

THE DIVINITY SCHOOL ADDRESS



Meantime, whilst the doors of the temple stand open, night and day, before every man, and the oracles of this truth cease never, it is guarded by one stern condition; this, namely; it is an intuition. It cannot be received at second hand. Truly speaking, it is not instruction, but provocation, that I can receive from another soul. What he announces, I must find true in me, or wholly reject, and on his word, . . . be he who he may, I can accept nothing.



Emerson's celebrated "Divinity School Address" was delivered before the senior class in Divinity College at Harvard in July 1838. The invitation came six years after he had resigned his pulpit at Second Church in Boston, and it prompted his most sustained thinking on the nature of religion and the role of ministry outside of his sermons. His remarks stirred considerable debate and the taking of sides between the Unitarian "orthodox" and the Transcendentalists, with the latter defending Emerson. Even today Emerson's words are provocative and revolutionary. The essential message of the address is that "the religious sentiment" is innate and intuitive in human experience. Ministers make religion vital, not by worshipping Jesus or venerating the Bible, but by leading their parishioners to look

