

Week 4 Documents – Disestablishment and Growing Diversity

Document A: Instruction from the town of Townsend, MA to their representative to the MA state Constitutional ratifying convention. December 31, 1787

To Capt. Daniel Adams –

Sir The business, in which you are chosen to act for us, in the State Convention; appointed to consider the pro[po]sed Federal Constitution, being very interesting; & you choosing to act under our direction; or at least to have our minds clearly expressed on the occasion. . .

7 In the proposed Constitution it is Containd, that all civil offices both of the United States & of the several States shall be bound by oath or affirmation to support this Constitution, but that no Religious Test shall Ever be required as a qualification to office or public Trust under the United States, But we think it necessary that our Civil rulers be professors of the true religion and apparent friends to it; & this has been the opinion of all wise & good men among us from the first settlement of this Country; if therefore any who have been chosen into public trust should afterward appear to be destitute of this essential qualification, the People must have a Right to Remove them. Nor can we on any consideration agree to a Constitution Which Will admit into governt, Atheists Deists Papists or abettors of any false religion; tho' we would not Exclude any Denomination [inserted: of] Protestants who hold the fundamentals of our religion, True religion distinguished from Infidelity & Idolatry [struck: & hereby] is the foundation of good government, as Well as of morality & happiness. To be secured in the free enjoyment of this our ancestors emigrated into this Country, and settled here in such dangers & distresses [sic] as should never be forgotten - This priviledge [sic] then has been Purchased at too dear a rate, to be viewed With indifferencey [sic] – it should be dearer to us than property or life itself: Nor can we consent to support any in authority who are not bound to defend this our greatest priviledge [sic]. – In the Bill of rights for this Commonwealth it is declar'd that the happiness of the people, & the Preservation of civil government depend upon piety religion & morality; & that the people have a right to invest their Legislature With Power to require that provision be made for the public Worship of God & the support of protestant teachers; & require the attendance of People upon such Worship & instructions – And it is not of as much consequence that a continental Legislature be vested with Such authority as a State Legislature but What Purpose will it answer if they are not abettors of the Protestant Religion – Will they Employ their power [inserted: &] influence this Way – upon the Whole whether a Religious Test be agreed to or not – We must insist that the Continental Constitution Contain a Bill of Rights which by express declaration will secure to us our priviledges especially our religion and such rulors [sic] to support it as we can put confidence in & while we view them as friends to the great Author of our religion, may expect his Presence With them, that so they may be ministers of God for the Good of his people for the interest of his religion & for the honour of his Name –

Document B: William Ellery Channing – Unitarian Christianity 1819

B. We object to the doctrine of the Trinity, that, whilst acknowledging in words, it subverts in effect, the unity of God. According to this doctrine, there are three infinite and equal persons, possessing supreme divinity, called the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Each of these persons, as described by theologians, has his own particular consciousness, will, and perceptions. They love each other, converse with each other, and delight in each other's society. They perform different parts in man's redemption, each having his appropriate office, and neither doing the work of the other. The Son is mediator and not the Father. The Father sends the Son, and is not himself sent; nor is he conscious, like the Son, of taking flesh. Here, then, we have three intelligent agents, possessed of different consciousness, different wills, and different perceptions, performing different acts, and sustaining different relations; and if these things do not imply and constitute three minds or beings, we are utterly at a loss to know how three minds or beings are to be formed. . . When we attempt to conceive of three Gods, we can do nothing more than

represent to ourselves three agents, distinguished from each other by similar marks and peculiarities to those which separate the persons of the Trinity; and when common Christians hear these persons spoken of as conversing with each other, loving each other, and performing different acts, how can they help regarding them as different beings, different minds?

C. We . . . protest against the irrational and unscriptural doctrine of the Trinity. "To us," as to the Apostle and the primitive Christians, "there is one God, even the Father." With Jesus, we worship the Father, as the only living and true God. We are astonished, that any man can read the New Testament, and avoid the conviction, that the Father alone is God. We hear our Saviour continually appropriating this character to the Father. We find the Father continually distinguished from Jesus by this title. "God sent his Son." "God anointed Jesus." Now, how singular and inexplicable is this phraseology, which fills the New Testament, if this title belong equally to Jesus, and if a principal object of this book is to reveal him as God, as partaking equally with the Father in supreme divinity! We challenge our opponents to adduce one passage in the New Testament, where the word God means three persons, where it is not limited to one person, and where . . . it does not mean the Father. Can stronger proof be given, that the doctrine of three persons in the Godhead is not a fundamental doctrine of Christianity?

Document C: A Short Essay on Universalism Hosea Ballou 1849

We propose, in what we shall say in the few following pages, on the subject of Universalism, to offer a few suggestions on several subjects which relate to the doctrine, considered as a system of theology, which distinguishes its believers, as a sect, from Christians of denominations. . .

- And, 1st. As respects the one central idea, in which all, who have ever professed to believe the doctrine, have agreed. This great and paramount idea embraces the final end of all sin in the human family, and the consequent holiness and happiness of all men. We deem it proper to consider all who embrace this one item of faith as Universalists, however they may differ in regard to the ways and means which have been, or may be, used to carry into effect the desired and glorious result; or however they may differ as to times and seasons in which Divine wisdom may accomplish it. This item of faith evidently distinguishes all its advocates from all who believe that any of the human family will sin and suffer as long as the Creator shall exist.
- 2nd. There is another item in the belief entertained by Universalists, in which all its advocates are agreed. And that is, that this great and glorious truth has its origin in the nature of God, and is a necessary result flowing from all the Divine attributes, which harmonize in infinite, unchangeable love. As it is manifestly unreasonable to suppose that there can exist in any one of the Divine attributes a tendency which conflicts with that of any other attribute, so it is equally unreasonable to allow that Divine justice can require any punishment or retribution which Divine love does not desire. . .
- 3rd. All Universalists agree in the belief, that their distinguishing doctrine is plainly taught by Divine inspiration, in the scriptures of Old and New Testaments; and, of course, they do not believe that the inspired Scriptures anywhere express a contrary doctrine. They find this doctrine in the writings of Moses, in the prophets, and in the Psalms; and most clearly set forth in the teachings of Jesus and his apostles. The very spirit of the gospel of the Son of God is that of love to enemies, and the rendering of good for evil.
- And, 4th. All Universalists agree in believing that the true Christian life consists in possessing, living, and acting the spirit of love, as manifested in the life and teachings of the Divine Master. And however we may fail, or come short of this rule, even our delinquencies admonish us of its purity, and compel us to acknowledge it.