

Swarthmore College

Works

Senior Theses, Projects, and Awards

Student Scholarship

Spring 2012

Prodigal Sons and Daughters: Unitarianism in Philadelphia, 1796-1846

Charlotte Gaw , '12

Follow this and additional works at: <https://works.swarthmore.edu/theses>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gaw, Charlotte , '12, "Prodigal Sons and Daughters: Unitarianism in Philadelphia, 1796 -1846" (2012). *Senior Theses, Projects, and Awards*. 473.

<https://works.swarthmore.edu/theses/473>

Please note: the theses in this collection are undergraduate senior theses completed by senior undergraduate students who have received a bachelor's degree.

This work is brought to you for free by Swarthmore College Libraries' Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Theses, Projects, and Awards by an authorized administrator of Works. For more information, please contact myworks@swarthmore.edu.

Prodigal Sons and Daughters: Unitarianism in Philadelphia, 1796 -1846

Charlotte Gaw
Senior Honors Thesis
Swarthmore College
Professor Bruce Dorsey

April 27, 2012

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Introduction: Building A Church.....	4
Chapter One: Atlantic Movements Confront a “National” Establishment	15
Chapter Two: Hicksites as Unitarians	45
Chapter Three: Journeys Toward Liberation.....	75
Epilogue: A Prodigal Son Returns.....	111
Bibliography.....	115

Acknowledgements

First, I want to thank Bruce Dorsey. His insight on this project was significant and valuable at every step along the way. His passion for history and his guidance during my time at Swarthmore have been tremendous forces in my life.

I would to thank Eugene Lang for providing me summer funding to do a large portion of my archival research. I encountered many people at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the Library Company of Philadelphia, the American Philosophical Society, and the Friends Historical Library who were eager and willing to help me in the research process, specifically Chris Densmore at the Friends Historical Library. I want to thank the staff at the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia for their assistance at the beginning of this project, particularly Anne Slater and Rev. Nate Walker. At Swarthmore, I found special support for this project from Ellen Ross. Her insights into Quakerism were just one of the many ways in which she has supported me during my time at Swarthmore. I also want to thank Professor Bob Weinberg, who has been a consistent source of encouragement on this project.

I owe a special thank you to my family, who provide me unending love and brownies. Nick is my best friend, and my biggest advocate. My parents have modeled for me exactly the kind of person I want to be. They support me for exactly the person that I am.

And lastly, I want to thank my friends – you made Swarthmore the home it is for me.

Introduction

Building A Church

In 1828, the Unitarian Society of Philadelphia built a new church edifice. Hoping the new building would “doubtless induce many to join it who entertain similar religious views and sentiments with ourselves,” members of the church argued that those newcomers “cannot be accommodated to their satisfaction in the present Church.”¹ The Society also decided that, after the current edifice was dismantled, the new Philadelphia Unitarian building would be built on the site of the old church.² In 1828, then, a new First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia was erected in the shadow of the old building, first erected in 1813.

The year 1828 was an important one for Philadelphia Unitarians. In that year, the group worked to re-imagine and redefine their faith in the face of contemporary circumstances, as the Hicksite Schism brought important changes to the Philadelphia church. That said, the way in which Philadelphia Unitarians rebuilt the church’s past to reflect a new present was not a process confined to 1828, when the Society erected a new church building. As the church’s self-identity was shaped and reshaped in response to the social and cultural world around it, Philadelphia Unitarians told and retold the church’s origins story, building new edifices from which to critique corrupted power and constricting authority in religious life.

This thesis examines the community of heterodox Christians that Philadelphia Unitarians built in the early American republic, seeking to understand the ways in which Philadelphia Unitarians’ religious and social commitments reflected both English Unitarian pasts and new American realities. The religious commitments of heterodox Christians in the early American

¹ Elizabeth Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961), 137-138.

² Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, 138.

republic have not been sufficiently studied, and investigations into religion in the early republic often marginalize heterodox Christians as they turn to focus on burgeoning evangelical revivalism. Alternatively, my study argues that Philadelphia Unitarians, and all those liberal religious people that came to associate with them, occupied an important space in the American religious landscape. The movement they forged not only leveled a strong critique against evangelicalism, but it also produced a dynamic concept of lived religion, community, and the moral centrality of the individual conscience that was vitally important to religion in America, as heterodox Christians sought to create an alternative religious formulation rooted in rational religious expressions.

Previous scholarship on Philadelphia Unitarianism has not adequately considered the ways in which the church interacted with broader American and Atlantic communities. Elizabeth Geffen's *Philadelphia Unitarianism, 1796-1861* was the first scholarly account of Philadelphia Unitarianism. Geffen's *Philadelphia Unitarianism* is a solid denominational history. Geffen chronicles the people and events that enveloped the First Unitarian Church in the first half of the nineteenth century. Its detailed account is ultimately short-sighted, though, as Geffen does not examine the ways in which Philadelphia Unitarians conversed with American and Atlantic currents outside of the narrow confines of the church.

Geffen's approach in *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, and in her related articles on the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia, reflect new social history's focus on ordinary Americans. New social history argues that ordinary Americans reflected pervasive social, political, and religious goals. Geffen's social history sees Philadelphia Unitarianism as a group of "religious

outsiders”³ who, in their marginality, reflected core American values.⁴ In her article on Joseph Sill, a member of the First Unitarian Church who kept an extensive diary, Geffen insists that Joseph Sill was “an authentic witness to a segment of the past about which we know too little.”⁵ As an upper-middle-class English immigrant, Sill’s experience in the United States, according to Geffen, was essentially American. And despite her rhetorical emphasis on the way in which Sill reflected broader currents in American life, the article focuses narrowly on Sill’s diary, connecting Sill’s diary entries to events within the Unitarian Church. Geffen does not explore with depth the way in which Sill interacted with the changing social and cultural world that surrounded him during his years of writing the diary.

More than four decades later, J.D. Bowers’ approach to Philadelphia Unitarianism in *Joseph Priestley and English Unitarianism in America* is starkly different from Geffen’s.⁶ While Geffen crafts a narrow denominational history, Bowers sets the Philadelphia Unitarian Church in a transatlantic context. He understands Philadelphia Unitarianism through its relationship with English Unitarianism, as he charts the proliferation of English Unitarianism in Philadelphia and other locations in the United States as expressions of dissent from the English establishment of church and state. His study begins with a history of Unitarianism in England and, in this way, for Bowers, the origins of the First Unitarian Church are found across the Atlantic. But in privileging English Unitarians’ transatlantic experiences, he loses sight of the way in which the Philadelphia Unitarian Church also reflected local realities. So while Geffen’s history focuses

³ For more on “religious outsiders” see R. Lawrence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); R. Lawrence Moore, “Insiders and Outsiders in American Historical Narrative and American History” *The American Historical Review* 87:2 (1982).

⁴ Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, 144.

⁵ Elizabeth Geffen, “Joseph Sill and His Diary,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 94:3 (1970): 276.

⁶ J.D. Bowers, *Joseph Priestley and English Unitarianism in America* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University, 2007).

narrowly inside the church, Bowers' transatlantic perspective leads him to ultimately miss the ways in which Philadelphia Unitarianism was also formed in conversation with American religious and political developments.

Evangelical revivalism was one of those American forces that deeply influenced the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia. In the early nineteenth century, the Second Great Awakening stirred religious individuals in communities across the nation, igniting evangelical passion in individuals. The evangelicalism that emerged during the Second Great Awakening was built on anti-Calvinist sensibilities that placed particular emphasis on the individual as the arbiter of his own religious life. Nathan Hatch's *Democratization of American Christianity* presents evangelicalism's rise in the early American republic in this way. For Hatch, the Second Great Awakening was about "religious populism"⁷ as "[a] diverse array of evangelical firebrands went about the task of movement-building in the generation after the Revolution."⁸ Local evangelical movements, for Hatch, fundamentally disrupted the old colonial religious order by creating democratic denominations committed to "a passionate social struggle with power and authority."⁹ In many ways a class-based analysis, Hatch argues for a reading of the Second Great Awakening that sees fervent revivalism as a disruption of traditional authority.

Social and moral reforms were at the center of nineteenth-century evangelicalism. The nineteenth century experienced a vast proliferation of benevolent societies with an impulse toward reform. These benevolent societies harnessed the spirit of the evangelical revivals, as they sought reformation that was, to an important extent, focused on individuals. Daniel Walker Howe argues that at the center of evangelical revivalism was an emphasis on "self-discipline."

⁷ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 5.

⁸ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 7.

⁹ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 14.

Evangelical reformers sought to “substitute for external constraint the inner discipline of responsible morality.” In this way, the individualism of the grassroots revivals was tied to the proliferation of benevolent societies for moral reform in the antebellum United States, as evangelicals continually sought individual reform within communities of committed Christians.¹⁰

Philadelphia Unitarians met the growing evangelical benevolent force with mixed attitudes. While they largely rejected the evangelical emphasis on revelation and “enthusiasm,” they were, nevertheless, culturally influenced by the movement as it increasingly came to reflect the mainstream religious culture in America. Trisha Posey, in her article “‘Alive to the Cry of Distress’: Joseph and Jane Sill and Poor Relief in Antebellum Philadelphia,” understands the Unitarian Church in terms of national and transatlantic processes. Posey studies the intersections among Philadelphia Unitarianism, benevolence and charity projects directed at English immigrants, and Philadelphia Unitarians Joseph and Jane Sill. She studies the Vaughan Charitable Association, the Unitarian Church’s benevolent organization, and argues that leaders and members of the First Unitarian Church “displayed a certain ambivalence about the causes of poverty,” as benevolent Unitarians both embraced and critiqued an evangelical spiritualization of poverty, which increasingly asserted that poverty was the result of moral, rather than material or systemic, deficiencies.¹¹ Posey’s understanding of Philadelphia Unitarians’ “ambivalence” toward the causes of poverty reflects on Philadelphia Unitarians’ complicated location in the Philadelphia religious landscape. Although Philadelphia Unitarians often casted themselves “religious outsiders,” they were never entirely opposed to the evangelical mainstream. While

¹⁰ Daniel Walker Howe, “The Evangelical Movement and Political Culture in the North During the Second Party System,” *Journal of American History* 77.4 (1991): 1218, 1220.

¹¹ Trisha Posey, “‘Alive to the Cry of Distress’: Joseph and Jane Sill and Poor Relief in Antebellum Philadelphia” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 132:3 (2008): 230; Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender and the Antebellum City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 217.

they critiqued certain facets of the evangelical experience, in benevolence, as well as in other arenas, evangelicalism's cultural influence strongly influenced the self-identity of the church.

Seeking to understand the complex relationship between Unitarian rationalism and the emerging evangelical mainstream, a significant part of this study focuses on the relationships between Quakers and Unitarians in the Philadelphia Unitarian Church. This thesis explores the connections that Philadelphia's Unitarians posited between their respective sects, and asserts that those connections reflected, in important ways, the religious world Philadelphia Unitarians saw around them, as they attempted to forge a heterodox Christianity that aspired to be a universal Liberal Christianity. The relationship that developed between Quakers and Philadelphia Unitarians is a key example of the ways in which religious and cultural developments in the early republic came to be expressed in new formulations of Philadelphia Unitarianism.

This study critiques a formulation of religious heterodoxy in the early republic and the antebellum United States that narrowly understands the movement as a rejection of religious institutions in favor of individualism in religious life. This view of heterodox Christianity glosses over the efficacy of heterodox religious communities, as it asserts that what a heterodox Christian really wanted was to be left to herself. For example, in his book *Radical Abolitionism*, Lewis Perry asserts that come-outers, or radical abolitionists in the 1840s who left their proslavery churches in protest, faced a "paradox," as they attempted to form a community of committed individualists.¹² For Perry, emphases on community formation and individual choice were fundamentally opposed in heterodox Christianity.

In fact, the religious heterodoxy that Philadelphia Unitarians emphasized was a principled critique of what they saw as human interventions of hierarchy and control in religion. For

¹² Lewis Perry, *Radical Abolitionism: Anarchy and the Government of God in Antislavery Thought* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), 103.

Philadelphia Unitarians, creeds, state established religion, Orthodoxy, and the proliferation of proslavery ideology were connected evils, as all those forces restricted individual conscience and moral agency. And just as evangelicalism's emphasis on individualism in religious life did not preclude the formation of committed evangelical religious communities, heterodox critiques of constricting institutions took place within communities of religious dissidents. For Philadelphia Unitarians, a religious community that recognized the diversity of individual religious journeys was never a "paradox."

Lived, or embodied, religion was central to the way in which Philadelphia Unitarians understood the intersection of the individual and the collective in the life of the Church. In his collection of essays on lived religion in American religious history, David Hall argues that a focus in American religious history on "lived" religion has its roots in the study of American "popular religion," where "men and women...became actors in their own right, fashioning (or refashioning) religious practices in accordance with local circumstances."¹³ Lived religion, as a frame through which to understand the religious lives of historical actors, takes from studies of popular religion an emphasis on "a questioning of boundaries" as, in lived religion, like in popular religion, everyday religious people and the practices that sustain their spiritual lives, are seen as historically significant.¹⁴ And while Hall explains that lived religion departs from popular religion in its attempts to see embodied religious practice beyond "a structure of opposition,"¹⁵ popular religion remains an important foundational aspect of lived religion, as it emphasizes that American Christianity existed not just in the formulations espoused from the pulpit, but also in the lives of everyday religious people, as they used religion to create meaning

¹³ David Hall, *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), viii.

¹⁴ Hall, *Lived Religion in America*, viii.

¹⁵ Hall, *Lived Religion in America*, ix.

in their lives. In the First Unitarian Church, leaders', laypeople's, and newcomers' lived religion helped them to interpret the meaning of their lives, and their place in a broader religious and social world.

In my study, the "spiritual journey" takes on an embodied dimension, as Philadelphia Unitarians saw their physical journeys away from orthodoxy and control as religious in nature. The spiritual journey is my own phrase – no Philadelphia Unitarians ever used it – but it is an essential frame to understand the self-identity of First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia. Over the span of my study, the spiritual journey functioned as an important narrative arc through which Philadelphia Unitarians understood their complex religious lives. In this sense, the framework of the spiritual journey points to continuity in the Philadelphia Unitarian Church's self-identity, as the religious and physical journeys of English Unitarians to establish religion free from the encroachment of the state were consistently reinterpreted in light of new circumstances.

In this study, I trace the self-identity of the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia over the course of a half century. I seek to understand the ways in which the church responded to changing American circumstances. Acknowledging the substantial changes that took root in American society and consciousness from the close of the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth, this history focuses on three formative years in the church's history; 1796, 1828, and 1846. Concepts like freedom of conscience, sectarianism and nonsectarianism, the separation between church and state, religious rationalism, and moral agency were central to Philadelphia Unitarianism in these years, but those concepts were not static definitions. They were intertwined in Unitarians' religious lives, and they overlapped with broader American currents. As the church's origins stories were told and retold, new self-identities replaced older ones. The

Philadelphia Unitarian Church interacted with particular American cultural developments and also with its own imagined past. In this way, the Philadelphia Unitarian Church was never confined by its four walls.

And though this history profiles particular moments in the Philadelphia Unitarian Church's self-identity, exploring the ways in which those moments interacted with a broader religious and social world, it also profiles people. I trace the spiritual journeys of three prophetic voices in Philadelphia's history: Joseph Priestley, William Henry Furness, and Lucretia Mott. The religious biographies of those who congregated in the Unitarian Church reflected the embodied spiritual journeys of these leaders. But still, the church was not defined by its leadership. They encouraged, but also responded to, an emphasis in Philadelphia Unitarianism on individual, embodied religious journeys as the building blocks for a heterodox religious community. Through conflict and change outside and inside the church, this consistent narrative gave individual experiences collective meaning.

In chapter one, I argue that Joseph Priestley's transatlantic journey to establish Philadelphia Unitarianism reflected a rational search for religious truth, as Priestley and his followers sought a religious community free from the corrupting influence of the State. As they understood Unitarianism as an ultimate truth to be discovered by all people, Philadelphia Unitarians imagined a Unitarianism in which English Unitarians' transatlantic journeys toward religious liberty would be embodied in all those who marked their opposition to state-imposed (and hierarchically controlled) religion. In the first few decades after the Philadelphia Church's founding, Philadelphia Unitarians' transatlantic search for religion free from the state pushed up against New England establishment Unitarianism, inciting conflict that was ultimately expressed by New England Unitarians through the language of nationalist exclusion. These discourses

sought a reinterpretation of Philadelphia Unitarianism's origins story, in which English Unitarians' transatlantic journeys were labeled non-American by their New England counterparts. This regional conflict, then, represents opposing origins stories for American Unitarianism, as English Unitarians' focus on Atlantic movement undercut New England Unitarians' emphasis on establishment consistency.

In the second chapter, I examine the Philadelphia Unitarian Church in the context of the Hicksite Schism in the late 1820s, and the conversations it instigated about the nature of Orthodoxy in antebellum life. I assert that new cultural and religious developments in the early republic merged into a broad power that religious liberals, including Philadelphia Unitarians and Hicksite Quakers, called Orthodoxy. With this new Orthodoxy in mind, I chart the movement of Hicksite Quakers into the Unitarian church after the Hicksite Schism, and I argue that, for members of the First Unitarian Church, Hicksite Quakers' own conflicts with Orthodoxy in the Society of Friends reflected Unitarian journeys. The entrance of Quakers into the congregation was ultimately incorporated into a new Philadelphia Unitarian self-identity, in which Hicksite Friends and Unitarians strove to develop a universal liberal Christianity that mirrored Orthodoxy's supposedly nonsectarian hold.

In chapter three, I concentrate on the consequences of diffusion of abolitionism within the First Unitarian Church during the 1840s. As Lucretia Mott and William Henry Furness emphasized an embodied religious practice that connected religious oppression to the bodily suffering of slaves, come-outers appeared in the church on Sunday mornings, seeking fellowship and inspiration in the First Unitarian Church which, for them, was an "antislavery" church. As Philadelphia Unitarians grappled with these changes that abolitionism wrought in their church, they ultimately reconciled the conflicts abolitionism brought in a re-articulation of the self-

identity of the church. This reassertion of Philadelphia Unitarianism saw Furness' antislavery preaching and the presence of come-outers within the spiritual journeys narrative, as embodied travels toward religious truth.

In these fifty years, Philadelphia Unitarians offered an important vision for heterodox Christianity, as they envisioned community of individuals who fled religious and social oppression. This formulation of heterodox Christianity and embodied lived religion connected Philadelphia Unitarians to the key issues of their times, as the critiques they leveled grappled with religious change and the proliferation of slavery.

Chapter One

Atlantic Movements Confront a “National” Establishment

Joseph Priestley once explained to his English Unitarian friend Theophilus Lindsey that, in America, “I shall carefully avoid all the party politics of the country, and have no other object besides religion and philosophy.”¹ Priestley traveled to the United States chasing a particular vision of religious liberty. Indeed, religion free from the intrusion of political forces was Priestley’s aim in establishing Unitarianism in Philadelphia. Almost immediately after the foundation of the church, though, Philadelphia Unitarians found themselves enmeshed in things outside the religious realm. As they claimed controversial identities in the early republic, Priestley and his followers were pushed into political conflicts.

This chapter examines the regional conflict in American Unitarianism. It looks to the core of Priestley and others’ visions for Unitarianism in the United States to argue that the conflict that Philadelphia and New England Unitarians waged over the nature of Unitarianism in America was deeply embedded in social and cultural forces in the early republic. This conflict was always something more than differing perspectives on theology. As English Unitarians established Unitarianism in America, they placed particular emphasis on their transatlantic journeys toward religious liberty in Pennsylvania. Indeed, those embodied travels were at the center of the religious vision that English Unitarians wished to create in Philadelphia. And as the regional conflict between New England and Philadelphia Unitarians proliferated, New England Unitarians expressed their exclusion of Philadelphia Unitarians in a nationalist discourse that saw those transatlantic journeys as “foreign.” In this way, a New England emphasis on

¹ Thomas Belsham, *American Unitarianism; or a Brief History of the Progress and Present State of the Unitarian Churches in America*, (Boston, 1815), 48.

establishment consistency was challenged by Philadelphia Unitarians' alternative focus on Atlantic movement as a guiding principle in Unitarian life.

The Society of Unitarian Christians of Philadelphia was the first religious body in the United States to take up the name Unitarian. The church was founded by a group of English Unitarians in 1796, led by Enlightenment thinker and scientist Joseph Priestley. The theological backbone of English Unitarianism was an interpretation of "Socinianism," a strain of Christianity which insisted that Christ was fully human, not divine. English Unitarians denied the doctrine of the Trinity, arguing that it was a false, unscriptural invention.²

English Unitarianism's anti-Trinitarian theology was part of a larger critique of power and authority in religion.³ In his important 1796 discourse *Discourses on the Evidence on the Nature of Revealed Religion*, Joseph Priestley argued that current events, particularly the French Revolution, had marked the contemporary age as a crucial stage in the development of Christianity. He contended that, "Whatever will not bear the test of the most rigorous scrutiny must now be rejected..."⁴ For Priestley, those facets of Christianity that could not "bear the test" were "the great supports of superstition and imposture, viz. human authority..."⁵ Priestley argued against human interventions in religion, because he argued that they polluted revealed religion with greed, power, and other human fallacies. He insisted that Christians should leave behind their "blind *implicit faith*, believing what their fathers, mothers, or nurses, believed before them..."⁶ Rather, they should embrace the notion that "their faith is the offspring of reason."⁷

² J.D. Bowers, *Joseph Priestley and English Unitarianism in America* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University, 2007), 1.

³ Bowers, *Joseph Priestley*, 29.

⁴ Joseph Priestley, *Discourses on the Evidence on the Nature of Revealed Religion* (London, 1794), ix.

⁵ Priestley, *Discourses*, ix.

⁶ Priestley, *Discourses*, viii.

Priestley sought a natural, uncorrupted Christianity, and he thought that reasoned, free inquiry allowed individuals to step beyond church doctrines that distorted true religion.

In its focus on simplicity, for Priestley, the First Unitarian Church was inclusive. Priestley envisioned the Unitarian Church bringing the religiously disinterested into Christianity. He argued that “The greatest difficulty...arises from the indifference of liberal-minded men here [in the United States] to religion in general; they are so much occupied with commerce and politics.”⁸ In this sense, Priestley positioned the Unitarian Society at an intersection of religious devotion and Enlightenment rationalism. As he explained, “I daily hear of the great impression that my discourses make on those who were the most averse to everything related to religion.”⁹ A scientist who had reconciled an Enlightenment rationality with religion in the emerging industrial age, Priestley hoped Unitarianism could bring forth, in Philadelphia, rational religion that responded to the tenor of the times.

Joseph Priestley’s followers, including John Vaughan, William Young Birch, Ralph Eddowes, and James Taylor, were Englishmen, and they retained significant connections to their English roots. The founders were a homogenous group – mostly middle-class merchants.¹⁰ Related to their social standing, many members of the church in its early formation considered themselves to be “intellectuals.” Indeed, John Vaughan, a powerful force in Philadelphia Unitarian life held, at different points, the offices of treasurer and librarian of the American Philosophical Society. Leading members of the Unitarian Society held personal relationships

⁷ Priestley, *Discourses*, viii.

⁸ Bowers, *Joseph Priestley*, 45.

⁹ Bowers, *Joseph Priestley*, 80.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961), 36.

with towering political figures like John Quincy Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin.¹¹

In the Unitarian Society's first years, before it had its own church space, members met weekly in a vacant classroom at the University of Pennsylvania to read tracts aloud and discuss religious principles.¹² Priestley had advised the Society that a permanent minister was not necessary, and he instead urged the group to rely on lay leadership. Except for a brief and unsuccessful attempt to install a full-time minister in 1807,¹³ the Society rested in the hands of lay leaders John Vaughan, James Taylor, and Ralph Eddowes until well after Priestley's death in 1804. Beyond religious fellowship, the group probably facilitated and reinforced a commitment to an English heritage.¹⁴ Some members through the first half of the nineteenth century were actively engaged in English politics, and many were involved in organizations, like the Society for the Sons of St. George, that provided poor relief to struggling English immigrants.¹⁵

While socially and culturally English, Philadelphia Unitarians conceived of their Unitarianism as a rational rejection of the established religion in England, Anglicanism. Joseph Priestley looked optimistically toward the United States as a land of religious pluralism, where "almost two-thirds of the population held some claim to the legacy of Protestant dissent..."¹⁶ In a sermon delivered in Philadelphia entitled "Unitarianism Explained and Defined," Priestley

¹¹ Roy Goodman and Pierre Swiggers, "John Vaughan (1756-1841) and the Linguistic Collection in the Library of the American Philosophical Society," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 138.2 (1994): 252; Thompson Westcott, "A History of Philadelphia, from The Time of the First Settlements on the Delaware to the Consolidation of the City and Districts in 1854," (Philadelphia, 1886), 987. APS.

¹² Elizabeth Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, 33-34; Joseph Gales, *Records of Proceedings by the Unitarian Society*, First Unitarian Church Records, HSP.

¹³ For more on the short ministry of William Christie in the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia, see J.D. Bowers, *Joseph Priestley*, 102-105 and Elizabeth Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, 70-72.

¹⁴ For more on the English character of Philadelphia Unitarians' benevolence, see Trisha Posey, "'Alive to the Cry of Distress': Joseph and Jane Sill and Poor Relief in Antebellum Philadelphia" *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 132:3 (2008): 221.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, 81; Joseph Sill, *Diary*, HSP.

¹⁶ J.D. Bowers, *Joseph Priestley*, 45.

envisioned that, “in this free country, where the state does not interfere with matters of religion, free discussion may be expected to produce its natural effect, and consequently that whatever shall appear to be true, will finally prevail, and establish itself...”¹⁷ Turning the religious establishment on its head, Priestley argued that, rather than the kind of religious establishments that existed in England and New England, the First Unitarian Church would “establish itself.” Priestley imagined a religious world in the United States in which state-nurtured Orthodoxy was absent, and religious expression and personal choice persevered among believers in a multitude of sects.

Pennsylvania was an especially vibrant site for a religious vision that pointed toward pluralism. In his book *A Perfect Freedom: Religious Liberty in Pennsylvania*, J. William Frost explains that Pennsylvania retained an important emphasis on religious liberty and toleration from its founding by William Penn. He argues that Pennsylvanians fostered a religious tradition that was rooted in “individual belief” – separate from institutions, and separate from the state.¹⁸ Priestley’s settlement in Philadelphia, and then in Northumberland, makes sense, given Pennsylvania’s rich history of tolerance toward free, individual religion.¹⁹

Priestley located in the United States an absence of state-imposed orthodoxy that restricted personal choice. For this reason, Bowers argues that Priestley saw Unitarianism as “just one denomination among many” in the United States.²⁰ Indeed, Priestley argued that if Unitarianism was purely a denomination along with all the others, “... by this means only will it appear to the world...that our religion is not that system of absurdity and impiety which

¹⁷ Joseph Priestley, *Unitarianism Explained and Defended* (Philadelphia, 1796), 39; Robert Schofield, *The Enlightened Joseph Priestley: A Study of His Life and Work from 1773 to 1804*, (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University, 2004), 327.

¹⁸ J. William Frost, *A Perfect Freedom: Religious Liberty in Pennsylvania* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 84.

¹⁹ J.D. Bowers, *Joseph Priestley*, 82.

²⁰ J.D. Bowers, *Joseph Priestley*, 78.

unbelievers think themselves authorized to reject without examination.”²¹ Under the American configuration that emphasized plurality, Unitarianism would be a viable form of religious expression. Bowers’ phrase, “one denomination among many,” is meant to emphasize English Unitarians’ desire for acceptance in a religiously plural society. In this sense, “one denomination among many” reflects an emphasis on marketplace denominationalism,²² in which, denominations in the religious market competed for followers.

And while Bowers suggests that Priestley’s theology functioned around something akin to “marketplace” denominationalism, Priestley and his followers also seem to have placed important emphasis on Unitarianism’s ultimate triumph as a universal faith. In fact, Priestley’s religious vision took up this formulation that saw Unitarianism as the ultimate truth, and he imagined denominationalism as part of a process of rational, scientific inquiry, in which Unitarianism would ultimately proliferate as religious truth. In his sermon “Unitarianism explained,” Priestley argued that religious plurality “is the only method of drawing *attention* to a set of important principles, and of promoting that inquiry, and free discussion, which is favourable to the propagation of truth.”²³ For Priestley, a reasoned process of inquiry would lead to Unitarian ascendancy. In this way, Priestley’s emphasis on denominationalism was fundamentally different than those who argued for a sort of religious marketplace. In this sense, Philadelphia Unitarianism aspired to be not “one denomination among many” other denominations, but rather, “one denomination among many” people. In this way, for Philadelphia Unitarians, religious pluralism was connected to an eventual universal Liberal Christianity, united under a scientific process of rational inquiry.

²¹ Priestley, *Unitarianism Explained*, 38

²² Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 14.

²³ Priestley, *Unitarianism Explained*, 39.

Philadelphia Unitarians marked a key tension between the church's English pasts and its Pennsylvania present, crafting a narrative that emphasized transatlantic journeys. For instance, in the first decades after the Unitarian Society's founding, Philadelphia Unitarians maintained significant ties to Episcopalians in the city. The manner in which Philadelphia Unitarians, particularly James Taylor, interpreted their relationships with Episcopalians speaks to their vision for religious plurality. It also speaks to the way in which transatlantic journeys toward Unitarianism in the United States were configured within a vision for a universal Liberal Christianity. Before he died, James Taylor penned a journal entitled *Notices and Anecdotes, Respecting...* that served as an index of prominent political and social leaders with whom Taylor was acquainted. Taylor's wrote a lengthy section on his relationship with Episcopalian Bishop William White. White was the first Bishop in Pennsylvania, but he was also a Pennsylvanian committed to the separation between church and state.²⁴

In his journal, Taylor explained that both he and Joseph Priestley frequently attended Episcopalian service. Of his attendance at Episcopalian service, Taylor wrote,

“I could not, with any comfort, frequent the Episcopal church on sunday mornings, the Litany being peculiarly exceptionable; but in the afternoon services there was much less in which a Unitarian could not unite; & therefore, while we had no place of Worship, I was, during several years, in the habit of attending the church where the Bishop was to preach on sunday afternoons...”²⁵

Taylor felt no particular religious affinity toward the Episcopalians, but still felt a pull toward the Episcopalian church. With no Unitarian church building to call home, Taylor reached to the Episcopalian church for fellowship.

²⁴ Frost, *A Perfect Freedom*, 80.

²⁵ James Taylor, “Notices and Anecdotes Respecting...”, HSP; 166; John D. Kilbourne and James Taylor, “Memoir of Bishop White by James Taylor,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 92.1 (1968): 48-66.

More than observations about the relationship between two denominations with cultural ties to England, Taylor's journal entry about the Episcopalians draws on English Unitarian pasts to craft a vision for American Unitarianism in Pennsylvania as the land of religious toleration. In his journal, Taylor described in great detail his relationship with Bishop William White. He described numerous conversations in which White defended Unitarians and expressed respect for religious difference. Taylor called White "one of the best men who ever lived."²⁶ His relationship with White reflected on Unitarian pasts in England, where Anglicanism dominated Unitarianism, and puts forth an alternative vision for Unitarianism in the United States, in which Anglicanism and Unitarianism stood on equal footing. So while Philadelphia Unitarianism's self-identity in these early years was largely formed with reference to a particular vision of religious liberty in Pennsylvania, it also corresponded to English Unitarian pasts. The tension Philadelphia Unitarians like Taylor drew between religious liberty and pluralism in Pennsylvania and state established religion in England reflected on Philadelphia Unitarians' transatlantic spiritual journeys, seeing the contrast between religious life in England and Pennsylvania as crucial to the mission of the Unitarian church. This tension emphasized how far English Unitarians had come physically and religiously from establishment religion. Taylor's tension between Unitarian pasts and presents brought English Unitarians' religious and physical journeys to the forefront of their self-identity.

Importantly, Philadelphia Unitarians' emphases on an eventual universal Liberal Christianity was related to the way in which Philadelphia Unitarians drew upon their own transatlantic journeys. That is, as the church emphasized an eventual universal Liberal Christianity, it drew from English Unitarians' transatlantic narratives, like Taylor's. English Unitarians imagined Trinitarians moving toward Unitarianism in Priestley's process of rational,

²⁶ Taylor, "Notices and Anecdotes Respecting...", 165, HSP.

scientific inquiry. Philadelphia Unitarians' transatlantic journeys toward Unitarianism gave substance and narrative focus to that vision for a universal Liberal Christianity. Indeed, as they emphasized their transatlantic journeys toward Unitarianism, Philadelphia Unitarians crafted an origins story for the church that linked their own stories to their vision for an American Unitarianism, in which countless religiously unsatisfied people made the difficult journey toward religious truth.

Despite their sense that an emphasis on religious pluralism did not oppose an understanding that Unitarianism would ultimately triumph, the universal Liberal Christianity that Philadelphia Unitarians imagined worked to undercut their related emphasis on religious pluralism. In his 1813 sermon "The Unity of God," Ralph Eddowes articulated a vision for Philadelphia Unitarianism that, like Priestley's, emphasized rational inquiry into religious truth.²⁷ While he trumpeted the importance of reason in true religion, he also acknowledged reason's counterpart – revelation – and explained that revelation, too, had a place in the religious landscape.²⁸ He argued that, "There is a clear distinction between things incomprehensible and things impossible. To the former, reason may and often must assent..."²⁹

Eddowes' admission that reason was a limited means with which to arrive at true religion was part of his larger religious outlook, which saw the existence of a variety of religious denominations in Philadelphia as key to a formation of religious truth. He argued that,

"...if...we differ in many points, some of greater, and some of lesser moment from other denominations of Christians, we are not the less disposed to own and respect them as our brethren. Our chief object is to advance the cause of religious truth, which we are confident can never suffer from investigation, and to exclude error by encouraging the spirit of free inquiry, by means of which alone it

²⁷ Bowers, *Joseph Priestley*, 110-111.

²⁸ Ralph Eddowes, *The Unity of God and the Worship that is Due to Him Alone* (Philadelphia: Thomas Dorson), 11.

²⁹ Eddowes, *The Unity of God*, 12.

can be expected that our holy religion will at length obtain an universal ascendancy.”³⁰

Eddowes, here, held up denominationalism as a central method by which to explore religious truth. His vision, in this sense, matched Priestley’s, as he imagined a religiously plural society in which a universal Unitarianism would gain “universal ascendancy.” In this way, for Eddowes, denominationalism helped Trinitarians see the Unitarian light. This framework, while it argued for a universal Unitarianism, pitted Unitarians against Trinitarians as it argued that Unitarians would ultimately prosper.

As Philadelphia Unitarians undercut a vision for religious plurality and toleration by emphasizing the truth of Unitarianism against Trinitarians’ fallacies, Trinitarians, too, conceptualized the religious landscape in a Trinitarian versus Unitarian model, in which Trinitarian beliefs were acceptable, and Unitarian beliefs were not. In one particularly vivid example of Trinitarian hostilities, one probably Trinitarian Philadelphian said of the Unitarian church: “They are going to have *John Vaughan’s* supper at the Unitarian Church on next Sunday; the Lord has nothing to do with it.”³¹ The Trinitarian mainstream, the group that would be redefined as “Orthodoxy” by the next generation of Philadelphia Unitarians, claimed that Unitarianism’s rationalism marked Unitarians as non-Christian. This criticism of Unitarians contributed to a religious vision that pitted Unitarians against Trinitarians. According to that Trinitarian critic, Unitarians’ rationalism marked them as different. Of the attacks on Unitarianism in Philadelphia, Eddowes explained that “It is very convenient to have a nickname to apply to those whom it is wished to run down and expose to public hatred... ‘*Socinian blasphemy*’ is a phrase so hackneyed that few, if any, will think of enquiring into its

³⁰ Eddowes, *The Unity of God*, 12.

³¹ Westcott, *A History of Philadelphia*, 987.

meaning...”³² Eddowes, here, argued that Unitarians were used, even in Philadelphia, as a convenient “other” upon which Trinitarians could hurl their attacks. For Trinitarians, then, Unitarianism’s rationalism marked them as different.

A sort of Trinitarian/Unitarian opposition undercut basic assumptions about religious plurality, both for Philadelphia Unitarians and the Trinitarian groups with whom they were acquainted. In this sense, Priestley’s particular vision for Pennsylvania religious liberty was never fully realized, but it was instead consistently undermined by moves, inside and outside the Unitarian Church, toward a religious vision in Philadelphia that saw Unitarians as the religious opposites of Trinitarians. Despite their desire for religious plurality in a rational exploration of religious truth, Philadelphia Unitarians found themselves enmeshed in a Unitarian/Trinitarian divide.

Philadelphia Unitarians’ relationship with Universalists, in the first few decades after the church’s founding, is a good example of the ways in which a vision toward religious plurality in Philadelphia was undermined by a religious vision that saw a chasm separating Unitarians from Trinitarians. In an 1825 article in the Universalist magazine *The Gospel Herald*, Samuel Hart explained that “I was informed from undoubted authority, that the late Mr. Winchester, the Universalist, though a Trinitarian, was a most liberal Christian... which he evinced by his friendly conduct towards Dr. Priestley in America...”³³ Hart, here, explained that he had asked his sister, a resident of Philadelphia, for “a correct statement of the particulars” regarding the relationship between Elhanan Winchester and Priestley. What follows in the article is a printed version of the letter that Hart’s sister, Sarah, wrote, in which she describes the relationship between Priestley and Winchester, who founded the first Universalist church in Philadelphia.

³² Bowers, *Joseph Priestley*, 110.

³³ “Sarah Hart” *The Gospel Herald*, 30 July 1825

Sarah Hart explained that Priestley and Winchester first came to know each other when “in the autumn of 1795 or 6” the Unitarians asked Universalists in the city “for the use, on Sunday forenoons, of a place of worship.” At that time, the Lombard Street church was in the process of being built. Hart describes how, “...our friends [the Unitarians] made an advance of some hundreds of dollars, and employed great activity and energy, so that very soon the house was completely benched and a pulpit erected...” Hart described how, at a Unitarian service at which Priestley preached, Winchester would sit in the front row, “on this seat which was generally occupied by elderly men, members of the Universalist society...” Hart explained that “Mr. Winchester would take his place [in this seat], unless he went into the pulpit with the Doctor...” For Hart, Winchester’s seat at the front of the Unitarian service “was a strong mark of friendly-heartedness and liberality...” In this sense, Priestley’s preaching at the Universalist church, and the relationship it fostered between Winchester and Priestley, was the realization of a vision of religious plurality and tolerance in Pennsylvania, for both Hart and Priestley.

Travels across the Atlantic were at the center of this narrative about the relationship between Priestley and Winchester, and the vision for religious tolerance and plurality with which this narrative intersected. Samuel Hart described how Priestley “had been expelled from his native land, by those whose intolerant spirit could not bear the freedom of energy with which that great man advocated the cause of truth and unalloyed Christianity.” And Sarah Hart began her description of the relationship between Unitarians and Universalists with a description of her own journeys across the Atlantic – “It is now near five and twenty years since I was in America, having sailed there from for England in the spring on 1798...” The narrative Hart offered about religious tolerance and plurality was strongly conditioned by these Atlantic crossings. Laying no claim to permanence in the United States, both Priestley and Sarah Hart, indicated that religious

liberty and tolerance in Pennsylvania was connected, not to American sensibilities, but to transatlantic ones. In other words, for Priestley and Hart, religious pluralism and tolerance in Pennsylvania emerged from transatlantic identities. Just like Taylor's sense that Philadelphia Unitarianism reflected a tension between Unitarian pasts and presents as Unitarians traveled toward religious liberty, the Harts also indicated that Philadelphia Unitarianism was sparked by transatlantic journeys.

J.D. Bowers talks about the relationship between Unitarians and Universalists at the beginning of the nineteenth century in Philadelphia, and sees the connection as one of "substantial optimism."³⁴ He cites an 1824 article written by F.W.P Greenwood in *Unitarian Miscellany*, in which Greenwood described Winchester's defense of the Unitarians. In a sermon defending Socinians, Winchester argued that that "it is of little consequence what *my* opinion is on this subject, but I can give you the opinion of the Apostle Paul respecting persons who acknowledge that Jesus is the Christ, and who believe that God raised him from the dead."³⁵ In Socinians' belief that Christ, despite his humanity, was the Messiah, Winchester located salvation.³⁶

According to Sarah Hart, though, the Unitarian-Universalist connection, and the vision for religious tolerance and plurality with which it coincided, was short-lived. Hart described the disintegration of Unitarian-Universalist relations. At the Universalist pulpit, Priestley explained that, for the following Sunday, "he intended to preach directly on the person of Christ... and that the Lord's Supper would be celebrated at the conclusion of that service..." Universalists found this deeply problematic – "it was truly absurd for them [Unitarians] to commemorate the death of Christ by receiving the Lord's Supper..." While Winchester stood by Priestley's right to his

³⁴ Bowers, *Joseph Priestley*, 106.

³⁵ Bowers, *Joseph Priestley*, 107.

³⁶ Bowers, *Joseph Priestley*, 107.

religious views, Universalists in the congregation attacked Priestley's Christology as inappropriate in a Universalist church.

That Sunday, as Joseph Priestley preached on Unitarianism, Winchester's evening sermon in the same church was a direct reply to Priestley; he defended Trinitarianism. Hart described Winchester, here, as "wielding the weapons of Trinitarianism." In this case, then, the vision for religious plurality that sought to see past the Unitarian/Trinitarian divide failed to realize its goals. While, in the nineteenth century, the divide between Unitarians and Universalists would take on a decisive class dimension, here Unitarians and Universalists could not bridge a significant Unitarian/Trinitarian divide, which set Trinitarian revelation against Unitarian rationalism. That this was the case is not entirely surprising – while Unitarians and Universalists imagine a collective history in the twenty-first century, in the nineteenth century Universalists, despite their rationalist outlook, displayed a vibrant evangelical spirit was markedly different from Philadelphia Unitarians' emphasis on rationalism.³⁷

In Philadelphia Unitarianism, a vision for universal Liberal Christianity helped forge an origins story that saw Priestley's and others transatlantic journeys to found Philadelphia Unitarianism as a central Unitarian narrative. At the same time this vision undercut Unitarians' attempts to forge community in Philadelphia, it also provoked great conflict with New Englanders, as New Englanders espoused their own version of universal Liberal Christianity that was connected to the state.

In New England, an alternative formulation of liberal Christianity came to the fore in the early nineteenth century. New England and Philadelphia Unitarians sustained deep conflict, as,

³⁷ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*. 41. Hatch depicts Winchester's adoption of Universalism as an evangelical conversion experience.

in these years, each group felt the other had misinterpreted Unitarianism. As circumstances in Philadelphia meant that Philadelphia Unitarians never fully realized their vision for liberal Christianity, the regional conflict that enveloped Unitarianism in the first few decades of the nineteenth century, too, exposed the limits of Philadelphia Unitarians' vision as they saw it repeatedly attacked from the North. The conflict itself was, in some ways, theological. It was, however, also informed by contemporary discourses on nationalism and regionalism in the years following the Revolution, as Congregational Unitarians in New England sought to craft their own liberal movement that advanced anti-Calvinist sensibilities while attempting to maintain social and political privilege. While Philadelphia Unitarians sought to define American religion by placing it within a broader, Atlantic religious story and claiming transatlantic identities, New England Unitarians appropriated nationalist discourse to exclude Philadelphia Unitarians from the American religious story entirely. In this way, contemporary attempts to define and cement national borders were at the center of the regional conflict in Unitarianism.

In New England and particularly Boston, liberal Congregationalists increasingly embraced a notion of "liberal Christianity" that professed Arianism – a sort of theological middle ground between Socinianism and Trinitarianism. In the Arian scheme, Jesus was both human and divine.³⁸ While they initially called themselves "Liberal Christians," a couple of decisive events in the first few decades of the nineteenth century coalesced to turn Liberal Christians into Unitarians, facilitating a gradual break with Congregationalism.³⁹

In his book *The Unitarian Conscience*, Daniel Walker Howe argues that Congregational Unitarianism was theologically more complex than merely their ambivalence toward the Trinity. Indeed, he explains that "The most important characteristic distinguishing the Liberals from

³⁸ Bowers, *Joseph Priestley*, 4.

³⁹ Bowers, *Joseph Priestley*, 5.

those who remained orthodox (whether Edwardsian or Old Light Calvinist) lay in their estimate of human nature.”⁴⁰ Unitarians were distinguished from Orthodox Congregationalists because they argued firmly “against considering humanity depraved.”⁴¹ Howe argues that New England Unitarians’ anti-Calvinist framework was central to the sort of Protestant movements that came after it: “The rebellion against Calvinist theology which the Liberals of Massachusetts pioneered was gradually accepted and followed by mainstream American Protestants in general (albeit without a rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity).”⁴² In this way, New England Unitarians leveled important anti-Calvinist critiques that extended beyond an anti-Trinitarian framework.

Priestley’s death in 1804 fell in the middle of this watershed for religious liberals in New England. In August of 1803, Hollis Professor of Divinity at Harvard Divinity School, David Tappan, died, initiating a power struggle in Cambridge that reverberated throughout the New England. In 1805, Tappan, a moderate Calvinist, was replaced by Henry Ware, a Unitarian. Soon after, the Unitarians, with newfound power at Harvard Divinity School replaced the Calvinist orthodox President, Eliphalet Pearson, with another Unitarian, Samuel Webber. Orthodox Congregationalists largely left Harvard Divinity School, founding their own seminary in Andover, Massachusetts.⁴³ And while, as Howe describes, “The controversy over the Hollis Professorship had been a long time in the making,” the event was an important turning point for religious liberals in New England, as Unitarians amassed, in the Controversy, a great deal of power.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Daniel Walker Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 5.

⁴¹ Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience*, 5.

⁴² Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience*, 7.

⁴³ Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience*, 4.

⁴⁴ Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience*, 4.

The main thesis of J.D. Bowers's book, *Joseph Priestley and English Unitarianism in America*, is that New England Unitarians, in refusing association with the theologically radical Socinians, claimed American Unitarianism as their own by "circumventing or eliminating preexisting Unitarian traditions."⁴⁵ He explains that the New England adoption of Unitarianism "quickly relegated Socinianism to the periphery and fervently denounced all associations between themselves and the Unitarianism of old..."⁴⁶ A New England version of Unitarianism was predicated on delegitimizing the theologically radical English Unitarians in America.

New England's assertion that they represented "true Unitarianism" is reflected in the historiography on American Unitarianism, which strongly favors a New England origins story. Secondary source scholarship on American Unitarianism overwhelmingly pinpoints New England as the nexus of American Unitarianism. George Willis Cooke's turn-of-the-century history of Unitarianism is emblematic of this approach. For Cooke, "Unitarianism was brought to America with the Pilgrims and the Puritans."⁴⁷ In this way, Cooke understood Unitarianism as a movement rooted in the same American individualism that, supposedly, led the first groups of religious dissidents to the New World. While the whiggish notion that the first European settlers in the New World were, in essence, already Unitarian has been largely abandoned, a tendency to privilege New England as the center of American Unitarianism is pervasive in the literature. That New England Unitarians claimed an institutional and intellectual center at Harvard Divinity School also probably influenced the primacy of the New England origins story in American Unitarianism. This New England emphasis downplays, or downright erases, the influence of Joseph Priestley's alternative foundation of Unitarianism in Philadelphia.

⁴⁵ Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience*, 5.

⁴⁶ Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience*, 5..

⁴⁷ George Willis Cooke, *Unitarianism in America* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1902), 16.

J.D. Bowers' book, *Joseph Priestley and English Unitarianism in America*, is an exception in the scholarship on American Unitarianism, and it gives an important voice to English Unitarianism. His description of the regional conflict within Unitarianism points to a more nuanced understanding of heterodox religious movements in the United States, as it complicates understandings of heterodoxy that emphasize homogeneity among religious dissidents.⁴⁸

Two related critiques of Bowers inform my study of the regional conflict in American Unitarianism. First, Bowers is overwhelmingly concerned with explaining the regional conflict in Unitarianism through a theological frame. And while the regional conflict was often coated in theological language, for New England and Philadelphia Unitarians, the conflict was also deeply connected to the social and political environment in which Unitarians lived. Moreover, just as his focus on theological issues removes Bowers' study from the social and cultural world in which particular theologies operated, his insistence that the Unitarian leadership reflected American Unitarianism in the nineteenth century is problematic. This focus on the leadership – specifically Joseph Priestley and William Ellery Channing – removes these men's discourses from the environment in which the discourses functioned. A focus on Unitarian leadership asserts that the regional conflict within Unitarianism reflected a timeless theological struggle of a few famous men, rather than a principled conflict that was deeply embedded in cultural and social life for ordinary Americans.

Bowers also insists that the regional conflict within Unitarianism was largely one-sided – waged by New England Unitarians in an effort to advance their more theologically moderate Unitarianism.⁴⁹ And, indeed, the historical record often displays a New England hostility toward

⁴⁸ Bowers, *Joseph Priestley*, 7.

⁴⁹ Bowers, *Joseph Priestley*.

Philadelphia Unitarians, with few hostile replies reverberating back to New England from Philadelphia. In 1816, for instance, William Ellery Channing wrote to the Philadelphia Church that, “It is well known that I am far from agreeing in every particular with the leading men of your society. I certainly do not wish successes to all your news.”⁵⁰ Meanwhile Philadelphia Unitarians acquiesced, petitioning New England Unitarians for a minister of their own.⁵¹ A few years later, Philadelphia Unitarians also wrote to New England Unitarians requesting information about the nature of their rational religion.⁵² In this evidence, Philadelphia Unitarians appear as the passive recipients of a New England desire for theological dominance. But to place New England Unitarians as the instigators of the regional conflict is to ignore the ways in which the conflict reflected important themes in the early national period that had no clear instigator.

Rather than imagining New England Unitarians as the sole instigators of the regional conflict, or reading deep into theological differences to find the source of the conflict, I contend that competing conceptions of American religious identity comprised the center of the conflict between Philadelphia and New England Unitarians. Was American religion about transatlantic journeys, denominationalism and religious pluralism? Or instead, was it about crafting a national, nonsectarian rational religion that shaped moral citizens? The regional conflict in Unitarianism circles around competing narratives, as Unitarians engaged in broader, national debates about the nature of American religious and national identities.

Until 1833, Massachusetts churches operated under the Standing Order, in which citizens were taxed to provide funds for the state’s established Congregational churches.⁵³ Starting in the

⁵⁰ William Ellery Channing to John Vaughan, 14 August 1816. Vaughan Papers. APS.

⁵¹ William Ellery Channing to John Vaughan, 14 August 1816; Elizabeth Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, 106.

⁵² Henry Ware Jr. to John Vaughan, 9 November 1823. Vaughan Papers. APS.

⁵³ Conrad Wright, “From Standing Order to Secularism” in *The Liberal Christians: Essays on American Unitarian History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 111.

1720s, the state granted “dissenters,” religious groups like the Baptists that did not recognize Congregationalism, tax exemptions.⁵⁴ This religious and political framework created a religious world in New England divided between those of the establishment and “dissenters.”⁵⁵ Because Unitarianism in New England was part of Congregationalism, New England Unitarians benefited enormously from the Standing Order. As Congregationalists, the Standing Order put Unitarians in a position of influence and privilege. New England Unitarians were, in William McLoughlin’s words, “staunch defenders of the establishment.”⁵⁶

The Standing Order fostered and reflected a New England understanding that nonsectarian “moral” religion was essential for a successful government. In 1820, William Ellery Channing defended the Standing Order in a sermon entitled “Religion as a Social Principle.”⁵⁷ For Channing, the Standing Order furthered religion that led “powerfully to publick order and happiness.”⁵⁸ Conrad Wright explains that those who supported the Standing Order “argued that... a civilized social order depended on a set of moral values held in common by the people.”⁵⁹ In other words, Unitarians saw the Standing Order as ensuring a nonsectarian moral basis for the rule of law. In this way, nonsectarianism, and its particular configuration of religion and politics, were central to New England Unitarianism.

New England Unitarians sharply criticized the supposedly sectarian nature of Philadelphia Unitarianism. In the eyes of New England Unitarians, Philadelphia Unitarians’ emphasis on denomination was a misinterpretation of Liberal Christianity and Unitarianism. For many years, John Vaughan corresponded with a number of New England ministers, including

⁵⁴ Wright, “From Standing Order to Secularism,” 111.

⁵⁵ William McLoughlin, *New England Dissent, 1630-1833: The Baptists and the Separation of Church and State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

⁵⁶ McLoughlin, *New England Dissent*, 1406.

⁵⁷ Wright, “From Standing Order to Secularism,” 112.

⁵⁸ Wright, “From Standing Order to Secularism,” 112.

⁵⁹ Wright, “From Standing Order to Secularism,” 113.

William Ellery Channing, regarding the installation of a permanent minister in the Philadelphia church. In 1812, Vaughan had corresponded with a Mr. Thacher of Brighton, Massachusetts about the possibility of entertaining Andrews Norton, Professor at Harvard Divinity School, as minister of the Philadelphia church. Of the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia, Thacher told Vaughan that,

“I rejoice in the prosperity of your little church. I am curious that you should not let it have too much of a sectarian character, but have it open to the liberal of every denomination the Arian, the Arminian etc, at not merely the Unitarian in the restricted sense in which our friend Mr. Belsham uses it.”⁶⁰

Belsham’s Unitarianism⁶¹ was “restricted” for Thacher because it was “sectarian.” A New England sense that Philadelphia Unitarianism was “sectarian” reflects New England Unitarians’ particular association of church and state. Indeed, Philadelphia Unitarians, like New England Unitarians, thought that nonsectarian Unitarianism was capable of infiltrating a variety of religious denominations. But for Thatcher and other New England Unitarians, Philadelphia Unitarians’ sectarianism marked them as “dissenters” – just like the Baptists, Quakers, Methodists and others in New England, Philadelphia Unitarians sought to carve out a small space for themselves that worked against established religion. Thacher’s critique spoke to the social and political position of New England Unitarians, as they were unable to imagine a nonsectarian religious framework outside of the establishment.

In this way, while the regional conflict in Unitarianism had deep roots in religious and theological debates between American Unitarians, a complete study of the conflict must look beyond theology, to understand the ways in which contemporary movements impacted the discourse. Most tangibly, the regional conflict between Philadelphia and New England

⁶⁰ Thacher to Vaughan, 9 November 1812. First Unitarian Church Records. HSP.

⁶¹ Thomas Belsham was a Unitarian in England and a good friend of Joseph Priestley. For more information on Thomas Belsham, see Bowers, *Joseph Priestley*.

Unitarians was underscored by a nationalist rhetoric that emerged in New England. This nationalist discourse in American Unitarianism revealed itself in exclusionary discourses that sought to marginalize Philadelphia Unitarians by denying them national, and relatedly regional, inclusion. The language of the regional conflict reflects the way in which the conflict reflected on competing origins stories for Unitarianism, as New England Unitarians could not imagine a Liberal Christianity that operated outside of the establishment.

In her article, “Dis-Covering the Subject of the ‘Great Constitutional Discussion,’ 1786-1799,” Carroll Smith-Rosenberg argues that exclusionary impulses in American nationalism were, in one sense, “looking east” toward Europe, but that they also “faced west” onto the burgeoning frontier.⁶² While American nationals searched for an American identity that was distinct from a European past, they also were deeply concerned with the possibility of themselves becoming “savage.” For this reason, Smith-Rosenberg claims that American nationals occupied a “liminal” space – “Perched on the lip of a red continent, the white descendants of European settlers denied their European-ness at the very time they insisted on a privileged position in relation to those Other Americans.”⁶³ In other words, the exclusive nature of American nationalism should be understood from two directions—discourses of difference and exclusion that constructed an American nationalism that faced East and West. In this way, American nationalism configured American exceptionalism with regard to Europe in tandem with a racialized discourse that sought to other Indians and black Americans. Indeed, American nationalism was predicated on racially excluding nonwhites.

In 1895, William Henry Furness delivered a discourse at the First Unitarian Church in Philadelphia entitled “Recollections of Seventy Years.” The discourse is a good example of the

⁶² Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “Dis-Covering the Subject of the ‘Great Constitutional Discussions,’ 1786-1789,” *Journal of American History* 79.3 (1992), 848.

⁶³ Smith-Rosenberg, “Dis-Covering the Subject,” 848.

ways in which New England Unitarians appropriated a nationalist discourse to exclude Philadelphia Unitarians from their religious tradition. Furness, a Unitarian from New England, reflected on the way in which the First Unitarian Church was understood by New Englanders in the first few decades of its existence. He wrote,

“...composed almost exclusively of persons from the Old Country, [the Philadelphia Church] was looked upon pretty much as would have been a settlement of a small company of Mahometans, as exotic, having no root in the soil. Even the liberally disposed in New England were shy of it, as going altogether too far.”⁶⁴

At once, Philadelphia Unitarians were, in the eyes of New Englanders like Furness, “persons from the Old Country” and “exotic.” He connected these criticisms of Philadelphia Unitarians by arguing that Philadelphia Unitarians could claim “no root in the soil.”

Furness’s description of Philadelphia Unitarians reflected a nationalist discourse rooted in exclusion. For starters, his instance that “persons from the Old Country” had “no root in the soil” mirrored a contemporary effort to craft an American identity that excluded European and English influence. In the years following the Revolution, this nationalist project aimed to construct a national identity that would bridge the social and cultural diversity of the thirteen colonies, while, at the same time, distancing the new nation from all that was “European.”⁶⁵ Furness’s description of Philadelphia Unitarians reflected a nationalist discourse rooted in exclusion.

This movement to exclude all that was “European” had two important, interrelated sources. First, the French Revolution made Federalist nationals uneasy. Michael Durey, in his work *Transatlantic Radicals*, argues that English Unitarians were “tarred with the brush of pro-

⁶⁴ William Henry Furness, “Recollections of Seventy Years: A Discourse,” (Philadelphia, 1895), 13, Northwestern University.

⁶⁵ Jill Lepore, *A is for American: Letters and Other Characters in the Newly United States* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 5.

French radicalism...”⁶⁶ For some in the United States, then, English rationalism was inseparable from the radicalism of the French Revolution. Indeed, for many in the Atlantic community, the turmoil in France “seemed to demonstrate that the old order was being swept away to make room for a better future.”⁶⁷ In this way, English Unitarians’ status as English, as well as their theological heterodoxy, marked them as politically dangerous supporters of Atlantic radicalism.

Second, nationals in the new United States sought to break out of the core/periphery paradigm that reinforced imperial power hierarchies.⁶⁸ For example, emboldened by the sense that a new American national identity would reconfigure Atlantic hierarchies of power, Noah Webster proposed a movement of “radical spelling reform,” which intended to rid American English of its cultural ties to the Old World. Insisting on the validity of his scheme, Webster wrote, “Nothing can be more ridiculous than a servile imitation of the manners, the language, and the vices of foreigners... Nothing can betray a more despicable disposition in Americans, than to be the apes of Europeans.”⁶⁹ In this way, the American nationalist discourse was rooted in a desire to transcend the United States’ colonized past.

With Smith-Rosenberg’s configuration of American nationalism in mind, when Noah Webster argued that an American national identity prevented Americans from being “the apes of the Europeans,” he drew on eastward and westward-facing nationalist discourses at once. A true American national identity would, for Webster, prevent Americans from being pulled into savagery on both sides of the Atlantic. In this example, the discourse used to mark Indians as Other was applied to Europeans. Furness’s characterization of English Unitarians as simultaneously “of the Old Country” and “exotic” followed a similar pattern. Like Webster,

⁶⁶ Michael Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 192.

⁶⁷ Pestana, Carla Gardina, “Religion” in *The British Atlantic World* edited by David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 87.

⁶⁸ Smith-Rosenberg, “Dis-Covering the Subject,” 847.

⁶⁹ Jill Lepore, *A is for American*, 21.

Furness appropriated a discourse used to exclude Indians and applied it to Anglo-Americans. In excluding Philadelphia Unitarians as English and also Indian, Furness articulated the nature of American identity – not English, not Indian.

Furness's 1895 reflection on the way in which Philadelphia Unitarians were viewed by New Englanders in the first part of the nineteenth century parallels his own rhetoric in 1825, when he was called to be the minister of the Philadelphia church. Elizabeth Geffen argues that the call to take the Philadelphia pulpit probably was, for Furness, "a cry from the wilderness..."⁷⁰ Furness had difficulty convincing his Boston friends to make the trek to Philadelphia for his ordination ceremony.⁷¹ In a letter to his sister-in-law, Mary Jenks, Furness wrote, of New England Unitarians' ambivalence to making the trek to Philadelphia, "They give me *their blessings and good wishes* in abundance but as to sacrifice of personal comfort, they hang back."⁷² Furness interpreted New England Unitarians' reluctance to attend his ordination as related to Philadelphia's peripheral status. In another instance, in his ordination sermon for Furness, William Ware explained to Furness that his "situation is peculiar." He went on to explain that Furness was "separated from those who, with you, believe Unitarian Christianity to be the religion of the gospel." For this reason, Ware cautioned Furness, "Your ministerial duties will be heavier... your conduct will be more strictly watched than those of most of your brethren."⁷³ Appropriating a westward-facing discourse, Ware's language, here, suggests that Philadelphia was the edge of civilization.

While Smith-Rosenberg's East/West cartography is important for understanding the exclusionary impulses upon which American nationalism was built, exclusion in American

⁷⁰ Elizabeth Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, 116.

⁷¹ Elizabeth Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, 116.

⁷² Elizabeth Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, 116.

⁷³ Elizabeth Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, 117.

nationalism did not only operate facing East and West.⁷⁴ Rather, American nationalism “depended on many Others...”⁷⁵ An American, in the early national period was white, male, heterosexual, and affluent. Integrating all kinds of exclusive paradigms, American men “could reach for a sense of self-sameness through fraternal and managerial projections of self-division/fragmentation onto democracy’s Others.”⁷⁶ Looking, as Dana Nelson cautions us to, for the “many Others” upon which American national identity was built, we must expand beyond an East/West exclusionary impulses. Another important line of exclusion in the early nineteenth century spanned North/South, as Philadelphia and New England demonstrated distinctive regional identities, that came to reflect nationalist discourses of exclusion.

New England Unitarians often talked about their disagreements with Philadelphia Unitarians by locating Philadelphia in another region of the United States. For instance, in 1816, John Vaughan wrote to William Ellery Channing, pressing Channing as to whether he had yet found a minister for the Philadelphia congregation. Channing responded to Vaughan, explaining that he had, up to that point, no success in locating a minister for the Philadelphia church:

“We have respectable candidates, but they are not, what is called, shocking. They could not probably excite great attention, & this is desirable in your situation. The great object is to lead people to think on religion. In your part of the country, religious opinions are hereditary, & unless I have been misinformed, the habit of sincere & fearless inquiry is hardly more common than in Constantinople.”⁷⁷

Channing, here, argued that Philadelphia Unitarians distorted the true nature of Unitarianism by seeing Unitarianism as a denomination, and thereby, ignoring the operation of free inquiry and choice in religious life. In this example, though, Channing connected Philadelphia Unitarians’

⁷⁴ Smith-Rosenberg, “Dis-Covering the Subject.”

⁷⁵ Dana Nelson, *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 18.

⁷⁶ Nelson, *National Manhood*, 18.

⁷⁷ William Ellery Channing to John Vaughan, 14 August 1816. Vaughan Papers. APS.

distortion of true Unitarianism to their location in Philadelphia, rather than their status as English immigrants or their persistent ties to England. In Channing's nationalist discourse, here, Philadelphia Unitarians were close-minded and anti-intellectual because they were Philadelphians, the equivalent of dissenters and sectarians in Channing's mind.

A discourse that relies on region is, at first, not clearly nationalist or exclusive at all. Indeed, in some ways, a focus on region could be seen to counter the American nationalist project, as a rhetorical focus on region seems to imply inclusion in the broader American geography – one could imagine a New England Unitarian emphasis on region in discourses with Philadelphia Unitarians as an attempt to extend an olive branch, or to recognize some essential American-ness that transcended regional divides altogether. This view recalls Elizabeth Geffen's central thesis in *Philadelphia Unitarianism*. While Geffen notes that an influx of New England Unitarians into the church probably contributed to the Philadelphia Unitarians' American identity,⁷⁸ her overarching thesis is that English Unitarians carried out a sort of transformation in the early nineteenth century, in which they became Americans. She writes that, in the late 1820s and 1830s, there was a “new spirit” in the church that was “American, self-assured, dynamic, and determined to make a practical success of the [Unitarian] enterprise...”⁷⁹ In Geffen's interpretation, as English Unitarians became Philadelphia Unitarians, they became Americans.

Geffen's “becoming American” theme ignores the way in which region could function discursively in the Unitarian conflict to define difference and exclude certain people from the nationalist project. Put another way, a New England insistence on describing Philadelphia Unitarians in terms of region fits into a nationalist agenda in which regional differences were

⁷⁸ Elizabeth Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, 143.

⁷⁹ Elizabeth Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, 143.

ascribed to outsiders. David Waldstreicher, in his book *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, offers a vision of New England nationalism that supports the argument that regional discourse in American Unitarianism expressed nationalist sensibilities. He writes against a common tendency to see regionalism and nationalism as “mutually exclusive” in the first half of the nineteenth century. Waldstreicher observes that the prevalent way of understanding regionalism and nationalism asserts that “...a regional perspective detracts from a nationalist one, and mature nationalism subsumes fugitive expressions of regional identity.”⁸⁰ Waldstreicher’s argument is certainly reflected in William Ellery Channing’s 1816 letter to John Vaughan, where Channing argues that Philadelphia Unitarians’ status as Philadelphians marked them as anti-intellectual and close minded.

Waldstreicher argues that “in the early nationalist era, regionalism... contributed to nationalism...”⁸¹ In other words, “nationalist regionalisms”⁸² professed nationalist rhetoric in regional terms. Waldstreicher notes that New England had a particularly firm “nationalist regionalism,” as New Englanders, from the Puritans onward, saw themselves as either “America writ small” or the nation’s “saving remnant.”⁸³ He emphasizes that the way regional identities interacted with a nationalist discourse often reflected status anxiety. He argues that, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, New Englander’s felt threatened by an increasing Southern political dominance. Jefferson, a Virginian, was elected president, and the Louisiana purchase signaled to New Englanders a problematic “demographic growth of the South.”⁸⁴ Under these circumstances, “the rearticulation of New England regionalism began as an attack upon southern

⁸⁰ David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776 – 1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 248; Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

⁸¹ Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 248.

⁸² Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 247.

⁸³ Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 251.

⁸⁴ Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 253.

distinctiveness,”⁸⁵ as New Englanders tried to “place all the nation’s sins” in another region.⁸⁶ In this way, status anxiety ushered forward a regionalist rhetoric. This discursive means of exclusion was essential to the nationalist project that projected New England as the nexus of American identity. In the regional conflict in American Unitarianism, we see a parallel focus among New England Unitarians on a regional identity as a means of ascribing difference.

Two events in 1825 illustrate the extent to which regionalist language in the Unitarian conflict was connected to a broader nationalist discourse. In that year, Philadelphia Unitarians finally acquired a full time minister, William Henry Furness, a recent graduate of Harvard Divinity School.⁸⁷ With Furness in Philadelphia, the First Unitarian Church would be transformed, in the eyes of New England Unitarians, into a “New England” Unitarian church. From that point on, the regional debate in Unitarianism would fade in importance for New England Unitarians, though, for Philadelphia Unitarians, the struggle to craft a Unitarianism that held true to Joseph Priestley and the origins of the church meant that they continued to engage in the regional conflict.⁸⁸

Also in 1825, Unitarians formed the American Unitarian Association. With its formation, New England Unitarians cemented Unitarianism as a specific religious denomination.⁸⁹ More broadly, the formation of the American Unitarian Association was a continuation of a nationalist discourse in Unitarianism, as it sanctioned the sort of Unitarianism

⁸⁵ Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 252.

⁸⁶ Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 252.

⁸⁷ Elizabeth Geffen, “William Henry Furness: Philadelphia Antislavery Preacher” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 82.3 (1958), 259.

⁸⁸ Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, 109. While Geffen does not explore the way in which the regional conflict faded in importance around the time that William Henry Furness became minister, she does explain that, in 1824, Philadelphia Unitarians added “Congregational” to their name.

⁸⁹ Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience*, 221. The specific implications for the AUA’s insistence on denominational Unitarianism, as opposed to a previous emphasis in New England on nonsectarian Unitarianism, is taken up in the next chapter.

that was also “American.” The Philadelphia Unitarian Church joined the American Unitarian Association, and, in fact, James Taylor became the organization’s first Vice President.⁹⁰

Philadelphia Unitarians entered the New England fold, at least on paper, with the coming of William Henry Furness. In the same year, Philadelphia Unitarians became “American” Unitarians, as they joined the American Unitarian Association. These events, combined, represent an important moment for the Philadelphia church, as New England Unitarians’ nationalist discourse that sought for so long to exclude them moved to incorporate Philadelphia Unitarians. These two events did not end Philadelphia Unitarians’ regional distinctiveness, but they did incorporate Philadelphia Unitarians into an American Unitarian frame, one that was created by New England Unitarians.

Ultimately, this study of the foundation of the Philadelphia Unitarian Church emphasizes how the first generation of Unitarians in Philadelphia conceptualized their new faith in terms of the spiritual journeys they took to get to Philadelphia. As they traveled across the Atlantic seeking religious lives free from state encroachment, they created a Unitarianism deeply committed to that journey that was both physical and religious. And as Philadelphia Unitarianism was deeply influenced by Atlantic movement, New England Unitarians, tied to establishment religion, forwarded a Unitarianism conditioned by consistency and a commitment to the status quo.

⁹⁰ Bowers, *Joseph Priestley*, 200.

Hicksites as Unitarians

In an 1865 letter to a Mr. Stebbins, who worked for the American Unitarian Association (AUA), William Henry Furness explained his refusal to ask his congregation to give money to the AUA. He cited the large number of Quakers in his congregation, and explained that “Most of our rich persons have Quakerism not Unitarianism in their blood.” He finished his letter by quipping, “I’m half a Quaker myself.”¹

Furness’s 1865 statement “I’m half a Quaker myself,” as well as his insistence that the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia did not mirror the Unitarianism defined by the American Unitarian Association, reflected in important ways on the history of his congregation. Hicksite Quakerism entered the congregation in the 1820s and 1830s, and its presence in the Church coincided with an important reinterpretation of Philadelphia Unitarian self-identity. As the Hicksite Schism pressed Quakers to rearticulate the nature of their faith in relationship to the social and cultural world around them, I argue that it pushed Philadelphia Unitarians to do the same.

This chapter seeks to understand the complex relationship between Unitarians and Quakers in the early republic. The religious vision that was embedded in that Quaker-Unitarian affinity was reinterpreted and redefined in 1828 as Unitarians interpreted the Hicksite Schism at least partly in terms of their own religious pasts, seeing in Hicksite Quakers’ spiritual journeys their own transatlantic vision for nonsectarian Unitarianism that operated without encroachment from the state. The Unitarian-Quaker affinity that emerged with particular force in the late 1820s was also deeply influenced by new religious and cultural developments in Philadelphia and across the United States. In the late 1820s, a growing body of religious liberals argued that the

¹ Furness to Stebbins, March 17, 1865, AUA Letterbooks, Harvard-Andover Library

ever-increasing evangelical mainstream powerfully constricted personal choice and sought to establish a new state-supported faith. Liberal Christians labeled the changes that came along with increasing evangelical dominance “Orthodoxy,” and they appeared as the old establishment religion, veiled in a new form. In this new religious and cultural environment, a variety of Liberal Christians came to recognize each other as allies. And as Hicksite Quakers and Unitarians connected in their opposition to Orthodoxy, they imagined a universal Liberal Christianity that, like Orthodoxy’s nonsectarianism, crossed denominational boundaries.

A close examination of the ways in which Philadelphia Quakers and Unitarians came to know each other in the 1820s does not ignore the theological differences between the sects. Indeed, Quakerism, at its core, recalled a mystical experience, whereas Unitarianism represented a highly rational one.² Putting basic theological differences aside, though, the way in which some Quakers and Unitarians expressed, or lived, their faiths in antebellum Philadelphia emphasized similarities rather than differences. Quakers and Unitarians both stressed simplicity before God and their communities, and they both located their faiths on the margins of an increasingly predominant evangelicalism.

Interactions between Quakers and Unitarians in antebellum Philadelphia contracted and expanded across time. Though there was never a sustained interaction between Philadelphia Quaker Meetinghouses and the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia, the drama of the Hicksite Schism and the conversations it encouraged about biblical rationalism and free thought in religion represented a significant moment in the relationship between the two sects. In that conflict, the Society of Friends split into opposing factions – the Orthodox and the Hicksites. The schism, which started in the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and spread, had its immediate cause in

² H. Larry Ingle, *Quakers in Conflict* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 92.

New York Quaker Elias Hicks' rational preaching, which argued, most essentially, that the Quakers had become too invested in issues beyond their own denomination, at the cost of ignoring the basic Quaker tenet of the Inner Light. For Hicks, true Quakerism should reflect on Quakers' mystical roots.³

Much historical scholarship that seeks to explain and understand the Hicksite Schism focuses on notions of "worldliness"—or engagement with people and events outside the Society of Friends – that provoked conflict within the Society of Friends in the 1820s. The common narrative of the Hicksite Schism posits that Orthodox Quakers were, in the 1820s, influenced by evangelical movements outside of Quakerism, and that they gradually moved away from their Quaker roots. In H. Larry Ingle's words, the Orthodox Quakers "had adopted a new system of belief that allowed them to break with the past and live comfortably in the new urban, commercial, industrial age..."⁴ In this interpretation, the Hicksite Quakers represented consistency and "time-honored traditions," while Orthodox Quakers adapted and responded to wider societal change.

Bruce Dorsey, in his article "Friends Becoming Enemies," explores this historiographical focus on "worldliness" in the literature about the Hicksite Schism, and he connects the conflict directly to rising evangelical cultural dominance in the 1820s. He faults previous studies for focusing too narrowly on either the social or theological contexts for the Hicksite Schism, and not exploring sufficiently "the connection between the social distinctions and the doctrinal

³ H. Larry Ingle, *Quakers in Conflict* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986); Bliss Forbush, *Elias Hicks: Quaker Liberal* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956); Thomas D. Hamm, *The Quakers in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Robert W. Doherty, *The Hicksite Schism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1967).

⁴ H. Larry Ingle, *Quakers in Conflict*, xiii – xiv.

controversy among Friends...”⁵ By contrast, Dorsey examines the ways in which the Hicksite Schism reflected and fostered real relationships with evangelical communities. Dorsey explains that while Orthodox Quakers generally embraced evangelical reform projects and benevolent societies, the Hicksites’ emphasis on rationalism and Quaker distinctiveness pushed them to avoid encounters with the evangelical mainstream.⁶ In this way, Dorsey links theological debates to contemporary social circumstances, arguing that Hicksite Quakerism’s accusations of Orthodox “worldliness” reflected on theological and also social tendencies. By emphasizing Quakers’ interactions with the social and cultural world around them, Dorsey seeks to complicate a tradition among Quaker historians that sees Quaker isolation as a paramount force in Quaker history.⁷

While the Hicksite Quakers accused the Orthodox of “worldliness,” my study suggests that many Hicksites, like the Orthodox, interpreted Quakerism relative to the Hicksite Schism in terms of contemporary social and religious circumstances. So while traditional interpretations emphasize Hicksite consistency in the face of Orthodox change, my study suggests that, for Hicksite Quakers who engaged with Unitarians in Philadelphia, the Hicksite Schism was deeply related to contemporary debates about orthodoxy and heterodoxy, evangelicalism and rationalism.⁸ Indeed, as Orthodox Quakers adapted to a changing religious landscape, so too did some Hicksite Quakers.

Unitarianism occupied an important space in discourses related to the Hicksite Schism. In Friends’ discussions about the Hicksite Schism, the designation “Unitarian” appeared often. Orthodox Quakers presumed theological similarities between Hicksite Quakers and Unitarians,

⁵ Bruce Dorsey, “Friends Becoming Enemies: Philadelphia Benevolence and the Neglected Era of American Quaker History,” *The Journal of the Early Republic* 18.3 (1998): 397.

⁶ Dorsey, “Friends Becoming Enemies,” 399.

⁷ Dorsey, “Friends Becoming Enemies,” 397.

⁸ Thomas Hamm, *Quakers in America*, 43-44.

charging that Hicksite Quakers were really expressing Unitarian sentiments. For instance, in February 1828, an article in *The Friend* entitled “Elisha Bates and The Berean” responded to a Hicksite critique of the writings of early Friends. The Hicksite interpretation found no evidence of a belief in the Trinity in early Friends’ theology. This finding fits into the Hicksites’ general theology – strongly anticlerical, the Hicksites regarded the Trinity as an unfortunate human intervention in religious practice. The Orthodox respondent in *The Friend* argued that Bates ignored passages in the writings of the early Friends that did emphasize the importance of the Trinity, and he insisted that Bates’ critique was evidence that he had come “to support opinions directly Unitarian.”⁹ According to the author of “Elisha Bates and the Berean,” when a Hicksite Quaker questioned the doctrine of the Trinity, he could be branded a Unitarian. In this instance, “Unitarian” was a label applied to mean a heterodox skepticism of the doctrine of the Trinity. This sort of label “Unitarian” did not reflect real interactions with Unitarian communities, or an explicit embrace of Unitarian theological writings. Rather, it served to paint the Hicksite Quaker movement and their denial of the Trinity as uber-rational, heretical, and exceedingly marginal.

In other instances, though, Orthodox Quakers pointed to more concrete relations between Hicksites and Unitarians. In a March 1834 issue of *The Friend*, an author wrote,

“We have seldom of late made any reference to those who ‘went out from us’ because ‘they were not of us,’ but yet have not been inattentive to the various and continued indications of a tendency in that people to assimilate, or to an amalgamation, with Unitarianism.”¹⁰

The author quoted a Hicksite Quaker, Evan Lewis, who had claimed a particular fascination with Boston Unitarian writings, including those of Jared Sparks, William Ellery Channing, and Noah Worcester. Lewis, according to the author, called these Unitarian ministers “men who are

⁹ “Elisha Bates and The Berean,” *The Friend* I (9 February 1828), 133.

¹⁰ *The Friend* VII (1 March 1834), 168.

excelled by no writers of the present age.”¹¹ In this instance, the author described connections between Hicksite Quakers and the community of New England Unitarians. For the Orthodox author, Hicksite Quakers were separating from the Society of Friends, and identifying themselves with Unitarianism.

In both of these cases, Orthodox Quakers’ accusations of Unitarianism display anxiety over the meaning of rational religion. For the Orthodox Quakers who published in *The Friend*, rational religion sometimes meant Unitarianism, and an abandonment of the mystical roots of Quakerism. Importantly, these accusations of Unitarianism, regardless of whether they imagined a real identification on the part of Hicksites with Unitarians, or simply theological overlaps with Unitarian societies, were rhetorical reflections on the Hicksite Schism. Orthodox associations of Hicksite Quakerism and Unitarianism were meant as a commentary on depth and severity of the present conflict in the Society of Friends—namely, to show how far Hicksites had strayed, in Orthodox eyes, from their Quaker heritage. In this sense, accusations of Unitarianism were part of the language of the Hicksite Schism and they served as charges of extreme rationalism within the Society of Friends.

In his important study of the Hicksite Schism, H. Larry Ingle recognizes this tendency of Orthodox friends to label Hicksites “Unitarians,” and he similarly insists that the brand was a way to discuss extremism within the Society of Friends. Ingle understands accusations of Unitarianism leveled by Orthodox Quakers as part of a larger discussion of Hicksite extremism, in part, because he sees them as untrue. According to Ingle, Hicksites were “rather unfamiliar” with Unitarianism.¹² In addition to his assertion that Quakers and Unitarians operated as relative strangers in the 1820s, Ingle cites important theological differences between Quakers and

¹¹ *The Friend* VII (1 March 1834), 168.

¹² H. Larry Ingle, *Quakers in Conflict*, 92.

Unitarians as evidence that Hicksite Quakers were, most certainly, not Unitarians.¹³ For Ingle, social and theological differences between Hicksite Quakers and Unitarians meant that, during the Hicksite Schism, Hicksites were not actively engaged in conversations with Unitarians.

Ingle's tendency to see the epithet "Unitarian" as disconnected from real Unitarian communities reflects his rejection of the tradition in the historiography of the Hicksite Schism that connects Hicksite Quakerism theologically to Unitarianism. A common, earlier interpretation of Hicksite theology emphasized theological overlaps with Unitarians. Rufus Jones, for instance, in his work *The Later Periods of Quakerism*, argued that, theologically, "It is possible, no doubt, to think of [Elias Hicks'] position as pointing toward Unitarianism."¹⁴ The rational expressions of Quaker faith that Hicks advocated, for Jones, strongly recalled a similar rationality in contemporary Unitarianism. Like Orthodox Quakers at the time of the Schism, Rufus Jones, here, connects Hicksite Quakers and Unitarians theologically. He does not suppose that Hicksite Quakers and Unitarians exchanged ideas in real communities. And indeed, in the 1820s, accusations of Unitarianism in the Hicksite Schism were not meant to reflect on real relationships between Quakers and Unitarians.

The epithet of Unitarianism that Orthodox Quakers hurled at Hicksite Friends, and the parallel historiographical emphasis on Hicksite Quakerism as an expression of Unitarianism, point to important points of intersection between Hicksite Quakerism and Unitarianism in religious discourses. A complete analysis of the discursive importance of Unitarianism in the Hicksite Schism, however, must examine the ways in which Unitarian discourses responded to and interpreted the conflict within the Society of Friends. In other words, how did Philadelphia Unitarians understand their religious tradition in the years surrounding the Hicksite Schism? If

¹³ H. Larry Ingle, *Quakers in Conflict*, 92.

¹⁴ Rufus Jones, *The Later Periods of Quakerism*, vol. 1, (London: Macmillan and Co, 1921), 443.

Unitarianism occupied an important rhetorical space for Quakers in the years surrounding the Schism, did Hicksite Quakerism, conversely, contribute to Unitarian experiences?

Around the same time that the Hicksite Schism was swirling in and around Philadelphia, another religious conflict, involving the relationship between religion and politics, reached fever pitch. In 1828, Ezra Stiles Ely, a Philadelphia Presbyterian minister, made the call for a “Christian party in politics,” in which he advocated a “nonsectarian” Christianity as the basis for a dominating political party. Ely thought that the Christian religion was essential to assuring morality in political life in the United States. His call took place during disestablishment, and a larger debate in the antebellum United States over the relationship between Church and State, in which many evangelicals supported the suspension of Sunday mails and other “sabbatarian” measures, and large numbers of Jacksonian democrats and rationalist Whigs argued for a strict separation between the Church and State, religion and politics.¹⁵

James Rohrer, in his article on the Sabbatarian movement, explains that Ely’s “Christian party” was, in many ways, a watershed for religious liberals and freethinkers, as they, from 1828 forward, came to link evangelicals with a plan for religious and political dominance.¹⁶ While some evangelicals sought to distance themselves from Ely’s views, which they viewed as extreme, many freethinkers and religious liberals linked his calls for evangelical dominance to the opinion of all evangelical leaders.¹⁷ In this new religious and political framework,

¹⁵ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, “Prelude to Abolitionism: Sabbatarian Politics and the Rise of the Second Party System,” *Journal of American History* 58.2 (1917); James R. Rohrer, “Sunday Mails and the Church-State Theme in Jacksonian America,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 7.1. (1987); Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

¹⁶ James R. Rohrer, “Sunday Mails and the Church-State Theme in Jacksonian America,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 7.1 (1987): 65.

¹⁷ Rohrer, “Sunday Mails,” 65.

Orthodoxy made advances on religious dissidents, and necessitated religious uniformity that religious liberals considered sectarian.

One outdated model for understanding evangelical Orthodoxy and the rise of the “benevolent empire” is the social control thesis. The social control thesis argues that the evangelical movement responded to an essential need in antebellum communities for order.¹⁸ Reformers’ aims, under the social control thesis, were often not genuine – what they expressed as a desire for reform and redemption was really, for historians who advocate the social control thesis, a concern about declining influence and an desire for continued dominance.¹⁹

Opponents of the social control thesis argue that the framework misrepresents the essentially religious nature of evangelical revivalism. More than an attempt to impose social and political order, evangelical revivalism was a communal and an individual movement toward new religious meaning.²⁰ Daniel Walker Howe argues that the revivals were “redemptive” more than “punitive” and, in this sense, they were not solely engaged in efforts toward social control.²¹ Similarly, Lois Banner, in her critique of the social control thesis, cites historians like Perry Miller and Sidney Mead, who look beyond the social control thesis to discover the deeply religious nature of evangelical reformers’ benevolent activities.²²

¹⁸ Clifford S. Griffin, *Their Brothers’ Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865* (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1960); Clifford S. Griffin, “Religious Benevolence as Social Control, 1815-1860,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 44.3 (1957); Charles Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1790-1837* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960).

¹⁹ Lois W. Banner, “Religious Benevolence as Social Control: A Critique of An Interpretation” *Journal of American History*, 60.1. (1993): 23.

²⁰ Daniel Walker Howe, “The Evangelical Movement and Political Culture in the North During the Second Party System,” *Journal of American History* 77.4 (1991): 1218.

²¹ Howe, “The Evangelical Movement,” 1218.

²² Lois W. Banner, “Religious Benevolence as Social Control: A Critique of An Interpretation” *Journal of American History*, 60.1. (1993): 25; Jonathan D. Sassi, *A Republic of Righteousness: The Public Christianity of the Post-Revolutionary New England Clergy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 6.

The social control thesis is an anachronistic rendering of Orthodoxy that fails to account for the ways in which religious liberals conceived of Orthodoxy in their time. While the social control thesis posits a class-based argument, in which Orthodox elites and new industrial leaders imposed controlling religious sensibilities on the masses,²³ many religious liberals and freethinkers saw in Orthodoxy, not necessarily the imposition of class-based control, but rather, an attempt to constrict thought in a union of church and state that enforced one religious viewpoint. James Rohrer explains that many religious liberals charged that Orthodox leaders were “more interested in securing political influence than promoting moral reform.”²⁴ In the *Christian Intelligencer*, explains Rohrer, Universalists argued that Sabbatarians wanted “to ... get Congress entirely under their control.”²⁵ For religious liberals and freethinkers, Orthodoxy plotted for a union of Church and State, and, in the process, it sought to restrict freedom of conscience.²⁶

Religious liberals’ critiques of Orthodoxy were conditioned by a strong emphasis on “democratic anticlericalism.” In this anti-Calvinist framework, anticlerical religious liberals hurled terms like “hireling priests” and “priestcraft” upon Orthodox religious institutions where clergy accumulated prestige and power in the church and society, because they thought these Orthodox constructions corrupted religion by emphasizing hierarchy and privilege in religious life.²⁷ And while Philadelphia Unitarians did not level the same anticlerical critique at “hireling priests” –they paid their minister – Philadelphia Unitarians’ opposition to state-supported religion as Orthodoxy was strongly conditioned by this American anticlerical framework, in which Orthodoxy represented, most fundamentally, the consolidation of privilege with the elite

²³ Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper’s Millennium*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978).

²⁴ Rohrer, “Sunday Mails,” 64.

²⁵ Rohrer, “Sunday Mails,” 65.

²⁶ Rohrer, “Sunday Mails,” 68.

²⁷ Bruce Dorsey, “Friends Becoming Enemies,” 407-408.

and the restriction of free thought. In this sense, an opposition to Orthodoxy brought together religious liberals from many different places, in an anticlerical critique of corruption and hierarchy in mainstream religious culture. And as religious liberals came from a variety of places, they expressed their critique of Orthodoxy in different ways.

On the heels of both the Hicksite Schism and Ely's call for a "Christian party," Ralph Eddowes gave a sermon entitled "The Spirit of Orthodoxy." Like many religious liberals influenced by democratic anticlericalism, Eddowes saw Orthodoxy as a force that used its power to constrain the rights of individuals. Talking about Ely's famous Fourth of July sermon, Eddowes explained that Ely "has been fortunate enough to discover, that the magic power of his project, which will *constrain* men to appear friends of God, followers of Jesus Christ, &c. whether they really are such or not..."²⁸ In other words, Orthodoxy built an institutional structure around religion, and in doing so, it pushed its followers to embrace or acquiesce to evangelical religious commitments. Eddowes insisted that such constraint of and control over individuals was Ely's aim in establishing the "Christian party."

Part of Orthodoxy's ability to constrain individuals came, for Eddowes, from its close relationship to the state. Reaching across the Atlantic, Eddowes recalled the seventeenth-century plight of John Biddle, commonly cited as a leader in English Unitarianism. He explained how John Biddle was branded a heretic by the state for his freethinking religious views—in Eddowes' words "the mild and tolerant genius of true Christianity was overborne by fanaticism and hypocrisy."²⁹ Eddowes saw Ely's Fourth of July sermon, which laid out his support for Andrew Jackson's Christianity, as "similar in principle" to the state-supported Orthodoxy that enveloped

²⁸ Ralph Eddowes and Joshua Toulmin, "The Spirit of Orthodoxy," (Philadelphia, 17), Duke University.

²⁹ Eddowes, "The Spirit of Orthodoxy," 12.

John Biddle.³⁰ In this way, for Eddowes, Orthodoxy, and the way in which it represented the coalition of political and religious forces, was a power “unaltered” through time and space.³¹

The same power that infected the religion of John Biddle in England was present in Ely’s “Christian party” across the Atlantic, as the rights of freethinkers were repeatedly pushed aside by state-supported religion.

Eddowes also saw contemporary Orthodoxy as exclusionary. He might have supported a project that sought to create a nonsectarian religious establishment, explaining that the supposed nondenominational and inclusive nature of Ely’s “Christian party” was “creditable.”³² He explained that, accordingly, “one would think that with these few and slender requisites [required for membership in the Christian party], even Unitarians might not be altogether excluded...”³³ But, Eddowes explained, a sectarian emphasis on revivalism and evangelicalism was embedded deep within his call for nonsectarian Christianity. Ely claimed inclusivity but, in fact, his message was deeply exclusive. For Eddowes, then, Orthodoxy not only constrained individuals, but it also left a mark on those outside of its constraints, by excluding them, and marking them as “a non-entity.”³⁴

Eddowes held up a truly nonsectarian formulation of Unitarianism as an alternative to Ely’s supposedly nonsectarian “Christian party.” Countering Orthodoxy’s penchant for constraint and exclusion, nonsectarian Unitarianism encouraged free thought and individual religious expressions in a variety of religious denominations. He explained that, if evangelicals were to listen to their own spiritual sense, Ely’s “force would be by more than half diminished.” For Eddowes, Orthodoxy’s dissidents should engage in “forming separate societies for

³⁰ Eddowes, “The Spirit of Orthodoxy,” 12.

³¹ Eddowes, “The Spirit of Orthodoxy,” 18.

³² Eddowes, “The Spirit of Orthodoxy,” 16.

³³ Eddowes, “The Spirit of Orthodoxy,” 16.

³⁴ Eddowes, “The Spirit of Orthodoxy,” 16.

themselves... and multitudes who have long been groping in the murky, misty, and mazy precincts of orthodoxy, would emerge into the soul-exalting and joy-inspiring light of the Divine Unity...”³⁵ In other words, Unitarianism operated in a variety of religious sects, as it denounced constraint and exclusion in religious life.

Eddowes’s opposition to Orthodoxy’s schemes embodied in Ely’s “Christian Party” led him to reflect on the recent Hicksite Schism, explaining that “The numerous and highly respectable Society of Friends, have given noble example of this effect...”³⁶ In other words, the Hicksite Quakers threw off Orthodoxy’s constraints and embraced the kind of “divine unity” Eddowes advocated. Importantly, Eddowes, here, refers to the Hicksite Quakers as the Society of Friends, rather than the Hicksites – for him, while the Hicksite Quakers were thoroughly Unitarian, they were also the true Society of Friends, resisting the encroachment of Orthodoxy. In this way, the “divine unity” that Eddowes saw in Hicksite Quakerism was not purely theological – indeed, it appears relatively divorced from a specific denouncement of the doctrine of the Trinity. Rather, the “divine unity” of the Hicksite Friends, for Eddowes, rested in their ability to throw off the encroachments of their Orthodox brethren. By standing against Orthodoxy, Hicksite Quakers became the equivalent of Unitarians.

As Eddowes pointed to the operation of Orthodoxy within sects – in particular within the Society of Friends – he argued that Unitarianism was fundamentally concerned with resisting Orthodoxy in all religious denominations. His nonsectarian Unitarianism mirrored the nonsectarian nature of contemporary Orthodoxy, as he argued for a movement toward universal liberal Christianity that, like Orthodoxy, transcended sectarian concerns to establish one common religious foundation for the new nation. That said, Eddowes’ definition of Unitarianism, here,

³⁵ Eddowes, “The Spirit of Orthodoxy,” 11.

³⁶ Eddowes, “The Spirit of Orthodoxy,” 11.

was also reflective of Unitarian pasts. He built on Priestley's assertion that rational inquiry produced Unitarian truths, as he located, in Hicksite Quakers' spiritual journeys to Unitarianism, Priestley's own movement toward religious truth. And like Priestley, Eddowes asserted that the key difference between his nonsectarian Unitarianism and Ely's "Christian party" rested in his assertion of a strict separation between church and state.

The indeterminacy of the the concepts nonsectarian/sectarian is important here – as Orthodox and heterodox religious people imagined their religious movements crossing sectarian boundaries and fitting within a variety of religious contexts, they imagined it as a nonsectarian force. However, supposedly nonsectarian Orthodoxy and Unitarianism reflected particular social and religious positions that were not accessible to all people. Indeed, nonsectarian Orthodoxy and Unitarianism were, like sectarian religious movements, always exclusive, even as they preached inclusivity.³⁷

As Eddowes' articulated his nonsectarian vision, Unitarianism, on a national scale, moved in the other direction, toward denominationalism. Indeed, as Eddowes' nonsectarian Unitarianism came into focus, the American Unitarian Association formed, in 1825, and a vision for denominational Unitarianism was articulated.³⁸ This decision to unite under a sectarian label was controversial, because, for decades, Unitarians had insisted that "theirs as an ecumenical movement of all 'rational' Christians."³⁹ Many Unitarians in Philadelphia and in New England felt betrayed by this new formulation of Unitarianism.

³⁷ Conrad Wright, "From Standing Order to Secularism" in *The Liberal Christians: Essays on American Unitarian History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 117.

³⁸ Daniel Walker Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861*, (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1988); Earl Morse Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism In Transylvania, England, and America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1945).

³⁹ Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience*, 54.

The decision to consolidate into a sect coincided with New England Unitarianism's break from Congregationalism. Although they would not be officially separate from Congregationalism until 1840, by 1825 Unitarians were "practically a community by themselves."⁴⁰ Unitarians that pushed for the denominational label saw it as essential for defeating Orthodoxy. These ministers felt that the consolidation of Unitarianism into a sect was the only way to ensure that Unitarianism could compete with Orthodoxy, in familiar Eastern locations and also in the emerging West.⁴¹ The consolidation of American Unitarianism into a denomination represented an important shift in its self-identity, and in the way it understood the religious world around it. No longer a movement sheltered within Congregationalism, American Unitarians saw their mission bolstered by a stricter definition of their sect. While Eddowes never referred to the American Unitarian Association in his speech, his nonsectarian Unitarianism was probably formed against a movement to build a denominational structure around Unitarianism. Eddowes' nonsectarian Unitarianism, as it incorporated Hicksite Quakers as Unitarian, directly conflicted with the American Unitarian Association's claim that Unitarianism was a distinct denomination.

Perhaps Eddowes' rejection of the American Unitarian Association reflected the regional debate that pervaded Unitarianism's first few decades in the United States. Eddowes conceived of Orthodoxy as a force that worked in tandem with the state, and, in this way, Eddowes' sermon worked hard to imagine both Orthodoxy and the opposition of non-sectarian Unitarianism as transatlantic forces. He did this by connecting Anglicanism in England to Ely's Christian Party. And whereas denominational Unitarianism declared a national affiliation under the label of the American Unitarian Association, nonsectarian Unitarianism, for Eddowes, was transatlantic.

⁴⁰ Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism*, 435.

⁴¹ Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism*, 435-436.

Eddowes' 1828 sermon linked English orthodoxy to the experience of Americans, and in this way, argued that Unitarianism, as a force to counter Orthodoxy, could not be constrained by national borders. Eddowes' nonsectarian Philadelphia Unitarianism, in this way, functioned as a critique of a nationalist and regionalist discourses in Unitarianism.

While discursive connections between Hicksite Quakers and Unitarians are an important part of understanding Unitarianism in the Hicksite Schism, a complete investigation looks behind rhetoric in an attempt to discover interactions between the sects. In fact, the rhetorical affinities that Eddowes found between Quakers and Unitarians were matched by real-life connections. In the years surrounding the Hicksite Schism, numerous Hicksite Quakers entered into the Philadelphia Unitarian congregation.⁴² While the exact number of Quakers in the congregation in the years after the Hicksite Schism is unknown, Elizabeth Geffen contends that "their number in the church [was] sufficiently large" that their wishes regarding simplicity of worship had to be respected.⁴³ The influx of Hicksite Friends into the Philadelphia Unitarian church in the years surrounding the Hicksite Schism shows that the Schism did not take place within the narrow confines of the Philadelphia meetinghouse. Rather, the rhetorical connections that Eddowes suggested in his configuration of nonsectarian Unitarianism played out in the real life of the church, as English Unitarians sat side-by-side with outcast Quakers.

Previous histories of the Unitarian Church of Philadelphia gloss over the presence of Quakers in the Church. Bowers' *Joseph Priestley and English Unitarianism in America* does not mention the presence of Quakers in the Church, and Elizabeth Geffen's *Philadelphia Unitarianism* briefly mentions the presence of Hicksite Quakers, but does not attach any

⁴² Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, 164.

⁴³ Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, 163.

particular meaning or importance to their existence in the Philadelphia church.⁴⁴ She fails to reflect on how an influx of Hicksite Quakers might have shaped the larger mission or outlook of the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia.

The presence of Quakers in the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia reflected Eddowes' configuration of nonsectarian Unitarianism, in which Hicksite Quakerism represented a fundamental articulation of Unitarianism. Hicksite Quakers and Philadelphia Unitarians tried to bridge their denominational differences, working to realize a nonsectarian Unitarianism that expressed both Quaker and Unitarian traditions. In an 1830 letter, Furness remarked to his sister-in-law that, in the previous night's services, there was "an anthem finely sung. But there are too many Quakers in our society to like such a display."⁴⁵ In this case, Furness was apparently aware of the ways in which a Unitarian service differed from a Quaker meeting, and he signaled that accommodations for the Quaker newcomers should be made.

In the Unitarian Church, though Quakers and Unitarians worked to establish common ground, they generally understood Quakerism and Unitarianism as separate traditions in the Church. Indeed, the kinds of interactions that Hicksites and Unitarians sustained were often meant to emphasize Quaker distinctiveness. Joseph Sill, in an 1836 entry in his diary, described the church's celebration of Communion Day. He explains that, "When I say it was a good Sermon, I mean that it was satisfactory to those who have been in the habit of Communing..." Sill went on to describe the factions in the church who may have been opposed to Communion. He explains that, "there are many of our Congregation who have been originally Quakers, and to this class it must have been considered superfluous..."⁴⁶ So while Quakers were in the Unitarian

⁴⁴ Joseph Bowers, *Joseph Priestley and English Unitarianism in America* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007); Elizabeth Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, 163.

⁴⁵ Elizabeth Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, 163.

⁴⁶ Joseph Sill, *Diary*, 4 December 1836, HSP.

congregation after the Hicksite schism, they were not necessarily thought of as adopted Unitarians – they retained their Quaker distinctiveness.

Sill lived next door to the Friends' Washington Square meetinghouse, and he would often watch the Quakers arrive for Meeting.⁴⁷ Sill found important theological similarities between Quakers and his Unitarian congregation: He claimed that Quakers “have certainly the most fit and correct ideas of the true Worship. God does not need ‘the uplifted eye, or bended knee’...”⁴⁸ Nonetheless, Elizabeth Geffen, in her article “Joseph Sill and His Diary,” argues that the “gravity and quietness [of the Quakers] fascinated him.”⁴⁹ So while Sill understood important similarities between the Unitarians and the Society of Friends, he was often concerned with pointing out differences between the groups. That Hicksite Quakers and Philadelphia Unitarians attempted to establish common ground at the First Unitarian Church, but were also committed to their separate denominations, echoed Eddowes' formulation of nonsectarian Unitarianism, where Hicksite Quakerism was an expression of true Quakerism and, simultaneously, true Unitarianism.

The entrance of Hicksite Quakers into the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia was not the first time dissatisfied Quakers threw off the constraints of Orthodoxy in the Society of Friends and found a new religious home in a Unitarian Church. Five years before the Hicksite schism began in Philadelphia, Quakers in New Bedford, Massachusetts were locked in their own bitter dispute.⁵⁰ From 1822-1824, Quakers in New Bedford split into New-Lights and Old-Lights. The Old-Lights, generally more senior members of the Meeting, saw themselves as the proponents of Quaker traditions, and they deplored the changes that came along with increased

⁴⁷ Elizabeth Geffen, “Joseph Sill and His Diary,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 94:3 (1970): 311.

⁴⁸ Geffen, “Joseph Sill and His Diary,” 311.

⁴⁹ Geffen, “Joseph Sill and His Diary,” 311.

⁵⁰ H. Larry Ingle, *Quakers in Conflict*, 93.

wealth among New Bedford Quakers after the War of 1812. The New-Lights, the more radical faction, saw themselves as marking a return to original Quaker values. Issues of choice in religious expression were at the center of the conflict. Frederick Tolles, in one of the only scholarly accounts of the New Bedford controversy, argues that the conflict reached its climax when some New-Lights attended a Unitarian service.⁵¹ He explains that “the crucial issue between the two groups had less to do with the substance of belief than with the freedom of individual Friends to follow their inward Guide wherever it might lead them.”⁵² In this sense, the conflict in New Bedford revolved around competing conceptions of rationalism and mysticism in the Quaker faith. Was Unitarian rationalism an apt expression of Quaker values, or did it represent an abandonment of core Quaker values?

Upon the New Lights’ disownment from the Society of Friends in 1824, “nearly all” of New-Lights, including New-Light leaders Newhall and Rotch, joined the Unitarian Church of New Bedford.⁵³ In March 1825, twenty-four pew holders at the Unitarian church were outcast Quakers.⁵⁴ And the exodus from Quakerism to Unitarianism in New Bedford did not fade – in 1832, when a new church building was commissioned, one-fourth of those that contributed to the efforts were former Quakers.⁵⁵

The entrance of dissatisfied Quakers into the New Bedford Church is important to a study of the Hicksite Schism in Philadelphia for two reasons. First, the New Bedford Schism between the Old Lights and the New Lights was an important precursor to the Hicksite Schism. In both the New Bedford and Hicksite Schisms, Unitarianism played an important role, as dissatisfied

⁵¹ Frederick Tolles, “The New-Light Quakers of Lynn and New Bedford,” *The New England Quarterly* 32.3 (1959): 293.

⁵² Tolles, “The New-Light Quakers...”, 294.

⁵³ Tolles, “The New-Light Quakers...”, 318.

⁵⁴ T.N. Stern. *The New Light/Old Light conflict among New Bedford [sic] Quakers*. 1994. Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore, 8.

⁵⁵ Stern, *The New Light/Old Light conflict*, 8.

Quakers identified with a Unitarian commitment to free thought. In his account of the New Bedford conflict, Frederick Tolles notes the similarities between the 1822 conflict in New Bedford and the Hicksite Schism in Philadelphia only five years later.⁵⁶ Indeed, issues of freedom of religious expression were central to both conflicts. Tolles also notes that while there was no “causal” link between the New Bedford controversy and the Hicksite Schism, the events in New Bedford can be viewed “as a minor skirmish preliminary to that wider struggle.”⁵⁷

Contemporaries also saw the New Bedford conflict and the Hicksite Schism as intertwined. In his reflection on the New Bedford Unitarian Church’s history, William James Potter, the minister of the New Bedford Unitarian Church in the mid-nineteenth century, actually referred to the New-Light Quakers that joined the Unitarian church in the 1820s as Hicksites. He wrote,

“With [Orville Dewey’s] coming, the Hicksite, or Unitarian, portion of the Society of Friends in this place, in which a separation had just occurred, came into this society in a body...”⁵⁸

For Potter, the Hicksite Schism was clearly not separated from the events in New Bedford five years earlier. Potter saw both the New-Light and Hicksite Schisms as emanating from a Quaker desire for stronger emphasis on an individual’s religious mission separate from his or her denomination.

The second reason why the New Bedford conflict between the Old Lights and New Lights is important in the Philadelphia Church is that the historical record can only tell us so much about the ways in which the self-identity of the First Unitarian Church changed after the Hicksite Schism, when Quakers entered the congregation. With the New Bedford Schism for

⁵⁶ Tolles, “The New-Light Quakers,” 295.

⁵⁷ Tolles, “The New-Light Quakers,” 294.

⁵⁸ William James Potter, “Some Aspects of Unitarianism in its past and recent history,” *New Bedford: Fessenden & Baker*, (1874) 11, Yale University.

comparison, we can better speculate as to the way in which a Quaker influx into the Philadelphia Unitarian Church might have facilitated changes in the Church. The ways in which Quakers changed the self-identity of the Unitarian church, as well as the way in which orthodoxy was wrapped in denominational concerns for New Bedford Quakers and Unitarians, can illuminate our understanding of the Hicksite Schism in the Philadelphia Unitarian Church.

In New Bedford, the entrance of dissenting Quakers greatly changed the self-identity of the Unitarian church. The influx of Quakers into the New Bedford Unitarian church worked to bring forth a spirit of nonsectarian rationalism that mirrored the sort of religion that Eddowes saw as the greatest antidote to Orthodoxy. In the winter of 1833-1834, New Bedford Unitarian minister Orville Dewey asked Ralph Waldo Emerson to temporarily take his pulpit. According to historian of the church, E. Stanton Hodgkin, the New Bedford congregation was particularly “prepared” to welcome Emerson’s transcendentalist Unitarianism, “because of the large influx of liberal Friends... bring so much of their free spirit with them.”⁵⁹ The influx of Quakers into the New Bedford Unitarian church worked to imbue the New Bedford Unitarian church with a sense of nonsectarian religious rationalism. The specific operation of Quakerism in the New Bedford Unitarian church suggests that an influx of Quakerism could actually work to shift the self-identity of a Unitarian church.

In the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia, a similar model could very well have played out. In other words, while a nonsectarian articulation of Unitarianism seems to have created an environment particularly suited for Quakerism in the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia, the New Bedford example illustrates the ways in which the presence of Quakerism in a Unitarian Church could itself precipitate an emphasis on nonsectarianism.

⁵⁹ Frederick Tolles, “Emerson and Quakerism” *American Literature* 10:2 (1938), 157.

In both the Philadelphia and New Bedford Unitarian Churches, a Quaker presence in the church was connected to the church's reluctance to embrace the American Unitarian Association (AUA) and a subsequent emphasis on free thought. Indeed, in both the Philadelphia and New Bedford Churches, free thought and a rejection of a denominational identity appear deeply related to a Quaker influence.

In the New Bedford Unitarian church, Quaker influence was connected with the Church's dissatisfaction with AUA. For William James Potter a transition to Quakerism was related to a rejection denominationalism, and the way in restricted free thought. Potter's own religious journey repeatedly deemphasized the importance of religious denomination. His religious biography showcases the intersection, in the minds of religious liberals, between Quaker Orthodoxy and attempts to consolidate Unitarianism into a sect. For Potter, those two issues were intimately connected in his own religious experience, as he opposed any attempts to impose a form on religion.

Potter was born in New Dartmouth, Massachusetts, and attended school in Massachusetts and Rhode Island.⁶⁰ During his teenage years, his extensive reading of religious tracts, specifically those of W.E. Channing and Charles Follen, called him to question his Quaker upbringing.⁶¹ In his sermon "Some Aspects of Unitarianism," Potter explained that his transition to Unitarianism was based less on specific theological teachings of Unitarianism, and more soundly on what he saw as a Unitarian emphasis on freedom of thought.⁶² As Quakerism seemed to proscribe certain religious proclivities, Unitarianism appeared to emphasize the

⁶⁰ Creighton Peden and Everett J. Tarbox, "Introduction" in *Essays and Sermons of William James Potter* vol. 1, ed. Creighton Peden and Everett J. Tarbox (Lewiston, NY: Edward Mellen Press, 2003), 1.

⁶¹ Peden and Tarbox, *Essays and Sermons*, 1.

⁶² Potter, "Some Aspects of Unitarianism," 19.

individual's religious journey. As a young adult, Potter matriculated at Harvard Divinity School, and studied to become a Unitarian minister.

Despite his initial understanding that Unitarianism emphasized free thought, Potter described constantly struggling to fit his religious views under the banner of "Unitarian" while at Harvard Divinity School. The American Unitarian Association was, at the time, unfriendly to those within the faith who took biblical rationalism to an extreme, most notably Theodore Parker. Of the evolution of his religious beliefs, Potter wrote, "To Channing and Follen and Unitarian writers of that stamp, had succeeded naturally, in my reading, Emerson and Martineau and Furness and Parker and Strauss; and, what with their influence and the rationalistic tendency of my own mind, my religious views had become such that it was a troubling question whether any foothold could be found any where for such a ministry as mine must be..."⁶³ In other words, Potter gravitated toward the radical wing of the Unitarian association, which was increasingly under attack from more conservative Unitarians. Of this time, he explains, "I did not really belong to any denomination, nor did I wish to be considered a denominational candidate. I would have gone just as readily to an Orthodox Society as to a Unitarian, if an Orthodox Society would have received me and given me full liberty of utterance."⁶⁴ Unitarianism appealed to this former Orthodox Quaker because it deemphasized denomination altogether. Attempts in the 1820s and 1830s to consolidate Unitarianism into a sect made Potter uneasy. He argued that the goal of Unitarianism "is higher and larger than simply to make a new sect..."⁶⁵ In this way, Potter's journey from Quakerism to Unitarianism was deeply related to his emphasis on free thought and nonsectarianism in Unitarianism. Potter embodied an important link between Quakerism in the Unitarian church and a rejection of the AUA. In Potter's life, a transition from

⁶³ Potter, "Some Aspects of Unitarianism," 21.

⁶⁴ Potter, "Some Aspects of Unitarianism," 22.

⁶⁵ Potter, "Some Aspects of Unitarianism," 24.

Quakerism to Unitarianism informed a consequent rejection of the AUA and an emphasis on free thought.

Similarly, In the Philadelphia Unitarian Church, it was a fact generally acknowledged that Furness had little patience for the encroachment of the American Unitarian Association into his pulpit.⁶⁶ Furness often implied that the lack of interest his congregation had in the American Unitarian Association stemmed from its association with Quakers. Furness explained to his Boston friend, Rev. Charles Lowe, secretary of the American Unitarian Association, in 1868 that “It occurs to me that you would like to make us that official visit we talked about... There are some of our members who have the denominational interest... They would all listen with good will, but many of them are or were of Quaker avocations.”⁶⁷ In this instance, Furness argued that the sort of Unitarian preaching called for by the American Unitarian Association was not entirely welcomed in the Philadelphia Unitarian Church, where the church service was tailored for both a Unitarian and a Quaker audience. Perhaps Furness’s strongest articulation of his ambivalence toward the AUA came in one of the last sermons he gave, upon his retirement. Looking back over the history the Philadelphia Church, he explained “I confess, friends... that I have been lacking in denominational zeal. I have accounted it a happiness to welcome here...those who care less for our denominational name, those who, if they were not among us, would be among the Friends.”⁶⁸ In this instance, too, Furness sees Philadelphia Unitarians and their history with the Quakers as furthering a specific brand of Unitarianism, one not fully understood by the AUA. For Furness, Quakers in his congregation was the explicit reason for his ambivalence toward the AUA.

⁶⁶ William James Potter, “Some Aspects of Unitarianism,” 25.

⁶⁷ Furness to Lowe, 6 April 1868, AUA Letterbooks, Harvard-Andover Theological Library

⁶⁸ William Henry Furness, “Recollections of seventy years: a discourse delivered in the First Unitarian Church in Philadelphia,” 23.

Just as Potter connected journeys from Quakerism to Unitarianism to an emphasis on freethought and a denouncement of religious denomination, Furness's reluctance toward denominational Unitarianism pushed him to see free thought as an essentially Unitarian value. In 1845, when the Unitarian church attempted to curtail Theodore Parker's radicalism by limiting his pulpit exchanges, Furness controversially sided with Parker. In his January 1845 sermon, he explained that the way in which the AUA attempted to censor Parker, arguing that "But now, it appears, that Unitarians have a creed after all, an unwritten creed..."⁶⁹ So while Furness insisted that he did not agree with Parker's theological sentiments, he conceived of a Unitarian church that welcomed Parker's radicalism. For Furness, "the right and duty of private judgment" was at the center of true Unitarianism.⁷⁰ Just as in the New Bedford Church, then, in Philadelphia, spiritual journeys from Quakerism to Unitarianism combined with an emphasis on freethought and a rejection of religious denominations. As Quakers and Unitarians fled Orthodoxy and imagined an alternative nonsectarian heterodox Christianity, they saw all attempts to control the form and function of religion as the encroachment of Orthodoxy.

In some ways, Hicksite Quakers and Unitarians appear connected to the experiences of those in the larger freethought community. In his article "Skepticism and American Faith: Infidels, Converts, and Religious Doubt in the Early Nineteenth Century," Christopher Grasso explains that religious skepticism in the first half of the nineteenth century should focus on revealing skeptics', converts', and dissidents' "complicated lives" that "denominational boxes"

⁶⁹ William Henry Furness, "Two Discourses Delivered in the First Congregational Unitarian Church" (Philadelphia, 1845), 9, Discourses, HSP.

⁷⁰ William Henry Furness, "Two Discourses," 7.

often miss.⁷¹ The “complicated lives” of religious dissidents in this time period, Grasso argues, “encourages us to pay attention, not just to the replacement of one set of beliefs and practices by another (as in the much discussed evangelical conversion experience) but to the periods of doubt and questioning themselves.”⁷² For religious skeptics and doubters, and also for Hicksite Quakers and Philadelphia Unitarians, combating orthodoxy meant, not only leaving orthodox denominations, but complicating an evangelical narrative that sought to define that very leaving as “conversion” to another religion. By occupying spaces in between denominations, religious doubters, skeptics, and Philadelphia Hicksites and Unitarians attempted to break free from orthodoxy and an attached narrative that saw their departures as denominational conversions. So Hicksite Quakers in the Unitarian church were both Quaker and Unitarian, they mirrored the experiences of other religious skeptics and dissidents, as all these anti-evangelical religious people straddled boundaries between denominations.

While Hicksite Quakers and Philadelphia Unitarians appear, in this way, connected to contemporary radical freethought movements, Philadelphia Unitarians seem to have downplayed, or downright rejected, such connections. The extent to which Philadelphia Unitarians did not necessarily extend their vision of nonsectarian Unitarianism to accompany radical freethinkers within their ranks showcases the operation of certain assumptions about social class in Philadelphia Unitarianism in the 1820s and 1830s.

The radical freethought movement that emerged contemporary to the Hicksite Schism was itself deeply conscious of the operation of class-based hierarchies in American society. In the 1820s, a resurgence of the radical freethought movement found footing up and down the east

⁷¹ Christopher Grasso, “Skepticism and American Faith: Infidels, Converts, and Religious Doubt in the Early Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 22.3 (2002): 469.

⁷² Grasso, “Skepticism and American Faith,” 469.

coast.⁷³ In 1829, spurred on by Fanny Wright's dramatic lectures, freethinkers like Robert Dale Owen and Abner Kneeland formed the First Society of Free Enquirers.⁷⁴ These men and women "saw themselves as recently liberated victims of a system of intellectual bondage, and they were determined to bring others to the same level of consciousness of their true situations in American democracy." Roderick French, in his article on Abner Kneeland's freethought campaign, argues that these radical freethinkers "perceived a connection between their benighted intellectual condition and their standing in society..." The 1820s resurgence of radical freethought, then, was focused on the marginalized in American society – particularly the women and the poor. Central to the movement of radical freethinkers in the 1820s was a self-identification with the lower classes.⁷⁵

Philadelphia Unitarianism's general rejection of the free thought movement illustrates the ways in which particular assumptions about social class were embedded in Philadelphia Unitarianism in the 1820s. In December 1829, free thought activists asked Philadelphia Unitarian Bronson Alcott to serve as an instructor for children of freethought activists in Boston. Alcott refused, explaining that to accept such employment would be "absolutely wrong." He railed against the precepts of the Free Inquirers of Boston, insisting that the members "oppose religion not because they deem it injurious to the interests of man but from that love of independence which always results when numbers are concerned..." In other words, for Alcott, freethinkers' rejection of religion was not a principled attack on Orthodoxy's constraints, but rather, a haphazard attempt to release themselves from all authority. For Alcott, freethought

⁷³ Roderick S. French, "The Trials of Abner Kneeland: A Study in the Rejection of Democratic Secular Humanism" Dissertation. George Washington University, Washington. D.C., 1971; Roderick S. French, "Liberation from Man and God: Abner Kneeland's Freethought Campaign, 1830-1839" *American Quarterly* 32.2 (1980): 204.

⁷⁴ French, "Liberation from Man and God," 204.

⁷⁵ French, "Liberation from Man and God," 204.

activists' attack on authority was not intellectual. He explained that while freethought activist Fanny Wright "...is right in many of her views...their party are not wise enough to understand her..."⁷⁶ In Alcott's view, the freethought community's campaign against religion was not Unitarian because it was not intellectual. In this way, Alcott's critique of freethought activism as anti-intellectual probably was meant to reflect on class distinctions between Unitarians and freethought activists. While Unitarians leveled an educated, intellectual critique on Orthodoxy, freethought advocates, for Alcott, were rebellious members of the working class, whose critiques of orthodoxy were self-serving – for Alcott, freethinkers wanted to transcend their working-class status by eschewing all authority.⁷⁷

Philadelphia Unitarians' relationships with Universalists in the 1820s also illustrates the ways in which class hierarchies deeply influenced vision for nonsectarian Unitarianism, and who was included in that supposedly "nonsectarian" formulation. At the time of the Hicksite Schism, Abner Kneeland was the minister of the Lombard Street Universalist Church in Philadelphia. Kneeland, a native of Gardner, Massachusetts, was also a unitarian – as early as 1805, he denounced the doctrine of the Trinity, and upheld Socinian Unitarianism.⁷⁸ He was well versed in Joseph Priestley's work, and the English Unitarian played a large role in Kneeland's spiritual development. In these ways, the Universalist minister seems to clearly fit with Eddowes' description of the nonsectarian Unitarianism that connected Hicksite Quakers and Unitarians. Kneeland was heterodox, anti-Trinitarian, and deeply informed by Joseph Priestley's theology. However, Kneeland pursued no affiliation with Philadelphia Unitarians. Indeed, Kneeland and Philadelphia Unitarians seem to have operated as relative strangers in the 1820s in Philadelphia.

⁷⁶ French, "The Trials of Abner Kneeland," 137.

⁷⁷ For more on Bronson Alcott's Philadelphia Unitarianism, see Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, 165.

⁷⁸ French, "The Trials of Abner Kneeland," 26.

Class probably played an important role in the separation between Kneeland and Philadelphia Unitarians. In his comprehensive history of the Universalist church, Russell Miller seeks to explain the chasm that separated Unitarians from Universalists in the antebellum United States. In addition to basic theological differences between Unitarianism and Universalism, Miller explains that many Unitarians and Universalists interpreted their primary differences in terms of social standing. Unitarian Henry Bellows, for instance, argued that differences in social standing had “undoubtedly done more to keep us apart than all other things. Unitarians have looked down upon Universalists, and Universalists have felt social jealousy of Unitarians.”⁷⁹ Similarly, Universalist Thomas Whittmore succinctly explained that “Unitarianism is the liberal Christianity of the aristocracy, -- Universalism of the common people.”⁸⁰ For leaders in antebellum Unitarianism and Universalism, social class was at the heart of the entrenched separation between the faiths.

The separation between Unitarians and Universalists on the basis of social class was probably conditioned by the legacy of the Standing Order in New England. In New England, Unitarians occupied positions of privilege in the state-supported Standing Order, whereas Universalists were branded the “dissenters.” Philadelphia’s Unitarianism was never bolstered by a Standing Order, and English Unitarians were deeply ambivalent about any encroachment by the state into religious matters. That said, English Unitarians, like New England Unitarians, largely came from privileged sections of society. And as the regional conflict between Philadelphia and New England Unitarianism faded, and the two camps exchanged ministers and ideas, the New England impetus to understand Universalism as a “dissenting” religion could have taken hold in Philadelphia as well. In this sense, the Standing Order’s institutionalization

⁷⁹ Russell Miller, *The Larger Hope* (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1979), 808.

⁸⁰ Miller, *The Larger Hope*, 809.

of Unitarian privilege might have reinforced Philadelphia Unitarianism's position within the upper classes.

Philadelphia Unitarians interpreted the Hicksite Schism within class strictures. They were opposed to evangelical orthodoxy and supportive of Christian heterodoxy as long as such a position remained "intellectual" and middle class. Philadelphia Unitarian's deference to social and class norms recalls Nathan Hatch's important intervention in early republic and antebellum religious history. He explains that the tradition interpretation puts evangelicalism and rationalism in opposed camps -- "the Second Great Awakening became the Thermidor of the American Enlightenment, the working out of opposite impulses."⁸¹ Instead, Hatch argues, "the most profound religious debates in the early republic followed social and class lines rather than merely intellectual ones."⁸² That is, while Unitarians were deeply committed to an Enlightenment rationalism that railed against evangelical enthusiasm, such an intellectual emphasis on rationalism as the opposite of evangelicalism seems to collapse when we view 1820s Unitarians within their social and cultural world. For Philadelphia's Unitarians, Universalists, radical freethinkers, and evangelical revivalists were all similar working-class upstarts. Social and class distinctions, and the ways those mingled with an intellectual emphasis on rationalism, demonstrate Philadelphia Unitarianism's opposite impulses toward inclusion and exclusion.

As the Hicksite Schism entered the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia, Philadelphia Unitarians asserted a new Unitarian self-identity that saw the experiences of Hicksite Quakers as the equivalent of Unitarian ones. Mirroring Orthodoxy's supposedly nonsectarian ambitions,

⁸¹ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 35.

⁸² Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 35.

Philadelphia Unitarians argued for a new nonsectarian Unitarianism that would combat Orthodoxy's constraints, and they saw Hicksite Quakers as an essential part of that movement toward a nonsectarian Unitarianism that supported free thought and individual spiritual journeys over powerful attempts to regulate religion.

Journeys Toward Liberation

In 1842, shortly after the death of John Vaughan, William Henry Furness memorialized the leader, matching Vaughan's death with the recent deaths of other prominent Philadelphians. Reflecting on the death of Vaughan and others, Furness said, "It seems as if the very city they inhabited and honored had passed away with them... It is no longer the place it was."¹ While Furness, here, was talking about Philadelphia in general, the same could be said for the Unitarian Church in the 1840s, as abolition and come-outerism entered the church and facilitated great changes. In these years, Philadelphia Unitarians and Quakers sustained new relationships as abolitionism contributed to the sphere of moral reform for members of both sects.

The story I trace is about the way in which Quakers and Unitarians, and other heterodox Christians, incorporated abolitionism into their religious worldviews. Heterodox Christians who were active in radical abolitionism expressed their heterodoxy through their bodies, so that their religious oppression was mirrored in the bondage of slaves. Furness's spiritual journey toward a heterodox Christianity that stood up against the power of slavery was reflected by other abolitionists who frequented the church. Lucretia Mott, a Hicksite Quaker, was an important voice for radical abolitionism in the church in the 1840s, and she pressed Unitarians to realize the full implications of their religious beliefs. Meanwhile, come-outers, radical abolitionists who left their proslavery religious institutions in protest, came to the Unitarian church in large measure to find their antislavery commitments reinforced and recharged. William Henry Furness negotiated between this heterodox community of radical abolitionism and the First Unitarian Church, where abolitionism provoked a conflict that forced Philadelphia's Unitarians

¹ William Henry Furness, "A Discourse Delivered on the Occasion of the Death of John Vaughan in the First Congregational Unitarian Church," (Philadelphia, 1842), 14, Discourses, HSP.

to address the nature of Unitarianism. The resolution of this conflict resulted in the articulation of a new origins story for the church. This new origins story located radical abolitionists' embodied spiritual journeys at the center of contemporary Philadelphia Unitarianism.

In October of 1846, the American Unitarian Association held its semi-annual Autumnal Convention of Unitarian Christians in Philadelphia. The event served as a forum for Unitarian ministers and active members of Unitarian societies to discuss sustaining themes in contemporary American Unitarianism. The anti-creedal nature of Unitarianism, regional divisions within the Unitarian movement, and the substance of moral reform were central issues in the conversation, as Unitarians grappled with social and religious change in the 1840s. More acutely, the convention exposed the ways in which contemporary circumstances shaped relationships between Quakers and Unitarians, as many of those who attended the convention increasingly understood the struggle against the broad and oppressive power of orthodoxy in terms of slavery.

The 1846 Unitarian convention in Philadelphia opened with a resolution honoring William Penn's emphasis on religious tolerance. The resolution itself identified Penn's "Christian character and services" as the same sort of liberal Christian spirit that currently prevailed within American Unitarianism,² and was meant to reflect on the meaning of the Convention's location in Philadelphia. A resolution honoring Penn was, to a large extent, a response to a strained relationship between New England and Philadelphia Unitarians. Indeed, the Convention's location in Philadelphia itself implied reconciliation – "It is a circumstance of no little importance," said one Philadelphia Unitarian, "that a Unitarian Convention...is met here

² *Proceedings of the Regular Autumnal Convention of Unitarian Christians: held in the city of Philadelphia, October 20th, 1846* (Philadelphia: Richard Beresford, 1846), 10.

at the invitation of a Society so long looked at askance...’’³ In identifying William Penn with Unitarian principles, delegates at the Convention sought to move past regional divisions that interpreted Joseph Priestley’s Unitarianism as a foreign expression of Unitarianism. A resolution reflecting on the ways in which William Penn’s principles resembled Unitarian ones was meant as a symbolic bridging of regional divides in American Unitarianism.

While the resolution was probably intended as a conciliatory gesture toward Philadelphia’s particular history in the Unitarian movement, the discussion that came after the resolution’s announcement largely bypassed any focus on William Penn and the history of Philadelphia, and instead moved toward the contemporary relationship between Quakerism and Unitarianism. A gesture to honor William Penn as a mid-Atlantic promoter of religious tolerance became, instead, a discussion of theological and social affinities between Quakers and Unitarians.

Some Unitarians rose to articulate points of theological congruence between their own religion and that of the Quakers. Reverend Osgood from Providence, for instance, discussed Quaker conceptions of the Trinity and the divinity of Christ. Osgood argued that Quaker conceptions of Christ’s divinity were “indefinite,” and he found meaning in ambiguity that he pinpointed.⁴ He argued that Quakers “maintained the divinity of Christ in a manner before which Trinitarian Orthodoxy must feel its dogmatism rebuked, and narrow Rationalism must acknowledge its boasted wisdom to be folly.”⁵ For Osgood, Quaker conceptions of Christ were situated in between evangelical and rationalist extremes. This moderate approach, for Osgood, escaped a tendency on the part of proponents of orthodoxy and heterodoxy to express their religious worldviews in terms of creeds and dogmas – written consolidations of “truth” that

³ *Proceedings of the Regular Autumnal Convention*, 13.

⁴ *Proceedings of the Regular Autumnal Convention*, 16.

⁵ *Proceedings of the Regular Autumnal Convention*, 16.

distorted true religion. For Osgood, Quakers' theology was Unitarian because it looked beyond human interventions in religion.

Unitarians also pointed to the Quaker emphasis on the inward light as a phenomenon that found particular expression in contemporary Unitarianism. William Henry Furness connected Transcendentalism and Quakerism through the Quaker notion of the inward light, arguing that Transcendentalism was really "Quakerism under an academic form" because of its emphasis on "the inward voice, and the inner illumination..."⁶ For Unitarians in the 1840s, the Quaker notion of the inward light articulated a sense of freedom of thought and action in religion that fit with a larger Unitarian denouncement of clericalism.

While Furness argued that Quakerism and Unitarianism were connected because, in both faiths, the inward light privileged the individual's conscience, intellect, and reason in religious life, in fact, Quakerism's inward light was grounded in a mysticism that was largely absent in the Unitarian tradition. The term "inward light" reflected, in the Quaker tradition, on revelation, rather than rationalism, as it was something received from outside one's body.⁷ So while Furness reached to find theological similarities with the Quakers and, he actually elided key theological distinctions between the faiths, missing the emphasis on mysticism and revelation in the Quaker notion of the "inward light," seeing the Quaker "inward light," rather, as an emphasis on the individual's conscience.

Another Unitarian minister, Reverend Farley from Brooklyn, described the way in which sectarian divisions between Quakers and Unitarians distorted the essential links between the faiths. Explaining that, in modern Unitarian societies, there are "... many individuals brought up under the influence of the Friends...", Farley attached great importance to the presence of the

⁶ *Proceedings of the Regular Autumnal Convention*, 12.

⁷ Hugh Barbour and J. William Frost, *The Quakers* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 98.

Friends in Unitarianism, and described a lecture he gave that suggested that William Penn's Quaker theology actually pointed toward Unitarianism.⁸ He described the reaction of one young Quaker woman to the lecture, who, according to Farley, expressed great interest in the sort of connections Farley pointed to between liberal Quakerism and Unitarianism. While her father strongly opposed her fraternization with Unitarians, the woman's interest persisted -- she borrowed a book from Farley on the subject, and retained a great interest in uncovering the substance of the theological connection between Quakers and Unitarians.⁹ Farley's tale spoke against narrow sectarian boundaries. Deep investigations of liberal Christianity, for Farley, revealed a larger heterodox community in which Unitarians and Quakers were connected.

The theological connections Unitarians like Farley, Furness, and Osgood identified with the Quakers were part of an effort by Unitarians to define contemporary orthodoxy. For these ministers, orthodoxy in the 1840s most clearly revealed itself as a force that controlled the individual's conscience. Quakerism and Unitarianism were, for Unitarian delegates at the Convention, connected in their efforts to combat orthodoxy, as both faiths emphasized the role of the individual in crafting his or her own religious journey.

The Unitarians at the Convention collapsed Quaker history, so that William Penn became an example of contemporary Quakerism over a century after his death. None of the Unitarian ministers at the Convention spoke of the Hicksites, or of Unitarian connections to Elias Hicks. The Unitarian Convention imagined Quakerism in the 1840s as if there was one, consolidated Quaker history, when in fact, contemporary Quakerism was deeply fractured. Unitarians at the Convention, then, not only distorted Quaker theologies to forge connections across denominations, but they also crafted a Quaker history that projected William Penn into the

⁸ *Proceedings of the Regular Autumnal Convention*, 12.

⁹ *Proceedings of the Regular Autumnal Convention*, 12.

nineteenth century. This history-making work communicated to Unitarians that religious truth, once located at the denominational boundary between Quakerism and Unitarianism, was consistent and clear. Glossing over the controversies that enveloped the Society of Friends in the nineteenth century, these Unitarian ministers argued that religious truth was discernable from orthodoxy's fallacies precisely because it was easily traceable – it had been there all along, under the surface.

In the 1840s, Philadelphia radical abolitionism and heterodox Christianity intersected in the lives and missions of Lucretia Mott and William Henry Furness. Leaders in their faiths and also radical abolitionists, Lucretia Mott and William Henry Furness offer clear examples of the operation of heterodox Christianity in 1840s Philadelphia. Mott's and Furness's particular religious and social frameworks help to showcase the way in which heterodox Christianity intersected with and, in fact, bolstered, abolitionist rhetoric. This intersection between liberal religion and radical abolitionism is central to the 1840s formulation of heterodox Christianity that connected liberal Quakers and Unitarians.

The relationship between evangelical revivalism and radical abolition has been well studied. The essence of evangelical radical abolitionism was a focus on moral agency, and a belief that constraint of individual moral agency paralleled the enslavement of Africans. Radical abolitionists James C. Birney argued that colonization was “an opiate of the consciences.”¹⁰ In contrast, as James Brewer Stewart argues in *Holy Warriors*, radical abolitionism rested “entirely in the individual's ability to recognize and redeem himself or herself from sin.”¹¹ In this way, an individual's turn from colonization to immediate abolitionism mirrored an evangelical

¹⁰ James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: the Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), 45.

¹¹ Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, 46.

conversion experience, in which the strictures of Calvinism were abandoned and individual agency emphasized.

In some instances, an evangelical emphasis on moral agency conditioned an emphasis, not necessarily on the slave as symbolic of Calvinism's constraints, but on the redemption of the person of the slaveholder. Understanding abolition in the context of evangelical benevolence, Stewart argues that "Opposition to slavery certainly constituted a dramatic affirmation of one's pure Christian identity and commitment to a life of evangelical engagement. Economic exploitation, sexual license, physical abuse, gambling, drinking, and dueling, disregard for family ties – all traits associated with slaveowning—could easily be set in bold contrast with the pure ideas of Christian humanitarianism."¹² In this sense, for Stewart, radical abolitionists' emphasis on moral agency conditioned a focus on the redemption of the slaveholder.

Other radical abolitionists contrasted an emphasis in evangelicalism on moral agency with the enslavement of Africans. In *Cosmos Crumbling*, Robert Abzug describes the religious views of immediate abolitionism's founder William Lloyd Garrison. Evangelical revivalism led Garrison to speak out against slavery – his evangelicalism caused him to question evangelical institutions themselves, as he relied on his individual conscience as the ultimate moral guide. Abzug explains that, "While he wholeheartedly championed evangelical reform, he felt free to test the consistency of its leaders and extend its logic in ways that advanced his search for the wellsprings of the religious life."¹³ Such was the basis of Garrison's antislavery work, as an evangelical emphasis on moral agency underscored his calls for freedom for the enslaved.

Historians often flatten the substance of heterodox radical abolitionists' beliefs. John McKivigan, in *The War Against Proslavery Religion*, for example, delves into the substance of

¹² Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, 42-43.

¹³ Robert Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 138.

immediate abolitionists' religious views, explaining that members of the American Anti-Slavery Society, "challenged the infallibility of the Bible, the spiritual authority of the clergy, and the sanctity of the Sabbath."¹⁴ However, he does not seek to understand in detail the intersection of religion and antislavery work for radical abolitionists, arguing instead that, "Because the AASS had no religious tests, the society attracted conspicuously large numbers of Unitarians, spiritualists, feminists, communitarians, and other theological and social radicals"¹⁵ In this example, McKivigan describes a connection between liberal religious views and antislavery work, but he does not delve deeper into how heterodox Christianity informed and intersected with radical abolition. How did liberal religious views take root in antislavery work, and how did this new intersection of religion and politics alter previous notions of a nonsectarian movement toward liberal Christianity and rational skepticism?

Nancy Isenberg offers one answer in her study of radical abolition and religious heterodoxy in the 1840s. In *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America*, she explains that "tension between custom and consciousness" in religious life was at the center of 1840s definitions of orthodoxy. Many liberal religious people thought that orthodox religions "trained people to... pay attention to the form – the image—rather than the substance of truth."¹⁶ For religious liberals, individual conscience was directly opposed to an orthodox focus on custom. A focus on conscience instead pressed individuals to explore religious and social issues with depth, rather than looking at their "form." Unitarian connections with Quakerism at the 1846 Convention were deeply informed by this framework, in which looking deeper into heterodox faiths precipitated connections among them. By extension, as radical abolitionists looked more

¹⁴ John R. McKivigan, *The War Against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 66.

¹⁵ McKivigan, *The War Against Proslavery Religion*, 66.

¹⁶ Nancy Isenberg, *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 85.

deeply at slavery, rather than just its “form,” they came to oppose slavery as a system that thrived on control of individuals.

Moral agency is at the center of Isenberg’s study of “form” versus “substance” in heterodox religious life. As heterodox Christians looked past “form” toward “substance” they engaged in religious and social issues as individuals. With their emphasis on moral agency and individual conscience, some evangelicals and liberal Christians could find affinities in the sphere of antislavery work. And yet, they came to this emphasis in vastly different ways. As such, an evangelical and a heterodox Christian focus on moral agency does not imply similar religious stories, but broader cultural affinities, exposed in antislavery work.

Bruce Dorsey, in *Reforming Men and Women*, offers another important frame for understanding the religious beliefs of heterodox radical abolitionists. He explores the intersection of religion and antislavery work for abolitionists, arguing that anticlericalism provided a critical framework for radical abolitionists. He examines the particular capacity of anticlericalism to offer critiques that stretched to connect themes in religious life to social and political ills. Dorsey argues that anticlericalism provided a “common language for numerous dissidents...”¹⁷ Looking closely at the activism of radical female abolitionists like Mary Grew and the Grimke sisters, Dorsey argues that “[t]heir anticlericalism represented not only a democratic assault on the special privileges of a clerical aristocracy, but also a gendered critique of the masculine privilege embedded in church institutions and biblical interpretations that had kept women in subjugation to men for centuries.”¹⁸ Radical female abolitionists’ critiques of gender hierarchies were expressed through an anticlerical discourse that railed against power and authority in its many manifestations. For Dorsey, anticlericalism was a radical discourse of dissent with the

¹⁷ Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 177.

¹⁸ Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women*, 178.

ability to connect women's rights, antislavery work and religious heterodoxy, as radical abolitionists configured those evils as consequences of the same orthodoxy that constricted the rights of individuals on all fronts.

Lucretia Mott's life and work constitutes a clear example of the operation of this anticlerical discourse, as Mott maintained that slavery and religious orthodoxy were connected evils. In her recent biography of Mott, Carol Faulkner asserts that Mott's work as an abolitionist, women's rights activist, Hicksite Quaker, and peace advocate were part of the same broad mission.¹⁹ Her commitment to a variety of causes caused William Henry Furness to ask, "...what good cause is there to which her heart was not open?"²⁰ Indeed, Mott's anticlerical vision connected the experiences of all individuals oppressed by the controlling grip of authority. Under this frame, Mott understood the Hicksite Schism as evidence of the same abuses of power as the persecutions suffered by abolitionists within the Society of Friends in the 1840s. When a number of Quaker abolitionists in the New York Yearly Meeting were disowned in the early 1840s for their antislavery work, Mott wrote that, "I told them I did not hesitate 15 years ago, to judge of the persecuting spirit of our Orthodox opposers, and I viewed the treatment of these frds. in N. York in the same light."²¹ In Mott's mind, conflict in the Society of Friends over slavery and abolition paralleled the Orthodox's exclusion of rational expressions of Quakerism during the Hicksite Schism. For Mott, orthodoxy, in all times and places, trapped individuals by constricting their thoughts and actions.

Mott's religious biography was unique in her time. Her religious views advocated for truth unmarked by hierarchy or other human interventions in religion. A Hicksite Quaker, Mott

¹⁹ Carol Faulkner, *Lucretia Mott's Heresy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2011).

²⁰ William Henry Furness, *God and Immortality: A Discourse in Memory of Lucretia Mott*, (Philadelphia, 1881), 15.

²¹ Faulkner, *Lucretia Mott's Heresy*, 122.

often disagreed sharply with other followers of Elias Hicks, as her radical egalitarianism pushed her to the margins of the Hicksite faith. Mott often called herself a “heretic” – “adopting the term to explain her iconoclasm as much as her theology.”²² For Mott, labels such as “heresy” reflected a problematic relationship between religious truth and expressions of exclusive power.

Lucretia Mott saw Unitarians as religiously connected to the spiritual and social movement she sought to forward in the world, and she identified deeply with some Unitarians’ quests for religious truth. In an 1858 portrait, Mott held close to her body *The Life of Joseph Blanco White*. One of her favorite books, the autobiography traced White’s religious transformation from Catholicism, to Anglicanism, to finally, Unitarianism. She found White’s journey from “the darkness of Catholicism to *more* than Unitarian light” captivating, and she located particular meaning in the fact that White’s transnational search for religious truth was “the result of his own examination and reflection.”²³ Indeed, White’s individual search for a religious identity, free from the confines of orthodoxy, reflected Mott’s own solitary struggle for religious truth.

To some extent, Mott’s abolitionist work, and the vision she advanced for heterodox Christianity, rested on religious views that saw denominational distinctions as artificial. She argued that a blurring of boundaries between denominations helped true religion, or religion unencumbered by doctrines or creeds, flourish. In 1846, Mott was invited by Furness to attend the Unitarian Convention in Philadelphia. Her invitation constituted, in the words of the abolitionist newspaper *The Pennsylvania Freeman*, “...an act of liberality which we imagine is altogether new in the history of ecclesiastical assemblies.”²⁴ Similarly, many Unitarians at the

²² Faulkner, *Lucretia Mott’s Heresy*, 2.

²³ Faulkner, *Lucretia Mott’s Heresy*, 122.

²⁴ “The Unitarian Convention,” *The Pennsylvania Freeman*, (29 October 1846), 2.

convention probably read Mott's presence as a clear expression of the radical claim that denominational distinctions were disruptive to the functions of true religion.

Mott rose to speak at the Convention. Her speech both functioned to explain her presence at the Convention and to offer her vision for liberal Christianity in which denominational distinctions faded into the background. In fact, Mott intentionally destabilized the idea of denominational identity. Mott vouched, "I care not for the superstition of the Quaker language. I feel myself to be one of you."²⁵ Combating orthodoxy in its multiple manifestations, for Mott, meant overcoming denominational differences. Referring to William Ellery Channing's antislavery commitments, Mott explained that "Channing rose and bore his testimony,"²⁶ and she urged Unitarians at the convention to do the same. Mott described Channing's antislavery work as an expression of Quaker traditions. Her configuration amounted to a radical critique of denominational labels: the leader of Boston Unitarianism, through his antislavery work, practiced core Quaker traditions. Mott's rhetorical connection between Quakers and Unitarians in her speech at the Unitarian convention reflected a sense that, for abolitionists like Mott, antislavery work provided the means to connect heterodox groups. This new religious formulation deemphasized denominational differences.

As Mott critiqued denominational identity, she recalled the radical anticlerical critiques leveled by women abolitionists against gender and racial hierarchies. Mott saw Unitarians' refusal to allow women ministers as a breach of this larger effort to transcend religious denomination in the heterodox Christian movement. She asked rhetorically, "Have you Brethren unfettered yourselves from a prejudice that is tending to immolate one half the whole human

²⁵ Lucretia Mott, "To Speak Out the Truth," in *Lucretia Mott: Her Complete Sermons and Speeches*, ed. Dana Greene (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1980), 56; Faulkner, *Lucretia Mott's Heresy*, 122-123.

²⁶ Mott, "To Speak Out the Truth," 55.

family?”²⁷ For Mott, distinctions between the sexes in Unitarianism was a hypocritical display of hierarchy and power. As she admonished Unitarians for their maintenance of masculine privilege, Mott tempered her remarks with the admission, “I know where I stand, I should speak with all delicacy...”²⁸ In a turn that worked against the rest of her speech’s emphasis on connections between Quakers and Unitarians, Mott, in this part, held up Unitarianism as an exclusive faith to which she was an outsider. For Mott, the Unitarians’ discrimination against women was problematic because it was at odds with the essential anticlerical values of the Unitarian faith, and also because it stood as an impediment to the establishment of nonsectarian liberal Christianity. As long as Unitarians discriminated between woman and men, they were bound to their sectarian label.

Mott’s insistence that combating orthodoxy meant throwing off denominational labels echoed the intersection of religion with antislavery work at the beginning of the immediate abolitionist movement. In 1833, when the American Anti-Slavery Society held its founding convention in Philadelphia, American Quakers and Unitarians connected over their rejection of slavery. Unitarian minister and abolitionist Samuel Joseph May was a leader at the Convention. He explained that the delegates of the convention, from many different religious denominations, “felt they had come together for a purpose higher and better than that of any religious sect or political party. Never have I seen men so ready, so anxious to rid themselves of whatsoever was narrow, selfish, or merely denominational spirit”²⁹ May, here, imagined antislavery activities as bigger and more significant than religious affiliations. May explained that there were few

²⁷ Mott, “To Speak Out the Truth,” 56.

²⁸ Mott, “To Speak Out the Truth,” 56.

²⁹ Samuel Joseph May, *Some Recollections of our Antislavery Conflict* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2005), 89.

Unitarians present, “Yet we were cordially treated as brethren...”³⁰ Mott’s sense that combating orthodoxy meant ignoring denominational distinctions in liberal Christianity was deeply rooted, then, in a longstanding configuration of religion in antislavery work, in which the urgency of the slavery problem amounted to a wholesale rejection of petty sectarianism. Sectarianism, for May, restricted the freedom of an individual’s conscience. For immediate abolitionists’ like May, in 1833, slavery appeared in religious life when moral agency was restricted.

While Mott clearly, to some degree, echoed May and others’ nonsectarian spirit in antislavery work, the religious views that informed Mott’s work differed from May’s. That is, Mott’s critique of sectarianism was deeply informed by her own religious experience. She was deeply committed to Quakerism, and it formed an essential part of her religious and social worldview.³¹ Mott’s commitment to Quakerism was understood and noted by others. In his sermon in memory of Mott, Furness said that “No one was more fully inspired with the best spirit of the denomination under which she was born than Lucretia Mott.”³² Mott’s Quakerism, for Furness, was an essential part of her activism.

Additionally, while Mott was a strong advocate of come-outerism, a movement that charged abolitionists to physically leave proslavery denominations, she never herself came out, even though she suffered significant persecutions for her religious and social views within the Hicksite meetings of the Society of Friends.³³ Mott’s personal attachment to Quakerism complicates a reading of her heterodox Christianity that sees it solely as an assault on denominational exclusiveness.

³⁰ May, *Some Recollections*, 90.

³¹ Faulkner, *Lucretia Mott’s Heresy*, 120.

³² William Henry Furness, *God and Immortality*, 13.

³³ Faulkner, *Lucretia Mott’s Heresy*, 120.

Rather than a singular assault on sectarianism, Mott's speech to the Unitarians in 1846 functioned as a broader expression of the importance of lived, or embodied, religious practice. For Mott, denominational labels restricted the minds of individuals most potently when they limited the ability of individuals to live embodied religious lives. It was not religious denominations themselves that were corrupting, but rather, religious denominations that successfully trapped an individual's mind and body under a label. In this way, Mott's statement, "Channing rose and bore his testimony,"³⁴ reflected not just a denouncement of discursive boundaries between sects, but it also meant to showcase the sheer physicality of Channing's anticlerical critique, as his religious and social inclinations were expressed in a physical act, where he broke out of denominational confines. Mott advocated a movement in which liberal Christians used their bodies to express their religious and social worldviews, and in so doing, abandoned denominational strictures that limited an individual's embodied religious practice.³⁵

An emphasis on the body in religious practice has been, historically, linked to resistance movements. In her article "'Embodied Practices: Negotiation and Resistance,'" Meredith McGuire argues that, in the history of European and American religious institutions, as the "religious" came to be associated with "belief" rather than "practice," embodied religious expression "came to be disparaged – as marginal..., as impure..., or as downright dangerous..."³⁶ For this reason, religious expressions that emphasized the body came to be "...an important site of contested authority, dominance, and resistance."³⁷ Importantly, for McGuire, this move away from the body in religious practice operates discursively – "all

³⁴ Lucretia Mott, "To Speak Out the Truth," 55.

³⁵ Meredith McGuire, "Embodied Practices: Negotiation and Resistance," in *Everyday Religion* ed. Nancy Ammerman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); David Hall, *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

³⁶ McGuire, "Embodied Practices: Negotiation and Resistance," 189.

³⁷ McGuire, "Embodied Practices," 189.

religions engage individuals through concrete practices that involve bodies...”³⁸ In this sense, Mott and others’ emphasis on the body in heterodox religious life did not represent a new practice in itself, but rather a discursive emphasis that denoted resistance to denominational structures.

In this frame, Mott never came out of the Society of Friends because, for her, Quakerism worked to define her activism, rather than to limit it. She located great strength in her denominational label, despite the ways that it also constricted her. Carol Faulkner describes Mott’s decision to remain in the Society of Friends by explaining that Mott found a particular power in her Quakerism: “Her Quaker garb made her an especially forceful advocate of dissent.”³⁹ Wearing her Quakerism on her body, Mott found her religious denomination a source of strength, guiding her toward true religion.

Mott was not alone in her emphasis on embodied religious practice as a key part of heterodox Christianity and a force that helped individuals break out of confining denominations. For some abolitionists, such an emphasis on the body in religious practice linked radical abolitionists and other religious liberals’ religious oppression with the bodily oppression of slaves. At the 1846 Unitarian convention Judge Greenwood, of Brooklyn, articulated this connection between religious and physical bondage by linking immediate abolitionism to heterodox efforts to combat religious orthodoxy. Tempering his remarks with an acknowledgement that he was not a clergyman,⁴⁰ Greenwood explained that progress in religion was halted by what he saw as the existence of “mental slavery.”⁴¹ For Greenwood, “We have

³⁸ McGuire, “Embodied Practices,” 189.

³⁹ Carol Faulkner, *Lucretia Mott’s Heresy*, 120.

⁴⁰ *Proceedings of the Regular Autumnal Convention*, 48.

⁴¹ *Proceedings of the Regular Autumnal Convention*, 48.

really no religious freedom.”⁴² In an incitement that recalled Garrison’s emphasis on immediacy in abolition, Greenwood insisted that mental slavery, in which Orthodoxy imposed creeds and doctrines, must be combated physically. The author of the pamphlet, here, paraphrases

Greenwood:

“It is our solemn duty to expedite the process by which the truth is to triumph. He would not have the friends of truth proceed at a slow and stealthy pace. He would have them move in serried ranks, with the iron tramp, the clang of armour, and the neighing steed—arousing the enemy from apathy and a sense of security.”⁴³

This insistence that religious orthodoxy in the 1840s amounted to a sort of slavery underscores the implicit connection between orthodoxy and slavery for many Unitarians in the 1840s. For Greenwood, discourses on abolition blended with discourses on religious dissent, as slavery and orthodoxy were, for him, linked as expressions of oppressive power that pushed dissenters to the periphery. For Greenwood, mental slavery, like physical slavery, had to be combated, not only with words, but also with physical, embodied resistance. Greenwood’s insistence on physically fighting mental slavery emphasizes that, for him, mental slavery itself was, despite its name, a bodily enslavement. For Greenwood, religious truth flourished, not just in individual minds, but in “the clang of armour” displayed on the body.

Mott and Greenwood, in 1846, saw antislavery work as connected to religious heterodoxy, as both movements fought orthodoxy with their bodies. Importantly, the embodied religious expressions that Mott and Greenwood advocated to combat religious and physical bondage disrupted a rationalist emphasis on the separation of the mind and the body, and the primacy of the mind in that separation. Indeed, the importance of the body to Mott and Greenwood in religious and social activism upsets the traditional framework that considers

⁴² *Proceedings of the Regular Autumnal Convention*, 48.

⁴³ *Proceedings of the Regular Autumnal Convention*, 49.

rational religion as only intellectual and the opposite of revivalists' bodily enthusiasm. In this case, evangelical revivalism was combated through embodied religious expressions that laid claim to religious truth.

In 1839, shortly after the burning of Pennsylvania Hall by opponents of abolitionism, William Henry Furness began speaking out against slavery.⁴⁴ Furness understood antislavery work in much the same way as other radical abolitionists like Mott – as one particularly severe manifestation of orthodoxy's power over marginalized individuals. For Furness, antislavery work was intertwined with the fight against religious orthodoxy. In a statement that was probably aimed at his congregation's general dismay over his antislavery preaching, Furness claimed, in 1845, to never have actually preached an "antislavery" sermon.⁴⁵ His sermons, rather, approached the subject of slavery as part of a larger critique of institutions of power and bondage – many of his sermons that were not primarily about slavery touched on slavery as an extreme example of the controlling power of orthodoxy. In this way, Furness's antislavery stance mirrored Mott's critique of orthodoxy's multiple manifestations of power.

Furness's adoption of the antislavery cause was strongly influenced by Lucretia Mott's mentorship, and the two sustained a close friendship until her death in 1881. Upon Mott's death, Furness gave a sermon entitled "God and Immortality," in which he described his devotion to Mott. He wrote that "I have no words to tell how much I owe her. As I look back now I remember how often she came to me or had me in her house and at her table, to awaken my slumbering sympathy with the oppressed."⁴⁶ Mott played a mentor's role in stimulating Furness's interest in and commitment to abolition. A year after William Lloyd Garrison

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961), 190; Geffen, "William Henry Furness: Philadelphia Antislavery Preacher," 269-271.

⁴⁵ Geffen, "William Henry Furness: Philadelphia Antislavery Preacher," 270.

⁴⁶ William Henry Furness, *God and Immortality: A Discourse in Memory of Lucretia Mott* (Philadelphia, 1881), 13.

organized the American Anti-Slavery Society and called for “immediate abolition,” Lucretia Mott became acquainted with Furness. In a letter to her Presbyterian protégé James Miller McKim, Mott explained that Furness was “becoming increasingly interested in the Abolition cause & we hope it will ere long be with him a pulpit theme.”⁴⁷ She explained that Furness had visited her home “several times,” expressing promising interest in the antislavery cause.⁴⁸ Mott and Furness came to know each other through a mutual commitment to abolition, and this commitment to antislavery reform remained a critical part of their relationship through much of the nineteenth century.

While there was considerable opposition in the First Unitarian Church to Furness’s antislavery preaching, some members of the Church stood behind their minister’s antislavery work. Furness’s antislavery preaching was defended by Joseph Sill, a member of the Church, in terms of Furness’s right to freedom of conscience. Describing the antislavery conflicts in his diary in 1841, Sill wrote that:

“We counseled [Furness] to be passive – non-militant—not to make Slavery a leading question, but an incidental; but that he owed it to consistency and his own independence, to continue to preach on whatever he thought consistent with Christianity, and for the real good of the flock – that he must by no means yield us his leading influence nor consent to be led by others; and that, we considered, the great majority of his people would uphold him in this course.”⁴⁹

Sill explained that supporters of Furness’s antislavery preaching saw it as a matter of freedom of conscience. Furness had to resist being “led by others,” and he needed to “preach on whatever he thought consistent with Christianity.” For Sill, then, support for Furness’s antislavery preaching came not so much from a support of Furness’s antislavery message (although he did

⁴⁷ Lucretia Mott, *Selected Letters of Lucretia Coffin Mott*, ed. Beverly Wilson Palmer (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 25.

⁴⁸ Mott, *Selected Letters*, 25.

⁴⁹ Joseph Sill, *Diary*, 10 January 1841, HSP.

support that, too), but, rather, from a broader sense that freedom of conscience was the defining trait of Unitarianism, and should be afforded to the minister as well as members of the congregation.

Furness, too, thought of his antislavery preaching in terms of freedom of conscience. In an 1842 sermon upon the occasion of erecting memorials at First Unitarian to commemorate founders of the congregation, he asked members of the church to “Look at these monuments with the earnestness that becometh the immortal spirits that you are” so that those monuments “shall be open windows, through which Eternity is revealed to you.” In his antislavery preaching, he explained that, “These monuments shall be my strengtheners. I will commune with them, and they will commune with me.”⁵⁰ In tracing the biographies of William Young Birch, John Vaughan, and Ralph Eddowes, the men to whom the monuments were dedicated, Furness was inspired “to be faithful to the dictates of my own conscience.”⁵¹ Furness’s emphasis on freedom of conscience as a core value of the First Unitarian church justified his own antislavery work, as it argued that the minister, as a member of the church, had a right to express his opinion.

For Furness, freedom of conscience meant that one’s religious and social views were expressed in one’s actions, in everyday life. In an 1842 sermon, he explained that true religion “shall come in its majesty, not through the feeble lips of those who speak, but through your living characters, clad in the whole armour of God...”⁵² In another instance, Furness wrote that true religion “is seen in the whole man, in all that he does and is.”⁵³ In these instances, Furness asserted that speech did not necessarily free men from orthodoxy’s grip. Lived religion,

⁵⁰ William Henry Furness, “A discourse delivered on the occasion of the erection of church tablets in memory of John Vaughan, Ralph Eddowes, and William Y. Birch” (Philadelphia, 1842), 11, Discourses, HSP.

⁵¹ William Henry Furness, ““A discourse delivered on the occasion of the erection of church tablets,” 11-12.

⁵² William Henry Furness, ““A discourse delivered on the occasion of the erection of church tablets,” 16.

⁵³ William Henry Furness, ““A discourse delivered on the occasion of the erection of church tablets,” 14.

alternatively, served that function as man's convictions were expressed through his physical self. While Furness's sense of embodied religious expression came from his own experience, preaching against slavery in a congregation unfriendly to such sentiments, it strongly recalls Mott's emphasis on lived religion. For both Furness and Mott, physical expressions of religious views countered orthodoxy's hold on minds and bodies.

Like Greenwood's "mental slavery," Furness's religious views linked religious and physical bondage, connecting liberal religious individuals to slaves, as both suffered under oppression. In his 1859 sermon "Religion and Politics," Furness asked members of his congregation to "imagine yourselves in *their* places, liable to have *your* parents, *your* husbands, *your* wives, *your* children torn from you and sold away into hard bondage ..."⁵⁴ Furness believed that combating physical bondage came from connecting it to religious bondage, through the bodies of liberal religious people. As Unitarians and radical abolitionists saw their own bodies as slaves' bodies, they could create new religious institutions that worked against the physical oppressions of orthodoxy.

Furness and Greenwood were not the only heterodox Christians to urge an identification between the oppressions of radical abolitionists and the oppressions of slaves -- many radical abolitionists saw their own oppression in the bondage of the slave. Most notably, women abolitionists often connected their gendered oppression to the oppression of the slave. For these radical abolitionist women gendered oppression was a way to "conflate the condition of free women and slaves."⁵⁵

While Furness's antislavery preaching displayed clear links with Mott's, his antislavery activism was by no means a mirror image of Mott's anticlerical frame. His anticlericalism was

⁵⁴ William Henry Furness, "Religion and politics: a discourse delivered on the first Congregational Unitarian Church Sunday" (Philadelphia, 1859), 13, Discourses, HSP.

⁵⁵ Jean Fagan Yellin, *Women and Sisters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 25.

not rooted in the same egalitarian spirit as Mott's. In an 1842 sermon entitled "The Ministry of Women," Furness denied that an anticlerical critique of authority could be applied to gender hierarchies. He explained that,

"There are those who imagine they can do nothing for Religion unless they quit their natural spheres and attempt something grand and imposing.... And yet it is not so easy a thing to be a good wife. It is much easier to be conspicuous in plans of public benevolence than to fill with uniform blamelessness the office of a faithful friend."⁵⁶

While it is unclear whether "those who... quit their natural spheres" was meant to refer directly to Mott and her activism, the broader implication here is notable – gendered hierarchies in Unitarianism, for Furness, were not expressions of power and difference that mirrored religious and physical bondage, but rather natural reflections of men and women's separate spheres. So while Furness's antislavery work leveled an anticlerical critique on slavery as a system of authority and power, he was unwilling to extend that critique to gender hierarchies and examine the proliferation of masculine privilege in Unitarianism.

Furness's anticlerical critique of slavery as orthodoxy also did not preclude him from upholding racial hierarchies in abolition work. Lucretia Mott and other radical abolitionists used their anticlerical critiques of power to work to dismantle racial hierarchies, arguing "that it was the duty of antislavery activists to conquer racism."⁵⁷ Importantly, for many antislavery activists, a shared religious vision facilitated a breakdown of racial hierarchies. In his study of friendships between four radical abolitionists that crossed racial boundaries, John Stauffer argues that for these sort of radical abolitionists who fought racial hierarchies, "religious belief was... the

⁵⁶ William Henry Furness, "The ministry of women: a discourse delivered in the First Congregational Unitarian Church, on the morning of the Lord's day, Nov. 20th 1842" (Philadelphia, 1843), 12, Discourses, HSP.

⁵⁷ Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women*, 180; John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

principle factor that allowed them to befriend and trust one another.”⁵⁸ Indeed, a common religious vision allowed radical abolitionists to tread in new and untenable territory, as these radical abolitionists boldly asserted that race was socially constructed.⁵⁹

As Philadelphia was a central site for black abolitionists, Furness’s antislavery work would have brought him into close contact with black and white abolitionists’ attempts to dismantle racial hierarchies through abolition work.⁶⁰ That said, Furness never joined the American Anti-Slavery Society,⁶¹ where black and white abolitionists worked alongside each other, and he had no apparent connections with prominent black Philadelphia abolitionists, like the Purvises or the Fortens, among others. Furness claimed that he never joined an antislavery society because “as pastor of a Christian Church, I felt myself *ex officio* the presiding officer of an anti-slavery society.”⁶² While there is no evidence to suggest he ever admitted hesitance toward black abolitionists and a radical abolitionist desire to combat racism, that he never joined the AASS may well have been rooted in a desire to maintain a white/black separation and hierarchy in abolition work.

While Mott and Furness’s anticlerical critiques of slavery were not mirror images of each other, they did, together, advance a frame for thinking about heterodox Christianity in the 1840s that saw individual, embodied religious expressions as an antidote to religious and physical orthodoxy and bondage. Deeply conditioned by radical abolitionism, this shared heterodox Christian frame connected Mott and Furness personally. It also had significant implications for

⁵⁸ Stuafter, *The Black Hearts of Men*, 4.

⁵⁹ Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City*, 180; Stuafter, *The Black Hearts of Men*, 2.

⁶⁰ Julie Winch, *Philadelphia’s Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988); Gary Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia’s Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women*, 180-186.

⁶¹ Geffen, “William Henry Furness: Philadelphia Antislavery Preacher,” 278.

⁶² Geffen, “William Henry Furness: Philadelphia Antislavery Preacher,” 278-279.

the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia, as new faces in the congregation on Sunday morning, combined with Furness's antislavery preaching, instigated significant changes in the church.

The First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia was an important space for heterodox Christians in the 1840s. While Furness's antislavery preaching marked the introduction of radical abolitionism and heterodox Christian rhetoric into the Philadelphia Church, his voice was not the only one to connect religious and physical bondage in an anticlerical critique of slavery as orthodoxy. In the late 1830s and in the 1840s, come-outers began to attend the Philadelphia Unitarian church to hear Furness's antislavery sermons. In these years, lifelong English Unitarians and followers of Joseph Priestley sat side-by-side with come-outers. Come-outers, along with Furness's antislavery preaching, made possible a new origins story for the church, one that, in an inclusive spirit, connected the Unitarian church to the larger heterodox Christian movement.

Come-outers were radical abolitionists who expressed a critique of slavery and bondage through an attack on religious institutions they deemed "proslavery." Inspired by the urgency of the immediate abolition effort, come-outers radically denounced their religious affiliations with pro-slavery churches.⁶³ Come-outerism was often meant as a public act of defiance. Julie Roy Jeffrey quotes one come-outer, Elizabeth Wheelwright, who wanted her letter resigning her church membership to be "...read in presence of the Church, that they might understand I entirely disapproved the course they had pursued..."⁶⁴ In this sense, while come-outers sought freedom from religious bondage, they often hoped their radical critiques of slavery would inspire change in the churches they left behind.

⁶³ Faulkner, *Lucretia Mott's Heresy*; Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism: Ordinary Women in the Antislavery Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Lewis Perry, *Radical Abolitionism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973); John R. McKivigan, *The War Against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

⁶⁴ Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism*, 153-154.

Come-outers were key players in the version of heterodox Christianity that Mott and Furness forwarded, as they leveled a critique on slavery that was rooted in this physical abandonment of proslavery churches. More than simply a denouncement of denominational distinctions in antislavery work, coming out of a proslavery church was a physical act, as it could connect the come-outer's body to her religious and social worldview. One come-outer imagined her absence in the church she left behind, writing "...they always see my chair empty..."⁶⁵ This come-outer's radical critique of hierarchy and control in sectarianism was mapped onto her body, or, in this example, the absence of her body in her church. In another instance, come-outer Parker Pillsbury wrote that "... 'Come-outers' are but fugitive slaves escaped from your spiritual and ecclesiastical plantations."⁶⁶ Come-outerism was a bodily response to the physical enslavement of fellow Americans. Its physical expression came in the act of removing one's body from a proslavery church, and in doing so, forging a radical, physical connection with slaves.

Few records survive to document who were these come-outers in the Unitarian Church, or to describe their individual experiences inside the Philadelphia Unitarian church. As members of the church fought over the nature of Philadelphia Unitarianism in the 1840s in pamphlets and sermons, come-outers' voices can be found between the lines of those documents, the imagined backdrop against which many of the identity-based conflicts that encircled the church in the 1840s played out. Elizabeth Geffen explains that, in the 1840s, "many who did not formally join the society were drawn to hear the eloquent preaching of Furness," but she does not give more detailed description of these new attendants.⁶⁷ More specific evidence of come-outers' presence in the church comes from Lucretia Mott, who, in an 1839 letter to her dear friend phrenologist George Combe and his wife Cecilia Combe, Mott explained that "Our childn. are all 'come

⁶⁵ Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism*, 153.

⁶⁶ Lewis Perry, *Radical Abolitionism*, 107.

⁶⁷ Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, 195.

outers.’ They go to hear William Furness sometimes.”⁶⁸ For Mott, come-outerism was a family story – her own children were active in the movement. Mott’s statement here also emphasizes that, in Philadelphia, it is likely that the Unitarian church was a centerpiece in the come-outer movement, an appealing port-of-call in the come-outer’s journey. Indeed, Mott sees William Henry Furness and, by association, the Unitarian church, as a necessary and important part of the come-outerism in Philadelphia.

Come-outers entered the Unitarian Church as others changes, beyond the sphere of antislavery, also took root. John Vaughan, a key leader in the church, died in 1841.⁶⁹ That same year another key member of the church from its founding, James Taylor, left the church in protest of Furness’s preaching on slavery, and he died three years later, in 1844.⁷⁰ Reactions to abolitionism in the 1840s Unitarian church must be understood with these changes in mind. Describing the impact of these changes on the church, in particular the death of John Vaughan, Elizabeth Geffen writes that Vaughan served as “link with an age that had gone.”⁷¹ As the original leadership of the church left or died, few were left who had personally known Joseph Priestley, or who could attest to his vision for Unitarianism.

In some ways, studying come-outers from the perspective of the Unitarian Church marks an odd vantage point, as come-outers’ main critique was expressed in the act of leaving, rather than joining. And while the Philadelphia Unitarian Church saw come-outers join its congregation on Sunday mornings, come-outers were probably still conceptualized by Unitarians in terms of their journeys to escape orthodoxy and proslavery religious institutions, rather than by their inclusion in Unitarianism. It is likely that no come-outers ever actually joined the

⁶⁸ Mott, *Selected Letters*, 171

⁶⁹ Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, 195.

⁷⁰ Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, 195.

⁷¹ Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, 195.

Unitarian church in the 1840s, as they came to the church more for inspiration in their antislavery work than for Unitarian fellowship. So while come-outers were coming-in to the Philadelphia Unitarian church in the 1840s, the essential character of come-outerism remained defined by their act of leaving—come-outers, even in their institutional presence alongside Unitarians, were expressing an absence in another place. In this way, come-outers crafted a new identity for the Unitarian church, as it became, for them, not a new institutional home, but rather a physical space that marked their dissent from orthodoxy.

Abolitionists' contemporaries saw come-outers leave organized religious bodies, and they often perceived come-outers as altogether denouncing organized religion. In his book *Radical Abolitionism*, Lewis Perry quotes a conservative contemporary to radical abolitionists, William Jay, who wrote:

“It often happens when an abolitionist abandons his alleged pro-slavery church he finds no other that suits him. Hence the public worship of God and the sacraments are neglected. Gradually he and his family learn to live without God in the world...”⁷²

In this instance, come-outers were characterized as God-less and religion-less. In a conservative frame, denouncing a proslavery religion became denouncing religious expression altogether, as cold rationalism replaced organized religion.

This sense that come-outerism represented a radical denouncing of organized religion is also found in the historiography on come-outerism, which generally glosses over the complexity of come-outerism's principled religious critique of orthodoxy in religion and politics. In his work on come-outerism and radical abolition, Lewis Perry poses a couple of questions that encapsulate the framework through which come-outerism is often understood. He asks, “Was come-outerism the renunciation of all sects? Or was it the replacement of old pro-slavery

⁷² Lewis Perry, *Radical Abolitionism*, 105.

institutions with new, hopefully freer ones?”⁷³ Here, Perry sets up a particular frame in which come-outerism either meant rejecting religious institutions entirely for abolitionism, or alternatively, creating new religious institutions that incorporated antislavery work. This conception of come-outerism is limited, because it does not explore with depth the nature of the religious commitments of come-outers and their allies, but rather assumes that come-outers were either for or against “institutionalized religion.” What Perry ignores is that come-outers leveled a principled critique of religious and physical orthodoxy that, in its religious views, was more complex than just a commentary on “institutionalized religion.”

Come-outers in the First Unitarian Church were at once outsiders and insiders, as the critique they leveled against orthodoxy and slavery mapped onto Furness’s anticlerical abolitionism. For Furness, public opinion in churches could act as a sort of orthodoxy, and, on this point, he probably identified in his personal experience with come-outers.⁷⁴ Furness felt that speaking out against religious and physical bondage was an act that could actually precipitate tighter bounds, capturing radical abolitionists in its tight grip. Of the criticism he endured in his congregation, Furness stated in an 1842 sermon that “...I feel myself bound as I do, to utter ungracious truth, to speak what it offends you and pains you to hear, it is one of the hardest duties that I have undertaken to perform.”⁷⁵ Furness’s experience as the leader of a church unfriendly toward abolition mirrored come-outers experiences in proslavery churches, as Furness, and also come-outers, felt themselves compelled to seek religious and social truth. As proslavery institutions constricted radical abolitionists, public opinion in the Philadelphia Unitarian Church did the same to Furness.

⁷³ Lewis Perry, *Radical Abolitionism*, 96.

⁷⁴ Nancy Isenberg, *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America*, 83.

⁷⁵ William Henry Furness, “A discourse delivered on the occasion of the erection of church tablets...”, 11.

As Furness's experience preaching antislavery was considerably connected to come-outers' experience leaving proslavery churches, he authored a Unitarian identity in the 1840s that allowed Unitarianism to embrace the sort of religious journeys that he and come-outers had undertaken. In a statement that alluded to the presence of come-outers without addressing them directly, Furness charged his congregation to "Guard the Church as the last place of refuge wither the persecuted rights of humanity may flee for protection... Let this holy place, at least, be free."⁷⁶ In this statement, Furness upheld as a central function of the church its role as a "place of refuge," accepting people who fled the oppression of orthodoxy. While on the one hand, Furness imagined a time when the church served as his own personal "place of refuge," where he could express his dissent from orthodoxy free from criticism, he likely located it also as a "place of refuge" for come-outers, who worked against the power of proslavery churches. In other words, as Furness and come-outers labored against the orthodoxy of church opinion, the First Unitarian Church was imagined as a "place of refuge" to house them. In this way, while Furness's antislavery work never included active membership in Vigilance Societies as "places of refuge" for runaway slaves⁷⁷, he imagined the Unitarian Church's purpose as something similar – providing a home for religious dissidents.

Priestley's group of Unitarians saw the entrance of radical abolitionism in the church as an abrupt rupture in the traditions of the church, and strongly disagreed with the ways in which radical abolitionists distorted the mission of the church. In May of 1841, James Taylor, one of the founders of the Philadelphia church and a key participant in its life, resigned his membership, protesting Furness's antislavery sermons. In a letter to John Vaughan, he resigned "with sincere

⁷⁶ William Henry Furness, "A discourse delivered on the occasion of the erection of church tablets...", 15.

⁷⁷ Geffen, "William Henry Furness: Philadelphia Antislavery Preacher," 284. Geffen argues that, while Furness never joined any Vigilance Committees, he was, according to active members, key in providing support for those efforts.

& earnest wishes that the Church may be built up a spiritual house...”⁷⁸ He rejected the entrance of “any political matter into the pulpit of a Christian church.” Joshua Tevis, too, rejected Furness’s antislavery preaching, because he did not appreciate the encroachment of political matters into church life. A church pamphlet summarized Tevis’ letter, explaining that he claimed that Furness had “injured the cause of Unitarianism by preaching politics...”⁷⁹ These dissenters saw antislavery work in the Unitarian church as distorting the fundamental mission of the Unitarian church they worked to establish.

Reflecting back on their own journeys toward religious liberation, English Unitarians entertained vastly different understandings about the nature of orthodoxy, and consequently, the role of the Unitarian church in countering orthodoxy’s hegemonic hold on minds. For English Unitarians, orthodoxy sprang from the marriage of religion and politics. Clearly informed by the Unitarian experience in England, in which state-supported religion marked Unitarianism’s religious dissent as a political problem, English Unitarians conceived of politics and religion as entirely separate in Philadelphia, and any perceived mixing between the two realms made them deeply uncomfortable.⁸⁰ That said, as Eddowes’ critique of Orthodoxy and Ely’s “Christian party” shows, for Philadelphia Unitarians, even if they rhetorically emphasized a divide between the two realms, politics and religion had always intersected in their religious lives.

Furness tried to connect English Unitarians’ origins story as dissidents from state-supported religion to his radical abolitionist framework, pointing to the ways in which, for him, those two Unitarian identities were not opposed, but rather overlapping. In his 1845

⁷⁸ James Taylor to John Vaughan, 20 May 1841, Vaughan Papers, APS.

⁷⁹ First Congregational Society of Unitarian Christians in the City of Philadelphia, “Proceedings of a meeting of the members and pew-holders of the First Congregational Society of Unitarian Christians in the city of Philadelphia: held on the 28th September 1846...” (Philadelphia, 1846), 9-10, Union Theological Seminary.

⁸⁰ J. William Frost, *A Perfect Freedom: Religious Liberty in Pennsylvania* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 74-85.

Thanksgiving Day sermon, Furness contended that radical abolitionism's anticlerical critique of systems of power reflected the same search for the "personal liberty" that immigrants to America sought in their relocation to the United States.⁸¹ Furness's sermon took two narratives about Unitarian identity and wove them together, arguing that an English Unitarian emphasis on religious pluralism and a separation between church and state was not at odds with an abolitionist anticlerical critique of power and authority. He wanted his audience to see that state-nurtured orthodoxy and physical bondage were intimately connected, and that his antislavery work was directly related to the church's establishment as a site of "personal liberty" in 1796. Furness asked listeners to link their own civic freedom to the oppression of others: "This, brethren, is the one thing needful, that we should feel – *feel* a supreme affection for freedom, and the deepest abhorrence of oppression."⁸² Furness's sermon looked back to the origins of the church to establish the legitimacy of his antislavery preaching, as he sought to connect English Unitarians' emphasis on "personal liberty" to abolitionists' (and other newcomers') sense that freedom of conscience was central to Unitarianism.

Furness's attempts at reconciliation were not successful. In September 1846, just weeks before the Unitarian convention in Philadelphia, the conflict in the Philadelphia church over Furness's antislavery preaching reached its climax. The church received a letter from the First Unitarian Church of New Bedford, asking that Furness vacate his Philadelphia pulpit and move to New Bedford, to take up the pulpit at the First Unitarian Church of New Bedford.⁸³

⁸¹ William Henry Furness, "A Thanksgiving Discourse," (Philadelphia, 1845), 17, Emory University Digital Archive.

⁸² William Henry Furness, "A Thanksgiving Discourse," 17.

⁸³ First Congregational Society, "Proceedings of a meeting of the members..."; Other sources that describe the 1846 New Bedford Conflict in the Philadelphia church include: Geffen, "William Henry Furness: Philadelphia Antislavery Preacher," Horace Howard Furness, "Historical Address Delivered in Connection with the Installation of the Reverend Charles E. St. John as Minister of the First Unitarian

The members and pew-holders of the Philadelphia church gathered on the evening of September 28, 1846 to discuss New Bedford's request. Thomas Fletcher, a longtime member of the church, moderated the proceedings. At the beginning of the evening, he posed the central question of the meeting to the members:

“...we meet for the purpose of considering whether a difference of opinion on a *single* subject shall sever the ties of Pastor and people, or whether our Pastor shall continue to exercise his duties here with the same freedom of conscience which he has hitherto enjoyed”⁸⁴

Though the word slavery was never mentioned by New Bedford or Philadelphia Unitarians in accounts of the 1846 conflict, it clearly occupied the center of the proceedings. In their letter to Philadelphia Unitarians explaining their request that Furness come be their pastor, New Bedford Unitarians referenced the conflicts in the Philadelphia church on the subject of abolition: “...we have thought that there might be reasons that would make it seem right to you that he should come [to New Bedford].”⁸⁵ Clearly, differences in the Philadelphia church regarding slavery were known in broader Unitarian circles, and New Bedford Unitarians imagined that Furness would find himself at home among a group of Unitarians more homogenously sympathetic to his abolitionism.

New Bedford's request for Furness also probably reflected the shared experiences of Philadelphia and New Bedford Unitarians. Indeed, both churches in the 1820s experienced an influx of Quakers into the Unitarian Church and, for both congregations, that influx had shaped the direction of the church in important ways, most notably toward a considerable ambivalence toward the AUA. Given New Bedford and Philadelphia's shared, intertwined Unitarian histories, New Bedford's request for Furness to take up the New Bedford pulpit makes sense.

Church of Philadelphia,” (Philadelphia, 1908), 107, New York State Library; Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism*, 205-206.

⁸⁴ First Congregational Society, “Proceedings of a meeting of the members...”, 5.

⁸⁵ First Congregational Society, “Proceedings of a meeting of the members...”, 7.

The way in which the 1846 request from New Bedford was handled by Philadelphia Unitarians reveals the democratic, anticlerical discourse that was at the center of church life. After receiving letters from the New Bedford society addressed to himself and to the Philadelphia church, Furness wrote a letter to his own congregation, explaining his thoughts on the matter, and asking the members and pew-holders to decide for him whether he should go to New Bedford. Furness linked New Bedford's request for him with his preaching of "a certain obnoxious subject,"⁸⁶ and explained that the conflict within the church "leaves me no alternative but to submit the whole matter to you..."⁸⁷ He insisted that he would "not discuss the disputed point," but said with vehemence "I have not the shadow of a desire to leave you."⁸⁸ Furness wanted to remain at the Philadelphia church, but felt that, given the magnitude of the conflict that abolitionism in the church had sparked, his removal might have proved necessary. Rather than using his own power to dispense with the matter, Furness put his fate in the hands of his congregation, sensing that the authority to determine whether he remained the minister of the Philadelphia church should be handed over to the congregation.

When Furness relinquished his decision-making power, what came forth from members of the church was a new articulation of Philadelphia Unitarian identity that linked Furness's own journey toward abolitionism with the changes in membership that took root in the church's antebellum years. Furness was retained as minister in a near unanimous vote.⁸⁹ A new origins story emerged following this decision that echoed Furness's insistence that come-outers' abandonment of orthodoxy fit with the larger function of the Unitarian church as a "place of

⁸⁶ First Congregational Society, "Proceedings of a meeting of the members...", 8.

⁸⁷ First Congregational Society, "Proceedings of a meeting of the members..." 9.

⁸⁸ First Congregational Society, "Proceedings of a meeting of the members...", 9.

⁸⁹ First Congregational Society, "Proceedings of a meeting of the members...", 16.

refuge,” and it argued that Furness’s own journey toward religious truth mirrored the journeys of all those in the congregation away from orthodoxy.

At the meeting to discuss New Bedford’s request, William Kelley, a new member of the Unitarian church, attached his support for Furness in a new articulation of the church’s past, in which the church’s true identity was rooted the religious journeys of its individual members, as they fled oppressive orthodoxy. In the opening of his speech, Kelley thanked Thomas Fletcher for offering a “historical sketch” of the history of the church, explaining that “I learned from it that one of your first articles of association vindicated our Pastor’s course. In coming together, you asserted the sacredness of individual conviction.”⁹⁰ He contrasted his own position in the church with “Those who are of long connection to the Society...”⁹¹ and argued “...there are many here who are not originally of our faith – who have come into the Church—who listen to and profit by the teachings of our Pastor; but who will not have the confidence to rise and utter their views and feelings.”⁹² Of his own religious journey, Kelley explained that he was “reared in the gloomy tenants of the Calvinistic faith,”⁹³ and that Unitarianism provided him hope as he “heard the encouraging assurance that there was somewhat of good in man...”⁹⁴ Kelley saw the changes taking root in the church, as more members came to Unitarianism from other denominations and the influence of the initial group of English Unitarians waned, and he proposed a new origins story for the church that emphasized individual religious journeys, and the Unitarian church as a particular space in which a variety of religious dissidents came together, all bearing similar religious biographies that emphasized stepping out of orthodoxy’s firm grip.

⁹⁰ First Congregational Society, “Proceedings of a meeting of the members...” ,11.

⁹¹ First Congregational Society, “Proceedings of a meeting of the members...” , 10.

⁹² First Congregational Society, “Proceedings of a meeting of the members...” , 10.

⁹³ First Congregational Society, “Proceedings of a meeting of the members...” , 10.

⁹⁴ First Congregational Society, “Proceedings of a meeting of the members...” , 11.

Included in the variety of religious dissidents that Kelley saw as the basis of the Unitarian church was the minister's own religious journey. After describing his own religious biography in which he fled the confines of orthodoxy, Kelley asked, "And shall we now attempt to shackle the mind of our Pastor, or to dictate the subjects on which he may speak?"⁹⁵ Kelley's language here is important – "shackling the mind" recalled the anticlerical discourse of radical abolitionists, where physical bondage was linked to religious bondage as manifestations of orthodoxy's grip over individuals. Kelley challenged his fellow church members not practice a form of "mental slavery." Here, the abolitionists' radical critique of authority was actually used to uphold the position of the minister of the church. Kelley turned a radical abolitionists' anticlerical discourse around, and argued for the right of the minister to retain his authority over the church, despite his controversial views. For Kelley, Furness's own religious journey toward abolition was mirrored in the religious journeys of all Unitarian churchgoers, as they each, in specific ways, combated orthodoxy. As members of the Unitarian Church claimed a heritage for the church that rested in individuals' religious journeys from orthodoxy, consequently affirming antislavery work in the church, they prevented Furness's religious biography from becoming, itself, a come-outer narrative. Just as Lucretia Mott located her dissent within Quakerism, William Henry Furness ultimately reconciled his religious and social differences with his congregation within the Unitarian tradition itself.

In the 1840s, radical abolition entered the Philadelphia Church and fundamentally altered the self-identity of the community. In those years, Philadelphia Unitarians came too see the experiences of come-outers, heterodox religious dissidents, Hicksite Quakers like Lucretia Mott, and William Henry Furness himself, as linked in the new self-identity of the church. In

⁹⁵ First Congregational Society, "Proceedings of a meeting of the members...", 11.

this way, Philadelphia Unitarians responded to the rising sectional conflict in the 1840s with an articulation of heterodox Christianity that referenced their transatlantic spiritual journeys as it imagined a new, larger group of heterodox Christians that fought spiritual and bodily oppression.

Epilogue

A Prodigal Son Returns

In 1859, William Henry Furness traveled to New Bedford, Massachusetts to give a sermon at the ordination of William James Potter. The sermon, entitled “Christianity: A Spirit,” reflected on Christianity as a force that existed in everyday life and actions, in the bodies of Liberal Christians. Furness explained that “you know it [true religion] best, when you know it not, when you are as little conscious of it as of your limbs or your breath...”¹ Furness interpreted the prodigal son parable, emphasizing the way in which this spirit of Christ, rather than the prodigal son’s intellect or reason, guided him home. He explained,

“He resolves to go home, and tell his father how greatly he has sinned, not with any thought of being reinstated in his old place, as a beloved younger son, but that he may be taken as a hired servant, only that he may earn his bread and live and not die. He executes his resolve, and turns his steps homeward.”²

Compelled by the spirit to turn towards home, the prodigal son expected to return an outsider, forever peripheral and isolated from his true community. Instead, Furness explains that the prodigal son returned home to the loving embrace of his father, whose “parental heart” was “swelling with the sacred yearnings of natural affection, waiting not for an explanation.”³ In this sense, Furness understood the prodigal son as an outsider, whose difficult journey homeward signed his commitment to true religion.

¹ William Henry Furness, “Christianity: A Spirit,” (New Bedford, 1860), 6, Discourses, HSP.

² Furness, “Christianity,” 22.

³ Furness, “Christianity,” 22.

Furness' presence in New Bedford signed a new era in American Unitarianism. Weeks after the execution of John Brown, the regional conflict in American Unitarianism probably seemed less important than the stirring sectional conflict in the United States. Indeed, Furness linked John Brown's status as a reified outsider to the prodigal son parable, explaining that "The least of his brethren, the outcast, the fugitive, and the slave, -- these are to us at this hour, the mighty Apostles of the spirit of Christ..."⁴ As Brown represented to abolitionists outcasted truth, Furness connected Brown's struggle to the prodigal son narrative.⁵

But Furness' prodigal son narrative did not solely reflect on the tumult of 1859. Indeed, as he made sense of impending war, Furness looked back to the origins of the church, seeing in the prodigal son story the Unitarian Church's spiritual journeys narrative. Furness meant to show that Liberal Christians, like the prodigal son, made difficult physical and religion journeys toward communities of religious liberals. English Unitarians' transatlantic journeys, Hicksite Quakers' entrance into the Unitarian Church, and come-outers' abandonment of proslavery institutions were all reflected in Furness' prodigal son narrative.

Furness, too, was a prodigal son of sorts. His spiritual journey into abolitionism was difficult, and New Bedford played a critical role in that conflict over abolitionism that deeply affected Furness. As Furness traveled to New Bedford to speak at William James Potter's Ordination, his own spiritual journey into abolitionism was probably on

⁴ Furness, "Christianity," 22-23.

⁵ Elizabeth Geffen, *Philadelphia Unitarianism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1961), 230-231; Historical Address Delivered in Connection with the Installation of the Reverend Charles E. St. John as Minister of the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia," (Philadelphia, 1908), 16-18; After the execution of John Brown, Furness, along with his son Horace and James Miller McKim welcomed John Brown's body at the train station in Philadelphia.

his mind. His journey North to New Bedford might have signaled to him the final resolution of that antislavery conflict in the Philadelphia Church, as he traveled to New Bedford to utter Philadelphia's origins story, which incorporated both abolitionism and the New Bedford Church in its emphasis on spiritual journeys away from constraint and control in religious life.

Indeed, Furness' prodigal son narrative spoke to the shared experiences of New Bedford and Philadelphia Unitarians. When Furness spoke of the prodigal son, he reflected on the history of his own church as an institution that recognized the validity of all Liberal Christians' spiritual journeys, and he connected New Bedford's own church history to Philadelphia's story. For Quakers-turned-Unitarians present in the New Bedford Church for Furness' sermon, the prodigal son parable placed their difficult religious and physical journeys within a meaningful narrative. In this way, the prodigal son parable connected New Bedford and Philadelphia Unitarians in a larger struggle to recognize diverse individual experiences within religious communities. As the prodigal son traveled home, his journey spanned communities, uniting previous strangers in a shared commitment to religious truth.

This thesis has sought to show how the Philadelphia Unitarian Church integrated itself into a larger heterodox Christian community as it critiqued establishment religion, Orthodoxy, and slavery as forces that confined moral agency and individual conscience. My study emphasizes how the spiritual journeys narrative created a larger narrative through which Liberal Christians could interpret their own complicated religious lives, and it served as a means to connect Liberal Christians to each other and to others who suffered under powerful control. The self-identity of the First Unitarian Church

expanded in the first half of the nineteenth century to incorporate Hicksite Quakers' into a revised interpretation of Joseph Priestley's religious vision, and it expanded again in the 1840s to incorporate radical abolitionists and those in physical bondage for whom radical abolitionists advocated. In this sense, the Philadelphia Unitarian Church was always deeply embedded in cultural and religious communities, as its congregation grew well beyond its four solid walls. And as sectional conflict threatened to tear the nation apart in 1859, Furness returned Philadelphia Unitarianism's essential narrative, seeking in that narrative stability and continuity.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Archival Abbreviations:

APS –American Philosophical Society. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

HSP –Historical Society of Society of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

FHL –Friends Historical Library. Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.

LCP –Library Company of Philadelphia. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Unpublished Manuscripts, Pamphlets, Books

Belsham, Thomas. “American Unitarianism; or a Brief History of the Progress and Present State of the Unitarian Churches in America.” Boston, 1815. Accessed via Google Books.

“Considerations on the Matters in Difference Between the Friends of London and Hannah Barnard.” Hudson, 1802. FHL.

Eddowes, Ralph and Joshua Toulmin. “The Spirit of Orthodoxy: As Exhibited in the Proceedings Against John Biddle, the Father of English Unitarians, In the period from 1645 to 1662, for imputed Heresy and Blasphemy. Abridged from Dr. Toulmin’s Review of his life, character, and writings. With Correspondent Remarks on Certain Passages in Dr. Ezra S. Ely’s Sermon of the 4th July, 1827.” Philadelphia, 1828. Duke University.

“Exercises at the Meeting of the First Congregational Unitarian Society, January 12 1875, Together with the Discourse Delivered by Rev. W.H. Furness , DD., Sunday Jan 10, 1875, On the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of his Ordination.” Philadelphia, 1875. Hathi Trust Digital Library.

First Congregational Society of Unitarian Christians in the City of Philadelphia, “Proceedings of a meeting of the members and pew-holders of the First Congregational Society of Unitarian Christians in the city of Philadelphia: held on the 28th September 1846.” Philadelphia, 1846. Union Theological Seminary Library.

First Unitarian Church. First Unitarian Church Records. Microfilm. HSP.

Furness, Horace Howard. “Historical Address Delivered in Connection with the Installation of the Reverend Charles E. St. John as Minister of the First Unitarian

- Church of Philadelphia." Philadelphia, 1908. New York State Library.
- Furness, Horace Howard and William Henry Furness. Correspondence. First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia Archives.
- Furness, William Henry. "An Address Delivered Before a Meeting of Friends of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society During the Annual Fair." Philadelphia, 1850. Openlibrary.com.
- Furness, William Henry. Correspondence. AUA Letterbooks. Harvard-Andover Theological Library. Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- Furness, William Henry. Discourses. HSP.
- Furness, William Henry. Discourses. LCP.
- Furness, William Henry. "Recollections of Seventy Years: a Discourse Delivered in the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia." N.p., 1895. Northwestern University.
- Furness, William Henry. "A Thanksgiving Discourse." N.p., 1845. Emory University Digital Archive.
- Furness, William Henry. "A Sermon Occasioned By the Destruction of Pennsylvania Hall: and delivered on the Lord's Day Following, May 20, 1838, in the First Congregational Unitarian Church." Philadelphia, 1838. FHL
- Garrison, William Lloyd to William Henry Furness. 21 April 1859. Horace Howard Furness Memorial Library, University of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia.
- Horace Howard Furness scrapbook. Microfilm. APS.
- Kemble, Francis. Letters to William Henry Furness. Claremont Colleges Digital Library.
- Parker, Theodore to William Henry Furness. 1845. Horace Howard Furness Memorial Library, University of Pennsylvania. Philadelphia.
- Potter, William James. "Some Aspects of Unitarianism in its past and recent history: two discourses / delivered before the Congregational Church, New Bedford, November 22nd and 29th, 1874". New Bedford, 1874. Yale University.
- Priestley, Joseph. "An Address to the Unitarian Congregation at Philadelphia, Delivered on Sunday, Match 5, 1797." Philadelphia, 1797. Early American Imprints, Series I.
- Sill, Joseph. *Diary*, 1831-1854. HSP.
- Taylor, James. "Notices and Anecdotes, Respecting..." , HSP

Vaughan, John. Correspondence. HSP

Vaughan, John. Vaughan Papers. APS.

Periodicals

Articles

“Antislavery Action Among British Unitarians.” *Pennsylvania Freeman*. Philadelphia. 7. August 1851. Accessed via Newsbank Early American Newspapers.

“Elisha Bates and The Berean.” *The Friend*. Philadelphia. 9 February 1828. Accessed via Google Books.

[No Title] *The Friend*. Philadelphia. 1 March 1834. Accessed via Google Books.

The Miscellaneous Repository. Mount pleasant. 1829. Accessed via Google Books.

“Sarah Hart.” *The Gospel Herald and Universalist Review*. New York. 30 July 1825. Accessed via American Periodicals.

“To Mr. W. L. McCalla, , Preacher of the Doctrine of Endless Misery, Philadelphia.” *The Gospel Herald and Universalist Review*. New York. 26 February 1825. Accessed via American Periodicals.

“The Unitarian Convention.” *Pennsylvania Freeman*. Philadelphia. 29 October 1846. Accessed via Newsbank Early American Newspapers.

Other Periodicals Read

The Berean. Wilmington.

The Christian Examiner. Boston.

The Christian Register. Boston.

The Friend. Philadelphia. Accessed via Google Books.

The Liberator. Boston.

The Miscellaneous Repository. Mount Pleasant. Accessed via Google Books.

The Unitarian. New York.

The Unitarian Advocate. Boston.

Published Primary Sources

Alcott, Bronson. *The Journals of Bronson Alcott*. Ed. Odell Shepard. Boston: Little,

- Brown & Company, 1938.
- Channing, William Ellery. *The Works of William E. Channing, D.D.* Boston, 1893.
- De Normandie, James. *In Memory of William Henry Furness, D.D.: A Sermon Preached to the First Church in Roxbury, Boston, February 2, 1896.* N.p., 1896.
- Eddowes, Ralph. *The Unity of God and the Worship that is Due to Him Alone.* Philadelphia, 1813. Accessed via Google Books.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo and William Henry Furness. *Records of a Lifelong Friendship, 1807-1882. Ralph Waldo Emerson and William Henry Furness.* Ed. Horace Howard Furness. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1910.
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson.* Ed. Ralph L Rusk and Eleanor M. Tilton. New York: Columbia University Press, 1939.
- Furness, William Henry. *God and Immortality: A Discourse Delivered in Memory of Lucretia Mott.* Philadelphia, 1881.
- Garrison, William Lloyd. *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison.* Ed. Louis Ruchames and Walter McIntosh Merrill. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971.
- Gilbert, E. W. and Benjamin Ferris. *Letters of Paul and Amicus: Originally Published in The Christian Repository.* Wilmington, 1823.
- Kemble, Francis. *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation.* New York, 1863.
- Leland, Charles Godfrey. *Memoirs.* New York, 1893. Accessed via Google Books.
- May, Samuel Joseph. *Some Recollections of our Antislavery Conflict.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2005. Making of America eBook.
- Mott, Lucretia. *Lucretia Mott, Her Complete Speeches and Sermons.* Ed. Dana Greene. New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1980.
- . *Selected Letters of Lucretia Coffin Mott.* Ed. Beverly Wilson Palmer. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002.
- Mott, James and Lucretia. *James and Lucretia Mott: Life and Letters.* Ed. Anna David Hallowell. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1896.
- Potter, William James. *Essays and Sermons of William James Potter (1829-1893), Unitarian Minister and Freethinker.* Ed. J. Edward Tarbox, Jr. and Creighton Peden. Lewiston, NY, 2003.

- Priestley, Joseph. *Discourses on the Evidence on the Nature of Revealed Religion*. London, 1794. Accessed via Google Books.
- Priestley, Joseph. *Unitarianism Explained and Defended*. Accessed via Google Books.
- Proceedings of the Regular Autumnal Convention of Unitarian Christians: Held in the City of Philadelphia, October 20, 1846*. Philadelphia, 1846.
- Sartain, John. *The Reminiscences of a Very Old Man, 1808-1897*. New York, 1899.
- The Unitarian Society of Philadelphia. *Sermons, Addresses, and Essays Delivered at the Celebration of the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Foundation of the First Unitarian Church of Philadelphia*. Philadelphia, 1896. Accessed via Google Books.
- Vaughan Sewing Circle, *The Seventeenth Annual Report of the "Vaughan Sewing Circle,"* November 1859.
- Ware, Henry Jr. *Views of Christian Truth, Piety, and Morality, Selected from the Writings of Dr. Priestley with A Memoir of His Life*. Cambridge, 1834. Accessed via Google Books.
- Whittier, John Greenleaf. *The Anti-Slavery Convention of 1833*. Boston, 1897. Accessed via Johns Hopkins Internet Archive.
- Wright, Frances. *Life, Letters, and Lectures, 1834/1844*. New York: Arno Press, 1972.

Secondary Sources

Published Secondary Sources

- Aaron Sullivan. "'That Charity Which Begins at Home': Ethnic Societies and Benevolence in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia." *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 134.4 (2010): 305–337.
- Abzug, Robert. *Cosmos Crumbling*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- American Unitarian Association. *Unitarianism: Its Origin and History. A Course of Sixteen Lectures Delivered in Channing Hall, Boston, 1888-89*. Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1895.
- Ammerman, Nancy T. *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Anderson, Benedict R. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of*

- Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1983.
- Armitage, David, and Michael J. Braddick. *The British Atlantic World: 1500 - 1800*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.
- Balibar, Etienne. *Race, Nation, Class : Ambiguous Identities*. London: Verso, 1991.
- Banner, Lois W. "Religious Benevolence as Social Control: A Critique of An Interpretation." *Journal of American History*, 60.1. (1993).
- Barbour, Hugh and J. William Frost. *The Quakers*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1988.
- Bennett, Fordyce Richard. "Bronson Alcott and Free Religion." *Studies in the American Renaissance* (1981): 403–421.
- Bercovitch, Sacvan. *The Puritan Origins of the American Self*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975.
- Bowers, J. D. *Joseph Priestley and English Unitarianism in America*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009.
- Commager, Henry Steele. "The Blasphemy of Abner Kneeland." *The New England Quarterly* 8.1 (1935): 29–41.
- Cooke, George Willis. *Unitarianism In America*. Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1902.
- Daniels, Roger. *Coming to America: a History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life*. New York: Harper Collins, 1990.
- David J. Voelker. "Joseph Priestley and English Unitarianism in America (review)." *Journal of the Early Republic* 30.3 (2010): 478–480.
- Deirdre, David. *Fanny Kemble: A Performed Life*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007.
- Doherty, Robert W. *The Hicksite Schism*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1967.
- Dorsey, Bruce. "Friends Becoming Enemies: Philadelphia Benevolence and the Neglected Era of American Quaker History." *Journal of the Early Republic* 18.3 (1998): 395–428.
- . *Reforming Men And Women: Gender in the Antebellum City*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006.

- Durey, Michael. *Transatlantic Radicals and the Early American Republic*. University Press of Kansas, 1997. Print.
- Eliot, Samuel A. *Heralds of a Liberal Faith*. Vol. 3. Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1910-1952.
- Faulkner, Carol. *Lucretia Mott's Heresy: Abolition and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.
- . "The Root of the Evil: Free Produce and Radical Antislavery, 1820-1860." *Journal of the Early Republic* 27.3 (2007): 377-405.
- Forbush, Bliss. *Elias Hicks Quaker Liberal*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1956.
- Foster, Charles I. *An Errand of Mercy; the Evangelical United Front, 1790-1837*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960.
- French, Roderick S. "Liberation from Man and God in Boston: Abner Kneeland's Free-Thought Campaign, 1830-1839." *American Quarterly* 32.2 (1980): 202-221.
- Freund, Elisabeth. *Crusader for Light: Julius R. Friedlander, founder of the Overbrook School for the Blind, 1832*. Philadelphia: Dorrance, 1959.
- Griffin, Clifford S. *Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1960.
- Frost, J. William. *A Perfect Freedom: Religious Liberty in Pennsylvania*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Geffen, Elizabeth M. "Joseph Sill and His Diary." *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*. 94.3 (1970): 275-330.
- . "Philadelphia Protestantism Reacts to Social Reform Movements Before the Civil War." *Pennsylvania History* 30.2 (1963): 192-211.
- . *Philadelphia Unitarianism, 1796-1861*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961.
- . "William Henry Furness: Philadelphia Antislavery Preacher." *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 82.3 (1958): 259-292.
- Ginzberg, Lori D. "'The Hearts of Your Readers Will Shudder': Fanny Wright, Infidelity, and American Freethought." *American Quarterly* 46.2 (1994): 195-226.
- Goodman, Roy and Pierre Swiggers. "John Vaughan (1756-1841) and the Linguistic

- Collection in the Library of the American Philosophical Society." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*. 138.2 (1994).
- Grasso, Christopher. "Skepticism and American Faith: Infidels, Converts, and Religious Doubt in the Early Nineteenth Century." *Journal of the Early Republic* 22.3 (2002): 465–508.
- Griffin, Clifford S. "Religious Benevolence as Social Control, 1815-1860," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 44.3 (1957).
- Griffin, Clifford S. *Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800-1865*. New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1960.
- Hall, David. *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.
- Hamm, Thomas D. *The Quakers in America*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.
- Hatch, Nathan O. *The Democratization of American Christianity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991.
- Hoffmann, R. Joseph. "William Henry Furness: The Transcendentalist Defense of the Gospels." *The New England Quarterly* 56.2 (1983): 238–260.
- Howe, Daniel Walker. "The Evangelical Movement and Political Culture in the North During the Second Party System." *The Journal of American History* 77.4 (1991): 1216–1239.
- . *The Political Culture of the American Whigs*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.
- . *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1970.
- Hutchison, William R. *The Transcendentalist Ministers; Church Reform in the New England Renaissance*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959.
- Ingle, H. Larry. *Quakers in Conflict*. 2nd ed. Pendle Hill Publications, 1998..
- Isenberg, Nancy. *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.
- Jeffrey, Julie Roy. *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism: Ordinary Women in the Antislavery Movement*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

- Johnson, Paul E. *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1978.
- Jones, Rufus Matthew. *The Later Periods of Quakerism*. London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1921.
- Kilbourne, John D., and James Taylor. "Memoir of Bishop White by James Taylor." *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 92.1 (1968): 48–66.
- Lepore, Jill. *A Is for American: Letters and Other Characters in the Newly United States*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002.
- . *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity*. New York: Knopf, 1998.
- Macaulay, John. *Unitarianism in the Antebellum South: The Other Invisible Institution*. Tuscaloosa: University Alabama Press, 2001.
- Marietta, Jack. *The Reformation of American Quakerism, 1748-1783*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984.
- McGuire, Meredith. "Embodied Practices: Negotiation and Resistance," in *Everyday Religion* ed. Nancy Ammerman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- McKivigan, John R. *The War Against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830-1865*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984.
- McKivigan, John R., and Mitchell Snay. *Religion and the Antebellum Debate over Slavery*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998.
- McLoughlin, William G. "Isaac Backus and the Separation of Church and State in America." *The American Historical Review* 73.5 (1968): 1392–1413.
- . *New England Dissent, 1630-1833: the Baptists and the Separation of Church and State*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971.
- Miller, Russell. *The Larger Hope*. Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1979.
- Moore, R. Laurence. "Insiders and Outsiders in American Historical Narrative and American History." *The American Historical Review* 87.2 (1982): 390–412.
- . "Religion, Secularization, and the Shaping of the Culture Industry in Antebellum America." *American Quarterly*. 41.2 (1989): 216-242.
- . *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

- Nash, Gary B. *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Nelson, Dana D. *National Manhood Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998.
- Pearson, Samuel C. "From Church to Denomination: American Congregationalism in the Nineteenth Century." *Church History* 38.1 (1969): 67-87.
- Perry, Lewis. *Radical Abolitionism: Anarchy and the Government of God in Antislavery Thought*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973.
- Posey, Trisha. "'Alive to the Cry of Distress': Joseph and Jane Sill and Poor Relief in Antebellum Philadelphia." *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 132.3 (2008): 215-243.
- Reid-Maroney, Nina. *Philadelphia's Enlightenment, 1740-1800: Kingdom of Christ, Empire of Reason*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000.
- Robbins, Caroline. "Honest Heretic: Joseph Priestley in America, 1794-1804." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 106.1 (1962): 60-76.
- Rohrer, James R. "Sunday Mails and the Church-State Theme in Jacksonian America." *Journal of the Early Republic* 7.1 (1987): 53-74.
- Sassi, Jonathan D. *A Republic of Righteousness: The Public Christianity of the Post-Revolutionary New England Clergy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Scharf, Thomas and Westcott, Thompson. *History of Philadelphia 1609-1884, Vols. I - III*. Philadelphia, 1884.
- Schofield, Robert E. *The Enlightened Joseph Priestley: a Study of His Life and Work from 1773 to 1804*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004.
- Smith-Rosenberg, Carroll. "Dis-Covering the Subject of the 'Great Constitutional Discussion,' 1786-1789." *The Journal of American History* 79.3 (1992): 841-873.
- Soderlund, Jean. *Quakers & Slavery: A Divided Spirit*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1985.
- Stange, Douglas C. *Patterns of Antislavery Among American Unitarians, 1831-1860*. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 1977.
- Stuaffer, John. *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.

- Stewart, James Brewer. *Holy Warriors : the Abolitionists and American Slavery*. Hill and Wang,, 1976. Print. American Century Series.
- Tarbox, J. Edward and Creighton Peden. "Introduction" in *Essays and Sermons of William James Potter (1829-1893), Unitarian Minister and Freethinker*. Ed. J. Edward Tarbox, Jr. and Creighton Peden. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003
- Tolles, Frederick B. "Emerson and Quakerism." *American Literature* 10.2 (1938): 142–165.
- . "The New-Light Quakers of Lynn and New Bedford." *The New England Quarterly* 32.3 (1959): 291–319.
- Wach, Howard M. "Unitarian Philanthropy and Cultural Hegemony in Comparative Perspective: Manchester and Boston, 1827-1848." *Journal of Social History* 26.3 (1993): 539–557.
- Waldstreicher, David. *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes : the Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.
- Wilbur, Earl Morse. *A History of Unitarianism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1945.
- Winch, Julie. *Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993.
- Wright, Conrad. *American Unitarianism, 1805-1865*. Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society and Northeastern University Press, 1989.
- . *A Stream of Light: a Sesquicentennial History of American Unitarianism*. First ed. Unitarian Universalist Association, 1975.
- . *The Liberal Christians : Essays on American Unitarian History*. Beacon Press, 1970.
- . *Beginnings of Unitarianism in America*. New impression. Gazelle Book Services Ltd, 1983.
- Wyatt-Brown, Bertram. "Prelude to Abolitionism: Sabbatarian Politics and the Rise of the Second Party System." *The Journal of American History* 58.2 (1971): 316–341.
- Yacovone, Donald. *Samuel Joseph May and the Dilemmas of the Liberal Persuasion, 1797-1871*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991.
- Yellin, Jean Fagan. *Women and Sisters: The Antislavery Feminists in American Culture*.

New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

Yellin, Jean Fagan, and John C. Van Horne. *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994.

Unpublished Secondary Sources

Dorsey, Bruce. "City of Brotherly Love: Religious Benevolence , Gender, and Reform in Philadelphia, 1780 – 1844." Diss. Brown University, 1993. FHL.

French, Roderick S. "The Trials of Abner Kneeland : a Study in the Rejection of Democratic Secular Humanism." Diss. The George Washington University, 1971. Richard Stockton College of New Jersey.

Haviland, Margaret Morris. "In the world, but not of the world: The humanitarian activities of Philadelphia Quakers, 1790—1820." Diss. University of Pennsylvania, 1992. Web.

Stern, T.N. *The New Light/Old Light conflict among New Beford [sic] Quakers*. 1994. FHL.

Westscott, Thompson. "A History of Philadelphia, From the Time of the First Settlements on the Deleware to the Consolidation of the City and the Districts in 1854." Mounted and Bounng by Pawson & Nicolson for Brinton Coxe, 1886. APS.