

[Rise and Development of the Congregational Polity and Spirit]

[X.] Henry Ware and Harvard University

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No Date¹

We have already seen how the congregational churches had been split up into factions over theological controversies, until, at the beginning of the 19th [century], there were three distinct parties, (1) There was the old Calvinistic Party. (2) The Hopkinsians, and (3) the out-and-out liberals, who had advanced to the liberal position in opposition to Hopkinsianism.

This date brings us to the beginning of the events which resulted in the severing of the Congregational churches into two bodies, the Trinitarian Congregational and the Unitarian Congregational. In the controversy which was just beginning, the old Calvinists and the Hopkinsians united in their opposition to the liberal movement.

There are five distinct events which mark the process of separation.

- (1) Election of Henry Ware as Professor of Divinity at Harvard in 1805.
- (2) The attempt to revive the proposals of 1705.
- (3) 1815 publication of Jedediah Morse's sermon.
- (4) 1819, Channing's Baltimore sermon.
- (5) Decision of the Dedham case relative to holding church property in 1820.

(1) Election of Henry Ware as Professor of Divinity at Harvard in 1805. It is to be remembered that [a] short one hundred years before this, the Theocracy of New England

¹ Earl C. Davis wrote a good number of manuscripts concerning the history of the church. All are hand-written dating them before 1907—so Pittsfield or Harvard. Some, including this one, are pretty clearly part of a series provided to a congregation—so probably Pittsfield.

received its final blow and passed away in the annals of history in the action of the Governing Board of Harvard in choosing a President who represented the liberal tendencies in New England life.² This same thing happened in 1805, when a vacancy occurred in the Hollis Professorship, and the necessity for choosing a new Lecturer was forced upon them. (It is interesting to think, in this connection, that Harvard was the first University to put into operation the idea of an undenominational divinity, a movement which was regarded as a piece of folly at the time, but which has now vindicated itself, not only in its own work, but in the work of other schools which are practically following in its step.)

In 1721 Hollis³ established a Professorship of Divinity, known as the Hollis Professorship. In the establishment of which he made certain, "Rules, orders and statutes," concerning the election of the professor, and the discharge of his duties.

(1) That the Professor be a Master of Arts, and in communion with some Christian Church of one of the three denominations, Congregational, Presbyterian or Baptist.

...

(11) That the person chosen from time-to-time to be a man of solid learning in Divinity, of sound or orthodox principles, one who is well gifted to teach, of a sober and pious life, and of a grave conversation. Etc.⁴

The only bone of contention was in the one phrase, "of sound or orthodox faith." The name of Henry Ware was prominent, and he was the choice of the liberal or Arminian faction. His election was opposed on the [grounds] that he was not "sound or orthodox" within the meaning of the conditions under which the fund was held.

² Earl Davis is likely referring to the appointment of John Leverette (1662-1724) to Harvard's presidency in 1708. He served until his death in 1724.

³ The Professorship was endowed by Thomas Hollis (1659-1731) a wealthy English merchant and benefactor of Harvard.

⁴ Rules for the Hollis Professorship of Divinity.

Jedediah Morse⁵, who was everywhere present in the controversies which followed, the father of Morse of telegraph fame, was the leader of the fight against the election of Ware. In his pamphlet, published in 1805 under the title, "The True Reasons on which the Election of a Hollis Professor of Divinity in Harvard College was Opposed at the Board of Overseers," [he] says that 33 out of 56 members of the Board of Overseers confirmed the appointment of the Corporation. This was in May 14, 1805. This marks the first clear step in the Unitarian controversy, and notice that it is not the liberal branch that is the branch to withdraw, but the orthodox branch withdraws, and founds Andover.⁶

(2) The second step is an attempt, under the leadership of Jedediah Morse, to revive the sixteen proposals of 1705, which John Wise had dealt with effectively.⁷ They were presented at a meeting in Dorchester. A committee was appointed to investigate the matter and it reported in favor of a modified form of a tribunal of the clergy. But the spirit of Congregationalism was so strongly entrenched that the report of this committee recommending an ecclesiastical tribunal failed, and Jedediah Morse and the conservatives met with a second set back.

(3) The third set of events centered about a very bitter and protracted controversy which assumed the character of a bitter personalities [sic] on Morse's part. A Miss Hannah Adams, of some literary ability, and a great deal of patience and zeal for work, published a history of New England in 1799.⁸ She had shown the manuscript to Morse

⁵ Jedediah Morse (1761-1826), and American geographer and preacher, and, at the time of Ware's appointment, a member of the Harvard Board of Overseers.

⁶ Earl Davis refers to the Andover Theological Seminary, founded in 1807 in Andover, Massachusetts on the campus of Phillips Academy.

⁷ John Wise (1652-1725), a New England Congregational preacher. See Earl Davis' discussion on him among his notes on important historical figures.

⁸ Hannah Adams (1755-1831) American author and historian, published *A Summary History of New England* in 1799. Adams was the first woman in the United States to work professionally as a writer.

previous to her publication. A short time afterwards, as she was about to publish a condensed form, or abstract, of the book, she found that Morse and a fellow minister by the name of Parish, had prepared a shorter history, which infringed somewhat upon the territory which Miss Adams claimed as hers. Morse was charged with plagiarizing.

It happened that those who supported Miss Adams were liberals. Morse immediately jumped to the conclusion that these men were making a personal attack upon his honesty because he had opposed the election of Henry Ware to the Hollis Professorship. This was a long and bitter controversy. Finally in 1815, there appeared in the *Panoplist* an article called American Unitarianism.⁹ The *Panoplist* was a sheet started in 1805 by Morse and others for controversial purposes. It happened that James Freeman, in a letter to Lindsey described the liberal movement in America as Unitarian.¹⁰ This was the opportune moment for Morse, and he seized upon it, urging for complete separation from the liberals. Channing, as leader, followed by others, opposed separation. This publication of 1815 is the first time "Unitarian" is used as describing the movement in America.

The next important event is in 1819 when Channing preached his famous sermon at Baltimore.¹¹

⁹ The article was written by Morse.

¹⁰ The correspondence between James Freeman and Theophilus Lindsey can be found in Thomas Belsham's *American Unitarianism or a Brief History of the Progress and Present State of the Unitarian Churches in America*, Boston: Nathaniel Willis, 1815. James Freeman (1759-1835) was an American writer and minister of the King's Chapel in Boston; he was the first avowedly Unitarian preacher in the United States. Theophilus Lindsey (1723-1808) was an English theologian and preacher who founded the first Unitarian congregation in Essex Street Chapel, London.

¹¹ William Ellery Channing (1780-1842) was the foremost Unitarian preacher in the first half of the 19th century. His "Baltimore Sermon," preached on May 5, 1819, was part of the ordination of Jared Sparks (1789-1866) as the first minister of the First Independent Church of Baltimore. Channing's sermon is notable for announcing the American Unitarian movement.

Notice that it is the orthodox who are the Separatists,
or schismatic body.