

Unitarian Theological Chain of Memory *Adrian Worsfold*

It is not the purpose or function of theology to grow a movement, but even the smallest of movements can still have an historically informed theology. Liberal Catholics, for example, formed early in the twentieth century, have a theological identity even if they consist mainly of wandering bishops and independent clergy. They also claim a pastoral outreach, and so can Unitarians even if, in England and Wales, they now form a rather pathetic number:

The quota returns for 2014/ 15, which drew on membership in mid-2014, show a decrease from 3,181 to 3,095 [in one year]. (GAUFCC, 2015, 7).

Ruston (2012) repeats the accurate survey of 1965-1966 by the Foy Society of 14,220 adult members in the 238 congregations surveyed estimating of 15,800 adult Unitarians in all 258 congregations. Now there are below 170 (some effectively defunct) congregations. He estimated 6000 in 2000, thus halved in 16 years since.

So to call a Theology Conference in May 2016 at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester, and draw on some of its more intellectual members to offer some insights, is very much a legitimate activity, even if such offering is to an institution that is a shadow of its past. Perhaps this was the actual emphasis of the Keynote Speech from the Rev. Dr. David Steers, read by the Rev. Jim Corrigan – more a lament to a lost past than its advertised 'Towards a Theology for the Twenty-First Century'.

That the conference and a revived theology might offer coherence and therefore some growth was optimistic. Speakers present were reluctant to actually prescribe a future for the creedless group – not that the means exist to do so – but were they still doing this?

The Rev. Stephen Lingwood considered that there were two key Unitarian themes that can be identified: the immediacy and unfolding of the holy (the latter, in a perspective 'from above', sometimes is called 'progressive revelation'). He opened doors, he suggested, but did not go through them. The Rev. Jo James did go through at least one to flesh out the importance of the Spirit in Unitarian practice, based on: the use by radical groups from the left wing of the Reformation moving through Europe and to England, of uniting the divine and the human, and after Romanticism the "Spirit" as acceptable in liturgical use whereas Christian and Earth Centred labels might alienate. Dr. Melanie Prideaux offered a critique of Stephen Lingwood, notably his reference to Systematic Theology, but in drawing on more tools from Theology, Religious Studies and Sociology of Religion she had more in her bag for a general application to the small creedless movement addressed.

The purpose of this article is not to repeat or particularly focus upon the conference. The recorded materials exist in the public realm, and I have produced my own online four review papers on my Pluralist Website (in the Learning area, Religion section, and Unitarianism part menus) (Worsfold, 2016b). Rather, I want to tackle related theological issues in depth regarding Unitarianism and its development.

To begin, one must indeed be careful when making use of Paul Tillich's jargon such as 'Ultimate Concern'. Stephen Lingwood used Tillich to focus on what really should be of ultimate concern rather than the idols of penultimates, and thus his focus upon the purer

Spirit. As Melanie Prideaux pointed out, this is a use of systematic theology that may not be appropriate.

Paul Tillich did not produce some open-ended existentialist theology to reflect the concerns of a puzzled humanity, but a parallel system of Christian theology – answers not questions – where Being is God and New Being is Christ and thus a closed system lives on (Worsfold, 2009b). Anyone who is from a secular perspective and yet interested in existential terms soon realises that this is not an open exploratory system. Perhaps many are over-influenced by the use made of Tillich by Bishop John Robinson in *Honest to God* (1963) (Worsfold, 2009c). It is arguable that Robinson creatively misused the main resources of Tillich, Bonhoeffer and Bultmann in his exploration of faith for the modern person. Robinson himself pursued a personalist God, a God of 'weakness' (see below regarding the relevance of this) exhibited in the biblical narrative. He was opposed to systematic theologies like Thomism, as they are invariably theologies of power and domination. His use of Tillich was partial, and this seemed to be the case at the Unitarian Theology Conference. Plus, the arrival at Spirit as immediate and unfolding is potentially anti-theological, and certainly against the totalities of systematic theology.

Furthermore, the attachment of Being to systematic theology creates a stabilising impression that might assist forming or affirming doctrine but is definitely not about openness to the unexpected. There needs to be a different theological emphasis, and one drawn from the varieties of theology available.

It is important to link use of the Spirit with its history and place, although I was surprised by the Rev. Jo James using the end of the János Zsigmond regime in Transylvania as causing refugee movement across Europe. Far more significant is the Polish repression in 1660 as it caused instant removal of ejected Socinians with journeys to the Netherlands and even *into* Transylvania.

It happens that on the 14th April 2016, at the Danish Lutheran Church in Hull, Professor Justin Champion, of Royal Holloway University of London and President of The Historical Association, gave a talk about the movement of people and radical ideas in the same period of interest to Jo James (Worsfold, 2016a). In the late 1620s in Poland, a certain Samuel Przpkowski (Pricovius) claimed that toleration is a "harmless freedom" that carries no harm to any public institution or regime including that of God itself. Socinus's works were mediated via Przpkowski and with travel and repression came over to the Netherlands and England for translation and, most importantly, printing. The transmission of these ideas via the Polish Brethren was significant. John Bidle translated the biography of S. Przpkowski: *Life of Socinus* published in 1653. Bidle and John Knowles, friends from the 1640s, defended anti-trinitarian accounts and lay enquiry; they refuted the hegemony of clergy regarding religious knowledge. Richard Moone was a key person regarding printing. The spread and dissemination of these ideas relates to the changing Sociology of Knowledge at the time (the effect of technological change on social and economic activity and upon ordinary thought processes). The authorities in England feared a network of sedition whereas it was at base only a network of ideas. Jo James seemed to focus instead on Zsigmund, Anabaptists (and others) and Arminius, the latter a partial corrective of Calvinism finding interest in the academies where dissenting ministers were trained.

All of this is an important legacy but what matters is that the ideas of Spirit continued within and transferred from such early rationality into later Romanticism and thus something

closer to the use made today. This is because of its translation into naturalistic concepts, and it is arguable that religion is becoming ever more naturalistic as specific cultural tramlines of Christian religious understanding fade, causing their loss in a porous non-doctrinal Unitarian community. Given such effect, the question remains as to what theology of coherence can be derived.

There were (at least) two key insights from Dr. Melanie Prideaux that matter here. One is the corrective of using what she called Practical Theology, and the second is sociological concept of the loss and reconstruction (for coherence) of a Chain of Memory that, in a religious group, would have theological content. *Religion as a Chain of Memory* (2000) is authored by Danièle Hervieu-Léger and discusses how history is used to construct a contemporary religious position in community. There are three elements: 'the expression of believing', or the stories, 'the memory of continuity', held as a community identity and 'the legitimising reference to an authorised version...', a tradition (see Sakaranaho, 2011, 146). Clearly Jo James was intending, perhaps without previously knowing it conceptually, a reconstruction of a Unitarian Chain of Memory.

In Religious Education for secondary schools theology is sometimes called Concept Cracking (Cooling, 1994), developing concepts from within the tradition. It is a subset of RE, as there are others: such as learning from Spiritual Experience, having a Humanist (e.g. Social Sciences) stance, the Phenomenological approach (as in descriptions of religion in their essentials: the sort of representational speech heard at respectful interfaith meetings) (Jackson, 1997, 7-29), and the Interpretive, Anthropological or Ethnographic approach. Do they actually do what the Phenomenologists describe? (Jackson, 1997, 30-48). Religious Studies at an academic level is as broad and uses a range of research tools. The Anthropological perspective would ask: "What do Unitarians now say and do?" This latter approach is clearly one of qualitative and inductive research, and overlaps with Practical Theology. From this we might discover the condition of the Chain of Memory; to do historically informed theology is to restore losses in the Chain of Memory.

Contextual Theology involves such as feminist, black and disabled perspectives in real situations deconstructed and reconstructed. Practical Theology focuses on belief and practice inside and outside the Church: it is about examining as theological reflection the ways that individuals, defined communities, and particularly churches themselves, professions, government, businesses and charities etc. operate. Much of this in Unitarianism is about services, liturgy and the discussion group, ministerial formation, ordinary conversation and displayed behaviour. It is also about coffee mornings, social groups, meeting in houses, making music and having exhibitions. It relates to Contextual Theology too in categories of people involved, and where found: predominantly white, lower middle class, retired professionals from suburbs.

But one must be careful, because many such a reflective Christian theologian might well ask: how do these activities, and the types of people involved, and issues faced, relate to the life, incarnation and resurrection of Christ? Such a question might well distort the actuality of Unitarian congregations and individuals that possess other key ideological and belief references for their religious understandings. In a Unitarian context, 'thick description' (as by Geertz, 1973, in his *The Interpretation of Cultures*) might be all the more important for a research method without trying to connect with some apparent remote body of knowledge. The extent of description might instead get categorised into typologies of ideological or social settings for critique.

Reference at the conference was made briefly to the study of religion in Kendal that included the Unitarian congregation there, where boundary-drawing analysis follows from all the detail, and relates to using Weberian (1947) ideal types (see Worsfold, 2006). Paul Heelas, originally Bronislaw Szerszynski and Linda Woodhead's study began in 2000 – a large enough place for variety and small enough for practicality (Department of Religious Studies, Lancaster University, 2005). Researcher Ben Seel identified over 50 non-Christian groups with some sort of spiritual dimension to their activities and Karin Tusting was involved in attending services at Kendal's 26 different churches. They used participant observation, interviewing (200 people) and a later questionnaire. With student helpers the study counted attendance on 26th November 2000 (8% - a lower attendance day; 45 Unitarians). Crucially the research identified a Subjective Turn in spirituality. Typologies of church they classified were: Congregations of Difference, of a subjective life constrained by doctrines and moral codes; Congregations of Experiential Difference with informal worship and lay involvement where deep experience takes priority over doctrinal and external forms; Congregations of Humanity that praise God with human duty and self-sacrifice over freedom; and Congregations of Experiential Humanity like the Quakers and Unitarians where the tradition of God speaking in the heart of the individual is more likely to develop subjective life-spiritualities than in other churches. Congregations of Experiential Difference held up their numbers best. (Heelas & Woodhead et al., 2005)

So Unitarians are identified with seeking inner experience aided by congregational gathering, very much part of the subjective turn.

Douglas Davies in his comparison of Anthropology with Theology (Davies, 2002) mainly identifies the Spirit with Charismatics and increased presence in Eucharist liturgies (Davies, 2002, 38). But he comes closest to the Unitarian typology when discussing the New Age and Paul Heelas where we have 'self-religion' that sacralises the present world and moving away from tradition. For Davies this involves the body, Flow and excitement (136). 'Flow' is embodied aware-achievement through ritual activity for its own intention (132). Perhaps one expects more Flow in Unitarianism, by, say, more meditation of the mind with bodily posture, circle-dancing, song, and lighting 'candles of joy and concern'.

So this is the theology that is identified anthropologically. It is also consistent with the Subjective Turn identified with the late nineteenth century Unitarian theologian James Martineau.

Is this the (very basic) Chain of Memory in operation, then, or is there an amnesia, suggested by Melanie Prideaux, in "how we got from there to here", via the involvement of the secular, as identified as one of the weaknesses these days in Chains of Memory? Are Unitarians becoming Spiritual and not Religious?

The issue tackled by Danièle Hervieu-Léger (2000) is that of being Spiritual but not Religious, where a collective history is lost, or being Religious but not Spiritual, where a collective history is say restored by narrative, or a balance between the two. It is relevant for Judaism, where a lack of present spiritual experience is substituted by the telling the story from the times when there were spiritual experiences and revelations. Individuals engage in narrative and maintain the religion, mixed in with the observance of rituals. Indeed the observance of rituals is the main narrative.

Care is needed when constructing a Chain of Memory. This is because of that other and related sociological (and historically related) concept, the Invention of Tradition (Hobsbawn, Ranger, 1983; Worsfold, 2005). This is where a group creates in its time a perspective of new activity that claims a historical background in order to give it present authority. This is part of the function of Chain of Memory. Nevertheless, an Invented Tradition is rather fanciful or misleading. Pagans have done this: with little choice the relaunch of Paganism has had to create a past which has little actual historical force, in general and detail (and admitting this in revision: Starhawk, 1999). Tarot Cards, for example, have the Swiss Antoine Court de Gebelin in 1781 claiming a bogus Egyptian origin in Isis and Thoth. Unitarians have been rather good at this too. There was the fantasist Unitarian Iolo Morgannwg (See Davies, 1982), very influential among the Eisteddfod Bards but claiming some mystical and documentary link back to the Druids. For example, his Gorsedd Prayer was adapted by the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids (See Worsfold, nd). The man was a romantic. The Invented Tradition approach tends to exploit Romanticism. But the most deceptive claim and yet one-time central to the Chain of Memory has been the Open Trust Myth, a key invented tradition to convince Parliament to let Unitarians keep Calvinist origin trust money in 1844. The Open Trusts might not have been very resistant to change, but they were never devices of liberalism as they rather represented confidence in *sola scriptura*; nor were they the causes of theological change. Indeed it is arguable that there was a division of memory through the nineteenth century so that the increasingly romanticist Free Christians regarded the former English Presbyterians as without their intolerant Puritanism and the doctrinal Unitarians had the spirit of Puritanism without the Presbyterian parish mentality. The Victorians were rather good at Invented Traditions, but institutions can always grab a good story supposedly to benefit the present and future institutionally by using the past. Nevertheless, 1844 was a point of recognition that Unitarians identified themselves as undergoing evolutionary change. Other Churches change too, but this is not part of their inner identity: they argue over what constitutes orthodoxy.

So here is an actual theological reconstruction that starts with the mirror-opposite for analytical comparison. In the so-called mainstream of Christianity we have the protestant theologian Karl Barth who argued for a pure revelatory God not made objective by worldly terms but only in itself (see Worsfold, 2009a). God was made known in Christ as evidenced in the one scriptural Biblical Narrative. Hans Frei reckons he has the methodology of this: he criticises the eclipse of the proper Biblical Narrative derived from mainly theology in the nineteenth century once the biblical witness became either historical – literalistic or limited by historiography – or symbolic. (For an example, see Wigmore-Beddoes, 1971, 58, where it is the methodology of history that prevents Martineau's belief in miracles, even when questioning the "essentially irreligious" philosophical denial that such cannot exist.) Frei argues instead that the biblical witness is history-like, and has no other referent than itself. He claims continuity with Karl Barth, whose whole focus is on the witness of the Bible and the key aspects of the Christian doctrinal tradition. Biblical characters combine intention and action in that textual witness. This is the impact of the *Identity of Jesus Christ* (1997, from an essay in 1967) and *The Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative* (1980). The later Frei identifies the text as interpreted within the Christian community, the collective body. He draws on the impact of Clifford Geertz (1973): thus Anthropology is important. This position is taken up also at Yale by George Lindbeck (1984). Lindbeck rejects the Historicist-Propositional and the Experiential-Individualist uses of the Bible and Christian tradition. (What does the Bible say about your own individual spiritual experience?) He chooses instead the Cultural-Linguistic, where the Ecumenical

Church operates on its own terms according to its own standard of performance. There is no objective rooting of this output: it simply is its own recognisable drama. Yale Postliberalism, then, is about identity, in a postmodern setting, about institutional recognition. In this case it freezes culture from a religiously friendly time, and simply maintains it. It is highly relativist: one has good neighbours, but that is all they are.

Once again there is a need to be careful. Not all Postliberalism is Yale Postliberalism. Daniel Liechty (1990) is keen to express a Postliberalism that has something in it of which it is 'post'. So he moves on from liberalism into deconstruction and also rejects Karl Barth and descendents. Jesus, he notes, pointed away from himself and to God (1990, 51), the Church then focussing on him rather than the Kingdom (e.g. 1990, 56). Thus Liechty seeks after a 'Church without Dogma' (59-72) including the witness of early Christians affirming experience without controls over the symbol picture (69-70), the witness of Anabaptists and Quakers in the authority of the Spirit (70) (as with Jo James), the witness of Pacifist Mystic Christians (70-71) and the witness of Feminism (71). This is a Pluralistic Church, even syncretistic, as other symbol systems leak in and get examined. Giving up a creed and dogma is a risk worth taking, he says (72). Pluralism in fact extends into other knowledge spheres (90). We killed God through our own analysis (95), although our tragic condition continues, with life a sense of play and internalising mortality and therefore Being incorporates 'Nonbeing' (97). So, Unitarians can make good use of Liechty's brand of Postliberalism. Unfortunately, set against the Yale School, this approach to deconstruction and its terminology has been rather overshadowed.

The Yale Postliberalism line of memory is quite popular with many an intellectual evangelical because it gives command of the Gospel by the gathering of believers and by them only. That it is relative in worldly terms, or freezes culture, is irrelevant, because from the inside it is the challenge of the Gospel on its own terms, an echo of the Radical Orthodox equivalent in (Anglo-) Catholicism of the pure Platonic Church deciding the intellectual basis of all else from its postmodern bubble (Milbank et al., 1999). More care is needed, in that although there are "no sharp boundaries" (Pickstock as quoted and used by Smith, 2004, 41), between Yale Postliberalism and Radical Orthodoxy, the latter considers that Barth left space for a person without God and therefore Atheistic Philosophy with a question, after Milbank, whether there has been *any* Postliberal theology. (Smith, 150). (Of course the more strict evangelical and fundamentalist remain propositional, realist, objectivist.) The reason for introducing Radical Orthodoxy into this argument is that arguably it is a toughened up postmodern Christian imperialism over all thinking (such as Social Science, Religious Studies, where:

...the *structure* of religious commitment is ineradicable, but the direction of such religious commitment can take an apostate *direction*. (Smith, 2004, 172)

Just as Radical Orthodoxy attacks what is actually underpinned by research, what falsifies and so is *not* another form of theology, so the Liberal Religious should attack it back as defective and aggressive, and this extends to Yale Postliberalism. John Caputo treats Radical Orthodoxy quite properly, I suggest, as:

...a lapsing back into a conservative pre-modernism masquerading under the guise of post-modern ...which is the sort of thing that is going on right now in a "post-secular" movement that describes itself with the unnerving, angry, and resentful title "Radical Orthodoxy." Radical Orthodoxy is a good deal more orthodox than radical, has

managed to convince itself that God came into the world in order to side with Christian Neoplatonism against post-structuralism, and appears utterly dumbfounded by the fact that medieval metaphysics has lost its grip on contemporary thinkers. (Caputo, 2001, 60-61)

At the 2016 Unitarian theology Conference, and fearing it had a prescriptive purpose, I asked whether we can construct a Chain of Memory (incorrectly stated as "chain of meaning") and, if trying to be recognisably Church and with a theology, whether the speaker Stephen Lingwood tended towards the Postliberal or Open Postmodern. Both Stephen Lingwood and his critic Melanie Prideaux stated that they were more Postliberal, and Dr Prideaux also questioned the objective-subjective division I made.

There is another reason why one might pick Barth and yet treat him and his legacy at some depth. It comes from a Unitarian production just after the Second World War:

An English Church leader has stated in *The British Weekly* that Karl Barth has saved the Protestant Churches of the Continent from Unitarianism. The statement is perhaps sufficiently accurate to serve as an index both of the character and of the extent of Barth's influence. (Spencer, 1947, 5).

For good measure Spencer, a Unitarian, further states:

The Barthian doctrine is the complete antithesis of the Quaker concept of the Inner Light. It is not easy to know what Barth makes of the Johannine phrase, "the Light that lighteth every man". (1947, 15)

Incidentally, before leaving this, Andrew Linzey is convinced that, in a longer life, had Karl Barth wrote on the Holy Spirit as he did with Christ, he would have come to more open conclusions (rather than the Spirit as simply transmitting revelation in Christ). Linzey sets up a dialectical approach of his own that suggests that the focus on the Spirit allows a paradoxical freedom of interpretation even in the context of faithfulness to creeds and doctrines (see Linzey, 1988). A "developed pneumatology" makes certain conceptions of the Church redundant (1988, 47) – it is not the depository of all spiritual truth; the Spirit's immanence means there is no division between sacred and secular (51); we can co-operate with a Spirit itself free to elect and reject (53) in developing creation (54); and we allow the Spirit to guide our moral and theological Christ-like living (55). So we move from the past only, to the past and present; from Church renewal to world renewal; from the Spirit in individuals and communities to within the world order; from human-centred welfare to that of the whole creation; and from a uniformity to diversity and complexity. (56) We thus live dialectically: between what is given and what comes anew; between creation as is and renewal; and between tradition and discovery (56). And, for Linzey, this dialectical emphasis on the creative Spirit is apparently Trinitarian and not even "liberalism" or "wooliness of theological thinking" (47). It is not Pantheism or Panentheism (45).

It is interesting to see that a Trinitarian theology of pneumatology can suggest diversity and plurality; this is a rejection of the Barthian scheme. There is no Yale Postliberalism here. What is definite is that this Yale School approach is not the evolutionary Unitarian path at all, and yet it could be defectively by several doctrinal adjustments and closing down freedoms that Linzey would even want for his Church: by choosing one moment of 'legitimate Unitarianism' from the past – and the question would be at which point of

Unitarian development would the selection be made? The nineteenth century, sometime just before Martineau, for example? What would this doctrine-setting involve? The Keynote Address from the Rev. Dr. David Steers, as read out by the Rev. Jim Corrigan, certainly sounded something like this, as a lament to a legitimate past, and a dismissal of the Unitarian Universalist Association influence in more recent times.

Now we might question the Objective and Subjective, but we do so from today's perspective. And that duality in the mirror takes us to Martineau and producing the opposite of the Barthian route to the liberal postmodern. Given indeed the historical and symbolic turns of text and theology, but more so the Subjective Turn to the individual, James Martineau set up a process whereby the Subjective was key and undermined the Objective. The objectivity was the religious culture, the collective conversation at that time, and the liturgical. As with the rest of the culture it was all generally Christian still, but already on the move as porous Unitarianism absorbed the rise of Science, Social Science and consciousness of Other Religions, and recognising the Secular generally.

When the Subjective undermines the Objective, you have neither: the binary opposites collapse into each other. Then statements can only be symbolic and linguistic, and we might even go so far as to suggest that liturgy becomes a kind of Baudrillardian Simulcra (Felluga, 2011). All sorts of old certainties die off into 'ritual play', and the old dour Puritan shadow gives way to experiment, aided by the loss of the external tramlines of a general Christian culture. Indeed the experience of the American Unitarian Universalists into Pluralism becomes all the more relevant – in its case seeking a place in the American religious culture of denominations, but in Britain based on loss of Anglican religious hegemony. In fact less relevant is the religious culture of the island of Ireland, particularly the north, based on nationalist dispute and sectarian fear, a religious culture hopefully now in transition as confidence grows about the neighbours and sharing the future.

Martineau was clear that the biblical witness is *a* and not *the* witness of God in action among humanity. The witness is to be found both in Palestine and elsewhere. The Holy Spirit is both a much wider and more immediate concept than one simply of God acting with the witness of Christ. So the Martineau God tends towards Religious Naturalism and the Multi-Religious – his liturgies were criticised and even self-criticised as over-conservative and unsupported by his theological thrust (Wigmore-Beddoes, 1971, 80-81).

Ernst Troeltsch calls this open tendency Mysticism (1931, 377): different from Church or Sect. Martineau's much earlier use of Church in 'Church-life? or Sect-life?' is actually typologically like Mysticism (Martineau, 1891, written in 1859) because it is individualist and Enlightenment based, if also present in the New Testament.

This [new] type had no desire for an organized fellowship; all it cared for was freedom for interchange of ideas, a pure fellowship of thought, which indeed only became possible after the invention of printing. ...This type, however, only attained its universal historical significance in the later Protestant Dissenters, and their connection with Humanism. (Troeltsch, 1931, 377)

The Postmodern result, then, is continuous with this, if more intense, and very diverse, where Being and non-Being coincide.

A relevant theologian here might be Mark C. Taylor. He argues that a potential Real

Absence theology is still too based on Being, even if vanished. His view coincides then with non-realist views such as developed by Don Cupitt in Britain. For Taylor, theology is associated closely with the arts, with creativity, and with technology. Theology releases itself into risk, the creative and the awesome. Taylor's main theological works draw much from the poststructuralism of Jaques Derrida (they were friends) (Taylor, 1987a, 1987b).

Another relevant theologian might well be John Caputo (as in 2006), used by Jo James for the phrase 'spectral hermeneutics' (Caputo, 1987) when relating his dissertation to the audience and his perspective on the Spirit. But Caputo, like Taylor, is keen not to settle on Being as something stable and giving. The notion of God as all powerful is turned on its head, so that God is not only a weak force but unstable. In a kind of quantum theology, Caputo goes beyond the illusory stability of Being (philosophically too) to the Event, a kind of quantum sub-Being aspect. Such is unstable and of a fundamental don't know or "nonknowing" and it's less about ontology and more like "hauntology" (Caputo, Vattimo, 2007). Weak Force also suggests an analogy with something like unignorable gravity – yet a whole planet is counteracted as a force by a small magnet. This is therefore another aspect of deconstruction and is useful for Unitarians as a fundamental of doubt. Being is a construct itself, as is theology (also says Liechty, 1990, 105, note 5), and, as a deeper paradox of indeterminacy, it still has some claim on us. The claim is that this Weak God, this paradox, is at the core of the Early Christian construction and reflection upon the Cross. This theology appeals across to kenotic, suffering God and non-dogmatic theologians. (The Rev. Lewis Connolly on the panel at the Conference himself referred to the death of God upon the Cross theologian Thomas Altizer, e.g. Altizer and Hamilton, 1968.) The notion of Event might initially appeal to the Postliberals (intention and action combined in the text) but it soon departs from them: as the Event for Caputo is behind the Radical Monotheism relating to generating justice (in that weak virtues have ethical superiority in the Kingdom of God), a Monotheism that is available across religions, rather than resting within a revelation witnessed wholly within the biblical text and Church doctrines. There is an inherent unitarianism and universalism (lower case u for both) in his theology - it cannot draw on Trinitarian resources. As such Caputo is different from Jürgen Moltmann (1981) and Sarah Coakley (2013) who take an apparent weak God and put such in the context of the relational Trinity – weakness only chosen as love on the cross and a feminist view of love and submission. In other words, Caputo's breadth is consistent with the line from Martineau and is, surely, Unitarian Universalist (capital Us): broad, paradoxical, interfaith, even observer-dependent as interpretive in minute examination (like in quantum physics), a somewhat invisible God of many names making its call. Radical Orthodoxy sees Caputo as “deeply liberal and modern” (Smith, 2004, 55) because he has a New Enlightenment (Caputo, 2001, 60) despite critiquing modernist neutrality (Smith, 2004, 54).

The “post-” in “post-secular” should not be understood to mean “over and done with” but rather after having passed through modernity (Caputo, 2001, 60).

There is an objection here to note. It is that Unitarianism has a tradition of finding simple Christianity, or the kernel of truth in the nut's casing of Christian doctrine, or seeking the gift inside the wrapping paper. This means a history of stripping out the language, getting rid of the clutter, or Reductionism.

...I, for one, consider it no discredit to Christianity that, thus reduced to its simplest elements, it becomes very near to what some have called Absolute Religion; the

quintessence, that is, of all that the wisest minds thought, all that the tenderest hearts have felt, all that the keenest consciences have recognized as binding. (Beard, 1927, from 1883, 427).

Thus the Subjective Turn runs with Reductionism. So Unitarianism has tended to hang on to the objective bits that still impress as 'true' foundationally. It is indeed far easier to be a Postmodernist inside a communion that keeps its liturgical clutter, where people recite far more than they believe, and so try to treat these parts as symbolic. The Virgin Birth is a symbol of God selecting Christ, or God selecting Christ is a symbol of the uniqueness of Christ, or the uniqueness of Christ is a symbol of, well, definitive exemplarism, and exemplarism is itself a league table of action about which there is no historical comparative information. Keep on peeling the onion! There is no kernel for the Postmodernist. It all ends up in nothing, really.

None of this stripping replaces the Subjective undermining the Objective: it just means delay. We get there eventually: the layers of myth and poetry that the Non-Realist Lewis Connolly could assert in his answer to me are the wrapping papers restored after the gift is never found or is inaccessible. We have more fun unwrapping and ignore the present. But which wrapping papers? I have stopped saying the Lord's Prayer or supposed alternatives, whereas he says it in Non-Realist fashion, according to his answer. I suggest that we demythologise the old and worn-out, and then remythologise across a broader field. One can have the old ways, so long as we are collectively clear and do not mislead, but also start saying more potent sayings, always knowing that they are about experience and conversation. When Being becomes sub-atomic Non-Knowing, the possibilities open up.

So some demythologise and end up more or less humanist, some try new sayings and practices and go East, some go for ritual play and become more or less Pagan, while others either hang on to or remythologise the Christian material despite the confusion of meaning with the long inheritance of this material. Such are broad theological perspectives with historical-theoretical trends.

We find these tendencies through using Ethnography. Now there may only be some 3000 Unitarian adherents in Britain, if with a further outreach, but among them one can do the Anthropology and come up with similar typologies of belief as in the United States where there are definite sub-groups of Unitarian Universalist identity (see Worsfold, 1999). There are Liberal Christians, but also Religious Humanists, and then there are Easterns (Hindu and Buddhist in outlook), and there are neo-Pagans (perhaps less superstitious, less commercial, than their Pagan near neighbours). The origins of these groupings are part of the Chain of Memory and its reconstruction, given the uncertainty of Christian meaning, the change in the religious culture and also the shifting of the Sociology of Knowledge of ordinary thought alongside communicative technology, understanding chaos and systems, and human-technical problem solving.

First of all, Rationalist Unitarianism also adopted Romanticism in the nineteenth century. The pre-critical biblical usage turned towards the limitations of doing history and the breadth of the symbolic text, so that we had the Victorian Gothic and the Liturgical-Poetic. Arguably liberal Christians were of one or the other, but latterly tended towards the Romanticist. The running argument between types of Christian – rationalistic with the supernatural (Bible, Miracles, Bodily Resurrection: a pre-critical reading) or free with naturalistic (experience, text as personal reflective, biblical text as subjected to what used

to be called higher interpretation) – synthesised and then found a non-Christian antithesis in a distinct Religious Humanism.

The 1960s and 1970s saw a Rationalist strengthening towards Religious Humanism, but it didn't last (rather a thin Secularism, not much to offer in terms of religious practice), and in becoming more Romanticist, and broader, the antithesis adapted more towards the Multi-Faith as well as the Scientific and Social Scientific. Some re-enchanted with practices towards Eastern Rationality and across to Pagan Romanticism. The dedicated Humanists with a human holy spirit generated slightly Remythologised stances and now look upon the emergent Sunday Assembly with perhaps some envy. Sunday Assembly is religious in a formal sense, but the Unitarian Humanists are happier to use explicit religious material and treat it symbolically and poetically. It is worth noting that the liturgical Ethical Churches pretty much died out (see Youlden 1914), and the Sunday Assembly is untested for longevity.

Modernist philosophical Hinduism may offer a theology of a broad transcendence uniting divinity within the human soul, especially recognising Unitarian contact with Brahmo Samaj, whereas a non-theistic alternative adapts the techniques of meditation to clear the mind and produce the salvation of non-attachment – a sort of Buddhism without rebirth. Stephen Batchelor outside Unitarianism (but inside Sea of Faith) is well known as a post-Buddhist or a Secular Buddhist (e.g see Batchelor et al., 2016). These philosophies and practices tend to gravitate to the Rationalist end of the spectrum.

The neo-Pagans or those of Earth Spirit can take their Romanticist theology from the likes of Starhawk (Miriam Simos) in the United States. She has had friendly contact with Unitarian Universalists. She has direct experience of circle collectives, and her religious outlook extends to magical fiction writing (e.g. Starhawk, 2015). She is keen in developing liturgies and can speak of ritual play and so do Unitarians. There is a strong recognition of the feminine and the reproductive in the neo-Pagan rituals, as well as of the earth, the body, Spirit and movement. Whilst not as magical as neat Pagans, these Unitarians do tend towards the more Romantic (nature) end of the spectrum.

So the Martineau-down Chain of Memory is one of individual preference, but an inductive gathering together and apart of religious and belief tendencies. It is an open, liberal, Postmodernism, and can be described.

So, from a general stance of Woodhead and Heelas's Experiential Humanity (and Human Relations Authority after Elton Mayo – see Worsfold, 1989, 35, 133, 137), there are then divergent belief typologies identifiable and describable, all of which face the pluralism of conversation and a more common liturgical mixing with others in the same community. John Robinson saw this back in the 1960s:

...a deep seated resistance to any attempt to start from given truths, to prescribe the definition in advance of the experience, the believing instead of the seeing.
(Robinson, 1965, 40)

This is demonstrated by research on Church Leavers, especially those under fifty years of age. Qualitative and then Quantitative Research by the Church Leaving Research Project shows that people leave because they wish to assert personal authenticity, that the chosen lifestyle is incompatible with church membership, that they want personal questing and

pluralism and are alienated by hypocrisy. (Richter, 1999, 182-183). They prioritise experience over belief and will shop around for where this is available. (Richter, 1999, 184)

Bishop Robinson realised back in the 1960s that the Society of Friends appealed to searchers: they have maintained their adherence considerably better than the Unitarians. They count Members as 13,401 in 2015, 13,527 in 2014, and 15,378 back in 2005, with Members and Attenders as 21,384 in 2015, 21,935 in 2014, 23,505 back in 2005. (YMRSFQ, 2016) and figures include 20752 membership in 1970.

Bishop Robinson continued (in the patriarchal fashion of the day):

In all this frontier-debate I have been made aware that about the one Church in Britain whose public 'image' is not a positive liability is the Society of Friends. And I believe this is because it appears to men to respect this order [experience over belief]. I could not go with it myself in rejecting creeds and sacraments, liturgies and ordinations. I believe that these have their rightful place, and I have myself been duly exasperated by the woolliness of the Quakers at their worst! But I am convicted by the integrity which they *seem* to men to have. (Robinson, 1965, 40)

Reputation is everything. And a reversion to Yale Postliberalism will not satisfy these searchers. One danger of adopting such Postliberalism by defective intention is that although the theology has moved towards the individual and experience, governance exists at the Congregation, or even at a small number of Trustees each. And although the Congregation should be open to evolve, some are better at this than others, or rather there is an observable restriction in many for maintaining (or keeping away from) liberal Christianity. This might be a political argument for Yale Postliberalism, but if so it is unsupported at a general theological level. Is it an example of practical theology? Is it contextual? If so defended, it remains a contradiction, and the contradiction is that decentralised liberalism, supposedly right down to the individual, instead, without checks and balances, becomes easily illiberal at the most effective point of actual authority. In other words, if never stated, "this congregation has creeds by the back door".

Clearly there has been change among Unitarians: Kendal has been a demonstrative example, but it may well be that change is slower not just from Reductionism in language but also due to centres of power and Congregational Resistance at any one time. These may well be connected. Trustees may not understand pluralism, never mind lack a commitment to freedom of belief actualised. As Dr. Melanie Prideaux pointed out, Unitarianism has decision making structures that might be shared with non-religious bodies: it does not have the theological underpinning of Quaker decision-making practices, like Threshing, for example. So Unitarian diversity is not necessarily handled well. Indeed Human Relations Authority is not religious as such, and it is Humanistic by perspective – anti-Bureaucratic, not Systemic (lacks vertical checks and balances), not Traditionalist, Post-Industrial, and free-floating (see Worsfold, 1989, 137. And so the contradiction between group and individual is unavoidable, once the group has to obey Charity Law with its theistic bias and be formally accountable, and Trustees make majority decisions. Perhaps only anarchy can be purely individualistic. So the contradiction just exists. Pluralism requires at the collective level understanding the Chain of Memory and commitment.

So I suggest that to be "Postliberal" is to be anti-Unitarian in tradition, if arising through

Congregationalist Contradiction as a mistake. In more positive intention, it is a wish a lament a dying past and becomes therefore a Museum of Religious Antiquities. The problem with such an Introversionist or even Esoteric Sect (to recoin terms from Bryan Wilson, 1961), is that the result relates to no one in particular other than the last of a tribe. It answers questions no one else is asking. Dedicated Evangelical Postliberals: they give tough and demanding answers to vague questions. But Unitarian Postliberals give vague answers to vague questions, and the Museum of Religious Antiquities really does become neither use nor ornaments. The Liberal Christians are the Unitarians' Conservatives, the upholders of one insider tradition, and Traditionalists always answer questions asked in the past and maintained within. They are always destined to die out, and this is what they have been doing. The Humanists have latched on to external plausibility structures that the Christians once enjoyed and have now lost: but this is a moving situation and Thomas Kuhn (1970) will tell us that Paradigms of thinking shift. The Easterns go for more relevant practice, and choices of philosophy, the neo-Pagans for the demands of Environmental Awareness.

A museum has visitors: people who look around and go away. It shows curiosities that few understand any more, despite the efforts of its archaeologists and historians. For the Generalised Other the mental picture the exhibits represent is imagined as defunct, or perhaps some remember with fondness. There is no ongoing renewal of use.

Of course it may be that Unitarianism comes to an end, or becomes something like the independent ministries of Liberal Catholicism, existing in minute corners of the religious world. In this case it is important to have curators, for making historical-theological records for posterity. Being ahead of the race to extinction in Christian denominations towards the 2060s (Thompson, 2015), if perhaps for Unitarians to 'bob along the bottom' in the meantime, it is important to *write things down*. It remains that there is no shortage of Unitarian Historians at this Winter of Unitarianism. The recording effort also needs, however, Unitarian Theologians, and those who are not trying to fix or legitimise or standardise, but seek to explain how plurality works when it is religious. Theological effort might even help self-understanding and inject life should individuals keep coming in through the doors and staying for long enough. No one knows the future.

So a faithful Chain of Memory is possible and generating a theology that is both descriptive and analytical. A form of Yale Postliberalism that seeks to narrow and define, to fix a legitimate Unitarianism, is itself not legitimate. It does not matter that Unitarianism is tiny: tinier Churches have historical-theological recognition and can recognise plurality.

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