

Charles Chauncy (1705-1787), Continued

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No Date

(2) Conflict with Episcopalianism

The rise and growth of the Episcopalian Church in New England was a movement which the clergy looked upon with considerable suspicion and uneasiness. We have already seen how John Lyford² disturbed the Plymouth church by his presence, and by his attempt to modify the Pilgrim Church and overcome the opposition that the Puritans had to the Church of England. The character of Lyford and the persistent efforts of the Episcopalians to gain a footing here led to a general feeling of opposition. The excesses to which religious enthusiasts had carried their ideas as seen in the Great Awakening to a reaction, and under such a reaction the tendency is for a few, who are naturally weak and timid, to seek shelter from the confusion within the limits of a church of authority.

In 1704 a Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts was organized by the, or within the, English Church. Priests were sent to this country as missionaries, and gained a footing here.

In 1742 a law was passed exempting Episcopalians from paying taxes to support the Congregational churches. This is evidence of their influence in politics, and it was the evidence of this

¹ The manuscripts in this series covering early New England Congregational preachers have no date. They are hand-written, dating them before Earl Davis started typing his manuscripts in 1907. So, they date either from his time at Harvard University, or the first year or two of his ministry in Pittsfield.

² John Lyford (1580-1634), a pastor at Leverlegkish, near Laughgaid, Armagh, Ireland, came to the Plymouth Colony in 1624 pretending to be sympathetic to the separatist movement, while in reality he was allied with the Church of England. Evidently, he had left Ireland and come to Plymouth Colony because he had been accused of rape in Ireland. Ultimately, he was banished from Plymouth Colony.

influence that caused such keen opposition to them on the part of the clergy.

By 1745, there were 24 Episcopal clergy in New England and by 1761 there were 30. This represents the results of the labors of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, which was sending out paid missionaries, to work in the New England towns.

Chauncy became the leader of this controversy. It was a curious incident that set him to studying the problem. In a letter to Dr. Ezra Stiles, May 6, 1768, he relates how he happened to become interested in this question. He says,

The occasion was that Mr. Davenport (first rector of Trinity Church, Boston) who married my first wife's sister, declared for the Church, and went over (to England) for orders. ... I imagined that my connections with him would naturally lead me into frequent conversations upon this point. And that I might be thoroughly qualified for the debate with him or others he might be connected with, ... I entered upon this study."

(Ten New England Leaders, p. 289).³

The increase of Episcopal churches with, we have noted, coupled with [sic] the attempt to establish an Episcopal College at Northampton about 1760 made the problem very pressing. The third point which brought out the opposition was an attempt to have a Bishop in New England. As early as 1713 this idea had been suggested and repeated in 1724, 1725, 1727, -- 1749, and was in the air in 1762 when Chas. Chauncy delivered the Dudleian Lecture at Harvard. This lecture was a defense of Non-Episcopal ordination. The publication of this lecture put Chauncy in the front in the controversy.

Feb. 20, 1767, Bishop of Landoff preached a sermon in London before the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts in which the American Colonies were represented as lands of barbarism, and heathenism. Chauncy replied in a very strong, dignified, but unanswerable defense of New England. In 1771, as a final contribution to this controversy, he published, *Complete View of Episcopacy, as exhibited in the Fathers of the*

³ Williston Walker, 1901, *Ten New England Leaders*, New York: Silver, Burdett and Co., 1901, p. 289.

*Christians, until the close of the second century.*⁴ This was a very notable contribution, and very scholarly.

Note the relation of this controversy to the political problems, which were arising. Chauncy here, as in the political problems, was American, and opposed to un-American views.

(3) Theological Controversy

Edwards in his preaching had drawn the logical conclusions that Calvinism demanded. But there was a growing tendency towards Arminian and Arian thought among the clergy of Eastern Mass. Arianism, so Walker says,

was distinctly advocated ... by Jonathan Mayhew⁵ in 1755, ... and Lemuel Briant⁶ of Braintree, Ebenezer Gay⁷ and Daniel Shute⁸ of Hingham, and John Brown of Cohasset were believed to sympathize with this denial of the Trinity." (*Ten N. E. Leaders*, p. 298-9).⁹

Chauncy took a leading part in this controversy. His *Benevolence of the Deity* published in 1784,¹⁰ strikes at the very roots of Calvinism. In this he declared that man is an intelligent moral agent; having in him an ability and freedom to will, as well as to do, in opposition to necessity from any extraneous cause whatever.¹¹

⁴ Charles Chauncy, 1771, *A Compleat View of Episcopacy, as Exhibited From the Fathers of the Christian Church, Until the Close of the Second Century: Containing an Impartial Account of Them, of Their Writings, and of What They Say Concerning Bishops and Presbyters*, reprinted by Forgotten Books, 2018.

⁵ Jonathan Mayhew (1720-1797), American Congregational minister at the Old West Church, Boston, Massachusetts.

⁶ Lemuel Briant (1722-1754), American Congregational minister of the First Church of Braintree, Massachusetts.

⁷ Ebenezer Gay (1718-1796), American Congregational minister of the First Congregational Church of Suffield, Connecticut.

⁸ Daniel Shute (1722-1802), American Congregational minister of the Third (now Second) Parish Church in South Hingham.

⁹ Williston Walker, 1901, *Ten New England Leaders*, New York: Silver, Burdett and Co., 1901, pp. 298-9.

¹⁰ Charles Chauncy, 1784, *The Benevolence of the Deity, Fairly and Impartially Considered*, Boston: Powars & Willis.

¹¹ Charles Chauncy, 1784, *The Benevolence of the Deity, Fairly and Impartially Considered*, Boston: Powars & Willis, p. 1

This is entirely incompatible with the Calvinistic idea of total depravity and especially opposed to Edwards' doctrines. "The plain truth is," says Chauncy,

God, man and means are all concerned in the formation of that character, without which we cannot inherit eternal life. (*Twelve Sermons*, p. 339).¹²

(1) He demands that goodness in God shall be like goodness in Man. (2) If Goodness in God is like Goodness in Man, then the Calvinistic doctrine of reprobation is untenable.

When Chauncy speaks of the benevolence of God he means God's tendency to communicate happiness to man.

This destroys the idea of the doctrine of election and with this idea destroyed, the idea of the limited atonement goes with it. If you give up the idea of a limited atonement, and still hold to the idea of Christ's death as an atonement of satisfaction, you are landed in the doctrine of Universal Salvation. It is just here that the Universalists take their rise through John Murray.¹³

In Chauncy there are four things noticeable as characteristic of the movement which he represents.

- (1) His constant use of the Scripture, "Back to Jesus," in its early form.
- (2) His constant appeal to common sense, or as we would say, to Reason, cf. John Wise.
- (3) His emphasis upon the freedom and the importance of man, closely connected with the above.
- (4) As a natural result of his idea of man's freedom, and importance, we have the constant emphasis upon means of Grace, e.g., his attitude towards Lord's supper. Taking the view of Stoddard.

¹² Charles Chauncy, 1765, *Twelve Sermons*, Boston: D. and J. Kneeland for Thomas Leverett, p. 339.

¹³ John Murray (1741-1815), one of the founders of the Universalist Church. Born in Hampshire, England, he emigrated to New England in 1770.