

Unitarianism (part 1 of 2)

Description: Unitarianism branched out of Christianity. Its early history and influence of Islam is traced along with comparison with Baha'i faith and Christianity.

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Introduction

Much like other branches of Christianity, Unitarianism is no exception to a wide diversity of beliefs, worship, and a complex history. In the US, Unitarianism has historically been closely related to Universalism and known as Unitarian Universalism or UU for short. Universalism, founded by an Englishman named John Murray, is a belief that God's love will ultimately redeem all people from sin. In simple words, everyone will be saved. Some consider UU to be part of liberal Christianity, others don't. UU is currently present in twenty-nine countries.



Early Historical Development

Unitarians go back to 325 CE and the Council of Nicaea in which the church voted that God and Jesus had a father-son relationship. Early Unitarians claimed to have the original, pre-Nicaea faith that was condemned as heresy. Arius (256-336 CE), a priest from Alexandria, claimed that Jesus was not God. His ideas were rejected at the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE. Also, 'universalism' was condemned as heresy two centuries later in 553 CE at Constantinople at the Fifth Ecumenical Council.

Historically, Unitarianism had a global presence and Universalists existed only in N. America. Unitarianism has a long history dating back to the Italian humanist movement of the 15th century which created Unitarian churches in Poland, Britain, and British colonies.

Influence of Islam and Toleration of Muslims

Michael Servetus (1511-1553 CE) from Spain revived the idea that the trinity was not based on the Bible. He was influenced by the Muslims who lived in the Iberian peninsula at the time. He actually used the Quran, the Muslim sacred text, to attack trinity in his book 'The Restoration of Christianity'[\[1\]](#) and denied the concept of original sin. He was eventually burned at the stake in 1553 CE. He is considered one of the fathers of liberal Christianity. Unitarians/anti-Trinitarians spread along the borders of Christendom with the Muslim Ottoman Empire as their people were forced to deal with other viewpoints

and this made Christians in these areas more tolerant,[\[2\]](#) and 'because of the cross-cultural interactions with Islam, a type of Christianity could emerge whose prophet was not divine, but more like Mohammed.'[\[3\]](#)

Muslims displayed tolerance towards Unitarians. Suleiman I of the Muslim Ottoman Empire, supported the monarchy of John Sigismund, the only Unitarian king in history. Suleiman sent an emissary to witness Queen Isabella nursing the young prince after he learned of his birth in 1540. Then the following year, the sultan sent troops to rescue Isabella's army in Buda as it was about to be defeated by Ferdinand of the Habsburg Empire. Historian Susan Ritchie argues that there is a direct influence of Islamic tolerance on the Edict of Torda, which was the "first modern articulation of the principle of religious toleration by Europeans at the level of state rule."