

# The Great Experiment in Religion: A Church Without a Creed

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The year 1925 marks the hundredth anniversary of the organized Unitarian movement. With that in mind I propose to consider on this first Sunday of the year the fundamental principle or point of view that has been and still is characteristic of those churches that are called Unitarian. This essential and fundamental principle which has been and still is the genus of the Unitarian churches is that the church according its true idea and purpose, an association of sincere and genuine followers of Christ, of which according to Channing the two main elements are first the high character of the minister and second the spiritual character of its members. Systems of thought and dogma, customs and practices of worship may come and go. God has more truth to bring forth from his word. Truth is infinite. Its way not be limited, or narrowed down to formulated statements and creeds.

With ideas such as these it happened that about 100 years ago these comparatively few churches entered upon the Great Experiment in Religion of a church without a creed.

But this departure in the method and the practice of religious thought and life was not accidental. It was one of the developments in human history that grew out of the nature of the situation and the nature of things. What the theologians would call the working of the will of God. Columbus started on his search for a route to the East Indies after the old route by way of Constantinople had been closed by the Turks. He did not reach the East Indies, but he did discover a new continent upon which a new civilization was destined to be built. When the Protestant Reformation brake came upon the scenes of European life, it raised questions that today have not been answered. It set in motion a course of events whose end it could not foresee. Like Columbus it started from its familiar world

of the established Religion of Europe, what we now call the Roman Catholic Religion, to find its way back to Palestine by a new route, because it felt that the old route had been blocked by the corruption of the Papacy.

The real issue in the Protestant Reformation was not so much doctrinal as it was a question of method when a difference of opinion arises in matters of faith and words, whose decision is to be final? If Martin Luther and the Bishop disagree, to whom may they appeal for settlement? In matters of faith and morals, where is the court of last appeal? That was the nut of the controversy.

In 1523(?) there was held in Zurich a disputation between the representatives of the Catholic Church and a representative of the Protestants on this very question.

The Catholic representative said that this decision must rest with the learned men of the Universities. The Catholic Church followed the line of that suggestion to its logical conclusion, the learned men of the Universities could not agree. Between them there must be an authoritative judge = The Church = the Papacy = and finally in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the doctrine of papal infallibility.