

## The Unitarian Universalist King



### King John Sigismund of Transylvania (1540-1571)

In 1500's Europe, the **Protestant Reformation** was just beginning and many formerly Catholics were finding new strength in the notion that they didn't need a priest in order to read and understand the word of God. Those leaders who **converted** led their people in new faiths such as Lutheranism, Calvinism and **Unitarianism**.

One such leader was young John Sigismund who became king of the nation of **Transylvania** when he was just 21 years old! King John was the first (and only) Unitarian king in all of history! He was deeply religious and was also interested in bringing peace to his people who were from all different faiths (Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran, Calvinist, Jewish and Unitarian). To help accomplish this, King John and his **Diet** issued the now famous Act of Religious Tolerance and Freedom of Conscience.

Although that's a long name, the **decree** basically said that people were free to believe in their own way and to worship in their own way. No one could be compelled to follow any particular **faith**. The Act read:

“His Majesty, our Lord, in what manner he -together with his realm [i.e., the Diet]- legislated in the matter of religion at the previous Diets, in the same manner now, in this Diet, he reaffirms that in every place the preachers shall preach and explain the Gospel each according to his understanding of it, and if the congregation like it, well, if not, no one shall compel them for their souls would not be satisfied, but they shall be permitted to keep a preacher whose teaching they approve.

Therefore none of the superintendents or others shall abuse the preachers, no one shall be reviled for his religion by anyone, according to the previous statutes, and it is not permitted that anyone should threaten anyone else by imprisonment or by removal from his post for his teaching, for faith is the gift of God, this comes from hearing, which hearing is by the word of God.”

While King John was a Unitarian, his beliefs and actions can be seen as **Universalist** as well. In issuing this powerful decree, he essentially laid the first officially sanctioned claim that recognized the inherent worth and dignity of each person. This has become our first **principle** and one of the key foundations of our religion. In short, King John Sigismund of Transylvania can be seen as one of our most important religious ancestors!

VOCABULARY (Can you define each of the highlighted words above?):

- Protestant Reformation
- Converted
- Unitarianism
- Transylvania
- Diet
- Decree
- Faith
- Universalist
- Principle