

**GREAT MOMENTS ON THE INEXORABLE MARCH TOWARD BOTHANDIA
— EASTERN EUROPEAN ROOTS —**

A sermon by Rev. Jaco B. ten Hove, *co-minister*

[Cedars Unitarian Universalist Church](#), Bainbridge Island and No. Kitsap Co, WA (2/19/2012)

(Find online resources for additional study at the end of this document.)

Just so there's no confusion, if you were to search the internet for references to the term "BothAndia," you would find mention of it almost entirely in works associated with me, so I have to be accountable for whatever fallout there is from this invented expression. It has become one of my favorite words, along with "inexorable" (which means steady, unstoppable)—and today I get to use them both in the same sermon title!

I find BothAndia to be a very handy and expressive tool, especially as an adjective—"bothandian." But more than that, it helps me highlight an important, maybe even essential liberal religious value: inclusion. And I will draw your attention momentarily to some early Eastern European roots of the Unitarian side of our religion, by profiling two pivotal moments that are decidedly "bothandian."

I believe the arc of the universe is leading us—slowly, perhaps, but inexorably—toward BothAndia, an idealized state of being, where "both/and" solutions to apparently oppositional dilemmas are eagerly sought, found and utilized to strengthen the common good. This inclusive vision is in contrast to reliance on more closed and often absolutist "either/or" responses to life's challenges.

My hope is that after I do this here, any of you will be at least a little bit better able to explain what we stand for and why our heritage matters, *both* then *and* now. To be able to adequately speak up for our religious perspective in the current national climate is a challenge I hope none of you will shy away from, since we are the latest generation of *both* caretakers *and* innovators of a "freedom that (*both*) reveres the past (*and*) trusts the dawning future (even) more" (from Hymn #145, "As Tranquil Streams").

Do not allow anyone to denigrate or minimize what we call our "living tradition," which is a *bothandian* ideal itself. To the extent that any of us know about and can speak to it, we are deeply grounded in a rich history that is *both* a strong heritage *and* very much alive and unfolding—thus a "living tradition." For we guard & uphold the tradition of heresy, if you will. You may have heard that the word heresy comes from the Greek, *hairesitikos*, meaning "able to choose."

Often, our courageous liberal religious ancestors chose to walk a path that was inclusive, affirming *liberty* of belief, and I am now going to tell you two highly abridged stories that put some flesh on this abstract skeleton. If I do *my* job reasonably well, *your* job will be to try to retell these stories later to someone else.

The first scene unfolds in an unlikely region, made so only because today it is such a dominantly (90%) Catholic country: Poland. But Poland wasn't always the religious monoculture that it is now. Journey back with me five hundred years, to the early 16th century, as the Protestant Reformation is unleashing sectarian diversity in Christendom.

In this era, Poland is the size of Texas and includes Prussia to the west and Lithuania to the east. It's a long distance from Rome and thus on the fringes of Church influence, having only been converted to Christianity a few centuries earlier. (And remember there was only one Christian Church in Europe before the Protestant Reformation, after which it had to be differentiated as the Roman Catholic Church. Before that it was just "The Church.")

What Church authority *was* there in Poland 500 years ago had become emblematic of why the *Protestant* Reformation was happening, which was to *protest* the corruption of church officials who frequently became rich men behaving badly. They had lots of power but little credibility. For instance, one local Bishop of that time is on record with this telling remark: "Believe in a goat if you like, provided you pay me my tithes." (Hmmm. Note to self: Consider new slogans for our next pledge drive.)

The fiercely independent Poles did not take kindly to any foreign authority, and had already learned to accept a diversity of religious practices, including those of Jews, Greek Orthodox and Moslems. Meanwhile, there were many indigenous Slavic peasants working the land, with communities of other European groups as artisans and merchants in the cities. Then the Polish King married the daughter of an Italian duke, and she brought a large entourage of other influential Italians with her, freshly inspired by the emerging Reformation.

So, we've got fiercely independent Poles, a long way from Rome, a weak and corrupt Church, and lots of other Europeans around. It all makes fertile ground for the Protestant Reformation—which the Roman Church hierarchy fought, but unsuccessfully, at least at first. Various new groups sprang up quickly in Poland, including the suitably named Reformed Church, through which the seed of anti-trinitarian thought was planted. And that idea is at the root of our *Unitarian* heritage.

However, most Protestants, including many within the Polish Reformed Church, still affirmed the Doctrine of the Trinity, which proposes a three-part God: father, son, holy

ghost, all co-equally divine. (The Reformation was not so much a protest against the theology of the church as it was an attempt to change the corrupt practices of the church fathers. So doctrines such as the Trinity were not at issue as much as, say, the selling of indulgences, whereby one could purchase a stairway to heaven from that local bishop.)

But more and more people were reading the Bible for themselves—thanks to the invention of the printing press only a few decades earlier. And the more open-minded and curious among them were unable to find any justification for the Trinity in there. The most outrageous of these free-thinkers also began to suggest the full humanity of Jesus, who was, therefore, not to be an object of worship. All this was, of course, quite a challenge to the Trinitarians, who still had the power to persecute such heretics, which they did, to be sure.

But 16th century Poland had enough of an open atmosphere that it nonetheless became a haven for heretics. Elsewhere in Europe the Church was relentlessly harsh to such anti-trinitarians, and numerous radical thinkers fled to Poland to join the Reformed Church. The anti-trinitarians among them became known as the Minor Church; also as the [Polish Brethren](#)

But within this group of otherwise unified dissenters there arose a different and very divisive issue: baptism, which brings me to the first *bothandian* moment I want to portray today. The radical members of the Minor Church in the 1560s hotly debated whether infants should be baptized, an issue which nowadays lacks controversial oomph, but back then it was huge.

My colleague David Bumbaugh, in his “[Narrative History](#)” of Unitarian Universalism [pg. 35] helpfully portrays the path they took in the face of this internal fight.

Some argued that since baptism was a sign of admission into the Christian community, and since participation in that community requires a conscious choice, baptism should be reserved for adults. Infant baptism, they argued, is invalid, and therefore those who have been baptized as infants must be rebaptized upon admission to the church. Others insisted upon the necessity of their children being baptized so that they might grow up within the Christian community.

There was much debate, and in the face of threatened schism, [they met in a synod—a council—and] resolved that...no one should be forced against conscience, and that all should dwell together in peace until the next synod. Subsequent synods ended with the participants giving and accepting forgiveness for any offense, and promising to live in peace together.

Thus, toleration of differences became an institutionalized custom among the Polish Brethren. In time, infant baptism would die out among them, without schism and without liberty of conscience being compromised.

So here we have a group of strong-minded free-thinkers, who had been pushing hard against the boundaries of trinitarian doctrine, now facing a significant disagreement among themselves regarding baptism. They probably knew quite well what it felt like to be suppressed by dominant authority, so they took a different route and modeled a *bothandian* resolution—to *both* disagree *and* live in peace.

This approach was very unusual in an era of uncompromising passion and oppressive power, but it characterized the proto-unitarian Polish Brethren in the Minor Church. They patiently allowed competing positions on baptism to each have some room, with respect for everyone’s “liberty of conscience.” This is our religious heritage—the “toleration of differences [as] an institutionalized custom.”

They even established a utopian town, called [Raków](#), in which together they could live out their beliefs, based primarily on the Sermon on the Mount. For many decades, this town attracted anti-trinitarians and idealists who *both* lived a simple, egalitarian lifestyle, imitating the early Christian disciples, *and* created a rigorous intellectual climate.

Raków was called “a perpetual synod,” with ongoing debates and explorations of religious issues, plus well-respected educational institutions. Residents there modeled how to *both* allow individual freedom *and* promote the common good, which remains an elusive balancing act to this day. Visitors came from all over Europe to witness this noble experiment in action.

The community had some bumpy periods, but flourished. Not coincidentally, the concurrent [Warsaw Confederation](#) of 1573 formalized religious toleration in the lands of modern Poland and Lithuania, which at this time were a religiously and ethnically diverse society.

Raków also became a strong publishing center, producing, among many other tracts, the very influential [Racovian Catechism](#), in 1605. The spirit behind this notable document was the same that guided the community’s emphasis on tolerance: one can never be totally sure of exclusive truth claims, so allowing for difference and change is essential. Unlike most other catechisms, this one was designed to be updated. Sixty years after its first edition, a new preface explained:

While we compose a catechism, we prescribe nothing to any[one]; while we express our own views, we oppress no one. Let each be free to express [their] own mind in religion... We do not think that we need blush if our Church advances in some things.

It is difficult for me to adequately portray how revolutionary such attitudes were in 16th and 17th century Europe. Rarely, if ever before had anyone dared to profess such openness to change in religion, which was otherwise steadily authoritarian and rigid, relying on closed systems of theology and practice that could not afford to be questioned.

In fact, the sad end of the Minor Church in Poland reflects the threat they were perceived to be, at least by the Roman Church. The more orthodox of the Protestants also perpetuated their fair share of repression, but in just a few years around 1640, all traces of Freedom, Reason and Tolerance were wiped out by the Catholic Jesuits, who had been given a mission to rid the country of the anti-trinitarian heresy. They were effective, brutally crushing the entire culture of the Polish Brethren, including the community at Raków, which was thoroughly scattered.

By the 18th century, Poland was one of the *least* tolerant countries in Europe, with nary a trace of the Minor Church. But this is not to say that the liberal religious experiment in Raków was futile, oh no! Their ideas—and their published documents—lived on in Western Europe and considerably advanced the inexorable march toward BothAndia.

Now our journey takes us due south a bit from Poland, to a nearby portion of Eastern Europe, around the same period in time, for a perhaps surprisingly parallel story that also deepens our heritage. And this story, which may be more familiar, features a main character.

We land in the Transylvanian region of what was then 16th century Hungary, where, as in Poland, the hand of the Church was not very strong. In fact, Hungarians had never paid any tithes to the church hierarchy. Furthermore, the region's geography had also provided a lot of contact with non-Christian peoples, especially Moslem Turks. In fact, the strategic location of the Transylvanian Alps between the Islamic east and the Christian west allowed it to experience a short period of independence—brief, but significant, with a somewhat happier ending than Poland's experiment.

The Protestant Reformation took hold there in Transylvania, first embodied in a big way by the two dominant competing strains related to Martin Luther and John Calvin. Gradually, mid-16th century, the anti-trinitarian notion began to catch on, largely due to the expert preaching and debating of one Transylvanian—[Francis Dávid](#), who had himself journeyed

through both other Protestant theologies to become convinced of the worth of a unitarian posture.

Francis Dávid's personal lineage was also bothandian, in a way, with a shoemaker father and a mother from the noble class, each from different ethnic groups, even. Such a polyglot background was not at all common or favored in those days, but it never slowed him down.

Dávid's oratory skills gained him notice and he soon had the ear of the young King John Sigismund of Transylvania, who had also been questioning the Trinity. His mother, Queen Isabella, had begun the liberalization of the religious landscape there earlier in the 1560s and he continued it, naming Dávid as the official Court Preacher.

From that post, Francis Dávid and his allies used a crucial and ingenious strategy to promote the anti-trinitarian view. They insisted that only the language and concepts found between the covers of the Bible could be used in debate. This was a righteous argument, hard to counter. It effectively limited Trinitarian references, which actually only began to appear in Church documents a few centuries after Jesus.

In 16th century Transylvania and much of Europe, religious debates between loud orators were high entertainment, lasting all day for weeks at a time, with large audiences, which sometimes would finally vote one or another of the partisans off the "island," as it were. Dávid and his anti-trinitarian allies were gaining momentum at such events.

They were also—thanks to the Unitarian King John Sigismund—able to take advantage of the royal printing press to spread their views more widely, most notably in a 1567 broadside called "False and True Knowledge of God." This direct attack on the Doctrine of the Trinity raised the ante and the tensions, so the next year the King called for a debate on that very issue: Unity or Trinity.

For a week and a half in early March, 1568, the arguments unfolded (beginning at 5 am each morning!), with Dávid eventually carrying the day for the unitarian position. (This is unitarian with a lower case "u," a turning point when the negative posture of *anti-trinitarianism* became a more positive affirmation.) Reports of the aftermath tell of throngs mobbing the hero on his return home. He climbed up on a big boulder and preached the Unity of God some more, and that very rock is a revered historical landmark to this day.

But there was an ugly backlash from the other Christian groups, who abused and slandered the emerging unitarians. So the Transylvanian King was moved to issue a formal and final decree that unequivocally declared freedom of conscience in religion. The different groups could debate all they wanted but were now ordered to not interfere in anyone's right to worship and believe as they see fit.

This was the first full Edict of Toleration in modern history, in 1568—just five years ahead of the similar Warsaw Confederation act I mentioned previously. It ensured that *both* Catholic *and* Protestant groups in Transylvania would have protection of the law. It helped launch a formal Unitarian Church—the first anywhere with a capital “U”—that has been steadily active there every since. That’s the good news, especially compared to what happened to the anti-trinitarians of the Minor Church in Poland.

But good Unitarian King John Sigismund died only a few years later and Catholics took over Transylvania. They immediately decreed that the religions that existed at that time would still be protected, yes, and even tolerated but there could be no further doctrinal development. They effectively outlawed theological innovation. All belief statements were to stay the same from then on. So the Unitarians survived, but could not change, and didn’t, really. (Their worship today is evidently very similar to what it was centuries ago.)

Francis Dávid was summarily released from his post as Court Preacher, and chafed under the limitation that theology couldn’t advance. He continued to argue, presenting his ideas as merely “repair” of previously wrong doctrine, but the authorities—mostly very astute Jesuits again—would have none of it and were happy to find him guilty of innovation and condemn him to “perpetual imprisonment.”

Imagine that: guilty of “innovation”! Francis Dávid— the man who gave us perhaps the most powerfully pithy and *bothandian* statement of all time: “We need not think alike to love alike”—sadly died in the dungeon, discredited. But the movement he helped establish in Transylvania flourished, with over 400 Unitarian churches there by the end of that 16th century, despite continuing persecution.

(In the mid-18th century, for instance, the government actively funded the forced conversion of Unitarian children, prevented any non-Unitarian from marrying a Unitarian, and refused permits for repair of all Unitarian churches.)

Transylvania, which is ethnically Hungarian, was unwisely ceded to Romania at the Treaty of Versailles after WW I, which led to 20th century persecution. You may recall as recently as the late 1980s, as I was beginning my ministerial career, when the Romanian leader [Ceaușescu](#) was planning to bulldoze most if not all of the Transylvanian villages to create a huge agri-business industry on that fertile land. A people’s revolution, led by a liberal minister, prevented this near-tragedy, and our earliest Unitarian churches survived again.

These two brief stories describe important and deep *bothandian* roots of ours in Eastern Europe. Things back then and over there looked very different from what we know here

today, so we might struggle to assess the meaning of this part of our heritage. To me, it's about promoting inclusion when that was a very dangerous attitude. Freedom, Reason and Tolerance might not mean precisely the same things to us today, but they are definitely open-minded, inclusive values, which is where, I believe, we must be headed as a conscious species on a crowded planet.

Practically, I advocate inserting into any discussion of any dilemma the following suggestive comment and then see what happens: "Hmmm. Maybe there's a bothandian solution here." My experience is that this opens up consideration of a wider selection of choices—some of which might be heresies, perhaps, but so be it. There often *is* a bothandian solution, perhaps hidden by the aggression of absolutism.

In your own spiritual practice you might, say, invoke an intuitive list of bothandian couplets that lead you to consider apparently opposing elements in a different, more productive light. See where such a meditative exercise takes you.

The forces of exclusion, especially in religion, are still very much alive in our time, so we might take heart from our courageous ancestors, and do our part to urge the arc of the universe inexorably toward the inclusive beacon of BothAndia. Thus do we strengthen our Faith of the Larger Liberty (Hymn #287)...

With "heroes of faith in every age," including our own, we celebrate and explore "an increasing heritage" that *both* deepens awareness of our liberal religious roots *and* urges us onward, toward a stirring vision of the common good. May it resound in our souls and find expression in our caring community. "We need not think alike to love alike."

Suggested **RESOURCES** to explore more about our Unitarian history, especially in Poland & Transylvania:

- **[Unitarian Universalism: A Narrative History](#)** by David Bumbaugh, Meadville-Lombard. 2001

TRANSYLVANIA

- Wikipedia about **Francis Dávid**: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ferenc_Dávid

- **Francis David — Guilty of Innovation**

<http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/adults/river/workshop4/workshopplan/stories/175758.shtml>

• Unitarianism in Transylvania: The Oak Tree

http://www.icuu.net/resources/downloads/unit2_transylvania.pdf

From a curriculum called *The Garden of Unitarian*Universalism* (12/2005) by Melinda Sayavedra and Marilyn Walker (Unit 2: Transylvania)

• Their Souls Would Not Be Satisfied

By Kendyl Gibbons

A short story about Queen Isabella, influential mother to Transylvania King John Sigismund:

<http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/adults/river/workshop6/workshopplan/stories/175854.shtml>

From *Faith like a River: Themes from Unitarian Universalist History* (A Tapestry of Faith Program for Adults) by Jackie Clement A. Cornish. Workshop 6: “Shall We Gather at the River? – Religious Tolerance”

POLAND

• Unitarianism in Poland: The Corn Poppy:

http://www.icuu.net/resources/downloads/unit4_poland.pdf

From a curriculum called *The Garden of Unitarian*Universalism* (12/2005) by Melinda Sayavedra and Marilyn Walker (Unit 4: Poland)

- Wikipedia about the **Warsaw Confederation** of 1573:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warsaw_Confederation

- Wikipedia about the **Polish Brethren**: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polish_Brethren

- Wikipedia about **Raków**: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raków,_Kielce_County

• The Racovian Catechism

About it:

<http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/adults/river/workshop2/workshopplan/leaderresources/175673.shtml>

Excerpts from an 1818 imprint:

<http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/adults/river/workshop2/workshopplan/handouts/175667.shtml>

See it in its entirety online:

Rees, Thomas, *The Racovian Catechism*, with notes and illustrations; translated from the Latin. To which is prefixed a sketch of the history of Unitarianism in Poland and the adjacent countries (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown, 1818).

From *Faith like a River: Themes from Unitarian Universalist History* (A Tapestry of Faith Program) by Jackie Clement A. Cornish. Workshop 2: “Against the Flow—Orthodoxy & Heresy”

* * * * *