

**ANSWER TO DR. WOODS' REPLY,
IN A SECOND SERIES OF LETTERS;
ADDRESSED TO TRINITARIANS
AND CALVINISTS, PP. 1-162**

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Answer to Dr. Woods' Reply, in a Second Series of Letters; Addressed to Trinitarians and Calvinists, pp. 1-162 by Henry Ware

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ANSWER

TO

DR. WOODS' REPLY.

IN A

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ADDRESSED TO

TRINITARIANS AND CALVINISTS.

BY HENRY WARE, D. D.

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LETTERS, &c.

LETTER I.

Occasion of the present publication. State of the controversy. Manner of conducting it. Charge of inconsistency answered. Agreement between some orthodox and infidel writers. Another charge of inconsistency answered. Statement of the question at issue on the subject of depravity corrected.

WHEN I published, nearly two years ago, "Letters addressed to Trinitarians and Calvinists," it was my hope not to be called upon to pursue any further the discussions, in which they were employed. But the Reply of Dr. Woods to those Letters, which is now before the public, has rendered it proper for me, I think, to offer some further thoughts on the several subjects of discussion, and remarks on his manner of treating them. I shall accordingly address to you a few additional Letters, in which I hope to be able to satisfy you, that the state of the controversy is not changed, and that the great points at issue between us remain, as they stood before. My opponent had doubtless good reason to felicitate himself as he does, (p. 6) "on the benefit he could derive from the frankness," (he might have added, perhaps, want of controversial skill and caution) of the person, with whom he was contending. Though I

trust to be able to show, that the benefit is to himself only, as an accomplished disputant, and not, as he flatters himself, to the cause he maintains. That will be found to derive less advantage from the circumstance, than he seems to promise himself.

I think it necessary, in the outset, to remind you of the state of the controversy, because you are otherwise in danger of losing sight of the points at issue, and of having your attention directed to subordinate circumstances, which are so apt, in the course of discussion, to be allowed to take their place. For this purpose I must call your attention to the origin and progress of the discussion.

The occasion, in which it originated, was a Discourse delivered by Dr. Channing at the ordination of the Rev. Mr. Sparks at Baltimore, in May 1819. A part of that Discourse, in which the doctrines of Calvinism were spoken of, was attacked by Dr. Woods, who complained that the doctrines referred to were misrepresented, professing at the same time to give a correct statement of them, as they are now held in this country by those, who assume for their system the title of Orthodoxy; and undertaking also to defend them, as constituting the true system of christianity, agreeing with our experience, and clearly taught by Revelation.

The important points of doctrine, you will recollect, which he maintained in a series of Letters addressed to Unitarians, were, *The total depravity of human nature, particular personal election, atonement by the death of Christ, and the necessity of*

special divine influence in producing holiness. Those Letters were published in the spring of 1820. In the month of August of the same year, the writer of these pages attempted an answer to them in Letters addressed to Trinitarians and Calvinists. In those letters he endeavoured to show, that the doctrines of orthodoxy, as stated by Dr. Woods, were not taught in the bible, were not supported by experience, and could not be reconciled with the moral character of God. The writer, at the same time, took occasion to state distinctly, his own particular views upon each of the several subjects in controversy.

In the book which furnishes my apology for addressing you once more in these Letters, Dr. Woods has appeared again in defence of the doctrines maintained in his former publication, and in reply to the objections, which I had urged against them. With what degree of success, you will be able to judge, after having read what he has written, and what I have now to allege in answer.

Nothing will be found, I am persuaded, which, upon a fair examination, will be thought to affect the evidence of any one of the main articles in the scheme of scriptural divinity, which I endeavoured to support in my Letters. The reader, who gives himself the trouble to make the necessary comparison of passages referred to, will perceive, without the aid of these pages, that although Dr. Woods has been able to fasten some apparent inconsistencies and absurdities, and perhaps you will think after all that can be said, some real ones upon his antagonist; they

are yet of such a nature, as not to affect at all the truth of the points at issue, but only the conclusiveness of my reasoning upon them, or still more frequently, the propriety of some term or phrase which I have employed. They serve to show, not the weakness of the cause, but that its strength has not been fully displayed; not that the Unitarian doctrines are incapable of a fair support, but that the best support has not been given them, of which they are capable.

It accordingly makes a part of my present design to show, that whatever advantage Dr. Woods may seem to have obtained in detecting apparent inconsistencies in the explanation and defence of the Unitarian doctrines, the evidence of the doctrines is not affected.

But I hope also to do more than this. I hope to satisfy you, and I think I shall be able to do it, that the inconsistencies so ingeniously detected and so faithfully displayed, are, in general, if not in every instance, apparent only; and that they will disappear upon a fair presentation of the true meaning of the passages, from a comparison of which they were drawn.

I mean not by this to intimate any unfair or dishonorable intentions in Dr. Woods. I will not allow myself to believe him capable of any intentional argumentative unfairness. I only mean, that in the discussion of religious or moral subjects for popular use, one can hardly employ words with such philosophical exactness, and so constantly guard against objection, that metaphysical subtilty

shall not be able to bring together expressions, which seem to be irreconcilable with each other. And there is certainly, at first view, something extremely imposing, and apt to make a strong impression, in an array of inconsistencies and contradictions, spread before one in strong relief and in broad characters. Our first thought is, that little reliance is to be placed on a writer, who so exposes himself. Yet, in reality, there is nothing, perhaps, upon which we have less reason to depend. For suppose, all that can be asked, the inconsistency to be as great in reality, as it seems to be; what does it prove?—not that the cause is a bad one, but only that it is unskilfully or carelessly managed;—not that the doctrine is false, but that the evidence of its truth has been less successfully stated than it might have been. But we are not usually required to admit so much as this. Such is the imperfection of language, and such the real difficulty of some subjects of speculation, that, as I have before observed, it is scarcely possible for words to be used with such accuracy and precision, and with such care, that a vigilant and acute antagonist shall not be able to discover inconsistencies, which may be so presented, as to seem of considerable importance. I could illustrate this by a hundred instances taken from the sacred writers, where we are constantly called to reconcile apparent contradictions; and where, by the fairest modes of interpretation, we are able to do it with entire satisfaction, without prejudice either to the writer or the doctrine. It would have been no difficult task to

discover apparent inconsistencies in the book, which I had occasion to notice in my former Letters. But had I pursued that course, the author would doubtless have charged me, and I know not how I could have repelled the charge, with a disposition to cavil, rather than reason; and would probably have been able to show, that a little more patient and impartial attention to the subject, or a little more argumentative fairness, would have presented to me a meaning, that implied no absurdity, and was chargeable with no contradiction.

With these preliminary remarks, I now invite your attention to the several charges of inconsistency, to which, in the book before me, I am represented to have exposed myself, in my statements of the Unitarian doctrine, and reasonings respecting it.

The first that I shall notice is contained in the passage in pp. 13 to 17 inclusive, and refers to p. 26 in the Letters to Trinitarians and Calvinists, compared with pp. 20, 31 and 41, of the same.* Upon looking at these several passages with a reference to the alleged inconsistency, my first thought was, that I might safely leave the subject without any explanatory remarks, only requesting you to read the whole of the several passages attentively; assured that you could not fail to perceive, that it only offers a remarkable instance of an appearance of inconsistency produced by a dexterous juxtaposition of separate passages, where a careful examination of the subject only is needed to show, that no real inconsistency exists.

* I refer always to the pages of the octavo edition of the Letters.