

**POPULAR OBJECTIONS TO  
UNITARIAN CHRISTIANITY:  
CONSIDERED AND ANSWERED  
IN SEVEN DISCOURSES**

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**GEORGE WASHINGTON BURNAP**

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## DISCOURSE I.

### THE POSITION OF UNITARIANISM DEFINED.

JESUS SAITH UNTO HER, WOMAN, BELIEVE ME, THE HOUR COMETH WHEN YE SHALL NEITHER IN THIS MOUNTAIN, NOR YET AT JERUSALEM, WORSHIP THE FATHER. YE WORSHIP YE KNOW NOT WHAT. WE KNOW WHAT WE WORSHIP; FOR SALVATION IS OF THE JEWS. BUT THE HOUR COMETH, AND NOW IS, WHEN THE TRUE WORSHIPPERS SHALL WORSHIP THE FATHER IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH; FOR THE FATHER SEEKETH SUCH TO WORSHIP HIM. GOD IS A SPIRIT; AND THEY THAT WORSHIP HIM MUST WORSHIP HIM IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH. — John iv. 21 - 24.

THESE are some of the sublimest words which were ever uttered on earth. It is in partial fulfilment of them that we, at the distance of more than eighteen centuries, “with half the convex globe between,” are assembled to worship God in the name of Christ in this beautiful temple built upon this distant shore, when the temple of Jerusalem, which then glittered afar in Oriental splendor, has long ago been razed to its foundations. I shall not attempt to describe the joy with which we again assemble in this sacred place. To many of you it has become endeared by the most tender and holy associations;

with the Sabbath's rest and the Sabbath's musings, with the soul's most consecrated hours of communion with God, with the divine teachings of Christ's blessed Gospel, with the moving symbols of his sorrows and his death, with the anthems of God's praise, with the hopes and anticipations of heaven, with the memory of kindred and companions, who, you trust, are now worshipping in that temple not made with hands eternal in the heavens.

I have thought to add interest to this first day of our restoration to our renovated house of prayer, by rehearsing the history of this church and religious society, by re-stating the principles upon which it was founded, the objects to which its energies are directed, the changes which have passed over the religious world since its establishment, and the prospects which the future presents of the dissemination of those great truths which it maintains as vital to Christianity and to man.

On the 12th of October, 1816, there appeared in one or more of the Baltimore newspapers the following advertisement: — "Divine service will be performed by the Rev. Doctor Freeman of Boston tomorrow at the Hall belonging to Mr. Gibney in South Charles Street, to commence at 11 o'clock A. M. and at half past 3 P. M."

Accordingly, at the appointed hours, an audience assembled and services were held. On the next Sunday, public worship was again celebrated at the

same hours and in the same place. Those who listened to the exercises of those two days had been accustomed to worship in the various churches in the city ; but they now heard an exposition of the doctrines of Christianity, as it seemed to them, more reasonable, consistent, and edifying, than any to which they had ever given their attention.

To many, perhaps most, of the hearers, the denomination to which the speaker belonged was wholly unknown. Their judgment of what he uttered was formed, therefore, either without prejudice, or in opposition to the bias there always exists against any thing that is new. A simultaneous desire sprang up in the minds of many who were there, to procure for themselves and their children a stated ministry by which such views of Christianity might be inculcated and maintained.

But who was Doctor Freeman, and why does he preach in a hall ? Among all the various denominations of Christians, is there no pulpit in the city to which he may be invited ? Not one. He had been almost isolated for more than thirty years for-conscience' sake. For more than thirty years, in the way called heresy he and the people of his charge had worshipped the God of their fathers. His personal history is, that he was a graduate of Harvard University of the class of 1777.

He pursued his preparatory theological studies principally at Cambridge, and in October, 1782, be-

came Reader at "King's Chapel," an Episcopal church in Boston, and in the April following was chosen Pastor of the church. He continued to read the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer till 1785, when a committee of the proprietors was appointed to revise that manual of devotion, and present it in a form more agreeable, as they thought, to the word of God. The result of their labor was the production, in substance, of the "Chapel Liturgy," a beautiful and almost faultless form of public devotions, now used by that ancient society. This change, and as they thought reform, was brought about mainly by the studies and ministrations of their pastor, who gave a course of lectures explanatory of the Scriptures in relation to those doctrines which were left out of their new book of prayer. Thus the most ancient Episcopal church in New England became the first Unitarian church in America.

Nothing, then, could have been more appropriate, than that the patriarch of Unitarianism in America should have been the founder of Unitarianism in Maryland.

The desire to have a church in Baltimore, modelled upon the simple principles of the Gospel, excited by the preaching of Doctor Freeman, found expression in a meeting held by several of the citizens on the 10th day of February, 1817, for the purpose of organizing a religious society, and taking into consideration the best means of erecting a building for public worship.



At this meeting they adopted a constitution, and gave to the society the legal title of "The First Independent Church of Baltimore." They also appointed nine trustees to superintend the concerns of the society and the erection of the building. The corner-stone was laid on the 5th day of June, 1817, in the presence of all the trustees, most of the subscribers, and many others.

In the centre of the stone, a plate was deposited, bearing the following inscription : —

In Greek, — "To the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God."

In English, — "This corner-stone of the First Independent Church of Baltimore was laid on the 5th day of June, 1817, under the direction of the following Trustees and Building Committee, viz. Henry Payson, Ezekiel Freeman, Cumberland D. Williams, James W. McCulloh, Tobias Watkins, Nathaniel Williams, William Child, Charles H. Appleton, John H. Poor, and Isaac Phillips. Maximilian Godfroy, Architect, and John Ready, Builder."

The church was completed in October, 1818, and dedicated on the 29th of the same month by Dr. Freeman, and the Rev. Mr. Colman, of Hingham, Mass., Dr. Freeman preaching the sermon.

The pulpit was supplied by different preachers from Boston and the neighbourhood, till May, 1819, when the Rev. Jared Sparks was ordained as the first pastor of this church ; his ordination took place

on the 5th of the month, and Mr., afterwards Dr. Channing, of Boston, delivered the customary discourse.

The 5th of May, 1819, was a memorable day in the theological history of this country. It might be called the Pentecost of American Unitarianism. In setting apart a minister to teach a faith, which, although the most ancient, appeared to the community in which it was to be preached comparatively a new doctrine, Mr. Channing thought it incumbent on him to make an open, plain, and candid statement of the principles which this new edifice was raised to maintain and disseminate. Into better hands that task could not have fallen. Circumstances made that discourse a confession of faith, a manifesto of principles, a declaration of independence, to a new association of the followers of Christ. For its purpose it was perfect. So clear are its statements, so simple its language, so grand and comprehensive the truths it unfolds, such earnestness, conviction, and candor pervade it all, that it leaves very little to be desired, and very little to be added. It made a profound impression. None who heard it will ever forget that day. Its publication, which took place immediately after, was followed by still more important results. On the printed page it appeared no less striking, original, powerful, and convincing, than it had done in delivery. It spread over the country with wonderful rapidity. It was reprinted and circulated by thousands,

and no pamphlet, with one exception, and that a political publication, ever attracted in this country so wide and universal attention.

Its author, before not widely, though favorably, known, soon rose to the highest literary eminence, and has been since acknowledged as one of the greatest masters of the English tongue, even in the jealous judgment of our mother land. His works are more read in England than those of any other theologian. Almost every year produces a new edition of them in this country, and this sermon, incorporated into his works, has, on the whole, been more read than any other, perhaps, that has been delivered in modern times.

This visit of Mr. Channing to Baltimore was the cause of a religious movement in another city, quite as important as this. On his way home, he stopped a short time at New York. His friends attempted to procure him a place to preach in, on Sunday. To obtain a church for him was hopeless, and he held services in a private house. Those services gave being to a religious society, which has since expanded into two of the most beautiful and well-attended churches in the city.

But to return to Baltimore. The plain avowal of principles and candid declaration of purposes made by Mr. Channing, while they gave clearness of view, definiteness of doctrine, and concentration of action to the new church, drew more sharply the line of de-