Unitarian Beginnings and Heritage in Poland

A Historical Pilgrimage and Study Tour: September 13-19, 2023

JOIN US for a visit to 16th century Poland's Unitarian "heartland," where early religious dissenters —who called themselves the Polish Brethren—established congregations in the early 1560s (eight years before similar events in Transylvania) that openly challenged the doctrine of the trinity, rejected infant baptism, and debated the morality of military service from their pacifist devotion to the life of Jesus. In 1569 many of them moved to the newly founded "unitarian town" of **Raków** (pronounced "RAH-koof"). After 1580, with leadership from Italian theologian, Fausto Sozzini (Faustus Socinus), the Brethren became known, and reviled, across Europe as "Socinians." In nearly 300 congregations across the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, they flourished into the 1630s, and persevered until 1660, when they were forced into exile or reconversion under Roman Catholic oppression.



Present-day Raków

Why study them? Their influence was huge for later liberal religious and political development in Holland, England, and America. In **Raków** their academy educated hundreds of youth and their printing press published a flood of progressive ideas in theology, ethics, and church-state separation. Fausto Sozzini and his disciple Johann Crell were in important ways the first process theologians, rejecting divine foreknowledge and predestination as incompatible with human free will and moral responsibility, and replacing the concept of an immutable God with the new understanding of a deity who changes over time in response to worldly events. It was in **Raków**—the Polish Brethren's intellectual center from 1598 to 1638—that the widely known summation of early Unitarian ideas, the *Racovian Catechism*, was first printed in 1605. Their radical pursuit of justice lifted up ideas that are only now, 400 years later, being seriously taken up in Unitarian Universalist thinking and action.

Leaders from the Unitarian group in Warsaw will be our hosts for this study tour. While we expect to attract mostly UUs from North America and Europe, we welcome interest from anyone and from anywhere. It's an excellent opportunity to connect with UUs internationally who have a shared interest in these earliest pioneers of our liberating religious movement, as they, against intense opposition, developed some of the most radical theology of the Protestant Reformation.



Kraków old town – Central Square

We begin with orientation and dinner on September 13 in **Kraków**, the vibrant royal and cultural capital of Poland, where Copernicus once lived, where Sozzini was nearly murdered for his heresy, and where industrialist Oskar Schindler developed his famous list during Nazi occupation. After two nights in Kraków, we will spend 2½ days traveling by chartered bus around the heartland of Polish Brethren life, staying in a hotel near **Raków**, and visiting nearby historic sites of Polish Brethren worship, some preserved or restored, others sadly neglected and in ruins. Finally, we continue north to Poland's capital city, Warsaw. There we will meet with members of the local Unitarian group, talk with historian Professor Stanisław Obirek, share a final conversation on learnings and insights from our tour, and then go our separate ways after breakfast on Tuesday morning, September 19. For North Americans planning their travel, we suggest arriving in Kraków or another European gateway city (London, Amsterdam, Frankfurt, etc.) a few days early for jet lag adjustment before our tour begins on Sept 13.

Our tour leaders from the U.S., the Rev'd Drs. Jay Atkinson and Roger Jones, are UU parish ministers in California. Jay visited Poland in 2004, 2006, 2014, 2017, and 2019, and has written on the history, ecclesiology, and social ethics of the Polish Brethren as well as on precursors of humanism, religious tolerance, and interfaith pluralism in Poland. Roger has also visited Poland on an earlier tour and has preached on the history and legacy of the Polish Brethren. Our local tour planners and directors are Justyna Borusińska and Jarosław ("Jarek") Wajchert, lay leaders of the Unitarian group in Warsaw. All four leaders will supplement our site visits with background commentary on the history, theology, congregational life, and social philosophy of the Polish Brethren and how their ideas influenced their contemporaries and still live on in modern Unitarian Universalism. In addition, we will provide interested tour registrants with suggestions for background reading.

The *estimated* cost for this tour is USD $800 (double occupancy) or $950 (single), including lodging, local transport, all breakfasts, one lunch, & two dinners, but not including travel to and from Poland, which will be the responsibility of each participant. Registration along with a $200 deposit is needed by May 15, with full payment due by June 30, 2023.

For questions, or to register for the tour, contact Jay Atkinson: jayatk40@gmail.com.

Tentative itinerary

Wednesday, Sept 13: afternoon – arrive in Kraków on your own schedule, check into your room at Hotel Wit Stwosz; gather in lobby (early evening, 6:00pm?) for greetings, introductions, and brief orientation to tour; then head out for dinner (cost not included) at old-town restaurants.

Thursday, Sept 14: hotel breakfast; gather in conference room for slide show overview of Polish Brethren life and history; walking tour of historic old town Kraków; lunch; free time in early afternoon; 4:00 pm concert of 16th-cent. music & Polish Brethren hymns; dinner (cost not included) at old town restaurants.

Friday, Sept 15: breakfast in hotel, chartered bus to Lusławice estate (Sozzini memorial and chapel); lunch; visit restored Polish Brethren chapel in Ublinek, then arrive and check in for two nights at Hotel Chańcza, near Raków; dinner and evening conversation at the hotel (included in tour price).

Saturday, Sept 16: breakfast in hotel; visit historic Secemin and Moskorzew churches; lunch at Ludynia estate with historic chapel and book exhibit; continue to Raków for walking tour and visit to its historical museum, meeting with local historians and city officials; back to hotel to rest before dinner with Racovians at nearby Kurozwęki palace (included in tour price).



Wawel Castle in Kraków

Sunday, Sept 17: breakfast in hotel, bus to Kolosy & Cieszkowy chapels for Sunday worship; lunch; continue on bus to Warsaw for hotel check in; free time to explore town center, then dinner (cost not included) in Warsaw old-town restaurants.

Monday, Sept 18: breakfast at hotel; meeting with Warsaw Unitarians; conversation with Prof. Stanisław Obirek; walking tour; closing tour reflection and conversation; dinner at a restaurant (cost not included) in old-town Warsaw.

Tuesday, Sept 19: breakfast in hotel; good-byes and departures for return flights or going on to other destinations, depending on individual travel plans.