

KINDNESS, COMPASSION AND BENEFICENCE

William Pitt Smith, a Revolutionary War physician from New York, was moved by his faith of Universalism to devote much of his energy to proclaiming God's love for all human beings. It seemed to him absurd and unscriptural that a benevolent God would damn any human soul to eternal misery. The notion dishonored God. The idea of eternal damnation was a "pagan" invasion of pure Christianity, he thought. Dr. Smith hoped that instead of living down to the example of a judgmental "Partialist" God, we might live up to the example of God of all-encompassing love, as borne out on earth in the life and ministry of Jesus.

In his 1787 book, *The Universalist*, Dr. Smith asked himself and those orthodox Christians who opposed his views to beware such "uncharitable bigotry" and "mistaken zeal" that cloaks "the half drawn dagger of persecution." Rather, let us all unite in humility to exert ourselves "in the offices of kindness, compassion, and beneficence." Smith hoped that "a gracious heaven" would promote such a spirit of universal kindness "that the sacred footsteps of charity and religious freedom, may be traced by our remotest posterity; and that my country maybe guarded against the temptations that arise from the profusion of her blessings, and that threaten to convert her liberty into licentiousness."

Dr. Smith lived and died doing what he saw as his religious duty. His final acts are recounted in Thomas Whittemore's *Modern History of Universalism* (1830). Smith was elected to the New York legislature in 1796, where he strenuously advocated a bill for the abolition of slavery. "Anxious to fulfil all the duties which had devolved on him, on the morning of the day on which the bill above mentioned was to be discussed in the Assembly, which was sitting in the city of New York, he rose very early, with a view to visit all his patients in time to enable him to take an active part in the debate on that important and interesting question. He spared himself no time to breakfast or dine. The day was wet, cold, and stormy. Drenched to the skin, he took his seat in the house, and sat all day in his wet clothes, was taken sick even before he concluded his speech, and, after a few days' severe indisposition, died in February, 1796, at the age of 36 years."

Ref: William Pitt Smith, *The Universalist: In Seven Letters to Amyntor* (New York, 1787), pp. 74, 80; Thomas Whittemore, *The Modern History of Universalism: From the Reformation to the Present Time* (Boston, 1830), pp. 381-383; Richard Eddy, *Universalism in America: A History*, vol. 1: 1636-1800 (Boston, 1891), pp. 271-272.