

UNITARIAN SOCIETY OF NORTHAMPTON AND FLORENCE

220 Main Street, Northampton, Massachusetts 01060

NOTES ON “THE HISTORY OF EUROPEAN UNITARIANISM” COURSE

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The course was facilitated by members of the Partner Church Committee. The committee’s mission statement:

In support of the Society’s commitment to diversity, as well as the Unitarian Universalist principle expressing the goal of world community, the Partner Church Committee adopts the following goals:

- 1. To foster an exchange of people and ideas between our Unitarian Society and the Unitarian Church of Homoródkarácsonyfalva for the joy and enrichment of all our lives.*
- 2. To help Unitarians and others in the village recoup and rebuild after decades of living under totalitarian regimes.*
- 3. To inform ourselves about the European roots of Unitarianism and share this history with other Unitarian Universalists and the wider community.*
- 4. To maintain our commitment to participation in the Partner Church Council at the national level.*

Course description:

In this course we will

- study continental Unitarianism in its historical and cultural context, from its antecedents in western and central Europe through the Reformation to the present day, with an emphasis on Transylvania.*
- see how our spiritual forbears began to formulate and practice the principles of freedom, reason and tolerance, and how their attempts at ongoing innovation were suppressed.*
- consider the questions*
 - What (if anything) does European Unitarianism have to do with us?*
 - Does “Unitarianism” suggest core beliefs, values, or principles which have arisen independently, in the midst of diverging national cultures?*
- examine in more detail the situation of the Unitarian Church in Romania since the Ceausescu era*

We developed this course in connection with the third goal in the mission statement. None of us are experts on the history of Europe, the Reformation, Unitarianism, or Transylvania. So we learned together. We had considered asking participants to take responsibility for portions of the material, but changed our minds once we started to read the text and saw how challenging it was. Each of us did research on our topic(s) beyond the text. There was no formula to our presentations. Sometimes we summarized the Howe chapters, with added facts and observations, and sometimes we based the presentation primarily on other sources. The length of the presentations varied. There was always time for questions and discussion.

Each participant was given a packet of handouts at the first session. A few additional items were distributed by individual presenters. All but one of the original handouts are included here:

Course outline.

A map of Hungary and Romania, showing Transylvania and the location of our partner church. (not included because it is copyrighted, and I don’t remember the source. If we develop the course further we will use a map for which we have gotten permission to copy.)

Two chronologies: “Important Dates in European Unitarian History,” and “Selected Dates in General European and Transylvanian History.” We thought it important to place the development of Unitarianism in historical context.

Supplementary bibliography.

The reading for the course is a sermon by József Kászoni and Gretchen Thomas, in In Storm, even Trees Lean on Each Other. Compiled by Judit Gellerd and available from her <zizi315@yahoo.com>

We began each meeting with a hymn. At the first 5 meetings we sang hymns of Hungarian, Transylvanian, or Czech origin (all in Singing the Living Tradition). At the last meeting we sang “Spirit of Life” in both English and Hungarian. It helped that one of the course coordinators is the choir director, and the other knows some Hungarian.

Session-by-session notes:

1. The 20th century to 1989. We decided to begin the course with the 20th century rather than the 16th or earlier.

(a) The first meeting set the tone by establishing the rationale for our connection with Transylvania. We read together the excerpt from “Our Darkness Was Very Deep.” (b) We thought it important to examine the relationship between Unitarianism and Hungarian ethnicity at the start. (c) This arrangement gave the participants another week to obtain the Howe text and begin to read it.

2. The early Reformation; Servetus. The presenter chose to focus heavily on John Calvin, because of his dominance during the period and his historical influence. This was a wise choice, as it provided a stark framework for considering Servetus’ heroic obstinacy and his fate.

3. Life of Socinus; Socinianism in Poland. During this meeting we read and discussed the Racovian Catechism, with admiration for its radical ideas.

4. Francis David; development of Unitarianism in Transylvania. The presenter summarized the assigned reading, supplementing it with information gleaned from Wilbur and Erdő (see Bibliography). We were amazed at the progressive nature of David’s teachings, and by his courage. All of us wanted to know more about him.

5. International Unitarianism and Unitarian Universalism. We scheduled this session because one of the committee members has visited the Khasi Hill Unitarians in India, and we wanted to hear more about them. It gave us an opportunity to discuss unifying factors in global liberal religion, as well as ways in which we differ. Also during this class, one of the participants gave a special report on the relationship between early Unitarianism and Judaism, a topic which generated interest when touched on briefly in an earlier session.

6. Unitarianism in Transylvania today; the Partner Church Program. We examined the Transylvanian catechism (available from the UUCF; see Bibliography). The wording and many of the concepts made more sense to us than they would have had we not studied Francis David, the repression of innovation, and the adaptation of the language of orthodox doctrine to reflect actual Unitarian beliefs. Three committee members have visited our partner village, and we each spoke of our impressions. We displayed photographs and Transylvanian textiles, etc.

Evaluation and future: Informal feedback has been very positive. We are in the process of doing a more systematic evaluation. Tentative plans are to offer the course every 2 years. One shortcoming was lack of attention to Czech Unitarianism. This is something we need to work into the curriculum.

***The Partner Church Committee of the Unitarian Society of Northampton and Florence would be thrilled if other groups could use any of the material or ideas included in this packet. We would welcome an exchange of similar materials and would especially like copies of adaptations of our work.

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UNITARIAN SOCIETY OF NORTHAMPTON AND FLORENCE

THE HISTORY OF EUROPEAN UNITARIANISM

A 6-week course

Wednesday evenings March 3 - April 14, 1999, 7:00 - 9:00

The Partner Church Committee

Text: Howe, Charles A. FOR FAITH AND FREEDOM. Boston: Skinner House, 1997.

Session 1, March 3 (Jeanne Kocsis and Flora Majumder)

Welcome and introduction. Major themes. The Unitarian Church in Transylvania since World War I. Political situation and ethnic relations. Sister church program of 1920s. The Ceausescu years.

Session 2, March 10 (Debbie Kehne)

Reading assignment: Howe, chapters [1 - 3] Early challenges to the accepted way of thinking about the holy trinity. Why questioning the nature of the trinity was upsetting to Rome. How the church handled even mild questioning of the catechism. Role of the Protestant Reformation in the evolution of Unitarian thinking. Life and times of Michael Servetus; why his martyrdom served to promote his thought.

Session 3, March 17 (Sally Lawton)

Reading assignment: Howe, chapters [4 - 5] Life and influence of Faustus Socinus. Socinianism in Poland. Theological issues ca. 1560-1660. Downfall of the Polish Brethren.

Session 4, March 24 (Flora Majumder)

Reading assignment: Howe, chapters [6 - 7] Milestones in the life of Dávid Ferenc (Francis David) (ca. 1510-1579). Rapid growth of Unitarianism in Transylvania. Cycles of persecution and revival. The theological differences between Us and Them: Are we direct descendants or distant cousins?

Session 5, April 7 (Flora Majumder and Laurel Foster-Moore)

Contacts between US and Transylvanian Unitarians, 19th and early 20th centuries. Founding of the International Association for Religious Freedom. Global Unitarianism and Unitarian Universalism today. Our co-religionists in India and other countries. What are the beliefs and principles which unite us, and how did they arise in the midst of diverging national cultures?

Session 6, April 14 (Jeanne Kocsis and Flora Majumder)

Reading assignment: Howe, chapter [10] The Unitarian Church in Transylvania today. The Partner Church Program. Northampton's role.

SUPPLEMENTARY BIBLIOGRAPHY

General

- Erdő, John. TRANSYLVANIAN UNITARIAN CHURCH: CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY AND THEOLOGICAL ESSAYS, trans. by Dr. Judit Gellérd. Chico, CA: Center for Free Religion, 1990.
- Howe, Charles A. FOR FAITH AND FREEDOM: A SHORT HISTORY OF UNITARIANISM IN EUROPE. Boston: Skinner House Books, 1997.
- “Hungarian Unitarian Catechism: The Catechism of the Hungarian Unitarian Church in Transylvanian Romania,” trans. by Byron C. Miller and György Andrászi [sic.], special issue of The Unitarian Christian 49:3-4 (Fall/Winter 1994).
- Morgan, Christine. ALABASTER VILLAGE: OUR YEARS IN TRANSYLVANIA. With Anne Morrison Welsh. Boston: Skinner House Books, 1997.
- Parke, David B., comp. THE EPIC OF UNITARIANISM: ORIGINAL WRITINGS FROM THE HISTORY OF LIBERAL RELIGION. Boston: Skinner House, 1985.
- Wilbur, Earl Morse. A HISTORY OF UNITARIANISM. 2 vols. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1945-1952.
- Williams, George Hunston. THE RADICAL REFORMATION. 3rd ed. Kirksville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1992.

Links between Judaism and Early Unitarianism in Europe

- Friedman, Jerome, “Alienated Cousins: Jews and Unitarians in Sixteenth-Century Europe,” 22 (pt. 1) Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society (1990-1991) 63-76.

The Partner Church Program 1989-

- Gellérd, Judit, comp. ENDING THE STORM: UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SERMONS ON TRANSYLVANIA. Chico, Calif.: Uniquet and Center for Free Religion, 1996.
- _____, ed. GUIDEBOOK FOR UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST PARTNER CHURCHES. Chico, Calif.: Center for Free Religion and Uniquet, 1997.
- _____, comp. IN STORM, EVEN TREES LEAN ON EACH OTHER: UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SERMONS ON TRANSYLVANIA. Chico, Calif.: Center for Free Religion, 1993.

- Partner Church News. Newsletter of the UU Partner Church Council. Published three times per year, sent to institutional and personal members of the Partner Church Council.

QUIZ ON UNITARIANISM IN EUROPE

1. What 1492 event contributed to the intellectual ferment of the Protestant Reformation?
(a) the expulsion of the Jews from Spain (b) death of Lorenzo de' Medici
(c) Columbus sailed the ocean blue (d) publication of Berlingheieri's edition of Ptolemy's *Geography*
2. Servetus was persecuted because of his unorthodox views on
(a) vegetarianism (b) monarchy (c) the Trinity (d) the shape of the earth
3. The Polish Brethren were
(a) followers of Socinus (b) a hot polka band out of Chicago (c) Supreme Court justices of Polish descent (d) a branch of the Mennonites
4. The Racovian Catechism was
(a) a hot rock band out of Chicago (b) a 17th-century statement of doctrine which repudiated many Lutheran and Calvinist teachings (c) the first papal encyclical (d) an Anabaptist covenant
5. Early non-trinitarians were accused of
(a) sermonizing (b) proselytizing (c) "judaizing" (d) bowdlerizing
6. The world's first (and only) Unitarian monarch was
(a) Maximilian I (b) John Sigismund (c) Lajos of Bohemia (d) Vlad Tepes
7. Francis David was
(a) the founder of the Franciscan order (b) a writer of popular detective novels
(c) the founder of Unitarianism in Transylvania (d) Martin Luther's bodyguard
8. Throughout its history, the Unitarian Church of Transylvania has placed great emphasis on
(a) education (b) the contemplative life (c) agriculture (d) sports
9. The theological institute which trains Hungarian and Transylvanian Unitarian ministers is located in
(a) Rome (b) Bratislava (c) London (d) Kolozsvár
10. The leader of the Unitarian Church in Romania is the
(a) bishop (b) president (c) chancellor (d) chef
11. Which of the following statements represent Transylvanian Unitarian belief?
(a) God is one. (b) We comprehend God as spirit and as love. (c) Reason is the lantern of faith. (d) All of the above.
12. Northampton's partner church is located in Homoródkarácsonyfalva, which means
(a) Little jewel in the Homoród Mountains (b) Crystal Springs (c) Christmas

Village by the Homoród River (d) Salty Brook

13. You might see these animals in a typical Transylvanian village:
(a) water buffalo (b) goats (c) storks (d) all of the above
14. The author of *Dracula* was born in
(a) Transylvania (b) Pennsylvania (c) Ireland (d) Iceland
15. Which European capital was home to the world's largest Unitarian congregation, with about 3000 members, between the two world wars?
(a) Budapest (b) Kiev (c) Warsaw (d) Prague
16. The founder of the Unitarian movement in Czechoslovakia was
(a) Norbert Čápek (b) Comenius (c) Vaclav Havel (d) Bedřich Smetana
17. Unitarian or UU congregations are to be found in which of these Asian countries?
(a) India (b) Pakistan (c) Philippines (d) all of the above

Answers: 1. (a) 2. (c) 3. (a) 4. (b) 5. (c) 6. (b) 7. (c) 8. (a) 9. (d) 10. (a)
11. (d) 12. (c) 13. (d) 14. (c) 15. (d) 16. (a) 17. (d)

Scoring: 14-17: Excellent! We need you in the Partner Church Committee's adult ed course on the History of European Unitarianism which begins March 21. Come and delve deeper. 9-13: Very good! Sign up and learn more. Below 9: Great! You'll enjoy the course even more than the others. Just bring your curiosity.

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IMPORTANT DATES IN EUROPEAN UNITARIAN HISTORY

Early Christian History

<p>1696 Unitarian printing house is established in Kolozsvár.</p> <p>325 Council of Nicaea adopts the Nicene Creed, proclaiming Jesus' divinity.</p> <p>1716 Unitarian property in Kolozsvár, including churches and printing house, are confiscated and given to Roman Catholic Church.</p> <p>375 General Council of Constantinople adds the Holy Spirit to the Godhead, thereby establishing Trinitarian dogma.</p> <p>1718 Unitarian college in Kolozsvár is confiscated and given to Roman Catholic Church.</p> <p>1511 Michael Servetus born.</p> <p>1719-1780 The Counter-Reformation continues in Transylvania. Unitarians are pressured to convert to Catholicism.</p> <p>1517 Martin Luther posts 95 theses in Wittenberg, Germany; Protestant Reformation begins.</p> <p>1527 Martin Cellarius publishes first anti-Trinitarian book.</p> <p>1763 Abolition of reserved pews.</p> <p>1781 Edict of Tolerance eases restrictions and promotes renewal of Unitarian Church.</p> <p>1531 Servetus publishes <i>On the Errors of the Trinity</i>.</p> <p>1821 Formal contact established with British Unitarians.</p> <p>1553 Servetus burned at the stake in Geneva.</p> <p>1831 Formal contact established with American Unitarian Association.</p> <p>1554 Sebastian Castellio publishes <i>Concerning Heretics</i>.</p> <p>Transylvania as an</p> <p>Sigismund dies.</p> <p>1870 Works of Channing translated into Hungarian.</p> <p>Polish Socinianism</p> <p>1898-1901 Building of Church headquarters (including college and seminary) in Kolozsvár.</p> <p>1539 Faustus Socinus born.</p>	<p>1604 Death of Socinus.</p> <p>1605 First version of Socinus' <i>Rakovian Catechism</i> published; revised version published in 1619.</p> <p>1638 Polish Senate orders burning of Rakow Press and schools; expels Socinian and ministers from Krakow.</p> <p>1658 Polish Diet banishes all Socinians from Transylvanian (Hungarian) Unitarianism</p> <p>1510 Francis David born.</p> <p>1566 Francis David preaches against the doctrine of Trinity.</p> <p>1568 Edict of Torda issued by King John Sigismund proclaims complete religious toleration.</p> <p>1570 1st Unitarian hymnal is published.</p> <p>1571 Unitarianism recognized in official "received religion"; King</p> <p>1572 Law against religious innovation enacted in Transylvania.</p>
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1569	Rakow established as Socinian center in Poland.	1579	Trial, imprisonment and death of David.
1900	The Transylvanian Church participates in the founding of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF).	1600	1 st use of the denominational name "Unitarian."
1579	Socinus arrives in Poland.		
1585	Rakow Press founded.		
1915	Establishment of Unit. Theological Seminary.	1638	Accord of Deés further restricts Unitarian freedom in Transylvania.
1591	Mob destroys the Socinian Church		
1948	Protestant seminaries are forced to merge. in Krakow.		