

RECONCILING A LAPSED WORLD

In 1790, the Universalists held a great national convention in Philadelphia. The Rev. John Murray, the Universalist movement's renowned leader, came down from Massachusetts for the meeting, and stayed on for over a month after its close. Judith Sargent Murray, who had accompanied her husband, wrote to her parents from Philadelphia on June 19, 1790:

“The sentiments of the Universalists are growing every day more respectable in this city. The family of Dr. Franklin are among the foremost of our favorers. Mrs. Bache, the doctor's daughter, says it was her father's opinion, that no system in the Christian world was so effectually calculated to promote the interests of society, as that doctrine which shows a God reconciling a lapsed world unto himself.”

Benjamin Franklin had just died a few weeks before, on April 17, and the memory of him as a great American patriot, communicator, statesman, and scientist was fresh and lasting. In fact the U.S. Postal Service has just issued [2006] a set of four commemorative postage stamps in his honor.

It has long been known that Franklin was attracted to Unitarianism as a rational and moral religion. He was present at the first openly Unitarian worship service in London in 1774, when he was in England trying to patch up the deteriorating relations between the thirteen American colonies and the mother country. In Philadelphia the Unitarians had not yet a church of their own, but met in the Universalist church. Franklin never joined a Unitarian church but was a friend of the emerging Unitarian movement. And we can see from such passages as this that he and his family were also attracted to the kindred religion of Universalism with its emphasis on God's love for and nurturing of all human souls.

Ref.: Richard Eddy, *Universalism in America: A History* (Boston: Universalist Publishing House, 1891), vol. I, p. 314.