal life. Human beings may also attain bodily resurrection and immortal life if they follow his precepts in obedience. As for the wicked, they will not be raised to immortal life but will experience annihilation.

Socinus wrote the present work, *A tract concerning God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit*, probably in 1583. He apparently composed this short work as part of his response to some lectures conducted at the Posnanian College, a Jesuit school.<sup>14</sup> In these lectures the Jesuits sought to refute the unitarian position in a series of theses entitled, *Theological assertions concerning the triune God, against the new Samosateans*.<sup>15</sup> Socinus excerpted these theses, added his own rejoinders to them, and then published them in 1583 under the aforementioned title. This separate *Tractatus*, which I have translated in this article, relates to the *Theological Assertions* in Socinus's collected works and has reference to that same series of lectures, as one of the editors of his collected works indicates.<sup>16</sup>

A few brief words about the translation are in order. I have tried to render Socinus's Latin into English as literally as possible, taking into consideration also the demands of modern English style. In some places, particularly where I have rendered an expression idiomatically, I have provided a footnote to the original Latin and indicated its literal reading. I have often found it necessary to divide Socinus's very lengthy sentences into two or more English sentences—again, in keeping with the sensibilities of modern English. At the same time, I have endeavored to retain the force of Socinus's logic and the interconnection of his ideas. The numbers that appear in square brackets are to the volume and page number in *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum*, should the interested reader wish to study the matter further.

## *A Tract Concerning God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit*

by Faustus Socinus

Translated from the Latin

by Alan W. Gomes

[BFP 1.811]

### ***[Trinitarian] Argument:***

GOD is only one, as many testimonies of Scripture establish. But in the Scriptures the Father is called God, and likewise the Son and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one God, and consequently God is indeed one in essence but three in persons.

### ***[Socinus's] Response:***

THE WORD "GOD" can be taken in a two-fold way, especially in the Holy Scriptures. The first way is, when it signifies him who rules over and is in charge of all things, both in heaven and on earth, and who is the author and source of things. No one has superiority or primacy over him, nor does he depend on any. It is in this first way that God is said to be one. The other way is, when it signifies him who has some highest rulership or might or power from the one God himself, or is a partaker in some other way of the divinity of this one God. Hence, the one God, i.e., Jehovah, is called the "God of gods" (Ps. 50:1). It is in the latter way that the Son, or Christ, is sometimes called "God" in the Scriptures.

The entire matter is made clear from the words of Christ himself in John 10:35: "If," he says, "he called them 'Gods,' to whom the word of God was given (and the Scripture cannot be broken): why do you say of him, whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'He blasphemes,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God?'" Christ clearly shows in these words that the name "God" in the Holy Scriptures is also attributed to those who are greatly inferior to the one God. And these words show that he wished to call himself the Son of God, and in turn God,

in no other superior way than that he was sanctified by the Father and sent into the world. Therefore, Christ is indeed God but nevertheless not the one God. He is indeed God because he was set apart from others in a most excellent way by the one God and, having been abundantly furnished with heavenly gifts, was put in charge both of announcing and of truly bestowing eternal salvation on men. (The one God is altogether the same as the Father, as we shall prove later.) For this is his sanctification from the Father and his sending<sup>17</sup> into the world.

Concerning the Holy Spirit, it<sup>18</sup> is never distinctly and literally (as it were)<sup>19</sup> called God in Scripture, but only, and by no means rarely, characteristics of God are attributed to it—or, what is attributed to the Holy Spirit somewhere<sup>20</sup> is found attributed to God either in the same place<sup>21</sup> or elsewhere. The reason for this is that the Holy Spirit is the power and efficacy of God. For what is attributed to the power and efficacy of God is without a doubt attributed to God himself. But the power and efficacy of God is not therefore some divine person, just as neither the goodness of God, nor his justice, nor mercy, nor judgment, nor other effects or properties of God are some divine persons. Otherwise, there ought to be many more [persons] than three.

Besides, from the mere fact that it is clearly indicated that God is one, a person can rightly conclude that he is neither three nor two. For to be One and Three are mutually exclusive;<sup>22</sup> likewise, to be One and Two. Thus, if God is three or two he cannot be one. For that distinction, “One in essence, Three in persons,” is never found in the Holy Scriptures, and clearly is at odds with most certain reason and truth. For it is absolutely certain that there are not fewer individual essences than there are persons, since a person is nothing other than an individual intelligent essence.

Now, the fact that this one God is none other than the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—and not the Son of God and the Holy Spirit—is proven clearly in many ways, especially the following:

1. First, as was shown, if God is one, he cannot be three or two. Moreover, everyone agrees and the Scripture everywhere testifies,

that the Father of Christ is that God. Therefore, it necessarily follows that this one God is none other than the Father of Christ.

2. [BFP 1.812] Next, from those very passages in which it expressly conveyed that there is only one God, there are not a few where it is stated that this one God is the Father of all, or the Father of Jesus Christ. In Jn. 17:3 Christ himself states that his Father alone is that true God, even with respect to Christ himself. In fact, he names himself in that same passage and distinguishes himself from the Father. Indeed, he does this in such a way that it could not be said that he spoke about himself according to his human nature alone. For he refers to himself in so far as that very knowledge [of himself] comprises eternal life. Everyone sees that, in so far as he refers to himself, the reference is to the entire Christ. Although formerly some supposed that Christ's words should be taken to mean that the Father and Jesus Christ are that only true God, this is rejected today by nearly all Trinitarians, since neither the structure of the words nor the passage itself would appear to bear it. Not only that, but in this way [of understanding the text] the Holy Spirit would clearly be excluded from that sole, true divinity, the knowledge of which is necessary for attaining eternal life. Again, 1 Cor. 8:6 clearly teaches that our one God is the Father, from whom are all things and we in him—"him," I say, referring to the Father, because he is distinguished from Christ, in so far as Christ is that one Lord, through whom are all things, and we through him. Thus, just as in the earlier passage, here also it can in no way be said that these words were written about Christ only according to his human nature. Likewise, Eph. 4:6, which says that there is one God, distinctly affirms at the same time that that one God is the Father of all, and he is clearly distinguished from Christ in so far as Christ is the one Lord.

3. An invincible argument for proving that the Father alone is that one God is that over and over<sup>23</sup> the name "God," when it appears

by itself<sup>24</sup> and signifies that subsistence, assuredly refers only to God the Father, even as the adversaries<sup>25</sup> themselves are compelled to admit. Moreover, when the name “God” is placed [in the text] by itself,<sup>26</sup> as stated above, it never signifies, clearly and without any controversy, Christ or the Son alone, or the Holy Spirit alone. For although Christ sometimes is called God, as stated above, nevertheless then the name of God does not signify that very subsistence but only an attribute of the subsistence. Or, if you prefer, then the name of God does not function as a subject but as a predicate. For never in the divine writings will you find it written that God either did or said something, or any other thing to be affirmed about God, that should altogether and necessarily be referred to Christ as distinct from the Father.

4. Additionally,<sup>27</sup> (A) Christ is everywhere called “the Son of God” (as he truly is), and, (B) the Holy Spirit is called “the Spirit of God,” and (C) without a doubt he is that one God who is called “God” in passages of this sort. From these facts it follows that neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit is that one God. Otherwise, the Son would be his own son and the Holy Spirit his<sup>28</sup> own spirit.

5. Since it is absolutely certain that Christ is the son of this one God, it is equally certain that the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are not at the same time that one God but only the Father is, since Christ is not the Son of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit all at the same time, but only is the Son of the Father.

But now, someone may still question whether Christ is that one God—or at least of the same essence with him—due to the altogether magnificent and thoroughly sublime things which are attributed to him in the divine scriptures. But such a one should consider<sup>29</sup> that there is nothing either more magnificent or sublime attributed to Christ in Scripture than the fact that everyone owes him divine worship. But Christ had this [right to be worshipped] from God the Father as a man.

Therefore, nothing can be found attributed to Christ in the divine testimonies so magnificent and so sublime that it cannot be consistent with him as a man (i.e., granting that something other than the sublimity and magnificence of the thing does not forbid it). Moreover, in the first place, the words of Christ himself prove that God the Father established that everyone owes divine worship to Christ as a man. In Jn. 5:22-23 he says that the Father does not judge anyone but has given all judgment to the Son, so that all should honor the Son just as they should honor the Father. From this judgment given by the Father to the Son, it becomes evident that divine worship should be given to him, owed to him by all. But Christ himself testifies himself in this same passage (i.e., a little later in v. 27) that the Father gave this judgment to the Son as a man, when he says that the Father gave the power of rendering judgment to the Son, because he is the Son of man. Next, the words of the Apostle Paul in Philippians chapter 2 prove this same thing, where he treats of the exaltation of Christ on account of his obedience unto the death of the cross. In verse 9 and following he states that on account of that obedience God so greatly exalted him, that at the name of Jesus every knee ought to bow. What else is this but divine worship, owed to him by all? But it is certain that Jesus was exalted as a man for the aforesaid reason. That is, obedience unto the death of the cross only falls on him as a man.<sup>30</sup> Paul's very words make it clear that he [Christ] himself was obviously exalted, who was obedient unto the death of the cross.

In brief, there is nothing either so sublime or so lowly attributed to Christ in the Holy Scriptures that it cannot properly pertain to that man Jesus of Nazareth. Wherefore, there was no reason for inventing in one and the same Christ two natures—that is, essences—divine and human. And since the excellence of the Father over Christ is most clearly attested in the Holy Scriptures, there is no reason to flee to that distinction of a divine and human nature, and of asserting that the Scripture in that case<sup>31</sup> speaks not according to the divine but only according to the human nature of Christ. This is so: when Christ himself says that the Father is greater than he (Jn. 14:28); when the Son admits that he does not know the day and hour of the future divine judgment, but

only the Father knows (Mk. 13:32); when, now raised from the dead, he testifies that the Father is no less his God than the God of the disciples (Jn. 20:17), and which he—already translated into heaven and clearly glorified—affirms four times in one verse (Rev. 3:12); and finally when, to cite but a few instances,<sup>32</sup> he states that he received from God the Father his doctrine, his words, his signs, all his works, together with his authority and power. Elsewhere, he said that those things are not his own but of him who had sent him, i.e., the Father. (See John 5:19, 20, 22, 23, 27, 30, 36, 43; 7:16; 10:25; 17:2.) Nor should I fail to mention the nearly countless testimonies that clearly confirm the eminence of the Father over the Son.

When the adversaries see in many of the aforesaid testimonies words that they think can in no way be taken per se according to the human nature of Christ, they seek refuge in two ways: (1) they refer those testimonies, which are related there, to eternal generation, through which the Son is produced<sup>33</sup> by the Father Himself. (2) [they explain them] through a certain figure of speech, which is called “the communication of attributes” (*communicatio idiomatum*), [teaching that] what is [characteristic] of only one nature is attributed separately to the other.<sup>34</sup>

Now, in order for the sacred testimonies to be interpreted in this astonishing way, it is first necessary for the [doctrine of] eternal generation and the two-fold nature of Christ to be clearly proven on other grounds.<sup>35</sup> Otherwise, that interpretation is most rightly rejected and confuted merely by denying these [two] things.

Besides, that which has to do with that generation, since it is eternal (as they<sup>36</sup> wish), must also be natural and necessary. Consequently, in no way can anything be referred to it which is said either to have been given to Christ by the Father in time (as they say), or is said to have been given by free will, or certainly unto some goal and by some counsel. And it is just these sorts of things which are recounted in these very testimonies. For “eternity” and “in time” are altogether opposed to one another, and indeed “not natural” and “necessary” likewise oppose “from free will,” and “given unto some end and by some counsel.”

Now, regarding the communication of attributes: This cannot in

any way effect that what [is characteristic] of one nature [BFP 1.813] alone can be attributed separately to the other. However, it could perhaps effect that what is [characteristic] of one nature might be accommodated to the person *simpliciter*. For no one, for the sake of example, would say, "My soul is tall"; or "My soul is dressed in an ankle-length robe"; or "My soul is washed in a bath." This is so even though a man's soul is so conjoined to his body (to which the [previously mentioned] examples apply) that one and the same man consists of each. This is just as they would have one and the same Christ Jesus consist of a divine and human nature or, as others state it, of God and man. Add to these [observations] that in whatever way this communication of attributes might be admitted in passages speaking about Christ, this is nothing other than to make a mockery of the holy words and to leave the reader completely uncertain about the meaning of the passage and most often concerning the issue itself.

But they might say that there are certain things that are completely impossible to explain without acknowledging the communication of attributes and, in turn, the two natures in Christ. Such is the case when all things are said to have been created by God through Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:9), as indeed the Greek codices read. Likewise, [the communication of attributes and the two natures in Christ must be acknowledged] when it is said that the Son of man was in heaven before he ascended to it with his disciples looking on (Jn. 6:62), and also that he is "in heaven," even though he made the statement while yet on earth (Jn. 3:13).

I respond that there is no reason why these things should not properly be referred to the man Jesus of Nazareth. For when "all things" are said to have been created by God through Jesus Christ, one ought not to understand those "things" as referring to the creation of which Moses most diligently wrote in the beginning of his history. For there Moses, when relating the act of creating, makes no mention of any person who had any part in it beyond God himself. But here [i.e., in Eph. 3:9] it is necessary to note that there is God on the one hand, and on the other him who is understood by the name "Jesus Christ," since God is said to have created through Jesus Christ. Besides, Christ is never said to have

created universally and generally, but [it is said that] the creation was made through him. And so no mention was made of Christ, or of him who in Paul is understood by the name “Christ,” in the creation that Moses relates. For Moses made mention of God as creating and not, moreover, as the one through whom creation was made. Therefore, the passage of Paul should be received as concerning other created things, and the expression “all things” should be referred to all things that pertain to the new creation, which is agreed to have been made through the man Jesus of Nazareth. Paul says the same thing elsewhere, namely, that all things were made new (2 Cor. 5:17). Nevertheless, since it is certain that there are an infinite number of things which remained in the same state in which they were before, there the expression “All things” ought to be referred to all those things that pertain to God’s covenant with men and to religion, and ought to be restricted to those things just as we contend that it ought to be done in the passage above [i.e., Eph. 3:9].

Similarly, concerning the fact that the Son of man was in heaven before his visible ascension to it: this can and ought to be referred, truly and properly, to the man Jesus of Nazareth. For that man truly, after he was born of the virgin but before he announced the Gospel, was raptured into heaven. There he was taught by God himself those things which he was going to reveal to the human race. This has so much the appearance of truth that it seems it could not have happened otherwise. The force to be inferred in these words, therefore, is not without any cause, and indeed not contrary and opposed to all reason. But those things in this and in other similar passages ought to be taken at face value.<sup>37</sup> If this is done, the meaning will become plain.<sup>38</sup>

Now, in Jn. 3:13, although it is commonly read “who is in heaven,” can nevertheless be read from the Greek as “who was in heaven”—just as Erasmus, Beza, and others have taught. And so this passage will become similar to the preceding one [i.e., Jn. 6:62]. But if, nevertheless, someone tenaciously wishes to retain the common<sup>39</sup> reading, it still would not follow that there was some other essence or nature in Christ besides a human one, according to which, evidently, he was then truly in heaven. For in that case, [the expression] “to be in heaven” would thus need to

be taken so that it can be consistent with his human nature, or to him as a man, to which these words distinctly refer. And no doubt the words found in that same passage, in which it is stated that the Son of man ascended to heaven and no one beside him, will also have to be taken in that sense. For these words cannot rightly be taken at face value<sup>40</sup> either according to the human or according to the divine nature, unless, perhaps, it is granted that that man truly ascended to heaven before he uttered these words. But, when this [fact]<sup>41</sup> is not acknowledged (even though utterly true and, as I said, clarifying the entire matter), then these words will be taken as many others have interpreted them. That is, the “ascent into heaven” will be taken as meaning the penetration (as it were) into the knowledge of divine things. And, similarly, we shall interpret “to be in heaven” as referring to the knowledge of divine things already secured.

But there are those who think that the two natures in Christ—divine and human—can be inferred especially from the fact that he both is and is called the “Son of God.” It is through the communication of attributes that the man himself, Jesus of Nazareth, is said to be the Son of God. For otherwise, how, they ask, could a mere<sup>42</sup> man, i.e., a man not joined with the divine essence itself, be the Son of God? Is it not necessary that, just as a human begets a human, in the same way God begets God?

I respond as follows. If it could be established that it were possible for God to beget from his own substance something similar to himself, just as humans and other animals do, it would seem that this argument would have some force. But not only can this not be established but the contrary is easily proven. For both from the very agreement of all Trinitarians, as well as from plain reason itself, it can be understood that the substance (i.e., the essence) of God can in no way be divided or multiplied. Moreover, what we already stated above evidently demonstrates that the entire, numerically one, and altogether same essence cannot be common in many persons. Clearly, it is necessary that there are no fewer individual essences than there are persons. Moreover, the Scripture sufficiently declares the way in which God generates something similar to

himself, affirming in many passages that pious men, but chiefly those having faith in Christ, are born of God and begotten by him. This is so to the extent that elsewhere it denies that these were born of men (e.g., Jn. 1:13). Why, then, do we not here [i.e., in Jn. 1:13] contrive two natures, divine and human, denying that mere men can be begotten and born of God, and denying [that those born of God] have been given birth from humans?<sup>43</sup> Therefore, we acknowledge here that one and the same man can be considered in a two-fold way—namely, by way of the spirit and by way of the flesh—and (accordingly) is or is not a Son of God or a Son of man. Even so, let us acknowledge that the very same man, Jesus of Nazareth, is the Son of man according to the flesh and is the Son of God according to the Spirit. Again, according to the flesh he is not the Son of God (if you please), and according to the Spirit he is not the Son of man—although, as we shall say later, Jesus of Nazareth is acknowledged by Scripture to be the Son of God even according to the flesh. Moreover, that very distinction in Christ himself is confirmed most clearly in the words of the Apostle Paul, who testifies in Rom. 1:3-4 that one and the same Son of God was begotten from the seed of David according to the flesh, but according to the spirit of sanctification was defined as the Son of God.

But someone might say that the sacred scriptures do not merely call Christ the Son of God but also the only begotten and proper<sup>44</sup> Son of God. Consequently, it is necessary [to conclude] that he was born of God in some singular way, beyond all other sons of God.

Here I freely confess and acknowledge that singularity. But I do not therefore grant that this singularity consists in the fact that Christ was begotten from the very substance of God while others were not. For it has already been shown that the substance of God can neither be divided nor multiplied, nor can the very same, numerically identical [substance] be common to many persons. The singularity of Christ's nativity from God consists in other things, which can be understood from the sacred testimonies themselves:

1. First of all, [this singularity] consists in the fact that Christ, at the

very moment he was born a man, was the Son of God, and thus is the Son of God by nature; other men are not sons of God in this way. And so, as the Scripture seems to say elsewhere in view of this reason, other people besides Christ ought not to be called “born” but rather “adopted” sons of God. For that man Jesus of Nazareth, who is called the Christ, was born the Son of God, because he was conceived in the womb of the virgin not from male seed but by the Holy Spirit and by the power of the Most High. [BFP 1.814] For this very reason the angel of God predicted to the virgin that what would be born from the virgin would be called the Son of God (Lk. 1:35). From this it appears that even according to the flesh he can deservedly be called the Son of God. And this has occurred and is so for no one else.

2. Next, in the case of other men God grants his spirit, by which they are sons of God, to a limited degree.<sup>45</sup> But he granted his spirit to the man Christ without measure, so that he was made a more eminent<sup>46</sup> Son of God than before, as in Jn. 3:35—assuming that Jn. 3:35 has reference to Christ. For that passage reads simply, “For God gives his spirit without measure,” with no mention made of Christ. These words also could aptly describe the entire ministry of preaching the Gospel, where God—not sparingly and restrictively but abundantly and lavishly—has granted his spirit to the human race. Whatever the case, it is certain from the divine writings themselves that God could have granted to other individuals many spiritual gifts that he did not give. But to the man Christ there is no spiritual [gift] that he could give that he did not give. Wherefore, it is rightly said that in a singular way he was born of God beyond others.

3. Additionally, the man Christ alone secured both immortality and the glorification of his body before all others, and shall have been constituted both heir and Lord of the universe,<sup>47</sup> in which matters especially his likeness with God (and, therefore, his divine

filiation) is comprised. From this it appears that he, in a singular way beyond all others, was born of God. And since it was absolutely certain from the very beginning that these things were going to occur, he was, for these very reasons, already deservedly called the only begotten and proper Son of God while he was yet abiding on earth.

I omit certain other things, on account of which the man Christ can rightly be called the only begotten and proper Son of God. But I only call to mind that Isaac, when he was offered to God on the mountain, was called the sole<sup>48</sup> and only begotten Son of Abraham (Gen. 22:2, 12; Heb. 11:17), even though Abraham at that time had another Son truly born from himself no less than Isaac, i.e., Ishmael. For the way in which, nevertheless, it is shown that Isaac could be called his sole and only begotten son is the same or similar to the way in which it will be demonstrated that the man Christ can be called the only begotten or proper Son of God, even though it is the case that others are similarly born of God.

So that this entire matter might be better understood, let all the passages of the sacred writings be examined, which explain either tacitly or openly the reasons Christ is called the Son of God. For nowhere will you find that cause expressed or indicated that he was begotten from the very substance or essence of God. But you will find that he is and is called the Son of God either on account of his mode of conception in the womb of his mother; or on account of the sanctification of God and in his being sent into the world; or on account of his resurrection from the dead, which certainly was followed by his glorification and exaltation over all created things; or on account of the eternal priesthood and reign, which he had from God; or on account of other things of this kind. Moreover, see the following passages, on the basis of which we have concluded some of those things stated above: Lk. 1:35; Jn. 10:36; Acts 13:33; Rom. 1:3, 4, 8; Ps. 2:6-7; Heb. 5:5.

## Notes

1. Alan W. Gomes, "The Value of Historical Theology for Apologetics," chap. in *Reasons for Faith: Making a Case for the Christian Faith*, Norman L. Geisler and Chad V. Meister, eds. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 169-181.
2. *Ibid.*, 179.
3. *Ibid.*, 178-9.
4. *Ibid.*, 179.
5. *Ibid.*
6. The full title is, *Argumenti pro trino & uno Deo, omnium potissimi, aut certe usitatissimi, examinatio, sive tractatus, de Deo, Christo, & Spiritu Sancto, cuius rei occasione tota de re, praecipue vero de Christi divinitate ac natura quaestio, breviter explicatur.* (*The strongest, or certainly most common, arguments of all for the triune God: an examination. Or, a tract concerning God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, on the occasion of which matter the entire subject, but principally the question of the nature and divinity of Christ, is briefly explained.*) This tract is contained in the *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum quos Unitarios vocant* (BFP) (Amsterdam: 1668) 1.811-814. (Note that the first two volumes of the nine-volume BFP comprise the *Opera omnia* [*Complete Works*] of Socinus.)
7. The single best treatment of the history of sixteenth-century Unitarianism is undoubtedly Earl Morse Wilbur's two-volume *History of Unitarianism* (Boston: Beacon, 1945). Wilbur, himself a Unitarian, presents a sympathetic portrait but his command of the primary sources and attention to detail is unequalled. For a short summary, Wilbur also has an article-length piece entitled "Faustus Socinus, Pioneer," *HibJ* 33 (1935): 538-48. Another standard work is David Cory's *Faustus Socinus* (Boston: Beacon, 1932). H. J. McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), 3-24, provides a compact summary of the background to Socinus. Brief discussions of Socinian history are also available in Alexander Gordon, "The Sozzini and Their School," *The Theological Review* 65 (1879): 293-322; Zbigniew Ogonowski, "Faustus Socinus," in *Shapers of the Religious Traditions in Germany, Switzerland, and Poland, 1560-1600* (ed. Jill Raitt; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 195-97; and George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 749-63. More recently, Lech Szczucki has written a helpful and concise article on "Socinianism" in the *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation* (4 vols.; ed. Hans J. Hillerbrand; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 4:83-86. (Note: This footnote is a condensation and summary of a more detailed list of references that I have provided in a forthcoming article entitled "Some Observations on the Theological Method of Faustus Socinus [1539-1604]," *WTJ* 70 [2008].)

8. Regarding the personal correspondence of the Sozzini, see Giampaolo Zucchini, "Unpublished letters added to the letters of Fausto Sozzini, 1561-1568," chap. in *Socinianism and its Role in the Culture of the XVI-th to XVIII-th Centuries* (Warsaw: Polish Academy of Sciences, 1983), 17-24; Ralph Lazzaro, "Four Letters from the Socinus-Calvin Correspondence (1549)," chap. in *Italian Reformation Studies in Honor of Laelius Socinus*, ed. John A. Tedeschi (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1965), 215-230; and David Willis, "The Influence of Laelius Socinus on Calvin's Doctrines of the Merits of Christ and the Assurance of Faith," chap. in *Italian Reformation Studies*, 231-241.
9. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Transylvania and Poland were among the most religiously tolerant countries in Europe. Accordingly, quite a few antitrinitarians settled there because their views were either not proscribed or at least not as vigorously persecuted as elsewhere.
10. I discuss Socinus's doctrine of scripture in considerable detail in my forthcoming "Some Observations on the Theological Method of Faustus Socinus (1539-1604)."
11. "Demonstratur, . . . nos Christum imitari posse, hancque esse aeternae salutis viam: ob idque Christum iurè Servatorem nostrum appellari" (Socinus, *De Iesu Christo Servatore*, 2.128).
12. Socinus advanced this rather quirky and possibly novel theory of Christ's literal, bodily ascent into heaven, which George H. Williams calls a "pre-ascension ascension," i.e., an ascension that took place before Christ's final, visible ascension after his resurrection. Socinus cites the Apostle Paul's rapture into the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:1-5) as a precedent. Besides the example of Paul, Socinus argues for this "pre-ascension ascension" particularly from Jn. 3:13 and 6:64, as well as from Moses' ascent on Mt. Sinai to receive the oracles of God (Ex. 19 and 24), pressing the typical likeness between Moses and Christ. This theory, among other things, allows him to reconcile his humanitarian Christology with the texts that speak of the Son of Man's descent from heaven, granting that his Christology denies Christ's preexistence. I have dealt with this unusual theory in considerable detail, with special attention to how it fits systemically into Socinus's overall theology, in a forthcoming article to be published in the *Harvard Theological Review* entitled "The Rapture of the Christ: The 'Pre-Ascension Ascension' of Jesus in the Theology of Faustus Socinus (1539-1604)." (The article is scheduled to appear sometime in 2008.)
13. Indeed, Socinus says that to deny religious worship to Christ is a sin more grievous than homicide! ("... multo gravius peccatum est Christum non adorare quam hominem occidere.") See Faustus Socinus, *Epitome colloquii Racoviae habiti anno 1601* (ed. Lech Szczucki

and Janusz Tazbir; critical Latin text printed in Warsaw, 1966), lines 789-91. For a good treatment of this internecine debate over the worship and invocation of Christ see George H. Williams, "The Christological Issues Between Francis Dávid and Faustus Socinus during the Disputation on the Invocation of Christ, 1578-1579," in *Antitrinitarianism in the Second Half of the 16th Century* (ed. Róbert Dán and Antal Pirnát; *Studia Humanitatis* 5; ed. T. Klaniczay; Leiden: Brill, 1982) 287-321.

14. Posnan is a city in west-central Poland.
15. *Assertiones theologicae de trino & uno Deo, adversus novos Samosatonicos*, in BFP 2.423-438. The term "Samosateans" refers to Paul of Samosata, a third-century Bishop of Antioch in Syria, who put forth a "dynamic monarchian" Christology. According to this view, Jesus was a mere man but one inspired by the power (*dunamis*) of God. Socinus and his followers were thus sometimes called "Samosateans," though on other occasions they were less accurately labeled "Arians." Note that the Arians believed in Christ's preexistence, even if not an *eternal* preexistence. Socinus, like Paul of Samosata, did not believe that Christ had any existence whatever before his early conception. (As already noted, he did believe this conception to have been virginal and therefore miraculous.)
16. See BFP 1.811. Actually, through a printer's error this tract appears *twice* (i.e., is duplicated) in volume one but, as the editor noted, it ought to have been placed in volume two, before page 423, i.e., ahead of the *Assertiones*, since the tract has reference to these.
17. *Missio*.
18. "Quod ad Spiritum sanctum attinet, is nusquam disertè atque ad literam (ut dicitur) in Scriptura Deus appellatur." I have translated the Latin masculine pronoun "is" as "it" rather than "he," in keeping with Socinus's denial of the Spirit's personhood. Socinus uses the masculine pronoun, as he must on grammatical grounds, because the antecedent "Holy Spirit" (*Spiritum sanctum*) consists of a masculine noun and adjective.
19. "...ad literam (ut dicitur)..."
20. I.e., in some passage of Scripture.
21. I.e., in the same passage of Scripture.
22. "Opposita sunt enim inter se Unus, & Trinus" = (lit.) "One and Three are opposed among themselves."
23. "Millies" = "on 1000 occasions," "1000 times."
24. "...simplici Dei nomine..." = (lit.) "with the simple/single name 'God.'"
25. The term "Adversaries," of course, refers to his Trinitarian opponents.
26. "...simplex Dei nomen est positum...." See note 24.

27. I added the separate enumeration of these points (as “A,” “B,” and “C”) to aid in clarifying the structure of Socinus’s argument.
28. I have used the masculine pronoun in my translation here because Socinus is presenting his argument on Trinitarian terms.
29. Or, “...let such a one consider...”
30. Lit., “...only falls against that very man.”
31. “In that case” = in the case of statements that make the Father more excellent than the Son.
32. “...ne singula recenseam...” = “Not that I might enumerate/review each individual [instance].”
33. “Habuerit.”
34. “Alterum, quod per figuram quandam sermonis, quae Idiomatum communicatio appellatur, quod unius tantum naturae est, alteri separatim tribuatur.”
35. “...on other grounds...” = “ex aliis,” lit., “from other things.”
36. I.e., the Trinitarians.
37. “...sed ea, ut sonant, accipere...oportet.” = (Lit.) “...but those things ought to be taken as they sound....”
38. “Et sic plana erunt omnia” = “And thus all things will become plain.”
39. Or, “Vulgate” (*vulgatam*), i.e., the Latin translation of the Bible.
40. “...ut ipsa verba sonant...” = (lit.) “as the words sound.”
41. I.e., of a literal, spatial rapture of Christ, as stated above.
42. Purus.
43. “...nec ex ipsis hominibus ortum ducere” = “...nor to have been born from humans themselves.”
44. Proprius = “proper,” “special,” “particular.”
45. “Ad mensuram.”
46. *Sublimior*.
47. “Universorum,” which could also be taken as “of all things.”
48. Unicum.

