Christian Connexion and Unitarian Relations 1800-1844

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Christian Connexion and Unitarian Relations
1800-1844

Thomas H. Olbricht

In the years following the Revolutionary War dissatisfaction grew with the established New England religion on various fronts. The main rupture within the Puritan (Congregational) Church was emerging Unitarianism. Unitarianism was an expression of rationalistic influences which fostered an objection to the sovereignty of God and the inability of man, and such mystical traditional theology as the doctrine of the Trinity and the two natures of Christ. Similar in outlook, but prevalent among the less educated was an emphasis on universal salvation of all mankind, and hence Universalism.

But another kind of leaven was at work, especially on the New England frontier, which objected to the formality and coldness of the state church. These men were heirs of the First Awakening of the eighteenth century and were instrumental among the forces which led to the Second Awakening in the early part of the nineteenth century. They emphasized the conversion experience, a heartfelt spontaneous worship, and an uneducated ministry. Churches were first formed by those who withdrew from the established churches. They became known as Separatists, and later, because most of them commenced practicing baptism by immersion, Separatist Baptists.1 In the early years the doctrine of conversion was Calvinistic in that man could only wait for God to act. But at the turn of the century the response of man to God became emphasized resulting in the development of the Freewill Baptists and the Christian Connexion.

The emphasis of the Connexion preachers on the ability of all men to accept salvation was one step toward Unitarian theology, but of course, with a much more evangelistic thrust. But a decade later, certain preachers of the Connexion came to share in addition the objections to the Trinity and the two natures of Christ. Views of this sort had prevailed among the Christians earlier, though for common sense rather than rationalistic reasons. These nascent views were furthered by contact with Unitarian theology, so that after two decades Unitarian Christology became one of the major platforms of the Christians. It was for this reason that cooperation emerged, and at times consideration was given to merger.

This article is an exploration of the contacts which developed at various points between the Christian Connexion and the Unitarians.

The period examined is from the inception of the Connexion at the turn of the century to the attempts at cooperation in the establishment of Meadville Theological School in 1844. These were the crucial formulative years; hence by exploring this period, one discovers the attractions which drew the two groups together, but also the basic differences which precluded any serious merger discussions.

I. THE EARLY YEARS

The Christian Connexion, the New England feeder movement to the Restoration, commenced at Lyndon, Vermont in 1801. By 1820 the movement had spread through New Hampshire, Maine, Massachusetts and was rapidly gaining ground in Central and Western New York. The area of growth is significant since geographically the Connexion was contiguous with and sometimes overlapped in the regions in which the Unitarians were the most numerous. The Connexion began as a protest against the Calvinistic doctrines of predestination and election. The two leaders, Abner Jones and Elias Smith, however, were not alone in this battle regardless of what they themselves thought at first. In Eastern Massachusetts and Southern New Hampshire, Arminian views had already won decisive battles through the preaching of the Freewill Baptists and the Universalists. Ludlum explores the Vermont social climate and concludes that these Arminian leanings were the result of the new democratic experience and the optimistic outlook of the American frontiersman. The Arminian tendencies were thus a facet of the total religious milieu and not limited to an individual movement.

A short description of the backgrounds of Jones and Smith will give some indication of the manner in which they fit the pattern of the times. Abner Jones was born in Royalston, Massachusetts, in 1772. When he was eighty years old, his family moved to Bridgewater, Vermont. Elias Smith was born in Lyme, Connecticut, in 1769, and in 1782, when he was thirteen, he moved with his family

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3 Robert Foster's *The Christian Register and Almanack for 1823* lists the following number of ministers for the various states, ordained and unordained, but by majority ordained: Pa. 1, Conn. 17, Mass. 9, N. Y. (E) 31, (W) 46, Vt. 40, N. H. 21, Me. 15, R. I. 1 (pp. 35-45).


to Woodstock, Vermont. In Vermont both youths attended Baptist services, Jones's parents being Baptists, while Smith's mother was a Congregationalist and his father a Baptist. The Baptist preaching they heard was Calvinistic, yet evangelistic. The later rebellion of both men was against the emphasis on election in the Calvinistic preaching. Jones claims to have come to this conclusion by himself at the time of his conversion. "I supposed," he says, "I was entirely alone in the world, and I fully expected ever to remain so." Jones may not have heard Arminian preaching, but it seems unlikely, since it was abroad in various forms. Smith, on the other hand, admitted that he heard anti-Calvinistic arguments and read on the subject before he finally rejected the emphasis on election. Later he claimed, however, that he "... always believed the gospel was to be preached to every creature." Smith, nevertheless, regarded himself as a Biblicist and not an Arminian. In an interesting statement written in 1805 he opposed Arminianism along with other favorite theologies of the time. "Those converted ministers who are dragging human doctrines, such as Calvinism, Arminianism, Fatalism ... are unclean." While Smith may not have accepted Arminianism as a systematic theology, he did accept its implications for a doctrine of salvation.

Since Jones and Smith held these views of election and came from a Baptist background, one wonders why they did not ally themselves with the Freewill Baptists, since they did have considerable contact with them. Two reasons seem to emerge. Jones had been impressed with the need to depend only on the Bible, and he had discovered in reading Acts that the early disciples went by the name Christian. He was ordained by a conference of Freewill preachers, but as a "Christian." His reason for being ordained in this way was his preference for the name but also his desire not to be limited in his preaching by a denominational label. As the result he was able to preach among the Baptists, Freewill Baptists, Methodists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians. Smith first attended a Freewill conference in 1895 at Somersworth, N. H., and expressed

7Elias Smith, The Life, Conversion, Preaching, Travels, and Suffering, Boston: B. True, 1840, p. 32. According to Ludlum, these were the two areas to which immigrants to Vermont came in those years. Ludlum, p. 10.
9A. D. Jones, p. 37.
10Smith, Life, p. 190.
11Elias Smith, Christian's Magazine, Vol. I, 1805, p. 4. Smith in his early years of preaching for the Baptists fluctuated back and forth in his views of election. When Smith moved to Woburn, Mass., in 1798 he preached election since that was the doctrine of the Baptist Church there, but he did not do it again when he discovered that some of the unconverted joined a dancing school as the result. Life, p. 251.
12A. D. Jones, p. 51.
his approval of what went on. Through he had met Freewill preachers earlier, he had viewed them with the usual Baptist prejudices. In 1803 he was convinced by Jones that the disciples of the Lord should wear the name Christian, and this stood in the way of full fellowship. A second matter which kept the two apart was the organization of the Freewills. The structure of that group was too formal for the independent outlook of Jones and Smith at that time.

The distinctive stand of the early Christian Connexion was a Biblically oriented anti-Calvinism. That this was the case is obvious from the articles which appeared in the early issues of the *Herald of Gospel Liberty*. As Ludlow states,

The Christians received many additions of those who, no longer able to accept the rigor of hyper-Calvinism, sought rest from sectarian strife in the long awaited Church Universal. Because of anti-Calvinism, however, one is not to suppose that the early members of the Christian Connexion felt a kindred spirit with the Arminian Congregationalists (Unitarians). The gap between the two was a wide one, for the Christians emphasized revivalism, experiential conversion, baptism by immersion and had an uneducated ministry.

It was natural that the religions of Vermont should retain the experiential emphasis of the Great Awakening since the inhabitants came from those areas in which revivalism was looked upon with favor. These were also the regions in which Separatism had its greatest influence. Both Jones and Smith experienced the usual

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12 Smith, *Christian's Magazine*, Vol. III, p. 72. Cf. Smith, *Life*, p. 309. In spite of the two groups going separate ways, members and preachers moved back and forth easily in the early years. In 1810 Smith wrote in the *Herald of Gospel Liberty* (August 17, p. 206), "There are in the northern parts of New England, a large number of brethren and preachers, called Freewill Baptists, who are in fellowship with these churches [Christian Connexion]; and some of them have given up their name, and in general they are determined to leave all for Christ. We make no distinctions. They preach, baptize, break bread, with those called Christians; and assist with them in ordaining Elders, and the Elders among the Christians do the same among them. It is likely that ere long, they will publicly declare, that which they now feel, viz., that we are all one in Christ Jesus." It was later, when the Freewills moved toward Trinitarianism that this relationship dissolved.

14 Baxter, pp. 43ff, says that the quarterly Freewill meetings were begun in 1783, monthly meetings in 1792, and yearly meetings before 1800. In 1809 Smith criticized Freewill organization as the cause of much trouble. *Herald of Gospel Liberty*, November 10, 1809, p. 126. The Christians did not develop similar organization until after 1817, in part as the result of the shock from Smith going to the Universalists. L. J. Shaw, *Memoir of Elder Elijah Shaw*, Boston: L. J. Shaw, 1852, p. 67.

15 See February 2, 1809, p. 47; March 2, 1809, p. 54; March 31, p. 62; September 1, p. 108; September 29, p. 114.

16 Ludlum, p. 36.
conversion of the New England frontiersman. Revivalism was a central motif for the Connexion in addition to anti-Calvinism, but then it was fundamental to all frontier religion. The Connecticut Congregationalists with an evangelistic bent helped to further frontier revivalism by sending missionaries to the frontier. Baptism by immersion also prevented the Christians from entering into wholehearted relations with the Unitarians who sprinkled. In 1793, when Smith was still a Baptist and preaching in Salisbury, N. H., he immersed some members of a Congregational Church of which Thomas Worcester was minister. This event resulted in harsh words between the two and a lengthy discussion. In July 1802 Smith preached at Portsmouth, N. H., where among those present was Joseph Buckminster, who had remained a Calvinist. Afterward they discussed the mode of baptism, and three years later Smith wrote a review of Buckminster's sermon presented at the ordination of the younger Buckminster in Cambridge, and the differences between the groups were further accentuated. Of the sermon Smith wrote, "If this discourse is not the hypocrisy of an hypocrite, I am ignorant of the meaning of the phrase." The educational attainments of the ministry also differentiated the two groups. Both Jones and Smith received less than a year of formal schooling, yet taught before they were twenty. This fact indicates the status of education on the frontier. The difference in training becomes obvious when one compares the native-born New Hampshire ministers of the two groups. Of one hundred three New Hampshire-born Christian Connexion preachers only nine attended college and of these nine, seven received their education after 1870. The two who received college training before that time both left the

18Whitney Cross rightly attributes the experiential character of the religion of the "burnt over district" to the migration of the northern New England populations. (The Burned-over District, Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1950, pp. 16ff.)
19Charles Roy Keller, The Second Great Awakening in Connecticut, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1942, p. 77. Missionaries were sent beginning in 1798. The high points of the Connecticut awakenings were 1797-1801, 1807-08, 1812, 1815-1816, 1820-21, and 1825-26. (p. 42) Interestingly, these were also favorable years for the Christian Connexion.
21Buckminster's son was minister of the Brattle Street Church, which favored Unitarianism. He later became a professor at Harvard College.
24Carter, pp. 918f.
Connexion; one trained in the thirties to become a Unitarian, and one in the fifties to become a Baptist. The seventy-four Unitarian ministers listed by Carter, by way of contrast, were all college educated except six, and three of these were ordained in other denominations before they became Unitarians. The frontier, because of its educational level, did not require an educated ministry; but, even when the Connexion became more urban and the people more educated, the compulsion toward the education of ministers was not great. The main reason was possibly the experiential emphasis in the movement. Joseph Badger, who emerged as one of the second generation leaders, himself uneducated, though supporting education for younger men, quoted with pleasure William Ellery Channing’s letter to the Christian Palladium.

I feel that a minister, scantily educated but fervent in spirit, will win more souls to Christ than the most learned minister whose heart is cold, whose words are frozen, whose eye never kindles with feeling, whose form is never expanded with the greatness of his thoughts, and the ardor of his love.

A second factor involved in the education of the ministry was that early preachers of the movement opposed the settled Congregational ministry because it was tax-supported. The early Connexion preachers spent most of their time traveling from place to place, and it took a number of years before the movement accepted the preaching of a man at only one location.

About 1805, the Arminian Congregationalists turned from the controversy about original sin and election to the doctrine of the Trinity. Discussion of the Trinity may be found in Christian Connexion writings at this time, but not as extensively as some ten years later. As with the dispute about Calvinism, the Trinitarian controversy for the Congregationalists was within the church. In both disputes the Christians differed, for they were unanimous on these matters within their movement; their disputes were with orthodox leaders outside, such as the Methodists and Presbyterians. The result was that the Unitarians and Christians were thrown to-

25Ibid., pp. 29, 840.
26 Ibid., pp. 932f. One of these men was the son of Abner Jones, Abner Dumont Jones, his biographer. The information about him is limited; but, since he was ordained at 18, he was no doubt ordained as a Christian Connexion preacher, p. 384.
gether despite the social and religious factors which kept them apart, but not until the Unitarians became independent of the Congregationalists, and the Christians more concerned with Christology.

It is difficult to determine the extent to which the Connexion preachers may have been influenced by the discussion of the Trinity within the established church. Smith mentions in his autobiography that in 1789 he had not as yet questioned the doctrine of the Trinity. He first mentions his consideration of the doctrine while he was preaching at Woburn, Mass., in 1798.

It was at Woburn that my mind was first troubled about what is called the *trinity*. Some years before, Dr. S. Shepard had told me that three persons could not be one person, and that the text brought to prove the trinity, I John v. 7, did not say, three persons, but three, without saying what the three were. He also said, that where Watts said, “When God the mighty maker died,” it ought to have read, “When Christ the mighty Saviour died,” because said he, God never died. This I remembered, and often after my preaching was much troubled on account of my ignorance of that mystery or rather mistake.

The time in which Jones first questioned the doctrine of the Trinity is even less clear. His son says in the biography that his father rejected the doctrine, but does not say why nor the time at which the rejection took place.

The main basis for Smith’s rejection of the Trinity was that he could not find it in the Bible nor would the doctrine stand up when examined by common sense. Smith and Jones affirmed, “I will have nothing but for which I can bring thus saith the Lord, and thus it is written,” and they failed to find anything about the Trinity in the Bible. Upon examining Smith’s earliest extant statement expressing his views on the Trinity the reason for his rejection becomes obvious.

As for three persons being one, and one three, it never was, nor never will be. People may think it is so; but they cannot understand it, for there is no Light in it. This is the mystery of the trinity, and not the mystery of Godliness. Let every per-

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31A. D. Jones, p. 23.
32Ibid., p. 23. For an article on calling doctrines by Biblical terms, see *H. of G. L.*, May 10, 1811, p. 282.
son remember, that trinity is an unscriptural Word, invented to express an unscriptural doctrine, which has puzzled and distracted the world down to the present day. By 1806 Smith was decidedly anti-Trinitarian, but he still did not look with favor on the anti-Trinitarian Congregationalists, as his comments on Buckminster's ordination sermon of the year before indicate.

II. THE FIRST STAGES OF CONTROVERSY

The earliest anti-Trinitarian literature of the Christian Connexion may be found in Smith's Herald of Gospel Liberty. The Herald was a bimonthly newspaper, the first issue of which appeared in September 1808. References to the Trinity appear from the first, but it was not until near the time of the paper's demise under Smith in 1816 that anti-Trinitarianism emerged as the chief polemic, though in certain other periods it received considerable attention. Topics of greater importance in the early years were progress reports of the movement, Calvinism, baptism, and anti-clericalism in that order. More than half the material was polemical in nature, the rest consisting of reports from preachers and contacts with Christian groups in the South and Southwest. The statements on the Trinity were neither positive nor systematic, but mostly directed toward the inadequacies of orthodox views.

The first statement on Christology in the Herald appeared as a refutation of Methodist doctrine. Smith's main attack was on Biblical exegesis and pointed out the inadequacies of the conclusions at which the Methodists arrived. In a footnote to this article Smith clarified his own stand.

I do not believe in an impersonal God, nor consider the son and Spirit as properties of God; but consider the son and Spirit as the Scripture has described them.

An interesting series of articles from the standpoint of the controversy is a series about Calvin's burning of Michael Servetus. The source of the material is not given but probably was taken from a church history book. The doctrine of the Trinity is not mentioned in the articles, but Servetus became the hero martyr of American Unitarians of various sorts. The year 1811 appears to be the one

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34 H. of G. L., September 15, 1809, p. 110.
35 Ibid., p. 111.
36 March 30, 1810, p. 166. Other references to the doctrine are: May 11, 1810, pp. 179, 180; July 20, 1810, p. 198. On October 26, 1810, Smith notes the founding of Andover Divinity School and presents a tirade against it. December 2, 1810, p. 242; February 1, 1811, p. 254; April 12, 1811, p. 314; November 8, 1811, p. 334; March 29, 1811, p. 272; January 31, 1812, p. 360; June 5, 1812, p. 395; July 17, 1812, p. 407; January 22, 1813, p. 459; December 24, 1813, pp. 554-55. This issue contains a letter to Smith's old friend and minister of the Second Baptist Church in Boston, Thomas Baldwin, opposing the doctrine.
in which the articles on the Trinity were the most numerous. In this time, too, Smith seemed to place less emphasis on the Biblical approach to the question and worked more at showing how irrational the doctrine is. He claimed that no one with good sense could explain how three persons could be one.

In 1813 the first pamphlet was published by the Christians on the controversy. It was written by Frederic Plumer, a young Connexion preacher. The title, “On Contradictions in the Methodist Discipline on the Trinity,” indicates the polemic nature of the document. The pamphlet, however, seems not to have enjoyed any sizeable circulation. But the Christians did not go unnoticed. In 1814 Stephen Porter of Ballston, Mass., attacked the anti-Trinitarian statements in Smith’s A New Testament Dictionary. Porter commented that Smith in defining Fables said, “These fables are such doctrines and laws as are not named in the Scriptures. I will name a few of them.” The first word on the list, to Porter’s dismay, was “Trinity.”

It appears that before Smith departed from the Christians to go to the Universalists in 1817 he was beginning to consider the Unitarians in a more favorable light. In the Herald of Gospel Liberty, March 4, 1914, Smith mentioned that a new publication, the Christian Disciple, had fallen into his hands and stated that it was an excellent work. He claimed not to know its background, but supposed that it was Congregational. It seems unusual that Smith did

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37 The reason is not clear. Smith moved to Philadelphia in July of that year, but what bearing this may have had is uncertain (July 5, 1811, p. 297). It may have been about this time that the controversy opened up in the less populous areas. It was in 1810 that Noah Worcester ran into trouble in favoring Unitarianism in New Hampshire (Ware, pp. 35ff). In 1811, Abiel Abbot was forced to withdraw from his Connecticut church, the first trial on the doctrine there (Wilbur, pp. 414f). At Sandwich, Mass., the same year trouble developed.


39 H. of G. L., September 17, 1813, p. 528. Plumer was originally from New England but moved to Philadelphia in 1810. A few years later he was back in New England. Milo True Morrill, A History of the Christian Denomination in America, Dayton: The Christian Publishing Association, 1912, pp. 112, 114. Cf. H. of G. L., June 22, 1810, p. 192. Jasper Hazen, editor of the Christian Palladium, wrote in 1846, “At first the Christians were generally Trinitarian. Now they are mostly Unitarian” (April 29, 1846, p. 401). Perhaps had he said the early preachers were not anti-Trinitarian he would have been nearer the truth. In 1814 the preachers of the movement were mostly in rural frontier areas. Smith gives the following statistics for preachers in each state in 1814: Conn. 1, R. I. 3, Mass. 11, N. H. 12, Me. 6, Vt. 16 (H. of G. L., March 4, 1813, p. 575).


41 Edited by Noah Worcester at Brighton, Mass., beginning in 1813. Ware, p. 56.
not know Noah Worcester from their early days in New Hampshire. At least he knew Noah’s brother, Thomas.

In 1816 Elias Smith commenced preaching Universalism and a year later became a member of the Universalist Convention. Many in the Connexion were shocked, but younger leadership had already developed and the movement was in little danger. Jones in the meantime had acquired a knowledge of medicine which permitted him to practice, and he gave more time to medicine than to preaching, except at certain intervals. He also did little publishing of the magnitude which characterized Smith’s efforts with the result that he failed to emerge in a serious role of leadership. About this time, because of migrations from upper New England, the geographical center of the movement shifted to New York State in the region south of Rochester. This meant that the older battlegrounds were disappearing and new ones taking their place. The Christians found that in evangelistic outlook they resembled their religious neighbors who were now Methodists, Presbyterians and Arminian Baptists. The one exception was their Unitarian Christology, and this question emerged as central.

Early in 1809 the New England Christians heard of a group in Virginia who had departed from the Methodists and who also went by the name Christian. They also heard of Christians in Kentucky and Ohio who were strongly anti-Trinitarian in sentiment. The exchanges with these people, among whom Barton W. Stone was the best known figure, were more frequent since after the 1820’s many New Englanders who migrated to New York later migrated to Ohio and Indiana. It is doubtful, however, that these contacts had much influence on the Christian Connexion until the 1830’s.

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42 Smith, Life, p. 360. The Universalists were much like the Christians in social and educational background and in their approach to church life. They had gone a step farther and not only claimed that all men could seek salvation, but that eventually all men would receive it.

43 Joseph Badger stated that others were as authoritative as Smith (Holland, pp. 179-190-91).

44 H. of G. L., November 10, 1809, p. 23. Cf. Morrill, p. 110. Smith visited the eastern Christians in 1812, and some of the southerners came north at a later date (October 25, 1811), but no effective cooperation existed prior to the Civil War. Discussions of merger were carried on in the Christian Sun (South) and the Christian Palladium by the respective editors Daniel W. Kerr and Joseph Marsh in the early 40’s (Christian Palladium, June 15, 1841). In 1844, however, the Northern group adopted an abolition platform, and discussions were broken off (Christian Sun, August 9, 1844).

45 On Stone’s Trinitarian views see Winfred Ernest Garrison and Alfred T. DeGroot, The Disciples of Christ A History, St. Louis: Christian Board of Publication, 1948, pp. 118ff. Joseph Badger was the first Connexion leader to visit the Stoneites, going to Kentucky in 1825 (Holland, p. 206). The Eastern Christians knew little about the Stone people before that time. In 1834 David Millard made a trip to the West, and from his letters it is obvious that the two
It was because of their strong anti-Trinitarian sentiments that the Christians moved from their close fellowship with the Freewill Baptists toward a greater affinity with the Unitarians. Responsibility for this change may be accredited to a number of young men who emerged into leadership roles in central New York. One of the most influential of these was David Millard, who was the first Connexion preacher ordained in the state of New York. Millard lived most of his adult life in the area south of Rochester, New York, but he traveled extensively. He secured a place for himself in the Trinitarian controversy while he was yet young by publishing a short work on the subject in 1818. In the preface he indicated that the Christians did not have at that time any work on the subject which was widely circulated. “I can only regret,” he wrote, “that this subject has not been taken up by a more able hand, and handled in a more skillful manner.” In 1823 he produced a more elaborate, bound work, which was revised and reprinted again in 1837. The influence of this book is attested in various ways. Henry Ware, Jr., a Unitarian and Harvard professor, indicated familiarity with it. In the preface to the second edition, Millard wrote:

A large number of persons, from reading this little volume have become decided believers in the divine unity of God, and groups were by no means merged (Christian Palladium, June 16, 1834).

46 Morrill, p. 114. The first New York church appears to have been established in 1809 in Otsego County (H. of G. L., February 28, 1812, p. 363). Millard was converted at Ballstown, N. Y., in 1814 by Nancy Grove Cram. She was a Freewill Baptist, originally from Weare, N. H., and probably remained in that faith. She returned to New Hampshire to encourage Freewill preachers to move to the frontier, but being unsuccessful she stopped at a Connexion meeting at Woodstock, Vt., and persuaded three of their preachers to make the trip (J. F. Burnett, Early Women of the Christian Church, Dayton: The Christian Publishing Association, 1921, pp. 11f). A letter from Millard appeared in the H. of G. L., June 9, 1815, p. 691, written from Ballstown, N. J., in which Millard gives his age as 20. Millard later was a lecturer at Meadville Theological School from 1844 until his death in 1866 (Francis A. Christie, The Makers of the Meadville Theological School, Boston: The Beacon Press, Inc., 1927, p. 5). See also D. E. Millard, Memoir of Rev. David Millard, Dayton: The Christian Publishing Association, 1874.

47 David Millard, The True Messiah Exalted or Jesus Christ really the Son of God, vindicated in three letters to a Presbyterian minister, Canandaigua: J. D. Bemis, 1818. The pamphlet was also printed from Keene, N. H., in 1819.

48 Ibid., p. 3.

49 The pagination here is from The True Messiah (In Scripture Light or the Unity of God, and Proper Sonship of Jesus Christ, Affirmed and Defended), Union Mills, N. Y.: The Christian General Book Association, 1837.

50 John Ware, Memoirs of the Life of Henry Ware, Jr., Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1846, p. 187.
the Sonship of Jesus Christ; among whom are several able ministers of the gospel.\textsuperscript{51}

It is important from the standpoint of Christian-Unitarian relationships to notice that Millard openly recognized indebtedness to two of the most widely known Unitarians of the day—Noah Worcester and William Ellery Channing.

The writings of the venerable Noah Worcester have been a rich treasure for years past. I think he stands justly entitled to a rank with the first writers in our country upon this subject. His “Bible News” and his “Appeal to the Candid,” I could wish were in the hand of every sincere inquirer after truth. Those works have been of great use to me in arranging this. I have also derived assistance from the writings of Dr. Channing, for which I would make grateful acknowledgments.\textsuperscript{52}

From this statement it is clear that willingness to listen to the Unitarians had increased considerably. The increasing contacts are also shown by the fact that Joseph Badger wrote Noah Worcester in 1818 requesting permission to distribute some of his pamphlets. Badger also spoke highly of Worcester’s two works.\textsuperscript{53}

Since the work by Millard influenced the views of the Connexion so extensively, we need to look at this work in detail. The book is divided into four chapters, 1. “The Unity of God,” 2. “On the Sonship of Christ,” 3. “Divine Titles Given to the Son of God,” and 4. “The Trinitarian Mode of Argument Assumed.”\textsuperscript{54} The book, as others written by Connexion preachers, was more concerned with refu-
tation than with taking a position and it is therefore not easy to construct a statement concerning what Millard believed about the Trinity. He evidently had two chief assumptions: (1) All doctrines must stand the test of reason, and (2) God is impassible, that is, he cannot suffer. The beginning points were likewise shared by the Unitarians. The fact that certain points of view from which he worked were condemned as heresy in the fourth and fifth centuries did not seem to bother Millard, and he came up with a strange combination of ancient heresies. He accepted the Arian conclusion that there was a time when Christ was not, i.e., he was not eternally the Son. At the same time he rejected Arius' view that Christ was created from nothing, asserting that he was not created, but derived. He was the proper Son of God, to employ Millard's own terminology. He was therefore in part correct in contending that he was not an Arian. He, however, did select his position from another ancient heresy; he was a monophysite, contending that Christ's nature was one—Divine.

That which proceeded forth from God before the foundation of the world, was made flesh in the womb of the Virgin, by the power of the Holy Ghost; so that Christ's flesh being made of the Word united with the seed of the woman, and was and is far superior to human nature. As Christ proceeded forth from God and was made flesh, he is far superior to human, and is DIVINE.

55Millard quotes Samuel Clarke, "... the doctrine which cannot stand the test of rational investigation, cannot be true" (p. 25). Cf. Channing, "... the ultimate reliance of a human being is and must be on his own mind" (Quoted in Stow Persons, Free Religion, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947, p. 4).
56Millard, p. 63. The Son of God, however, can suffer (p. 72). Channing accepted the view that God did not suffer but differed with Millard's theory of atonement. Channing viewed the efficacy of the death of Christ its "moral influence" (John White Chadwick, William Ellery Channing, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1903, p. 146). This difference is a basic one. The Christians were evangelistic and still accepted original sin. Sin is therefore something that only God can deal with. This, along with cultural reasons, is why transcendentalism did not make headway in the Christian Connexion. Austin Craig, who came the nearest of the Christians to being a transcendentalist, still emphasized experimental religion and hence did not qualify as a transcendentalist. Transcendentalists were too certain of the goodness of man to feel a need for conversion (W. S. Harwood, Life and Letters of Austin Craig, New York: Revell Company, 1908, p. 72). At one time Craig hoped to secure Emerson and Parker as lecturers at his West Bloomington, N. Y. church (p. 162).
57Millard, pp. 101, 242. Christ was preexistent but not eternal. Interestingly Millard used the word derived rather than begotten, which is a Biblical term. The Trinitarians, however, used begotten and he may have thought it would cause confusion.
58Ibid., p. 115. Christ was divine, but not a deity. "... but the Bible nowhere mentions the deity of Christ" (p. 209). This use of language indicates that Millard's interest was chiefly polemical. In his view Jesus is neither fully God nor fully man.
Strangely enough, Millard was not accused of the monophysite heresy. But then Millard’s view was not the same as ancient monophysitism, since the monophysites employed the Stoic Logos in their doctrine and considered the Son eternally existent because the Arian alternative had been condemned.

The question has to be raised as to whether Millard’s Christology, by his own premises, was any better than that of the Trinitarians. He was especially vicious in his attack on the two-natures view of Christ, charging that no one could make sense of it, and the orthodox, when cornered, replied that it was a mystery. But did Millard do any better? It is true that he stuck to his premise that God did not suffer, but he believed that sin could only be overcome by someone superior to man, and hence the Son suffered.

Being made flesh, he became subject to pain, sickness, sorrow, and death; and thus, in all things he was made like unto his brethren. . . .59 Christ’s death was not a human death, for, if so, it would be meaningless.60 But Millard’s Christ seems to be in as difficult a situation rationally as the orthodox Christ. He recognized his predicament, but still would not admit of mystery. His out was “. . . I, therefore, leave the subject where the Bible leaves it.”61 Millard once again is shown to be a better debater than a constructive theologian.

The work shows erudition in spite of Millard’s lack of a college education. Christie says: “Certainly his exegetical and controversial work, The True Messiah, shows an informed mind.”62 Millard surprisingly does not quote Worcester or Channing but does refer to the church histories of Mr. Milner, Dr. Mosheim, and Dr. Priestley.63

By the third decade of the nineteenth century the two ancient foes of the Christians subsided and were exceedingly weak in New York, the new center of the movement. This left the New York preachers free to concentrate on the new enemy, Trinitarianism.64 An important element of the anticlerical polemic of the early years was the tax support of ministers. By the late twenties, however, this practice had all but vanished. As Smith pointed out in 1811, the Southern states and Vermont were free of this requirement.65 In 1814 the

59Ibid., p. 115.
60Ibid., pp. 71f. Some Methodists granted that God did not suffer. They argued that Christ had two natures and that it was the human nature which suffered. Millard would have none of this. He correctly pointed out that if they retained their view of sin, Christ dying in his human nature would not provide forgiveness.
61Ibid., p. 100.
62Christie, p. 58.
63Millard, p. 36.
64Controversy was one of the characteristics of frontier religion. Clifton E. Olmstead, History of Religion in the United States, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1960, pp. 304ff. When one controversial matter declined, another was taken up.
65H. of G. L., June 21, 1811, p. 293.
church-state relationship was voted out in Connecticut, in 1817 in New Hampshire, but not until 1833 in Massachusetts. Calvinism had also greatly declined by the latter part of the twenties. In 1809 Smith could write, "In Edgecombe, Calvinism is law..." but twenty years later in 1829, Noah Porter wrote to Lyman Beecher,

You know as well as I, but, if I am not mistaken, thirty years ago, ten sermons were preached in New England on total depravity and election to one that is preached on those subjects now.

At this time, especially the latter half of the third decade, the preachers of the Connexion devoted themselves more and more to the Trinitarian controversy and sent out feelers of friendship to the Congregational Unitarians.

IV. UNITARIAN OVERTURES

Developments within the Unitarian bodies also favored growing contacts between the two groups. By 1820 it had become obvious to most Unitarians that they were a body apart from the Trinitarian Congregationalists, and they commenced looking for avenues of disseminating their liberal views. In 1821 the Berry Street Conference was formed and the Publishing Fund Society founded. In considering ways of distributing the publications they looked westward and became more interested in the people of the Christian Connexion. While at Baltimore in the early twenties, Jared Sparks became aware of the Stoneite Christians in Kentucky. In 1825 the American Unitarian Association was formed, over some objection, for the primary purpose of publishing tracts and circulars. The following year students from Harvard Divinity School commenced traveling west in the summers, making contacts for liberal Christianity on the frontier. In 1827 Moses G. Thomas traveled by horseback as far west as St. Louis, making many contacts with people of the Christian Connexion.

69Wilbur, p. 439. The publications, however, were not merely concerned with anti-Trinitarianism. Religious publishing began to boom about that time. The Congregationalists commenced quantity publishing about 1815 (Keller, p. 118). It was also a period of new interest in missions. From 1811 to 1820 the Connecticut Congregationalists contributed $34,859.76 to missions, but contributions for the following decade were $123,991.60 (p. 98).
70Wilbur, p. 426.
71Wilbur, p. 443. Further details are found in the American Unitarian Association, Second Annual Report, 1827, p. 49.
Because of these contacts, some Unitarians began to look at the Connexion as the solution to their circulation problems, an outlet for mission enterprises, and a possible source for ministers. Some felt these people would make better frontier preachers than Boston-trained ministers. Henry Ware, Jr., who opposed Unitarian ministers moving out of New England, reasoned that they still had much work there of liberalizing religious views and especially favored such a solution. He wrote Mr. Allen, July 23, 1827:

Mr. Clough [a Boston Connexion preacher] has proposed that the Unitarians and 'Christians' should unite in one, on the Hudson River. Many of us think favorably of the plan, and are disposed to patronize it, if feasible, but are little fearful that it is not. Others start strong objections to it in toto. Something must be done to gain us an increase of ministers.72

Ware's favorable response was the result of his contacts with the Christian preachers. He was personally acquainted with Clough, and wrote of him, "Mr. Clough, an elder of the 'Christians,' a man of a good deal of talent and influence . . ."73 Ware also had visited Millard at his home in West Bloomfield, New York, in 1826. Concerning Millard and the Connexion, he wrote his sister Harriet, . . . I passed the evening with Dr. Millard, author of 'The True Messiah exalted,' whom I found a sensible, interesting man, about thirty-three years of age. . . . [He] tried to persuade me to spend Sunday and preach. . . . I peremptorily denied him. I believe I was right; but indeed, I regretted it, for I shall never be there again and it would have been an opportunity to rivet one of the links of the great Unitarian Chain of connection, and a very important one too. . . .74

The result of these contacts was that Ezra Stiles Gannett, the young colleague of William Ellery Channing, and secretary of the American Unitarian Association, was sent to the United States Christian Conference at West Bloomfield, N. Y., in 1827.75 One purpose for Gannett's appearance was to formulate plans for a theological school, but nothing came of it.76 The reason for lack of enthusiasm among

72Quoted in Ware, p. 201. 73Ibid., p. 202.
74Ibid., p. 187. In 1828 Ware visited Connexion churches while on a trip through Vermont, mentioning especially his stopover at Woodstock, Vt. (p. 218). Ware made these trips because of his ill health, hence the reason for his refusal to preach!
75Ibid., p. 201. The copies of the Christian Palladium in the Andover Library (Harvard Divinity School) are addressed to E. S. Gannett. Apparently, however, he did not find time to read the journal inasmuch as the pages in a number of issues had not been cut. The conference, although called "United States," did not include delegates from the South and West even though occasional messengers might be present from the O'Kelly and Stone people. In 1834 the delegates to the conference were only from the East, with a few from Ohio. The New England Christians by this time had a number of churches in Ohio, established by people who had moved from New York (Christian Palladium, September 1, 1834, p. 152; October 15, 1834, p. 197).
76Christie, p. 5.
the Christians was probably best summed up by David Millard in an article in the 1826 *Gospel Luminary*, p. 199:

To say a man cannot be a minister of the gospel, without what is termed a liberal education, is to say most of the primitive preachers of the gospel were not such in reality. In short it would contradict the scriptures of truth, and the Lord God himself.

Certain leaders of the Christians, including Millard and Joseph Badger, were inclined toward the education of those ministers who desired it, but they fluctuated back and forth, always defending the place for those ministers who were untrained as they themselves were. Simon Clough appears to be the only minister who consistently pushed the idea of an educated ministry, but he was one of the few who preached solely in the urban centers, first at Boston, then in New York. Most of the Christian ministers spent their lives away from the seaboard and appear either to have been indifferent or opposed to the education of young men.

The overtures of the Unitarian societies soon began to appear in the Christian publications. In February 1826, the following statement appeared in the *Gospel Luminary* under the title *Unitarian Association*:

We have lately received a letter from the Corresponding Secretary of the American Unitarian Association, inviting a cooperation with them of all such as are friends to liberal and rational Christianity, the leading features of which are, a belief in one God, and his Son Jesus Christ. The object thus far is good, and although we are not connected with the American Unitarian Association, we feel willing to lend our aid, by receiving tracts and distributing them...

References are made in the *Luminary* in the same year to two Unitarian publications, the *Christian Inquirer* and the *Christian Register*. Millard commented that he had read the *Inquirer* for the past

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77Christie, pp. 6f.
78It was 1834 before the Christians even went so far as to back an academy—the one proposed by Elder Tobey at Portsmouth, N. H. W. E. Channing gave $50 toward its establishment (*Christian Palladium*, June 16, 1834, p. 72). A similar school was established at Beverly, Mass., in 1836 through the efforts of J. V. Hines. Both the schools were voted funds by area conferences, but the money was never raised (Morrill, p. 162). It was even difficult for the Christians to raise their preachers' salaries. The blame possibly may be attributed to the early opposition of the Christians to the tax support of ministers, itinerancy, and the view that the preacher must desert all. Because of their early stand, the movement appealed mostly to those who were not inclined to part with their funds. E. Edmunds, *Memoir of Elder Benjamin Taylor*, Boston: George W. White, 1850, p. 33. Antioch at mid-century was the first college project, but it also failed in Connexion hands for lack of support.
79*Gospel Luminary*, 1826, p. 48. The Christians by this time comprised one of the most influential churches in central and western New York (Cross, p. 263).
80Ibid., pp. 50, 71.
year and recommended it highly to his readers. He further stated that persons wishing to take it might apply to the editor of the *Gospel Luminary*. In the same issue Millard noticed that both the *Christian Register* and the *Inquirer* had spoken highly of a sermon by Simon Clough, delivered at the opening of the Christian Meetinghouse at the corner of Summer and Sea Streets, in Boston, December 29, 1825. He then proceeded to quote at length from the *Inquirer*:

We have viewed with a good deal of interest a sect that has risen up within a few years denominated Christians—They have done much to propagate the doctrines of unadulterated Christianity, and have fearlessly maintained the unity of God. . . . They set up their banner among the humble and the lowly, and many have been sheltered under it. . . . Differing as we do in some particulars from this sect yet as Unitarians we cannot but bid them God speed. . . .

We have been led to these remarks by a sermon delivered by Mr. Clough of this city. . . . We cannot conclude, however, without congratulating the society in this city in having a preacher so well able to vindicate the doctrines they profess. . . .

Additional contacts with the Unitarians are mentioned in the *Luminary*. In New Jersey, a "Female Laborer" by the name of Abigail Roberts proclaimed Unitarian Christology. The hearing she received was not particularly favorable at first because of her theology; but, after she explained her position more fully, the people declared that the great portion of them had always thought that way and they could not understand why their ministers should believe a doctrine ". . . so opposite to the plain and positive declarations of the scriptures, as the Trinity." At this time the relations between the Unitarians and Christians in New Jersey seemed quite congenial. Millard wrote,

In the State of New Jersey, there are a few congregational societies the greater part of which have recently avowed the Unitarian doctrines; and it is highly probable, will become incorporated with the Christian denomination. The greater part of the members of the church at Johnsonburg, have already united, and a number more, it is highly probable, will eventually join. The greater part of the societies in Frankford and Wantage are friendly; but in consequence of the critical state of their public property, choose to remain, for the present, as they are.

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81 *Ibid.*, p. 71. Various references are made in this issue to the Trinitarian controversy. A pamphlet by Henry Grew, a former Hartford, Conn. Baptist, is mentioned, p. 168, and on page 192 a statement from the *New York Telescope* that the Unitarians are on their last leg is refuted, cf. p. 215.

82 Mrs. Roberts was born in Rensaeler County, New York, in 1791. She became a Friend and spoke at their society meetings. She became a convert to the Christian cause through the preaching of Nancy Grove Cram (Burnett, p. 18).

83 *Gospel Luminary*, 1826, p. 222. On page 225 a statement of similar results is included.
One of the ministers of this denomination has united, and some others are friendly to the doctrine we preach. Although cooperation of this sort is significant, it does not appear ever to have been widespread.

Millard also mentions that the United States Annual Conference held at Windham, Connecticut, in September 1826 appointed a committee to correspond with the Unitarian General Baptists of England. The stay of Joseph Badger in Boston for some months in 1828 also served to further relationships. One of Badger's chief interests was the Trinitarian controversy, and he openly sought contacts with the Unitarians, as is shown by his correspondence with Noah Worcester.

Upon arriving in Boston to preach at Summer and Sea streets, he made it a point to meet as many Unitarians as possible. To David Millard, he wrote,

I have visited the colleges at Cambridge, and the venerable Noah Worcester, of Brighton. He is one of the purest men I ever saw... I would also say, that for young men among us who should wish to have a liberal education for the ministry, they can have board and tuition gratis, if properly introduced at Cambridge.

He also became acquainted with Henry Ware, Jr., E. S. Gannett, and Joseph Tuckerman. At one point he seriously considered an invitation to join Mr. Tuckerman in his program of benevolent work, but he finally declined. A difference in the preaching methods of the two groups is pointed up in an anecdote about Badger.

While he was in Boston, he occasionally associated with clergymen of the Unitarian denomination, men who were perhaps distinguished above the average of ministers by the careful and elaborate manner in which they prepared their written discourses. One day he was accosted by one of them thus: 'Mr. Badger, how do you manage to prepare so many sermons?' 'Why, sire,' he replied, 'I never study the words of my sermons. I study ideas, and clothe them in words when I want them.'


Ware wrote in October 1826, "Our Theological School is so poor, that it almost languishes; three applicants went away because there was no support for them" (Ware, p. 190).

It is difficult to imagine Badger in this role since he loved controversy so much. Tuckerman, however, was favorably impressed with him, *ibid.*, p. 308.
Badger was interested in education even though he always defended the rights of the uneducated. It was because of this interest that on the evening of September 8, 1835, he conversed with William Ellery Channing in Channing’s summer residence at Newport, R. I. During the course of the discussion Badger suggested that Channing write an article for the *Christian Palladium*, which appeared the following year. Channing stated at that time that he regarded the Christian denomination as having a great mission to fulfill. He hoped that the denomination would give more serious attention to education.\(^9^0\)

An interesting event occurred during Badger’s residence at Boston which points up some of the differences between the two groups and indicates that Badger was not as ecumenical as his association with the Unitarian ministers might lead one to believe. A young lady who had been a Unitarian became a member of the Christian Church while Badger was there. Concerning her changed status, he wrote,

> I baptized a very respectable young lady who had always attended a Unitarian meeting until a few months since, when she found in a pew of her chapel Clough’s letter to Mr. Smallfield, which excited her inquiry and finally became the means of her awakening. Thus a good thing may come out of a despised and persecuted Nazareth.\(^9^1\)

One problem in any rapprochement with the Unitarians was evidently a feeling of inferiority on the part of the Christians.

V. HOPES OF UNITY DIMINISH

During the thirties the contacts continued, but it appears that both groups became increasingly aware of the deep-seated differences. The Unitarians were friendly, but reserved, waiting for responses from the Christians. Some of the Christians were alarmed at the friendship, fearful that they might be swallowed up by the Unitarians. The result was that the contacts became less numerous and the groups became less optimistic about their ability to work together. Both groups also developed internal problems which diminished their desire for external contacts. These new developments also drew interest away from the Trinitarian controversy, which had thrown the two denominations together in the first place.

The Christians first became interested in structuring their brotherhood when Elias Smith left the fellowship in 1817. But in spite of growing concern, nothing of great significance jelled until the thirties. As they tightened their organizational structures, the Christians turned more inward. At first, the trend was to develop regional conferences which had the right to ordain and try ministers. Before long a General Conference was held, the first in 1820, but it was a loosely organized affair and not delegated, with people from

all denominations invited. Much opposition to this sort of arrangement was expressed. By the thirties representation had developed to some extent, and as late as the 1832 Badger found it necessary to defend the principle of the delegated conference. So indifferent were the Christians to organization that in 1832 the decision was made to abandon the United States Conference, but it was reorganized the next year, this time on a permanent basis.

In the late thirties the growing influence of the Campbell Reformers caused the Christians anguish. In New England the influence was not felt until the forties, but in Ohio many churches of the Connexion were won over to the position of Campbell. Later historians of the Connexion, who lived in the days when a merger had finally taken place between the New England, Virginia, and Kentucky Christians who did not become a part of the larger Campbell movement, assumed that earlier relationships were closer than they actually were. They write as if the New England Christians were one with the Stoneites and the Virginia Christians and as though the Stoneites deserted this unity. It is true that interrelationships existed, but the picture is not that simple, and the matter awaits further investigation.

About 1834 the Christians began to recognize Alexander Campbell as the new enemy in the West. The Unitarians, in contrast, were little alarmed by the influence of Campbell. A few years later,

93 Christian Palladium, June 1832, p. 42.
94 Christian Palladium, November 1832, p. 149; May 1883, pp. 43, 66.
95 Morrill, p. 132. Cf. J. F. Burnett, Barton W. Stone, Dayton: The Christian Publishing Association, 1921, p. 38. The Eastern Christians did not have delegates from the South or West at their United States General Conference even in 1834. Christian Palladium, September 1, 1834, p. 152, and October 15, 1834, p. 197. In 1832 and later the Reformers and the Stoneites commenced their merger attempts. It appears to have been late in 1834, however, before the Christians in the East became concerned. Letters from the West before that time say nothing of the problem. See the Palladium, July 1833, p. 230; November, pp. 266, 254; June 16, 1834, p. 71. A letter from Matthew Gardner in the November 1, 1834 issue, page 213, is the first indication of alarm.
96 The material remains so that the relations and mergers could be determined, but such a study is still to be undertaken.
97 Campbell often spoke in Unitarian churches. The following statement is made by the editor of The Western Messenger, Vol. I, 1836, p. 56, titled “Alexander Campbell at Louisville.” (The Messenger was published by the Western Unitarian Association and printed bound in Boston by James Munroe & Co.) “Before his [Campbell’s] arrival, some of his friends had requested the use of our Unitarian church, on the morning of the Lord’s day, April 5th, on which he was expected to be present. We willingly consented; not however wishing to give up our church entirely on that day, but rather that Mr. Campbell should come and preach to us, and his own friends, together. We thought it a more Christian way, for us all to
Transcendentalism sprang up among the Unitarians which siphoned off the energies for relations with others because of the internal disputes. Campbell in some ways was closer to the Unitarians of the early thirties than were the Christians, but he was more concerned with “restoring the primitive faith” than either. He rejected experiential conversion, insisting that the basis for faith was the Biblical message about Jesus Christ. He appeared on the scene just in time to cause the Christians to defend their experiential revivalism, which may have contributed to the strengthening of this emphasis, weakened by contacts with the Unitarians. At the same time, the traditionalists among the Unitarians were becoming more entrenched in their rationalistic views as the result of the rising romanticism of the Transcendentalists.98

The views concerning Campbell, expressed in the Christian Palladium in 1834, were mixed. In March of that year (p. 322) he was mentioned and called a sectarian. In the very same issue, however, L. D. Fleming sent in a report, following a visit to Bethany, which is quite favorable (p. 342). In September, an article appeared opposing Campbell’s view of the Holy Spirit, and Badger wrote on the subject in the same issue.99 In 1836 Campbell made a trip to New England, but little resulted except the establishment of a church in Vermont.100 He met several of the Christians but felt that they were not following the Bible closely enough.

It was boasted by many preachers in New England and New York that the Bible was their only creed, and that by it alone they would be governed; but unless the production of great excitement, camp meetings, war against Trinitarians, and enunciations against Calvinism be walking by the Bible alone, I cannot see that these Eastern Christians are more under the banners of the Bible than any other sect in the land.101

By 1840, however, the rift between Campbell and the New England Christians was certain. By that time they accused Stone of having gone over to the Campbellites.102

During the thirties the Trinitarian controversy continued in the pages of the Palladium. One can find articles on the subject in almost every issue or read a report of a debate or difficulty which some preacher had with a Trinitarian. In the late thirties, however, worship together on that morning, than to desert our church because other Christians were coming to it.” But see Campbell’s complaint of unfair treatment by the Unitarians, Millennial Harbinger, Vol. VII, 1836, pp. 289-293.

98Wilbur, pp. 456ff.


100Garrison and DeGroot, p. 268.


102Garrison and DeGroot, p. 216.
such material begins to decrease. Throughout this decade numerous quotations from Unitarian writings appear in the *Palladium*. Sometimes articles of a devotional sort may be found. In the issues available at the Andover Library, quotations during this decade may be found from the following Unitarian journals: one from the *Christian Examiner*, four from the *Christian Monitor*, six from the *Christian Register*, and two from the *Unitarian Advocate*. Also in these issues may be found three articles by William Ellery Channing on “Sin,” “Love to Christ,” and “Ultra Universalism.”

One also discovers in the *Palladium* the movement away from the Freewill Baptists. Notice is given in 1832 of an attempt by the Freewills to secure a Trinitarian creed. The Freewills and the Christians had worked together, especially in New York in the twenties, but the growing emphasis which the Christians placed on Unitarian Christology drew them farther apart. Zalmon Tobey was expelled from the Freewill Baptists in the Connecticut-Rhode Island Conference in 1833 because of his Unitarian sentiments.

Various notices in the *Palladium* during these years pointed up ways in which the Christians differed from the Unitarians. J. V. Himes, a Connexion minister in Boston, tells about a group of people who had mistaken the Christians for Unitarians.

But they were surprised at our views of revivals of religion, and of conversion. “We thought,” said they, “That they believed in this cold, chilling doctrine of Unitarianism,” (as they contemptuously call it), and of course denied the influence of the Holy Spirit, and were opposed to evangelical religion.

Himes, however, was careful not to appear critical of the Unitarians in his own comments. In fact, a year later he even defended their style of religion, a defense, however, which few Unitarians would likely welcome.

Besides, some of the Congregational Unitarians do approve of revivals, and do have them in their societies. The subjects of their revivals are as pious and devoted as those of the orthodox.

Millard heard a similar criticism of the Unitarians by a Congregational preacher while on a train trip. The comments on education are exaggerated, but probably more true than the Christians would care to admit.

Unitarians! said he, they are not Christians; they do not believe in experimental religion. I replied that I was acquainted with one body of people who are sometimes called Unitarians, who contend as zealously for experimental religion as any peo-

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103 Most issues of the *Palladium* from 1832 to 1835 were available. Only a few scattered issues from 1835 to 1840 are held.


105 See Cross, pp. 262f.

106 *Christian Palladium*, September 1833, p. 139.


ple with whom I was acquainted. Ah, says he, I presume I know the people you allude to, and no real Christian would esteem it a privilege to commune with them. He then gave his own representation of the people called Christians. He said they were a set of ignorant, imprudent men—that there was not a learned man nor a man of respectable talents among them in New England, and that their church members and hearers were of the ignorant and illiterate part of the community many of whom had been excommunicated from other churches.109

Other statements were more direct and critical of the Unitarians. A preacher writing in the *Palladium* in the March 1834 issue, p. 322, stated,

The Unitarians are not superstitious, nor delusive. Their theory is plausible; their kind spirit, and strict morality are commendable; they preach "the way and the truth," but in general the life is wanting.110

Joseph Badger could be even more biting as he compared the two groups:

We are Anti-Trinitarians, and all such we regard as Christians if they believe in One God. According to the meaning of the word, in one sense, we are Unitarians. Our labors go to prove the existence of "One God" and to establish the proper sonship of Jesus Christ—therefore on this point, we are Unitarians. But when we are asked if we take the name "Unitarian" as a sectarian name, or if we have a Unitarian creed, we answer in the negative. . . . But where some Unitarians fail, (we believe) is, they rest too much on a plausible theory of fashionable "will-worship" which is as "a sounding board, or a tinkling cymbal.111

The social customs of the two groups come to the surface in this comparison.

The attitude of the Unitarians toward the Christians remained much the same, except that less talk of merging the two groups may be found. In the November 1834 issue of the *Palladium* appeared an article from the *Unitarian* concerning the Christian Denomination and its ministers.

Such being the case, we, who are professedly anxious for the progress of the truth, cannot but feel that they have strong claims on our sympathies and assistance; and in whatever direction a call may be made by our brethren I hope it will be met with a generous alacrity, and its character and tendencies of their denomination must be regarded as one of the most important to the cause of truth.

I am glad to perceive that they are beginning to look to a more educated ministry.112

The ability of preachers to cross the boundaries also indicates the continuing congeniality. In announcing the *Memoirs of Elder Jones* written by his son, A. D. Jones, the *Palladium* mentioned that the

111 *Ibid.,* May 1, 1834, p. 21.  
112 *Ibid.,* November 1, 1834, p. 207.
son was a Unitarian minister at Brighton, Mass. Carter says that young Jones was born in 1816 and ordained at Wilton, N. H., in 1834. He was therefore ordained at the age of 18 and without education. The assumption must be that he was ordained a Christian, then transferred to the Unitarians when he was dismissed by the Christian Conference in 1836.

In the last years of the thirties a new crisis developed among the Christians which moved them even further from their Unitarian counterpart. This was the Millerite excitement concerning the second coming. People joined Miller from all denominations, but especially from the Baptists, Free Baptists, and the Christian churches. The movement seemed to appeal especially to the Biblically oriented, experiential, rural, and lower socioeconomic churchman. The Christians contributed considerable leadership to the movement, especially in the areas of publication and pamphleteering.

As early as 1834 some of the Christians had become interested in the millennial event. A book was announced in the Palladium, Signs of the Times, by Oliver True. Three influential leaders of the Christians allied themselves with the Miller movement almost from its inception—Joshua Vaughan Himes of Boston, Joseph March, who succeeded Joseph Badger as editor of the Christian Palladium in 1839, and L. D. Fleming of Portland, Maine. The Christians generally welcomed Miller and his followers, a welcome refused by most of the older orthodox and liberal churches.

Joshua V. Himes of the Chardon Street Christian Church in Boston was perhaps more responsible than any other one person for getting the Miller movement off the ground. He invited Mr. Miller to give his lectures in the Chardon Church in 1839, a year after Miller had begun his tours. He was so influenced by Miller that in March 1840 he began on his own to publish the paper The Signs of the Times. His travels and publications from that point on for the Millerite cause were prodigious. In the first few years of these efforts Himes was still viewed favorably by the Christians as is shown in a statement in the Palladium, concerning The Signs of the Times, February 15, 1841, p. 314.

In 1840 Miller spoke in Portland, Maine, at the Casco St. Christian Church. The minister of the church and a well-known preacher

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113Ibid., July 1, 1841, p. 75. A. D. Jones presided at the second marriage of his father in March 1839 at the Brighton home. A. D. Jones, p. 153.
114Carter, p. 384. He was pastor at Brighton 1839-1842, Manchester, N. H., 1844-1845.
115Cross, p. 263.
116Christian Palladium, August 16, 1834, p. 136.
among the Christians was L. D. Fleming. Not long afterward he moved to Boston and commenced editing the journal which Himes established. An article of his on the second coming of Christ was published in the *Palladium* October 1, 1841, p. 167.

Joseph March assumed editorship of the *Palladium* in 1839 and almost immediately plunged into a discussion of millennial doctrines which were popular in his New York region. He was able to swing large numbers into the movement, and it was not until July 1843 that he was relieved of his editorial post. When the second coming did not occur in 1844, he found himself in the different wing of the splintered adventist camp from his former Christian cohorts, Himes and Fleming, because he opposed a convention of the adventists.

Since these important leaders joined the adventists, the inroads into the Christian churches were heavy. This was particularly the case in Vermont where over 100 churches went with the adventists. The losses were also great in New Hampshire and Maine. A number of the old stalwarts, however, refused to go along with the new excitement, among whom were Joseph Badger, David Millard, and Elijah Shaw. Shaw, perhaps not as influential as the other two, but well known, having preached all over New England and New York, wrote a pamphlet against the Millerite interpretations of the Scriptures.

Unfortunately for the Meadville Theological School, which was supposed to be a joint project of the Unitarians and Christians, the doors opened in October 1844 during the heat of excitement about the coming of the Lord. The Christians, torn as they were by the millennial hopes, were in no position to collect funds for the school.

Because of the differences between the Christians and the Unitarians and because of the unwillingness of the Christians to contribute to educational projects, the attempts at cooperation at Meadville Theological School and Antioch College were doomed from the start. Some Unitarian leaders as well as some Connexion leaders were willing to overlook these differences, but by majority the Christian preachers were not ready or willing to go along with these undertakings. The Christians were fearful that aspects of the faith which they held dear and which the Unitarians ignored would be destroyed. In spite of the lack of monetary support from the Christians, during the first ten years of the school's existence, about one-half of the students, about five per class, came from the Connexion. After 1857 the numbers declined rapidly to about one per class, and only an

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occasional student may be found after the 1870's. A majority of the Christians who attended Meadville ended up sometime later preaching for Unitarian churches. Some went back and forth. Only a few Unitarians ended up preaching for Connexion churches. The shift from the Connexion may have had something to do with the decline of students attending Meadville.

The differences between the Christians and the Unitarians were pointed up in an excellent way by Henry W. Bellows in a pamphlet designed to secure support for Antioch College from among the Unitarians, a project which the Christians initiated, but largely abandoned, particularly from the monetary angle.

The Christians are a sort of Unitarian Methodist, having the theology of the elder Unitarians without their culture, and the heat and fervor, the camp-meeting usages, and emotional feelings of the Methodists, without their ecclesiastical system of opinions. They have specially cultivated devotional feeling, and commonly owe their accessions to sudden conversions during periodical excitements which are conscientiously favored by them. . . . It claims more than a thousand churches, and boasts fifteen hundred ministers, who have commonly been men wholly uneducated for the ministry, except by their convictions, scriptural reading, and prayers.

So a relationship which at one time showed great promise was never fully consummated. It is ironical that finally in 1931 the Christians merged with the Congregational Church, the archenemy of both Christians and Unitarians a century earlier.

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