

DID UU KNOW?

Ambulatory Luminaries

Did you ever notice that the numerous rooms off the Ambulatory of our church are named after (you might have guessed) various Unitarian or Universalist luminaries? This is the third of several articles that will attempt to shine a light on who these Ambulatory Luminaries were and why they merit the honor of being named to these locations.

Faustus Socinus (1539-1604, Ambulatory Room 3) by Toni Gold

Fausto Sozzini, or in Latin form Faustus Socinus, the next of our ambulatory luminaries, was an Italian theologian and the founder of the non-trinitarian Christian belief system known as Socinianism. He was born in 1539 to a wealthy Italian family; the Protestant Reformation, including the ideas of Martin Luther and John Calvin, was in full flower as he grew up. At the age of 22 Socinus was already formulating a more radical Protestant theology, asserting that Jesus was not essentially divine — in other words, that he was not born both God and Man.

Socinus' uncle Laelio Sozzini was also involved in the movement, called the Radical Reformation, and influenced him immeasurably. Laelio learned Greek and Hebrew so he could read the Bible in the original, and found that much of the Roman Catholic Church's doctrine was directly contradictory to scripture.

While Socinus and his followers believed in miracles such as the virgin birth, they also said that religion should not contradict natural reason, or what we would today call scientific understanding. The rise of such beliefs in Europe, of which Socinus was an early pioneer, led to what today we call the Enlightenment, and the philosophy of Hobbes, Locke, and Hume. Socinus' ideas also had considerable influence over Isaac Newton who, upon his death, was found to have many Socinian books in his library, four of them written by Socinus himself. The spirit of the Enlightenment played a large part in the formation of the American experiment in self-government, in the rule of reason and law, and the separation of church and state.

Socinus traveled to Transylvania, where there were many who had rejected the idea of the Trinity. The interchange between Socinus and the Transylvanian anti-trinitarians is one of the principal threads in the development of modern-day Unitarianism.

Socinus left Transylvania for Poland in 1579, where there were many others of like mind; he remained in Poland until his death in 1604. He was a major influence on the development of the Polish Brethren, a dissenting church which forms another thread in the development of a non-supernatural way of participating in the Christian faith. Unlike Servetus and Francis, he did not die a martyr.