

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Timothy Ward Jensen for the degree of Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies in English, History, and Philosophy presented on November 14, 1995.
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David M. Robinson

Recent changes in the historiography of American Transcendentalism have inspired a reappraisal of the relationship between the Transcendentalist movement in New England and the pietistic wing of the Unitarian church. This thesis explores this reappraisal through a close reading of selected writings by Henry Ware Jr. in juxtaposition to the more familiar strains of Ralph Waldo Emerson's Divinity School Address and other Transcendentalist texts of the late 1830's and early 1840's. In opposition to the view that American Transcendentalism is an imported form of German Romanticism, the thesis argues that both Emerson and Ware represent a response on the part of rational religious liberalism to the emotional enthusiasm of the Evangelical movement, and that the primary inspiration for Emerson's philosophy came from his own mentor in the Unitarian ministry.

Henry Ware Jr. was the senior minister of the Second Church in Boston from 1817-1830. Emerson was called to that same congregation in 1829 to serve as Ware's assistant and eventual successor. From 1830 to 1842 Ware was "Professor of Pulpit Eloquence and the Pastoral Care" at the Harvard Divinity School. His *Hints on Extemporaneous Preaching* was an influential handbook of homiletics. His devotional manual *On the Formation of the Christian Character*

went through fifteen editions. His sermon "The Personality of the Deity" has traditionally been perceived as a response to Emerson's controversial 1838 address, which Emerson delivered at the height of Ware's tenure at the Divinity School, and which is often depicted as the opening salvo of the so-called "Transcendentalist Controversy."

Chapter One of the thesis summarizes the changes in the historiography of American Transcendentalism. Chapter Two relates Ware's "Formation of Christian Character" to the broader Unitarian understanding of Self-Culture, which the Transcendentalists also shared. Chapter Three compares Ware's "Hints" to the Emersonian ideal of preaching as proclaimed in the Divinity School Address. Chapter Four addresses the issue of the "Personality of the Deity" in relation to Emerson's notion of an "Over-Soul." The final chapter offers some personal observations about the nature of history and the reappraisal of the relationship between Unitarianism and Transcendentalism.

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Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Ware Jr., and
the "Nature" of "Christian Character."

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APPROVED:

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Major Professor, representing English

Redacted for Privacy

Committee Member, representing History

Redacted for Privacy

Committee Member, representing Philosophy

Redacted for Privacy

Chair of the English Department

Redacted for Privacy

Dean of the Graduate School

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Timothy Ward Jensen, Author

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"My Nonsense is Only Their Own Thought in Motley:"

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and the "Nature" of "Christian Character."

I. *"Their own thought in motley..."*

The historiographical problem of American Transcendentalism

On October 3rd, 1838, Henry Ware Jr., professor of "Pulpit Eloquence and the Pastoral Care" at the Harvard Divinity School, wrote a letter to his former junior colleague at the Second Church in Boston, who only three months earlier, on a refulgent summer day in Cambridge, had himself delivered a provocative "Address" to the graduating class of theological students. Enclosed in the letter was a copy of Ware's own address entitled "The Personality of the Deity," which had recently been printed for distribution. Claiming to be "not perfectly aware of the precise nature of your opinions on the subject of the discourse," yet acknowledging that his own sermon had been "written partly with a view to them," Ware expressed his concern that by articulating his own views on the matter he would appear to be entering into "a sort of public opposition" to his friend. A week later, on October 8th, Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in reply:

I well know, that there is no scholar less willing or less able to be a polemic. I could not give account of myself if challenged. I could not possibly give you one of the "arguments" you cruelly hint at, on which any doctrine of mine stands. For I do not know what arguments mean, in reference to any expression of a thought. I delight in telling what I think, but, if you ask me how I dare say so, or, why it is so, I am the most helpless of mortal men...¹

¹ *Memoir of the Life of Henry Ware, Jr. by his brother, John Ware, M. D. in Two Volumes* (Boston, 1846; new edition, Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1890) II, pp. 186-88. C.f. Stephen E. Whicher, ed. *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), pg. 116.

Apparently somewhat bemused to find himself “suddenly raised into the importance of a heretic,” the soon-to-be Sage of Concord continued:

I shall read what you and other good men write as I have always done, glad when you speak my thought and skipping the page that has nothing for me. I shall go on just as before, seeing whatever I can and telling what I see, and I suppose with the same fortune as has hitherto attended me, the joy of finding that my abler and better brothers, who work with the sympathy of society and love it, unexpectedly confirm my perceptions, and find my nonsense is only their own thought in motley.²

Emerson’s Divinity School Address has long been regarded as one of the principal events of the so-called “Transcendentalist Controversy,” a spirited dispute among Boston’s religious and intellectual elites regarding both the importance of belief in the supernatural miracles of Jesus and the acceptability of German Higher Criticism with regard to Christian faith.³ At the time of the controversy, it appeared to many that the “new views” expounded by Emerson and his Transcendentalist friends who comprised the “Hedge Club” threatened to split Religious Liberalism into two antagonistic camps only a generation after William Ellery Channing had boldly differentiated his “Unitarian” theological opinions from those of New England Congregationalism’s Calvinist Orthodoxy. In similar fashion, subsequent commentators have long assumed that Emerson intended such a reaction, and that Transcendentalism represented a bold and intentional break from the liberal Christianity of Boston Unitarianism. More recent scholarship, however, has suggested that Emerson was both surprised and disappointed by the backlash against his Divinity School Address, and that such

² *Memoir II*, pg. 188; Whicher, pp. 116-17.

³ as a general, standard reference for the dates and events in the history of Unitarianism I have relied principally upon David M. Robinson, *The Unitarians and the Universalists*, (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985). Readers who may be unfamiliar with the general course of Unitarian denominational history are referred to that volume. Additional secondary sources in the field are cited in the bibliography.

backlash, while vocal, was hardly universal among the Unitarians themselves.⁴ Most notably, Henry Ware Jr., who has often been represented (along with his Harvard colleague, Andrews Norton) as one of Emerson's principal critics, emerges instead as one of Emerson's principal inspirations. As a close reading of the original sources will readily indicate, the "thought" that Emerson has dressed in the colorful patchwork garb of a jesting Harlequin is often none other than that of Ware himself: Emerson's friend, mentor, and professional colleague from his days as the junior minister at the Second Church in Boston.

Traditional Unitarian historiography (if one may safely speak of such a thing) has tended to characterize the Transcendentalist Controversy as one of a series of theological conflicts or "controversies" which, cumulatively, served to shape and direct the development of the American Unitarian movement over the course of the nineteenth-century. This view, still widespread both within the modern Unitarian Universalist denomination and among the wider academic community, was expressed succinctly by Alice Felt Tyler in her 1944 social history *Freedom's Ferment* :

Just as New England Unitarianism stemmed from orthodox Calvinistic Congregationalism in the eighteenth century, so Transcendentalism was an offshoot of Unitarianism when it too had grown orthodox and conservative.⁵

According to this view, "Liberal Religion" is an ever-expanding manifestation of the "Spirit of the Age." Its origins can be traced back to the same impulse for freedom that brought the Pilgrims to Plymouth Rock and kindled the American Revolution. Thus the 1805 election of Henry Ware Sr. to

⁴ see Robert D. Richardson Jr., *Emerson: the Mind on Fire* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1995) for a good, recent example of this trend.

⁵ Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History to 1860*, (University of Minnesota Press, 1944; reprinted by Books for Libraries Press, 1970), pg. 47.

the Hollis Chair of Divinity at Harvard University is portrayed as merely a prelude to the "Unitarian Controversy" proper of 1819 - 1928. William Ellery Channing's Baltimore Sermon ("Unitarian Christianity") at the installation of Jared Sparks in 1819, and the subsequent "Wood 'n Ware" debate between Leonard Wood of Andover and Henry Ware, Sr. at Harvard, is generally treated as a single historiographical episode, culminating with the Dedham decision, the organization of the Berry Street Conference and the American Unitarian Association, and the arrival of Lyman Beecher, in 1825, to serve as champion of the Christian Religion in its struggle against the "Boston Religion." Beecher's daughter, the future Harriet Beecher Stowe, described in these terms the theological battlefield encountered by her father:

All the literary men of Massachusetts were Unitarian. All the trustees and professors of Harvard College were Unitarians. All the elite of wealth and fashion crowded Unitarian churches. The judges on the bench were Unitarian, giving decisions by which the peculiar features of church organization, so carefully ordained by the Pilgrim fathers, had been nullified....⁶

From the perspective of the "orthodox" Congregationalists, both then and now, the historiography of the Unitarian Controversy is sometimes characterized as "they kept the furniture and we kept the faith." Yet the reasons for the persistence of a "historiography of conflict" well beyond the period of the actual conflict itself are legion, and easily worthy of far more attention than it is possible to give here. The birth of American Unitarianism in the first few decades of the nineteenth century was, indeed, fraught with controversy, much of which was in fact generated by orthodox polemicists such as Jedediah Morse over the silent resistance of the "Broad and Catholick" sympathies of the liberals, who shunned controversy and hoped to preserve the "sisterly communion" of the New

⁶ quoted by Daniel Walker Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861*, (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1970), pg. 8.

England Way.⁷ A generation later, in the 1840's, as Transcendentalism in its turn emerged out of the comfortable intellectual cradle of Boston liberalism, the Unitarian Christians found themselves caught in a crossfire between the "told you so" sour grapes of a bloodied but unbeaten orthodoxy, and "young turk" apologists for the radicals, whose appeals for legitimacy ironically derived from their ability to make common cause with that first generation of Unitarian "prophets." As still a subsequent generation of radicals in the 1860's found themselves alienated from the efforts of mainstream Unitarianism to organize itself as a denominational body, episodes such as the 1843 confrontation between Theodore Parker and the Boston Association of Ministers took on near-mythic proportions, later serving as the template for inflating the significance of an insignificant administrative misunderstanding into the so-called "Yearbook Controversy" of 1874.⁸ Although the radicals will later cast him in the role of authoritarian, exclusionary "creedalist," Henry Whitney Bellows' 1859 dichotomy regarding the "centrifugal" and "centripetal" motions of religion essentially enshrined this same Hegelian dialectical historiography as a tenet of mainstream, "orthodox" Unitarianism.⁹ As the century progressed, the openly

⁷ see Conrad Wright, "The Controversial Career of Jedediah Morse," *The Unitarian Controversy: Essays on American Unitarian History*, (Boston: Skinner House, 1994) pp. 59-82.

⁸ see Perry Miller, "Theodore Parker: Apostasy Within Liberalism," *Harvard Theological Review*, 54 (October, 1961). Reprinted in *Nature's Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard Belknap Press, 1967) pp. 134-162.

⁹ "There are two motions of the spirit in relation to God, his Creator and upholder, essential to the very existence of generic or individual Man — a centrifugal and a centripetal motion — the motion that sends man away from God, to learn his freedom, to develop his personal powers and faculties, relieved of the over-awing and predominating presence of his Author; and the motion that draws him back to God, to receive the inspiration, nurture, and endowment, which he has become strong enough to hold." Bellows goes on to develop this notion into an idea of religious progress which emphasizes the primacy of human development, observing that "every radically important relationship of humanity is, and must be, embodied in an external institution" and that "the invisible Church takes due care of itself and of us; the visible Church is committed to our hands." Suggesting that Catholicism represents "God coming to man" and Protestantism "man coming to himself," he proposes that a "dignified, symbolic, and mystical church-organization

apologetic histories of Octavius Brooks Frothingham and John White Chadwick (both articulate representatives of this later generation of radicals) effectively redefined dissent as normative of the mainstream. More hagiographers than historians, these Free Religionists looked across the Atlantic for the roots of their radicalism, characterizing Kant and Coleridge as the forebearers of the Transcendental Philosophy in New England, while relegating the "Old School" Unitarian Christians to roles of straw men, cold corpses, or (at best) minor theological influences and literary foils.¹⁰

The impact, in particular, of the writings of Octavius Brooks Frothingham in this regard upon subsequent scholars of Transcendentalism is both difficult to measure and impossible to ignore. The tendency has been to read Frothingham as though he were himself a primary source, accepting at face value his characterization of the movement and its principal figures despite the fact that Frothingham was scarcely twenty and still in school at the time of the events he narrates, and is writing about them some thirty years later out of a religious ideology which sees its own roots in the very radicalism he seeks to describe. In his laudatory introduction to the 1959 Harper Torchbook reprint of Frothingham's *Transcendentalism in America*, Sidney Ahlstrom acknowledges some of these difficulties, while at the same time minimizing the more "doctrinaire" elements of the book, and characterizing Frothingham's work as "the only serious historical effort written by a man deeply involved in the

without the aid of the State, or the authority of the Pope..." will eventually emerge as the synthesis of this dialectic. See Sydney E. Ahlstrom and Jonathan S. Carey, editors, *An American Reformation: a documentary history of Unitarian Christianity*, (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1985) pp. 371-397.

¹⁰ for Chadwick, see David M. Robinson, "John White Chadwick and Theological Change: How Struggle Shaped the Unitarian Universalist Identity," *Regaining Historical Consciousness: Proceedings of the Earl Morse Wilbur History Colloquium*, (Berkeley: Starr King School for the Ministry, 1994) pp. 67-74. For Frothingham, see below.

movement who yet lived long enough beyond its golden season to view matters with circumspection and a degree of objectivity."¹¹

Both Vernon Parrington and Van Wyck Brooks essentially adopted Frothingham's interpretation whole cloth, on occasion even glossing over nuances that Frothingham himself preserves, while Robert Spiller's *Literary History of the United States* helped enshrine Frothingham's views as a solid cornerstone in the canonical orthodoxy of American letters. Parrington describes Frothingham as Transcendentalism's "most penetrating historian," and even mimics his practice of assigning brief, descriptive monikers to the principle figures of the movement.¹² Brooks embraces a contrast between German *Naturphilosophy* and an aesthetically "torpid" Boston, apologizing for William Ellery Channing's Unitarianism while in the same breath depicting him as a proto-transcendentalist:

Channing spoke for the inner life of Boston, with a charm and glow of intellectual goodness that triumphed over its prejudices. Although he was a Unitarian, the only man of genius in the movement, who had defined the faith and even defended it in controversy, when the Orthodox party attacked the "Boston Religion," he was a poet in his theology, for whom a creed was only a vestibule. He was not at home with the Cambridge logic-choppers, whose ways he found repellent. His fluid mind, suspicious of every dogma, wished to live "under the open sky."¹³

Spiller is much more terse in his assessment. Transcendentalism is "a revolt against the sterile Unitarian orthodoxy," inspired by German Idealism and

¹¹ (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), pg. x, reprint of Octavius Brooks Frothingham, *Transcendentalism in America: a History*, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1876). With all deference to Ahlstrom, Frothingham's father Nathaniel was far more involved in the controversy (and on the "wrong" side) than Frothingham himself, while thirty years distance had hardly made the son more objective or circumspect.

¹² Vernon Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought II: The Romantic Revolution in America*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1927), pg. 379.

¹³ Van Wyck Brooks, *The Flowering of New England*, (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1936) pg. 97.

nurtured with "the liberalizing ministry of William Ellery Channing," although ultimately more "moral" in its interests than its European catalyst.¹⁴ In each of these works, such potentially provocative questions as the legitimacy of Frothingham's claim as a Free Religionist to the spiritual legacy of the Transcendentalist ministers, or even the role of Frothingham's own father as one of the principal "inquisitors" at Theodore Parker's so-called "heresy trail" (and its potential psychological impact on the man who would later think of himself as Parker's disciple) are all but ignored.

Frothingham himself locates the origins of the "Transcendental Philosophy" in the metaphysical idealism of Immanuel Kant, transported across the Atlantic through the writings of Schleiermacher, Fichte, Coleridge, Carlyle, and others, to take root in a New England soil well-prepared to receive it.

The religion of New England was Protestant and of the most intellectual type. Romanism had no hold on the thinking people of Boston. None beside the Irish laboring and menial classes were Catholics, and their religion was regarded as the lowest form of ceremonial superstition. The Congregational system favored individuality of thought and action. The orthodox theology, in spite of its arbitrary character and its fixed type of supernaturalism, exercised its professors severely in speculative questions, and furnished occasions for discernment and criticism which made reason all but supreme over faith. This theology too had its purely spiritual side — nay, it was essentially spiritual. Its root ran back into Platonism, and its flower was a mysticism which, on the intellectual side, bordered closely on Transcendentalism.¹⁵

Yet this alone was not enough. In Frothingham's view, before the Transcendentalist *Zeitgeist* could find its full expression in New England, the mysticism inherent in Puritanism's latent Platonism must be purged of its Christian dogma. "Transcendentalism simply claimed for all men what

¹⁴ Robert Spiller, *et. al.*, *A Literary History of the United States* (Toronto & London: Collier-MacMillan Ltd., 1946) pgs. 346, 356.

¹⁵ Frothingham, *Transcendentalism in New England*, pg. 107.

Protestant Christianity claimed for its own elect,"¹⁶ Frothingham declares. The instrumentality of this cleansing appears providentially in the empirical, "Lockean" rationalism of New England Unitarianism, providing (in Hegelian terms) a dialectical "Antithesis" to Calvinist orthodoxy that will eventually result in the "Synthesis" of the Transcendentalist movement.

The Unitarians of New England, good scholars, careful reasoners, clear and exact thinkers, accomplished men of letters, humane in sentiment, sincere in moral intentions, belonged, of course with individual exceptions, to the class which looked without for knowledge, rather than within for inspiration. The Unitarian in religion was a whig in politics, a conservative in literature, art, and social ethics....The Unitarians leaders were distinguished by practical wisdom, sober judgment, and balanced thoughtfulness, that weighed opinions in the scale of evidence and argument.¹⁷

To preserve the Hegelian symmetry of his historiography, Frothingham feels compelled to differentiate the new philosophy even from the thought of William Ellery Channing, the Unitarian minister most revered by the Transcendentalists themselves.

Even Dr. Channing clung to the philosophical traditions that were his inheritance from England. The splendid things he said about the dignity of human nature, the divinity of the soul, the moral kinship with Christ, the inspiration of the moral sentiment, the power of moral intuition, habitual and characteristic as they were, scarcely justify the ascription to him of sympathy with philosophical idealism.¹⁸

In Frothingham's view, the relationship between the Unitarian Church and the Transcendentalist faith was a tenuous one at best, perhaps not unlike that between a son whose father has given him every advantage, and yet remains

¹⁶ Frothingham, *Transcendentalism in New England*, pg. 108.

¹⁷ Frothingham, *Transcendentalism in New England*, pg. 110.

¹⁸ Frothingham, *Transcendentalism in New England*, pp. 110-111.

incapable of fully appreciating just how far the achievements of the offspring have outstripped those of the progenitor.

The debt which Transcendentalism owed to Unitarianism was not speculative; neither was it immediate or direct. The Unitarians, clergy as well as laity, so far as the latter comprehended their position, acknowledged themselves to be friends of free thought in religion. This was their distinction.¹⁹

Indeed, for Frothingham, "free thought in religion" would seem to be the *only* contribution that Unitarianism had to make to the Transcendentalist cause. In a fashion that conveniently echoes his own experience with the Free Religious Association a generation later, Frothingham implies that the fatal shortcoming of Unitarianism was its inability to embrace its natural heir as anything other than an enemy.

This profession of free inquiry, and the practice of it within the extensive area of Protestant theology, opened the door to the new speculation which carried unlooked-for heresies in its bosom; and before the gates could be closed the insidious enemy had penetrated to the citadel.²⁰

The openly-Hegelian and not-so-subtlety apologetic tenor of Frothingham's analysis are well-suited to his credentials as a Free Religionist, and in this sense bolster his status as a legitimate "participant" in the larger Transcendentalist movement. His insights are often poignant (despite his sentimentalizing of Margaret Fuller and his slight of Henry Thoreau), and it is not without cause that his work has proven as influential as it has.

The drawbacks of such a historiography are not always so obvious. By enshrining the dialectic of German idealism as the centerpiece of the tradition, Frothingham's historiography (and thus the analysis of those who rely too

¹⁹ Frothingham, *Transcendentalism in New England*, pp. 113-114.

²⁰ Frothingham, *Transcendentalism in New England*, pg. 115.

uncritically upon him) essentially creates its own anachronism, becoming as much an article of faith in its own right as it is an act of scholarly interpretation. Likewise, by emphasizing "controversy" as the vehicle of progress, this style of historiography tends to lend undue importance to the controversial — the radical, the extreme, even the crackpot — at the expense of the "broad and catholic" liberal consensus which typified the Unitarian movement in its "classical" manifestation. Thus, for the generations who succeeded the Unitarian "Trinity" of Channing, Emerson, and Parker, such lesser luminaries as George Ripley and Orestes Brownson often appear to shine far more brightly than perhaps they deserve simply because they drew such criticism in their own day, while the intellectual contributions of a Frederick Henry Hedge or a James Freeman Clarke sometimes seem obscured by the long shadows of their more troubled and cantankerous colleagues. This phenomenon works in the opposite direction as well. Andrews Norton, for example, is reduced to the caricature of a "Unitarian Pope" on the basis of his criticism of Emerson and Ripley.²¹ Less controversial figures are simply ignored entirely. "Channing Unitarianism" is reduced to a precursor of Transcendentalism, while the "Unitarians of Brattle Street" are summarily dismissed as both intellectually irrelevant and theologically extinct.

Yet even as Frothingham's views were being enshrined as the "orthodoxy" of American Literary Criticism, other voices were beginning to question these interpretations. In his highly influential essay "From Jonathan Edwards to Emerson,"²² Perry Miller argued that the writings of Emerson and

²¹ see Lilian Handlin, "*Babylon est delenda* — The Young Andrews Norton" in Conrad Edick Wright, editor, *American Unitarianism 1805-1865* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society and Northeastern University Press, 1989) pp. 53-85. A more even-handed treatment of Norton's role, as well as an insightful discussion of the place of German Higher Criticism in Unitarian circles prior to the emergence of Transcendentalism as a distinct movement.

other Transcendentalists were not merely "amateur versions of *The Critique of Pure Reason*", but rather "restatements of a native disposition."²³ In particular, Miller asserts that it is the mystical strain of the Puritan tradition, as exemplified by Jonathan Edwards, which provides the inspiration for Emerson's pantheistic idealism. Miller supports this claim by tracing the "antinomian" tendencies within the Puritan tradition, with their associated mystical and pantheistic tendencies, from Anne Hutchinson and the Rhode Island Quakers through to the Great Awakening. Puritan antinomianism has its roots in the Calvinist doctrine of "regeneration," from which the antinomians "drew, with what seemed to them impeccable logic, the idea that God imparted His teaching directly to the individual spirit."²⁴ The trouble with this doctrine, in Miller's view, was that "Puritanism was not merely a religious creed and a theology, it was also a program for society."²⁵ Thus from the very beginning of its history, there exists within the New England way a tension between the mystical and the civil which frequently became a source of schismatic conflict.

The point might be put thus: there was in Puritanism a piety, a religious passion, the sense of an inward communication and of the divine symbolism of nature. One side of the Puritan nature hungered for these excitements; certain of its appetites desired these satisfactions and therefore found delight and ecstasy in the doctrines of regeneration and providence. But in Puritanism there was also another side, an ideal of social conformity, of law and order, of regulation and control. At the core of the theology there was an indestructible element which was mystical, and a feeling for the universe which was almost pantheistic; but there was also a social code demanding

²² Perry Miller, "From Jonathan Edwards to Emerson," originally published in *The New England Quarterly*, 13 (1940), pp. 589-617. Reprinted as "From Edwards to Emerson" in Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1956)

²³ Miller, "From Edwards to Emerson," pg. 187.

²⁴ Miller, "From Edwards to Emerson," pg. 192.

²⁵ Miller, "From Edwards to Emerson," pg. 191.

obedience to external law, a code to which good people voluntarily conformed and to which bad people should be made to conform .²⁶

Miller suggests that, over time, the "civil" side of this religion became associated with the emerging, wealthy elite of New England, who preferred a faith defined by ethical conduct (together with the stable business environment it engendered), and who found the "enthusiasm" of the Great Awakening both unseemly and unsettling. For a Boston rationalist, "God's glory was manifested in the orderly machine of Newtonian physics, and...a man glorified God in such a world by going about his rational business: real estate, the triangular trade, or the manufacture of rum out of smuggled molasses."²⁷ Miller characterizes revivalism as an expression of the mystical strain of Puritanism, and Jonathan Edwards as its principal apologist: a subtle thinker who "was particularly careful to hold in check the mystical and pantheistical tendencies of his teaching because he himself was so apt to become a mystic and a pantheist."²⁸

The genteel Unitarianism, which evolved out of the civil side of Puritanism, was the result of "one half of the New England tradition — that which inculcated caution and sobriety — ...cast[ing] off all allegiance to the other....Though Unitarianism was 'liberal' in theology, it was generally conservative in its social thinking and its metaphysics."²⁹ Yet Unitarianism was, in effect, only half a religion, shorn of its mystical roots. Miller is somewhat non-committal about why the "white-headed children of Unitarianism," the product of "respectable, prosperous, middle-class Boston and Cambridge...elected to become transcendental black sheep." Yet, similarly,

²⁶ Miller, "From Edwards to Emerson," pg. 192.

²⁷ Miller, "From Edwards to Emerson," pg. 194.

²⁸ Miller, "From Edwards to Emerson," pg. 195.

²⁹ Miller, "From Edwards to Emerson," pg. 196.

One can hardly say at what point rationalists in eastern Massachusetts ceased to be Calvinists, for they were forced to organize into a separate church only after the development of their thought was completed. Consequently, although young men and women in Boston might be, like Waldo and Margaret, the children of rationalists, all about them the society still bore the impress of Calvinism....We do not need to posit some magical transmission of Puritanism from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century in order to account for the fact that these children of Unitarians felt emotionally starved and spiritually undernourished.³⁰

This hunger was satisfied by a reappropriation of Edwardsian mysticism:

The ecstasy and the vision which Calvinists knew only in the moment of vocation, the passing of which left them agonizingly aware of depravity and sin, could become the permanent joy of those who had put aside the conception of depravity, and the moments between could be filled no longer with self-accusation but with praise and wonder. Unitarianism had stripped off the dogmas, and Emerson was free to celebrate purely and simply the presence of God in the soul and in nature, the pure metaphysical essence of the New England tradition.³¹

In his essay "The Road Not Taken: From Edwards, Through Chauncy, to Emerson,"³² David Robinson seizes on the irony of Miller's admission (when "From Jonathan Edwards to Emerson" was republished in the collection *Errand into the Wilderness*,) that "There can be no doubt that Jonathan Edwards would have abhorred from the bottom of his soul every proposition Ralph Waldo Emerson blandly put forth in his manifesto of 1836, *Nature*."³³ Robinson responds to this observation by suggesting that Emerson did not, as Miller had asserted, reject whole cloth the "pale negations" of his Unitarian heritage, but rather that Unitarianism itself possessed a far richer tradition of mystical

³⁰ Miller, "From Edwards to Emerson," pg. 200.

³¹ Miller, "From Edwards to Emerson," pg. 198.

³² David M. Robinson, "The Road Not Taken: From Edwards, Through Chauncy, to Emerson," *Arizona Quarterly* 48:1 (Spring, 1992) pp. 45-61.

³³ cited by Robinson, "...Through Chauncy to Emerson," pg. 45.

spirituality than Miller had given it credit for containing, and that this was the more immediate source of Emerson's inspiration.

Robinson admires Miller's "canny sense of the divided nature of the Puritan mind," suggesting that it was his ability to link this conflict with modern psychological interests that "shattered the stereotyped image of the Puritans's narrow complacency and conformist self-righteousness."³⁴ Yet this rehabilitation of Puritanism came at the expense of the Unitarians and their Arminian forebearers, in particular Edwards's antagonist Charles Chauncey. If Emerson is "an Edwards in whom the sense of original sin has evaporated," then Unitarianism is likewise Arminianism *sans* Soul, and Chauncey its most soul-less adherent. Yet what this interpretation overlooks is that scholarly attention to liberalism's emphasis on Reasonable Religion has overshadowed "the extent to which the rebellion from the doctrines of innate depravity and election to grace were gestures of the heart as well as of the mind."³⁵

According to Robinson, Miller's error was that he attacked liberal theology as "the masking ideology of the spiritually barren Boston elite" without addressing the emotional and spiritual experience which animated that doctrine in the first place. Thus Miller ignores the fact that, "For Chauncey and his colleagues, religion began to be conceived as a process of character-building, which insisted on the organic connections between the inner experience and the outer act."³⁶ The liberals believed that "they were removing the weight of a dead theology from the souls whose development it had crippled."³⁷ Rather

³⁴ Robinson, "...Through Chauncey to Emerson," pg. 48.

³⁵ Robinson, "...Through Chauncey to Emerson," pp. 49-50.

³⁶ Robinson, "...Through Chauncey to Emerson," pg. 51.

³⁷ Robinson, "...Through Chauncey to Emerson," pg. 51.

than functioning as an instrument of social control, "character formation" served as a vehicle for social liberation, a legacy passed from Chauncy's generation through Unitarians like William Ellery Channing and Henry Ware Jr. to Emerson and the Transcendentalists. Thus, Robinson concludes, it was not Edwards' latent pantheistic mysticism that linked him to Emerson, but rather the revivalism unleashed by his thought, dooming the doctrines of innate depravity and unconditional election, and leaving Arminianism the dominant theology among both liberals and evangelicals. The Puritan doctrine of "preparation for grace" (by which faithful Calvinists sought to create within themselves a suitable vessel for the predestined manifestation of God's sanctifying election) is a far more persuasive influence on the subsequent tradition, and likewise provides the key for understanding both the mysticism of the early Emerson, and the ethical and social concerns of the mature Emerson.³⁸

The ramifications of this shifting historiography for both the study of Literary Transcendentalism and Unitarian denominational history are widespread. Once Transcendentalism is understood simply as Unitarian pietism in its "old clothes," it becomes possible to depict the events of the controversy from the perspective of an on-going tradition of intellectual influence rather than rebellious theological schism. In this regard, the writings of Henry Ware Jr. represent a stream of indigenous Unitarian belief extremely influential on the ideas of Emerson and his Transcendental colleagues. Or as Emerson himself put it, in Transcendentalism the Unitarians might easily have seen simply "their own thought in motley." If they failed to take notice, perhaps it was merely because

³⁸ see Perry Miller, "'Preparation for Salvation' in Seventeenth-Century New England," *Nature's Nation* (Cambridge, Harvard Belknap Press, 1967) pp. 50-77; and David M. Robinson, *The Apostle of Culture: Emerson as Preacher and Lecturer* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982) and *Emerson and the Conduct of Life: Pragmatism and Ethical Purpose in the Later Work*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993)

they were too distracted by the colorful costume to perceive who and what actually stood behind it.³⁹

³⁹ for a description of the "revolution" in American Unitarian historiography in the current generation of scholarship, see David M. Robinson, "Unitarian Historiography and the American Renaissance," *ESQ* Volume 23, 2nd Quarter (1977) pp. 130-137.

II. Self-Culture

The "Nature" of "Christian Character"

Emerson's position as a central figure among the Transcendentalists has been secure since the earliest days of the movement. By comparison, given the traditional understandings of the relationship between Transcendentalism and the Unitarian Church just examined, Henry Ware Jr. represents something of an enigma. Strictly speaking neither Transcendentalist nor "supernatural rationalist," he is perhaps most familiar as the son and namesake of the man whose 1805 election to the Hollis chair at Harvard served as the catalyst of the Unitarian controversy. Not only was Ware the senior minister of the Second Church in Boston in the days when Emerson was the assistant minister there, he was also the Harvard professor who delivered the Charge at the 1837 ordination of Barzillai Frost in Concord, and who, the following year, was among the first to respond to the controversial "Address" by his Second Church colleague with a sermon of his own on "The Personality of the Deity."⁴⁰

During his thirteen-year tenure as Harvard's "Professor of Pulpit Eloquence and the Pastoral Care," a generation of Harvard Divinity School Students came to admire Ware as "*the* model of the pastor throughout the denomination."⁴¹ His 1831 devotional manual *On the Formation of the Christian Character*,⁴² published shortly after Ware had resigned his Boston pulpit to

⁴⁰ see Robinson, *The Unitarians and the Universalists*, pp. 41-42, 332-333; Daniel Walker Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience*, pp. 106-113, 314-315; Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*, (New York: Knoff, 1977; reprinted Anchor Doubleday, 1988), pp. 159-164.

⁴¹ Gary L. Collison, "'A True Toleration': Harvard Divinity School Students and Unitarianism, 1830-1859" in Conrad Edick Wright, editor, *American Unitarianism: 1805-1865*, (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society and Northeastern University Press, 1989), pg. 214.

⁴² Henry Ware Jr., *On the Formation of the Christian Character*, 2nd edition (1831) reprinted in the *Unitarian Universalist Christian* Vol. 43, No. 2 (Summer, 1988). Subsequent references to this text will be cited with the abbreviation FCC.

assume his appointment at Harvard, went through fifteen editions in the United States, and was likewise popular both overseas and among non-Unitarians. Ware was himself "surprised to see how seasonable my little book has been, how widely it has been circulated, and how strongly people feel about it."⁴³ His *Hints on Extemporaneous Preaching* similarly went through several editions, and continued to be used as an instructional text long after Ware's own death. Yet in comparison to the writings of Emerson, William Ellery Channing, or even Theodore Parker, Ware's work is today all but forgotten.

There are several good reasons for this obscurity. Even more so than other writers of his era, much of Ware's work seems very much trapped by the sentimental pietism of his day: derivative, formulaic, sometimes superficial. His dense, gender-bound exhortatory language can easily distract the modern reader from an easy and comfortable engagement with the text, while the evocative, aphoristic qualities of his prose likewise allow the injection of contemporary understandings in ways that might well have never occurred to Ware. Yet despite these drawbacks, Ware's practical insights illumine the Transcendentalist controversy in ways that the writings of more significant literary figures do not. Whatever its various qualities and drawbacks, the one inescapable feature of Ware's work that gives it continuing importance is that it represents an authentic expression of "mainstream" Unitarian pietism that, until relatively recently, has been all but ignored. In Ware we find an artifact of indigenous Unitarian spiritual expression that is neither the amorphous naturalistic mysticism of Emersonian Transcendentalism, nor the "corpse cold Unitarianism of Brattle Street" so excoriated by the Transcendentalists.

⁴³ quoted by Howe, *Unitarian Conscience*: pg. 107.

For Ware, religion consists of one's relationship to and accountability toward the Creator, together with whatever duties, sentiments, and relationships to other beings such an accountability entails. Yet this is not merely some vague and free-floating, formless obligation. Rather,

Concerning these relations, sentiments, and duties, we are instructed in the Scriptures, especially in the New Testament. Religion, for us, is the *Christian* religion. It is found in the teachings and example of Jesus Christ. It consists in the worship, the sentiments, and the character which he enjoined, and which he illustrated in his own person.⁴⁴

A paragraph later he expands this point by observing:

You desire to be a Christian. To this are requisite three things: belief in the truths which the gospel reveals; possession of the state of mind which it enjoins; and performance of the duties which it requires: or, I may say, the subjugation of the mind by faith, the subjugation of the heart by love, the subjugation of the will by obedience. This universal submission of yourself to God is what you are to aim at. This is Religion.⁴⁵

Note that faith consists of "belief in the truths which the gospel reveals" not belief that everything in the gospel is true. Ware clearly intends this distinction, and in this regard stands alongside Channing, Emerson and Parker with respect to a fundamental principle of liberal Biblical hermeneutics. Likewise, in a manner that seems very contemporary, faith for Ware is not *merely* belief, but rather the "universal submission" of heart, mind and will to what we today might call (to borrow the language of Paul Tillich) an object of Ultimate Concern.⁴⁶ The faith stance described here is neither the deterministic "preparation for grace" characteristic of Puritan piety, nor is it the enthusiastic Arminianism of "a heart strangely warmed" typical of the revivalism of the two

⁴⁴ FCC, pg. 8

⁴⁵ FCC, pg. 8.

⁴⁶ see Paul Tillich, *The Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957) pp. 1- 29 & *passim*.

Great Awakenings, although in some ways it shares qualities of both.⁴⁷ Rather, Ware's emphasis on the primacy of "character" indicates a faith that is essentially an existential matter, involving the whole of one's spiritual and physical being, or, (in Ware's own words) "the absolute supremacy of the soul and its interests over all the objects and interests of the present state."⁴⁸

Moreover, while Ware does insist upon a *specificity* of religious tradition within which to cultivate religious character, he does not explicitly exclude the possibility that alternative religious traditions might not also provide this opportunity. Based upon a definition of religion that is experiential rather than confessional, the non-sectarian nature of Ware's devotional practice, both highly individualistic and focused on the unattainable goal of "Perfection," inherently embraces a high degree of universalism and ecumenical latitude. The focus is one of progress, rather than conformity to tradition. Ware writes,

Remember always that you are capable of being more devout, more charitable, more humble, more devoted and earnest in doing good, better acquainted with religious truth; and that, as it is impossible there should be any period to the progress of the human soul, so it is impossible that the endeavor of the soul should be too exalted.⁴⁹

Christianity, as Ware understood it, may well have represented the most perfect vehicle known for the cultivation of religious character. But it was not, by any means, the final word — particularly since the task itself is primarily an inward one, which then manifests itself in the external forms of religious practice.

⁴⁷ By contrasting Ware's views to this admittedly artificial dichotomy, I don't mean to oversimplify the range or variety of late-eighteenth/early-nineteenth-century theological thought. Strictly speaking, Whitefield was not a "Methodist," nor were all "Arminians" "enthusiasts." Indeed, many of the most important ones — Charles Chauncey, for instance — were not. See Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966) for an excellent discussion of this issue.

⁴⁸ FCC, pg. 9.

⁴⁹ FCC, pg. 11.

Ware's best known expression of the purpose of religious life is contained in his phrase "giving your heart a permanent bias toward God."⁵⁰ But the real substance of Ware's thought is found in his chapter on "The Means of Religious Improvement," which contains approximately one-half of the text of the entire work, and includes his most practical devotional suggestions. In this chapter, Ware begins by distinguishing between the "private" means of religious improvement (reading, meditation, and prayer) and the public methods (listening to the word preached and participating in the Lord's Supper). Although the public methods are by no means without interest, it is the private means that are of most interest to us today, in that they seem so familiar to the kinds of devotional practice still common in the liberal church. Yet for Ware, the public and the private build upon one another in ways that contemporary devotional practice often ignores.

By reading, Ware intends not only the reading of the Bible, but a variety of secular literature as well. According to Ware,

Thought is exercise; it is to the mind what motion is to the body. Without it, there is neither health nor strength. And when God has graciously ordered that your lot should be cast amid the abundance of books, where you need only put forth your hand and be supplied; when he thus makes easy for you that intellectual and moral attainment which is the soul's dignity and happiness; I see not how you can answer it in your conscience, if you do not sacredly devote to this object a certain portion of your leisure.⁵¹

Yet Ware's prescription for reading is anything but leisurely. The intellectual and moral components of the activity are firmly connected in his mind: we read not merely for knowledge and understanding, but also so that we can apply those lessons to our own heart and character.⁵² This involves not only the

⁵⁰ FCC, pg. 19.

⁵¹ FCC, pg. 22.

⁵² FCC, pg. 24.

devotional reading of secular literature, but also the critical reading of Scripture as well. Thus,

in deciding upon the meaning of scripture, you cannot use your intellectual powers too much or too acutely. Use them constantly, coolly, impartially, with the best aid you can obtain from human authors, and then you may rest satisfied that you have done your duty — have done all which you could do toward learning the truth.⁵³

Ware's views on secular reading and Biblical exegesis both echo Channing and anticipate Thoreau. Channing's "leading principle in interpreting Scripture," that "the Bible is a book written for men, in the language of men, and that its meaning is to be sought in the same manner as that of other books"⁵⁴ clearly articulates Ware's opinion also, while Ware's metaphor of thought as "exercise" evokes this far more famous passage from Thoreau's as yet unwritten *Walden*:

To read well, that is, to read true books in a true spirit, is a noble exercise, and one that will task the reader more than any exercise which the customs of the day esteem. It requires a training such as the athletes underwent, the steady intention almost of the whole life to this object. Books must be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written.⁵⁵

Ware distinguishes between prayer and meditation on the basis of their aims. Meditation is a process of self-examination, though which we likewise incorporate the religious truths which we have learned more deeply into our character than is possible by memory alone. Ware describes meditation as "an habitual thoughtfulness of mind" which stirs us from indifference: a universal

⁵³ FCC, pg. 24

⁵⁴ William Ellery Channing, "Unitarian Christianity" a sermon delivered at the ordination of Jared Sparks, May 5th, 1819, in Baltimore, Maryland. David M. Robinson, editor, *William Ellery Channing: Selected Writings*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1985) pg. 72.

⁵⁵ William Rossi, editor, *Walden and Resistance to Civil Government*, 2nd ed., (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992) pg. 68.

self-examination “not to be rested in as a final good, nor allowed to satisfy us, except so far as it imparts to the character a permanent impress of seriousness and duty, and strengthens the principles of faith and self-government.”⁵⁶ Thus, in Ware’s scheme, “there are three purposes which you have in view; the cultivation of a religious spirit, the scrutiny of you life and character, the renewing of your good purposes.”⁵⁷ Meditation embraces both “the conduct of your external life and the habitual tenor of your mind...”

You must survey the train of your thoughts, the temper you have sustained, your deportment toward others, your conversation, your employment, the use of your time and of your wealth; you must consider by what sort of motives you are prevailingly guided, what is the probable effect of your example, and whether you are doing all the good which might be reasonably expected of you; you must compare yourself with the example of Jesus Christ, and measure your life b y the laws of holy living prescribed in his gospel.⁵⁸

Ware even evokes the spirit of Cotton Mather, suggesting the use of a written list and assigning specific meditative inquiries to particular days of the week, so that “every day might have its own topic of reflection, and every topic its due share of attention.” Such a discipline “may begin in sorrow, but it ends in reformation.” Penitence and reflection are the catalysts of “prompt and resolute action.”⁵⁹

Prayer, on the other hand, might be characterized as an expressive act that leads to deeper introspection, rather than an introspective act that results in more resolute expression. Its purpose is “to excite in your mind a sense of the divine presence.”⁶⁰ In prayer, one learns to

⁵⁶ FCC, pp. 29-30.

⁵⁷ FCC, pg. 30.

⁵⁸ FCC, pg. 30

⁵⁹ FCC, pg. 30-31.

⁶⁰ FCC, pg. 32.

Walk with God as you would journey with an intimate friend; not satisfied to make formal addresses to him at stated seasons, but turning to him in brief and familiar speech whenever opportunity offers, or occasion or feeling prompts.⁶¹

Prayer is central to Ware's understanding of Unitarian Christian pietism. Yet one senses in the following passage the presumption of a certain hesitancy on the part of his intended audience, as if Ware has anticipated the reluctance of busy Brahmin businessmen to take time from their commerce to converse with the Lord, and who require some assurance of prayer's practical benefits before committing to the program that Ware has prescribed.

The practice of devotion is a sign of spiritual life, and a means of preserving it. No one prays heartily without some deep religious sentiment to actuate him. This sentiment may be but occasionally felt; it may be transient in duration; but the exercise of it in acts of devotion tends to render it habitual and permanent, and its frequent exercise causes the mind at length to exist always in a devout posture. He who truly prays, feels, during the act, a sense of God's presence, authority, and love; of his own obligations and unworthiness; of his need of being better. He feels grateful, humble, resigned, anxious for improvement. He who prays often, often has these feelings, and by frequent repetition they become customary and constant. And thus prayer operates as an active, steady, powerful means of Christian progress.⁶²

Likewise, it is essential to create "settled appointments of time and place, and let nothing interfere with them."⁶³

You must feed the soul as you do the body, furnishing it with suitable nourishment at suitable intervals. You must keep its armor bright and serviceable, as does the soldier in human warfare, who examines and restores it at a certain hour daily. If it were left to be done at any convenient season, a thousand trifling engagements might cause the work to be deferred again and again, till irretrievable injury should accrue....The wisdom and experience of

⁶¹ FCC, pg. 36.

⁶² FCC, pg. 31.

⁶³ FCC, pg. 31.

all the religious world insist on this; and it would not be necessary to state it so urgently, if it did not seem to be a notion growing in favor with some, that, as the spirit, and not the form, is the essential thing, it is better not to be burdened with methods and rules, but simply to pray always; — which, there is reason to fear, would in practice be found a precept to pray never.⁶⁴

Thus a disciplined life of prayer represents not only a vehicle for a relationship with the deity, but also a manifestation of one's commitment to that relationship, which, like any other, suffers dreadfully from lack of attention and concern.

Ware's insistence upon discipline as the vehicle of discipleship, however, is anything but a retreat into formalism. Rather, it is the foundation for a rigorous but flexible spiritual life which integrates prayer, meditation, and the reading of Scripture into a unified life of habitual religious devotion which draws the heart closer to God. Thus,

As your object is not to get through with a certain task, but to pray devoutly, you will find it well to vary your method according to circumstances, and not always adhere to the same mode.⁶⁵

This spontaneity can be cultivated through the meditative discipline.

Pour your whole soul, the utmost intensity of your feelings, into your words. One sentence uttered thus is better than the cold repetition of an entire liturgy. For this reason, let your prayer be preceded by meditation. In this way make an earnest effort after a devout temper. While you thus muse, the fire of your devotion will kindle.... having warmed your mind, give it free way, and let its religious ardor flow on. But if, as will often be the case, you find your thoughts wander and your feelings cool, then pause, and by silent thought bring back the mind to its duty; and thus intermix meditation with prayer, in such manner that you shall never fall into the mechanical, unmeaning repetition of mere words.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ FCC, pg. 32.

⁶⁵ FCC, pg. 33.

⁶⁶ FCC, pp. 32-33.

Reading, likewise, is an essential component of this flexible practice. The purpose of reading is as much a process of education the heart as it is one of imparting information to the mind.

You will always have by you the Bible to quicken and guide you. But sometimes the first verse you read may lead you to feelings, thoughts, and prayers, which shall so occupy your soul that you will read no more. And it is better to read but one verse, which thus influences your whole spiritual nature, than to read chapters in the unheedful way that is so often practised. At another time, however, the reading of the Scriptures may be your principal occupation, and your less excited mind may not flow beyond a short ejaculation at the close of each verse.⁶⁷

Although Ware's pietism often seems oriented primarily toward the subjective experience of the seeker, he is adamant in his insistence that (unlike the contemporary joke) Unitarians do not pray merely 'to whom it may concern.' This notion of the "Personality of the Deity" will eventually prove a key element in distinguishing Ware's ideas from those of Emerson, whose concept of an "Over-Soul" emphasized the unitive experience of the divine in Nature, yet who in middle age often felt isolated from the confident mystical ecstasy of his youth. For Ware, this alienation is avoided through the conviction that one does, in prayer, communicate intimately and immediately with a personal God.

You must realize that you are actually speaking to him [God], and he is listening to you, as truly as when you address yourself to a visible mortal; and you must have as real a conviction that something depends on the act, and as real a desire to receive what you ask for, as when you make a request for some important favor to a human friend. If you doubt, your prayer is weak and inefficacious.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ FCC, pg. 33.

⁶⁸ FCC, pg. 36.

Genuine prayer is the product of faith, fervor, and perseverance, which result in the humble confidence that ones prayers have been heard and will be answered.

Yet the answer to our prayers is not always the answer we might hope for.

God feeds his children with spiritual food; and it is one part of his discipline of their faith, to deny them temporal blessings in order to the more abundant bestowal of those that are spiritual; to advance the moral man to perfection through the disappointment or mortification of the outward man. Do not, then, be uneasy, because your prayers may at first view seem inefficacious. The service of truth and virtue is not to be rewarded by the wages of this world's goods. Health, strength, riches, prosperity, are not the best, they are not the appropriate recompense, for self-denial, humility, benevolence, and purity. The true recompense is eternal and imperishable. If you have this, why be dissatisfied that you have not the other? If you have this, how can you fancy that God has not accepted your prayer?⁶⁹

Ware's understanding of the inner religious life is perhaps best summarized by his "salutary rule" that "it is better to pray often than long,"⁷⁰ and his admonition not to "covet long prayers," but "rather multiply their number than increase their length..."

This is the rule of Christ; who insists that we pray often and always, but that we do not pray long. A most wise regulation. For the mind is easily wearied by a long exercise, and is likely to return to it slowly and reluctantly; and in the interval, it is liable to go back, like a swinging pendulum, into a directly opposite state.⁷¹

In other words, learning to pray is not unlike starting to jog or beginning a new diet: overdo it early, and you are likely to fail. It is slow and steady progress over the long haul that brings results. Prayer, meditation and devotional reading form a single continuum of private piety in Ware's thought: a verse of scripture may serve as a catalyst for meditation, which in turn inspires a spontaneous

⁶⁹ FCC, pg. 38.

⁷⁰ FCC, pg. 35.

⁷¹ FCC, pp. 35-36.

expression of piety and gratitude in prayer — prayer which is answered, perhaps, not through miraculous intervention, but with a greater degree of understanding and appreciation for the original passage of scripture.

This process as a whole might be thought of as the kernel of Self-Culture: the “self-searching and the self-forming power” by which the mind turns upon itself, recalls its past, learns its nature, and thus is “able to discern not only what we already are, but what we may become.”⁷² As a religious discipline, it displaces the old Puritan notion of “Preparation for Grace,” and of searching one’s soul for the tangible signs of election. Yet it also curiously parallels Puritanism’s standard homiletic form of Text, Doctrine, and Application, only on a private and personal rather than a public level.

When Ware himself eventually turns his attention to the more public means of religious improvement, we can see that they likewise compliment both one another and the more private means of devotion. Attendance at public worship is an active and participatory activity, for which one prepares in advance by cultivating a proper state of mind, and likewise reinforces afterwards through meditation and reflection. It is in this particular context that Ware first makes mention of the use of a devotional diary or journal. He notes:

it is a custom, with some persons, to make a record of the discourses which they have heard, entering in a book the texts and subjects, together with a brief sketch of the train of remark. This is a very commendable and useful custom, provided it not be allowed to take off one’s thoughts from the duty of self-application, and do not become a mere effort of memory and trial of skill.⁷³

⁷² William Ellery Channing, “Self-Culture: an Address Introductory to the Franklin Lectures, delivered at Boston, Sept. 1838.” in Robinson, *William Ellery Channing: Selected Writings*, pp. 226-267.

⁷³ FCC, pg. 44.

This written diary is considered by Ware to be an active, participatory devotional practice, in which one actively engages the issues raised in the public discourse in a private, personal, yet immediate and practical manner.

The exercise of writing greatly assists that of thinking, and discovers to one whether his ideas are distinct and clear. It enables and compels him to look closely at the subject, so that he cannot dismiss it with the cursory and impatient examination which he might be otherwise tempted to give it. It enables him afterwards to read, with distinctness, the impressions which he received, and to revive the purposes which he formed in consequence of them. His record becomes a spiritual monitor, reminding him, whenever he consults it, of the lessons he has learned, and the expostulations he has heard; and prompting him to a more definite comparison of his actual attainments with the standard which has been placed before him.⁷⁴

Ware has one more observation about the institution of preaching and its significance as a liturgical activity. Having cautioned his readers to avoid the habit of listening to sermons "for the gratification of a literary taste,"⁷⁵ Ware addresses the problem of individuals for whom "Everything they hear from the pulpit slips from their minds, even if it [has] highly moved and delighted them; and they fear that it is a sign of unprofitableness and sin."⁷⁶ To this problem, Ware responds by passing on to his readers the advice of John Newton:

You forget, said he, what was preached to you. So, too, you forget upon what food you dined a week or a month ago; yet you are none the less sure that you received nourishment from it: and no doubt, also, that your spiritual food nourished you, though you have forgotten in what it consisted. So long as you received it with pleasure and a healthy digestion, and it has kept you a living and growing soul, it can be of no consequence whether you can particularly remember it or not.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ FCC, pg. 44.

⁷⁵ FCC, pg. 42.

⁷⁶ FCC, pg. 45.

⁷⁷ FCC, pg. 45.

Thus the important quality of the experience is not intellectual, but participatory. A sermon is not simply a performance, but exists within the context of the act of worship: the face to face communication of a nourishing message that feeds "a living and growing soul."

Ware's views of the Sacrament of Communion, or "the Lord's Supper" as it was then known, is interesting principally when compared to those of Emerson, who served as Ware's assistant and eventual successor at the Second Church in Boston, and who in 1832 (the year following the publication of Ware's devotional handbook) presented his own objections to continuing to observe the ritual as his specific motivation for resigning that pulpit. Emerson's reasoning was essentially two-fold: first, he did not believe that Jesus had intended to establish a ritual meal as a perpetual observance of his own last Passover supper; and second, he objected to a "formal" observance which he believed had lost its meaning, and distracted worshippers from the true essence of Christianity. "What I revere and obey in it," Emerson said (referring to the Christian faith),

is its reality, its boundless charity, its deep interior life, the rest it gives to mind, the echo it returns to my thoughts, the perfect accord it makes with my reason through all its representation of God and His Providence; and the persuasion and courage that come out thence to lead me upward and onward. Freedom is the essence of this faith. It has for its object simply to make men good and wise. Its institutions then should be as flexible as the wants of men. That form out of which the life and suitableness have departed should be as worthless in its eyes as the dead leaves that are falling around us.⁷⁸

Ware likewise expresses some reservations about the observance of the Lord's Supper. But its faults, he believed, were not so much located in the ritual itself as in the mistaken attitudes of those who sometimes participate in it. Far from being a celebratory commemoration or a reward of sorts for a job well done,

⁷⁸ Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Lord's Supper" in Brooks Atkinson, ed., *The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, (New York: Random House Modern Library, 1940) pg. 117.

Ware views observance of the Lord's Supper as a manifest declaration of one's identity as a Christian, as well as a public confirmation of one's desire to continue in the "sentiments, purposes, and habits which belong to that character."⁷⁹ Although its symbolic nature is obvious to anyone,

its value will depend on yourself, and the manner in which you engage in it. It has no mystical charm, no secret and magic power, to bless you against your will. Every thing depends on your own sincerity and devotion. Earnestly desire, and pray, and endeavor that it may do you good, and it will do you good. Go to it heedless, thoughtless, and unprepared, and it will prove to you an idle and inefficient ceremony.⁸⁰

Thus, as with his view of preaching, Ware identifies the sacramental quality of the Lord's Supper as participatory rather than passively receptive. One must be open to the experience in order to benefit from it, and that openness is, at bottom, a form of active commitment rather than confessional consent. That which Emerson rejects as empty ritual, Ware is willing to embrace as the earnest, sincere and devoted work of the people. By doing so, he preserves a view of public worship that is multi-dimensional, and not easily reduced to either the Lyceum platform, or the solitude of the church before the service.

⁷⁹ FCC, pg. 46.

⁸⁰ FCC, pg. 48.

III. *"Speak what you think now in hard words..."*

The Centrality of Preaching in the New England Tradition.

For both Emerson and Ware, preaching is the centerpiece of Christian worship. Emerson considered "the institution of preaching" to be one of the "two inestimable advantages Christianity has given us," the other being the Sabbath. It is his sense of the incompetent failure of the first to do justice to the "splendor" of the second that stands at the center of the Divinity School Address.⁸¹ Emerson reveres the Sabbath as a "jubilee of the whole world, whose light dawns welcome alike into the closet of the philosopher, into the garret of toil, and into prison-cells, and everywhere suggests, even to the vile, the dignity of spiritual being."⁸² Observance of the Sabbath creates a "circumstance" where "the best and the worst men in the parish, the poor and the rich, the learned and the ignorant, young and old, should meet one day as fellows in one house, in sign of an equal right in the soul."⁸³

Preaching, in Emerson's mind, is intimately bound to this transcendental democracy of the soul. It might even be said that, for Emerson, ministry *is* preaching. Rather than becoming "too anxious to visit periodically all families and each family in your parish connection," Emerson suggests that a minister should see himself as "a newborn bard of the Holy Ghost," whose task it is to "acquaint men at first hand with Deity."⁸⁴ Having characterized preaching as "the expression of the moral sentiment in application to the duties of life,"

⁸¹ "I have heard a devout person, who prized the Sabbath, say in bitterness of heart, 'On Sundays it seems wicked to go to church.'" Whicher, pgs. 112, 115.

⁸² Whicher, pg. 115.

⁸³ Whicher, pg. 112.

⁸⁴ Whicher, pg., 113.

Emerson asserts in the Divinity School Address that "the true preacher can be known by this, that he deals out to the people his life — life passed through the fire of thought."⁸⁵ In contrast, the great enemy of effective ministry is homiletic formalism, a preaching that "comes out of the memory, and not out of the soul."⁸⁶ Indeed,

Whenever the pulpit is usurped by a formalist, then is the worshipper defrauded and disconsolate. We shrink as soon as the prayers begin, which do not uplift, but smite and offend us. We are fain to wrap our cloaks about us, and secure, as best we can, a solitude that hears not.⁸⁷

Under the influence of the traditional historiography discussed previously, generations of scholars and other interested parties have tended for the most part to take Emerson's critique of preaching in the Divinity School Address at face value. It is assumed that the shortcomings he describes were widespread and commonplace among the Unitarian clergy, and that Transcendentalism, with its prescription of "first, soul, and second, soul, and evermore, soul..."⁸⁸ was a revolutionary antithesis to a moribund status quo. The excellent scholarship of Conrad Wright has forced the modification of this traditional view. Using evidence gathered from a close reading of Emerson's own journals, Wright demonstrates convincingly that the "spectral" preacher who "sorely tempted" Emerson "to say I would go to church no more..."⁸⁹ was in fact none other than Emerson's own pastor in Concord, the Reverend Barzillai

⁸⁵ Whicher, pgs.. 112,113.

⁸⁶ Whicher, pg. 111.

⁸⁷ Whicher, pg. 109.

⁸⁸ Whicher, pg. 115.

⁸⁹ Whicher, pg. 109.

Frost, and that criticisms once thought directed at an entire generation of clergy were more accurately targeted at a single individual.

Following Wright, it is now generally recognized that much of the Divinity School Address draws its inspiration from "Emerson's inner turmoil over his crisis of vocation," and that

Hence the Divinity School Address may be read on two levels. Its manifest content is the enduring message that the life of religion must be re-created anew in the souls of each successive generation of men. Its hidden meaning is an apology for casting aside the prized gown and band, and an assertion that society — symbolized here by Barzillai Frost — was responsible for the outcome.⁹⁰

Building on this insight, Wright goes on to observe

Evidently, Emerson's generalizations represent less reliable evidence than has usually been supposed as to the condition of religion and the churches at that day. No one would ever guess, from reading his comments, that the Divinity School in Cambridge in the 1830s was an institution of extraordinary vitality; that it was exploring new fields of Bible scholarship; that it was alive to all sorts of social issues; that some of the most promising young men of the region were enrolled as students; and that a very high proportion of them went on to distinguished careers in a variety of professions, including the parish ministry. Emerson's oft-quoted phrase, "the pale negations of Boston Unitarianism," tells us a good deal about his standard of values, but it is hardly the final word on the religion of William Ellery Channing, Henry Ware, Jr., or even Andrews Norton.⁹¹

Not only do Emerson's criticisms of ministry have a much more specific context and inspiration than has generally been presumed, but his proposed solution to the problems he identifies are likewise by no means as "radical" as one might guess from the text of the Address itself. The Divinity School Address comes in the footsteps of nearly a century of discussion about the nature of

⁹⁰ Conrad Wright, "Emerson, Barzillai Frost, and the Divinity School Address," *The Liberal Christians: Essays on American Unitarian History*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970) pg. 55.

⁹¹ Wright, *Liberal Christians*, pg. 55.

preaching and the changing role of the ministry in New England. Likewise, if the immediate catalyst of Emerson's remarks was his own crisis of vocation with regard to assuming "the prized gown and band," Emerson was certainly not the only individual concerned about the changing nature of the ministry, or confronting a similar vocational crisis. In typical Transcendentalist fashion, Emerson generalizes his own experience to the level of universal principle, thus illuminating his own experience while enlightening others as well.

Traditional Puritan preaching had tended to follow an outline of Biblical "Text," Theological "Doctrine," and Practical "Application," mirroring an understanding of Christian life based on a sequence of "sin, salvation, and service."⁹² As the spiritual leaders of a congregation of "visible saints" elected for salvation by God, the clergy were responsible for the religious instruction and moral encouragement of the communities they served, acting as "ambassadors" of the Deity whose public discourse from the pulpit was proceeded in private by extensive study of scripture and painfully rigorous self-examination. Thus, although "Ministers rarely talked about their own turmoils and uncertainties in their sermons..."

...such personal detachment was less a reflection of the minister's distance from his discourse than of his intent to create the impression that God himself was speaking through a human voice. In fact, ministers agonized over their sermons and recorded that agony in another staple of Puritan literature, the diary. From these it is clear that, along with hours of biblical study and analysis, the ministers engaged in ceaseless self-examination and self-censure. Before calling the congregation to account to God for their lives, thoughts, and feelings, the minister first had to submit his own life to a withering divine scrutiny. Only then could he project that message outward and say to his congregation with the proper combination of humility and finality, "Thus saith the Lord."⁹³

⁹² Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) pg. 43.

⁹³ Stout, *New England Soul*, pg. 35.

This introspective yet rigorously analytical tradition of "regular preaching" must also be viewed alongside the distinguished New England tradition of "occasional" preaching. Through Election Day, Artillery Day, and Thanksgiving Day sermons, preachers exercised a public role beyond the mere exhortation and edification of their own flocks. Sermons on the occasion of the ordination of a minister proved especially suitable for public ministerial reflection on the nature and importance of the ministry. The perceived problem of religious "declension" generated a variety of responses to it: the Half-Way Covenant, Stoddardianism, and in particular the ubiquitous Jeremiad — a genre of sermonic admonition that takes its name from the Biblical admonitions of the prophet Jeremiah, and to which the Divinity School Address itself might also be said to belong. This sense of standing in an on-going tradition of religious oratory, attempting to awaken a people of faith through the revitalization of the institution of preaching, provides a much more basic link between Emerson and Jonathan Edwards than the mystical "ecstasy" of Puritan "vocation" suggested by Miller.

The revivalistic sermons of the Great Awakening emphasized a pulpit eloquence based on "enthusiasm" — the ability to appeal to the listeners' emotions and sway them — rather than a carefully reasoned appeal to the rational intellect. Although the dangers of excess were clearly disturbing in some circles, the potential for success was equally apparent in the ability of evangelists like George Whitefield or James Davenport to draw tens of thousands of listeners solely on the strength of their reputations for public eloquence. Accompanying this rhetorical change was a subtle but very real transformation in the role of the clergy. Where revivalists railed against "the dangers of an unconverted ministry," and liberals responded with accusations of intellectual superficiality

and emotionalism, it should also be recognized that beneath the rhetorical polemics existed a far more mundane and tangible division. To the degree that ministers embraced a homiletics of enthusiasm, they functioned as “entrepreneurs” rather than public officials — their influence depended less upon their specialized knowledge or official public role than on their ability simply to gather an audience around them, and to inspire it.

Donald M. Scott has suggested that this small distinction eventually transforms the profession of ministry in America, beginning with the manner in which clergy were recruited and educated, and extending to virtually every other aspect of the pastoral vocation.⁹⁴ In the early days of the New England colony, potential clergymen were recruited by individuals already within the profession, who were personally familiar with the talent, character, and piety of the young men living in their communities. Suitable candidates for ministry were trained for leadership through an informal system of clerical apprenticeship, which tended to respect established patterns of social organization and community authority. In contrast, the experience of revivalism (particularly following the Second Great Awakening) instead inspired ambitious individuals to recruit themselves to ministry. Although many, no doubt, felt authentic vocational calls growing out of their own experience of revival, aspiring ministers also often took advantage of subsidized seminary education in order to pursue a career of preaching as a pathway to social advancement.

This shift of understanding concerning clerical vocation accompanied much larger changes in the American economy as a whole. Industrial manufacturing, a growing population, increased trade and commerce, and the trend toward urbanization transformed older, rural notions of “parish” ministry,

⁹⁴ see Donald M. Scott, *From Office to Profession: the New England Ministry 1750-1850* (Camden: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978)

which had been appropriate to a predominately agricultural economy, into something at once both different yet still familiar. Career paths for ministers changed profoundly: rather than accepting an invitation to serve a single congregation for life, as had been typical in the eighteenth-century, clergy became more mobile, often moving from smaller, outlying congregations to larger and more visible pulpits as their eloquence and effectiveness as preachers became proven. These tendencies, to some extent, paralleled the development of Jacksonian Democracy, beginning on the frontier among Baptists, Methodists and such smaller sects as the Universalists (for whom the ability to “get up” a congregation was essential to a minister’s economic survival), and only gradually making inroads among the established Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Unitarians of New England.

By 1838, however, this pattern was widespread even in “the neighborhood of Boston,” and Emerson’s criticism of soul-less formalism in ministry must be considered in this light. Emerson was himself descended from a long and distinguished line of New England clergy, and his perspective is one of a privileged position within the very profession he critiques. Just as he “generalized” a personal crisis of vocation in composing certain passages of the Divinity School Address, there is also a sense in which he “personalizes” this far larger social trend. There is a tincture of the reactionary in his radicalism; his clarion call is to “let the breath of new life be breathed by you through the forms already existing,” coupled with an almost fatalistic “Faith makes us, and not we it, and faith makes its own forms.”⁹⁵ It is almost as if Emerson longs nostalgically for an experience of ministry similar to those of his father or

⁹⁵ Whicher, pg. 115.

grandfather, sadly recognizing that the last of the old wine has soured with age, even as he calls for new wine in new wineskins.

Emerson's charge to the Harvard Divinity School's assembled ministers-in-training: "What hinders that now, everywhere, in pulpits, in lecture-rooms, in houses, in fields, wherever the invitation of men or your own occasions lead you, you speak the very truth, as your life and conscience teach it, and cheer the waiting, fainting hearts of men with new hope and new revelation?..."⁹⁶ has the look and feel of a revolutionary call to arms. One might almost envision his grandfather, watching in 1775 from an upstairs window in the "Old Manse" as "the Shot Heard 'Round the World" is fired at the Concord Bridge. If the liberal clergy are to regain the prestige and influence they once enjoyed in New England, they must revitalize the Sabbath by revitalizing the institution of preaching, wedding the "doctrine of the Reason" (which will not bear to be "taught by the Understanding") to an enthusiastic eloquence worthy of "the true race of prophets."⁹⁷ The "controversial" issues raised in the Divinity School Address, such as Emerson's discussion of miracles and his assertion "the soul knows no persons," are simply supporting illustrations for this more fundamental, overarching theme.

The theme itself was hardly new. Many of Emerson's insights about the art of preaching can be seen to have their roots in Ware's *Hints on Extemporaneous Preaching*. Indeed, many (if not all) of Emerson's auditors in Divinity Hall would have doubtlessly been familiar with the contents of Ware's book. Some may even have used it as a textbook, in that by 1838 its author had been serving as Professor of Pulpit Eloquence and Pastoral Care at Harvard for nearly a decade.

⁹⁶ Whicher, pg. 115.

⁹⁷ Whicher, pg. 105.

In the 1824 "Preface" to his "little work," Ware describes his intention of assisting individuals "who are preparing for the Christian ministry" to improve the effectiveness of their preaching by "breaking up the constrained, formal, scholastic mode of address, which follows the student from his college days, and keeps him from immediate contact with the hearts of his fellow-men."⁹⁸ He seems well aware of the division between "formal" and "enthusiastic" preaching discussed above, observing that

While some classes of Christians do not tolerate the preaching of a written discourse, others have an equal prejudice against all sermons which have not been carefully precomposed. Among the latter are to be found those who favor an educated ministry, and whose preachers are valued for their cultivated minds and extensive knowledge⁹⁹

Yet in much the same vein that Emerson will eventually tap, Ware also wishes to celebrate a certain democracy of the soul, suggesting that communication is not merely a meeting of minds, but also takes place heart-to-heart, and that

It is a great fault with intellectual men, that they do not make sufficient allowance for the different modes of education and habits of mind in men of other pursuits.... When a young man leaves the seclusion of a student's life to preach to his fellow-men, he is likely to speak to them as if they were scholars...addressing himself, as he thinks, to the intellectual part of man; but he forgets that the intellectual man is not very easy of access, and must be approached through the senses, and affections, and imagination.¹⁰⁰

The advantage of extemporaneous speaking is its "animation" — it is familiar, it is direct, it addresses individuals "according to their actual character, and in that mode in which their habits of mind may render them most

⁹⁸ Henry Ware Jr., *Hints on Extemporaneous Preaching in The Works of Henry Ware Jr., D. D. (Volume Two)* (Boston: James Munroe & Company, 1846) pg. 350. Subsequent references to this text will be cited with the abbreviation *HEP*.

⁹⁹ *HEP*, pg. 351.

¹⁰⁰ *HEP*, pp. 356-357.

accessible."¹⁰¹ Few people come to church to appreciate the preacher's "choiceness...of language" or the "profoundness of the argument;" indeed, "they can find all these qualities in much higher perfection in their libraries," and even the most educated listeners "are as likely to sleep through the whole as others."¹⁰² What is attractive about worship is "the free, flowing, animated utterance, which seems to come from the impulse of the subject; which may be full of faults, yet masters the attention by its nature and sincerity."¹⁰³ Moreover, this sincerity works in both directions, since: "few can give the spirit to another's writings which they communicate to their own, or can read their own with the spirit with which they spontaneously express themselves."¹⁰⁴

This emphasis on the power of spontaneous expression not only suggests a much earlier and broader affinity with Romanticism than the traditional historiography would tend to acknowledge, it likewise reveals that the dangers of "formalism" in preaching were a topic of discussion among Unitarian clergy long before Emerson's "Address." Indeed, it might even be argued that such discussions were the common currency of Emerson's own ministerial training. The first edition of Ware's *Hints* was published only a year before Emerson began his own studies in theology at Harvard. Given Ware's reputation, and their subsequent close association at the Second Church in Boston, it is impossible to imagine that Emerson would have been unfamiliar with Ware's ideas. Indeed, it is far more plausible to suspect just the opposite: that Emerson

¹⁰¹HEP, pg. 358.

¹⁰²HEP, pg. 358.

¹⁰³HEP, pg. 359.

¹⁰⁴ HEP, pg. 360.

was intimately familiar with Ware's little handbook, perhaps beyond even the level of self-critical reflection or awareness of its influence.¹⁰⁵

Compared to Emerson's pithy description of preaching as "the speech of man to men — essentially the most flexible of all organs, of all forms..."¹⁰⁶ Ware is positively ebullient in his praise of the utility of extemporaneous utterance. Where Emerson suggests:

when you meet one of these men or women, be to them a divine man; be to them thought and virtue; let their timid aspirations find in you a friend; let their trampled instincts be genially tempted out in your atmosphere; let their doubts know that you have doubted, and their wonder that you have wondered....¹⁰⁷

Ware admonishes:

...a minister of the gospel, whose success in his important calling depends so much on his personal influence, and the estimation in which his gifts are held, can hardly be justified in slighting the cultivation of a talent which may so innocently add to his means of influence.... In the course of his ministrations among his own people, occasions will arise when an exhortation or address would be seasonable and useful, but when there is no time for written preparation. If, then, he have cultivated the art of extemporaneous speaking, and attained to any degree of facility and confidence in it, he may avail himself of the opportunity to do good, which he must otherwise have passed by unimproved.... If it were only to avail himself of a few opportunities like these in the course of his life, or to save himself but once the mortification of being silent when he ought to speak, is expected to speak, and would do good by speaking, it would be well worth all the time and pains it might cost to acquire it.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ see Howe, *Unitarian Conscience*, pp. 151-173; David M. Robinson, "Poetry, Personality, and the Divinity School Address", *Harvard Theological Review*, 82:2 (1989), pp. 185-199; and David M. Robinson, "The Sermons of Ralph Waldo Emerson: an Introductory Historical Essay" in Albert J. von Frank, ed., *The Complete Sermons of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Volume One* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989) pp. 1-32.

¹⁰⁶ Whicher, pg. 115,

¹⁰⁷ Whicher, pg. 113.

¹⁰⁸ *HEP*, pp. 364-365.

Likewise, where Emerson observes:

By trusting your own heart, you shall gain more confidence in other men. For all our penny-wisdom, for all our soul-destroying slavery to habit, it is not to be doubted that all men have sublime thoughts; that all men value the few hours of real life; they love to be heard; the love to be caught up into the vision of principles. We mark with light in the memory the few interviews we have had, in the dreary years of routine and sin, with souls that made our souls wiser; that spoke what we thought; that told us what we knew; that gave us leave to be what we inly were. Discharge to men this priestly office, and, present or absent, you shall be followed with their love as by an angel.¹⁰⁹

Ware merely remarks:

...the presence of the audience gives a greater seeming reality to the work.... Consequently, there is likely to be greater plainness and directness in his exhortations, more closeness in his appeals, more of the earnestness of genuine feeling.... He ventures, in the warmth of the moment...to employ modes of address which are allowable in personal communion with a friend, but which one hesitates to commit to writing, lest he should infringe the dignity of deliberate composition.¹¹⁰

Yet despite his matter-of-factness about the interpersonal qualities of extemporaneous preaching, Ware is not unaware of the spiritual or mystical aspects of the encounter. Immediately following the passage just quoted, he goes on to say:

This forgetfulness of self, this unconstrained following the impulse of the affections...creates a sympathy between [the preacher] and his hearers, a direct passage from heart to heart, a mutual understanding of each other, which does more to effect the true object of religious discourse than anything else can do. The preacher will in this way have a boldness to say many things which ought to be said, but about which, in his study, he would feel reluctant and timid.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Whicher, pg. 113.

¹¹⁰ HEP, pg. 366.

¹¹¹ HEP, pg. 366

The language in this passage becomes very reminiscent of the language Ware will later use in *The Formation of Christian Character* to describe the experience of prayer. Ware himself explicitly makes this connection here as well — in fact, on the very next page:

It is a common remark concerning many men, that they pray much better than they preach. The reason is, that their sermons are made leisurely and sluggishly, without excitement; but in their public devotions they are strongly engaged, and the mind acts with more concentration and vivacity.¹¹²

One criticism often leveled at extemporaneous preaching is that what it gains in spontaneity and power of expression, it sacrifices in intellectual rigor and precision. Although Ware has already addressed this point with regard to his views on the relative importance of these two opposing qualities, he is not quite ready to concede the intellect without a fight. Instead he turns the criticism upside-down, asserting that by making better use of the time ordinarily spent in sermon preparation, a minister might actually improve the intellectual content of his discourse.

There is one more consideration in favor of the practice I recommend...namely, that it redeems time for study. The labor of preparing and committing to paper a sermon or two every week, is one which necessarily occupies the principal part of a minister's time and thoughts, and withdraws him from the investigation of many subjects, which, if his mind were more at leisure, it would be his duty and pleasure to pursue....But if he have acquired that ready command of thought and language, which will enable him to speak without written preparation, the time and toil of writing are saved, to be devoted to a different mode of study.¹¹³

Rather than confining preparation to the responsibilities of the moment, one should rather aspire to embody one's scholarship in one's self. The overtones of

¹¹² HEP, pg. 367.

¹¹³ HEP, pg. 369.

what we now think of as "Emersonian" thought are clearly in evidence here, anticipating themes not only of the Divinity School Address, but also of "The American Scholar" and the "Essays: First Series."

The great danger in this case would be, that of substituting an easy flow of words for good sense and sober reflection, and becoming satisfied with very superficial thoughts. But this danger is guarded against by the habit of study, and of writing for other purposes.... The minister must keep himself occupied, — reading, thinking, investigating; thus having his mind always awake and active. This is far better preparation than the bare writing of sermons, for it exercises the powers more, and keeps them bright.¹¹⁴

Indeed, it might even be suggested that the theme of Emerson's "Self-Reliance:"

To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men — that is genius. Speak your latent conviction, and it shall become the universal sense; for the inmost in due time becomes the outmost, and our first thought is rendered back to us by the trumpets of the Last Judgment....¹¹⁵

is really only Ware's practical advice to extemporaneous speakers given a transcendent and universal significance:

The extemporaneous speaker should therefore trust himself to the moment for all his language. This is the safe way for his comfort, and the only sure way to make all of a uniform piece....it is better to lose the choicest quotation, than suffer constraint and awkwardness from the effort to bring it in.¹¹⁶

Ware's views on the power of extemporaneous expression echo the admonishment of Matthew 10:19-20 "...take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given to you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you." [KJV] For Ware, the speaker must remember "that he is a teacher of virtue, a messenger

¹¹⁴ HEP, pp. 370-371.

¹¹⁵ Whicher, pg. 197.

¹¹⁶ HEP, pp. 402-403.

of Jesus Christ, a speaker in the name of God" and that "the great essential requisite to effective preaching, in this method, (or indeed in any method,) is a devoted heart."¹¹⁷ Strong, sincere religious sentiment is superior to all artifice or preparation, in that "art may fail him, and all his treasures of knowledge desert him; but if his heart be warm with love, he will 'speak right on,' aiming at the heart, and reaching the heart, and satisfied to accomplish the great purpose, whether he be thought to do it tastefully or not."¹¹⁸ Asserting a proposition one might easily expect of Emerson — "the truths of religion are not matters of philosophical speculation, but of experience"¹¹⁹ — Ware concludes by suggesting that it is only through the experience of "the exercises of personal religion" that a preacher may overcome the fear of embarrassment and become "conscious only of laboring for the Glory of the ever-present God!"¹²⁰

Trust God, Ware in effect declares, and your own shortcomings will become transparent to your auditors, as the truth of God's message flows through you. For Emerson, a similar insight of becoming transparent to "the currents of the Universal being" takes on very different significance, and leads him toward a very different destination, almost in defiance of their common point of departure.

¹¹⁷ *HEP*, pgs. 408, 409.

¹¹⁸ *HEP*, pp. 409-410.

¹¹⁹ *HEP*, pg. 410.

¹²⁰ *HEP*, pp. 411-412.

IV. *The Personality of the Over-Soul*

The Permanence and the Transience of the Latest Form of Infidelity

"Trust thyself," Emerson wrote in perhaps his best-known and most widely-quoted essay: "Every heart vibrates to that iron string."¹²¹ In what can be read as a deviously clever slap at critics of his Divinity School Address, Emerson transforms the maxims of Ware's extemporaneous speaking manual into a manifesto of metaphysical individualism.

A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines. With consistency a great soul has simply nothing to do. He may as well concern himself with his shadow on the wall. Speak what you think now in hard words and tomorrow speak what tomorrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict every thing you said today. — "Ah, so you shall be sure to be misunderstood. — Is it so bad then to be misunderstood? Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Jesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton, and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh. To be great is to be misunderstood."¹²²

In Emerson's case, this "misunderstanding" orbits around two related statements in the Divinity School Address. Although in context they are clearly intended as supporting illustrations of his principal theme, for some they apparently took on an exaggerated importance which may or may not have been intended or anticipated by Emerson himself. The first of these is his declaration that "the soul knows no persons," together with the assertion that, although "Jesus Christ belonged to the true race of prophets," nevertheless

Historical Christianity has fallen into the error that corrupts all attempts to communicate religion. As it appears to us, and as it has appeared for ages, it is not the doctrine of the soul, but an

¹²¹ Whicher, pg. 148.

¹²² Whicher, pg. 153.

exaggeration of the personal, the positive, the ritual. It has dwelt, it dwells, with noxious exaggeration about the *person* of Jesus.¹²³

The second concerns Emerson's treatment of miracles, which then (as now) many Christians pointed to as historical evidence of the supernatural authentication of Christ's divinity. But in Emerson's opinion, Jesus

...spoke of miracles; for he felt that man's life was a miracle, and all that man doth, and he knew that this daily miracle shines as the character ascends. But the word Miracle, as pronounced by Christian churches gives a false impression; it is Monster. It is not one with the blowing clover and the falling rain.¹²⁴

Likewise,

To aim to convert a man by miracles is a profanation of the soul. A true conversion, a true Christ, is now, as always, to be made by the reception of beautiful sentiments.¹²⁵

Traditionally, Emerson's so-called "rejection" of the doctrine of miracles has been characterized as a unique and revolutionary manifestation of the radically "new" epistemology of German Idealism — the Romantic movement come to America. Ware, and the Unitarians in general, are stereotyped as clinging to Scottish common sense realism and "faculty" psychology — an outmoded rationalism undone by the skepticism of Hume and the epistemology of Kant. Yet these kinds of distinctions would have seemed unduly rigid and convoluted to the principals themselves. We have already seen the footprints of Romanticism in Ware's writing almost two decades before Andrews Norton labels it "The Latest Form of Infidelity." In a similar vein, Emerson's insistence that miracles "shine" in the ascent of "character" and that conversion is the "reception of beautiful sentiments" indicates that there was actually a much

¹²³ Whicher, pp. 105, 106.

¹²⁴ Whicher, pg. 105.

¹²⁵ Whicher, pg. 107.

greater continuity within the broad tradition than the subsequent historiography would suggest.

This is not to imply, however, that there was not also plenty of controversy to go around, or any shortage of potential participants. The “blow by blow” narrative of the “Transcendental Controversy” has been repeated so often it is scarcely necessary to recount it in great detail.¹²⁶ The summer following Emerson’s Divinity School Address, the venerable Andrews Norton, former Dexter Professor of Sacred Literature at Harvard and author of *The Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels*, a three-volume Unitarian apologetic based on an epistemology of supernatural rationalism and the doctrine of miracles (the first of which had just been published in 1837), himself mounted the pulpit in Divinity Hall to assail “the Latest Form of Infidelity.”

Norton argued that “the denial of the possibility of miracles must involve the denial of the existence of God,” and suggested that intuition alone lacked sufficient weight to create the “conviction” required for meaningful religious faith. Acknowledging that “absolute certainty, so far as human reason can judge, cannot be the privilege of any finite being,” he nevertheless asserted that the intellectual desire for certainty demanded not the “transient excitement” of mere intuition, but rather convincing evidence capable of evoking “a feeling possessing the whole heart, and governing our lives.”¹²⁷

Emerson, in turn, was defended by his friend George Ripley, who responded with an anonymous review of Norton’s “Discourse” that took issue with Norton’s “personal dogma,” and suggested that very few Christians in the

¹²⁶ see Robinson, *Unitarians and Universalists*, pp. 75-86; also William R. Hutchinson, *The Transcendentalist Ministers: Church Reform in the New England Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959; reprinted Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), pp. 52-136.

¹²⁷ Andrews Norton, “A Discourse on the Latest Form of Infidelity,” in Ahlstrom and Carey, *An American Reformation*, pgs. 449, 457, 460.

course of history had ever been “convinced” of the truth of the Gospels simply because of the empirical weightiness of the miracles. Norton backpedaled, distinguishing between evidence that was persuasive and evidence that was decisive and authenticating, and the grounds of the debate shifted to the acceptability of “the Continental Philosophy” as a tool of religious scholarship and a basis of religious truth. Norton, in his “Discourse,” had essentially accused Spinoza, DeWette and Schleiermacher of atheism, by his claim that they denied the personality of the Deity. In attempting to defend German Higher Criticism, Ripley needlessly opened the Transcendentalists to this same charge of atheism, even though he had already wrung from Norton the important concession that empirical evidence is not the only evidence by which human beings are persuaded of the truth of Christian faith.¹²⁸

The response of the remainder of the Unitarian community to this exchange of views is telling. Rather than dividing sharply into two camps, as has often been suggested, the general attitude was apparently one that combined “profound deference” and public praise for Norton’s reputation, along with a much more even-handed toleration of the “new views” and a reluctance to embrace Norton’s strident tone.¹²⁹ The entry of Theodore Parker into this debate, however, changed its tenor considerably. Only a few years out of Harvard himself, Parker was an earnest young minister of humble origins and an omnivorous intellect completely sympathetic to Transcendental thought. Well-read in the German philosophers, he combined his prodigious scholarship with the pugnacious tenacity of a Boston terrier — a temperament that would later serve him well as an abolitionist and social reformer, and which enticed him into

¹²⁸ Hutchinson, *Transcendentalist Ministers*, pp. 84-85.

¹²⁹ Hutchinson, *Transcendentalist Ministers*, pp. 88-89.

the fray with an intensity that would eventually make "Parkerism" synonymous with the most extreme expressions of the Transcendental philosophy.¹³⁰

Parker was an advocate of "Absolute Religion," which he spelled out in some detail in a 1841 ordination sermon "A Discourse on the Transient and Permanent in Christianity." Taking his title from an essay by the "blasphemous" German New Testament scholar David Friedrich Strauss¹³¹ and his text from Luke 21:33 ("Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my words shall not pass away..."), Parker asserted that the tangible, empirical, "sensational" aspects of religious faith — its forms, its doctrines and its sects — are transitory phenomena which change over time, while the essential truth of religion is something that cannot be contained by an external form, but must rather be experienced directly in the human heart. And just as each individual experiences Christianity in the heart in a slightly different way, so too

The Christianity of sects, of the pulpit, of society, is ephemeral — a transitory fly. It will pass away and be forgot. Some new form will take its place, suited to the aspect of the changing times. Each will represent something of the truth, but no one the whole. It seems that the whole race of man is needed to do justice to the whole of truth, as "the whole church to preach the whole gospel." Truth is intrusted for the time to a perishable ark of human contrivance. Though often shipwrecked, she always comes safe to land, and is not changed by her mishap.¹³²

The following year, Parker expanded upon these ideas in his *Discourse on Matters Pertaining to Religion*. Mounting a direct attack on Lockean empiricism,

¹³⁰ "Parker could no more stay out of such a quarrel than he could stay out of a library..." Henry Steele Commanger, *Theodore Parker: an Anthology*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960) pg. 37.

¹³¹ for a brief biographical sketch of Strauss see Marcus J. Borg, "Profiles in Scholarly Courage," *Bible Review* 10:5 (October, 1994) pp. 43-44.

¹³² Theodore Parker, "The Transient and Permanent in Christianity," in Commanger, *Theodore Parker: an Anthology*, pg. 59.

Parker faults it for its *subjectivity*, at least as pertaining to its ability to characterize the infinite nature of the Deity:

...when we attempt to go further, to give a logical description of deity, its nature and essence; to define and classify its attributes; to make a definite conception of God as of the finite objects of the senses or the understanding, going into minute details, then we have nothing but our own subjective notions, which do not, of necessity, have an objective reality corresponding thereto. All men may know God as the infinite. His nature and essence are past finding out. But we know God only in part — from the manifestation of divinity, seen in nature, felt in man; manifestations of matter and spirit. Are these the whole of God; is man his measure? Then he is exhausted, and not infinite....¹³³

Rather, Parker insists, the absolute nature of the godhead places it beyond our understanding, as well as such limited abstractions as personality or consciousness. God is knowable only by “the intuition of reason, and the process of reasoning” which in turn is a reflection of our own innate “religious faculty” and natural “sentiment of God.” According to Parker, God “is the highest idea of which man is capable. But is God to be measured by our idea?”¹³⁴ The answer to this rhetorical question is obvious:

The nature of God is past finding out. “There is no searching of his understanding.” As the absolute cause, God must contain in himself, potentially, the ground of consciousness, of personality — yes, of unconsciousness and impersonality. But to apply these terms to him, seems to me, a vain attempt to fathom the abyss of the godhead and report the soundings. Will our line reach to the bottom of God? There is nothing on earth, or in heaven, to which we can compare him; of course we can have no image of him in the mind.¹³⁵

¹³³ Theodore Parker, *A Discourse on Matters Pertaining to Religion*, Centenary Edition (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1907) pg. 142.

¹³⁴ Parker, *A Discourse on Matters Pertaining to Religion*, pg. 141.

¹³⁵ Parker, *A Discourse on Matters Pertaining to Religion*, pg. 143.

If Parker's views raised concerned eyebrows among the liberal Unitarians, creating (as some have called it), a "tempest in a Boston teapot," they must have elicited gleeful grins from the Orthodox Congregationalists, who had long contended that Unitarianism was merely "a half-way house to infidelity," and who were now suddenly presented with a gift-wrapped example of the same. Even as the Boston Ministerial Association was attempting to distance itself from Parker, the Orthodox at Yale and Andover were enjoying open season on apostates, revisiting the Unitarian Controversy of a quarter-century earlier with the smugness borne of long-awaited vindication.¹³⁶ In this complicated interplay of polemic, catholicity, tolerance and potential schism, N. L. Frothingham's comment that "the difference between Trinitarians and Unitarians is a difference in Christianity; the difference between Mr. Parker and the Association is a difference between no Christianity and Christianity...."¹³⁷ must be read alongside of such pointed rhetorical queries as that of Yale's Noah Porter "Where learned Mr. Parker his philosophical system?"¹³⁸ The fact remains that Parker was never formally expelled from the Boston Association, despite the shabbiness with which many of his ministerial colleagues would subsequently treat him.

O. B. Frothingham's attempt to exonerate his father's actions as simply a dialectical manifestation of the *Zeitgeist* required for the eventual culminating synthesis of Free Religion is far too simplistic. Rather, the same liberal spirit that inspired some Unitarians to attempt to maintain catholicity with the Orthodox by distancing themselves from the views of Parker also inspired them to allow

¹³⁶ see C. H. Faust, "The Background of the Unitarian Opposition to Transcendentalism," *Modern Philology*, 35 (February, 1938) reprinted in Phillip F. Gura and Joel Myerson, eds., *Critical Essays on American Transcendentalism*, (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1982) pp. 266-292.

¹³⁷ quoted by Miller, *Nature's Nation*, (Cambridge: Harvard Belknap, 1967) pg. 138.

¹³⁸ quoted by Faust, "Unitarian Opposition..." pg. 280. The insinuated answer, of course, is from Henry Ware Jr. and his colleagues at Harvard.

Parker himself to remain within their fellowship, regardless of their personal opinions of his views. As for the Orthodox, they certainly had no problem identifying the intellectual continuity between the Boston liberals and their apostate Transcendentalist offspring, despite the earnest desire on the part of both the latter to emphasize the differences between them.

Once shorn of the stridency of its principal polemicists, Andrews Norton and Theodore Parker, and examined coldly from the vantage point of our own era, the "Transcendentalist controversy" is best understood as a divergence concerning the manner in which individuals articulate their experience of the divine, rather than a profound disagreement regarding the existential qualities of the experience itself. For Emerson, the mystic, God/Spirit/Transcendental Over-Soul, circulates through consciousness in a flood of enlightenment. Standing in the woods (as he described his experience in *Nature*) "all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part and parcel of God."¹³⁹ Away from the meeting-house, at one with "the blowing clover and the falling rain," he feels himself to be united with the Ultimate in a profoundly abstract and impersonal sort of way.

For Ware, the pastor and professor, soul is known only *through* persons — it is not by mystical insight, but in the imitation of Christ, that one grows to know the Deity. A vivid conception of a loving, personal God is required in order for human beings to fully appreciate the experience of being "adopted" as His children. Yet despite these differences, it is the common themes: an openness to the inward experience of the Divine, combined with a rigorously introspective contemplative study, and culminating in a disciplined effort to manifest one's

¹³⁹ Brooks Atkinson, editor, *The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, (New York: Random House Modern Library, 1940) pg. 6.

inner wisdom in a tangible and consistent outward expression — in a word, the practice of “Self-Culture” — that stand out over time. The practice (and *praxis*) of Self-Culture represents a much stronger continuity between the Unitarianism of Ware and the Transcendentalism of Emerson than any so-called “controversy” of symbolization can possibly sever.

Attempts to dichotomize the Transcendentalist controversy solely as a conflict between Lockean empiricism and Kantian idealism overstate the importance of both these poles. Rather, the “latitudinarian” tradition of New England liberalism was already quite comfortable with an intuitive, mystical pietism that was grounded much more deeply in Neo-Platonism than in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. According to Daniel Walker Howe, “the origins of this strain may be found in the English Cambridge Platonists,” who bequeathed to New England “a form of natural religion that looked inward toward human nature itself rather than outward toward the external world.”¹⁴⁰ Howe identifies a mystical strain of Neo-Platonism based on the writings of Plotinus, who “elaborated his predecessor’s philosophy into a system for seeking God within one’s own *psyche*, working through the essential identity between the spirit or reason within and the great Spirit or Reason, the *Nous*, that controlled the Universe.”¹⁴¹ This naturalistic mysticism, rationalist rather than empiricist in tone, forms the epistemological glue that unites Edwards, Emerson, Channing, Ware, and Parker. As Howe observes:

The study of the Cambridge Platonists and their relation to New England religious thought illuminates the Transcendentalist controversy by showing what was, and what was not, at stake.

¹⁴⁰ Daniel Walker Howe, “The Cambridge Platonists of Old England and the Cambridge Platonists of New England,” *Church History* 57 (1988); reprinted in Conrad Edick Wright, editor, *American Unitarianism 1805-1865*, (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society and Northeastern University Press, 1989) pg. 88.

¹⁴¹ Howe, “The Cambridge Platonists...” pg. 91.

Both sides in the controversy were convinced of certain principles they had each inherited from Cambridge Platonism. They agreed that morality was objective, immutable, and not created by fiat; that humanity could know spiritual and moral principles through natural faculties of mind and spirit; and that there was a necessary place in religion and morality for the sentiments. Neither doubted the power of the "candle of the LORD" within the individual to illuminate divinity. The issue in the controversy concerned whether there was any authority *external* to the individual to which one could look for guidance in religion. Classical Unitarianism affirmed that both scripture and empirically known nature constituted such authorities. Transcendental Unitarians, for all they delighted in the poetic inspiration external nature could provide, denied that either it or scripture constituted a religious authority binding on the individual.¹⁴²

Rather than representing a simple, straightforward, polarized dichotomy of thought, one pole Kantian and the other not, both Emerson and Ware (like most other theologians of the past 200 years) are each attempting to come to grips with shifting religious and philosophical paradigms in their own way. Both are well-versed in the faculty psychology of Scottish common-sense realism, as well as the intuitive idealism of the Cambridge Platonists, and both essentially follow Schleiermacher down the pathway of the primacy of experience as the most immediate catalyst for religious conviction, but there their roads diverge. Emerson follows the trail that will eventually be surveyed by Tillich: real God is the "God beyond God" whose essence cannot be symbolized, yet who exists as the "Ground of Being." If "Oversoul" is perceived by some as God shorn of personality, it should also be recognized as the place where our individuals souls touch one other, and in which we live and move and have our being.

Ware, on the other hand, ventures into the territory of Gordon Kaufman's "available God," and the "heuristic" metaphorical theology of Sallie McFague. Although obviously Ware was unfamiliar with "postmodern" semiotic

¹⁴² Howe, "The Cambridge Platonists..." pg. 111.

disciplines such as Structuralism and Deconstructionism, whose linguistic methodologies make the insights of McFague's metaphorical theology possible, his intuitive sense of what is at stake is superb, as when he writes:

The difference between conformity to a statute and obedience to a father is a difference not to be measured in words, but to be realized in the experience of the soul. It is slightly represented in the difference between the condition of a little child that lives in the presence of a judicious and devoted mother, an object of perpetual affection, and of another that is placed under the charge of a public institution, which knows nothing but a set of rules. Each is alike provided for and governed; but the one enjoys the satisfactions of a trusting and loving heart, while the other, deprived of the natural objects of affection, knows nothing but a life of order and restraint. Take away the Father of the universe, and, though every ordinance remain unchanged, mankind becomes but a company of children in an orphan asylum; clothed, fed, governed, but objects of pity rather than congratulation, because deprived of those resting-places for the affections, without which the soul is not happy.¹⁴³

Ware likewise recognizes that these images need not, and indeed should not, be taken literally in order to be meaningful. In insisting upon the "personality" of the Deity, he has in mind a specific quality rather than a particular form:

A *person* is an intelligent, conscious agent; one who thinks, perceives, understands, wills, and acts. What we assert is, that God is such. It is not implied, that any distinct form or shape is necessary to personality. In the case of man, the bodily form is not the person. That form remains after death, but we no longer call it a person, because consciousness and the power of will and of action are gone. The personality resided in them. So also in the case of the Deity; consciousness, and the power of will and of action constitute him a person. Shape, form, or place make no part of the idea.¹⁴⁴

This quality extends in particular to what McFague would characterize as "one of the most distinctive aspects of the Judeo-Christian tradition," namely

¹⁴³ Henry Ware Jr., "The Personality of the Deity" in Ahlstrom & Carey, *American Reformation*, pp. 433-434. This sermon was delivered some two months following Emerson's Divinity School Address, and has generally been characterized as a formal answer to it, although Ware himself denied that charge.

¹⁴⁴ "The Personality of the Deity," pg. 434.

"that in its kind of theism the deity is appropriately addressed as Thou, not It."¹⁴⁵ Ware approaches this insight and its ramifications from both a divine and a human perspective.

Suppose the Deity to exist alone in the universe which he has made. Then, from the conscious enjoyment of his own perfections and the exercise of his power in the physical creation, He must dwell in bliss; but, as he has no relations to other conscious existences, he cannot exercise justice, or truth, or love; they lie in the infinite bosom as if they were not; they have only a contingent existence. But the instant he should *create* various tribes, they spring into actual existence; they no longer may be, they are; they rise out of the new relations which are created, and are the expression of sentiments and duties which had not before been possible.¹⁴⁶

As for the experience of human beings:

The sentiment of reverence may, undoubtedly, be felt for a principle, for a code of laws. But worship, which is the expression of that sentiment, is applicable only to a conscious being; as all the language and customs of men signify.... Philosophy steps forth, and insists that the soul is to be satisfied with abstractions. As if human nature were anything, without its affections! as if a man were a man without his heart!¹⁴⁷

Ware's casual appeal to a standard of truth which "all the language and customs of men signify" seems almost prescient in its anticipation of the far more rigorous semiotic "pragmatism" of Charles Saunders Peirce or the "Radical Empiricism" of William James, both of whose work is foundational for the development of a theological method based primarily on the symbolization of personal experience rather than systematic, abstract reflection regarding the metaphysical qualities of an entity who, by definition, is mysterious and unknowable. Ware himself might even be thought of as a "proto-pragmatist," in

¹⁴⁵ Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987) pg. 18.

¹⁴⁶ "The Personality of the Deity," pg. 435.

¹⁴⁷ "The Personality of the Deity," pg. 437.

that his own theological interests are invariably focused upon practical application and personal experience: the "heart" and not the head. Unlike Emerson, who sought to turn the Lyceum platform into the ideal pulpit he found missing in the church, Ware remains rooted solidly in the life of a community of faith, balancing inner wisdom and outer action, individual integrity and public accountability, the "centrifugal" motion expressed in the freedom to cultivate one's personal talents and faculties, and the "centripetal" motion reflected in the challenge of giving one's heart "a permanent bias toward God."

There is a second area in which Ware also seems to have foreshadowed more modern developments in a way that has rarely been recognized or acknowledged. Contemporary Unitarian Universalism self-consciously describes itself as "a church without a creed," emphasizing values of tolerance, diversity, and pluralism under a "covenantal" rubric identified with language affirming "the rights of conscience, and the use of the democratic process." This tradition of "freedom of belief," mirroring the traditional historiography discussed in chapter one, is most often attributed to episodes such as Parker's so-called "heresy trial" before the Boston Ministers Association, and the potent philosophical individualism of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, in rebellion against a conservative, reactionary, established (and tax-supported) Unitarianism. Yet Theodore Parker's witticisms regarding "Unitarian embalmers"¹⁴⁸ at Harvard to the contrary, this view overlooks the plain and simple truth (a circumstance quite obvious to the Orthodox) that the vast majority of (male) Transcendentalists were, in fact, educated at Harvard, and often trained there for the Unitarian ministry as well.

¹⁴⁸ "Egyptian embalmers took only seventy days...to make a mummy out of a dead man.... Unitarian embalmers use three years in making a mummy out of live men." letter to Samuel J. May, October 24th, 1853, quoted by Collison, "A True Toleration..." pg. 210.

Much of the responsibility for the preservation of this atmosphere of theological openness and exploration rested in the hands of the Divinity School faculty. Dean John G. Palfrey and Henry Ware Jr. (and later, George R. Noyes, who succeeded Palfrey in 1840, and Convers Francis, who followed Ware) attempted, often in the face of controversy, to steer the school safely through a sea of criticism and general dissatisfaction that originated from both ends of the theological spectrum. Ware, in particular, was apparently quite important in this regard. As Gary Collison has observed, "From assuming the professorship in pastoral care in 1829 to his retirement in 1842, Henry Ware Jr., provided the divinity students with a model of toleration and progressive sympathies."¹⁴⁹ Although it was decades before Emerson was invited back to Harvard, and a subsequent invitation to Parker was later rescinded, in 1839 Charles Follen was invited by Ware to deliver lectures on pantheism, while in their turn both Amos Bronson Alcott, and James Freeman Clarke likewise presented lectures at the Divinity School. According to Collison, Ware and his colleagues

...helped create a tolerant, progressive atmosphere ...[while] the students were the ones who continually used the opportunity to enlarge Unitarian boundaries. At Divinity Hall they mingled supernaturalist theology with Transcendentalism and Parkerism, social and economic elitism with democratic sympathies and social utopianism. As a result of this often vigorous dialogue, antebellum divinity students inevitably developed a conception of Unitarianism at once more flexible and more open than was possible for many of the ministers of Andrew Norton's generation to entertain. Experiences of Harvard Divinity School students thus paved the way for the broad church pluralism of post-Civil War Unitarianism.¹⁵⁰

In our own time, Emersonian individualism has frequently been identified as one of the significant contributing factors to the decline of public spiritedness

¹⁴⁹ Collison, "A True Toleration..." pg. 214.

¹⁵⁰ Collison, "A True Toleration..." pg. 231.

and community life in American society.¹⁵¹ In contrast, Ware's views of toleration and dialogue within a broad community of mutual interests and accountabilities maintains a balance between the individual and the group. For Emerson, individual minds descend to meet one another, trusting that what is true in their own hearts is true for all others as well. For Ware, it would seem, individuals come together seeking a meeting of the minds, as well as an encounter with a higher truth that can be known both intuitively and interpersonally. Theological education is not merely a matter of cultivating "soul" alone in the woods. Rather, it becomes a process of "faith seeking understanding," humble before the imperfections of the seeker, and the magnificence of the thing sought.

¹⁵¹ see Robert Bellah, *et. al.*, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985); and Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979) and *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and its Critics*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991).

V. *"Genius looks forward...."*

Concluding reflections on the metamorphosis of an American Scholar

History is at once both a map and a mirror.

History's map-like qualities flow from the chronological nature of time. Ideas, decisions, events are indeed perceived to flow one from another; what happens today is to some degree determined by what happened yesterday, and will in turn have its impact on what happens tomorrow. Historiographers may argue among themselves about how "deterministic" this dynamic, linear progression of events may be — whether it has a goal, perhaps reflecting the metaphysical design of some supernatural consciousness, or rather represents the inexorable trajectory of meta-cultural and macro-economic social forces, or perhaps merely the hit-or-miss evolution of heads or tails. But on some level, at least, history is a discourse of cause and effect, even if only the cause and effect of being in the right or wrong place at the right or wrong time. History helps us to discover where we are by remembering where we have been.

The mirror-like quality of history results from the existential consistency of human experience. There is something fundamentally "the same" about "being" a human being: we are all born into history naked and helpless, and we all must eat in order to survive; we fall in love, rear children of our own, experience joy and disappointment, struggle seeking power, wealth, success, happiness, the "Good" (however these things may be defined), confront the inevitability of our own physical mortality. Yet the range of human response to these existential consistencies varies widely, not only over time but geographically from culture to culture as well. Thus the study of history has often been compared to foreign travel with respect to its benefits for self-understanding. By encountering historical "Others" who are at once both so

alike and so different from ourselves, we come to see our own lives reflected back to us through eyes newly alert to other possibilities.

Yet the existential consistency of human experience and the perceived continuity of past events can also be barriers to historical understanding. We do not stand upon the mountaintop and look back clearly into the past; rather, the past exists like a midden beneath our feet, both delineated and obscured by intervening accumulations of refuse. History is less retrospective than it is archeological; we roll up our sleeves and slowly strip away the burden of the past on our hands and knees, and, if we are lucky, when we are finished with our task we are left in possession of the abandoned artifacts of lives no longer lived. Our understanding of these artifacts will always be imperfect. History is unavoidably an act of imagination; the past is only temporarily in our grasp, and time will eventually reclaim it from us as well.

These methodological challenges confront all historical study, but nowhere are they more acute than in the study of intellectual history. Ideas are very protean artifacts. They often seem to have lives all their own: they mutate rapidly, infect without warning, can lie dormant for decades or even centuries before breaking forth even more virulently than when they were first conceived. Their eloquence often belies their antiquity; nothing is new under the sun, yet nothing seems more like the act of Creation itself than the first glimmer of an idea reborn in the mind of new thinker. Is Thinking an act of invention or an act of discovery? Can such a distinction even fairly be drawn?

As a historical movement, Transcendentalism itself embodies a high degree of ahistoricism. "Books are for the scholars' idle times..." Emerson asserted in his 1837 Phi Beta Kappa address. "Each age, it is found, must write its own books; or rather, each generation for the next succeeding. The books of

an older period will not fit this."¹⁵² Intellectual inspiration cometh whence it will: from the great minds of the past, as recorded in books, or from the mind of God, as experienced directly in nature. The purpose of scholarship is not mere bookwormishness, but Thinking itself. Yet this is not good enough for the historian. It is insufficient to try to understand the Transcendentalists as they understood themselves. In examining the movement as a historical artifact, it is equally essential to understand how Transcendentalism came to be that way, and the kind of impact it made on what followed after it.

Given this three-fold historiographical charge, how than should we characterize the Transcendentalists?

Clearly, from the perspective of the Transcendentalists themselves, as well as many of the "old-school" Unitarians who preceded them, and the so-called "Free Religionists" who followed after, Transcendentalism represented a radical departure from what had come before. Its roots were in Europe, in the timeless wisdom of philosophical Idealism or the arcane mysticism of the orient, in the mind of God and in the depths of the Soul. What Unitarians and Transcendentalists held in common were perceived as part of the landscape; what stood out were those things that diverged from this common ground.

From the perspective of a century and a half of subsequent reflection, it is the landscape of that common ground that seems most striking. In this regard, Henry Ware Jr. represents an important landmark in the mapping of that landscape. As an exemplary representative of the Unitarian pietism out of which Transcendentalism emerged, Ware provides a context for the understanding of the Transcendentalist movement true to its many-faceted diversity, its abiding religious interests, and its implicit cultural critique. If Emerson is the father of

¹⁵² Whicher, pp. 66-67.

Transcendentalism, than Ware is perhaps both its grandfather and its godparent, responsible for at least one-half of its inherited intellectual heritage, as well as its early spiritual education, and the preservation of its tangible, institutional legacy.

In regard to the long-term impact of the Transcendentalist movement, its influence clearly extends well beyond the margins of the Unitarian church. Emerson is "America's Philosopher;" his experiences as a Unitarian minister are merely a brief preamble to this much larger vocation. Yet within the Unitarian denomination itself, Transcendentalism has been thoroughly reabsorbed into the denominational mainstream. Lecturing in 1882, retiring Harvard Divinity School Lecturer in Ecclesiastical History Joseph Henry Allen divided the history of Unitarianism in America into three periods: the age of William Ellery Channing, the age of Theodore Parker, and the age "Dr. Hedge" and "Dr. Bellows." In Frederick Henry Hedge was embodied "a philosophical student and thinker," as well as "probably the ablest, deepest, and most widely cultivated intellect that the denomination has embraced..." while Henry Whitney Bellows' "splendid enthusiasm" represented the "inspiration and organizing force" of Unitarianism as a denominational body.¹⁵³ Hedge, of course, was the man from whom "The Hedge Club," Transcendentalism's embryonic organization, took its name. Bellows was the architect of the 1865 General Conference, in the aftermath of which a snubbed O. B. Frothingham sought to organize the Free Religious Association by evoking the memory of Theodore Parker. Yet it was Hedge's conception of the "Broad Church" — at once liturgical, mystical, rational and evangelical — that informed Bellows' vision of convening a national convention to create "The Liberal Christian Church of America." Ironically, the denominational name eventually chosen by the convention — the "National

¹⁵³ Joseph Henry Allen, *Our Liberal Movement in Theology* 3rd. ed. (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1892) pp. 22-23.

Conference of Unitarian Churches" — had less to do with the Radicals' objections to the word "Christian" than it did the attachment to the term "Unitarian" by the delegates representing the "conservative" Rationalist Christians of the venerable "establishment" Standing Order congregations.¹⁵⁴

By the time of the General Conference in 1865, Henry Ware Jr. had been dead for two decades. He was 49 years old when he died, but his health had been poor for some time prior to his death, forcing the resignation of his professorship in 1842, and severely curtailing his activities in the last few years of his life. Emerson lived to the age of 78. In 1867, two years after the General Conference (and as Frothingham's denominational dissidents sought to organize themselves as the FRA, with Emerson delivering one of the keynote speeches), Emerson was appointed to Harvard's Board of Overseers, and was invited once more by the Phi Beta Kappa society to speak at the University commencement. Robert H. Richardson describes Emerson's return to Harvard:

Thirty years had passed since "The American Scholar"; now his topic was "The Progress of Culture." The occasion was a notable failure. Emerson suddenly found that he could not see his papers clearly. He had not until that moment needed glasses to read his lectures. He became flustered, his papers slipped away under his hands on the poorly contrived table he was using as a lectern. Finally, one of his auditors got up and put a cushion under Emerson's papers for him. The audience was uneasy.¹⁵⁵

By this point in his life, Emerson had become well-established as a fixture in American letters. His name alone was enough to lend credibility and generate a ready audience (thus explaining both Harvard's and Frothingham's eagerness to enlist him in the cause of their respective endeavors). Yet his fading eyesight and failing memory conspired increasingly to restrict his public appearances. In

¹⁵⁴ Walter Donald Kring, *Henry Whitney Bellows*, (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association Skinner House, 1979) pp. 305-339.

¹⁵⁵ Richardson, *Emerson: The Mind on Fire*, pg. 557.

many ways, the elder Emerson lived out the last years of his life in the ever-lengthening shadow of his own youth. His mature thought contains little of the intuitive mysticism of his younger days. It is instead highly reminiscent of the ecumenical Unitarian pietism of his one-time colleague and mentor, Henry Ware Jr. From his interest in "Self-Reliance" and "The Over-Soul" exhibited in the *Essays: First Series*, Emerson's attention has shifted by the 1860's to topics such as "Wealth," and "Culture" in *The Conduct of Life*. As David Robinson has recently suggested, "the fading of visionary ecstasy as a reliable religious foundation eventuated in Emerson's gradual orientation toward ethical engagement as a means of spiritual fulfillment."¹⁵⁶ In pursuing this new orientation, Emerson reawakens the legacy of Ware's *Christian Character* in the formation of his own Transcendental Pragmatism.

¹⁵⁶ Robinson, *Emerson and the Conduct of Life*, pg. 3.

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