

THINGS COMMONLY BELIEVED AMONG US

Late nineteenth century Unitarianism, especially in the West, was split between the Christian Theists and the Free Religionists. The Unitarian movement seemed to be breaking apart, and there was tension on all sides.

Into the controversy stepped the Rev. William Channing Gannett. He proposed to the Western Unitarian Conference, meeting in Chicago in June 1887, a statement of "things commonly believed among us." "All names that divide 'religion,'" Gannett declared, "are to us of little consequence compared with religion itself. Whoever loves Truth and lives the Good is in a broad sense, of our religious fellowship; whoever loves the one or lives the other better than ourselves is our teacher, whatever church or age he may belong to."

The resulting statement, Gannett emphasized, is "always open to re-statement and to be regarded only as the thought of the majority," and never should become a de-facto creed. Here are some of the key affirmations that united the disputing factions:

"We believe that to love the Good and live the Good is the supreme thing in religion;

"We hold reason and conscience to be final authorities in matters of religious belief;

"We honor the Bible and all inspiring scripture, old and new;

"We revere Jesus and all holy souls that have taught men truth and righteousness and love, as prophets of religion;

"We believe that good and evil invariably carry their own recompense, no good thing being failure and no evil success; that heaven and hell are states of being, that no evil can befall the good man in either life or death; that all things work together for the victory of Good.

"We believe that we ought to join hands and work to awake the good things better and the worst good, counting nothing good for self that is not good for all;

"We worship One-in-All—that life whence suns and stars derive their orbits and the soul of man its Ought,—that light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world, giving us power to become the sons of God,—that Love which our souls commune."

The statement passed by a wide margin, paving the way for the reconciliation of the theological factions in Unitarianism over the next few years. Unitarianism thus became a more open and inclusive rather than a divided and exclusive way in religion.

Ref.: Charles H. Lyttle, *Freedom Moves West: A History of the Western Unitarian Conference, 1852-1952* (Boston, 1952), pp. 189-190.