

Dr. Roger Green, American Christianity, Session 9, The Emergence of American Unitarianism Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Green, American Christianity, Session 9, The Emergence of American Unitarianism, Biblicalelearning.org, Dr.

Roger Green's lecture, the ninth session on American Christianity, focuses on the emergence of American Unitarianism and its historical context during and after the American Revolution. The lecture begins by noting how the Revolution affected different denominations, with some remaining largely unchanged while others, like Anglicanism and Congregationalism, experienced significant shifts. **The discussion then turns to Universalism, highlighting its core belief in universal salvation and its early proponents. A key portion of the lecture traces the roots of Unitarianism, starting in England with figures like John Biddle and Joseph Priestly, emphasizing its rational approach and eventual split between biblical and rational wings. The lecture then details the arrival and growth of Unitarianism in America, focusing on pivotal figures such as James Freeman and William Ellery Channing, and significant events like the founding of the first Unitarian church and the American Unitarian Association. Finally, the lecture touches upon Transcendentalism as an intellectual movement arising from Unitarianism and briefly outlines the core beliefs of Unitarianism, noting its eventual merger with Universalism.**

2. 16 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Green, American Christianity, Session 9 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Church History → American Christianity).



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3. Briefing Document: Green, American Christianity, Session 9, The Emergence of American Unitarianism

Briefing Document: The Emergence of American Unitarianism and Religion in the American Revolution

Overview: This briefing document summarizes the main themes and important ideas discussed in Dr. Roger Green's ninth session on American Christianity, focusing on the impact of the American Revolution on various denominations and the emergence of American Unitarianism.

I. The Reaction of Churches to the American Revolution:

- **Differential Impact:** The American Revolution had a varying impact on different Christian denominations.
- **Anglicanism:** Experienced a significant decline in numbers due to its association with pro-British sentiments. Green states, "...the numbers dropped considerably in America because they were pro-British, obviously..."
- **Congregationalism:** Largely supported the Revolution.
- **Other Denominations (Baptists, Presbyterians, Quakers):** These denominations were generally less affected by the Revolution in terms of overall denominational stance. While individual members may have held differing views, the denominations themselves weren't as severely impacted. Green notes, "So, some denominations weren't affected one way or another, such as Baptists, Presbyterians, and Quakers."
- **Individual vs. Denominational Alignment:** While denominations might not have been uniformly affected, individual Christians held varying loyalties during the Revolution. "...there were certainly Christians who were on either side of the story, who some were pro-Revolutionary, some were pro-British, but the denominations themselves weren't so seriously affected."

II. The Rise of Universalism:

- **Core Belief:** Universalism is the belief that all people will ultimately be saved and redeemed, with no eternal hell. Green explains, "Universalism, obviously, is a belief that all people are going to be saved, that all people, there is not going to

be kind of hell, everybody's going to go to heaven, everybody's going to be redeemed, everybody's going to be saved."

- **Founder and Arrival in America:** John Murray founded Universalism in Britain and brought the message to America in 1770.
- **Rational Appeal:** Universalism resonated with some due to its perceived rationality within a Christian framework. "...it certainly appeared to people that it was reasonable to believe that God's grace was going to save everybody, kind of reasonable to believe."
- **Nuanced Views:** Early Universalists held varying views, including:
- **Full Payment on the Cross:** Believing Christ's death was a sufficient sacrifice for all, rejecting Calvinistic ideas of the elect and predestination.
- **Immediate Presence of God After Death:** The belief that individuals are immediately taken into God's presence upon death, without initial judgment.
- **Post-Death Purification:** A belief in a period of purification after death for those who had sinned, not an eternal hell but a temporary purging to prepare them to meet God. "...after death, there would be a time of purification... It's not eternal punishment. It's more of a purging in preparation to meet God."
- **Early Organization:** By 1790, the Universalists were strong enough to hold a convention in Philadelphia.

III. Church Attendance During the Revolution:

- **Avoiding Extremes:** It's important to avoid two extremes when considering church attendance during this period.
- **Mythological Extreme:** The inaccurate belief that everyone regularly attended church and were devout believers. Green refutes this, stating, "Well, there's nothing that can support that. We've mentioned that many of these people were deists. They didn't have regular church attendance, and so forth."
- **Myopic View:** The limited perspective that only measures attendance by formal church membership, which was often lower than actual attendance. "...a lot of people who did not become members of churches attended churches."
- **General Trends:** Scholars suggest that church attendance was generally larger than church membership.

- **Post-Revolution Attendance:** Around 1780, approximately three-fifths of the population regularly attended church. Attendance seemed to have dipped during the war but began to recover afterward. "...it seems as though about three-fifths of the population attended church on a regular basis in 1780..."

IV. The Emergence of American Unitarianism:

- **Core Belief:** Unitarianism fundamentally involves a disbelief in the Trinity and a belief in the oneness of God, emphasizing monotheism. "Unitarianism, of course, is a disbelief in the Trinity and a belief in the oneness of God. Unitarianism wants to emphasize monotheism..."
- **Historical Roots:** While early forms of anti-Trinitarian thought existed, modern Unitarianism traces its roots to the 16th century with Michael Servetus, who opposed Calvin on the Trinity. However, Servetus was burned at the stake by civil authorities in Geneva, not by Calvin himself. Green clarifies, "Calvin tried to convince Michael Servetus not to come to Geneva. He thought that if Servetus came to Geneva, Servetus would be in trouble."
- **Development in England:** John Biddle in the 17th century began to organize Unitarian thinking in England. Unitarianism found resonance in the English rationalistic society. It spread through missionary efforts and gained prominence with figures like Dr. Joseph Priestly, a well-known scientist who became a Unitarian minister. "...Unitarianism in the 17th century fit very well in an English rationalistic society."
- **Shift in Unitarian Thought:** Early Unitarians heavily relied on the Bible, though they struggled with certain doctrines. Over time, a shift occurred towards a more rationalistic approach, with some later Unitarians diminishing the importance of the Bible as reason became the primary source of truth. "...the Bible was used less and less. Finally, a lot of Unitarians decided we don't need the Bible anymore. Everything we believe can be understood by reason..."

V. Unitarianism in America:

- **James Freeman and King's Chapel:** In 1785, King's Chapel in Boston, under the leadership of Anglican priest James Freeman, became the first Unitarian church in America. "In 1785, this became the first Unitarian church in America under James Freeman..."
- **William Ellery Channing: The Father of American Unitarianism:** William Ellery Channing, pastor of the Federal Street Congregational Church in Boston (now

Arlington Street Congregational Church), is considered the key figure in shaping American Unitarianism.

- **Key Dates:1815:** Channing led his church to become Unitarian.
- **1816:** Harvard University founded a Unitarian divinity school, with which Channing was associated. Green notes, "1816 Harvard University founded a divinity school in 1816. it was basically a Unitarian divinity school..."
- **1825:** Channing founded the American Unitarian Association, uniting Unitarian churches. "The American Unitarian Association was an association of Unitarian churches finding common ground together... So that was founded in 1825. And William Ellery Channing was the founder."
- **Transcendentalism:** This movement emerged from Unitarianism, with Ralph Waldo Emerson as a prominent figure. Transcendentalism was a rejection of Unitarian rationalism, embracing Romanticism and emphasizing religious truth through intuition and experience rather than solely through reason or scripture. Transcendentalists believed God is in every person's heart and dwells in nature. "Transcendentalism was really a rejection of Unitarian rationalism... Transcendentalism, instead of embracing the Enlightenment movement... embraced the Romantic movement."

VI. Beliefs of Unitarians:

- **Focus on What They Don't Believe:** Unitarianism is often defined by its rejection of core Orthodox Christian doctrines.
1. **Key Beliefs (and Non-Beliefs):Charitable Work and Loving Neighbor:** A positive affirmation of social responsibility. "The Unitarians believed in loving your neighbor. They believed in charitable work."
 2. **Denial of the Trinity:** A rejection of the Christian doctrine of one God in three persons. "Number two, of course, is a denial of the Trinity."
 3. **Denial of Atonement:** Particularly the understanding of Christ's death as a necessary sacrifice for salvation. "Number three, which follows from number two, is a denial of atonement." They view Jesus as a good moral teacher and prophet.
 4. **Denial of Original Sin:** Rejecting the idea of inherited sin from Adam. "Fourth, Unitarians believed or denied, I should say, the doctrine of original sin."

5. **Denial of Predestination:** Opposing Calvinistic doctrines of election and predestination. "Number five, is that they denied the doctrine of predestination."
6. **Salvation by Good Morals/Works:** A tendency towards believing that a good moral life leads to a positive relationship with God. "Number six, they developed... a kind of salvation by good morals, a salvation by ethics, a salvation by being a good person..."
7. **Low View of the Bible (if any):** The Bible is not considered the ultimate source of authority. "They have a very low view of the Bible if any view of the Bible at all. It certainly is a low view, if any view."
8. **High View of Reason:** Reason and rationality are highly valued in determining truth. "They have had and do have a high view of reason, a high view of rationality..."
- **Unitarian Universalist Merger:** In 1961, the Unitarians merged with the Universalists to form the Unitarian Universalist denomination. "The Unitarians united with the Universalists in 1961... and formed the denomination called the Unitarian Universalist denomination."

Conclusion: Session 9 provides a valuable overview of the religious landscape during and after the American Revolution, highlighting the varying impacts on different denominations. The emergence of Unitarianism, rooted in rationalist thought and diverging significantly from traditional Christian doctrines, is presented as a key development in American religious history, shaped by influential figures like James Freeman and William Ellery Channing. The subsequent rise of Transcendentalism as a reaction to Unitarian rationalism further illustrates the dynamic and evolving nature of religious thought in America.

4. Study Guide: Green, American Christianity, Session 9, The Emergence of American Unitarianism

Study Guide: The Emergence of American Unitarianism

Key Topics:

- **Religion in the American Revolution:** The impact of the Revolution on different denominations (Anglicanism, Congregationalism, Baptists, Presbyterians, Quakers), the emergence of Universalism, and church attendance during this period.
- **The Emergence of American Unitarianism:Background:** Historical roots of Unitarianism, including Michael Servetus and John Biddle, the rationalistic context in England, and the influence of Joseph Priestly. The shift from biblical to rational Unitarianism in England.
- **Unitarianism in America:James Freeman and King's Chapel:** The first Unitarian church in America.
- **William Ellery Channing:** His role as the "father of American Unitarianism," the Federal Street Congregational Church (Arlington Street), the founding of Harvard Divinity School as a Unitarian institution, and the establishment of the American Unitarian Association.
- **Transcendentalism:** Its origins in Unitarianism, key figures like Ralph Waldo Emerson, and core tenets (rejection of rationalism, embrace of Romanticism, emphasis on intuition and experience, the indwelling of God, and God in nature).
- **Beliefs of Unitarians:** Charitable work, denial of the Trinity and atonement, view of Jesus as a moral figure, denial of original sin and predestination, a focus on salvation by good morals, a low view of the Bible as authority, and a high view of reason.
- **Unitarian Universalism:** The merger of Unitarians and Universalists in 1961.

Key Individuals:

- **Dr. Roger Green:** Lecturer providing the source material.
- **Ted Hildebrandt:** Co-copyright holder of the lecture material.
- **John Murray:** Founder of Universalism.

- **Michael Servetus:** Early figure who denied the Trinity.
- **John Calvin:** Reformation leader Servetus debated against (though Calvin did not execute him).
- **John Biddle:** Organized Unitarian thinking in England.
- **Joseph Priestly:** Influential Unitarian in England, also a noted scientist.
- **James Freeman:** Anglican priest who led King's Chapel to become the first Unitarian church in America.
- **William Ellery Channing:** Key figure in shaping American Unitarianism.
- **Ralph Waldo Emerson:** Prominent Transcendentalist.
- **John Harvard:** Puritan who donated his library to establish Harvard University.
- **Mark Noll:** First holder of the evangelical chair at Harvard Divinity School.
- **George Marsden:** Another notable holder of the evangelical chair at Harvard Divinity School.

Quiz: The Emergence of American Unitarianism

1. How were the Anglican and Congregational churches differentially affected by the American Revolution, according to Dr. Green?
2. What is the central tenet of Universalism, and who is credited with founding this movement?
3. According to Dr. Green, what are the two extremes to avoid when considering church attendance during the time of the American Revolution, and what does he suggest is a more accurate picture?
4. What is the core theological tenet of Unitarianism that distinguishes it from traditional Christianity? Briefly explain its historical roots, mentioning at least one key figure from the Reformation era.
5. Who was John Biddle, and what was his significance in the development of Unitarianism? How did the movement evolve in England with the influence of Joseph Priestly?
6. Describe the significance of King's Chapel in Boston and the role of James Freeman in the early history of American Unitarianism.

7. Who is considered the "father of American Unitarianism," and what were two key events or developments associated with his efforts to shape this movement in America?
8. What was Transcendentalism, and what were at least three of its key characteristics or beliefs that differentiated it from Unitarian rationalism?
9. Identify and briefly explain three core theological beliefs that Unitarians typically deny, setting them apart from orthodox Christian doctrines.
10. What significant event occurred in 1961 involving the Unitarian denomination, and what is the name of the resulting religious body?

Answer Key: The Emergence of American Unitarianism

1. The Anglican Church saw a considerable drop in numbers because many of its members were pro-British, while Congregationalism largely supported the Revolution.
2. Universalism is the belief that all people will eventually be saved and redeemed, and it was founded by John Murray.
3. The mythological extreme is that everyone regularly attended church, while the myopic view measures attendance solely by church membership; Dr. Green suggests the truth lies in the middle, with church attendance being larger than formal membership, estimating about three-fifths attended regularly around 1780.
4. The core tenet of Unitarianism is the disbelief in the Trinity and the belief in the oneness of God (monotheism). Its historical roots in the Reformation involve figures like Michael Servetus, who argued against the Trinity and debated with John Calvin.
5. John Biddle was a key figure who began to organize Unitarian thinking in England in the 17th century. The movement grew in England through a missionary impulse under Biddle and later gained significant momentum with the involvement of the well-known scientist Dr. Joseph Priestly, who became a Unitarian minister.
6. King's Chapel in Boston was the first church in America to become Unitarian in 1785 under the leadership of its Anglican priest, James Freeman, when the congregation adopted Unitarian beliefs.

7. William Ellery Channing is considered the "father of American Unitarianism." Key events include leading his Federal Street Congregational Church to become Unitarian in 1815 and playing a significant role in the founding of Harvard Divinity School as a Unitarian institution in 1816.
8. Transcendentalism was a movement that emerged out of Unitarianism, representing a rejection of its strict rationalism and an embrace of Romanticism. Key characteristics include an emphasis on religious truth through intuition and experience, the belief that God is in every person's heart (the over-soul), and the idea that God dwells in nature.
9. Three core theological beliefs that Unitarians typically deny are the Trinity (the doctrine of one God in three persons), the atonement (especially the idea that Christ's death was a necessary sacrifice for salvation), and the doctrine of original sin (the inherited sinfulness of humanity).
10. In 1961, the Unitarian denomination merged with the Universalist denomination to form the Unitarian Universalist Association.

Essay Format Questions: The Emergence of American Unitarianism

1. Analyze the ways in which the American Revolution impacted the religious landscape of the newly formed nation, focusing specifically on the denominations discussed by Dr. Green and the emergence of Universalism.
2. Trace the development of Unitarianism from its early historical roots in Europe to its establishment and growth in America. Discuss the key figures, theological shifts, and societal contexts that shaped its trajectory.
3. Compare and contrast Unitarianism and Transcendentalism as religious and intellectual movements in 19th-century America. In what ways did Transcendentalism emerge from Unitarianism, and where did they diverge in their beliefs and emphases?
4. Evaluate the core theological beliefs of Unitarianism, as presented by Dr. Green, in relation to traditional Christian doctrines. What are the most significant points of divergence, and what might explain these differences in theological perspectives?

5. Discuss the lasting influence of the Unitarian and Universalist movements on American religious and cultural life, considering their eventual merger and their perspectives on social issues and the nature of religious truth.

Glossary of Key Terms: The Emergence of American Unitarianism

- **Anglicanism:** The tradition within Christianity comprising the Church of England and churches in other countries that are in communion with it.
- **Atonement:** The belief that through Christ's death and resurrection, humanity is reconciled to God and sins are expiated.
- **Calvinism:** A major branch of Protestantism following the theological tradition and forms of Christian practice of John Calvin and other Reformation-era theologians. Key tenets include predestination and the sovereignty of God.
- **Congregationalism:** A Protestant movement emphasizing the autonomy of the local church congregation.
- **Deism:** An Enlightenment-era belief in a supreme being who created the universe but does not intervene in its affairs.
- **Elect:** In Calvinist theology, those whom God has predestined for salvation.
- **Enlightenment:** An intellectual and cultural movement of the 17th and 18th centuries characterized by reason, individualism, and skepticism towards traditional authority.
- **Heresy:** A belief or opinion contrary to orthodox religious (especially Christian) doctrine.
- **Incarnation:** The Christian doctrine that God became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ.
- **Monotheism:** The belief in one God.
- **Original Sin:** The Christian doctrine that humanity inherited a corrupted nature and a propensity to sin from Adam's transgression.
- **Predestination:** The theological doctrine that God has foreordained all things, including who will be saved.

- **Puritan:** A group of English Reformed Protestants in the 16th and 17th centuries who sought to "purify" the Church of England of what they considered to be Roman Catholic practices.
- **Rationalism:** A belief that reason is the primary source of knowledge and justification.
- **Reformation:** A 16th-century movement for the reform of abuses in the Roman Catholic Church, leading to the establishment of the Protestant churches.
- **Romanticism:** An artistic, literary, musical, and intellectual movement that originated in the late 18th century and emphasized emotion, intuition, individualism, and the beauty of nature.
- **Theocracy:** A system of government in which priests rule in the name of God or a god.
- **Trinity:** The Christian doctrine that God exists as three coequal and coeternal persons: Father, Son (Jesus Christ), and Holy Spirit.
- **Transcendentalism:** A philosophical movement that developed in the late 1820s and 1830s in New England, emphasizing the inherent goodness of people and nature, and the belief that society and its institutions have corrupted the purity of the individual. It valued intuition and personal experience over established doctrines.
- **Unitarianism:** A theological movement that emphasizes the oneness of God and rejects the doctrine of the Trinity. It often stresses the importance of reason and individual interpretation of scripture.
- **Universalism:** A theological doctrine that all souls will ultimately be saved.

5. FAQs Green, American Christianity, Session 9, The Emergence of American Unitarianism, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: American Unitarianism and the American Revolution

1. How did the American Revolution impact different Christian denominations in America? The American Revolution had varying effects on different denominations. Anglicanism, being largely associated with British loyalists, saw a significant drop in membership. Conversely, Congregationalism, with its predominantly pro-Revolution stance, generally thrived. Other denominations like Baptists, Presbyterians, and Quakers were less directly affected as denominations, although individual members held differing views on the conflict. The Revolution also created an environment for the emergence and growth of new religious movements like Universalism.

2. What is Universalism and what were its core beliefs during the time of the American Revolution? Universalism is the theological belief that all people will ultimately be saved and redeemed, rejecting the concept of eternal damnation or hell. Founded in Britain by John Murray and brought to America in 1770, it gained traction by appealing to rational Christian thought, suggesting that God's grace would extend to everyone. Universalists held nuanced views, generally believing that Christ's death provided full payment for all, that individuals enter God's presence immediately after death, and that a period of purification might occur after death for those who died in sin, though this purification was not eternal punishment.

3. What can be said about church attendance during and immediately after the American Revolutionary War? It's important to avoid two extremes: the myth that everyone was a devout churchgoer and the narrow view that only formal church membership numbers accurately reflect attendance. While church membership might have been low in some areas, many individuals attended services without becoming official members. Scholars generally agree that church attendance was larger than membership, with estimates around three-fifths of the population attending church regularly around 1780, a number that had slightly decreased during the war itself before beginning to recover.

4. What is Unitarianism, and what are its historical roots leading up to its emergence in America? Unitarianism is fundamentally characterized by a disbelief in the Trinity and a strong affirmation of the oneness (monotheism) of God. While early forms of anti-Trinitarian thought existed in the early church, modern Unitarianism traces its roots to the 16th century with figures like Michael Servetus, who opposed Calvin's doctrine of the Trinity. In England, John Biddle organized Unitarian thinking in the 17th century, emphasizing a rational understanding of Christianity. Later, the influential scientist and theologian Dr. Joseph Priestly furthered the movement. Early Unitarians valued the Bible, though they struggled with certain doctrines, but later the movement increasingly emphasized reason over scripture.

5. How and where did Unitarianism first take hold in America? Unitarianism officially emerged in America in Boston in 1785 when King's Chapel, an Anglican church under the leadership of Reverend James Freeman, adopted Unitarian theology, becoming the first Unitarian church in the country. This marked a significant shift as an existing congregation transitioned to Unitarian beliefs.

6. Who was William Ellery Channing, and why is he considered the "father of American Unitarianism"? William Ellery Channing, the pastor of the Federal Street Congregational Church in Boston (now Arlington Street Church), is considered the "father of American Unitarianism" due to his significant role in shaping its theological identity and organizational structure. In 1815, he led his church to become Unitarian. He was also instrumental in the founding of Harvard Divinity School in 1816, which became a Unitarian institution, and in the establishment of the American Unitarian Association in 1825, a unifying body for Unitarian churches.

7. What were some of the key theological beliefs that distinguished Unitarians from other Christian denominations in America? Unitarians held several core beliefs that set them apart: a denial of the Trinity (believing in one God), a denial of the traditional doctrine of atonement (especially the necessity of Christ's death as propitiation), a denial of original sin (believing in human perfectibility), a denial of predestination (emphasizing free will), and a tendency towards salvation through good morals and ethical living. They also developed a low view of the Bible as a sole source of authority, prioritizing reason and individual interpretation.

8. What was Transcendentalism, and what was its relationship to Unitarianism?

Transcendentalism was an intellectual and spiritual movement that emerged out of Unitarianism in the 19th century. Led by figures like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Transcendentalists reacted against the perceived strict rationalism of Unitarianism. They embraced Romanticism, emphasized religious truth through intuition and personal experience rather than solely through reason or scripture, believed in the inherent divinity of individuals ("God in every person's heart"), and saw God dwelling in nature. While some Transcendentalists remained within Unitarian churches, the movement represented a distinct philosophical and theological departure from mainstream Unitarian thought.