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Locating scriptural authority in Charles Chauncy's Universalism

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LOCATING SCRIPTURAL AUTHORITY IN
CHARLES CHAUNCY’S UNIVERSALISM

by

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Charles Chauncy remains an important transitionary figure between eighteenth
century Puritan orthodoxy and nineteenth century liberal Congregationalism. Many
historians imagined Chauncy as a figure caught between the revelatory experiences of the
Great Awakening and the rational social ethos of the Revolutionary War. This framework
has helped historians harmonize Chauncy’s traditional Calvinism and his progressive
Universalism, especially as they understand Chauncy’s publications on Universalism:
The Mystery Hid From Ages, The Benevolence of the Deity, and Five Dissertations. Read
together, these three works comprise a Universalism canon that portrays Chauncy as a
theologian compromising between two extremes: reason and revelation. Read separately,
however, demands a more nuanced view of Chauncy beyond portrayals of him as a
religious innovator or an indecisive theologian.

Chauncy’s strict adherence to scripture complicates this paradigm. On the surface,
Chauncy’s biblicism illustrates his adherence to Puritan methods of epistemology. A
deeper analysis of scriptural authority’s shifting role in Chauncy’s canon demonstrates an
individual negotiating his abiblical environment with the texts of scripture. While
historians have demonstrated the ways in which hermeneutical decisions arise from the
social and political situations faced by individuals like Chauncy, few have investigated
the ways in which scripture also facilitates religious transitions, at times even the decline
of its influence in social and political contexts. Chauncy’s inclusion and omissions of scripture in his publications demonstrated the ways in which eighteenth century biblical canon struggled to adapt to an eighteenth century context. Recognizing this, Chauncy grounded his Universalism on scripture by appropriating John Taylor’s exegetical approaches to rebut the abiblical Universalism of John Murray or the rationalist of deists like Thomas Paine. But by the nineteenth century, New England Congregationalism demonstrated the fruits of a Chauncy’s labors: a steep decline in reliance upon biblical authority. While Chauncy had demonstrated the possibility of a biblical foundation for his Universalism, he may have also inadvertently diminished the need for it as he compromised on biblical authority in his works on Universalism. These compromises foreshadowed the challenges to scriptural authority in the nineteenth century.
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INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the shifting authority of scripture in Charles Chauncy’s publications on Christian Universalism. Charles Chauncy was an eighteenth century Calvinist minister who famously opposed the Great Awakening revivals. Towards the end of his life, Chauncy revealed his departure from Calvinistic limited atonement towards universal salvation. Recent historiography on Chauncy has sought to harmonize his stalwart defense of early eighteenth-century Puritan orthodoxy with his later eighteenth century liberalized soteriology. Many of these histories recognize Chauncy’s role as a transitional figure between eighteenth century Puritanism and nineteenth century liberal Congregationalism. For example, Charles Lippy describes Chauncy as striving “to combine a fresh examination of doctrinal supports with orthodox affirmation not only aided the birth of Unitarianism, but helped determine the continuing theological task”¹ This thesis enters this historiography by complicating the dualistic frameworks of Chauncy’s biographers. By focusing on scriptural authority rather than the tension between reason and revelation, this thesis will situate Chauncy within a larger conversation about the role of scripture in the late eighteenth century.

Edward Griffin published the most notable biography on Charles Chauncy titled Old Brick: Charles Chauncy of Boston, 1705-1787. Griffin positions Chauncy’s theology between two strands of eighteenth-century Protestantism: providential deism, and evangelicalism. Caught between the rationalistic enterprise of deism and the sensationally innovative evangelicalism in the eighteenth century, Chauncy is portrayed as a troubled

theologian who struggled to resolve these tensions. Identifying Benjamin Franklin and Jonathan Edwards as representative figures of deism and evangelicalism respectively, Griffin writes,

[Chauncy’s] mind, unlike that of Edwards, did not receive an “extraordinary influence of God’s Spirit” that enabled him to “rest assured” in “delightful conviction” about troublesome dogmas. A New-Light might consider his failure to be so favored as evidence of his damnation after all. At any rate, an anxious Chauncy was left to spend his life wrestling with his problems instead of confidently defending the old orthodoxy. Unlike Franklin he could not turn away from the faith of his fathers when he found some of their ideas “unintelligible, others doubtful.”

Typically portraying himself as a moderate, Chauncy represents the moderate laity’s propensity to find solace in the middle of theological and political extremes. Between these two theological stances, Chauncy forms a hybrid position borne out of a “tendency to adopt the paradoxical and uncomfortable middle positon between contradictory tendencies.” For Griffin, Chauncy based his Universalism on a supernatural rationalism that combines Enlightenment rationalism and Great Awakening sensationalism.

The following year, Charles Lippy published his biography on Charles Chauncy titled *The Seasonable Revolutionary: The Mind of Charles Chauncy*. While Griffin located Chauncy’s theology somewhere between political and religious extremes, Lippy explores the theological coherence of Chauncy’s Universalism. According to Lippy, Chauncy merely adapted Puritan theology to late-eighteenth century sentiments. Lippy writes, “Yet it is unlikely that Chauncy believed he was shattering the foundations of

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3 Ibid., 8.
traditional religious belief. Rather, as was so often the case throughout his life, Chauncy
was no double convinced that he was simply offering a ‘seasonable,’ logical explication
of spiritual truth.” Lippy avoids Griffin’s dichotomy between deism and evangelicalism,
but his analysis nonetheless identifies an implicit dualism between traditional orthodoxy
and theological innovation. Lippy captures this tension, writing:

Chauncy had not intended to undercut the heart of orthodox theology,
although that was the effect of his works. As far as he was concerned, he
was simply doing for religious doctrine what he had tried to do for
religious structures in the Awakening and episcopal controversies and for
political order in the Revolutionary era: preserving what he saw as vital to
the New England Way by providing a rational and logical defense of
present practice and experience.

Lippy ultimately credits Chauncy’s attempts to adapt Puritan theology to the eighteenth
century for the weakening of Calvinism’s hegemony by early nineteenth century.

John Corrigan wrote the most recent biography on Charles Chauncy titled The
Hidden Balance: Religion and the Social Theories of Charles Chauncy and Jonathan
Mayhew. While Griffin portrays Chauncy as a theological moderate and Lippy depicted
Chauncy as an opportune innovator, Corrigan introduces Chauncy as a socially conscious
pastor. Within Corrigan’s scheme, Chauncy bore the minister’s responsibility of
communicating an orderly universe to his congregation. Against the socio-political and
religious upheavals of eighteenth century movements due to events like the Great
Awakening, the Enlightenment, and the Revolutionary War, Chauncy maintained the
importance of social order and traditional hierarchy. Along with another eighteenth

4 Lippy, 112.
5 Ibid., 122.
century minister Jonathan Mayhew, they both “emphasized that a divine plan assured the
interdependence and cooperation of forces and events in the universe… Most important,
each of the infinitely numerous parts of the universe was ‘connected’ to every other part,
and together these parts formed a perfect whole.”6 Finding the middle ground Chauncy
and Mayhew occupied, Corrigan writes:

Chauncy and Mayhew were neither strict conservatives, as Heimert has
claimed, nor as radical thinkers in politics and religion as Baldwin and
Haroutunian have claimed. Chauncy and Mayhew occupy a pivotal place
in American intellectual life not because they proposed a sterile
rationalism born of reaction to the Great Awakening, but because they
affirmed the mystery and sacrality of the cosmos in new ways. They
emphasized the complexity of social life and the necessity for both head
and heart in religion, at a time when most of their contemporaries had all
but abandoned the responsibility for such an endeavor.7

In other words, Chauncy’s theological compromises were less motivated by personal
struggles and more so by social responsibility:

Historians of Chauncy have attempted to locate Chauncy somewhere between the
polarized extremes that defined the eighteenth century. Griffin’s Chauncy never resolves
his personal struggle between Enlightenment rationalism and Great Awakening
spirituality. Lippy’s Chauncy adapts stale Puritan spirituality to the late-eighteenth
century revolutionary ethos. Corrigan’s Chauncy synthesizes an ordered metanarrative of
the universe in the midst of a chaotic and revolutionary period. In many ways, these
biographies adopt different dichotomist frameworks to illustrate Chauncy as a

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6 John Corrigan, The Hidden Balance: Religion and Social Theories of Charles Chauncy and

7 Ibid., xii.
transitionary figure within the turbulent late eighteenth century. However, in their attempts to capture Chauncy as a representative figure properly situated between eighteenth century ideological extremes, perhaps these biographers understated the novelty of Chauncy’s own views on his Universalism. While these works demonstrate a general awareness of Chauncy’s apprehensions towards publishing his works, they may not have anticipated the radical religious developments that Chauncy fueled with the publication of these works.

It’s from this conversation that this thesis will explore Charles Chauncy’s Universalism. By exploring the role of scriptural authority in Chauncy’s three main publications on Christian Universalism (The Mystery Hid From Ages, The Benevolence of the Deity, and Five Dissertations), this thesis will trace a notable shift in Chauncy’s own views about the centrality of scripture. This analysis rests on the importance of the sequence in which Chauncy wrote and published these works. The order in which Chauncy published his works will reveal the hierarchy of authorities invoked by Chauncy in his argument for his moderate Universalism.

Beginning with The Mystery Hid from Ages, Chauncy grounds Christian Universalism on key passages from Rom 5:12-21 and Rom 8:19-25. However, contextualizing his biblicism reveals his narrow adherence to scripture which appropriates John Taylor’s hermeneutical approach to address features lacking in Murray’s Universalism. Perhaps anticipating arguments from Calvinist peers and rational deists regarding the centrality of God’s benevolence in his argument, he publishes The Benevolence of the Deity after The Mystery Hid from Ages. However, The Benevolence of
*the Deity* draws heavily on natural religion conceptions of God to derive God’s benevolence. Chauncy’s strategy inadvertently subverts revelation and scripture under reason and sequesters scripture’s authority to moral and theological matters.¹⁸ Within the broader theological issues of the eighteenth century, Chauncy may have conceded to eighteenth century rationalists claims about scripture’s limitations. Perhaps as a corrective to the distinctive lack of scriptural support for *The Benevolence of the Deity*, Chauncy publishes *Five Dissertations*. In this work, Chauncy provides the necessary biblical narrative basis for his arguments in *The Benevolence of the Deity*.

Together, these three works demonstrate Chauncy’s commitment to scripture as the foundation for his Universalism. However, analyzing these works separately hints at a general ethos shifting away from scriptural authority in place of extra-biblical rational inquiry that perhaps Chauncy was himself struggling against. While Chauncy seems to have succeeded in restoring scriptural authority in his scheme, his struggle nonetheless evinces a radical departure from scriptural authority from that of his forefathers and in many ways, prefigures the religious disputes regarding scriptural authority in the nineteenth century.

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¹⁸ Use of “revelation” here is the extra-biblical revelation that Chauncy refers to in *Five Dissertations*. The distinction is important because there are times in *The Mystery Hid from Generations* when Chauncy considers scripture a form of revelation which is often juxtaposed with reason. However, given the three frameworks adopted for this thesis of reason, revelation, and scripture, it would be helpful to distinguish between these three as distinct sources of knowledge.
CHAPTER 1
MYSTERY HID FROM AGES AND GENERATIONS

Background

To Chauncy’s close friends, his Universalism did not begin with his publication of *The Mystery Hid from Ages* in 1784. Chauncy had been hinting at his scheme for universal salvation in sermons and correspondences. While he has pursued his scriptural study of this new scheme soon after the revivals of the Great Awakening were tempered, he was mindful to reveal his findings to only select individuals. To contain the secrecy of his Universalism, Chauncy masks his theology behind the code word “pudding.” Griffin writes, “Chauncy had hinted at the recipe in several sermons; Richard Price had been sent a sample as early as 1770. During the 1770s, younger men such as Eliot, Clarke, and Jeremy Belknap gained admission to the society. As Belknap wrote to this friend Ebenezer Hazard, ‘The doctrine of universal restitution has long been kept as a secret among learned men.’”

Lippy also observed that “For many years, only a select few knew of the ‘pudding,’ fewer knew that the documents proposed a substantial revision of the doctrine of election by claiming that all persons would ultimately reap the blessings of salvation.”

These instances highlighted Chauncy’s cautiousness in revealing his Universalism for fear of backlash from his contemporaries.

Circumstances changed, however, when English minister John Murray arrived in New England in 1770 with his own Universalism. Coming from England, Murray had originally joined George Whitfield but was eventually excommunicated for his

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9 Griffin, 170.

10 Lippy, 108.
Universalism. Despite his unorthodox soteriology, New England ministers failed to stem Murray’s influence upon his arrival. He participated in the first general Universalist Convention in 1785 and later became pastor of the Universalist society of Boston. An aging cleric, Chauncy was initially reluctant to publish his own views while rebutting Murray, recognizing that the “intellectual climate may have been receptive to his writings, but the politics of the Revolution had come to dominate public concern.”

Furthermore, Chauncy feared of his Universalism being maligned with Murray’s heresy, acknowledging that laypeople were not interested in subtle distinctions. However, with Murray’s growing popularity and with New Divines like Joseph Eckley attacking Chauncy’s *Salvation for all Men, Illustrated and Vindicated as a Scripture Doctrine*, a pamphlet published to test people’s receptivity to Christian Universalism, Chauncy was left to defend the middle position between New England orthodoxy and Murray’s Universalism. Eckley criticized Chauncy’s pamphlet in *Divine Glory, Brought to View, in the Condemnation of the Ungodly*, to which Chauncy replied with his aptly titled *Divine glory brought to view in the final salvation of men*. While Chauncy’s response merely summarizes his more complex arguments in the fuller *The Mystery Hid from Ages*, it nonetheless exemplifies the reactionary nature of Charles Chauncy’s publications.

In many ways, *The Mystery Hid from Ages* is as much a publication of Chauncy’s decades-long study as repudiation of Murray’s Universalism. Griffin identifies three key disagreements between Chauncy and Murray. The first is that Murray’s scheme lacked

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11 Ibid., 110.

12 Griffin, 171.
scriptural support. Compared to Murray, “Chauncy’s lengthy struggles with the Scriptures convinced him that only his own system accorded with both reason and revelation.”¹³ The second is that Murray’s scheme “removed sanctions against immoral conduct, it encouraged ‘Libertinism,’ such a doctrine naturally appealed enormously to young people. At a time when Boston seemed infatuated with dancing and gambling, one could hardly have the town’s ministers advocate loose living.”¹⁴ Thirdly, at that time, Murray was an itinerant, a disorderly preaching style that Chauncy fought against during the revivals of the Great Awakening. In an attempt to distinguish his Universalism from Murray’s Universalism, Chauncy published *The Mystery Hid from Ages* as both an exposition of his Universalism and as a counter-point to Murray’s own Universalism.

**Summary**

Chauncy states his primary thesis in the beginning of his introduction: “The whole human race are considered in the following work, as made for happiness; and it finally fixes them in the everlasting enjoyment of it, notwithstanding the lapse of the one man Adam, and all the sin and misery that ever has been, or ever will be, consequent thereupon.”¹⁵ Before delving into the proofs for his thesis, Chauncy prefacing *The Mystery Hid from Ages* with three introductory points. The first is to establish the centrality of scripture to this entire scheme. He argues that his findings were discovered “solely from

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¹³ Ibid., 171.

¹⁴ Ibid., 171.

¹⁵ Charles Chauncy, *The Mystery Hid From Ages and Generations, Made Manifest by the Gospel-Revelation; or, the Salvation of All Med The Grand Thing Aimed at in the Scheme of God, as Opened in the New-Testament Writings, and Entrusted with Jesus Christ to Bring Into Effect* (London: Printed for C. Dilly, 1784), v.
the fountain of revealed truth, the inspired oracles of God.”16 Chauncy credits John
Taylor of Norwich’s work Scripture Doctrine of Original and the accompanying
Paraphrase of Notes upon the Epistle to the Romans with the Key to the Apostolic
Writings as his inspiration to study scripture diligently and without the inhibitions of
sources external to scripture.17 Describing his conviction, Chauncy writes, “I was at first
brought into this train of thought by being willing, in opposition to previous sentiments
and strong biases, to follow the light wherever it should lead me.”18 Furthermore,
Chauncy adopts this strict biblicism against the established traditional theologies of his
peers.19 Anticipating his critics’ objections to his strict biblicism who may be inclined to
argue from theological traditions and not scripture, Chauncy writes:

I am not at all concerned about either the opinion, or doom, of this kind of
persons. And, to speak the plain truth, I do not think, whatever a man’s
character may be in other respects, that he is duly prepared to pass
sentence upon the present work, if he has not often read over the New
Testament, and in the language in which it was originally wrote, and with
a special view to take in an idea of the scheme of salvation, as it is there
set forth in its native purity and simplicity;20

In other words, scripture must always take priority over theological traditions or general
or expert consensus.

16 Ibid., vi.
17 Ibid., xi-xii.
18 Ibid., x.
19 See Mark Noll, In the Beginning Was the Word: The Bible in American Public, 1492-1783 (New
York, Oxford University Press, 2015), 9. This thesis adopts Noll’s definition of Biblicism which he
describes as “an effort to follow ‘the Bible alone’ – absent or strongly subordinating other authorities – as
the path of life with and for God.”
20 Chauncy, The Mystery Hid From Ages, viii.
Chauncy’s diligent study of scripture becomes evident in *The Mystery Hid from Ages* and is highlighted by his peers’ reception of *The Mystery Hid from Ages*. Publisher Ebenezer Hazard commented that Chauncy’s “reasoning is clear and satisfactory, and his criticisms are just… He has placed many texts and passages in Scripture in a light altogether new to me, and I cannot help but thinking his system not only rational, but Scriptural, and that it reflects more honor on the divine character than I have yet met with.”

In context, Chauncy’s strict adherence to biblicism shines against what he perceived as a lack of diligent study among his peers. While New Divines like Jonathan Edwards, Jr. opposed Chauncy’s views *The Mystery Hid from Ages*, it had nonetheless garnered support from those impressed by the scriptural depth of Chauncy’s project.

For the second point, Chauncy champions a strict biblicism coupled with rational discourse. Regarding criticisms levied against other religious works making claims to biblical truths, Chauncy refers to the exchange between John Locke and John Taylor as an exemplary model. He points to their ability to concede to the others’ points but to also freely dissent “with all freedom, as led thereto by the light of truth.” Chauncy continues:

> And this is the way in which we should always read the writings of others; especially upon the Scriptures, however high an opinion we may entertain of their integrity, capacity, or learning. We shall then use them as helps, as we reasonably may, in order to understand the true meaning of revelation; founding out faith, not on what they say, but on what we are enabled by their assistance to be satisfied is the word and will of God.

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21 Griffin, 176.


23 Ibid., xiv.
While on one hand Chauncy stresses the importance of biblicism in his scheme, he also underscores the importance of civil discourse in the communication of truths obtained from a diligent study of scripture. Chauncy points to his dissent from John Taylor’s conclusions as another example of civil, albeit rational, disagreement. He writes, “And though I widely differ from him in the interpretation of some very important texts, yet even here I am beholden to him; and should not, perhaps, have been qualified to have gone into this difference of sentiment, had it not been for the light and instruction I had first received from him.”24 In other words, Chauncy stressed the importance of civil disagreement perhaps against itinerants who relied on one-sided, emotionally charged sermons to dispute the local ministers.

Chauncy’s third point is his desired goal for this work. Acknowledging that most ideologies could be used to justify immoral ends, Chauncy begins this section hoping that none of his readers “will make an ill use of the doctrine here set forth as a sacred truth.”25 He then provides what he hopes to be the appropriate moral application of his work in The Mystery Hid from Ages:

The hope of the gospel, as illustrated in these sheets, is powerfully adapted to excite our most earnest endeavors that we may enter into life without passing through the second death. But if we will be so disingenuous as to turn the grace of God into wantonness, we can justly lay the blame nowhere but upon ourselves, should we be made to suffer for our own folly, God only knows how long, and to how awful a degree, in the slate that is beyond the grave.26

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24 Ibid., xii-xiii.
25 Ibid., xv.
26 Ibid.
In other words, Chauncy’s Universalism is a scheme borne out of a desire to encourage moral social behavior by exciting affections towards goodness from within the hearts and affections of its readers. By clarifying the proper application of his work, Chauncy establishes the agency of his readers and attempts to absolve his message of any misuse. If readers desire to take advantage of Chauncy’s Universalism as a justification for immoral living, then the responsibility falls squarely on the readers.

Chauncy’s three points in his introduction to *The Mystery Hid from Ages* correlate with Chauncy’s concerns about John Murray’s Universalism. According to Griffin, Chauncy maintained three objections to Murray’s Universalism: the scheme was unscriptural, the theology seemed immoral in its ties to libertinism, and the method of delivery was through itinerant preaching. Against Murray’s lack of scriptural support for his Universalism, Chauncy begins *The Mystery Hid from Ages* with an explanation of his biblicism. Chauncy draws from John Taylor’s exegetical study which he argues was unimpeded by extra-biblical authorities. Regarding Murray’s immoral Universalism, Chauncy warns readers not to abuse his theological scheme as a justification for immorality. Instead, Chauncy expresses his desire to excite the affections of his readers towards moral living. As he states towards the end of *The Mystery Hid from Ages*, Chauncy writes, “It may, if we have behaved ill in this, excite our fears, and fill us with anxiety, when we look into that, and it may also, if we have endeavored to act
conformably to the rules of virtue, encourage us to rely on the divine goodness with some
degree of hope.”

Lastly, to address Murray’s itinerancy, Chauncy encourages civil disagreement.
During the Great Awakening, itinerant preachers like Gilbert Tennent and James
Davenport visited towns to preach the urgency of conversion by verbally lambasting the
ministers of the local church and departing without engaging in a dialogue with those
they had criticized. Chauncy’s charge for civil disagreement in the context of theological
exchange corrects the precedent set by itinerant preachers. While it’s not clear that
Murray was as disruptive to civil order as the revivalists a few decades before, perhaps it
could be inferred from Chauncy’s crusade against itinerancy during the Great Awakening
that his disdain for them would have been comparable. John Eliot, one of Chauncy’s
friends who convinced Chauncy to abstain from publishing his works after observing
Chauncy’s peers’ reactions to Murray’s Universalism writes:

> Murray has tended to irritate the passions of those whom we call worthy
> men, rather than to mollify their minds with ointment to receive a doctrine
> any ways similar to what he hath propagated. They are not able to
distinguish between the restitution of all things upon his plan, and the
other scheme which employs the attention & arrests the assent of so many
of the wise & learned of the modern New England clergy.28

Within this social context, Chauncy believed that “when the balance was upset, when
passion and understanding no longer ‘kept pace with each other,’ disorder resulted.”29
Corrigan continues, “This was the crux of Chauncy’s criticism of the revival: The

27 Ibid., 359.
28 Griffin, 172.
29 Corrigan, 32.
affections had become important out of all proportion to understanding, with the result that persons were acting… ‘under no influence than that of an over-hearted imagination.’ Thus it’s from this perspective that Chauncy champions a rational and civil approach to theological discourse in the introduction to *The Mystery Hid from Ages*.

The first chapter of *The Mystery Hid from Ages* is theological exposition on Chauncy’s Universalism. Chauncy’s scheme begins with the premise that not all individuals will be saved from temporary punishment. While eternal happiness is promised to all individuals, some will need to experience a purgatorial-like state before entering into paradise. Chauncy proposes that this purgatory-like state is for the benefit of the individual in preparation for eternal happiness. He writes:

> If therefore the next state is a state of punishment, not intended for the cure of patients themselves, but to satisfy the justice of God, and give warning to others, ‘tis impossible all men should be finally saved: whereas, if the next state is a state of discipline, designed for the amendment of the sufferers themselves, as well as the good of others, and wisely adapted as a mean to this end, they may be recovered, and formed to the meetness for immortality and honor.

Thus, Chauncy’s purgatory serves as a state where the punishment purges immorality from an individual and cleanses them before they enter into the final state of happiness. Chauncy concludes that the entirety of creation and biblical history “has the happiness of all mankind lying at the bottom, as its great and ultimate end; that it gradually tends to this end; and will not fail of its accomplishment, when fully completed.”

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30 Ibid.


32 Ibid., 12.
sequence, in contrast to the traditional Puritan framework of limited salvation, will reflect the most honor on God and is the most beneficial to men.\textsuperscript{33}

In the first chapter, Chauncy creates a soteriological compromise between the Calvinist' limited salvation and Murray’s Universalism. The deterministic promise of universal salvation preserves the benevolence of God. However, a purgatory-like state also preserves the shadow of the afterlife and its ability to motivate individuals to moral living. Chauncy’s purgatory-like state resolves one of his biggest contentions against John Murray’s universalism in that the latter permits immorality without spiritual consequences. While it can be argued that Murray was not as concerned about social order and morality, Chauncy nonetheless criticizes Murray’s theological scheme for its failure to address that topic. Thus, the first section of \textit{The Mystery Hid from Ages} is as much an explanation of Charles Chauncy’s Universalism as it as a corrective theology providing the much needed soteriologically-motivated morality that was lacking from Murray’s Universalism.

The second chapter of \textit{The Mystery Hid from Ages} delves into Chauncy’s scriptural proofs for his Universalism. Chauncy begins this section with a summary of his hermeneutical approach: “But when I had once disengaged myself from the influence of the former notions, so as to be able to look into Scriptures, with a readiness to receive whatever they should teach for truth, it was truly surprising to me, to find in them such evident traces of the doctrine I am now going to prove to be a revealed one.”\textsuperscript{34} Chauncy

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 15.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 16-17.
may have overstated his adherence to *sola scriptura*, but he nonetheless bases his arguments on his exegesis of scripture. This becomes evident in his explanation of the biblical passages Rom 5:12-21 and Rom 8:19-23.

Before delving into his exegesis, locates the genesis of human happiness in Adam’s story and its restoration through Christ’s redemption: “From the time that sin entered into the world by the first man Adam, Jesus Christ is the person through whom, and upon whose account, happiness is attainable by any of the human race.”\(^35\) This happiness is granted to the human race through the obedience of Christ and consists of the eternal happiness promised to the entirety of mankind. By consequence, universal salvation best demonstrates God’s benevolence and thus, the scheme that grants him the most glory and honor. Chauncy writes, “greater virtue is attributed to the blood of Christ shed on the cross; and, instead of dying in vain, as to any real good that will finally be the event, with respect to the greatest part of mankind, he will be made to die to the best and noblest purpose, even the eternal happiness of a whole world of intelligent and moral beings.”\(^36\) These maneuvers demonstrate Chauncy’s ability to leverage biblical narrative to overlay eighteenth century anthropocentric Universalism on top of eighteenth century anthropocentric New England Calvinism.

In many ways, Chauncy’s depiction of the biblical narrative does not stray too far from the traditional Calvinist arc of biblical history. Chauncy’s main departure from New England orthodoxy consists of a move from limited salvation to universal salvation.

\(^{35}\) Ibid., 17.

\(^{36}\) Ibid., 22.
Perhaps this may explain why Chauncy devotes most of the second chapter to the exegesis of Rom 5:12-21 and Rom 8:19-25. He recognized that this is the soteriological implications of these passages demand the most attention and this seems to be the primary source of contention between Chauncy and his fellow ministers. One of the few individuals who responded to Chauncy’s *The Salvation of all Men examined* was Jonathan Edwards, Jr., where he “subjects Chauncy’s idea of temporary punishment to searching criticism.”37 While Chauncy had already died by the time Edwards, Jr. published his response to Chauncy, Edwards, Jr.’s publication simply reflected the concerns of Chauncy’s contemporaries like Bezaleel Howard who worried about the social and moral implications of universal salvation. However, not all of Chauncy’s contemporaries antagonized his Universalism. Some were convinced by Chauncy’s strict Biblicism that perhaps Chauncy’s Universalism might be a more biblical view than that of their traditional Calvinist framework.

Chauncy’s proofs consist of six key propositions. The first three support his broader argument that Universalism is evident from the broader arc of traditional biblical narrative of fall and redemption. Chauncy’s fourth proposition argues that “It is the purpose of God, according to his good pleasure, that mankind universally, in consequence of the death of his Son Jesus Christ, shall certainly and finally be saved.”38 Building on the first three propositions, the fourth proposition extrapolates from his

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37 Griffin, 176.

38 Ibid., 22.
earlier assertions about the direct relationship between humanity and Christ. It’s from this section that Chauncy delves into his analysis of Rom 5:12-21.

Chauncy splits his exegetical analysis into three sections. The first consists of translating the text from the original language, paraphrasing to bridge the gap between the ancient scripture and contemporary audience, and summary of the theological significance of each verse. The second is his selection of specific phrases that need further explanation. The third consists of Chauncy’s attempt to fit his conclusions into a larger theological framework. He summarizes this approach, writing, “I shall, that I may convey my sense of this scripture in the fairest and easiest way, in the first place let it down with a paraphrase, containing what I take to be its true meaning; I shall then justify the paraphrase by critical notes; and finally apply the notes and paraphrase to my main view.”

Romans 5:12-21:

12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. 13 For until the law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed where there is no law. 14 Nevertheless, death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come. 15 But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one, many be dead; much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. 16 And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation; but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. 17 For if by one man’s offence, death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness, shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. 18 Therefore as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto

39 Ibid., 23.
justification of life. 19 For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners; so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. 20 Moreover, the law entered that the offence might abound: but where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. 21 That as sin hath reigned unto death; even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord.

From his translation above, Chauncy draws several key summaries that form his Universalism. From Rom 5:12-13, Chauncy derives the theological conclusion that death could not have been the penalty for sin because sin predates the law of Moses. He argues, “But whatever sin may, in its own nature, be supposed to be deserve, it is not reasonable to suppose, that it should be universally reckoned to death, when no law is in being that makes death the special penalty for transgression.”

However, from Rom 5:14-15, Chauncy concedes that death did exist between Adam and Moses and therefore, death must have been a universal consequence of Adam’s lapse. Chauncy concludes that this consequence must be universal mortality which he reads from Rom 5:18-19. The apostle Paul seems to be drawing a perfect parallelism between Adam and Christ in these texts leading Chauncy to conclude that the universality of death through Adam must also result in the universality of life through Christ:

I say therefore (15) (to resume now, and pursue, the comparison I began in the 12th verse) as it was by the lapse of the one man Adam (16) that the judicial act, ‘dust thou art, and unto dust though shalt return,’ came upon all men (17) subjecting them to death; even so by the righteousness of one man Jesus Christ, the opposite advantageous gift is come upon the same all men, which delivers them from death to reign in life for ever (18).

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40 Transcribed Chauncy’s translation found in *The Mystery Hid from Ages*, 23-29.


42 Ibid., 27.
While Chauncy’s assertions appear within his paraphrasing decisions, his analysis truly begins in his notes on the passage.

Chauncy’s first note delves into the relationship between the first-person plural in the Rom 5:11 and the adverb “Wherefore” in Rom 5:12. Chauncy engages the translations proposed by English nonconformist Philipp Doddridge who argued that Rom 5:11, which uses the first person plural pronoun to describe believers, defines the primary subject and object for the rest of the passage by virtue of the connecting term “Wherefore” in Rom 5:12.43 Doddridge’s scheme presumes that first person plural pronoun of Rom 5:11 and throughout the rest of Romans 5:12-21 refers to only believers and not the entirety of humanity. Chauncy objects and points to Rom 5:6-11 to highlight that Doddridge misinterpreted the different states implied in this section. Rom 5:6 refers not to the justification of an individual in the present after receiving faith, but rather to a historical event in the past that justified all of humanity at that particular point in time. By historicizing this section, Chauncy removes the indication that present-day believers are the primary subject of this verse. Furthermore, by highlighting the chronological sequence implied in this verse, Chauncy shifts salvation away from the justification of an individual in the present and towards the past where he can better make a case for general salvation rather than specific, individual salvation.

43 Chauncy uses “conjunction” to describe these adverbs in reference to the Greek term. While Biblical Hebrew textbooks like Mounce’s Basics of Biblical Hebrew recognize that the part of speech is adverb, Chauncy assumes that their structural function with respect to describing relationships between clauses lends itself to calling them “conjunction.” For the purpose of this paper, I will maintain the modern classification of their part of speech rather than adopting Chauncy’s term.
Next, Chauncy addresses the universal scope of Rom 5:12: “for that all have sinned.” He references other uses of this key phrase in Rom 3:9, Rom 3:19, and Rom 3:23, assuming a semantical uniformity throughout the entire epistle. Given the universal implications of sin, Chauncy then enters into a discussion about the universality of the consequences of Adam’s fall:

Only in the text we are upon, according to the sense I have given of his words, he lets us into the true occasional source of this universal defection, by carrying our view back to Adam, through whose lapse a weak, frail, mortal nature has been transmitted to us, upon which, in consequence of which, we have all sinned ourselves, in our own persons, as we must do, if we are justly, or intelligibly, chargeable with being sinners at all.44

Chauncy draws the causal relationship between Adam’s lapse and human mortality where the former results in the natural consequence of human frailty and weakness, while the latter is the ultimate result of this natural human condition. In other words, human mortality replaces sin as the primary inheritance of humanity. He argues, “Mortality, and thereupon a liableness to sin, such liableness as that, separate from grace or gospel, man would sin, were the two disadvantages he had mentioned as occasioned by Adam’s one offence.”45 Furthermore, sin, within Chauncy’s scheme, cannot be inherited because it precedes the law of Moses, writing “But what [Paul] intends is, that sin is not reckoned, brought to account, ought not to be looked upon as being taxed with the forfeiture of life… when there is no law in being with death as its affixed sanction.”46

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44 Chauncy, The Mystery Hid From Ages, 45.
45 Ibid., 56.
46 Ibid., 47.
Chauncy’s major departure from Doddridge, Locke, and Taylor, which presumably all argued for limited salvation, stems from a fundamental difference in understanding the structure of Rom 5:12-21. He engages Taylor’s assumption of a logical linear sequence of Rom 5:12-14, Rom 5:15-17, Rom 5:18-19, and Rom 5:20-21, which Chauncy believes mistakenly lead Taylor to conclude that the free-gift in Rom 5:15 should be equated with the justification of life in Rom 5:18. In contrast, Chauncy highlights the parallelism between Rom 5:12 and Rom 5:18 by the inferred conjunctive terms that begin each verse: “Wherefore” and “Therefore” respectively. Rather than assuming a linear structure where each subsequent verse depends on the previous, Chauncy proposes a parallel pairings that help to interpret their corresponding sections. More specifically, Chauncy pairs Rom 5:12-14 with Rom 5:18-19, and pairs Rom 5:15-17 and Rom 5:20-21. Grouping together these similar sections based in their shared topical concerns allows Chauncy to interpret them in light of a presumed uniformity. In the case of Rom 5:12-14 and Rom 5:18-19, both these sections begin with an adverb, share similar structures that juxtapose contrasting typologies, and share universal claims about the nature of sin and salvation. This parallelism leads Chauncy to the following conclusion:

The human race came into the world under the disadvantage of being subjected to death, in virtue of a divine constitution, occasioned solely by the offense of the one man Adam; and they come into existence likewise under the advantage of an absolute assurance, that they shall be delivered from death, in virtue of a divine constitution, occasioned solely by the obedience of the one man Jesus Christ.47

47 Ibid., 84.
Likewise, Chauncy reads Rom 5:15-17 and Rom 5:20-21 as parenthetical sections merely expounding upon the magnitude and scope of Adam’s sin and Christ’s gift.

Chauncy’s exegesis flows naturally into the question posted in Rom 6:1: “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid!”\textsuperscript{48} This rhetorical question parallels Chauncy’s concerns against Murray’s Universalism which doesn’t seem concerned with the moral questions raised by Universalism. At the same time, Chauncy also distances himself from Taylor’s Armenianism which also fails to account for the significance of Rom 6:1’s natural progression from Rom 5:21. Chauncy writes, “If the \textit{abounding of the grace, and of the gift through Christ}, of which the apostle had been speaking was only a conditional offer of life, (as Dr. Taylor supposes)…I see not with what propriety any could be introduced, from this doctrine of his, as pleading, \textit{that they might continue in sin that grace might abound}.”\textsuperscript{49} Therefore, Chauncy’s thorough exegesis of Rom 5:12-21 was as much of an explanation of some key pieces of his theological scheme as it was an exegetical counter-argument against Murray’s immoral Universalism and Taylor’s laudable, albeit incorrect, study of scripture.

Before he discusses the purgatory-like punishment awaiting unbelievers, Chauncy presents his exegesis of Rom 8:19-25. Expressing his reluctance to address this intermediary eschatological state and the need to provide a stronger foundation for it, Chauncy acknowledges that “the reader may not be, at present, prepared to discern the

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 89.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
propriety of this interpretation, or the force of the argument grounded on it. He may therefore, if he pleases, suspend his judgment till he has gone further into the scriptures that support the scheme we are upon.50 Therefore, similar to this exegesis of Rom 5:12-21, Chauncy exegetes Rom 8:19-23, structuring his argument into the same three sections: paraphrases, notes, and application.

Rom 8:19-23:

19 For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. 20 For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who subjected the same in hope, 21 Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the children of God. 22 For we know, that the whole creation groaneth, and travaileth in pain together until now. 23 And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.51

From this translation, Chauncy derives three key summary points in support of his Universalism. From Rom 8:19-20, Chauncy derives the first point that mankind, as a rational creature, has been waiting to be revealed as immortal sons of God while humanity is subjected by God to the present moral life as part of his judgment. From Rom 8:21-22, Chauncy explains the promise that mankind will ultimately be delivered from its mortal state and into incorruptible bodies, writing that “the rational creature… should be delivered from its slavery through the influence of a frail mortal corruptible body, into the freedom of those, who, as the sons of God, shall, in proper time, be clothed

50 Ibid., 91.
51 Transcribed Chauncy’s translation found in Mystery Hid from Ages, 92-95
with immortal incorruptible bodies.” 52 Lastly, from Rom 8:23-24, Chauncy concludes that Christians, while bearing the first fruits of this scheme, also groan for deliverance from this mortal body to immortality. To further highlight Chauncy’s sophisticated biblicism, Chauncy includes two footnotes which highlight the importance of translating adverbs and prepositions. Chauncy’s scholarly approach to the translation methods of these parts of speech underscore scripture’s malleability which allows for ambiguity in discerning the proper relationship between verses and the structure of the passage.

In his notes, Chauncy continues to draw out the typological parallelisms between Adam and Christ. Rom 8:19-23 describes the universal scheme of salvation as part of a larger design for creation. First, Chauncy demonstrates how “creation” is solely referring to humanity and not to animals or inanimate objects. He accomplishes this by referring to the lexical similarities between “creation” in this text and in Col 1:15 and Mark 16:15. 53 Second, Chauncy interprets “manifestation of the sons of God” as “immortality” due to its connection to preceding chapters like Rom 5:1-21. The universality of this promise rests on Chauncy’s perception of God’s justice. He writes, “For if mankind was subjected to a state of suffering, not through any willful disobedience which they themselves had been personally guilty of, it is congruous to reason to think, that they should be subjected to it, not finally and forever, but with room for hope that they should be delivered from it.” 54 This implies a form of moral determinism implicit in Puritan texts which Chauncy explores more readily in order to provide a deterministic solution. Humanity was destined

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52 Ibid., 92-93.
53 Ibid., 99-100.
54 Ibid., 102-103.
for damnation but the appropriate response for humanity to be destined for eternal salvation. Chauncy also alludes to Heb 2:14 where all of humanity are saved “‘because the children are partakers thereof.’ The children that is, every son and daughter of Adam, the whole human race, for it was with a view to every man, in order to his being qualified to give his life a ransom for every man.”⁵⁵ Through these proof-texts, Chauncy successfully demonstrates Universalism does not simply rest on the Epistle to the Romans, but on the entirety of the eighteenth century biblical canon.

Having established the biblical support for Universalism, Chauncy returns to the discussion about purgatory. Bringing together his conclusions from Rom 5:12-21 and Rom 8:19-23, he concludes, “And what he says of them is, that they are subjected to it, not on the account of any sin or sins, they had been guilty of previous to this subjection, but by the will of God, raking rise from, and grounded on, the sin of the one man Adam.”⁵⁶ Regarding the punishment incurred by this fall, Chauncy continues, “and that he subjected them to this suffering condition, not as a final condemnation, but upon having first given them reason to hope, not only that they should be delivered from their sufferings, but with abounding advantage, by being finally made meet for… immortality and glory as the sons of God.”⁵⁷ In other words, God’s punishment is temporary both in this life and the next. Pointing to the final apocalyptic vision in the Book of Revelation’s new heaven and new earth, Chauncy forms a two-tiered eschatology that allows him to dismiss the finality of suffering in the next life.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 116.
⁵⁶ Ibid., 120-121.
⁵⁷ Ibid.
Using the purgatory-like state as his fulcrum, Chauncy pivots from the eventual salvation of humanity to the eventual redemption of the entirety of creation, including material and immaterial creation.\textsuperscript{58} In similar fashion to the charge of the Great Commission in Matt 28:16-20, Chauncy’s benediction to those enlightened with this revelation consists of bringing the world into the knowledge of its saved state:

In consequence of this, having thus changed their state, he has given unto us (apostles) the ministry of reconciliation: that is, the office or service of acquainting the world that they are absolutely changed from the state of condemnation they were in, through the lapse, into a salvable one through Jesus Christ; and to prevail upon them to make a wise and good use of this change of state, that it may issue in that moral internal change, which would make them meet for, and actually interest them in, the immortality and glory that is opened to view in the gospel.\textsuperscript{59}

Ultimately, this commission, which also draws from Eph 4:4-6, becomes a charge to educate, enlighten, and unify the world “until we are all arrived at the unity of faith – unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”\textsuperscript{60} While on the surface, Chauncy’s scheme contrasts with the confessional conversionism stressed by the itinerant preachers of the eighteenth century, his commission nonetheless echoes an epistemological conversion experience. Furthermore, in stark contrast to Murray’s amoral Universalism, Chauncy’s scheme expects the good news of the gospel to enlighten traditional Calvinists into moral living.

For Chauncy, this entire scheme of humanity’s fall into weakness, the universal salvation achieved through Christ’s total obedience, and the call to enlighten the entirety

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 130-131.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 137.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 155.
of creation to its saved state constitutes the mystery of God’s will which he had aptly titled this work:

> God hath made known unto us the mystery of his will — which he purposed in himself,’ but explains what he means by this mystery, making it to consist in this, namely ‘that, in the dispensation of the fullness of times, he would gather together in one all things by Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth.’ This then is the thing meant by the mystery, which, in other ages, was not made ‘known to the sons of men,’ that is, so made known to them in so clear, full, and explicit manner, ‘as it is now,’ under the gospel, ‘revealed to the apostles, and prophets, by the Spirit, ‘as the apostle speaks, chapter iii. Ver. 5.

Chauncy’s description of this scheme as a mystery denotes a novelty to his proposition and ignorance of this structure among his Puritan contemporaries. Criticizing Calvinists’ perception of a distant, albeit benevolent God, Chauncy paints the picture of the Calvinist God as one whose plans are thwarted by humanity’s inability to accept this grace. He writes, “And if God really desires their salvation, why need it be supposed that his desire should be finally and everlastingly frustrated through men’s non-compliance with the means used in order to its accomplishment?” Chauncy ends his exegetical analysis with this criticism and his fourth proposition which asserts that “It is the purpose of God, according to his good pleasure, that mankind universally, in consequence of the death of his Son Jesus Christ, shall certainly and finally be saved.”

Chauncy’s fifth proposition is that Jesus Christ will ultimately make all men moral and obedient in the next life. He writes, “As a mean in order to bring men’s being

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61 Ibid., 157.
62 Ibid., 166-167.
63 Ibid., 22.
made meet for salvation, God, by Jesus Christ, will, sooner or later, in this state or another, reduce them all under a willing and obedient subjection to his moral government.”64 Chauncy’s scheme demands the total destruction of sin and Christ’s ultimate victory over men’s wills achieves this end. To make his argument for this proposition, Chauncy briefly analyzes key texts. Pss 8:5-6 demonstrates Christ’s ultimate subjugation of creation where “there shall be no rebels among the sons of Adam, no enemies against the moral government of God.”65 Phil 2:9-10 points to Christ’s universal dominion of things that had previously not been subjected to his rule. Chauncy believes that this scheme is the one that most promises honor and glory to God:

If all men, without limitation, are wrought upon, under his mediatory reign, so as to become the willing and obedient subjects of God’s moral kingdom, his reward will be carried to the utmost height of glory: whereas, if multitudes, the greater part of the human race (as the common thought is) will finally continue rebels, and, as such, be everlastingly bound in chains of darkness, his reward will be, comparatively, but low and small.66

1 Cor 15:24-29 demonstrates the ultimate destruction of enemies in the first death, ultimately transforming them into “willing subjects of Jesus Christ, and so fitted for an happy immortality.”67 Chauncy’s scattered use of scripture, while not as thorough as his exegesis of the Romans passages, portrays a biblical Universalism. From this point, Chauncy concludes with his sixth proposition: “The Scripture language, concerning the reduced, or restored, in consequence of the mediatory interposition of Jesus Christ, is

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64 Ibid., 170-171.
65 Ibid., 183.
66 Ibid., 193.
67 Ibid., 199.
such as to lead us into the thought, that they are comprehensive of mankind universally.”

In other words, scripture completely supports the scheme that Chauncy exposted in his work *The Mystery Hid from Ages*.

The last section of Chauncy’s work addresses any objections from his opponents and critics. He begins with an appeal to his biblicism writing, “Notwithstanding all that has been offered in proof, that the final salvation of all men is a doctrine of the Bible, it ought not, it is freely acknowledged to be received as such, unless the contrary evidence can be fairly invalidated.”

Chauncy anticipates four key objections. The first is the objection that eternal suffering is promised in the bible. Chauncy objects to a literalist meaning of the eternity of suffering, opting to interpret these verses as hyperbole that describe God’s attributes and not the state of humanity in the future. Likewise, his lexical study of the terms “eternity,” “eternal,” or “everlasting” reveals their hyperbolic usage throughout the canon. The second objection points to Judas Iscariot, the disciple who betrayed Jesus in the Gospel accounts, as a counter-example to Chauncy’s universal salvation thesis. Chauncy directly addresses the claim in Mark 16:21: “Good were it for that man if he had never been born, is inconsistent with the final salvation of all men; though it will not certainly prove the state of endless misery.”

Similarly, Chauncy argues that this hyperbole merely underscored the severity of Judas’ sin.

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68 Ibid., 237.

69 Ibid., 255.

70 Ibid., 328.
The third objection points to the unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit referred to in Mark 3:28-29 and Matt 12:31. Similar to his response to the first two objections, Chauncy asserts that the author had utilized hyperbole to help believers distinguish between what is permissible and is not permissible. The last and final objection claims that Chauncy’s scheme “will greatly tend to encourage wicked men in their vicious courses, to be told, that the future torments will have an end; as must be the truth, if it is possible, that they should be finally saved.” Chauncy argues that the perversion of truth is not a strong argument for the veracity of that truth’s claims. Furthermore, Chauncy argues that God would not simply design something solely for the purpose of persuading/dissuading people for action. Agency must remain uninfluenced and men should choose based on what they know and not what they’re persuaded or influenced to know. After answering these objections, Chauncy concludes his work as follows:

Evils and sufferings, whether present or future, in this world or another, are a disciplinary mean wisely and powerfully adapted to promote the good of the patients themselves, as well as others; they stand connected with this end in the plan of God, and will, in the last result of its operation, certainly bring it into fact. Instead therefore of being a contradiction to, they very obviously coincide with, wise and reasonable benevolence.

These final words not only summarize the moral claims embedded within Chauncy’s Universalism, but also seems to anticipate the arguments he will make in the Benevolence of the Deity for the benevolence of God.

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71 Ibid., 345.
72 Ibid., 345.
73 Ibid., 366-367.
Scripture

Chauncy makes scripture a prominent resource in *The Mystery Hid from Ages*. Compared to his later works *The Benevolence of the Deity* and *Five Dissertations*, *The Mystery Hid from Ages* best illustrates Chauncy’s sophisticated treatment of scripture. The most notable analysis comes out of his exegesis of Rom 5:12-21 and Rom 8:19-25 which comprised of about 150 pages of textual analysis and constructing theologies from scripture. Chauncy engages with the structural analyses of Doddridge and Taylor which demonstrates his own confidence in his mastery of Greek language and syntax. Furthermore, Chauncy’s lexical and grammatical analysis only further strengthens his claim to a strict adherence to biblicism. Lippy and Griffin acknowledge Chauncy’s strict biblicism but a deeper analysis of Chauncy’s use of scripture demands a more nuanced approach to Chauncy’s views on scriptural authority.

In many ways, Chauncy’s biblicism in *The Mystery Hid from Ages* was directly influenced by three primary figures: John Murray, John Taylor, and Joseph Eckley. Chauncy’s use of scripture addressed what he perceived as the scriptural and moral shortcomings in Murray’s Universalism by supporting his own Universalism with his exegetical analysis and scripture-based commissions for moral living. With respect to John Taylor, Chauncy addressed what he believed was a misunderstanding of scriptural structure that contributed to Taylor erring into Armenianism. Lastly, Chauncy used scripture to demonstrate the logical conclusion of Joseph Eckley’s universal atonement which, Chauncy believes, is universal salvation. Recognizing these critical influences on Chauncy’s work complicates the thesis that Chauncy was simply a strong biblicist. On
the contrary, it would seem that Chauncy’s appropriation of Taylor’s exegetical approach towards scripture enabled Chauncy to provide the moral injunctions lacking from Murray’s scheme while also being able to overlay his universalism on top of theological positions much closer to his contemporaries’ orthodoxy like Eckley’s. Responding to Murray and Eckley, Chauncy recognizes the necessity of scripture to be able to address both the moral and the traditionally theological issues that Universalism presents.

The last section of Chauncy’s *The Mystery Hid from Ages* also hints at one of Chauncy’s most notable shifts with regards to scriptural authority. Perhaps against the literalist views of his contemporaries, Chauncy interprets bold claims about eternity and cruelty in scripture as hyperbolic in intent. According to Chauncy, Judas’ description in Mark 16:21 was simply a “representation of the greatness of Judas’s sin.”\(^{74}\) Likewise, the unforgivable sin mentioned in Mark 3:28-29 and Matthew 12:31 simply denotes a harsher degree of punishment and not a literal indictment. Chauncy’s lexical study softens the eternality of the suffering of the wicked.

Chauncy’s Universalism was situated in a middle ground between John Murray’s Universalism and his contemporaries’ orthodoxy. Chauncy’s biblicism allows Chauncy to shift, at least in the minds of his contemporaries, from limited salvation orthodoxy to universal salvation orthodoxy. Taking advantage of the fluidity of lexical translations and structural analysis, Chauncy successfully demonstrated that universal salvation could be derived from the Book of Romans. Chauncy’s biblicism also validates scripture’s authority over theological claims and confirms its role as the battleground for contention

\(^{74}\) Ibid., 329.
between those who disagree on moral grounds. Lastly, contextualizing Chauncy’s biblicism underscores Chauncy’s attempts at establishing the benevolence of scripture before he delves into his arguments in his work *Benevolence of the Deity*.

Many eighteenth century movements in American Christianity prefigured much of the nineteenth century shifts in the religious landscape. One could trace the tradition of specific revelation challenging structured theological hierarchy from the Great Awakening to the individualistic transcendentalists of the nineteenth century. One could also argue that the strict adherence to reason of Unitarian Christianity in the nineteenth century succeeded the rational deism of eighteenth century deists. Besides reason and revelation, perhaps Chauncy’s *The Mystery Hid from Ages* illuminates a third variable that defined the character of nineteenth century Christianity. Chauncy, much like the Great Awakening revivalists and the eighteenth century deists, inadvertently succeeded in destabilizing the Puritan canopy.\(^{75}\) However, unlike the revivalists who relied on revelation or the deists who relied on reason, Chauncy relied on scripture to loosen Puritanism’s grip over late eighteenth-century New England, which allows Lippy to conclude: “Chauncy had not intended to undercut the heart of orthodox theology, although that was the effect of his works.”\(^{76}\) Chauncy may not have believed he was destroying any beliefs basic to New England theology, but he may have inadvertently turned one of its key pillars against it.

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\(^{75}\) See Mark Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 31. Here, he describes the decline of eighteenth century Calvinism’s hegemony as the collapse of the “Puritan Canopy.”

\(^{76}\) Lippy, 122.
CHAPTER 2
BENEVOLENCE OF THE DEITY

Background

In *Seasonable Revolutionary*, Charles Lippy groups *The Benevolence of the Deity* with *The Mystery Hid from Ages* as being published in the 1784.\(^{77}\) This grouping assists Lippy’s general summary Chauncy’s universal salvation. Along with *Five Dissertations* and *Divine Glory Brought to View*, these works “left an indelible mark on the New England theological landscape, providing an embryonic ideology for advocates of Unitarianism in the nineteenth century.”\(^{78}\) Part of Lippy’s decision to analyze these works together, however, is to also identify the theological lynchpin to Chauncy’s Universalism. Lippy observed from *The Benevolence of the Deity* that God’s benevolence remains “The pivotal notion which ties together the theological doctrines dissected in these works.”\(^{79}\) Lippy’s grouping presumes that these five works should be read theologically and thematically in order to identify which modules maintained their traditional Calvinism and which ones were adapted to the ethos of the eighteenth century.

Griffin’s summary of these publications, however, highlights the specific sequence that these works were published. Towards the end of 1783, Chauncy had already sent for publication *The Mystery Hid from Generations*. While Charles Dilly is in the process of publishing *The Mystery Hid from Generations*, Chauncy publishes *Divine Glory* in Boston in response to Joseph Eckley sometime that same year. *The Mystery Hid*

\(^{77}\) Lippy, 112.

\(^{78}\) Ibid.

\(^{79}\) Lippy, 112-113.
from Generations arrives in summer of 1784.80 At around the same time in June 1784, Chauncy sent for publication Five Dissertations to England. Later that same year, Boston printers Powars and Willis brought out The Benevolence of the Deity.81 It is important to note that both The Mystery Hid from Ages and Five Dissertations were published in London due to the lack of Greek or Hebrew type in the Boston or Philadelphia.82 John Eliot concludes that due to this limitation, along with the scarcity of paper in post-Revolutionary America, he writes, “Tis probable the Pudding will be boiled in England.”83 Meanwhile, Divine Glory and The Benevolence of the Deity were likely published in Boston due to those works not requiring any Greek or Hebrew type. In many ways, this contributes to the timeline proposed in this thesis. While Griffin might not identify a chronology of themes and contexts that help to contextualize Chauncy’s publication of The Benevolence of the Deity, this section of the thesis will in part, infer from evidence from The Mystery Hid from Ages that The Benevolence of the Deity not only chronologically follows The Mystery Hid from Ages, but was also meant to build on the foundation set by The Mystery Hid from Ages84. This is evidenced from two sources:

80 Griffin, 176.

81 Ibid.

82 Griffin, 174

83 Ibid.

84 This thesis does not suggest that Chauncy necessarily conceived of his universalism in the order of the works’ publishing, nor were the original manuscripts written in this particular order. Instead, this thesis asserts the order in which Chauncy published these works is significant with respect to the arguments posed in the final published versions. It’s worth noting that original manuscripts are not available, but certain connections between Chauncy’s sermons and publications could hint at the existence of a singular collection existing prior to the publication of these works.
Chauncy’s use of benevolence in *The Mystery Hid from Ages* and the references to *The Mystery Hid from Ages* in the introduction to *The Benevolence of the Deity*.

In *The Mystery Hid from Ages*, Chauncy uses benevolence primarily as a barometer to compare the benevolence of God in his universalism scheme and the benevolence of God in the traditional Calvinist scheme. Comparing universal salvation to limited salvation and the yield of God’s glory, Chauncy writes:

> Tis now carried to its utmost height, and appears to be a design eminently worthy of God’s contriving, and of Christ’s executing, and that lays a just foundation for the everlasting admiration and adoration of all angels, and of all men: Whereas, upon the common scheme, the extent of God’s benevolence is comparatively small, as well as the advantage of Christ’s mediation.85

In other words, because Chauncy’s universalism better demonstrates the benevolence of God over the traditional Calvinism’s limited salvation, Chauncy’s universalism is also the scheme that best glorifies God. Later in his work, he returns to this comparison but instead of comparing which scheme yields the most glory for God, Chauncy underscores the difference in God’s freedom and ability. He writes, “Is infinite wisdom, excited by infinite benevolence, and accompanied in the infinite power, incapable of devising, and then executing, a scheme, with reference to all men, which shall … without breaking in upon their liberty… infallibly issue in their salvation?”86 This limited use of benevolence hints at the possibility that at least for *The Mystery Hid from Generations*, Chauncy had not yet intended to delve into the complexities of benevolence of his scheme. As

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86 Ibid., 166-167.
demonstrated in the section on The Mystery Hid from Generations, Chauncy’s primary objective was to correct some of the weaknesses in Murray’s Universalism.

In his conclusion to The Mystery Hid from Generations, he starts to anticipate some of the topics covered in The Benevolence of the Deity. He ends his work delving into a brief discussion about theodicy, writing, “Evils and sufferings, whether present or future, in this world or another, are a disciplinary mean wisely and powerfully adapted to promote the good of the patients themselves, as well as others; they stand connected with this end in the plan of God, and will, in the last result of its operation, certainly bring it into fact.”87 Chauncy then continues with his conclusion that “Instead therefore of being a contradiction to, they very obviously coincide with, wise and reasonable benevolence.”88 It seems more reasonable that Chauncy is anticipating the key arguments he will make in The Benevolence of the Deity by mentioning theodicy and benevolence at the end of the preceding work The Mystery Hid from Generations, rather than The Mystery Hid from Generations concluding with a summary of the key arguments from another work The Benevolence of the Deity.

There are some key references to The Mystery Hid from Ages in the introduction to The Benevolence of the Deity. The first is a continuation of Chauncy’s marveling at God’s benevolence from the conclusion of The Mystery Hid from Ages. Regarding universalism, Chauncy writes:

God has so loved us as to project a scheme, which, in the final result of its prosecution, will instate us all in heavenly and immortal glory; how

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87 Ibid., 367.

88 Ibid.
powerfully are we herefrom excited to yield to him the intire homage of our hearts? Who but God, who in competition with God, should be the supreme object of our love, hope, confidence, joy, and delight? We may, with infinite reason, take to ourselves the words of the Psalmist, and say, “whom have we in heaven but thee? There is none on earth we desire besides thee: Our flesh and our heart may fail us; But God is the strength of our heart, and our portion forever.” 89

Meanwhile, Chauncy begins *The Benevolence of the Deity* with “Benevolence is that ingredient in his character which exhibits him to our view as amiably perfect, and worthy of our warmest love, and intire confidence. His other attributes, separate from this, are insufficient to inspire these affections; nor are they indeed at all suited to such purpose.”90 Another theme that hearkens back to themes in *The Mystery Hid from Ages* is the comparison drawn between the God of either scheme. He writes, “immense and eternal goodness, goodness all-powerful and all-wise, goodness invested with supreme dominion, and tempering the rigor of unrelenting justice: This is indeed the description of a perfect Being; a character truly worthy of God.”91 In this scheme, God is worthy of being God because of his benevolence which parallels the following scheme from *The Mystery Hid from Ages*:

Tis now carried to its utmost height, and appears to be a design eminently worthy of God’s contriving, and of Christ’s executing, and that lays a just foundation for the everlasting admiration and adoration of all angels, and of all men: Whereas, upon the common scheme, the extent of God’s

89 Ibid., 364.

90 Charles Chauncy, *Benevolence of the Deity, Fairly and Impartially Considered. In Three Parts. The First Explains the Sense, in which we are to Understand Benevolence, as applicable to God. The Second Asserts, and Proves, that this Perfection, in the Sense Explained, is One of His Essential Attributes. The Third Endeavors to Answer Objections* (Boston: Powars & Willis, 1784), iii.

91 Ibid., iv.
benevolence is comparatively small, as well as the advantage of Christ’s mediation.\textsuperscript{92}

These references Chauncy makes in \textit{The Benevolence of the Deity} to some central themes in \textit{The Mystery Hid from Ages} that Chauncy further strengthens the role of the introduction to \textit{The Benevolence of the Deity} as a bridge between both works. This is further highlighted by a key distinction between central arguments in \textit{The Mystery Hid from Ages} and \textit{The Benevolence of the Deity}: after the introduction, \textit{The Benevolence of the Deity} doesn’t seem as concerned as \textit{The Mystery Hid from Ages} in rebutting Eckley or Murray. Instead, \textit{The Benevolence of the Deity} seems to shift its focus on objections to the very nature of God coming from deists and religious skeptics. As Lippy notes: “soon there would have to be a response to the new attacks on orthodox theology which came from the pens of Revolutionary heroes such as Ethan Allen and Tom Paine.”\textsuperscript{93} \textit{The Benevolence of the Deity} joins this battle for theological orthodoxy with Chauncy recognizing that “Infidelity could also make serious dents in the precarious structure of New England theology unless defenders of the faith stepped forward.”\textsuperscript{94} This shift is acknowledged by Chauncy himself triumphantly proclaims at the end of \textit{The Mystery Hid from Ages}, writing, “The Deists themselves will not pretend to set up reason in competition with revelation, if the happiness of the whole human species is the GREAT

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\textsuperscript{92} Chauncy, \textit{The Mystery Hid From Ages}, 15.
\textsuperscript{93} Lippy, 110.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
END of the scheme of God there opened, and an end that shall not fail in being accomplished in the issue of its operation.”

Summary

Chauncy’s goal in writing *The Benevolence of the Deity* is to establish the benevolence of God. In the beginning of his introduction, Chauncy properly bridges *The Benevolence of the Deity* to *The Mystery Hid from Ages*. After fitting benevolence into his scheme of human happiness, Chauncy begins to address potential objections to God’s benevolence. His central argument seems to be semantical in nature. He acknowledges that there might be some who object to Chauncy’s attributing goodness to God on the basis that he’s ascribing a term typically descriptive of material and human to a divine being. Chauncy summarizes their position, writing “To be sure of their ideas of goodness in God, if they have any, must be totally different from all the ideas we have of goodness, as we apply the term to ourselves, or any created intelligent agent whatsoever.”

Chauncy, however, suggests that the term be used consistently with how humans use it to describe other things. Part of Chauncy’s move is to underscore the importance of the human observer to the assessment of God’s attributes. He argues, “And in discoursing to these points, I shall rather apply to men’s understandings, than their imaginations; endeavouring to set what I have to say in the clearest, and strongest point of rational light, that I am able.”

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95 Chauncy, *The Mystery Hid From Ages*, 360.


97 Ibid., ix-x.
Chauncy’s suggestion marks a notable shift in his epistemology which was somewhat implicit in *The Mystery Hid from Ages*. In Chauncy’s exegetical method and in his observations about God, the observer is presumed to be capable of dependable reasonability and insight. Regarding his views on his own Biblicism, Chauncy describes it as “in opposition to previous sentiments and strong biases, to follow the light wherever it should lead me.”98 Furthermore, citing John Taylor, he argues that readers should “freely to use their own judgment, without regarding his; that is unless they should perceive it to be grounded on good evidence.”99 In a similar vein regarding God’s benevolence, Chauncy suggests that he will “apply to men’s understandings, than their imaginations; endeavouring to set what I have to say in the clearest, and strongest point of rational light.”100 All of these arguments privilege the rational observer above external, irrational, or divine sources of knowledge.

While Chauncy acknowledges the importance to try and balance reason, revelation, and scripture in the end of *The Mystery Hid from Ages*, his hermeneutical method of proper exegetical analysis in *The Mystery Hid from Ages* and scientific reasoning in *The Benevolence of the Deity* evinces a strong preference for reason.101 In other words, Chauncy’s anthropocentric assumptions about epistemology in the introduction of *The Benevolence of the Deity* anticipate his anthropocentric methodology in the rest of *The Benevolence of the Deity*, which this thesis argues, inadvertently

98 Chauncy, *The Mystery Hid From Ages*, x.
99 Ibid., xiii.
100 Chauncy, *The Benevolence of the Deity*, ix-x.
diminishes or neglects the narrowed role of scripture in Chauncy’s universalism. Or as Lippy summarizes Chauncy’s shift: “Another way to put it is to say that Chauncy had shifted the cornerstone of religious thought from a theocentric anthropology to an anthropocentric theology.”

Similar to *The Mystery Hid from Ages*, Chauncy divides his work into three chapters. In the first section, he elaborates on the benevolence of God. Continuing the theme of anthropocentric theology, Chauncy suggests that humans “have clear and distinct ideas of this moral quality. ‘Tis as readily perceived by the mind as any sensible quality whatsoever, and as readily distinguished from all others.” Chauncy asserts that concepts like benevolence and goodness must be able to exist apart from humanity, especially against claims that humanity is simply too imperfect in both its descriptions and conceptions. Rhetorically, he argues, “we really mean nothing when we say, that God is just, true, and faithful; but ascribe to him an unknown character. In which case, how can we make him the object of our adoration and worship? We must certainly, upon this supposition, worship him as an unknown God, if we worship him at all.” However, between the perfect reason he advocates for and the frailty of humanity as understood within the Puritan tradition, Chauncy offers the following compromise:

“The moral attributes of the infinitely perfect Being, ‘tis true, are incomprehensible by such narrow understandings as our’s, and perhaps by the understandings of all creatures whatsoever. But this does not mean, that we know nothing at all about their true nature; but only that their

102 Lippy, 114


104 Ibid., 15.
mode of existence, manner of exercise, and degree of perfection, transcend our, and all other finite, capacities.”

Establishing the anthropocentric framework, Chauncy proceeds to conclude that God’s goodness must be the same form of goodness exhibited by creatures. God’s virtue differs only in degree and proportion.

Afterward, Chauncy presents his working definition for God’s benevolence: it is “A natural disposition then in the Deity, moving him to the communication of happiness.” In other words, God’s benevolence stems from an inherent desire for humans to witness the means through which God makes them, both individually and socially, happy. Chauncy continues, “The God of Nature has therefore given us particular affections, apt to be excited upon proper occasions, and make us active in using our endeavors to contribute our part toward the production of social happiness.” However, Chauncy is also quick to distinguish between God’s perfect faculties and fallible human faculties to establish the perfect agency of God in willing the happiness rather than simply being predisposed to do so. In describing God’s composition, Chauncy writes, “Together, with the powers of intelligence and volition, we suppose social as well as private affection, to have been implanted in him, disposing him to pursue the happiness

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105 Ibid., 15-16.
106 Ibid., 17.
107 Ibid., 18.
108 Ibid., 20.
of others, as well as his own, a proper foundation is not laid in his nature for benevolent actions.”  

It is important for Chauncy to establish God’s agency, in the form of volition and intelligence, in order to properly ascribe to him benevolence. If God was simply predisposed towards granting happiness, then God is not benevolent in the human sense. As Chauncy recognized, “He is morally good, and we speak of him as such, because his exertions for the benefit of others are chosen acts; tho’, at the same time, they originate in a natural principle of benevolence. Such a principle necessarily inheres in him i.e., independently of his own choice.” Thus, this freedom to choose goodness allows Chauncy to conclude God’s benevolence:

The Deity necessarily exists a being endowed with the principles of intelligence and volition; and yet he freely exerts these principles: Nor otherwise would they be moral ones. The same may be said of his benevolence: He necessarily exists with this state of mind; and yet, he truly wills the communication of good, in all instances whatsoever. And this constitutes benevolence in him a moral character.”

After establishing God’s benevolence in light of his agency, Chauncy argues for the centrality of benevolence in light of God’s other attributes and as a prevailing theme in all of his actions. Regarding God’s actions being constrained to act only in benevolence through what is fit for social happiness, Chauncy writes, “And it is an honor, not a dishonor, to an infinitely perfect will, that it is limited… by the fitness of action. It is not a real lessening to the true liberty of the will of God, that he is thus confined, as it
were, by the fitness of action, any more than it is to his power that it does not extend to impossibilities.”112 By emphasizing social fit, Chauncy also dismisses attributes of God like wrath, malice, and hatred because they are not conducive to social flourishing. Through this course, Chauncy constructs a consistent theology around benevolence with social happiness as God’s ultimate goal. Describing this structure, Chauncy writes, “And this therefore is the happiness that may reasonably be expected should be produced by him; that is to say, all the happiness to the whole, and every part of the creation, than can be, not in respect of omnipotence, considered as a natural power, but in the way of fit and reasonable conduct.”113

At the end of Chauncy’s first chapter, he draws clear parallels between God and humanity to establish the reasonability of God’s actions. After establishing the role of intelligence and volition as variables that control God’s benevolence, Chauncy returns his anthropocentric theology’s focus, which started with humanity’s ability to understand God by reflecting on the operation of their own faculties, back to humanity. He writes, “Besides, it may be justly questioned, whether moral agents can be made truly happy, but by wise and right use of their implanted faculties. The goodness of God, under the direction of wisdom, has given them various faculties, and placed them within reach of objects fitted to yield them the enjoyment they were formed capable of.”114 Chauncy continues his comparisons, “And as he has made us men with intellectual and moral powers, after the similitude of his own, though in a low degree, he has planted a capacity

112 Ibid., 36-37.
113 Ibid., 39.
114 Ibid., 44.
in our nature of being happy with the lie kind of happiness, he himself exists in the
enjoyment of.”\textsuperscript{115}

Towards the end of his discussion drawing similarities between God and
humanity, Chauncy charges his readers to commit to “an imitation of God in benignity of
tempter and conduct, in purity, in righteousness, in charity, and in everything that is
amiable, and worthy of esteem. In this way God is happy, and in this way we may be
happy also; but in no other.”\textsuperscript{116} In many ways, Chauncy’s assertions challenged the
otherness of God as traditional Calvinists may have emphasized which deists have
interpreted as the distance between God and present creation. He writes against both
claims by suggesting that God is knowable through introspection. Human facilities are
able to conceive of God because humanity is made in God’s image. Therefore, human
morality must be derived from God’s propensity to act benevolently for social goodness.
This theology provides moral imperatives similar to \textit{The Mystery Hid from Ages}.
\textit{However}, instead of grounding these moral directives from scripture, Chauncy derives
these from a theological structure that elevates human introspection. At the end of his
comparison, Chauncy writes, “If, according to our measure we are perfect as God is
perfect, holy as he is holy, just and true as he is, we may depend we shall never fail of
being as happy, with a God-like happiness, as our nature will allow.”\textsuperscript{117} Ending the first
section with a moral imperative, \textit{The Benevolence of the Deity} continues the moral
imperatives that Chauncy started in \textit{The Mystery Hid from Ages}. However, one distinct

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 48.

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 50.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
difference is the source of that morality. Instead of relying on his biblicism, Chauncy defers to the perfectibility of human reasoning to conceive of a perfectly relatable God, which is a strategy that permeates the rest *The Benevolence of the Deity*.

Chauncy devotes much of the rest of his work to the second chapter of *The Benevolence of the Deity*. This chapter explores the benevolence of God “from the effects of his goodness we every where see in our world, and in all parts of the universe we have knowledge of.”\(^{118}\) He divides this chapter into three separate discussions about the benevolence of God: as evident from his inanimate creation, as evident from his animal creatures, and as evident from humanity. However, before delving into these three proofs, Chauncy introduces four prefaces to these proofs. The first is that a request to expand the scope of his readers’ context of the world in which God’s benevolence will be applied.

Chauncy explains:

> And in this view of the case, the full discovery of benevolence is not to be looked for, in our system singly and separately, but in them all collectively considered. And it would be injurious to the Deity, to complain of him for want of goodness, merely because the manifestation of it to our particular system, considered singly and apart from the rest, is not so great as we may imagine it to be.\(^{119}\)

This move allows Chauncy to dismiss evils specific to this planet that deists may have raised as a proper objection to Chauncy’s claim for God’s benevolence.

To further disarm his opponents from objecting to God’s benevolence, Chauncy introduces his second preface: “We ought not to consider its displays as they affect

\(^{118}\) Ibid., 53.

\(^{119}\) Ibid., 56.
individual beings only, but as they relate to the particular system of which they are parts.” In other words, God’s benevolence can only be measured when viewed through the benefit gained for an entire system and not by the benefit gained or lost in each specific instance. Building on this point, Chauncy provides the third, and in his mind the most important, preface:

That we must not judge the benevolence of the Deity merely from the actual good we see produced, but should likewise take into consideration the tendency of those general laws conformably to which it is produced. The reason is, because the tendency of those laws may be obstructed, and less good actually take place, than they are naturally fitted to produce: In which case, it is no argument of want of goodness in the Deity that no more good was communicated; though it may be of folly in the creatures.

In other words, God’s benevolence should not be measured by individual instances, but by the general laws that may have given rise to those unfavorable events. One could argue that this preface aligns with deistic conceptions of the watchmaker God. Under this scheme, Chauncy proposes that God’s benevolence only be measured through secondary causes and not through direct intervention on the earth which Chauncy argues, God does not need to do. He writes, “Possibly this method of communicating good by general laws, uniformly adhered to, is, in the nature of things, a better adapted one to produce the greatest good, than the other method by interpositions continually repeated.” This move also absolves God of the moral failures of human beings because God can only be credited with imbuing humanity with life and faculties, but responsibility still rests on the

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120 Ibid., 57.
121 Ibid., 60.
122 Ibid., 65.
individual. As Chauncy argues, “The laws might be well adapted in their nature, and
tendency, to effect more good than is actually accomplished: And that more good is nor
produced may be owing, not to any defect in the laws, but to a misuse of them by his
creatures: for which they are answerable, and not the Deity.”¹²³

The fourth premise is that when measuring God’s benevolence, one must also be
aware of the benefit gained in the future. He writes, “We are too short-signed to trace any
irregularities, in the present state, through all their connections, either here or hereafter;
and therefore cannot pretend to affirm, with any degree of probability, that they may not
finally turn out proof of benevolence, rather than an objection against it.”¹²⁴ Chauncy
continues with the possibility that the suffering experienced in this world could “be
repaid by an over-balance of enjoyments.”¹²⁵ Through these prefaces, Chauncy not only
prevents specific instances of evil to challenge the benevolence of God, but Chauncy also
utilizes uncertainty and doubt to his advantage. By introducing the potentiality to
infinitely broaden the scope of a particular system in both space and time, Chauncy could
always locate God’s benevolence in the ambiguity of the past, heavens, complex, or the
future, making it difficult to strategically diminish and weaken. With this impregnable
defense for God’s benevolence, Chauncy concludes his scheme summarizing his main
point before delving into his first and second proofs:

To make evident, that the appearance of good, in our world, are such as
fairly lead us to conceive of the Supreme Creator as absolutely and
perfectly benevolent. I do not mean, that the present actual amount of

¹²³ Ibid., 68.
¹²⁴ Ibid., 70.
¹²⁵ Ibid.
these appearances is so much good as will answer the idea of infinitely perfect benevolence; But what I intend is, that they arise from such laws, and are so circumstanced and related as that, in this view of them, we may clearly and fully argue that the original author of them is supremely and infinitely good.\textsuperscript{126}

Chauncy devotes little attention to his first and second proofs. For his first proof, Chauncy derives God’s benevolence from inanimate creation by identifying the different ways these inanimate objects contribute to human flourishing. For example, the sun is beneficial because of the light and warmth it provides to the creatures. Regarding all of the heavenly bodies’ qualities, Chauncy writes, “But yet, the globes themselves may well be considered as illustrations of this noble quality, if it be found that they are constituted so as to be passively instrumental in occasioning good to numberless beings, formed with capacities for enjoyment.”\textsuperscript{127} Continuing with his anthropocentric focus, Chauncy provides his second proof which focuses on animals. He highlights the animals’ diversity and their ability to propagate as being good for the entire system. This complex system benefits humanity in both filling the earth and in being further evidence of the mind of God. Chauncy writes, “And as we are able to see but a little way into the design of the Deity, with respect to these inferior creatures; and yet, are at no loss, from what we do see, certainly to determine that it is a design tending to good.”\textsuperscript{128} These two proofs only underscore the anthropocentric focus of Chauncy’s benevolent deity.

Chauncy’s third proof demonstrates God’s benevolence from his creation of humanity. Contrary to the first two proofs, Chauncy devotes almost a third of his entire

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., 72.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 74.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 85.
work on this section. Transitioning from his discussion about animals, Chauncy delves into the two aspects of the human composition: animalistic tendencies, which he considers as the lower parts, and the higher intelligences, which constitute the upper parts. In this section, he derives God’s benevolence from both parts of the human composition. Regarding the animalistic portion of the human physiology, Chauncy writes, “As to which, we are allied to the inferior kinds, and partake, in common, with them, of a bodily organization, rendering us capable of pleasure in various ways.” Defining these pleasures, Chauncy lists some them: “For it is in our power, by the help of our understandings, to render our animal life far more easy and happy, by guarding it against injuries; by providing for its necessities, by diversifying its pleasures, by multiplying its delights; and by refining and exalting its enjoyments, in a variety of ways.” All of these pleasures are means for humans to derive nature from the material world. Even concepts like physical pain is made out to be beneficial for human flourishing. Regarding physical pain, Chauncy argues that it “rouses our attention to guard ourselves against these external objects that may cause wounds and bruises, or in any other way do mischief to our bodies.” In a manner that almost anticipates evolutionary advantages of certain human physiological features, Chauncy is able to derive a human benefit from every facet of humanity’s material existence.

The second aspect of human composition consists of mental faculties. Chauncy identifies two primary ones: sensation and reflection. Regarding sensation, Chauncy

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129 Ibid., 88-89.
130 Ibid., 91.
131 Ibid., 95-96.
argues that this is the mental ability that allows humanity to interact with the material world. He writes, “It is from hence that we derive all our sensible ideas; that is to say, all our ideas of color, taste, sound, light, heat, cold, and in a word, whatever ideas we have of external objects, or any of the modes of properties that belong to them.” On reflection, Chauncy describes it as the more abstract and introspective component of humanity’s mental faculties. In conjunction with sensation, reflection enables humans to perform activities such as “thinking, willing, knowing, believing, doubting, loving, hoping, fearing, and the like.” According to Chauncy, in tandem, these faculties are “suited to yield us far more exalted pleasure.”

In addition to these two mental faculties, Chauncy describes several additional capacities that further benefit human beings. The first is memory which according to Chauncy, aids human beings in granting them the ability “to will ourselves to recalling instances in the past and keeps us from merely being stuck on present ideas.” The second is discernment or the ability to distinguish between ideas. Specifically, this ability prevents human minds from being filled with too many confusing ideas and enables humans to perceive truth and understanding. Regarding the ability to compound, enlarge, and diminish, Chauncy writes:

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132 Ibid., 98.
133 Ibid., 98.
134 Ibid., 99.
135 Ibid., 101.
136 Ibid., 101-102.
In consequence of this compounding power, we become, as it were, Creators; being able to frame images at our pleasure, hereby multiplying the objects of thought, and giving occasion for infinitely various new perspectives, accompanied with pleasure, we must otherwise have been strangers to. The imagination is chiefly employed in this work of making new complex ideas.”  

Chauncy further argues that these complex ideas give way to enjoyable endeavors like art and ingenuity. New truths are also gained from the mental faculty of being able to perceive positions and arrangements, which Chauncy describes as the ability to “assemble ideas in various positions and arrangements, in order to compare them together, and view them in the respects and relations they bear to each other.” Lastly, Chauncy discusses abstractions which is the ability to generalize particular ideas which remedy the infinite particularities of each individual object. Chauncy argues that all of these mental faculties point to the benevolence of God by humanity’s ability to intellectually conceive of their benefits. He summarizes, “The forming us with faculties whereby we are qualified for such noble intellectual attainments, evidently carries with it the marks of benevolence. Northing indeed but supreme and perfect goodness, could have so wonderfully adorned and endowed our nature.”

Chauncy highlights the importance of intellectual progress over the human lifespan. Chauncy argues that this capacity for growth serves as “the strongest stimulus that now prompts us to exert ourselves in order to enlarge our intellectual powers.”

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137 Ibid., 102-103.
138 Ibid., 103.
139 Ibid., 104.
140 Ibid., 107.
is an argument made in response to assertions that God’s benevolence should have prompted him to grant humanity complete and total knowledge at conception. However, Chauncy argues that humans would be deprived of the joy that comes from developing humanity’s intellectual abilities. He writes, “It is still further acknowledged, that our intellectual powers, at first, are weak and feeble, and it is in a slow and leisurely way, under due cultivation, and in the use of labor and pains, that they gain strength, and advance to any considerable degrees of their attainable perfection.”\textsuperscript{141} He continues, “it seems much better that they should gradually open and enlarge, as ideas are gradually let into them to empty their exercise, and fit them for the offices and enjoyments of life.”\textsuperscript{142} Furthermore, Chauncy believes that humans would be deprived of the joys of earning the fruits of their intellectual labor. “If knowledge had been the gift of the Deity, independently of ourselves, we should have had no reason, were we endowed with it in ever so high a measure, for the least self-approbation on this account.”\textsuperscript{143} In summary, all of creation, both inanimate and animate, and all aspects of human existence, evince the benevolence of God.

Before delving into the moral aspects of humanity, Chauncy concludes the previous sections by suggesting that God had chosen this form of reality to be the optimal means of communicating happiness to humanity. He writes, “So that, upon the whole, instead of complaining of God for not furnishing us with powers, wonderfully contrived to fit us with powers, wonderfully contrived to fit us for intellectual attainments, and the

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 113.

\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 114-115.

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 118.
happiness consequent thereupon, we have reason rather to admire the greatness of his benevolence."\textsuperscript{144} In other words, this world is the best possible existence according to Chauncy’s scheme. This conclusion is in many ways, consistent with Chauncy’s propensity towards proper social order and hierarchy. However, Chauncy also reflects the post-Revolutionary ethos of social progress. Embedded within Chauncy’s theology is an appreciation for growth towards perfection. This framework works on both an individual and social level. With his discussion about systems, he can fit this scheme to support a social progressivism. At the same time, the moral dictums that follow this discussion also point to a theology that hints at the possibility of attaining, or at least moving as close as possible, towards individual moral perfection. With regards to scripture’s role in championing either cause however, it seems that scripture’s role is limited to the latter.

In his discussion about morality, Chauncy delves into the power of moral sense or discernment. He describes this as “that by which we are enabled at once, without the labor of a long train of reasoning, to distinguish between moral good, and moral evil; in all instances that are of primary importance; and essentially connected with the good of the moral world.”\textsuperscript{145} Chauncy attributes immoral decisions to a temptation towards temporary joys in exchange for true happiness. He argues, “They indulge these and those vicious gratifications, not because they do not perceive them to be unreasonable, but because they are excited hereto by the lusts of the flesh, or mind, or both.”\textsuperscript{146} Furthermore, these moral capacities are universal across humanity. However, to hedge

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 119.

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 120.

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 125.
against accusations of Armenianism for suggesting that humanity is able to freely choose between good and evil, Chauncy credits God for imbuing humanity with this capacity to discern moral choices. He writes:

The author of this chain of causes, which inevitably gives existence to them, is their real, and only proper cause. A power in man that with subject his volitions to his command, and constitute him the efficient of those effects that are consequent upon them, is the only bottom upon which agency can, with the least shadow of propriety, be grounded.147

To balance his position between free-will and fatalism, Chauncy argues against a completely fatalistic framework, he describes it as a scheme that is “so grossly false and one, so debasing to the nature of man, and so dishonorary to the perfectly benevolent God, that it is strange any should entertain a favorable opinion of it.”148 For Chauncy, human agency, mirroring God’s own agency and volition, separates humans from the rest of the animals. Part of Chauncy’s larger argument rests on the idea of human liberty, a cause he championed during the Revolutionary War and one that he champions in these spiritual matters. Summarizing his position on human agency and responsibility, and the merits it bestows on humanity, Chauncy concludes:

I may properly add yet further here, this command we are entrusted with over the exertion of our faculties, and a right use of it are the true and only basis of that approbation of our Maker, and that consciousness of it within ourselves, upon which is raised, that inward peace and satisfaction of soul which yield the highest relish to life, and have in them a sufficiency to support and comfort us under all the various vicissitudes, trials, and events, we may be called to pass through, while in the world; and, what is more, inconceivably more, this inward sense of the approbation of God, the foundation of which is the right use of the power of determination we

147 Ibid., 129.

148 Ibid., 132.
are endowed with, is that only which can rationally relieve us in the view of death, and inspire the hope of a glorious immortality beyond the grace, as the reward a God will bestow upon those, who have acted their part well on the stage of life.\textsuperscript{149}

For Chauncy, agency also reflects both God and is necessary for happiness. Regarding the divine reflection of human beings, Chauncy argues that “our being free agents is that which not only makes us living images of the Deity in that perfection of his nature which is his greatest glory, but capable percipients, in a degree, of that happiness which is his highest.”\textsuperscript{150} In the relationship between happiness and liberty, however, Chauncy takes the dependent relationship further. He argues that if liberty was not contingent on happiness, then “we might, it is true, in this way be in a degree happy; but our happiness would not be worthy the name, in comparison with that which arises from a morally good conduct, in consequence of a right use of that power which makes us free agents.”\textsuperscript{151} Chauncy continues that benevolence is ascribed to God insofar as he granted humanity the ability to reap the happiness of its moral workings.

As a final point in his proofs for God’s benevolence, Chauncy also describes shame as one of the “strongest restraints from an undue, wrong use of our moral liberty.”\textsuperscript{152} He continues, “And was it not for this powerful restraint, mankind would be more abandoned to vicious conduct than they now are, as we may reasonably conclude from the man behavior of those, who, by their debaucheries, have so suppressed the

\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 140.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., 141.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., 143.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., 148.
operation of this passion." He also adds to it more sensations like remorse, regret, horror, and uneasiness. Chauncy argues that these also evidence of the benevolence of God. He argues that these are means of protecting humans from a misuses of their agency and serve to hinder any further attempts at immorality that may incur more harmful consequences. Chauncy writes:

The passions of shame, and remorse, upon the conviction of conscience, are not only an illustration of the Deity’s benevolence, in guarding us against an ill use of our elective power, but a strong proof that we are endowed with this power. Every one knows, from what he has felt within himself, the difference between those uneasy sensations, that are occasioned by evils, which are the effects of exterior causes, whose operation is necessary, and over which we have no command, and those that are the production of our own folly, in misusing the over we have over our own volitions.

To reiterate his discourse on the benevolence of God demonstrates through the ideal creation of this version of this world and reality at large, Chauncy argues that “his goodness, as manifested in such a way, would have been less, far less, than in the way of instrumental means and causes, the way in which it is now done.” Expanding this principle into the realm of theology, Chauncy ends his proofs with a discussion about Christ and the universal salvation promised through him. In the same way that God works through natural means, God chose to save humanity through the intermediate method through Christ’s obedience. Through this method, Chauncy argues that through creation and salvation, “As it is carried into effect, not by an absolute sovereign grant from God,

153 Ibid., 148-149.
154 Ibid., 150.
155 Ibid., 151.
156 Ibid., 160.
but in a mediate way, his benevolence is more gloriously illustrated than it otherwise would, or could, have been."\textsuperscript{157}

Similar to the third chapter of \textit{The Mystery Hid from Ages}, Chauncy devotes the third chapter of \textit{The Benevolence of the Deity} to answering objections. In this work, he anticipates three objections to his assertion about God’s benevolence. The first objection against God’s benevolence involves his creation of imperfect beings. Responding to this criticism, Chauncy asserts that imperfections in creation enable the “the benefits of social co-dependence and improvement.”\textsuperscript{158} In other words, diversity and specialization become blessings from God to creation. Chauncy writes, “Upon the truth now of these premises, it plainly follows, that the capacity for happiness in the universe, is enlarged by means of the diversity of beings that have existence in it.”\textsuperscript{159} Furthermore, Chauncy also points back to his earlier argument about the capacity for improvement. Imperfection, in Chauncy’s scheme, provides the opportunity for humanity to strive towards perfection and to enjoy the fruits of laboring for that state.\textsuperscript{160}

The second objection is the existence of moral order. God could not possibly be perfectly benevolent if he did not prevent moral evil and the unhappiness that it engenders. Chauncy contends that perhaps this moral evil is overstated in this world. He writes, “But it is not fair, in making an estimate of the corrupt state of the world, to enumerate all the horrid immoralities which have been perpetrated, at the same time

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 172.

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 183.

\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., 191.

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 203.
overlooking the many shining virtues which have adorned the character of multitudes.\(^{161}\)

Furthermore, Chauncy conceives of the different possible ways God could have prevented moral evil without constraining human liberty. After considering the different possibilities, Chauncy concludes that the current moral system is the optimal one for God to adopt to preserve human liberty while limiting human immorality by discouraging the latter with unhappiness as a consequence:

> If wrong determinations, and unreasonable pursuits, were not accompanied nor followed with unhappiness, either to the faculty agents themselves or others by their means, the objectors against infinite goodness would not, it may be, be so strenuous in urging this difficulty: But as the fact is they are bitter in their complaints, thinking it extremely hard, that creatures, for only misusing their liberty, should be subjected to consequent punishment, natural or penal.\(^{162}\)

The third objection questions God’s benevolence in light of natural disasters and plagues which could not be attributed to human fault. To address this objection, Chauncy concedes that perhaps the best world that will yield the most happiness for humans at the end contains this mixture of good and evil.\(^{163}\) Temporary pain in this world enables humans to recognize comfort and to strive for it with excitement in life.\(^{164}\) Hunger and thirst are necessary reminders to sustain ourselves in order to stave off death and continue enjoying life, or as Chauncy argues, “Hunger and thirst are what nature has made and intended to give us warning of tis danger, and to push us on to a due care, to prevent, in

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\(^{161}\) Ibid., 206.

\(^{162}\) Ibid., 235.

\(^{163}\) Ibid., 258.

\(^{164}\) Ibid., 264-265.
time, those inconveniences that would befall our bodies, if not supplied with good and
drink to strengthen and uphold them.”\textsuperscript{165} Labor and toil are necessary to cultivate the
world and make it beautiful to be appreciated by humanity.\textsuperscript{166} Regarding the shortness of
life, Chauncy argues that this design shows how “He intended both, not so much for the
enjoyment of our highest happiness here, as to prepare us for it in a better state. This is
the true and proper idea of life.”\textsuperscript{167} And finally, death is necessary to enable for the
multiplication of life and the perpetuation of species. He writes, “And should a
calculation be made of life multiplied in this way, it would amount to a sum
inconceivably greater, than it could otherwise have been. Millions of animals, in every
class, are capable, in this way, of being brought into life, and made percipients of
enjoyment.”\textsuperscript{168} Chauncy concludes \textit{The Benevolence of the Deity}:

\begin{quote}
From these observations, we may conclude, that all the various parts of
our system are so admirably suited to one another, and the whole
contrived with such exquisite wisdom, that were anything, in any part
thereof, in the least otherwise than it is, without an alteration in the whole,
there would be a less sum of happiness in the system than there now is.\textsuperscript{169}
\end{quote}

In summary, all aspects of the present human experience are necessary for
the full realization of their happiness.

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., 268.
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid., 272.
\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., 280.
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., 282.
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., 292.
**Scripture**

In a manner that seems differ from the biblicism of *The Mystery Hid from Ages*, *The Chauncy refrains from extensive exegetical analysis in* *The Benevolence of the Deity*. While scripture was not entirely absent from his work, it’s nonetheless a notable departure given his earlier assertion that the truths of Universalism can be obtained solely through scripture, or as he describes it in *The Mystery Hid from Ages*, “the fountain of revealed truth, the inspired oracles of God.”\(^{170}\) Perhaps one difference lies in the intended audience for each work. While *The Mystery Hid from Ages* seems targeted towards individuals like Joseph Eckley and John Murray, *The Benevolence of the Deity* seems targeted towards a different audience, or at least appears cognizant of a broader audience that might not be swayed by pure biblical claims.

In the conclusion of *The Mystery Hid from Ages* and within *The Benevolence of the Deity*, there are three instances where Chauncy seems aware of both deists and atheists in his work. In *The Mystery Hid from Ages*, Chauncy acknowledges deists’ propensity to pit reason against revelation. He writes, “The Deists themselves will not pretend to set up reason in competition with revelation, if the happiness of the whole human species is the GREAT END of the scheme of God there opened, and an end that shall not fail in being accomplished in the issue of its operation.”\(^{171}\) The second instance where he may be aware of deists is in his support for God’s general laws and contention against God’s need to intervene in his creation. Chauncy writes, “Possibly this method of

\(^{170}\) Chauncy, *The Mystery Hid From Ages*, vi.

\(^{171}\) Ibid., 360.
communicating good by general laws, uniformly adhered to, is, in the nature of things, a better adapted one to produce the greatest good, than the other method by interpositions continually repeated.” Chauncy constructs a deistic conception of creation in support of God’s benevolence. One could argue perhaps that against the more commonly understood impersonal, watchmaker God of deism, Chauncy anthropomorphizes him in order to both attribute benevolence to God and attempt to restore a religious structure around a relevant, albeit absent, God. Lastly, Chauncy seems aware of nascent forms of atheism in his assertion about God’s existence. He writes, “If there is such an existing being as God (as there most certainly is) his approbation must be worth than all earthly good; and a consciousness that we are the objects of it must yield inward delight, greater than can be conceived of by those whole affections are set upon the infinitely lower pleasures of time and sense.” Chauncy’s smug retort hints that God’s existence may no longer be an axiom or that Chauncy has encountered literature or individuals who have started to challenge this assumption about God’s existence. In many ways, these new voices have started to echo their objections in Chauncy’s work and perhaps have shaped it in ways that Chauncy may not have intended.

Chauncy’s shift away from his strict biblicism might be explained by one of his arguments against a commonly-held belief. Similar to his observation that there are some of among his readers who may not believe in God’s existence, he also acknowledges that there might be some of his readers who do not ascribe to the tenets of scripture. In a


173 Ibid., 141.
manner almost arguing for his biblicism, Chauncy writes: The infinitely good God, if we may depend upon the bible, was not excited to purpose, or contrive, or reveal, or execute the gospel-plan of salvation, by any motive extraneous to himself; but benevolence of heart was the true source, and the only one from whence it all proceeded. The conditional statement Chauncy poses seems to acknowledge a group of individuals who may assent to the negative of that claim, namely that the bible may not be dependable. Most deists have a loosened adherence to scripture with some even abandoning it altogether. In light of the deists’ discarding of scripture, which he directly addresses, and Chauncy’s recognition of deists’ preference for a watchmaker God which can be derived from reason alone, it is no coincidence that Chauncy’s main apologetic to them for his benevolent God argues from the same extra-biblical grounds.

That’s not to say, however, that Chauncy entirely omits scripture from The Benevolence of the Deity. In discussing people’s propensity to make immoral decisions, Chauncy cites Rom 7:14: “The law in their members, getting the better of the law in their minds, influences them to do that they approve not; year, many times, that they even hate, it is so opposite to the light in them, which ought to be the guide of their conduct.” Regarding those who refuse to discern the benevolence of God, Chauncy also argues that “it should seem as though it must be because we have so blinded our eyes that we cannot, or hardened our hearts that we will not, see and own it to the praise of the glory of his

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174 Ibid., 165.
175 Ibid., 126.
goodness.” This seems to be a reference from either John 12 or Matthew 13.

Furthermore, regarding human conscience being accompanied with shame, Chauncy writes, “And as the witness of conscience, when in favor of a man, is connected with joy; so is its testimony, when against him, accompanied with shame. This is a passion we can much better understand, the meaning of by internal feelings than by outward description.”

After this observation, Chauncy points to Jeremiah 3:3 and Jeremiah 8:12 as suitable illustrations of this point. Later on in this section, Chauncy also points to Proverbs 18:14 to illustrate this same point about conscience. All of these scriptural references point to scripture’s authority over moral matters.

The other section where Chauncy introduces scripture pertains to matters of Christ’s atonement and God’s benevolence demonstrated through this act of love. Describing the obedience of Christ to death, Chauncy cites Philippians 2:8. To demonstrate God’s love as the motivation behind Christ’s death, Chauncy also points to John 3:16 and Rom 5:8. Chauncy summarizes his scheme about God’s love in connection to Christ’s death within his citation of 1 John 4:10:

Yeah, so far as we are able to judge, more benevolence is manifested in this method of our redemption, than in all the other works of God’s providence; and we have abundant reason given to us, upon this occasion, to admire and exclaim, “Herein is love, not that we have loved God, but that he has loved us, and sent his son to be the propiation for our sins! O

176 Ibid., 144.
177 Ibid., 147.
178 Ibid., 150.
179 Ibid., 171.
Looking at these two distinct uses of scripture, Chauncy seems to relegate scriptural authority only over moral and biblical narrative matters. Thematically, these seem to be the primary theological categories Chauncy covers in his *The Mystery Hid from Ages* which may explain his ability to center his work on a sophisticated and extensive exegetical study. In contrast to *The Mystery Hid from Age*, *The Benevolence of the Deity* does not address human morality or biblical themes until halfway through his work and this is where Chauncy makes scattered references to scripture. Why might Chauncy have refrained from bringing biblical arguments in support of God’s benevolence? This thesis will hypothesize that perhaps the answer lies with Chauncy’s audience and his message to them.

As noted earlier, Chauncy seems cognizant of deists and atheists reading, or at least encountering his readers of, *The Benevolence of the Deity*. *The Mystery Hid from Ages* might share the same audience, but it’s clear from Chauncy’s structure and emphasis that he intends for this to be targeting sympathizers to either Murray, Eckley, or even Edwards, Jr. *The Benevolence of the Deity* seems to be a work targeting deists who may object to the benevolent God on two grounds: either God is too anthropomorphized that he ceases to be the impersonal, albeit rational first cause, or evils and imperfections are too rampant in this world for God to be benevolent. Chauncy spends the entire first half of his work discussing the reasonability of God by inferring an anthropomorphized

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180 Ibid., 173.
composition to God’s mental faculties. On the second point, Chauncy answers questions about theodicy in his objections which make up roughly a third of this work. Perhaps to avoid the hypocrisy of omitting moral imperatives and scriptural referenced he charged Murray of omitting, Chauncy inserts these in his discussion about God’s benevolence as evident from humanity.

This thesis presumes deliberateness to Chauncy’s ordering of his arguments. While the crux of his works seems intent on pursuing a rational, extra-biblical basis for God’s benevolence to properly answer deists’ objections, Chauncy inadvertently concedes ground to deists’ dismissal of scripture’s ability to speak on these matters. In many ways, Chauncy anticipates this move in the beginning of his conclusion in *The Mystery Hid from Ages*. He writes:

> The light of reason, it is true, if duly attended to, may open to our view a state beyond the grave: But does it discover, with clearness and certainty, what out condition will be in that state? It may, if we have behaved ill in this, excite our fears, and fill us with anxiety, when we look into that, and it may also, if we have endeavored to act conformably to the rules of virtue, encourage us to rely on the divine goodness with some degree of hope.\(^{181}\)

In other words, reason provides a strong enough foundation for life while scripture and revelation supplement necessary, albeit extraneous if the afterlife is of little concern, components with respect to the next state. From this perspective, Chauncy engages the eighteenth century desists on the grounds of natural religion.

Chauncy’s move is not without its own consequences. The first and more immediate consequence is that his decision concedes to deists that scripture should only

\(^{181}\) Chauncy, *The Mystery Hid from Ages*, 359.
cover matters involving morality and biblical narrative. One could point to this growing rift between reason and scripture as the beginning of the rift between science and religion which widens in the nineteenth century. The second consequence is that Chauncy’s decision to adopt solely naturalistic arguments for God’s benevolence set the precedent for Unitarian Universalism, and perhaps broader liberal Christianity, to continue to wrestle with the role of scripture in light of the dependability of reason. The third is that Chauncy’s biblicism, which has weakened traditional Puritan orthodoxy in New England, has retreated into morality and biblical narrative without providing a complete scripture-based structure to replace it.

In many ways, Chauncy may have anticipated these potential consequences especially as Lippy notes, “Chauncy had not intended to undercut the heart of orthodox theology… As far as he was concerned, he was only… preserving what he saw as vital to the New England Way by providing a rational and logical defense of present practice and experience.”¹⁸² Chauncy’s wariness of his extra-biblical focus in The Benevolence of the Deity is evidenced in the nature of his next work. One could read Chauncy’s Five Dissertations as a much-needed exegetical analysis of the first few chapters of Genesis meant to provide biblical support to Chauncy’s overemphasis on reason and natural religion in The Benevolence of the Deity. Perhaps to avoid Murray’s neglect of scripture, Chauncy publishes Five Dissertations as the conclusion to his biblical Universalism.

¹⁸² Lippy, 122.
CHAPTER 3
FIVE DISSERTATIONS ON ACCOUNT OF THE FALL

Background

_Five Dissertations_ was published in 1785 and by that year, all three treatises – _The Mystery Hid from Ages_ and _The Benevolence of the Deity_ included – were in print.¹⁸³

The last page of text in _Five Dissertations_ validates this point. It notes that the work was just imported from Boston, New England and that the author had also written _The Mystery Hid from Ages_ and _The Benevolence of the Deity_. Chauncy’s decision to send the manuscript for _Five Dissertations_ seems to align with his purposes for sending the manuscript for _The Mystery Hid from Ages_ to London. Both works consisted of extensive exegetical analysis of biblical texts which required proper Hebrew and/or Greek text types, which Griffin notes, was not yet available in post-Revolutionary War America. On the other hand, Chauncy was able to publish _The Benevolence of the Deity_ in Boston since his work did not require Greek or Hebrew text types. In many ways, the sequence in which Chauncy sent for publishing these works only further reveals the distinctiveness of each work contrary to Lippy’s grouping of these works. Furthermore, the inefficiency of Chauncy’s decision to publish these works in this sequence demands further inquiry into Chauncy’s intentions in publishing the first work in London, the second in Boston, and the third in London again. Perhaps Chauncy’s decision to publish in London, then Boston, and then to London again, parallels pattern of high-biblicism, low-biblicism, and high-biblicism evident in these works.

¹⁸³ Griffin, 176
There are two key pieces of evidence that suggest that *Five Dissertations* was intended as a follow-up to primarily *The Benevolence of the Deity* and secondarily *The Mystery Hid from Ages*. The first evidence is that the end of *The Benevolence of the Deity* anticipates the publication of *Five Dissertations*. Summarizing his views on the relationship between the mortality of mankind in light of the laws of nature, Chauncy enters into a brief discussion about the biblical narrative as captured in Genesis. He writes, “Men live now, generally speaking, but seventy or eighty years: Whereas in the Anti-Diluvian ages, they loved some hundreds of years; and they might, had God so pleased, have gone on living as many thousands.”184 This mention of the biblical account of the Fall in Genesis is notable because by this point in *The Benevolence of the Deity*, Chauncy has not yet mentioned the biblical narrative of the fall. Most of Chauncy’s arguments in *the Benevolence of the Deity* have relied mostly on his audience’s rational capacities as opposed to their understanding of scripture.

Furthermore, Chauncy inserts a footnote on that same page where he provides a brief explanation on the afterlife in light of the fall of Adam, the consequences from Adam’s actions, and the salvation of mankind due to God’s goodness. This leads into the second evidence in support of the argument that the *Five Dissertations* was published as a follow-up work to *The Benevolence of the Deity*. *Five Dissertations* consists of two dissertations analyzing Genesis 1-3, two dissertations on Romans, and an additional dissertation focusing on just Rom 5:12-20. Chauncy’s first section of *Five Dissertations* not only perfectly reference his footnote at the end of *The Benevolence of the Deity*, but

also seem to provide the necessary scriptural analysis to support Chauncy’s assertions in *The Benevolence of the Deity* with respect to God’s creation of mankind. While *The Benevolence of the Deity* relied on the reasonability of mankind to infer the goodness of their physical and mental faculties from their present experiences, *Five Dissertations* provides the biblical history to further ground Chauncy’s analysis in the benevolence of the biblical God and not just the natural God.

These two key pieces of evidence point to a continuity across *The Mystery Hid from Ages*, *The Benevolence of the Deity*, and *Five Dissertations*. These three treatises provide the rational and scriptural basis for Charles Chauncy’s Universalism. However, the sequence demonstrates notable shifts in Chauncy’s views on scripture. *The Mystery Hid from Ages* reveals Chauncy’s strong biblicism. However, Chauncy shifts away a strict reliance on scriptural authority in *The Benevolence of the Deity*. Instead, he relies on explanations from natural religion to demonstrate the benevolence of God. While the strategy to demonstrate God’s benevolence through nature and reason was not unique to Chauncy, it was nonetheless a notable departure from his claims to biblicism in *The Mystery Hid from Ages*. Perhaps recognizing the lack of scripture in *The Benevolence of the Deity*, Chauncy may have inserted a short footnote close to the end to explain the biblical narrative that undergirds his claims about God’s benevolence. Upon further reflection, Chauncy could have found that short footnote insufficient in explaining his scheme and so publishes *Five Dissertations* to remedy the lack of scripture in *The Benevolence of the Deity*. 
Summary

Chauncy’s first dissertation delves into the nature of creation itself as described in the Book of Genesis. Specifically, Chauncy focuses on Genesis 1:26-29 and Genesis 2:7-9, 15-25. Analyzing these verses, Chauncy derives five central points about the nature of creation. The first observation is the exceptional way in which God created humanity relative to the other creatures. While the texts describe God’s creation of the animals from their respective elements, the texts also provided a different way of describing God’s creation of man. Chauncy writes, “He only said, relative to the other creatures, “let the waters and the earth bring them forth after their kind:” But when he was about to make man, he is represented as speaking in quite a different style, “Let us make man.” Chauncy concludes that this means that God had set apart humankind as “a creature of the highest dignity and importance in this lower world.” The second point relates with the means by which God created mankind. Instead of creating the first human by a series of secondary causes, God chose to create man through an “immediate act of his own almighty power.” The primary means by which God created mankind was through the literal breath of life.

The third observation is that God had created mankind in his own likeness. Before defining this definition, Chauncy cites plethora of alternative views that attempt to

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186 Ibid., 5.

187 Ibid., 6.

188 Ibid., 8.
explain this like Samuel Shuckford’s *History of the Creation and Fall of Man*.

Ultimately, all of these alternatives fail to account for the true meaning of the text. In contrast to assertions that Adam was created with a strong likeness to God in holiness or perfectibility, Chauncy asserts that Adam was simply “endowed with nothing more than those capacities which are proper to a being of that order in which he was created.”

With these faculties, Adam was provided the tools to attain “that ‘perfection’ in resembling the Deity he was originally formed and designed for.” The ultimate goal of this gradual perfection is self-approbation. Regarding perfection, Chauncy writes:

> If perfection, in all desirable mental qualities, had been the grant of God to man independently of himself, he would have had no reason for ‘self-approbation’ on this account; nor could he have enjoyed that noble pleasure, which is the natural result therefrom. For this can arise only from a conscious reflection on his own activity in the procurement of them.

This observation from Chauncy mirrors his sentiments from *The Benevolence of the Deity* where he writes, “If knowledge had been the gift of the Deity, independently of ourselves, we should have had no reason, were we endowed with it in ever so high a measure, for the least self-approbation on this account.” Thus, similar to *The Benevolence of the Deity*, Chauncy utilizes this section to establish the moral responsibility of human beings with the faculties that God gave to them.

The fourth observation studies God’s command for humans to be fruitful and multiply. God established as a law of nature, in contrast to Adam’s origins, that

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189 Ibid., 23.
190 Ibid.
191 Ibid., 32
subsequent creatures will be made in an intermediate manner of biological propagation rather than in a miraculous fashion. This point seems to contend against the uniqueness of humanity from creation if the means of their propagation is likened to the animals. To respond to this point, Chauncy provides his own explanation on humanity’s likeness to God. He answers, “the creation of the first man and woman in ‘the image of God,’ that is, their being made intelligent moral beings, capable, in consequence of a right use of their implanted powers, of resembling the Deity in knowledge, holiness and happiness, was the GRAND CHARACTERISTIC of their rank or order.”\textsuperscript{193} For Chauncy, to be made in the image of God is to be made in a state above the animals. This is due to God imbuing humanity with certain characteristics such as knowledge and happiness that is unique to them. Within this hierarchy, Chauncy enters into his fifth observation. He writes, “The last thing observable, though not the least important, is the ‘law of trial’ man was placed under in his innocent state, or that ‘rule of government,’ conformably to which God would deal with him in regard of the great affair of his ‘living,’ or ‘dying.’”\textsuperscript{194} Within the creation scheme, mankind is subject to higher authorities in the same way that humanity is higher than the animals.

Chauncy closes his first dissertation with the following observation: “This account of the creation of the first man, and of his state while innocent, is that which Moses has communicated to us, either expressly, or in words that naturally and fairly

\textsuperscript{193} Chauncy, \textit{Five Dissertations}, 35.

\textsuperscript{194} Ibid., 42
import this sense.” Chauncy’s first dissertation in his *Five Dissertations* heavily mirrors the themes in *The Benevolence of the Deity*. Both works explore the hierarchy of God, humanity, and animals. Both works also locate the source of human faculties, establish the centrality of human responsibility, and provide moral imperatives for humanity. However, while *The Benevolence of the Deity* roots its authority in reason, *Five Dissertations* grounds its arguments on scripture. In many ways, the first dissertation serves as a transitionary work that both provides the necessary scriptural support for the preceding work *The Benevolence of the Deity* while also introducing the scripture-laden approach of Chauncy in the rest of his four dissertations in his work *Five Dissertations*.

Chauncy’s second dissertation explores Adam’s temptation in Genesis 3:1-6 and is divided into two sections: the temptation itself and the consequences that arose from Adam’s fall. In keeping with his strict biblicism, Chauncy dismisses any extra-biblical depictions of the serpent in Genesis 3:1-6. He argues, “Whatever descriptions are given of this serpent, however fine and curious, are the fruit of imagination only, and should be carefully distinguished from the truth of scripture-history.” From this strict biblicism, Chauncy argues that the serpent must not be assumed to be Satan or the agent of God because those descriptions are not present in the text. Instead, Chauncy proposes that the serpent was a “trial of virtue, a trial adjusted to men’s state and character; and such

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195 Ibid., 63.

196 Ibid., 69.

197 Ibid., 76-77.
as, notwithstanding the temptation, will leave them justly chargeable with sin.\textsuperscript{198}

Because this incident was a trial, Adam’s fall was solely his fault for failing the trial.

With Adam bearing the responsibility, Chauncy absolves God of any responsibility and thus, Chauncy is able to preserve God’s benevolence even if these descriptions are absent from the text. This is perhaps why in his discussion about the consequences of Adam’s act, Chauncy focuses on the topic of shame. Describing Adam and Eve’s nakedness, he summarizes it as “knowledge accompanied with self-disapprobation; arising from an inward consciousness of having transgressed the command of God, which deserved punishment, they were at a loss how to escape.”\textsuperscript{199} By affirming the guilt of Adam not simply by inferring the nature of the situation as a trial that Adam failed, but also by demonstrating that Adam’s own faculties evince his guilt, Chauncy draws a linear connection between Adam’s act of moral failure and the ultimate consequence of mortality. Arguing against the interpretation that Adam’s failure bore original sin, Chauncy proposed that Adam’s consequence was literal death. Comparing Genesis 2:19 with Genesis 5:5, Chauncy writes, “The ‘death’ he is here said to have suffered is plainly opposed to the ‘life’ he had enjoyed, which was a life here on earth: consequently, there is no reason to think, that any more is meant by this ‘death’ that the ‘privation of that life he had, for many years, been in possession of.’”\textsuperscript{200} By addressing not simply God’s benevolence but also the promise of resurrection afterward, \textit{Five Dissertations} also becomes scriptural support for the eschatology Chauncy championed.

\textsuperscript{198} Ibid., 78

\textsuperscript{199} Ibid., 82.

\textsuperscript{200} Ibid., 124
in *The Mystery Hid from Ages*. Concluding his second dissertation with a discussion alluding to universal salvation, Chauncy writes, “Nothing more is necessary in order to it, but their being restored to their former mode of existence, or to one analogous to it; which, perhaps, is the precise idea of the *Scripture*-resurrection.”

Chauncy’s third dissertation is the longest of all five dissertations, focusing on the entirety of Paul’s epistles to the Corinthians and Romans. Inferring Paul’s intentions behind writing these epistles, Chauncy argues that Paul sought to reveal that “the gospel scheme of mercy stands in close connection with the unhappy state mankind universally are brought into, by means of the lapse of our first progenitor.”

Focusing on Romans while further building on his earlier discussion about Adam’s fall, Chauncy summarizes the first eight chapters of Romans as the “grace of God, through Jesus Christ, is as truly intended for the help of our nature brought into a disadvantageous state in consequence of the lapse, as to affect our deliverance from the vanity and mortality to which we have been subjected.” Through these general assumptions about Paul’s intentions, Chauncy summarizes the traditional biblical narrative of eighteenth century Protestantism but infusing it with the results of his own exegetical work.

Chauncy proposes two statements regarding this scheme. The first is that through Adam’s lapse, the entirety of mankind is subjected to death. The second proposition is that in addition to being subjected to death, mankind is also subjected to a state of nature

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201 Ibid., 128.
202 Ibid., 130.
203 Ibid., 133.
204 Ibid., 138-139.
less perfect, which makes it “morally impossible [for mankind] that they should upon the foot of strict rigorous law, attain to the justification of life.”

Within his second proposition, Chauncy launches an offence against original sin. He questions the idea of Adam’s spiritual corruption, writing “How is it known, that Adam was that entirely corrupted creature, ‘indisposed to all good, and prone to all evil continually,’ he is represented to have been? Does the Scripture teach us this for truth?”

Original sin was not a concept unique to Taylor though. As Chauncy recognized, Calvinists like Jonathan Edwards strongly adhered to the tenets of moral depravity which assumed a type or form of original sin. To refute their assertions, Chauncy highlighted the contradictions in Edwards’ *Original Sin.*

From this criticism, Chauncy proposes a more benign alternative to the metaphysical assumption of original sin. He writes:

> It appears, that our nature, as transmitted from Adam, is neither morally corrupt, or devoid of those faculties or principles, in the exercise of which we may, under the means, helps, and advantages we are favoured with, become the subjects of those qualities, which will prepare us for honour and immortality in God’s kingdom that is above.

Chauncy’s departure from one of the central tenets of eighteenth century Calvinism marks a significant shift in his theological orientation. However, a more notable change, perhaps, was Chauncy’s willingness to use scripture to loosen the grip of Calvinism over eighteenth century New England. While his previous works attacked potential dissenters like John Murray in *The Mystery Hid from Ages* or deists in *The Benevolence of the*
Deity, Chauncy reserved criticism of his peers’ most deeply held beliefs for his most scripture-centric work in *Five Dissertations*.

In the last third of his third dissertation, Chauncy infers three main observations about Paul’s intentions in writing the entirety of the epistle to the Romans. The first reasserts the morally ambiguous nature of humanity in stark contrast with the morally irredeemable humanity of Calvinism. Regarding humanity’s moral faculties, Chauncy writes, “when they are capable of moral action, they will so far transgress the rule, as to be incapable of claiming justification upon the foot of the naked law.”209 In other words, moral failure is not a status imputed on humanity, but is exercised when an individual is tested. The second observation is that Paul and the other writers of the New Testament “ground man’s sanctification, as their justification, on the scheme of grace that is opened in the gospel; giving us to understand, that no son of Adam can, upon any other foot, attain a ‘freedom from sin,’ any more than ‘condemnation.’”210 In light of humanity’s propensity to sin, God provides a way by grace. Further focusing on Adam’s sin, Chauncy enters into his third point writing that Paul has “acquainted us with the true rise or occasional cause of all this; namely, our coming into existence through the first man Adam, and, in consequence of his lapse, under a disadvantageous state of nature.”211 Chauncy seems to imply through his narrow attention to the epistle of Romans, that entirety of the biblical narrative could be told from this single epistle and that Genesis is a helpful supplement to explicate Paul’s discussion about Adam.

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209 Ibid., 207.
210 Ibid., 213.
211 Ibid., 214.
In summary, Chauncy demonstrates that one could derive the entire biblical scheme for salvation from a study of the epistle to the Romans. However, he anticipates a key objection that might challenge his scheme: “Why need the Deity have confined himself to establish general laws in the bestowment of existence... Does it not argue a defect in God’s wisdom or benevolence, that mankind, by the fatality of settled connections in nature, should be made liable to sufferings?”\(^{212}\) In other words, the largest objection to Chauncy’s scheme questions the very lynchpin of his universalism: God’s benevolence. Borrowing directly from one of the objections in *The Benevolence of the Deity*, Chauncy proposes that a promised future state would justify the evils suffered in the present state.\(^{213}\) He writes in *Five Dissertations*, “The inconveniences which arise for the present, from general laws statedly permitted to take their course, may possibly, under the conduct of infinite wisdom, power, and goodness, be remedied in the final issue of their operation.”\(^{214}\)

The similarities between these two objections highlight one of the key similarities and differences between *The Benevolence of the Deity* and *Five Dissertations*. In many ways, the third dissertation builds on the arguments of the first and second dissertations regarding creation, human responsibility, and implicitly, God’s benevolence. However, the dissertations provide the scriptural support for the biblical narrative that undergirds Chauncy’s scheme while *The Benevolence of the Deity* argues purely from a rational and moral perspective. This notable shift is captured in Chauncy’s shifting description of

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\(^{212}\) Ibid., 207.


\(^{214}\) Chauncy, *Five Dissertations*, 232.
salvation. In *The Benevolence of the Deity*, Chauncy explains “infinitely good God, if we may depend upon the bible, was not excited to purpose, or contrive, or reveal, or execute the gospel-plan of salvation, by any motive extraneous to himself; but benevolence of heart was the true source, and the only one from whence it all proceeded”\(^{215}\) Note Chauncy’s cautious rhetoric surrounding the role of scripture in this broader scheme. This is in stark contrast to Chauncy’s bold eschatology: “Nothing more is necessary in order to it, but their being restored to their former mode of existence, or to one analogous to it; which, perhaps, is the precise idea of the *Scripture*-resurrection.”\(^{216}\) Chauncy emphasizes the centrality of scripture in his *Five Dissertations*, perhaps as a remedy to its absence in his work on the benevolence of God.

Chauncy’s fourth dissertation delves into the centrality of Adam’s experiences as the authority to humanity’s mental and physical attributes. First, he explicates the similarities between Adam and his descendants. He writes:

> His bodily machine was curiously suited to be a fit instrument for his soul to act by; and his soul was furnished with intellectual and moral faculties, rendering him capable of attaining to an actual resemblance of the Deity in knowledge, holiness, and happiness; and of growing perpetually in this likeness to the highest degrees attainable by a creature of his order in the creation.\(^{217}\)

The most notable feature is the concept of potentiality for perfection. Both Adam and his descendants were imbued with faculties that enable them to attain some level of spiritual and moral perfection resembling God’s. Second, Chauncy devotes the rest of his work

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\(^{216}\) Chauncy, *Five Dissertations*, 128.

\(^{217}\) Ibid., 234.
distinguishing between Adam and the rest of humanity. He highlights the instantaneous speed which Adam received his mental and physical faculties whereas humanity needs to biologically develop before truly enjoying them. Chauncy writes, “It is true, his powers, at first, were naked capacities as ours are; but then, they were the powers of a full-made man, and not of a mere babe or infant.”218 Another key difference was the possibility of eternal life for Adam provided he maintained his access to the Tree of Life. In contrast, the rest of humanity must experience death with no hope for immortality in this state. Chauncy writes, “We, his posterity, came into being not only corruptible mortal creatures by nature, as he was, but under such circumstances that death must inevitably pass upon us.”219 Chauncy, however, concludes that while Adam may have enjoyed these benefits, humanity is in a much better state than Adam was because of the promises of the gospel-plan for salvation.220 Chauncy’s comparisons between humanity and Adam provide a scriptural foundation for what Lippy describes as Chauncy’s shift from a theocentric anthropology to an anthropocentric theology.221 In Benevolence of the Deity, Chauncy relied heavily on his readers’ human reasoning and introspection to extrapolate God’s attributes from their own experiences. Five Dissertations complicates the simplicity of the scheme in The Benevolence of the Deity by provides a biblical character to serve as a much more relatable point of reference. Chauncy inserts Adam between humanity and God as a type

218 Ibid., 236.
219 Ibid., 239.
220 Ibid., 249.
221 Lippy, 114
of linking figure between God’s attributes and human attributes. Whereas *The Benevolence of the Deity* presumed a direct epistemological connection where God is directly knowable to humanity, *Five Dissertations* shifts the methods of knowing about God back to scripture. Chauncy’s audience can derive some attributes of God from introspection and reason, but scripture provides a clearer picture of God through Adam. In many ways, Chauncy not simply correct the lack of scripture in *The Benevolence of the Deity*, but also softens his anthropocentric focus in earlier works.

Chauncy’s last dissertation is a fitting end to his three-part work. In his fifth dissertation, Chauncy revisits his exegesis of Rom 5:12-21 from *The Mystery Hid from Ages* with particular attention to Rom 5:18-19. However, Chauncy commits more pages on an extensive analysis of the structural parallelism of Rom 5:1-21. He explores different ways in which certain adverbs were utilized across the entire canon. Chauncy also introduces more commentaries and engages with each of their assumptions about Romans 5. However, all of these levels of analysis only strengthen Chauncy’s assertions in *The Mystery Hid from Ages*. To summarize his intentions in the final dissertation, Chauncy writes:

> I may have been long and tedious in illustrating the above-scripture-passages; but if it should appear that they have been set in a just and true light, an easy forgiveness might reasonably be expected; especially as the subject of them is in itself highly important, and there is no such thing as fully understanding the apostle Paul in this, or indeed in any of his epistles, without knowing his meaning with respect to our state and circumstances in consequence of the lapse of our first father Adam; for the gospel-salvation, as preached by him, is essentially connected herewith.\(^{222}\)

\(^{222}\) Chauncy, *Five Dissertations*, 309-310.
Chauncy concludes his final work with the strict biblicism that evidenced the scheme of universal salvation and the benevolent God behind it.

**Scripture**

One of the notable features of *Five Dissertations* is its complete devotion to scripture. Contrary to *The Benevolence of the Deity*, *Five Dissertations* not only includes scripture, but demonstrates Chauncy’s mastery over eighteenth century exegesis. These dissertations justify Chauncy’s earlier assertion in *The Mystery Hid from Ages* that he derived his scheme from a study of scripture “in opposition to previous sentiments and strong biases, to follow the light wherever it should lead me.” Chauncy’s dissertations reflects his full commitment to *sola scriptura* to the point that summarizing *Five Dissertations* is in many ways, summarizes Chauncy’s own commentaries and methodologies towards exegeting the book of Genesis and Paul’s epistle to the Romans.

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223 Chauncy, *The Mystery Hid from Ages*, viii.
CONCLUSION

Contextualizing *Five Dissertations* within Chauncy’s broader corpus reveals a developing tension in Chauncy’s views on scriptural authority. Beginning with *The Mystery Hid*, Chauncy demonstrates a strong biblicism which appropriates Taylor’s scripturalism to provide a biblical and moral alternative John Murray’s universalism. Building on the *Salvation of all Men*, Chauncy “tried to consider every facet, answer each objection” from his contemporaries.²²⁴ However, recognizing his argument for universalism remains contingent on God’s benevolence, Chauncy publishes *The Benevolence of the Deity*. Anticipating objections from deists like Ethan Allen and Thomas Paine about Chauncy’s imputing an anthropomorphized conception of benevolence upon the Deity; Chauncy relies on anthropocentric reasoning and introspective common sense to make his case.²²⁵

In his attempts to establish God’s benevolence on the grounds of pure reason, Chauncy’s *The Benevolence of the Deity* cedes scriptural authority to deists. He compromises on his strict biblicism by orienting the focus of his scheme towards less orthodox deists. Perhaps realizing this, Chauncy publishes *Five Dissertations* to provide the necessary scriptural support for his assertions in *The Benevolence of the Deity*. Satisfied with the publication of his three works, Chauncy had finished the fight for universal salvation. As Griffin notes:

> A heretic at his old age, Chauncy encountered the inconvenience of attack, but at eighty, one more inconvenience could not matter much. After all,

²²⁴ Griffin, 176.

²²⁵ Lippy, 110.
the manuscripts that had ‘lain by’ in his study had occupied his mind for decades were not between the boards. The bloody war had been won, and a new country had been born. 226

Chauncy had finished his battle against New England orthodoxy and competing heterodoxies.

His treatise against an imported European universalism from John Murray demonstrated the prevailing influence of scripture in eighteenth and early nineteenth century American religion. In *The Benevolence of the Deity*, Chauncy negotiated with deists by offering them a reasonable theology that maintains orthodoxy. However, his arguments inadvertently questioned the necessity of scripture in the social project of nation building after the Revolution. If God was perfectly benevolent and universal salvation guaranteed, what could scripture possibly contribute to the new world? Chauncy aids his scheme with *Five Dissertations*. By demonstrating a strong biblicism in *Five Dissertations*, Chauncy peaceably grounds his entire scheme, both universalism and God’s benevolence, on a traditional means of epistemology: God’s Word.

In a broader sense, scripture did not simply validate Chauncy’s theological schemes, but it facilitated Chauncy’s departure from orthodox New England Calvinism in a way that heralded the challenges to the centrality of scripture to any religious movement by the nineteenth century. While Chauncy’s departure from scripture in *The Benevolence of the Deity* seemed a slight miscue on the publication of his work, its effects in New England tradition could not be overstated. Chauncy’s readiness to correct this anomaly demonstrates Chauncy’s awareness that scripture’s significance must be

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226 Griffin, 177.
preserved against the abiblical forces of his day. While Chauncy eventually restores scripture’s centrality to his scheme, for a brief period, Chauncy demonstrated the possibility of Universalism hinging on God’s benevolence without relying on scripture.

Within Griffin’s framework, Chauncy remains a pivotal figure caught between Benjamin Franklin’s rationalistic deism and Jonathan Edwards’ orthodox adherence to the validity of revelation. However, while earlier historians have noted Chauncy’s biblicism, they may have oversimplified his biblicism as caught between this same spectrum of reason and revelation. One could argue that Franklin and Edwards also represented two competing views on scripture. Franklin may have viewed the social benefit of religion derived from scripture and may have respected its moral claims. Meanwhile, Edwards maintained the revelatory nature of scripture as the ultimate source of knowledge and theology. Chauncy, however, does not fit neatly into either paradigm. Chauncy is unique in that he maintains Edwards’ biblicism but constrains revelation within the pages of scripture in light of his criticisms of the Great Awakening. At the same time, Chauncy maintains the revelatory nature of scripture and its centrality to Christian teaching while offering a seasonable and rational interpretation of traditional orthodox practices. This paradigm presents an alternative explanation for the rise of liberal Christianity in eighteenth century New England. While reason was a tempting alternative to revelation, scripture facilitated that transition in a manner that was amenable to the stalwart tradition and orthodoxy of Boston’s most respected ministers. Ultimately, Chauncy’s wavering crusade for biblical Universalism only heralded the challenges to scriptural authority in the post-Revolutionary War religious landscape.

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---.* Five Dissertations on the Scripture Account of the Fall and its Consequences.* London: Printed for C. Dilly, 1785

---. Chauncy, Charles. *The Benevolence of the Deity, Fairly and Impartially Considered. In Three Parts. The First Explains the Sense, in which we are to Understand Benevolence, as applicable to God. The Second Asserts, and Proves, that this Perfection, in the Sense Explained, is One of His Essential Attributes. The Third Endeavors to Answer Objections.* Boston, Massachusetts: Powars & Willis, 1784.

---. *The Mystery Hid From Ages and Generations, Made Manifest by the Gospel-Revelation; or, the Salvation of All Med The Grand Thing Aimed at in the Scheme of God, as Opened in the New-Testament Writings, and Entrusted with Jesus Christ to Bring Into Effect.* London: Printed for C. Dilly, 1784.


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EDUCATION

**Boston University School of Theology**, Boston, MA  
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- Master of Sacred Theology
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- Master of Divinity, *summa cum laude*
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  - Division of Biblical Studies Boston Award in New Testament
  - Division of Practical Theology Boston Award in Mentored Ministry
  - Athanasian Scholars Program
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**Boston University School of Management**, Boston, MA  
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- Bachelor of Science in Business Administration
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ACTIVITIES

**Athanasian Scholar**  
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- Teaching Assistant for William Spencer’s Systematic Theology I, with responsibilities consisting of guiding students through book reviews and the semester papers.

**Byington Scholar**  
Sept 2015 – Aug 2016

- Teaching Assistant for Seong Hyun Park in OT644: Exegesis of Old Testament Narratives. Responsibilities consist of drafting and correcting weekly quizzes, providing a lesson on BibleWorks, and tutoring students on both Dr. Robert Chisholm’s and Dr. Douglas K. Stuart’s Old Testament exegetical methods
- Assisting Seong Hyun Park with the Spring 2016 spiritual formation seminar by investigating causes in students’ financial difficulties, researching financial literacy programs across U.S. theological schools, and drafting an article summarizing research findings for student reading

**Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary: Center for Urban Ministry and Education (CUME) Student Organization**  
Vice President and Treasurer  
Mar 2015 – May 2016

- Acting liaison between faculty and student leaders by arranging venues for event promotion, designed a new method for soliciting student feedback through distribution of surveys, and aggregating responses for presentation to faculty and the student organization
Formulated the 2015-2016 budget, managed fund allocation for student activity requests, and generated fundraising opportunities for the student government

Logistical planner for bi-annual Gordon Conwell Worship Night. Coordinated event set up and itinerary, presented summary of government activities to student body

TEACHING EXPERIENCE
Boston Chinese Evangelical Church; Boston MA
- Contributing speaker for a series on Carole Kaminski’s CASKET to young adults, with a focus on a contextualized understanding of Genesis, the Exile, and the Intertestamental Period
- Assistant teacher for a Sunday School series for adults and college students on Matthew Sleeth’s 24/6 Sabbath Living and Richard Niebuhr’s Christ and Culture
- Taught Sunday School series for college students on Larry Osbourne’s A Contrarian’s Guide to Knowing God and N.T. Wright’s Ephesians

INDUSTRY EXPERIENCE
Fidelity Investments; Boston MA May 2012 - Present
Full-Time Paralegal
- Compiled customer and client-level research materials for attorneys in their litigation, regulatory, and arbitration cases, pulling from various systems and requesting documents and information from business unit contacts across the company to create these case files
- Managed casework and training for team members on advisor-related cases and workplace investing-focused cases in order to enable cross-coverage on these case-types and minimize specialization across the a team of nine members
- Implemented paralegal support for project managers responding to Department of Labor and Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation subpoenas, with work focused primarily on investigating client-level relationship with plan-at-issue, determining responsive research to regulator requests, drafting the response letters, and compiling the research for production.

LANGUAGES
- English – Fluent
- Tagalog – Native language for eight years prior to immigrating to the U.S.
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- Hebrew – Two semesters of Basics of Biblical Hebrew by Gary Patio and Miles Van Pelt and two semesters of exegesis classes utilizing basic Biblical Hebrew
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