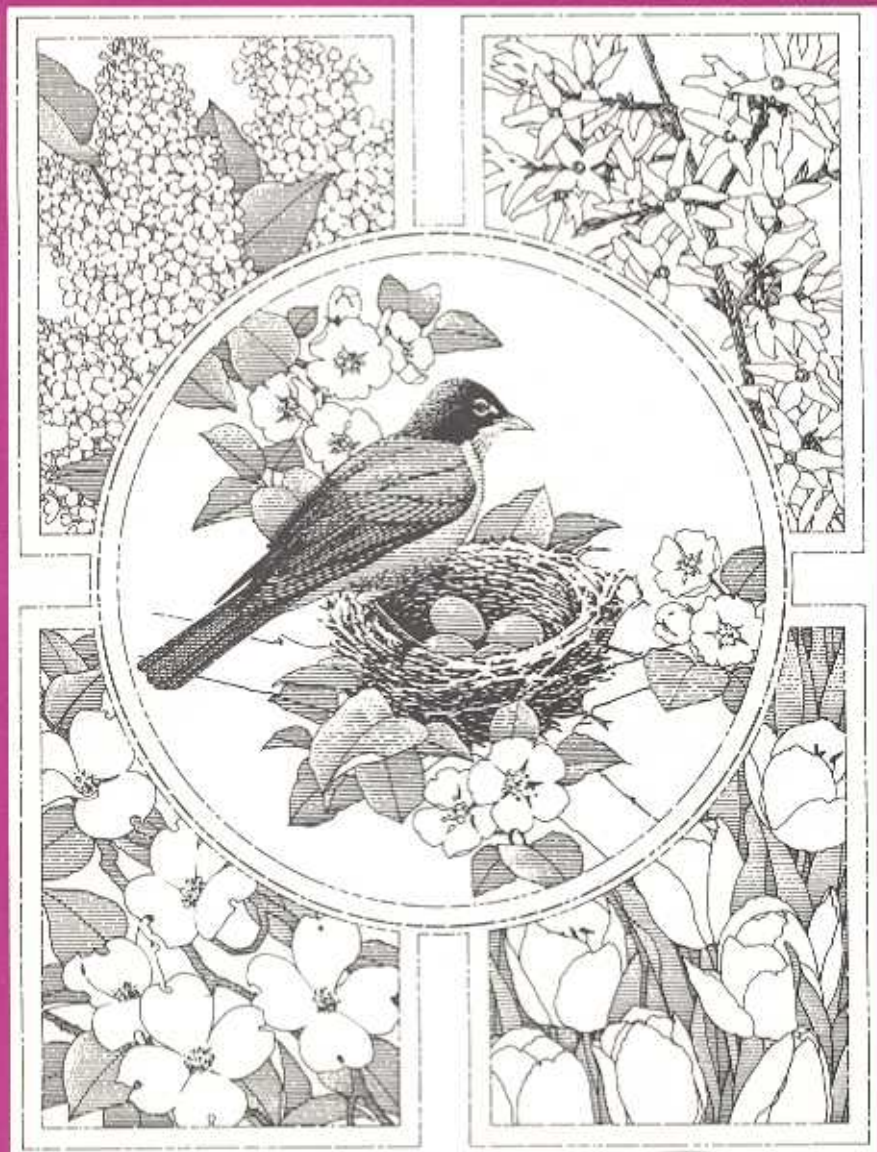


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Historical Notes on the Polish Brethren Unity

by Przemyslaw Waliszewski and Laura Price

Editor's Note: The author, a medical doctor, was in America as a Fulbright scholar when he read TSS article about the Polish Brethren Unity (July, '91), which he refers to as "my community." He submitted this article to provide some historical background. In his cover letter, Dr. Waliszewski wrote, "I think that in these days when the Catholic Church tries again to control human minds, it is a good opportunity to recall how it was in the past."

The history of the Polish Brethren Unity is connected with the most important events of the European Reformation. The Unity was founded in 1562 in Krakow (South Poland).

The sixteenth century was a very dramatic period in European history. It was a time of religious intolerance. The Catholic Holy Office passed judgment on thousands of innocent people. There were two judgments: guilty or not guilty, but the first one was often and willingly passed. The Catholic Church hierarchy tried to influence science, culture and social life. Every scientific experiment, every theory, every treatise had to be confirmed by the so-called Holy Office as a loyal one. For example, the Polish astronomer and mathematician, Nicholas Copernicus, tried to prove that the earth revolves around the sun. This was contradictory to the official church version. There was a lot of others such as Giordano Bruno, Galileo, Hus, Luther, Socyn, all of whom suffered some form of persecution for their beliefs. Some lost life because the activity was contradictory to the official policy of the church. Catholic clericalism and religious fanaticism achieved triumphs.

In this situation many educated, broad-minded and courageous people tried to escape being killed, put in jail, or suffering some other form of persecution. Poland was a tolerant country in that time. There was a king who hindered the influence that the Catholic hierarchy tried to exert on politics
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and government. This in turn allowed creativity to flourish and provided a good environment for philosophers such as Erasmus from Rotterdam, Servet, Blandrata (a personal medical doctor of the Polish king), Valla, Gentile, Alciati and Socyn, all of whom helped shape the final doctrinal beliefs of the Polish Brethren Unity. Some of them lived in Poland. Some of them corresponded with the denizens of Poland from foreign countries. The Polish Brethren Unity developed intensive dialogues with the intellectual giants of the day—Descartes, Tycho, Kepler, Gassendi, and Grotius. These dialogues were published throughout Europe. They were studied by the English physicist, Sir Isaac Newton, the Dutch philosopher, Spinoza, and the English thinker, John Lock. A compilation of these works was published in the Netherlands as "Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum".

As principles, the Polish Brethren Unity accepted antitrinitarianism, humanism and rationalism. They utilized an analytical method for studying the Bible. They used the Scriptures as a basis for their belief system and as a means for which to live their lives. They did not attempt to use it to build a dogma. This resulted in a multiplicity of currents within the Polish Brethren Unity. Some members believed in two gods—Adonai and Yeshua. Some believed in the Holy Trinity. Some of them studied Judaism and kept the Sabbath. Pacifism was one of the generally accepted

tenets of the faith. A tolerance for a mixture of ideas and beliefs existed. This attitude, full of friendship, co-operation and honor for the opinions of others enabled discussions. This tolerance enabled them to achieve an agreement in the basic theological matters of the church. In 1600, about forty years after the meeting in Krakow, the Polish Brethren Unity became the first movement in Europe which did not agree with the Catholic dogma of the Holy Trinity and protested the persecutions, religious intolerance and antisemitism (1). It was the beginning of the Unitarian movement.

The Polish Brethren drew their attention during the comparative study of the Scriptures on the distorted character of the basic dogmas of Christianity. The Christian philosophy developed after 324 A.D. It was a philosophical system which accepted the basic notions of Ancient Greek philosophy and applied them to interpret biblical events. However, the Scriptures are a moral set. Christianity, grafted at the beginning with Judaism quickly forgot that the Torah is a fragment of natural Jewish history. The change of the Ten Commandments (324 A.D. in Nicea) was the first serious sin of Christianity against God. It caused the Jewish people to never accept Christianity. It led to the establishment of Arianism and Catholicism (2). The Polish Brethren Unity stayed connected ideologically with Arianism and continued its traditions.

The Polish Brethren founded a University in Rakow in 1600. At that time Rakow was a small country. After several years, the university developed an excellent reputation far superior to that of the Catholic schools at that time, and as a consequence, it attracted young people from all over Europe. The printing firm that was established at the university published the results of their findings in almost every European language.

Special financial programs enabled the poor to study at the university.

The experience and methodological achievements of The Arian University were used one hundred and fifty years later when the Polish educational committee established a program for the Polish primary schools.

The ideas of tolerance, brotherhood, human co-operation, freedom and equality found a place in the Polish Constitution from 1791 on.

Achievements of the Polish Brethren exerted an influence on the national culture. The first Polish grammar was written by the Frenchman, Piotr Statorius. The German, Stegmann introduced fractions to Polish mathematics. Translations of the Scriptures were rendered from original languages, Hebrew and ancient Greek by Szymon Budny. He compared different translations and came to the conclusion that it is necessary to interpret biblical events using historical knowledge as a guideline. Many of the Polish Brethren knew Hebrew and Greek, and they read the Scriptures in their original languages. The German Schmalz, together with the Pole, Hieronim Moskorzowski, wrote *Katechizm Rakowski* (The Doctrinal Beliefs of the Polish Brethren Unity). Samuel Przykowski, an expert in the field of relationships between state and church suggested a separation of the two institutions.

The social activity that developed as a function of their theological beliefs was a key ingredient in their faith. Everybody who lived in the community had a job, food, place to live and social care. The Brethren understood their spiritual development in a very practical way. Because of this attitude they were known in all of Europe.

In 1656, after a tragic war with Sweden over independence, the Catholic Church hierarchy accused the Polish Brethren Unity of treason and demanded banishment. The Polish Parliament working under the super-

vision of the new Catholic king considered two possibilities: to banish the Polish Brethren or to banish Jewish people because both social groups were hated by governing Catholic centers. This time the Polish Parliament decided to banish The Polish Brethren Unity. The only alternative was to convert to Catholicism. About fifty to seventy thousand Polish Arians emigrated to the Netherlands and Transylvania (Romania and Hungary.) Since that time, the Catholic Church, having no serious opponents in Poland became very self-serving. This was one of the reasons why Poland lost its independence. This was a great national tragedy. Before Poland was divided into three parts between Russia, Prussia and Austria all of which were under the rule of the Catholic Church. This church exerted strong influence on human minds bringing people up in intolerance and ignorance. One third of the Polish territory belonged to the Catholic Church and provided money for this activity. A big part of this fortune belonged to the Polish Brethren before they had to leave the Polish Kingdom.

The Polish Brethren Unity continued activity abroad until the eighteenth century investigating the principles of the spiritual development of man according to the Scriptures. Andrzej Wiszowaty published the results of those investigations in the Netherlands in his book *Religio Rationalis*. In this way the ideas of the Polish Brethren led to the creation of the International Unitarian Movement, people believing in only one God, the God of Israel.

Resumption of the Polish Brethren Unity occurred in Poland in 1930 in Krakow. The Lutheran pastor, Karol Grys-Smilowski, arranged meetings and discussions to arouse the Christians interest in the Polish Brethren ideas. He wrote a book *Z Ziemi Swieterj Nowoczesne Wierze* and published it before World War II.

In its present form the Polish Brethren Unity has existed since 1984. It is
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interesting that the doctrine of the Unity as a philosophical system does not exist at all. The Scriptures are a source of spiritual development and determine the moral norms. The Polish Brethren Unity is a small, Sabbathkeeping group of about 100 members under the authority of Robert Kisiel. However, the community has a custom to invite everybody who wants to discuss the topics of Judaism and Christianity. It enables a cooperation between Jews and other people looking for their own way to God. This organization has contacts with believers in the US, Canada, Ukraine and Germany.

The main task of the Polish Brethren Unity presently is studying the Scriptures with a consciousness that Christianity is grafted with the history of Israel. Everybody who appears to be a Christian ought to know that Yeshua was a Jew and that the history of the Jewish nation was not completed with Christ's death! The Polish Brethren Unity is interested in the religious freedom in Poland which to this day is threatened by the political activity of the Catholic Church. Studying and teaching about the Biblical roots of the Church of God is a form of activity against Anti-Semitism in this country. The Polish Brethren try to be a bridge between Jew

and Christians.

The most important achievement besides observing the Sabbaths, new moons and annual feasts, is the activity of praying. The prayers are like those of ancient Israel (Ezra 3, 10-13). Many come to have a spiritual rest on the Sabbath and to find a new balance in life. People who have serious troubles, who are alcohol and drug abusers, prisoners, homeless people, children from the families threatened by social pathology can find understanding and help. Although the organization is poor, it tries to realize the most beautiful human ideals. The Polish Brethren understand that everybody who wants to say he is a Christian should keep in mind the following words: "I myself will show him all that he must go through for my name's sake" (Acts 9, 15-16).

Please do not hesitate to write letters for the purpose of exchanging ideas or to visit the Polish Brethren Unity in Poland to deliver a lecture on the topics of Judaism or Christianity! Write to them at: 50-950 Wrocław, Skrzynka Poczta - P. O. Box 655, Polska, Poland. References: (1) Chmaj Ludwik Bracia Polscy - Ludzie, idee, wpływ, 1963, PWN Warszawa. (2) Wierusz - Kowalski Władysław. Dzieje wczesnego chrześcijaństwa I-W wieku, 1935, KAW Władysław.

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Polish Group Seeks Help with Ministry

Unity of the Polish Brethren, a small, Sabbathkeeping group of about 50 members is seeking help to renovate a building they intend to use as a community ministry center in Wroclow.

Over a year ago, President Robert Kisiel wrote, "We noticed this place about three years ago and officials allowed us to take care of it. It was badly damaged inside. The state was not interested in the building after World War II. We prepared the hall for services. We are very satisfied with this building and want to stay there and make it a center. We want to help old, poor, alcoholics, drug addicts and keep rooms for them there. We dream about a library, a kitchen, kindergarten and school for children. We want to cultivate the grounds and have animals. There is enough space inside and outside. We know that we

will not find a better meeting place and there is no other solution for us here, but we have no money to rebuild it completely. We trust that God has believers who will react and help us to rebuild it."

According to Brother Kisiel, the building is located in a beautiful quite green area of their town, close by the river, where baptisms can be performed.

For a while Unity of the Polish Brethren (UPB) cooperated with the Sabbath Day Christian Church of Poland (affiliated with the SDB World Federation). They had common services, baptisms, lectures, and organizational meetings. However, UPB's teachings regarding speaking in tongues and other gifts of the spirit became controversial and cooperation was broken off.

President Kisiel writes that UPB



Members of Unity of the Polish Brethren gathered on the front steps of the building they hope can become theirs for ministry; Pastor Robert Kisiel (with Bible) and his wife are in the front row.

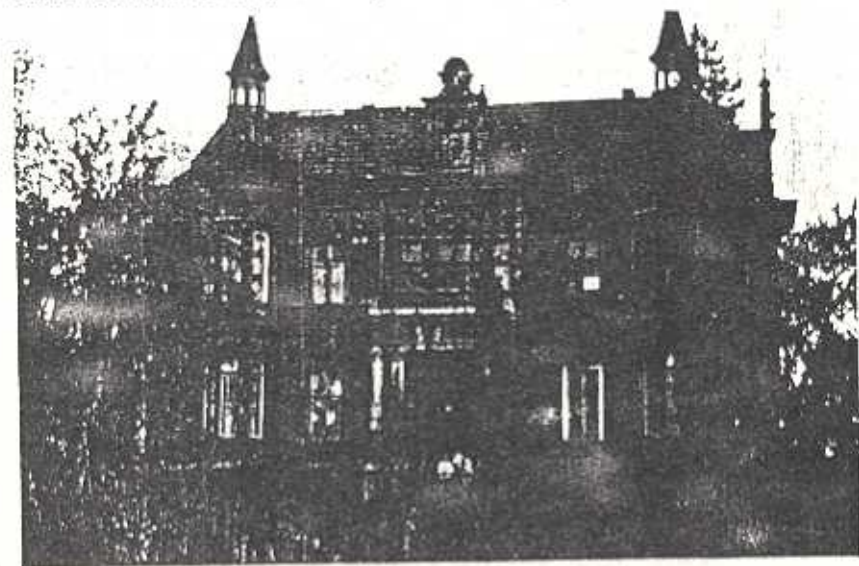
has had contacts with Brother Wasia from the Judaic-Christian Church of Proselytes (from the U.S.S.R.), and that they maintain correspondence with believers especially from the U.S.A. Their regular Sabbath services consist of preaching the Word, prayers, singing and praising God's glory, which is followed by an agape "meal of love." During this time they eat and fellowship and talk to people interested in the Word of God. They also have prayer meetings and special services connected with the Lord's Supper, annual feasts, and new moons in their building. They make an effort to help one another and to provide their neighbors with food, clothing, and money.

Dr. Kazamierz Jodkowski, a professor at the University of Lublin who has frequently translated TSS articles into Polish, reports that some members of UPB have accepted the annual Sabbaths and the sacred name teaching. While he is not sympathetic to their charismatic practices, Dr. Jodkowski believes they are a legiti-

mate ministry "very engaged in preaching the Gospel and all truths they accept as Biblical."

After a visit to Poland early in 1990, Ed Saunders, chairman of the Apostolic Church of God 7th Day in British Columbia, and his wife reported that they "found (Unity of Polish Brethren) to be very sincere believers who trace their history to a movement at the time of the Reformation. We saw the buildings which they wish to purchase, and we would like to help them purchase these buildings, but our mission commitments are too heavy at present to undertake any further projects. So we would recommend to anyone who wishes to assist these brethren that it would be a worthy cause."

With appropriate financial support, United of the Polish Brethren can take legal possession of the building from the state and begin developing it for ministry. Any brethren interested in helping with this project may write to the Unity of the Polish Brethren at skr. poczt. 655, 50-950 Wroclaw



Front of the building the Polish Brethren would like to convert to a ministry center in Wroclaw.