

Unitarian Beginnings and Heritage in Poland

A Historical Study Tour with the Rev'd Dr. Jay Atkinson: July 27–August 1, 2019

JOIN US on a visit to the 16th century's Unitarian "heartland" where early religious dissenters—who called themselves the Polish Brethren—first established congregations in the 1560s 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, whose 450th anniversary we will celebrate as part of our tour. After 1580, under the leadership of Fausto Sozzini (Faustus Socinus), the Brethren became known, and reviled, across Europe as "Socinians." They established over 200 congregations in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, flourished into the 1630s, and persevered until 1660, when they were forced into exile or reconversion under resurgent Roman Catholic oppression.

Nevertheless, their influence was hugely influential for later liberal religious development in Holland, England, and America. In the towns of Pińczów and then Raków, their academy educated hundreds of youth, nobility and commoners alike, and their printing press published a stream of innovative ideas in theology, ethics, and socio-political philosophy. Fausto Sozzini and his disciple Jan 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.



Present-day Raków

Leaders from the Unitarian congregation in Warsaw will be our hosts for this study tour. While we expect to attract mostly UUs from the United States and Europe, we welcome interest from anyone and from anywhere. It's an excellent opportunity to connect with UUs from American and European congregations with a shared interest in these earliest pioneers of our liberating religious movement, who developed the most radical theology of the Protestant Reformation.



Kraków old town – Central Square

Our tour begins July 27 in Kraków, the vibrant royal and cultural capital of Poland, where Copernicus once lived, where Sozzini was nearly murdered for heresy, and where Oskar Schindler developed his famous list during Nazi occupation. The next morning we drive north by chartered bus, making stops in what was once (1560-1640) the Unitarian heartland, and then arriving for a two-night hotel stay near the town of Raków—the Polish Brethren's intellectual center from 1598 to 1638, where the widely known summary of early Unitarian ideas, the *Racovian Catechism*, was first printed in 1605. Over the next two days we will visit Raków itself and other nearby historic sites of Polish Brethren worship, some preserved or restored, others sadly neglected and in ruins.

We'll return to Kraków for two nights and a full day, ending the tour at noon on August 1, and then go our separate ways: additional days of stayover, travel to other destinations, or departure for home, depending on individual preferences.

Our tour leader, the Rev'd Dr. Jay Atkinson (<https://www.sksm.edu/people/jay-atkinson>), served 32 years in UU parish ministry before retirement, was an adjunct seminary instructor in UU history at Starr King and Meadville Lombard, and is now a research scholar at Starr King School for the Ministry. He visited Poland in 2004, 2006, 2014, and 2017, 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. He will supplement our site visits with background commentary on the 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.

The estimated cost for this tour is USD \$700 (double occupancy) or \$850 (single), including lodging, local transport, all breakfasts, one lunch, and 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 required by March 30, with full payment by June 15. We hope also to arrange academic credit and scholarship aid for interested UU seminarians and others with limited budgets.

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

Tentative itinerary:

Saturday, July 27: afternoon – arrive in Kraków on your own schedule, check into Hotel Wit Stwosz; gather in lobby (early evening, 6:30pm?) for greetings, introductions, and brief orientation to tour; then head out in small groups for dinner on your own at old-town restaurants.

Sunday, July 28: hotel breakfast, then chartered bus to old Polish Brethren chapels in Kolosy and Cieszkowy for Sunday worship; lunch stop; arrive and check in for two nights at Hotel Chańcza, near Raków; late afternoon concert of 16th-century music and Polish Brethren hymns; then dinner at the nearby Kurozwęki palace (included in tour price).

Monday, July 29: breakfast in hotel, panel presentations on Raków and Polish Brethren history; lunch; walking tour of Raków and its historical museum, meeting with local historical group and city officials, back to hotel for dinner (included in tour price), and evening conversation.

Tuesday, July 30: breakfast and hotel check-out, visit historic Secemin church; lunch stop; Ludynia estate and historic chapel with afternoon tea/coffee; back to Kraków for two more nights at Hotel Wit Stwosz; dinner on your own in old-town Kraków

Wednesday, July 31: breakfast in hotel, chartered bus to Lusławice estate (Sozzini memorial and chapel); lunch; return to Kraków; free time for sightseeing and shopping; dinner on your own at Kraków old-town restaurants.

Thursday, Aug 1: breakfast in hotel, morning walking tour of Polish Brethren sites in Kraków and unveiling of Faustus Socinus memorial plaque; good-byes and departures at noon.



Wawel Castle in Kraków