

## THE CHAOS OF THE CULTS

### 5. UNITARIANISM

Reading: 2 John

While all Unitarian churches are autonomous, they are linked together by a General Assembly, which was established in 1928 to give encouragement and cohesion to the work. *In 1995 they were about 195 churches in Great Britain.* The majority of these churches in England are found in the midlands, Lancashire and the London area. Of course Unitarianism is practiced in Ireland through the denomination known as “ *The Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland.* In Ulster and the Republic there are several forms of the Presbyterian Church. There is the Presbyterian Church of Ireland, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, the Reformed Presbyterian Church and the Free Presbyterian Church. Many people think that “ *The Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland,*” is just another of the same and it’s far from it. Though they may take the name “ *Presbyterian,*” the Non Subscribing Presbyterian Church are far from being orthodox Christians as their liberal stance on theological issues show. Today there are a total of 34 congregations with most of them being in Northern Ireland and just two in the Republic of Ireland.

We are told that there are 1,000 Unitarian Universalist congregations around the world, and that this denomination is growing at the rate of 4 percent annually. The Unitarian Universalist has been defined as “ *an association of fellowships, churches or societies that subscribe to certain broad principles and purposes and affiliate themselves organizationally with the Unitarian Universalist Association headquartered in Boston, Massachusetts.*” ( Alan Gomes Unitarian Universalism 9. ) The Unitarians are so named because they *deny the doctrine of the Trinity* ( George Beach Catechism with an Open Mind ( n.p 1995 ) , 34 ) The Universalists are so named because *they believe in the salvation of all human beings* ( Sheridan Unitarian Universalist 60 ) Now while their numbers and growth may not seem too impressive, Dr. Alan Gomes notes that “ **anyone who has been told that truth is relative, that tolerance of alternative lifestyles and beliefs, including homosexuality, radical feminism, and abortion on demand is the highest virtue, that reason, conscience and experience are the ultimate guides to truth, and that the Bible is a myth and Jesus Christ is but one of many inspirational but fallible teachers, has encountered cherished Unitarian Universalist dogmas.**”

( Journal of Christian Apologetics vol 1, no 2, 35 Alan Gomes ) Many famous historical figures were Unitarians. Among them are five past presidents of the United States of America, John Adams, John Quincy Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Millard Fillmore, and William Taft. In the world of literature we discover that Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Charles Dickens

were all Unitarians. In fact Unitarian Universalist members comprise 25% of those who are listed in America's Hall of Fame. Now as its name suggest, its emphasis is on the Uni-personality of God, in contrast to the Trinitarian view of "*One God, eternally existent in three Persons.*" A Unitarian is defined by Webster is, "*one who denies the doctrine of the Trinity, and regards the Father as the only God.*" Such a view implies the denial of the deity of the Lord Jesus. Although given the highest place as man, He is still less than God. In leaflet 15 of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association, it is stated that a Unitarian is one who believes in the simple unity of God rejecting the doctrine of the Trinity, and believing in the divine nature of man. In course of time other heterodox features were added, which afforded the movement less and less claim to be regarded as within the pale of Christianity. Now where did such a movement begin?: What does such a movement believe? Why is such a movement condemned in the Scriptures?

### (1) ITS DEVELOPMENT

You see, Antitrinitarianism, is rooted in the ancient heresies of Monarchianism, Arianism and Socinianism. Monarchianism is *the failure to hold that there are three Persons who are equally God.* In addition to the errors which sprang up in history, there are today a growing number of individuals, movements and cults which are monarchian. They speak of the Son and the Holy Spirit as being God in a lesser sense than the Father. Sometimes they speak of the Son and the Holy Spirit as not being God at all. My .... the battles in this area are by no means

over. We must insist that the Lord Jesus is God in the same sense as is the Father, and is coequal and coeternal with Him, and we must do the same concerning the Holy Spirit. One of the greatest threats to the truth about God came in the early fourth century from Arius, a presbyter in Alexandria. He maintained that God was but one eternal Person, who before anything else was made, created in His own image His highest creature. This was His only begotten Son. *Arius held that the Son was divine in a secondary sense.* But He was not eternally the Son of God and was certainly not God in the same sense as was the Father. It was by the Son that everything else was made, and it was He who much later, became a man in person of Jesus of Nazareth. The first and greatest creature created by the Son of God was the Holy Spirit. *He was divine in a lesser sense still.* Now for a long time it looked as if the teachings of Arius would conquer the church world-wide. Then Athanasius the Bishop of Alexandria appeared on the scene and we are indebted to him for the purity of the truth. He would not relinquish his stand against this popular heresy of the day.

Someone came to him and said, "*Athanasius, don't you know that the Emperor is against you, the bishops are against you, the church is against you, the whole world is against you.*" Do you know what Athanasius said, "*Then Athanasius is against the whole world.*" Well, truth won the day and the Council of Nicea met in A.D. 325 to deal with the subject and it firmly rejected what Arius taught. It held that the Son was "*Son of God, light of light, very God of very God, being of one substance with the Father.*"

So Unitarians point back to Arius and others who opposed the doctrine of the Trinity and eternal damnation as the forerunners of their movement. However, the movement did not gain any real impetus,

**(a) IN EUROPE:**

Until a Spaniard Michael Servetus ( 1511-53 ) began expounding his Arian views. He denied that Jesus was the Son of God and in 1531 he published a book entitled “ *On the Errors of the Trinity.* ” In this book he asserted “ *Your Trinity is the product of subtlety and madness. The Gospel knows nothing of it.* ” ( Cited in Jack Mendelsohn Why I am a Unitarian Universalist Boston Beacon, 1969, 6 ) This book met with swift condemnation from the religious authorities of the day, so much so that he had to flee to France, change his name. Finally he was executed in 1553. Another individual who contributed to the growth of Unitarianism on the Continent was Faustus Socinius ( 1539-1604 ) After living for some time in France he migrated to Poland where he ended his days. His negations of evangelical truth included the denial of the doctrines of the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the total depravity of man, the vicarious atonement of Christ, and the eternity of future punishment. Soon the doctrines of Unitarianism were found,

**(b) IN ENGLAND:**

John Biddle ( 1615-62 ) an Oxford graduate is the considered the Father of English Unitarianism. ( See Buehrens and Church A Chosen Faith, 214 ) He argued

that the doctrine of the deity of Christ was repugnant to both sound reason and Holy Scripture. ( Philip Schaff History of the Christian Church ) Theophilus Lindsey ( 1723-1808 ) is another who promoted the cause of Unitarianism in England. Because of his views he objected to being required to worship Christ and the Holy Spirit. At one point he circulated a petition that received 250 signatures asking that ministers be relieved from having to subscribe to the Thirty Nine Articles which required belief in the Trinity. The English Parliament rejected this and it was following this in 1773 that the first styled Unitarian church was opened when Lindsey left the Church of England and opened his Essex Chapel in London. From Europe to England and then on to America.

**(c) IN AMERICA:**

Where the first permanent Unitarian church was founded in Philadelphia in 1796. The growth of the movement resulted in a major cleavage in the Congregational Church of America, with approximately 125 churches eventually moving over to the Unitarian side. ( The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide 65 ) A number of individuals were responsible for the growth of Unitarianism in the States. Jonathan Mayhew ( 1720-66 ) Joseph Priestley ( 1733-1804 ) and William Channing ( 1780-1842 ) and Hosea Ballou all did their bit to promote the cause. Then in 1961 the American Unitarians and Universalists were brought together. According to a report in Time magazine “ *A compromise hammered out during the merger eliminated the name of Jesus, from the association’s statement of principles which were said to be*

*immemorially summarized in the Judeo-Christian heritage as love to God and love to man.*" ( Deleted Deity Time June 27, 1983, p 63 ) Now it would be remiss of me to say nothing about this movement,

**(d) IN IRELAND:**

Did you know that Unitarianism caused havoc in the Presbyterian church ? What happened was this. Unitarians dominated the presbytery of Antrim and found many sympathizers throughout the denomination. Many Irish Presbyterians like most orthodox Christians were alarmed at these heretical views concerning the person of Christ and the authority of the Holy Scriptures. So the leaders met over this matter of false doctrine, and they decided that a new subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith was necessary. The liberal wing of the denomination refused to have their ministers and members subscribe to the Westminster Confession. They were called "*New Light*," or "*Non-Subscribing Presbyterians*," and were basically liberal and tolerant in their approach. Subsequently they and their congregations were expelled from the Presbytery of the Synod of Ulster.

Only the heroic stand of Henry Cooke finally ( 1828 ) forced them out of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to form the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church. So Non-Subscribing means they do not subscribe to the fundamentals of the faith. Now while the history of the Unitarians is interesting, the theology of the group is more important than its development. So I want to pass from (1)

**(2) ITS DENIALS**

For Unitarianism is marked not so much by its beliefs as by its "*unbelief's*," for it is a system of negations. Those truths which we deem fundamental to our faith are ruthlessly rejected. In his book Truth Under Attack Eryl Davies says that in one of its official publications the Unitarian General Assembly defines Unitarianism as

**A liberal religious movement arising out of Christianity, expressing itself largely but not wholly in Christian forms and terms, and in the spirit of the man Jesus. It is liberal in rejecting the idea of a unique and final revelation of truth and in trusting men to discover and believe as much as they can for themselves, it is a religious movement inasmuch as it has churches and a ministry and ways of worship. It is glad to remain Christian where it can but glad also to discover other truth and beauty and goodness in other faiths and other lives. Unitarians know of no better man in religion than Jesus of Nazareth, but they believe that there have been others like him in the past, and that there will be others like him again.**

( The Unitarians p 2-3 )

So Unitarians do not claim to be Christian in the biblical sense, indeed while they claim to be tolerant of all religions, in reality they are intolerant of Christians who trust Christ as the only way of salvation. The words they use for evangelical Christianity are "*myth, rubbish, sham, primitive and nonsense.*" Ankerberg & Weldon Encyclopedia of Cults and New Religions, 508 ) Christian

doctrines are often viewed as mere superstitions. Those who believe the Bible is the infallible Word of God are considered imbeciles. Consider what they state,

***(a) In Relation to the Bible:***

*“ Do Unitarians believe the Bible is divinely inspired and infallible ?”* This was one of the key questions addressed to the Unitarian Church, and received the following reply from Dr. Chorowsky one of its ministers.

***No. The doctrine of revelation of the absolute and indisputable authority of the Bible is alien to Unitarian faith and teaching.*** ( Look Magazine 8<sup>th</sup> March 1955 )

Jack Mendelsohn, a respected minister in the Unitarian Universalist Movement expressed the views of the group when he wrote,

***“ Churches, Bibles and creeds are the creations of men who once exercised their freedom to create.” He added, “ The Bible is replete with inaccuracies, inconsistencies and errors.”*** ( Mendelsohn Why I am a Unitarian Universalist p. 132 ) They state

***We regard the Bible as one of many important religious texts but do not consider unique or exclusive in any way. The Bible is not a central document in our religion.***  
( Sias 100, Questions that Non-Members ask about Unitarian Universalism )

You see in contemporary Unitarianism, the individual conscience, guided by human reason is the source of what is believed. While the Bible is respected as *“ a helpful guide,”* containing religious insights, it is rejected as the Word of God. For many Unitarians human reason and experience has replaced the Bible. Mendelsohn wrote,

***With us reason holds the place that is ordinarily accorded to revelation in orthodox religions.*** ( Mendelsohn Why I am a Unitarian Universalist p 37 )

Do you see what they are saying ? We are to be guided by and rely on human reasoning. How different is the counsel of the psalmist when he says, *“ Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”* ( Ps 119:105 ) *“ The entrance of Thy words giveth light, it giveth understanding unto the simple.”* ( Ps 119:130 ) My .... God does not leave us to our own deceptive hearts, our own defective reasoning, this book is our chart and compass.

***(b) In Relation to the Trinity:***

They deny the Trinity, affirming that in God there is only one personality, namely God the Father. Even when they refer to God as Father, they feel that human language is inadequate to define what is beyond definition. For some this reason some find it more helpful not to use the word **“ God,”** at all. Unitarians claim that the Trinitarian doctrine is not taught in the Bible but was later added by the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325. In William Channing’s Baltimore sermon entitled *“ Unitarian Christianity,”*

( 1819 ) he placed “ *Jesus well above humans but well below God, by holding as he put it the most exalted views of Jesus Christ which are consistent with the supremacy of the Father.* ” ( Robinson p 31 ) What Unitarians have failed to recognize is that those who believe in the Trinity do not deny the unity of God. The word “ **Trinity,** ” means “ *three in one.* ” The word “ *signifies that within the one essence of the Godhead we have to distinguish three ‘ persons,’ who are neither three gods on the one side, nor three parts or modes of God on the other, but coequally and coeternally God.* ” ( Evangelical Dictionary of Theology p 1112 ) Do you recall the words of Moses ?

“ *Hear, O Israel the Lord our God is one Lord.* ”

( Deut 6:4 ) That statement underscores the unity of God but it does not deny the Trinity. Time and again in the Book of Genesis the Lord frequently uses plural pronouns “ *us, our,* ” in referring to Himself. ( Gen 1:26 11:7 ) God said, “ *Let us make man in our image.* ” Do you recall the Trinitarian benediction that Paul uses as he bring’s his letter to the Corinthians to an end ? He says, “ *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.* ” ( 2 Cor 13:14 )

The word “ *and,* ” shows that we must regard the Three as distinct from one another, yet Paul clearly believed in the unity of God. You see, although the word “ *Trinity,* ” is not found in the Bible, the doctrine of the “ *Trinity,* ” is there for all to see.

### (c) *In Relation to the Lord Jesus:*

- **His Person:**

Dr. Chorowsky states,

***Unitarians repudiate the doctrine and dogma of the Virgin Birth. Unitarians do not believe that Jesus is the Messiah, either of Jewish hope or of Christian fantasy. They do not believe He is “ God Incarnate,” or the second person of the Trinity as the final arbitrator at the end of time, who shall come to judge the quick and the dead.*** ( Look Magazine 8<sup>th</sup> March 1955 )

They tell us that Jesus was only a man. He is viewed “ ***as one of a number of great moral and ethical teachers who have lived on earth.*** ” ( Sias A Hundred Questions that Non-Members Ask about Unitarian Universalism ) But what does God’s Word say about Christ ? When the Lord Jesus asked as to whom Peter believed Him to be, Peter replied, “ *Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God.* ” ( Matt 16:16 ) Did the Jews not understand that when Christ was claiming to be God’s Son, He was claiming to be in essence God. John tells us, “ *Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the Sabbath. But said also that God was His Father, making himself equal with God.* ” ( 5:18 ) How can a system which robs our Lord of His deity possibly expect to be classed as Christian ?

- **His Work:**

They tell us that man does not need a mediator or Saviour because man is essentially good. Human beings have “ *great potential for further growth,*” and even now possess “ *evidence of the divine.*” ( Marshall, Unitarian Universalists Believe 2 ) Dr. Chorowsky again states,

***Because of the total depravity of man, supposedly, God sent His only begotten Son to the world to die for sinful men. Such doctrine Unitarians find offensive, un-Biblical, even immoral.*** ( Look Magazine 8<sup>th</sup> March 1955 )

Unitarians tell us that Christ’s death was not sacrificial or substitutionary. Socinius the father of Unitarianism tells us that Christ’s death was merely that of a martyr, and that men are inspired to heroic struggle and victory by His unswerving example of loyalty to truth, even though it led to His death. But what does the Bible say ? Paul testifies, “ *But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.*” ( Eph 2:13 ) Peter testifies, “ *For Christ also hath suffered for sins, the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God.*” ( 1 Pet 3:18 ) For the Unitarian there is no saving value in the precious blood, yet the Scripture says “ *without shedding of blood is no remission.*” ( Heb 9:22 ) What about,

- **His Resurrection:**

Well, ***appealing to human reason Unitarians reject Christ’s miracles, His virgin birth, and His resurrection from the dead as mythological.*** ( Sias 100 Questions that Non-Members Ask about Unitarian Universalism , 4 ) You see, they explain our Lord’s resurrection as His deeds and thoughts living on in the lives of others. There was no physical or bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Yet do you recall the angel’s testimony to the women ? “ *Why seek ye the living among the dead ? He is not here, he is risen as He said.*” ( Lk 24:5-6 ) Paul tells us that the resurrection is an integral part of the gospel. He says, “ *He was buried and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.*” ( 1 Cor 15:4 ) Indeed he says, “ *If Christ be not risen, your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins.*” ( 1 Cor 15:17 ) But hallelujah, “ *Up from the grave He arose.*” But what do Unitarians state,

***(d) In Relation to Salvation:***

Well, since they deny the deity of Christ and His role as Saviour, it is to be expected that they would also reject the Bible’s teaching on salvation through faith in Christ. And indeed they do. You see, they are called “ *Unitarian Universalists,*” because they believe that everyone ultimately will be saved. This flows from the premise that all faiths are equally valid systems to bring us to God. The claim by believers that they alone are the children of God, and that Christ is the only way of salvation is considered by them the height of arrogance. Yet Christ Himself said,

*“ I am the door by me if any man enter in he shall be saved and shall go in and out and find pasture.”*

( Jn 10:9 ) Do you recall Peter’s words to the Jewish Sanhedrin ? *“ Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”* ( Acts 4:12 ) In ( Acts Ch 16 ) the Philippian jailor asked what he should do to be saved. Paul answered *“ Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.”* ( Acts 16:31 )

Unitarian minister Jack Mendelsohn states,

***Here was the track of authoritarianism on which orthodox Christianity would run from Paul’s day to our own. It did not occur to Paul that the jailer might have some thoughts and insights of his own worth probing and nurturing. Paul saw no reason whatsoever for encouraging the man to think, to use his own mind, to exercise his reason, to ponder the experiences of heart and conscience for satisfying religious answers. Paul said none of the words that might have moved Christianity in the direction of freedom and personal responsibility. Instead he uttered a dogma. He said, in effect, this is not something to discuss, to weigh, to test by the experience. No this is something you simply accept. Unitarian Universalists will have none of it.*** ( Mendelsohn, Why I am a Unitarian Universalist p, 29-30 )

You see, for the Unitarian salvation is not a matter of being delivered from the penalty of sin and eternal condemnation through faith in Christ. No, to them

salvation involves character development. We can “save,” ourselves by improving our character from an ethical point of view. ( Robinson, The Unitarians and the Universalists 3, 5 ) Of course, those who know the Lord should be concerned about integrity of character in all areas of life, but this is a result of salvation, not a means to it. ( Eph 2:8-10 ) We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. What do they say,

### ***(e) In Relation to the Future:***

Well, some believe in personal immortality, some believe their deeds and thoughts survive only in the memory of other people, and some simply don’t know. Let me give you a quote,

***Very few Unitarian Universalists believe in a continuing individual existence after physical death. Even fewer believe in the physical existence of places called heaven and hell where one goes after dying.*** ( Sias 100 Questions that Non-Members Ask about Unitarian Universalism, 4 )

Yet what does the Saviour say ? *“ And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.”* ( Matt 25:46 ) (1) (2)

### **(3) ITS DENUNCIATION**

Just as we fight cults today, John was fighting heresy yesterday. You see, there are always going to be people who will attack the Lord Jesus, and they will attack Him from all sides. They will either attack His deity, or they



will attack His humanity. Now this Second Epistle of John is not only a *Personal Letter* ( v 1 ) but it's a *Doctrinal Letter*. In the first 4 verses of this letter John uses the word “ *truth*,” 5 times. ( v1, 2, 3, 4, ) He also uses the word “ *love*,” 4 times. Now when you put those two words together you see the emphasis that John intended in this short letter. He was saying, “ *I want you to understand what Christian love is. Its walking in truth.*” Now its important not to separate these two things. To practice truth without love leads to legalism, to employ truth without love leads to liberalism. Paul combines the two when he says, “ *But speaking the truth in love.*” ( Eph 4:15) You see, in this letter.

#### **(a) TRUTH IS EMPHASISED:**

The truth appears to be the whole body of Christian *teaching later called by John* “ the doctrine of Christ.” ( v 9 ) His deity, His virgin birth, His sinless life, His miracles and teaching, His atoning death, His bodily resurrection, His ascension, His enthronement, and His coming again. John narrows it down to one issue, the Incarnation ( v 7 ) ***Jesus Christ was either God manifest in flesh, in which case all the rest followed as a matter of course or else He wasn't.*** You see, there were false teachers then as there are false teachers now ( v 7 ) and John was determined to fight for the faith. You see, the issue with this whole matter is not sincerity, the issue is truth. Are you concerned about the truth ? Are you concerned about what folk say about your Saviour ? Are you prepared to stand up for Jesus ?

#### **(b) TRUTH IS EXPERIENCED:**

The “ *truth*,” is not only an objective revelation but a subjective experience. We can know the truth. How did this elect lady and her children come to know the truth and become children of God ? Through the grace and mercy of God. ( v 3 ) And when you receive grace and mercy from God you experience His peace. ( Rom 5:1 )

#### **(c) TRUTH IS EMBODIED:**

For the Lord Jesus is “ *the truth*.” ( Jn 14:6 ) Here John affirms **His Deity** for he is “ *the Son of the Father*,” here John affirms **His Humanity** for “ *Jesus Christ is come in the flesh*.” ( v 7 ) My .... if He were not God He could not save you, if He were not Man He could not sympathise with us, but He is perfect God and perfect Man. On one occasion the great Daniel Webster the American statesman was dining with a company of literary men in Boston, a Unitarian stronghold, when the conversation turned upon Christianity. As the gathering was in honour of Mr. Webster he was expected to take a leading part in the conversation, and he frankly stated his belief in Deity of Christ and his personal dependence on His finished work.

A Unitarian minister opposite him said, “ ***Mr. Webster, could you comprehend how Jesus Christ could be both God and man ?***” Webster fixed his eye on him and said, “ ***No, sir, I cannot comprehend it, and I would be ashamed to acknowledge Him as my Saviour if I could comprehend it. If I could comprehend Him, He would be***

*no greater than myself. And such is my conviction of my accountability to God, my sense of sinfulness before Him, and my knowledge of my own incapacity to recover myself, that I feel I need a superhuman Saviour.”*

Do you not find yourself in hearty agreement with Webster's reply ? Often in the morning when I talk to my Heavenly Father about His Son these words are on my lips.

*In Thee most perfectly expressed  
The Father's glories shine  
Of the full Deity possessed  
Eternally Divine  
Worthy O Lamb of God art Thou  
That every knee to Thee should bow*