
On reasons and remedies for discords
and dissention in the matter of religion
Two noteworthy writings of our times, with
a preface for the senators of the Kingdom of Poland

[Toruń]
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Preface for the senators of the Kingdom of Poland

Honourable Senators! Two writings have got into our hands,¹ both of the same contents. Having read them and having found out that these may be not useless in our stormy times, when the love between Christians has cooled down, we believe that we will do something agreeable to pious and honest citizens, who burst into tears over tragedies played at schools or in churches, if we publish these writings in print. There is also another reason for it. The position of these who confess the pure teaching of the Gospel is too well-known to be demonstrated. Never in the history of this Kingdom the true religion was more hastily attacked and persecuted as it occurs now. And although it can be heard that it is only a matter of restitution of seized temples, furious attacks against the confederation on the one hand and on the other hand impudent tumults, which are provoked here and there in Poland for the destruction of the true religion clearly demonstrate that the real intention is to introduce the superstition into this land again and to extinguish the light of the Gospel. And if this occurred, French and Belgian slaughters would surely repeat here in our country. Our adversaries erroneously believe that we are unaware of rhetoric tricks or rather war contrivances, which were also used by them for the benefit of their cause and to

¹ It refers to two pamphlets defending the Confederation of Warszawa. They were anonymously published by Ulryk Schober, see Chronological list of titles, XXXIII.

the detriment of ours during the war in Germany.² It was in this intention that they divided German princes and German towns, so that they could – at it clearly turned out later – destroy them all more easily.

Today our adversaries use the same tricks by inclining others to them, as much as it is possible, they strive to divide one from another. This is done in order to destroy the confederation with little effort by casting this hitherto flourishing Kingdom into worst misery. No tears are enough to deplore such blindness of them! They cannot deny that the confederation has been the main binder of the Commonwealth after God and had it not been introduced into our country, the same stakes would have long burned in Poland for the Poles as they burned in France for the French and in Belgium for the Belgians. Therefore, why this what is a salvation for the fatherland, is being attack so furiously?

“You are heretics” – I can hear it and I do not even ask the reason for it. I only say that even if we admitted that you are right with regard to it (and we will never admit it), there is no sufficient reason for you to hate us like that. You tolerate the Jews and other scoundrels, you even tolerate the errors of the Church Fathers, such as Tertullian, Cyprian, Augustine and Hieronymus. As it can easily be demonstrated, they were only men and they often erred and stumbled. This, however, does not impede the memory of them to be held in utmost reverence both by you and by us? Therefore, why do you not have the same or similar humanity for us? These who err are worth compassion and not hatred, as it is clearly demonstrated by the writings which are preceded by this preface of outs.

You give other arguments; these, however, are neither as numerous not as grave so that more numerous and graver ones could not be given for the opposing thesis. Is it not better to patiently bear the confederation than to ruin the fatherland by means of overthrowing it? A wise man having to choose between two evil things will choose lesser evil. Looking into the future, he makes sure to avoid evil which can be avoided. With regard to evil which cannot be avoided, he surrenders to Divine Providence.

Had the French and other nations done so, so many people would not have perished among them and so many households and towns would not have been burnt down. They were, however, possessed by such blindness that in spite of the fact that such a terrible punishment for this madness was oncoming, they would not even have obeyed to the Truth descending from Heaven! Naturally, if it were possible to revert what already occurred, they would be wiser now (many among us are also more like Epimetheus than Prometheus). They would know that it is necessary to keep accept-

² It refers to polemic writings published during the armed rebellion of peasants in southern Germany under the leadership of Thomas Müntzer (1525). These writings were published i. a. by M. Luther and Ph. Melanchton.

ed principles and obey to passed acts, especially the act passed in Orleans.³ Its violation became the beginning of all misfortunes.

An ancient proverb says: “Happy is who is wise by the misfortunes of others.” Truly, it is a salutary wisdom to draw useful conclusions from the misfortunes of others; if one gives us advice – to carefully consider why and what for one gives it; to weigh all advice on the scales of truth and honest benefit; to accept such advice which promises more good than evil for us; to prefer sure, safe and sound advice to uncertain, dubious and treacherous one; not to save efforts to preserve this what is prosperously possessed. We have rested so peacefully under the tree of Minerva so far; our country has flourished; we have peacefully and harmoniously indulged in our own affairs; we have felt safe and free – we owe this first of all to God and then to this confederation. Whoever fights it is the enemy and whoever defends it is the benefactor of the fatherland. Therefore, all citizens wishing the salvation of the fatherland – both Roman Catholics and Protestants – should keep this confederation as the apple of their eye. Let no-one lend an ear to foreigners who are driven by other reasons than the prosperity of our fatherland. As it occurred in France and elsewhere, these foreigners blow the trumpet of war, they incite the rulers, they menace our confederation in every possible way. They stop at nothing to raise their hopes and bury ours.

Our present circumstances is exacerbated by news from abroad. Our rulers are, however, even more agitated when they learn on truly Cadmean struggles and mutual slaughters which take place abroad. Conversely, bloody persecution in France, Spain and in Belgium which cost so many lives, were influenced by discords and dissention here in our country. As testified to by Eusebius,⁴ also this great persecution which almost destroyed the Church during the reign of Emperors Diocletian and Maximian, was provoked by no other reasons than the discord among bishops and their exuberant ambitions. I omit here cruel and terrible persecutions in Persia, which were provoked by ill-timed zeal of Bishop Auda, who ordered to destroy the Temple of Fire. For this kind of zeal he was not praised by Theodoret who described this story.⁵ Nor was Karlstadt praised by Luther in our times.⁶

Both conflicting parties are not without sin when they engage into struggle which is beyond their forces. It cannot be denied that this entire war resulted from agitated passions and is still fuelled with agitated passions. Many times these discords and dissention would perhaps come to an end, if agitated human minds were

³ It refers to decisions of the General Estates in Orleans (1560-1561) concerning the preservation of religious peace.

⁴ Eusebius of Cesarea (died 339), the author of the *Ecclesiastical History*.

⁵ Theodoret of Cyrrhus (died 458), the author of the *Ecclesiastical History*.

⁶ Karlstadt – a German Anabaptist and companion of Müntzer. The text refers to attacks of Luther against Karlstadt (cf. Luthers Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Tischreden, Vol. 2).

not getting out of control of those who began the war and if ardent passions were cooled down, mutual prejudices were refuted, mutually inflicted wounds were healed on both sides. Furthermore, the spirit of partiality and quarrelsomeness, which is so contrary to the truth, would have to be eliminated from the discords.

If one wants to investigate the truth, one must restrain his passions. Otherwise, his efforts will be in vain. During the solar or lunar eclipse the glare of both these celestial bodies disappears for the spectator, as the Moon or the Earth go in between. In the same way, if passions stand on the way of the human mind, the light of the truth becomes invisible. Therefore, passions that deviate from the truth in the same way as arrows of a poor archer deviate from the target always turn out to be the most significant reason for discords which we discuss here. Anyway, these men admit to it themselves, when one party charges the other with excessive ambitions, avarice and invidiousness, whereas both parties – let them pardon me for saying so – equally sin with that.

An ancient author who described the customs of old Greece said that avarice lived in Oropos, invidiousness – in Tanagra, quarrelsomeness – in Tesphiae, impetuosity – in Anthidona, inquisitiveness – in Coronea, vanity – in Plataea, fever – in Onchestos, foolishness – in Aliartos, and so on. We do not need to look far for these towns and their inhabitants, as they are close to us. Simply look at this recent parliament of theologians,⁷ pay attention to the spirit they are animated with (I always make an exception for honest individuals). Taste the fruits of their efforts: I will lie if I do not say that this parliament of theologians is an image of the catalogue which was offered above and it is a contradiction to all these virtues which St Paul demanded. Is it therefore bizarre that this parliament, being convulsed with disturbances, incites the same disturbances outside itself. They fight, as they attempt at making us believe, for the glory of God, but in fact they are only concerned with their of glory. They conceal their ambitions in every possible way; these, however, become evident when they – not without detriment to the Church – indulge their vainglory, they puff out with acquired popularity and they incite quite superfluous controversies which concern not the Word of God, but their own words. God does not want the teaching He passed down to us be distorted by depravation. He does not want us to recede from sound and simple expressions used by the Son of God and by the Prophets and the Apostles who followed His example. He said about the Son: “Listen to Him.” Moses also ordered to listen to Him, threatening with perdition these who will not do so. Also Isaiah orders us to refer to the words of the Law of God, whereas David calls the Word of God (and not the word of man) a lantern of his feet. What can one say about St Paul, who with utmost seriousness calls Timothy to guard that what was entrusted to him, to keep the sound and simple teaching and to both prudently avoid and order other people to avoid pagan word games and disputes over words.

⁷ The author refers to an otherwise unknown convention.

New theological phases are always suspicious and should be suspicious for the truly pious, in the same way as new coins, which are usually worse than those minted previously.

We can see as these theological gladiators who are after laurel wreaths impose self-invented formulae on everyone. If you dared to criticise any of these, you would perish immediately. Even if you tried – as Ulysses did – to sail in the very middle between Scylla and Charybdis and not to declare for any conflicting party, you will not flee the wrath of theologians anyway. There is no moderation in either of the parties and therefore you would in vain expect anything sound. How unfortunate we have become, how miserable times we live in! How deplorable it is that it has even come to that that these who obediently listen to the simple words of the Holy Spirit and – mindful of the commandment of God – avoid vain verbosity and disputes over words and – thinking the same of the mysteries of God what the Evangelists and St Paul say – do not want to accept any new formulae, are called with names of wicked heretics or paganised politicians!⁸ Did Christ not praise the simplicity and sincerity of faith of a child, whom he had introduced among gathered people?

I do not understand your theological phrases and issues – so what? You do not fully understand them, either. What is more important for you – to express yourself clearly or to make me entangled in words on this occasion? Is it not the latter? Tell me – I pray you – whether it not better to stay with simple and sound teaching with is not subject to any controversies than to accept some new and disputable formulae? Who made you a teacher of the Holy Spirit? Do you also suspect Him of heresy? When I can see how you treat people who confine themselves to the words used by the Holy Spirit to your chants, I would suspect you to be willing to compete with them in eloquent discussion on the mysteries of God. O wretched dust, do you imagine that with your darkness you will illuminate the Word of God, which shines with light by itself? And none of the Words of God is concealed before the faith – the faith which does not inquire but contemplates the depth of God’s Wisdom with admiration.

What is above us is also beyond our cognition. What is wrong and blameworthy in this statement? But it is known that quarrelsome people will never have too few matters to quarrel about. No word or deed is so good that human malice would withdraw from deriding it. Thus, what shall we do? It is necessary, I say, to bear it and not to give up hope. It is truly admirable and worthy of a Christian not to imitate him who delivered a strike to you and to repay inflicted injuries with silence. You will not sin if you remain silent; on the contrary, you will sin if you do not, and whatever you undertake, will be in vain and will lead the anyway festering Church to fester even more.

⁸ In the original text – “prophanus politicus.” At that time, the term “politicians” was used for followers of the view that the duty of the state is first of all to defend secular interests of citizens and to maintain religious peace.

We should bring ourselves to do something in the name of peace, in the name of the Fatherland and the Church, especially in our times, when not only the ability to get to know our neighbours but also to forgive them has vanished. Let us bear the errors of others, so that they bear ours. “Blessed are those of meek heart and peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God;” Christ orders us to be honest and merciful, following the example of His Father and Himself. And I have no doubts that many of those who are found guilty on earth, will be found innocent by Him in Heaven. He will take to Himself many of those who were rejected by the world. He will grant the place in Heaven to many of these, who were erased by our zealots from the books of eternal life. Truly, it would be unfortunate for us if it depended on these zealots for whom to open and for whom to close the gate of Heaven!

When one asks these zealots why they become so aroused and fly into passion, we are given the same old story as a response: “The zeal for the cause of the Lord devours us.” However, the truth is that it is you who devour the cause of the Lord and it is a sophism with which you cover up the debauchery of wildest passions. You betray yourselves with this immediately when you step out in public. Some of you are devoured by excessive ambition, others are convulsed with anger and envy, yet others are possessed by these and numerous other most wicked passions. Indulging these passions to the detriment of the Church, you swear the worst curses and slander the innocent. I omit here your reckless and ill-timed verdicts, your celerity to condemn what you have not read and not understood. Impetuosity leads to no good, according to how Jocasta by Euripides expressed herself: “haste is not just.” Instead, I will point out something else.

In our theological theses you resort to perverse distortion of what is actually good and does not contain anything improper. You draw on the authority of what you know that is false. How often you impute such ideas to the opposing party which they have never proclaimed and you invent errors where there are none!

What times! What customs! These discords and dissention have such a result that among the quarrels the truth is being more and more pushed into the darkness and the door for atheism opens. Some want to call such a madness and such a debauched rage with the name of zeal! It is, however, not zeal for the House of God, but the same zeal against the House of God as Abishai demonstrated⁹ (2 Samuel 19 : 22), or as it was among the Jews against Christ, Paul and Stephen, and that was demonstrated by Peter and John against the Samaritans. Such a zeal is a distortion and a negation of the true zeal, as it is deprived of love and wisdom. Instead of building, it ruins; instead of healing, it irritates wounds. It intensifies discords and dissention; it disturbs, spoils and weakens. And what happened somewhere else, I shudder to remind (anyway, it has become public in the Christian world).

⁹ Ahishai – son of Zeruiah, a figure appearing in 2 Samuel 19 : 22.

It is praiseworthy to draw conclusions from the madness of others and to lead to concord what deviated to the wilderness of discord. We should therefore get rid of ill-timed zeal and let us evoke this ancient “oblivion of faults.” Let us neither approve nor defend biased names which were rebuked by St Paul. Let us ornament practiced occupation with good customs. Let us cover shortcomings with the greatest moderation, as if in a theatre. Let us discuss our own affairs, and not those of others, let us wash one another’s feet, let us pardon offences to one another and let us behave in such a way that we set an example with words, behaviour and the spirit that animates us. And above all, let us beware of reckless condemnation of our neighbours due to trivial and easily amendable errors. Hastiness in condemning is dangerous and we are deterred from it by the fate of a Pharisee, who rejected others with conceit and then he was rejected himself by the Righteous Judge.

Let public offices intervene in these matters and oppose to pettifogging. Constantine the Great proceeded in a just way when he neither read himself nor let others read numerous written complaints and mutual accusations of bishops. Instead, he burnt all these complaints. We will not rebuke the conduct of some rulers, who imposed silence on quarrelling parties. By means of this, they did not make an attempt on the ecclesiastical office as such, nor they violated the ecclesiastical power of the keys and of watching over the purity of the faith. They only aimed at curbing the impudence of individuals who believe that they have properly cared for the salvation of the faithful if they are allowed to attack with impunity whomever they want and however they want. There are big differences among the errors: some of them can be tolerated, some of them not. Justice, moderation and objectivity are needed for it. Furthermore let us heed, what will bring benefit and what will bring harm. There are many issues that it is better to be silent about, rather than announce them in public; correct is therefore the principle, stated e.g. by Plato, that nothing should be announced in public until special judges approve of it. The malicious tussle and biting would have been efficiently prevented a long time ago if it had not been allowed to spread all possible fabrications and slurs with the help of the art of printing,

Truly, it is vile that printing which is a truly Divine art, God’s gift, pride and excellent support of the Church, was used to the society’s doom.

About this and the other matters, two papers which accompany this preface will deal with in more details. Those papers are written by some unknown authors, but as it can be seen, these authors are learned, honest and full of moderation. Therefore, we cannot doubt, that you, distinguished and noble Senators, will find it a pleasure to read them. You also love the moderation, lost heart for the religious dissensions that convulse our country; with your whole hearts you call all the people to the agreement and peace. This is what we indeed need, in vain would we face the evil from the outside, if we did not deal with the evil inside the country. So it would be right to let those two papers spread across the world, adding the splendor of your authority

to them. We do foresee that these papers will not tickle everybody's taste: that bar-raters who would not live if they did not hinder with somebody, will definitely not like them. We also know that the papers of that content were already written by Iu-nius¹⁰ and Zepperus.¹¹ But neither the malice of these, nor the pious efforts of those dissuade us from taking part in the matter of concord.

Lord Jesus, please come, give peace to your Church, remove the seeds of dis-cord, disperse the darkness of lie with the light of the truth, thwart the plots of Your and our opponents! Give us the true, unshakable, intact concord which was set in advance by Your Word, strengthen and preserve it and be our only Teacher! Amen.

¹⁰ François du Jon, Iunius (1545 – 1602). In 1593 in Leiden he published (in French and Latin), a work entitled: *Le paisible chrétien ou de la paix...*

¹¹ Wilhelmus Zepperus, the author of the work *Pollitia Ecclesiaie*, no year.