

---

---

# Ralph Waldo Emerson

## *An Address delivered before the Senior Class in Divinity College, 1838*

---

---

In this refulgent summer, it has been a luxury to draw the breath of life. The grass grows, the buds burst, the meadow is spotted with fire and gold in the tint of flowers. The air is full of birds, and sweet with the breath of the pine, the balm-of-Gilead, and the new hay. Night brings no gloom to the heart with its welcome shade. Through the transparent darkness the stars pour their almost spiritual rays. Man under them seems a young child, and his huge globe a toy. The cool night bathes the world as with a river, and prepares his eyes again for the crimson dawn. The mystery of nature was never displayed more happily. The corn and the wine have been freely dealt to all creatures, and the never-broken silence with which the old bounty goes forward, has not yielded yet one word of explanation. One is constrained to respect the perfection of this world, in which our senses converse. How wide; how rich; what invitation from every property it gives to every faculty of man!

In its fruitful soils, in its navigable sea; in its mountains of metal and stone; in its forests of all woods; in its animals; in its chemical ingredients; in the powers and path of light, heat, attraction, and life . . .

But when the mind opens, and reveals the laws which traverse the universe, and make things what they are, then shrinks the great world at once into a mere illustration and fable of this mind. What am I? and What is? asks the

human spirit with a curiosity new-kindled, but never to be quenched. Behold these outrunning laws, which our imperfect apprehension can see tend this way and that, but not come full circle. Behold these infinite relations, so like, so unlike; many, yet one. I would study, I would know, I would admire forever. These works of thought have been the entertainments of the human spirit in all ages.

A more secret, sweet, and overpowering beauty appears to man when his heart and mind open to the sentiment of virtue. Then he is instructed in what is above him. He learns that his being is without bound; that, to the good, to the perfect, he is born, low as he now lies in evil and weakness. That which he venerates is still his own, though he has not realized it yet. *He ought.* He knows the sense of that grand word, though his analysis fails entirely to render account of it. When in innocency, or when by intellectual

Chapel at Divinity Hall,  
Harvard Divinity School



perception, he attains to say,—‘I love the Right; Truth is beautiful within me: thee will I serve, day and night in great, in small, that I may not be virtuous, but virtue;’—then is the end of the creation answered, and God is well pleased.

The sentiment of virtue is a reverence and delight in the presence of certain divine laws. It perceives that this homely game of life we play, covers, under what seem foolish details, principles that astonish. The child amidst his baubles, is learning the action of light, motion, gravity, muscular force; and in the game of human life, love, fear, justice, appetite, man, and God, interact. These laws refuse to be adequately stated. They will not be written out on paper, or spoken by the tongue. They elude our persevering thought; yet we read them hourly in each other’s faces, in each other’s actions, in our own remorse. The moral traits which are all globed into every virtuous act and thought,—in speech, we must sever, and describe or suggest by painful enumeration of many particulars. Yet, as this sentiment is the essence of all religion, let me guide your eye to the precise objects of the sentiment, by an enumeration of some of those classes of facts in which this element is conspicuous.

The intuition of the moral sentiment is an insight of the perfection of the laws of the soul. These laws execute themselves. They are out of time, out of space, and not subject to circumstance. Thus; in the soul of man there is a justice whose retributions are instant and entire. He who does a good deed, is instantly ennobled. He who does a mean deed, is by the action itself contracted. He who puts off impurity, thereby puts on purity. If a man is at heart just, then in so far is he God; the safety of God, the immortality of God, the majesty of God do enter into that man with justice. If a man dissemble, deceive, he deceives himself, and goes out of acquaintance with his own being. A man in the view of absolute goodness, adores, with total humility. Every step so downward, is a step upward. The man who renounces himself, comes to himself.

See how this rapid intrinsic energy worketh everywhere righting wrongs, correcting appear-

ances, and bringing up facts to a harmony with thoughts. Its operation in life, though slow in the senses, is, at last, as sure as in the soul. By it, a man is made the Providence to himself, dispensing good to his goodness, and evil to his sin. Character is always known. Thefts never enrich; alms never impoverish; murder will speak out of stone walls. The least admixture of a lie,—for example, the taint of vanity, the least attempt to make a good impression, a favorable appearance,—will instantly vitiate the effect. But speak the truth, and all nature and all spirits help you with unexpected furtherance. Speak the truth, and all things alive or brute are vouchers, and the very roots of the grass underground there, do seem to stir and move to bear you witness. . . .

These facts have always suggested to man the sublime creed, that the world is not the product of manifold power, but of one will, of one mind; and that one mind is everywhere active, in each ray of the star, in each wavelet of the pool; and whatever opposes that will, is everywhere balked and baffled, because things are made so, and not otherwise. Good is positive. Evil is merely privative, not absolute: it is like cold, which is the privation of heat. All evil is so much death or nonentity. Benevolence is absolute and real. So much benevolence as a man hath, so much life hath he. For all things proceed out of this same spirit, which is differently named love, justice, temperance, in its different applications, just as the ocean receives different names on the several shores which it washes. All things proceed out of the same spirit, and all things conspire with it. Whilst a man seeks good ends, he is strong by the whole strength of nature. In so far as he roves from these ends, he bereaves himself of power, of auxiliaries; his being shrinks out of all remote channels, he becomes less and less, a mote, a point, until absolute badness is absolute death.

The perception of this law of laws awakens in the mind a sentiment which we call the religious sentiment, and which makes our highest happiness. Wonderful is its power to charm or to command. It is a mountain air. It is the embalmers of the world. It is myrrh and storax, and chlorine and rosemary. It makes the sky and the

hills sublime, and the silent song of the stars is it. By it, is the universe made safe and habitable, not by science or power. Thought may work cold and intransitive in things, and find no end or unity; but the dawn of that Law is sovereign over all natures; and the worlds, time, space, eternity do seem to break out into joy.

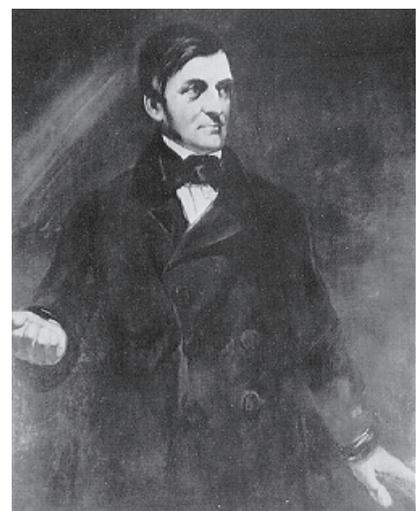
This sentiment is divine and deifying. It is the beatitude of man. It makes him illimitable. Through it, the soul first knows itself. It corrects the capital mistake of the infant man, who seeks to be great by following the great, and hopes to derive advantages *from another*;—by showing the fountain of all good to be in himself, and that he, equally with every man, is an inlet into the deeps of Reason. When he says, “I ought;” when love warms him; when he chooses, warned from on high, the good and great deed; then, deep melodies wander through his soul from Supreme Wisdom. Then he can worship, and be enlarged by his worship; for he can never go behind this sentiment. In the sublimest flights of the soul, rectitude is never surmounted, love is never outgrown.

This sentiment lies at the foundation of society, and successively creates all forms of worship. The principle of veneration never dies out. Man fallen into superstition, into sensuality, is never quite without the visions of the moral sentiment. In like manner, all the expressions of this sentiment are sacred and permanent in proportion to their purity. The expression of this sentiment affect us more than all other compositions. The sentences of the oldest time, which ejaculate this piety, are still fresh and fragrant. This thought dwelled always deepest in the minds of men in the devout and contemplative East; not alone in Palestine, where it reached its purest expression, but in Egypt, in Persia, in India, in China. Europe has always owed to oriental genius, its divine impulses. What these holy bards said, all sane men found agreeable and true. And the unique impression of Jesus upon mankind, whose name is not so much written as ploughed into the history of this world, is proof of the subtle virtue of this infusion.

Meantime, whilst the doors of the temple stand open, night and day, before every man,

and the oracles of this truth cease never, it is guarded by one stern condition; this, namely; it is an intuition. It cannot be received at second hand. Truly speaking, it is not instruction, but provocation, that I can receive from another soul. What he announces, I must find true in me, or wholly reject; and on his word, or as his second, be he who he may, I can accept nothing. On the contrary, the absence of this primary faith is the presence of degradation. As is the flood so is the ebb. Let this faith depart, and the very words it spake, and the things it made, become false and hurtful. Then falls the church, the state, art, letters, life. The doctrine of the divine nature being forgotten, a sickness infects and dwarfs the constitution. Once man was all; now he is an appendage, a nuisance. And because the indwelling Supreme Spirit cannot wholly be got rid of, the doctrine of it suffers this perversion, that the divine nature is attributed to one or two persons, and denied to all the rest, and denied with fury. The doctrine of inspiration is lost; the base doctrine of the majority of voices, usurps the place of the doctrine of the soul. Miracles, prophecy, poetry; the ideal life, the holy life, exist as ancient history merely; they are not in the belief, nor in the aspiration of society; but, when suggested, seem ridiculous. Life is comic or pitiful, as soon as the high ends of being fade out of sight, and man becomes near-sighted, and can only attend to what addresses the senses.

These general views, which, whilst they are general, none will contest, find abundant illustration in the history of religion, and especially in the history of the Christian church. In that, all of us have had our birth and nurture. The truth contained in that, you, my young friends, are now setting forth to teach. As the Cultus, or established wor-



ship of the civilized world, it has great historical interest for us. Of its blessed words, which have been the consolation of humanity, you need not that I should speak. I shall endeavor to discharge my duty to you, on this occasion, by pointing out two errors of its administration, which daily appear more gross from the point of view we have just now taken.

Jesus Christ belonged to the true race of prophets. He saw with open eye the mystery of the soul. Drawn by its severe harmony, ravished with its beauty, he lived in it, and had his being there. Alone in all history, he estimated the greatness of man. One man was true to what is in you and me. He saw that God incarnates himself in man, and evermore goes forth anew to take possession of his World. He said, in this jubilee of sublime emotion, "I am divine. Through me, God acts; through me, speaks. Would you see God, see me; or, see thee, when thou also thinkest as I now think." But what a distortion did his doctrine and memory suffer in the same, in the next, and the following ages! There is no doctrine of the Reason\* which will bear to be taught by the Understanding\*\*. The understanding caught this high chant from the poet's lips, and said, in the next age, "This was Jehovah come down out of heaven. I will kill you, if you say he was a man." The idioms of his language and the figures of his rhetoric, have usurped the place of his truth; and churches are not built on his principles, but on his tropes. Christianity became a mythus, as the poetic teaching of Greece and of Egypt, before. He spoke of miracles; for he felt that man's life was a miracle, and all that man doth, and he knew that this his daily miracle shines, as the character ascends. But the word Miracle, as pronounced by Christian churches, gives a false impression; it is a Monster. It is not one with the blowing clover and the falling rain.

He felt respect for Moses and the prophets; but no unfit tenderness at postponing their initial revelations, to the hour and the man that now is; to the eternal revelation in the heart. Thus was he a true man. Having seen that the law in us is commanding, he would not suffer it to be commanded. Boldly, with hand, and heart, and life, he declared it was God. Thus is he, as I

think, the only soul in history who has appreciated the worth of a man.

1. In this point of view we become very sensible of the first defect of historical Christianity. 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 exaggeration of the personal, the positive, the ritual. It has dwelt, it dwells, with noxious exaggeration about the *person* of Jesus. The soul knows no persons. It invites every man to expand to the full circle of the universe, and will have no preferences but those of spontaneous love. But by this eastern monarchy of a Christianity, which indolence and fear have built, the friend of man is made the injurer of man. The manner in which his name is surrounded with expressions, which were once sallies of admiration and love, but are now petrified into official titles, kills all generous sympathy and liking. All who hear me, feel, that the language that describes Christ to Europe and America, is not the style of friendship and enthusiasm to a good and noble heart, but is appropriated and formal,—paints a demigod, as the Orientals or the Greeks would describe Osiris or Apollo. . . . You shall not own the world; you shall not dare, and live after the infinite Law that is in you, and in company with the infinite Beauty which heaven and earth reflect to you in all lovely forms; but you must subordinate your nature to Christ's nature; you must accept our interpretations; and take his portrait as the vulgar draw it.

That is always best which gives me to myself. The sublime is excited in me by the great stoical doctrine, Obey thyself. That which shows God in me, fortifies me. That which shows God out of me, makes me a wart and a wen. . . .

The divine bards are the friends of my virtue, of my intellect, of my strength. They admonish me, that the gleams which flash across my mind, are not mine, but God's; that they had the like, and were not disobedient to the heavenly vision. So I love them. Noble provocations go out from them, inviting me to resist evil; to subdue the world; and to Be. And thus by his holy thoughts, Jesus serves us, and thus only. 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. It is true that a great and rich soul, like his, falling among the simple, does so preponderate, that, as his did, it names the world. The world seems to them to exist for him, and they have not yet drunk so deeply of his sense, as to see that only by coming again to themselves, or to God in themselves, can they grow forevermore. . . . The time is coming, when all men will see, that the gift of God to the soul is not a vaunting, overpowering, excluding sanctity, but a sweet, natural goodness, a goodness like thine and mine, and that so invites thine and mine to be and to grow.

The injustice of the vulgar tone of preaching is not less flagrant to Jesus, than to the souls which it profanes. . . .

2. The second defect of the traditionary and limited way of using the mind of Christ is a consequence of the first; this, namely; that the Moral Nature, that Law of laws, whose revelations introduce greatness,—yes, God himself, into the open soul, is not explored as the fountain of the established teaching in society. Men have come to speak of the revelation as something long ago given and done, as if God were dead. The injury to faith throttles the preacher; and the goodliest of institutions becomes an uncertain and inarticulate voice.

It is very certain that it is the effect of conversation with the beauty of the soul, to beget a desire and need to impart to others the same knowledge and love. If utterance is denied, the thought lies like a burden on the man. Always the seer is a sayer. Somehow his dream is told: somehow he publishes it with solemn joy: sometimes with pencil on canvas; or sometimes with chisel on stone; sometimes in towers and aisles of granite, his soul's worship is builded; sometimes in anthems of indefinite music; but clearest and most permanent, in words.

The man enamored of this excellency, becomes its priest or its poet. . . . But observe the condition, the spiritual limitation of the office. The spirit only can teach. Not any profane man, not any sensual, not any liar, not any slave

can teach, but only he can give, who has; he only can create, who is. The man on whom the soul descends, through whom the soul speaks, alone can teach. Courage, piety, love, wisdom, can teach; and every man can open his door to these angels, and they shall bring him the gift of tongues. But the man who aims to speak as books enable, as synods use, as the fashion guides, and as interest commands, babbles. Let him hush.

To this holy office, you propose to devote yourselves. I wish you may feel your call in throbs of desire and hope. . . . And it is my duty to say to you, that the need was never greater of new revelation than now. From the views I have already expressed, you will infer the sad conviction, which I share, I believe, with numbers of the universal decay and now almost death of faith in society. The soul is not preached. The Church seem to totter to its fall, almost all life extinct. On this occasion, any complaisance would be criminal, which told you, whose hope and commission it is to preach the faith of Christ, that the faith of Christ is preached.

It is time that this ill-suppressed murmur of all thoughtful men against the famine of our churches; this moaning of the heart because it is bereaved of the consolation, the hope, the grandeur, that come alone out of the culture of the moral nature; should be heard through the sleep of indolence, and over the din of routine. This great and perpetual office of the preacher is not discharged. Preaching is the expression of the moral sentiment in application to the duties of life. In how many churches, by how many prophets, tell me, is man made sensible that he is an infinite Soul; that the earth and heavens are passing into his mind; that he is drinking forever the soul of God? Where now sounds the persuasion, that by its very melody imparadises my heart, and so affirms its own origin in heaven? Where shall I hear words such as in elder ages drew men to leave all and follow,—father and mother, house and land, wife and child? Where shall I hear these august laws and moral being so pronounced, as to fill my ear, and I feel ennobled by the offer of my uttermost action and passion? The test of the true faith, certainly, should be its power to charm and command the

soul, as the laws of nature control the activity of the hands,—so commanding that we find pleasure and honor in obeying. The faith should blend with the light of rising and of setting suns, with the flying cloud, the singing bird, and the breath of flowers. But now the priest's Sabbath has lost the splendor of nature; it is unlovely; we are glad when it is done; we can make, we do make, even sitting in our pews, a far better, holier, sweeter, for ourselves.

. . . I once heard a preacher who sorely tempted me to say, I would go to church no more. Men go, thought I, where they are wont to go, else had no soul entered the temple . . . A snow storm was falling around us. The snow storm was real; the preacher merely spectral; and the eye felt the sad contrast in looking at him, and then out of the window behind him, into the beautiful meteor of the snow. He had lived in vain. He had no one word intimating that he had laughed or wept, was married or in love, had been commended, or cheated, or chagrined. If he had ever lived and acted, we were none the wiser for it. The capital secret of his profession, namely, to convert life into truth, he had not learned. Not one fact in all his experience, had he yet imported into his doctrine. . . . The true preacher can be known by this, that he deals out to the people his life,—life passed through the fire of thought. . . . It seemed strange that the people should come to church. It seemed as if their houses were very unentertaining, that they should prefer this thoughtless clamor. It shows that there is a commanding attraction in the moral sentiment, that can lend a faint tint of light to dulness and ignorance, coming in its name and place. The good hearer is sure he has been touched sometimes; is sure there is somewhat to be reached, and some word that can reach it. . . .

I am not ignorant that when we preach unworthily, it is not always quite in vain. There is a good ear, in some men, that draws supplies to virtue out of very indifferent nutriment. . . . The prayers and even the dogmas of our church, are like the zodiac of Denderah . . . wholly insulated from anything now extant in the life and business of the people. They mark the height to which the waters once rose. . . . Alas for

the unhappy man that is called to stand in the pulpit, and *not* give the bread of life. . . . Would he ask contributions for the missions, foreign or domestic? Instantly his face is suffused with shame, to propose to his parish, that they should send money a hundred or a thousand miles, to furnish such poor fare as they have at home, and would do well to go the hundred or the thousand miles to escape. . . .

[The Puritan and Catholic faiths are] passing away, and none arises in its room. . . .

And now, my brothers, you will ask, What in these desponding days can be done by us? The remedy is already declared in the ground of our complaint of the Church. We have contrasted the Church with the Soul. In the soul, then, let the redemption be sought. When a man comes, there comes revolution. The old is for slaves. When a man comes, all books are legible, all things transparent, all religions are forms. He is religious. Man is the wonderworker. . . . The stationariness of religion; the assumption that the age of inspiration is past, that the Bible is closed; the fear of degrading the character of Jesus by representing him as a man; indicate with sufficient clearness the falsehood of our theology. It is the office of the true teacher to show us that God is, not was; the He speaketh, not spake. . . .

Let me admonish you, first of all, to go alone; to refuse the good models, even those which are sacred in the imagination of men, and dare to love God without mediator or veil. Friends enough you shall find who will hold up to your emulation Wesleys and Oberlins, Saints and Prophets. Thank God for these good men, but say, 'I am also a man.' Imitation cannot go above its model. The imitator dooms himself to hopeless mediocrity. The inventor did it, because it was natural to him, and so in him it has a charm. In the imitator, something else is natural, and he bereaves himself of his own beauty, to come short of another man's.

Yourself a newborn bard of the Holy Ghost,—cast behind you all conformity, and acquaint men at first hand with Deity. Look to it first and only, that fashion, custom, authority, pleasure, and money are nothing to you,—are

not bandages over your eyes, that you cannot see,—but live with the privilege of the immeasurable mind. Not too anxious to visit periodically all families and each family in your parish connection,—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 feel that you have wondered. By trusting your own heart, you shall gain more confidence in other men. . . . It is not to be doubted, that all men have sublime thoughts; that all men value a few real hours of life; they love to be heard; they 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 of 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 the priestly office, and, present or absent, you shall be followed with their love as by an angel.

And, to this end, let us not aim at common degrees of merit. Can we not leave, to such as love it, the virtue that glitters for the commendation of society, and ourselves pierce the deep solitudes of absolute ability and worth? We easily come up to the standard of goodness in society. Society's praise can be cheaply secured, and almost all men are content with those easy merits; but the instant effect of conversing with God, will be, to put them away. There are persons who are not actors, not speakers, but influences; persons too great for fame . . .

And now let us do what we can to the smouldering, nigh quenched fire on the altar. The evils of the church that now is are manifest. The question returns, What shall we do? . . . The remedy to their deformity is, first, soul, and second, soul, and evermore, soul. . . . 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?

## RESPONSES

### II

#### Andrews Norton

*Norton graduated from Harvard in 1804—just as the school was “going Unitarian”—and was deeply committed to liberal Christianity. He began teaching at Harvard in 1811, but it was 1819 when he assumed the principal professorship in Divinity and thus ruled the Divinity School. Ripley, Emerson, Clarke, and their friends were, therefore, his students. He resigned his post in 1830 to devote himself fully to his forthcoming masterpiece on the “evidence” of Christianity, but he continued to dominate the theological world of Cambridge. He was earnest in his crusade for his unfortunately limited definition of religious truth. He published his condemnation of Mr. Emerson’s address not in the Unitarian newspaper, of which he was an editor, but in the Boston Daily Advocate—with the intention of blasting not only the orator but the graduates who invited him.*

There is a strange state of things existing about us in the literary and religious world, of which none of our larger periodicals has yet taken notice. . . . The characteristics of this school are the most extraordinary assumption, united with great ignorance, and incapacity for reasoning. There is indeed a general tendency among its disciples to disavow learning and reasoning as sources of their higher knowledge.—The mind must be its own unassisted teacher. It discerns transcendental truths by immediate vision . . .

The writer . . . floats about magnificently on bladders, which he would have it believed are swelling with ideas. . . .

The state of things described might be a matter of no great concern, a mere insurrection of folly, . . . if those engaged in it were not gathering confidence from neglect, and had not preceded to attack

principle which are the foundation of human society and human happiness. “Silly women,” it has been said, and silly young men, it is to be feared, have been drawn away from their Christian faith, if not divorced from all that can properly be called religion. The evil is becoming, for the time, disastrous and alarming; and of this fact there could hardly be a more extraordinary and ill boding evidence, than is afforded by a publication, which has just appeared, entitled, an “Address, delivered before the Senior Class in Divinity College, Cambridge,” upon the occasion of that class taking leave of the Institution—  
”By Ralph Waldo Emerson.”



It is not necessary to remark particularly on this composition. It will be sufficient to state generally, that the author professes to reject all belief in Christianity as a revelation, that he makes a general attack upon the Clergy, on the ground that they preach what he calls “Historical Christianity,” and that if he believe in God in the proper sense of the term, which one passage might have led his hearers to suppose, his language elsewhere is very ill-judged and indecorous. But what *his* opinions may be is a matter of minor concern; the main question is how it has happened, that religion has been insulted by the delivery of these opinions in the Chapel of the Divinity College of Cambridge, as the last instruction which those were to receive, who

were going forth from it, bearing the name of Christian preachers. . . . No one can doubt for a moment of the disgust and strong disapprobation with which it must have been heard by the highly respectable officers of that Institution. . . .

But the subject is to be viewed under a far more serious aspect. The words God, Religion, Christianity, have a definite meaning, well understood. . . . We well know how shamefully they have been abused in modern times by infidels and pantheists; but their meaning remains the same; the truths which they express are unchanged and unchange-

able. . . . It is not . . . to be supposed that his vanity would suffer him long to keep his philosophy to himself. This would break out in obscure intimations, ambiguous words, and false speculations. But should such preachers abound, and grow confident in their folly, we can hardly overestimate the disastrous effect upon the religion and moral state of the community.

### III The Christian Examiner (Unitarian newspaper)

It is not likely that we should have noticed this Address, had it not received . . . notice already, and caused some stir and speculation. But as we have been asked repeatedly, whether certain strange notions contained in it are regarded as good divinity by the instructors and students of the Divinity School at Cambridge, and whether the gentleman who advanced these notions is to be considered as thereby uttering or representing the opinions of the body of Unitarian ministers, we deem it right to say, and we believe we have the best authority for saying, that those notions, so far as they are intelligible, are utterly distasteful to the instructors of the School, and to Unitarian ministers generally, by whom they are esteemed to be neither good divinity nor good sense.

### IV Orestes Brownson

*Brownson's religious pilgrimage began with his rejection of Presbyterian Calvinism and his adoption of one of the anti-Calvinist ideologies available to him, Universalist. He was ordained a Universalist minister in 1826 in New Hampshire, and espoused a political outlook, particularly his commitment to laboring classes, more radical than was comfortable for many of that denomination. A religious crisis ensued, and a period of skepticism. But he stayed within the Universalist sphere until he came upon William Ellery Channing's Likeness to God, which he called "the most remarkable sermon since the Sermon on the Mount." He converted to Unitarianism and assumed the pastorate in Walpole, N.H.—rather closer to Boston, which brought him into contact with George Ripley, who knew of him as an advocate for the working class. The two became close friends and shared the ferment of new ideas that became Transcendentalism. In 1836 he estab-*

*lished in Boston what he hoped would be a new kind of church, The Society for Christian Union and Progress—meant to bring progressive religion to the working class. Many Unitarian clergy hoped for the success of Brownson's new church since Boston's Unitarian churches seemed unable to reach the working class.*

*In 1838 he launched the Boston Quarterly Review, an early vehicle for Transcendentalist writing, and in it, published a challenging critique of Channing's doctrine of self-culture. Brownson believed that political reform had to precede self-culture, and argued that without general reform and redistribution of wealth, there could be no self-culture for working class people.*

*He placed his hopes in the Democratic Party, which was crushed in 1840 by the Whigs. Brownson entered another period of crisis. He drifted from the Transcendentalists and embraced John Calhoun's "states' right" philosophy as well as Catholicism*

This is in some respects a remarkable address,—remarkable for its own character and for the place where and the occasion on which it was delivered. It is not often, we fancy, that such an address is delivered by a clergyman in a Divinity College to a class of young men just ready to go forth into the churches as preachers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Indeed it is not often that a discourse teaching doctrines like the leading doctrines of this, is delivered by a professedly religious man, anywhere or on any occasion.

We are not surprised that this address should have produced some excitement and called forth some severe censures upon its author; for we have long known that there are comparatively few who can hear with calmness the utterance of opinions to which they do not subscribe. Yet we regret to see the abuse which has been heaped upon Mr. Emerson. . . .

Mr. Emerson is the last man in the world we should suspect of conscious hostility to religion and morality. No one can know him or read his productions without feeling a profound respect for the singular purity and uprightness of his character and motives. . . . His object is to make men scorn to be slaves to routine, to custom, to established creeds, to public opinion, to the great names of this age, of this country, or of any other. He cannot bear the idea that a man comes into the world too-day with the field of truth monopolized and foreclosed. To every man lies open the whole field of truth, in morals, in politics, in science, in theology, in philosophy. The labors of past ages, the revelations of prophets and bards, the discoveries of the scientific and the philosophic, are not to be regarded as superseding our

own exertions and inquiries, as impediments to the free action of our own minds, but merely as helps, as provocations to the freest and fullest spiritual action of which god has made us capable.

This is the real end he has in view, and it is a good end. To call forth the free spirit, to produce the conviction here implied, to provoke men to be men, self-moving, self-subsisting men, not mere puppets, moving but as moved by the reigning mode, the reigning dogma, the reigning school, is a grand and praiseworthy work, and we should reverence and aid, not abuse and hinder him who gives himself up soul and body to its accomplishment.

## V James Freeman Clarke

*James Freeman Clarke had been a member of the Transcendentalist Club while he was founding minister of the Unitarian Church of the Disciples in Boston. He had since removed to the Ohio Valley, where he was pioneering new Unitarian congregations—of a more liberal bent—and editing The Western Messenger, a more progressive Unitarian newspaper. By now he was somewhat unhappy with Emerson for not seeming suitably enthusiastic about Clarke's own social projects; but he cannot help but defend him in the matter of the Divinity School Address.*

On the whole, we think that the results of this controversy will be excellent. It will show that our Unitarian plan of church union works better in a case of real or suppose heresy, than any other . . . For ourselves, we are convinced that if Mr. Emerson has taught any thing very wrong, it will be found out, and then he will quietly drop out of the Unitarian church, or the Unitarian church will quietly fall off from him. No *excommunication* is necessary. . . .

The question, however, is, *has* he taught any thing wrong? Is he opposed to historical Christianity? . . .

To confess the truth, when we received and read the Address, we did not discover anything in it objectionable at all. We were quite delighted with it . . . Parts seemed somewhat obscure, and for that we were sorry . . . but we bounded carelessly over these rocks of offence and pit-falls, enjoying the beauty, sincerity and magnanimity of the general current of the Address. . . .

The most serious charges that can be brought against a Christian man, have been laid against our author, founded on the contents of this discourse. He has been accused of Infidelity, disbelief in his-

torical Christianity—and of probable Atheism or Pantheism. . . .

It is too late in the day to put a man down by shouting Atheist, Infidel, Heretic. Formerly you could thus excite a prejudice against him that would prevent men from examining the truth of the charge. Not so now. Men cannot be in this day put down by denunciation. The whole religious pulpit and religious press has united for thirty or forty years in calling Unitarians, Deists. What is the result? That their principles are rapidly spreading. In view of this fact, let us lay aside prejudice and candidly examine every new thing . . .

, , , If a man praises Shelley, he is to be suspected. If he studies Cousin, the charge is almost brought home against him. But if he admires Carlyle, and occasionally drops dark hints about Schleiermacher, he is a confirmed disciple of this new heresy. . . .

Now it is very true that there are those who assert that the soul is not like a sheet of white paper—that it does not acquire all knowledge by perception and reasoning, but that it is endowed by the Creator with certain ideas which arise necessarily in the mind of every sane man. . . . They belong to a common sense which is back of all logic—an impartial God bestows them on all his children, and not merely on those who have been educated at Colleges and Universities . . .

We can agree with our friend that there is a new school. Perhaps we should agree with him as to those who are its chief masters and leaders. But we should describe them quite differently. We should say—there is a large and increasing number of the clergy and laity, of thinking men and educated women, especially of the youth in our different colleges, of all sects and all professions, who are dissatisfied with the present state of religion, philosophy and literature. The common principle which binds them together and makes them choose a school, is a desire for more of life, soul, energy, originality in these great departments of thought. . . . All who look, and hope, and labor for something better than now is, who believe in progress, who trust in future improvement, and are willing to spend and be spent in bringing forward that better time; all such are members of the New School.

## VI Sampson Reed

The natural mind is every backward to receive *revealed truth*, both from the character of this truth itself, and from the fact of its being revealed—from

the character of the truth, because it is opposed to the affections and principles of the natural mind, and calculated to reform and regenerate them—from the fact of its being revealed, because it leaves no place for the pride of discovery . . . There is among insects a class called parasites. Their instinct leads them to deposit their eggs in the bodies of other insects, where, when the young is hatched, it has only to open its mouth and eat up its brother. It would seem to be in a way analogous to this, that Providence often permits one falsity to be removed by another. *Transcendentalism* is the parasite of *sensualism*; and when it shall have done its work, it will be found to be itself a worm, and the offspring of a worm.

## VII Orestes Brownson

*Andrews Norton labored intensely for years upon his masterpiece, published in 1838 as The Evidence of the Genuineness of the Four Gospels. It is the perfect summation of Unitarian scholarship, and is everything that Emerson, in the Divinity School Address, clearly had in mind when he scorned "historical Christianity." Brownson pounced upon Norton's book with glee, dismissing Norton's lifework as irrelevant and accusing him of infidelity. Not only that, it's antipathetic to American democracy!*

When we heard that [Norton's] work was announced as actually published, we trusted it would wipe out that suspicion of infidelity, which had long been attached to the author in the minds of some of his religious friends, as well as of his religious enemies; but we are sorry to say, that, to a certain extent at least, we have been disappointed. He bears the reputation of being a first-rate logician, and is said to surpass most men in the acuteness and strength of his reasoning powers; consequently, he must know better than others when he has made out his case, and done all that by the nature of his argument he is required to do. It is, therefore, difficult to believe that he himself can be satisfied with the evidences he has adduced, or that he is not well aware that his argument, taken as a whole and in all its force, falls far short of proving the truth of Christianity.

There are persons who believe that the truths of Christianity bear on their face a certain stamp of divinity, which the soul is capable of recognizing . . . To these persons the question of the genuineness of the Four Gospels, is a matter of comparative indifference. They have in themselves a witness

for God, and may know the things whereof they affirm. With these Christianity is not a mere matter of opinion, but of experience; and they can speak of it as of something they know, which they have seen, felt, handled. But the author of the work before us, if we rightly apprehend his views, does not arrange himself with these persons; he does not believe that the truths of Christianity bring with them their own vouchers; nor does he believe that the soul possesses any inherent power of perceiving their truth, and of knowing that they are from God. Christianity with him is an historical fact, to be established by historical evidence alone . . .

Religious truth never springs up spontaneously in the human mind; there is no revelation made from God to the human soul; we can know nothing of religion but what is taught us from abroad, by an individual raised up and specially endowed with wisdom from on high to be our instructor. This individual we must hear and obey, because he speaks by divine authority. The fact, that he speaks from divine authority, no man of himself can know. There is no divinity in man to respond to and vouch for the divinity that speaks to him from without. Man has no inward power to recognize the voice of God spoken by the mouth of his inspired messengers. These messengers, when they come to us from God, must ring their credentials, sealed with God's seal and God's seal is a miracle. . . . Did not the teacher authenticate his mission by working miracles, we, alas for us! could not know whether he came from heaven above or from hell beneath; whether he were a teacher of truth or of falsehood! God has made us all the disclosures of truth, he proposes to make; and has sent us all the messengers he ever intends to send. How much then depends on the records in which are contained those miracles which authenticated the mission of those past messengers! Deprive us of the record of those miracles, or invalidate the testimony by the genuineness, integrity, and authenticity of those records are established, and we shall be without God or hope in the world, plunged into midnight darkness, with not the glimmering of one feeble star even to direct us. . . .

We are not aware that [this doctrine] received any very distinct utterance, nor any firm hold upon any portion of the Church, till after the prevalence of Locke's philosophy, of which the author of the work under review is one of the few remaining disciples. Locke was a great and good man, but his philosophy was defective, and altogether unfriendly to religion. It denied the possibility of proving religion by any other arguments than miracles addressed to the

outward senses, and in point of fact, it denied even those. Locke reduces man to the capacity of receiving sensations, and the faculty of reflecting on what passes within us. According to him we can have no ideas which do not enter through the senses, or which are not formed by the operations of the mind on ideas received by means of sensation. Consequently, we can have no idea of anything which is not either an object of the senses or an operation of our own minds. . . .

This system of philosophy, on which we are animadverting, is no less fatal to political liberty than to religion and morality; and the fact, that many generous defenders of freedom in its broadest sense, have sometimes embraced it, makes nothing against this position; for their defence of freedom was a sublime inconsistency, which does them honor. This philosophy necessarily disinherits the mass. It denies to man all inherent power of attaining to truth. In religion, if religion it admits, it refers us not to what we feel and know in ourselves, but to what was said or done in some remote age, by some special messenger from God; it refers us to some authorized teacher, and commands us to receive our faith on his word, and to adhere to it on peril of damnation. It therefore destroys all free action of the mind, all independent thought, all progress, and all living faith. In politics it must do the same. It cannot found the state on the inherent rights of man; the most it can do, is to organize the state for the preservation of such conditions, privileges, and prescriptions, as it can historically verify . . .

The doctrine, that truth comes to us from abroad, cannot coexist with true liberty . . . The democrat is not he who only believes in the people's capacity of being taught, and therefore graciously condescends to be their instructor; but he who believes that Reason, the light which shines out from God's throne, shines into the heart of every man, and that truth lights her torch in the inner temple of every man's soul, whether patrician or plebeian, a shepherd or a philosopher . . . It is only on the reality of this inner light, and on the fact, that it is universal, in all men, and in every man, that you can found a democracy . . .

But the disciple of Locke denies the reality of this inner light . . . But disciple of Locke may compassionate the people, but he cannot trust them; he may patronize the masses, but he must scout universal suffrage, and labor to concentrate all power in the hands of those he looks upon as the enlightened and respectable few. . . .

The history of the University, in which our

author is or was a professor, together with that of her favorite sons, may tend to confirm this conclusion, to which invincible logic conducts us. That University, we believe, has not of late years been renowned for her reverence for the people, her faith in democratic institutions, or her efforts to establish universal suffrage and equal rights. . . . And we do not expect that she will, so long as Locke is her textbook in philosophy . . .

## VIII Andrews Norton

*In this address to the alumni of the Divinity School one year after Emerson's Address, he answers those who have replied to his attacks on Emerson. This is the essence of Andrews Norton.*

The latest form of infidelity is distinguished by assuming the Christian name, while it strikes directly at the root of faith in Christianity, and indirectly of all religion, by denying the miracles attesting the divine mission of Christ . . .

It has been vaguely alleged, that the internal evidences of our religion are sufficient, and that miraculous proof is not wanted but this can be said by no one who understands what Christianity is, and what its internal evidences are. . . Christianity was a revelation from God . . . No proof of his divine commission could be afforded, but through miraculous displays of God's power. Nothing is left that can be called Christianity, if its miraculous character be denied. Its essence is gone; its evidence is annihilated.

. . . There can be no intuition, no direct perception, of the truth of Christianity . . .

## IX George Ripley

*Ever since Norton had published, everyone had been looking for a reply to George Ripley; Ripley, who, as a member of the inner circle of Transcendentalists, was also a brilliant thinker. In 1839 he published the first of three pamphlets: The Latest Form of Infidelity Examined.*

In the hope, that the Cambridge Theological School would be true to these momentous obligations, would answer to the piercing cry of our country and age for a free and generous theology, would

be a tower of safety and strength against every foe of mental liberty, we have loved it with an exceeding love. . . . We looked to her, perhaps with exaggerated, yet with pardonable confidence, as the great hope of a progressive theology in our native land, as the fountain from which a bright and benignant light would radiate beyond the mountains of New England, and shine upon the broad and pleasant meadows of the West . . .

. . . With intelligent and reflecting men of every pursuit and persuasion, many of them had been led to feel the necessity of a more thorough reforming theology; they were not satisfied that the denial of the Trinity and its kindred doctrines gave them possession of all spiritual truth; they wished to press forward in the course which they had begun, to ascend to higher views, . . . to imbibe more fully its divine spirit, and to apply the truths of revelation to the wants of society and the progress of man. . . .

The doctrine, that miracles are the only evidence of a divine revelation, if generally admitted, would impair the religious influence of the Christian ministry. It would separate the pastor of a church from the sympathies of his people, confine him in a sphere of thought remote from their usual interests, and give an abstract and scholastic character to his services in the pulpit. The great object of his endeavors would be to demonstrate the truth of the Christian history; the weapons of his warfare would be carnal, and not spiritual; drawn from grammars, and lexicons, and mouldy traditions, not from the treasures of the human heart. The miracles being established to the satisfaction of an inquisitive generation, nothing would remain but to announce the truth on their authority; for as all other evidence is without value, and this alone sufficient, it would be a waste of time to direct the attention to the divine glory of Christ and his revelation; this is beyond the reach of human "perception"; none but enthusiasts can make use of it. The minister would rely for success on his skill in argument, rather than on his sympathy with man; on the knowledge he gains within the walls of the University, rather than on the experience which may be learned in the homes of his people. He would trust more to his logical demonstration of the evidences of Christianity, than to the faithful exhibition of Christian truth to the naked human heart. . . .

Christ honored man. He felt the worth of the soul. He knew its intimate connexion with God.

## X Richard Hildeth

*Hildreth was no Transcendentalist: he was just a standard Unitarian, a lawyer and historian. He, too, found Norton's position preposterous, and said so in this pamphlet, A Letter to Andrews Norton on Miracles as the Foundation of Religious Faith.*

Reverend Sir . . . Summing up your doctrine the best I can, it seems to be this. Religion consists in knowledge, which knowledge leads to certain feelings, called Religious feelings. This Religious knowledge is only to be attained by a critical study of the Greek and Hebrew scriptures; books very difficult to be understood, very liable to be misinterpreted, and which in fact, have been interpreted to our satisfaction by nobody except yourself. . . . Indeed, the rule you lay down as the propriety of giving publicity to opinions, must condemn all the world to perpetual silence, with the exception of those few privileged individuals, like yourself, who are so lucky as to possess the gift of infallibility . . .

## XI Theodore Parker

*Mr. Parker was one of the seven graduating students to whom Mr. Emerson spoke. Amid the chorus of condemnations, Parker simply said the Address was "the noblest and most inspiring strain I ever listened to." A down-to-earth Yankee farmer with little formal schooling, he was too poor to attend Harvard but applied and was admitted. Because he couldn't afford it, he couldn't attend classes, but was permitted to take all the examinations, all of which he passed. He then ran a school in Watertown, earning enough finally to manage two years of classes, and then went on to the Unitarian Church in West Roxbury, where he could easily get to the Boston libraries. By now he was the master of twenty languages. He was a man of prodigious learning and staggering accomplishment. No one, other than Emerson himself, was as important to the Transcendentalist movement. Since he was a practicing Unitarian minister in 1840, when he put out The Previous Question between Mr. Andrews Norton and His Alumni Moved and Handled in a Letter to all Those Gentlemen, he used a pseudonym. In West Roxbury he resolved "to preach nothing as religion that I have not experienced inwardly and made my own." Soon enough that meant coming out of this particular closet—as the author of this piece. Here he ministered to his seventy families, wrote articles for Transcendentalist journals and conversed with fellow reformers at Brook Farm, nearby. When the monied gentlemen of the congregation began to choke on his words, he founded the*

*Twenty-Eighth Congregational Society of Boston as an open, avowed Transcendentalist. He drew 7,000 members.*

Now since all religion in general starts from the germs, and primary essential truths of religion, which are innate with man; since it is promoted by religious geniuses who, inspired by God, appeal to these innate germs and specific variations of one and the same genus, and since, therefore, Christianity is one religion among many, though it is the highest, and even a perfect religion—it follows incontestably that Christianity also must start from these same points. Accordingly we find history verifying philosophy, for Christ always assumes these great facts . . . as facts given in man's nature. He attempted to excite in man a more living consciousness of these truths, and to give them a permanent influence on the whole character and life. . . .

Gentlemen, Christianity is either the perfection of a religion whose germs and first truths are innate in the soul, or it is the perfection of a religion whose germs and first truths are not innate in the soul. If we take the latter alternative, I admit, that, following the common opinion, miracles would be necessary to establish the divine authority of the mediator of this religion; for devout men measuring the new doctrines by reason, conscience, and the religious sentiment—the only standard within their reach—and finding this doctrine contrary and repugnant thereto, must, of necessity, repel this religion, because it was unnatural, unsatisfactory, and useless to them. . . . Now if a religion whose germs and first truths are not innate in man, should be presented by a mediator furnished with credentials of his divine office, that are satisfactory to all men, the religion must yet be rejected. The religion must be made for man's religious nature, as much as the shoe must be made for the foot. . . . But if we take the other alternative, and admit that Christianity is the perfection of a religion whose germs and first truths are innate in man, and confessed to be so, by him who brings, and those who accept the religion, I see no need, or even any use of miracles, to prove the authority of the mediator. . . .

Gentlemen, I believe that Jesus, like other religious teachers, wrought miracles. . . . But I see not how a miracle proves a doctrine, and I even conjecture we do not value him for the miracles; but the miracles for him. . . . for many Christians believed Apollonius of Tyana wrought miracles, but they placed no value on them, because they had little respect for Apollonius of Tyana himself. . . .

I need no miracle to convince me that the sun shines . . .

You make our religion depend entirely on something outside, on strange events which happened, it is said, two thousand years ago, of which we can never be certain . . . Gentlemen . . . I beseech you . . . to prove that the miraculous stories in the Bible are perfectly true, that is, that there is nothing fictitious or legendary from Genesis to revelations, which yet professes to be historical, and that the authors of the Bible were never mistaken as to facts or judgments there on; or leaves us to ground our belief in Christianity on its truth . . . Until you do one of these things, we shall mourn in our hearts, and repeat the old petition "God save Christianity from its friends . . ."

## XII

### **Charles Hodge and his associates at Princeton Theological Seminary, militant Calvinist Presbyterians denouncing Transcendentalism.**

*Charles Hodge said with pride that in his fifty years at Princeton there had never been broached a new or original idea. These three leading Princeton professors wrote in the Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review for January 1839, and Andrews Norton reprinted it, showing that old-line Calvinists and old-line Unitarians had more in common than one would have thought!*

In America, the earliest school of metaphysics was founded by the followers of Locke; and, with the clew of this great inquirer in his hand, Jonathan Edwards ventured into a labyrinth from which no English theologian had ever come out safe. . . . Where this metaphysics was plied by a strong hand, as was that of [Jonathan] Edwards, it was noble indeed . . .

Every English and American reader must fail to penetrate even the husk of German and mock-German philosophy, unless he has accepted the distinction between the *reason* and the *understanding* . . . "The understanding," says Kant, "is the faculty of judging according to sense [that is, sensation; the senses; sensory data]." "Reason," says Coleridge, "is the power of universal and necessary convictions, the source and substance of truths above sense, and having their evidence in themselves" . . .

There is something in this new philosophy which will recommend it to many, and especially to young men. It has the charm of novelty. It affects to be

very profound. It . . . recognizes no standard of right and wrong but the reason of man, and permits no appeal from the decisions of humanity to the authority of the one living and true God. While it retains the name of God, and does not, therefore, at once startle and shock the feelings like open atheism, it teaches its disciples to deify themselves and nature, and to look upon all phenomena alike, whether of the material universe or of the mind of man, as manifestations of the Deity. . . .

We have another alarming symptom of its progress among us, in the Address delivered in July last, by the Rev. Ralph Waldo Emerson, before the Senior Class in Divinity, at Harvard University. This Address is before us. We have read it, and we want words with which to express our sense of the nonsense and impiety which pervade it. . . . If the notion which it gives us of God is correct, then he who is concerned in the production of any phenomenon, who employs his agency in any manner, in kindling a fire or uttering a prayer, does thereby manifest the Deity and render to him religious worship. This consequence is frankly avowed and taught by Mr. Emerson. Speaking of the "religious sentiment," he says, "It is mountain air" . . . He even admonishes us, that the time is coming when men shall be taught to believe in "the identity of the law of gravitation with purity of heart" . . . He complains grievously of this want of faith in the infinitude of the soul; he cries out because "man is ashamed of himself, and skulks and sneaks through the world" . . . Miracles, in the proper sense of the word, are of course discarded . . . There is not a single truth or sentiment in this whole Address that is borrowed from the Scriptures. And why should there be? Mr. Emerson, and all men, are as truly inspired as the penmen of the sacred volume. Indeed, he expressly warns the candidates for the ministry, whom he was addressing, to look only into their own souls for the truth. He has himself succeeded thus in discovering many truths, that are not to be found in the Bible. . . . He treats Christianity as a Mythos, like the creeds of Pagan Greece and Rome . . . We would call public attention to this Address, as the first fruits of transcendentalism in our country. We hold it up as a warning . . .

Let those who will, rehearse to us the empty babble about reason as a faculty of immediate insight of the infinite; we will trust no faculty, which, like Eastern princes, mounts the throne over the corpses of its brethren. . . .

We learn with pain, that among the Unitarians of Boston and its vicinity, there are those who affect to embrace the pantheistic creed. . . . when men

change the truth of God into a lie, he will give them over to a reprobate mind.

### XIII

#### Ralph Waldo Emerson and Margaret Fuller.

*Emerson never responded to the attacks. But from its first meeting the Transcendental Club talked of founding an "organ of spiritual philosophy." At a meeting on September 18, 1839, it was decided to move forward. In November, Margaret Fuller agreed to be editor. Bronson Alcott suggested the title, The Dial. It never made money and never had a circulation above 300. In 1842 Emerson became editor and Elizabeth Peabody the publisher. In what follows—from the first issue—Emerson and Fuller hint at a response to the angry pitch of the controversy.*

With some reluctance the present conductors of this work have yielded themselves to the wishes of their friends, finding something sacred and not to be withstood in the importunity which urged the production of a Journal in a new spirit.

. . . They have obeyed, though with great joy, the strong current of thought and feeling, which, for a few years past, has led many sincere persons in New England to make new demands on literature, and to reprobate that rigor of our conventions of religion and education which is turning us to stone, which renounces hope, which looks only backward, which asks only such a future as the past, which suspects improvement, and holds nothing so much in horror as new views and the dreams of youth.

With these terrors the conductors of the present Journal have nothing to do,—not even so much as a word of reproach to waste. . . .

No one can converse much with different classes of society in New England, without remarking the progress of a revolution. Those who share in it have no external organization, no badge, no creed, no name. . . . They are united only in a common love of truth and love of its work . . .

The spirit of this time is felt by every individual with some difference,—to each one casting its light upon the objects nearest to his temper and habits of thought;—to one, coming in the shape of special reforms in the state; to another, in modifications of the various callings of men, and the customs of business; to a third, opening a new scope for literature and art; to a fourth, in philosophical insight; to a fifth, in the vast solitudes of prayer. It is in every form a protests

against [customary] usage, and a search for principles. In all its movements, it is peaceable, and in the very lowest marked with a triumphant success. Of course, it rouses the opposition of all which it judges and condemns, but it is too confident in its tone to comprehend an objection, and so builds no outworks for possible defence against contingent enemies. It has the step of Fate, and goes on existing like an oak or a river, because it must. . . .

Our means correspond with the ends we have indicated. As we wish not to multiply books, but to report life, our resources are therefore not so much the pens of practised writers, as the discourse of the living, and the portfolios which friendship has opened to us. From the beautiful recesses of private thought; from the experience and hope of spirits which are withdrawing from all old forms, and seeking in all that is new somewhat to meet the inappeasable longings; from the secret confession of genius afraid to trust itself to aught but sympathy; from the conversations of fervid and mystical pietists; from tear-stained diaries of sorrow and passion; from the manuscripts of young poets; and from the records of youthful taste commenting on old works of art; we hope to draw thoughts and feelings, which being alive can impart life.

And so with diligent hands and good intent we set down our Dial on the earth. We wish it may resemble that instrument in its celebrated happiness, that of measuring no hours but those of sunshine. Let it be one cheerful rational voice amidst the din of mourners and polemics. Or to abide by our chosen image, let it be such a Dial, not as the dead face of a clock, hardly even such as the Gnomon in a garden, but rather such a Dial as is the Garden itself, in whose leaves and flowers and fruits the suddenly awakened sleeper is instantly apprised not what part of dead time, but what sate of life and growth is now arrived and arriving.

#### XIV George Ripley

*“What a brave thing Mr. Ripley has done,” wrote Emerson to Margaret Fuller. “He stands now at the head of the Church militant and his step cannot be without an important sequel.” Ripley resigned from the Purchase Street Church in a great symbolic gesture of the era, all without melodrama. His congregation was devoted to him, but in all honesty, he couldn’t continue under the rules of old-line Unitarianism.*

I had met you for many years from Sunday to Sunday; the thoughts and feelings, which were perhaps new to many of you when first presented, had lost much of their freshness my own mind had ceased to take a deep interest in many points which we had fully considered with each other; while at the same time I was aware there were others in which I had a deep concern, which had failed to attract your attention. . . . Unless a minister is expected to speak out on all subjects which are uppermost in his mind, with no fear of incurring the charge of heresy or compromising the interests of his congregation, he can never do justice to himself, to his people, or the truth which he is bound to declare . . . I was fully sensible that . . . I had not strength to resist the formality and coldness which are breathed from the atmosphere of our churches; and that, unless we could break away from such influences, it was wholly in vain for me to speak any longer in this pulpit. . . .

It was thought dangerous to continue the progress which had been commenced. Liberal churches began to fear liberality, and the most heretical sect in Christendom to bring the charge of being so against those who carried out its own principles. . . .

There is a class of persons who desire a reform in the prevailing philosophy of the day. These are called Transcendentalists, because they believe in an order of truths which transcends the sphere of the external sense. Their leading idea is the supremacy of mind over matter. Hence they maintain that the truth of religion does not depend on tradition, nor historical facts, but has an unerring witness in the soul. There is a light, they believe, which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world; there is a faculty in all—the most degraded, the most ignorant, the most obscure—to perceive spiritual truth when distinctly presented; and the ultimate appeal on all moral questions is not to a jury of scholars, a hierarchy of divines, or the prescriptions of a creed, but to the common sense of the human race. . . .

There is another class of persons who are devoted to the removal of the abuses that prevail in modern society. They witness the oppressions that are done under the sun, and they cannot keep silence. They have faith that God governs man; they believe in a better future than the past. Their daily prayer is for the coming of the kingdom of righteousness, truth, and love; they look forward to a more pure, more lovely, more divine state of society than was ever realized on earth. With these views, I rejoice to say, I strongly and entirely sympathize. . . . I would aid in the overthrow of every form of slavery; I would free the mind from bondage and the body from

chains; I could not feel that my duty was accomplished while there was one human being, within the sphere of my means of influence, held to unrequited labor at the will of another, destitute of the means of education, or doomed to penury, degradation, and vice by the misfortune of his birth. I conceive it to be a large share of the minister's duty to preach the gospel to the poor, to announce glad tidings of deliverance to all that are oppressed. His warmest sympathies should be with those who have none to care for them; he should never be so much in earnest as when pleading the cause of the injured. His most frequent visits will not be to the abodes of fashion and luxury, but to the dwellings where not many of the wise and mighty of this world are apt to enter; and if he can enjoy the poor man's blessing, whom he has treated like an equal and a brother in all the relations of life, whose humble abode he has cheered by the expression of honest sympathy, and whose hard lot draws tears from those unused to sorrow, he will count it a richer reward than the applause of society or the admiration of listening crowds. . . .

If you shrink from one who comes before you laden with so many heresies; I shall claim no privilege in this place. I shall consult your truest interests ever; and I cannot believe that they will be promoted by your being compelled to listen to one with whom you feel a diminished sympathy. If, on the other hand, you do not decline my services, on the conditions which I have stated, it will be my earnest endeavor to build you up in holiness, in freedom, in faith, so long as I stand here. But I can never be a different man from what God has made me. I must always speak with frankness the word that comes into my heart; and my only request is that it maybe heard with the same frankness and candor with which it is uttered.

## XV Theodore Parker

*In May 1840, Unitarian ministers were still arguing about miracles, and whether unorthodox views about miracles should exclude people from Christian fellowship. In his journal, Parker wrote, "This is the nineteenth century! This is Boston! This among the Unitarians!" A year later—May 19, 1841—Charles Shackford was to be ordained in the South Boston church, and he invited Parker to preach. Parker rose to the occasion with "A Discourse of the Transient and Permanent in Christianity." The commotion that followed made the furor over Alcott or Emerson seem very pale. A layman,*

*named Bradford, declared in a Boston newspaper that he would rather have every Unitarian church razed than to have one man of Parker's views in the pulpit. Parker was ostracized from respectable Boston; no other minister would exchange pulpits with him (Channing died this year). But his church drew throngs, with a membership of 7,000, including William Lloyd Garrison. This sermon has been considered by some the single most important manifesto of Transcendentalism.*

*"Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my words shall not pass away."—Luke xxi, 33.*

*In this sentence we have a very clear indication that Jesus of Nazareth believed the religion he taught would be eternal, that the substance of it would last for ever. . . .*

*Let us look at this matter a little more closely. In actual Christianity—that is, in that portion of Christianity which is preached and believed—there seems to have been, ever since the time of its earthly founder, two elements, the one transient, the other permanent. The one is the thought, the folly, the uncertain wisdom, the theological notions, the impiety of man; the other, the eternal truth of God. These two bear, perhaps, the same relation to each other that the phenomena of outward nature, such as sunshine and cloud, growth, decay, and reproduction, bear to the great law of nature, which underlies and supports them all. As in that case more attention is commonly paid to the particular phenomena than to the general law, so in this case more is generally given to the transient in Christianity than to the permanent therein. . . .*

*. . . Now there can be but one religion which is absolutely true, existing in the facts of human nature and the ideas of Infinite God. That, whether acknowledged or not, is always the same thing, and never changes. So far as a man has any real religion—either the principle or the sentiment thereof so far he has that, by whatever name he may call it. For, strictly speaking, there is but one kind of religion, as there is but one kind of love, though the manifestations of this religion, in forms, doctrines, and life, be never so diverse. It is through these men approximate to the true expression of this religion. Now, while this religion is one and always the same thing, there may be numerous systems of theology or philosophies of religion. These, with their creeds, confessions, and collections of doctrines, deducted by reasoning upon facts observed, may be baseless and false, either because the observation was too narrow in extent, or otherwise defective in point of accuracy, or because the reasoning was illogical, and therefore the deduction spurious. Each of these faults is conspicuous in the systems of theology. Now the solar system as it exists in fact is permanent, though the notions of Thales and Ptolemy, of Copernicus*

and Descartes, about this system, prove transient, imperfect approximations to the true expression. So the Christianity of Jesus is permanent, even though what passes for Christianity with popes and catechisms, with sects and churches, in the first century or in the nineteenth century, prove transient also. . . .

To turn away from the disputes of the Catholics and the Protestants, of the Unitarian and the Trinitarian, of old school and new school, and come to the plain words of Jesus of Nazareth, Christianity is a simple thing, very simple. It is absolute, pure morality; absolute, pure religion; the love of man; the love of God acting without let or hindrance. The only creed it lays down is the great truth which springs up spontaneous in the holy heart—there is a God. Its watchword is, Be perfects as your Father in heaven. The only form it demands is the divine life; doing the best thing in the best way, from the highest motives; perfect obedience to the great law of God. Its sanction is the voice of God in your heart; the perpetual presence of him who made us and the stars over our head . . . All this is very simple—a little child can understand it; very beautiful—the loftiest mind can find nothing so lovely. Try it by reason, conscience, and faith—things highest in man's nature we see no redundancy, we feel no deficiency. Examine the particular duties it enjoins—humility, reverence, sobriety, gentleness, charity, forgiveness, fortitude, resignation, faith, and active love; try the whole extent of Christianity, so well summed up in the command, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind—thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," and is there anything therein that can perish? No, the very opponents of Christianity have rarely found fault with the teachings of Jesus. The end of Christianity seems to be to make all men one with God as Christ was one with him; to bring them to such a state of obedience and goodness that we shall think divine thoughts and feel

divine sentiments, and so keep the law of God by living a life of truth and love. Its means are purity and prayer; getting strength from God, and using it for our fellow-men as well as ourselves. It allows perfect freedom. It does not demand that all men think alike, but to think uprightly, and get as near as possible at truth; not all men to live alike, but to live holy, and get as near as possible to a life perfectly divine . . . for Christianity is not a system of doctrines, but rather a method of attaining oneness with God. . . .

God sends us a real religious life, which shall pluck blindness out of the heart, and make us better fathers, mothers, and children! a religious life, that shall go with us where we go, and make every home the house of God, every act acceptable as a prayer. We would work for this, and pray for it, though we wept tears of blood while we prayed.

Such, then, is the transient and such the permanent in Christianity. What is of absolute value never changes; we may cling round it and grow to it for ever. No one can say his notions shall stand. But we may all say, the truth as it is in Jesus shall never pass away. Yet there are always some, even religious men, who do not see the permanent element, so they rely on the fleeting, and, what is also an evil, condemn others for not doing the same. They mistake a defence of the truth for an attack upon the holy of holies, the removal of a theological error for the destruction of all religion. Already men of the same sect eye one another with suspicion, and lowering brows indicate a storm, and, like children who have fallen out in their play, call hard names. Now, as always, there is a collision between these two elements. The question puts itself to each man, "Will you cling to what is perishing, or embrace what is eternal?" The question each must answer for himself. . . . Choose as you will choose; but weal or woe depends upon your choice.