

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 fourth 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. Recently we have learned about the origin of our named ambulatory rooms. You can read about it here on the web. Look for the listing, **About the Ambulatory**.

The Protestant Reformation by Toni Gold

Let us pause in the recitation of Luminaries for a word about the Protestant Reformation, one of the greatest upheavals in Western history and a profound force in shaping Unitarianism, not to mention in the creation of all Protestant denominations of Christianity that we know today.

The Reformation is often said to have ended the Middle Ages and sparked the Renaissance. The first three of our Luminaries — Michael Servetus, Francis David, and Faustus Socinus — as we have seen, were major actors in the Reformation, on the radical end of it, inspired in part by the Arian (that is, non-Trinitarian) tradition stretching back almost a thousand years.

The Reformation began in 1517 when Martin Luther, a Catholic priest, nailed 95 theses to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany challenging the Catholic Church, which many regarded as corrupt. The end of the Reformation is often placed to the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia. In other words, almost 150 years of religious wars, which engulfed all of Europe, where Roman Catholicism had reigned unchallenged for more than 1000 years (no wonder it was corrupt).

In England, Protestant reform began with Henry VIII in 1534, not for any compelling religious reason, but because the Pope would not grant the king an annulment of his marriage to his wife, Catherine of Aragon (the first of six). Spurred by the burgeoning Protestant Reformation, King Henry rejected the Pope's authority, instead creating and assuming authority himself over the Church of England, an established church that became a sort of hybrid that combined some Catholic doctrine and some Protestant ideals. Needless to say, the new Church of England gave King Henry his divorce.

The Church of England had its own dissenters, which fell into two groups. Both played a profound part in the earliest American history. The first group, known as separatists, believed the Church of England remained so corrupt that their only choice was to leave England, separate from the church, and start a new church. In 1620, members of the

English Separatist Church set sail aboard the Mayflower for America and eventually landed near Plymouth, Massachusetts. They would, in time, become known in America as The Pilgrims.

The other group of English citizens, while they did not believe the reform efforts of Queen Elizabeth (the daughter of Henry VIII) went far enough; they did not seek to leave the Church of England. They wanted only to purify it by eliminating the remnants of Catholicism. In terms of theology, most of them were Calvinists. They immigrated to Massachusetts Bay in 1630.

From these two strands of Anglican dissenters grew a variety of ever-expanding sects that accommodated radicalism. Thus, American Unitarianism took root in New England, a consequence of the same religious conflicts that shaped the Protestant Reformation in England. Indeed, American Unitarianism and English Unitarianism developed simultaneously but were largely independent of each other. This diversity of religious thought has also become a core part of the identity of the United States: The Bill of Rights explicitly forbids "establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Four hundred years in the making, this belief in personal empowerment and independence in religious matters, with its roots in the Protestant Reformation, has become an enduring part of the American mind.
