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Religion, Reason, Responsibility: James Martineau and the Transformation of Theological Radicalism in Victorian Britain, 1830-1900

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation is a study of the shifting presence of religious groups in nineteenth-century British public life. It concentrates on Unitarians, a denomination little studied by historians but who were one of the key groups enfranchised in the period around 1830, and examines how religious leaders made sense of both increasing political opportunities and increasing religious sectarianism. Its focus is James Martineau and the generation of denominational leaders who came of age after 1830 and their use of Romanticism to transform the traditional Nonconformist principle of religious liberty into a call for free theological inquiry. Making use of letters, diaries, newspapers, pamphlets and magazine articles, this dissertation shows how Martineau and his allies moved beyond the theological legacy of Joseph Priestley, transformed congregational life, reformed the denomination and reached out to other religious liberals in mid-Victorian Britain. They were among the first religious thinkers to endorse developmental science and German Biblical scholarship. In sharp contrast to many evangelical Nonconformists who radicalized religious liberty into a campaign for the abolition of Established Churches, Martineau and his followers hoped that the government would guarantee free theological inquiry. Martineau hoped to reform the Church of England into a non-dogmatic national religious community, but the growth of agnostic science and the Liberal embrace of popular politics undermined Martineau’s vision. Although Martineau’s career ended
in failure, the demise of a vision of public life grounded in Nonconformist principles underscores the paradoxically conservative nature of religious change in nineteenth-century Britain. Martineau and his allies played a crucial role in broadening British religious and intellectual life, but the Anglican Church and its associated educational institutions proved much more successful representatives of that culture.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Nineteenth-century Europe presents the historian with a conflicted picture of religious decline and religious revival.\(^1\) Over the course of the nineteenth century, new national authorities took over social welfare and educational apparatuses from Christian churches, and new modes of intellectual, artistic and social life took shape outside clerical control. For the first time in history, many people from all social classes led their lives outside the influences of religion.\(^2\) Yet, religious groups flourished and religious belief remained strong and even assumed new shapes outside of traditional institutions. As governments directed churches and their resources to national purposes and religious believers resisted these plans, nation states faced a seemingly intractable religious pluralism. In Britain, Anglicans, Protestant Dissenters and Catholics all evangelized the population but quarreled viciously over what political arrangement would best support their efforts.\(^3\) In France, where proponents of outright secularism created a powerful network of support, Catholics used reinvigorated devotional life, networks of schools and mass organizations to bind members more closely to church communities. Millions of pilgrims


travelled to the Marian shrine at Lourdes and the Shrine of Sacré Coeur in Paris. In Germany, the Catholic Church resisted Bismarck's *Kulturkampf* by building up its own political party and a network of schools and social clubs. In the Netherlands, Protestants and Catholics developed all-encompassing confessional subcultures, each represented by its own political parties and knit together by its own religious, social and cultural institutions. In Ireland and Eastern Europe, religion became the basis for national identity itself.

Most of these European disputes have burnt themselves out, but the appearance of charismatic religions and the proliferation of liberation theologies in developing countries suggest that the outcomes of these nineteenth-century disputes were by no means inevitable and are better seen as the advent of new struggles over the interplay between religion and democratic society. Margaret Lavinia Anderson has gone so far as to dub scholarship on the decline of religion after 1800 a fantastic product of "the secularization of scholarship in the twentieth century" rather than a reflection of any real historical trend.

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8 David Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 12-13. Although Jenkins uses the word "Christendom," which evokes the Middle Ages, the types of Church-State conflicts that he describes in developing nations actually suggest a return to nineteenth-century issues.

For this reason, historians and sociologists have acknowledged that the cultural authority of religion has declined but have re-focused their accounts of secularization and religious change on the role of human agency. Christian Smith has suggested that secularization in the late-nineteenth-century United States took its own peculiar course because many different groups with widely varying interests sought to shape political, social and educational institutions for their own purposes. Recently, Jonathan Sheehan has argued that secularization must be viewed as a “media driven” process. Sheehan defines the secular realm in terms of cultural practices--especially new communications tools (encyclopedias, dictionaries) and forums (salons, readings circles, clubs). Religious change happens as different individuals and groups adjust their message, institutions and practices in response to changed circumstances, but it does not follow any predetermined course. In short, by recasting secularization as a more uneven and contingent process, historians have raised the possibility of re-examining the interplay between the religious and the secular at different historical moments.

As historians of Victorian Britain have reassessed the origins of their discipline in the modernization theories of the mid-twentieth century, they have drawn attention to

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how the people of the nineteenth century drew on religious identities and religious language to understand economic, social, and political change. According to mid-twentieth-century historians, Victorian Britain was the prime example of a society that had managed to safely navigate the shoals of industrialization, urbanization, and democratization and made the transition from traditional to modern society. The intellectual concomitant of this modernization was a “crisis of faith” in which individuals abandoned traditional, religious ways of thinking in favor of modern, rational ways of thinking. A growing tide of revisionist studies, however, have questioned the notion of a crisis of transition between traditional and modern societies by pointing to the unevenness and slowness of industrialization, the persistence of aristocratic government, and the continued centrality of constitutional and populist language among the lower classes. In particular, historians have disentangled secularization from modernization by charting the widespread role of religion in forming national, regional and individual identities. Taking stock of the


As the secularization of British society has been pushed into the early-twentieth century, a series of important studies have emphasized that much of Victorian politics was theological and much of Victorian theology was political. One of the most important strands of debate was the role of an established church in national religious life, in particular, its ability to preserve the freedom of conscience necessary for self-government.\footnote{Parry, \textit{Democracy and Religion}, 5 and Stefan Collini, \textit{Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850-1930} (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1991), esp. 121-169, in which Collini argues that J. S. Mill was the model for this type of public intellectual work.} For much of the eighteenth century, the Church of England could represent the broadly shared Protestantism that united the British during their wars on the continent.\footnote{Linda Colley, \textit{Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).} The Church of England was the strongest church in the British Isles and, well into the nineteenth century, it was confident, cohesive, and even successful in extending its influence.\footnote{R. Arthur Burns, \textit{The Diocesan Revival in the Church of England, c. 1800-1870} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). For the eighteenth-century success of the Church of England in organizing the English welfare system, see Hempton, \textit{Religion and Political Culture}, 1-24.} Intellectually, issues of theology and the nature of the Church remained important and clergy and religious believers of all sorts resorted to polite sociability and the latest advances in Lockean epistemology and Newtonian science to defend the cause of
the Church.\textsuperscript{22} Well into the nineteenth century, the habits of Anglican piety centered on *The Book of Common Prayer* shaped the beliefs of many.\textsuperscript{23} By the end of the Napoleonic Wars, however, a number of groups were questioning the equation of the Established Church with Britain’s Protestant heritage. The Evangelical Awakening left many both inside and outside the Church of England dissatisfied with the spiritual compromises of a state Church. Nonconformist groups (especially Congregationalists and Baptists), who had always been hostile to the idea of a religious establishment, gained large numbers of converts and organized campaigns to abolish the Church of England altogether.\textsuperscript{24} Against both Anglican and Nonconformist willingness to compromise the status of the Established Church, the Oxford Movement reinvigorated the Catholic elements of High Churchmanship, especially its supernatural and Apostolic vision of the Church, and, in the process, fueled the growth of Church parties.\textsuperscript{25}


\textsuperscript{23} Frances Knight, *The Nineteenth-Century Church and English Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

\textsuperscript{24} For the secessions that resulted from evangelical discomfort, see Grayson Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals: Protestant Secessions from the via media, c. 1800-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

The relative lack of Nonconformist perspectives (Congregationalists, Baptists, Unitarians, Quakers, and Methodists) in this general reassessment of the place of religion in British public life, however, shows that some of the assumptions of secularization theory still need to be questioned. Many of the advances in recent historiography—particularly the work of Peter Nockles, Grayson Carter and Arthur Burns—are rooted in scholars' willingness to examine the diverse effects of the Evangelical Awakening on Anglicanism. Historians of Victorian religion, however, have not been able to bring into focus the distinctive contribution of Nonconformity because they have subsumed the various sects, theological viewpoints, and practical considerations of the Congregationalists, Baptists, Unitarians, Quakers, and Methodists who made up Victorian Nonconformity under evangelicalism, a common commitment to individual moral reform. This has been reinforced by arguments from the sociology of religion that the individualism and flexibility of evangelicalism made it the appropriate religion for a society undergoing a rapid transition from traditional society to modern industrial society. Two of the founding fathers of Victorian Studies, G. M. Young and Elie Halévy, strengthened this

26 The Protestants who were not a part of the Church of England were known by several, basically equivalent names: Dissenters, Nonconformists, Free Churchmen. The only differences are that “Dissenters” prevailed from c.1660-c.1832; “Nonconformists” from c.1832-c.1890; and “Free Churchmen” from c.1890 to the present. This dissertation will use Dissent and Nonconformity roughly interchangeably.


conception with memorable portrayals of the widespread influence of evangelical religion. Yet, a concentration on the common evangelicalism underlying much of Victorian religious life cannot account for the bitter disagreements among Anglicans and Nonconformists over the value of religious establishments. Despite these substantive intellectual disagreements, many historians have characterized the Nonconformist political campaigns for disestablishment with the stark dichotomies posited by secularization theories. On the one hand, some historians have argued that Nonconformists simply cared about the salvation of souls and acted out of purely religious motives. On the other hand, some historians have treated Nonconformity as a worldly political lobby whose goal was power.

These dichotomies are the product of a lack of attention to the motives and ideas guiding Nonconformists, a gap in the historiography of Victorian intellectual life that Frank M. Turner has called a "vast lacuna." To a very great extent, this exclusion of the intellectual traditions and principles of Nonconformity from consideration reflects Victorians’ own cultural politics. Many of the thinkers—such as J. S. Mill, Thomas Carlyle,

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Matthew Arnold and John Ruskin—who were canonized as "Victorian sages" by the founders of Victorian Studies lamented the deficiencies of Nonconformist political, social, intellectual and cultural life. In *On Liberty*, Mill criticized the moral crusaders who sought to impose their own moral vision and religious views on others. In *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold criticized the narrowness and lack of appreciation of worldly beauty among Nonconformists. Similarly, many of the great Victorian novelists—especially Dickens—deplored what they saw as the cant and hypocrisy of Nonconformity. Yet, Nonconformist intellectual life was more than just a pale reflection of debates by abler minds. Nor was Nonconformist intellectual life simply the result of prosperity and increasing opportunities for education. Nonconformity was embedded in a web of theological and political beliefs and, when Nonconformists spoke, they drew on a long and distinctive tradition of religious liberty.

Inspired by the evangelical revival, Nonconformists did campaign for religious revival and contribute to nondenominational moral reform efforts but, after the 1830s, they also drew on a commitment to a theology of religious liberty dating back to the Res-

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toration and earlier to protect the rights of all people to worship freely.  
From the beginning, Nonconformists had held that all people ought to have liberty to interpret the Scriptures for themselves.  
Second, Nonconformists increasingly emphasized that all religious groups ought to be voluntary, that is, supported by the free offerings of their own members rather than government support. Thus, after their ejection from the Church of England in 1662, Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Baptists maintained their own systems of church polity against the encroachments of the Church of England. In 1795, the Methodists left the Church of England and, technically, became Dissenters but were separated from the rest of Dissent by their origins as a voluntary society within the Church of England and open political support for the state. They were never part of groups such as the Protestant Dissenting Deputies. Although they campaigned for moral reform, they had no tradition of religious liberty.

This dissertation covers the contests over the meaning of the Nonconformist principle of religious liberty triggered by the growth of religious sectarianism, in particular the struggle over formerly Presbyterian chapels, the resulting changes in Nonconformist intellectual and denominational life, and the impact on Victorian religious and intellectual life more generally. By focusing on British Unitarians, it aims to show how the harshest critics of the corrupt Church-State alliance became the careful and responsible religious

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39 For two famous Victorian moral reform causes, Sabbatarianism and temperance, see respectively, John Wigley, The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Sunday (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980) and Brian Harrison, Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England, 1815-1872 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1971). On the surprising willingness of a great number of Nonconformists to join with non-believers, such as John Morley, in their campaigns on behalf of religious liberty, see John Vincent, The Formation of the British Liberal Party (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1966), 70.

liberals of the mid-Victorian years. Although Unitarians were a relatively small group, historians have argued that their denial of the Trinity, Original Sin and a divinely ordained church made them a potent source of opposition to the British governments of the late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-centuries. In the late-eighteenth century, the polymath, Joseph Priestley, argued that the whole of nature was one substance, thereby questioning the distinctions between matter and life and body and soul. Jesus Christ was not a pre-existent soul joined to matter but a human being. His mission was to explain the proper ethical system for human beings, not to establish an earthly Church with an elaborate system of sacraments. Thus, the Church-State alliance was a morally harmful corruption of Jesus’ message. Although Unitarians won few converts, they contributed leaders to the Dissenting cause and to municipal government out of all proportion to their numbers. In the early nineteenth century, Unitarians had managed to make common cause with evangelicals in campaigns for criminal law reform, the abolition of slavery and even the distribution of Bibles. In the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars, however, Unitarians’ erstwhile allies turned on them and argued that religious liberty meant that all religious groups must be self-supporting (Voluntarism), and, therefore, Unitarians must surrender the chapels inherited from their orthodox Presbyterian ancestors. Although the

41 Although they disagree sharply on the political ideology and religious policies of the British government from roughly 1783-1832, both Boyd Hilton and J. C. D. Clark highlight Unitarian influences in the British counterculture during this period. See Boyd Hilton, A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People? England, 1783-1846 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 461-466 and Clark, English Society, 1688-1832, 277-348.


Dissenters' Chapels Act (1844) averted this threat, the principle of religious liberty, once the foundation of Dissent, had become a point of contention among Dissenters themselves.

This dissertation focuses on the new generation of Unitarian leaders that emerged in the 1830s, specifically James Martineau (1805-1900), John James Tayler (1797-1869) and John Hamilton Thom (1808-1894). It explores how they abandoned their forebears' critiques of the corruption of the British Church-State alliance and acted as "public moralists," writers and scholars dedicated to speaking to ordinary people and cultivating the deep inner qualities of character that were necessary to resist the temptations of social and political selfishness. Against Anglicans and orthodox Nonconformists, these Unitarians argued that Nonconformity's tradition of religious liberty could forge a national church and unite the British people. All three were prominent ministers in the north of England. The younger brother of the prominent radical writer Harriet Martineau, James Martineau came from a long line of Dissenting merchants in Norwich and in 1832 came to Paradise Street chapel, Liverpool. Tayler was the minister of Lower Mosley Street chapel, Manchester, and Professor of Ecclesiastical History at the Unitarian seminary, Manchester New College (MNC). Finally, John Hamilton Thom was the minister at Renshaw Street chapel, Liverpool. Although he battled ill-health, Thom found time to edit a journal and serve on numerous committees, thus helping consolidate these different impulses into a new school of Unitarianism. James Martineau and the new school of Unitarianism encouraged their increasingly settled congregations and denominations to combat sectarianism and assume more responsible roles in local social and political life.
The key to Martineau’s intellectual contributions was his conviction that religious liberty could inform new visions of congregational life, intellectual training, ministerial training and denominational life and, so, become a foundation for religious unity, but he obscured this source by publishing his lectures in the 1880s, far after he developed some of his basic insights. To make matters worse, Martineau wrote these volumes using his own unique terminology to explain the history of ethics.\(^4^4\) Three of his students published biographies shortly after his death, but there has been relatively little done since then.\(^4^5\) Over the past century, there have been several studies of Martineau’s ethics, theism and philosophy of religion.\(^4^6\) More recently, Ralph Waller has studied Martineau’s published sermons and drawn out Martineau’s theories of Christology and Ecclesiology.\(^4^7\) What is still lacking, however, is a proper estimation of Martineau’s place in Victorian intellectual

\(^{4^4}\) One amusing example of the opacity of Martineau’s later prose occurs in P. G. Wodehouse’s short story, “Jeeves Takes Charge,” the story in which the butler, Jeeves, first meets Bertie Wooster. Bertie’s fiancée, Lady Florence Craye, wants to improve his mind and has given him Martineau’s *Types of Ethical Theory* to read. Eventually, Jeeves saves him from this engagement. See P. G. Wodehouse, *Carry On, Jeeves* (London: H. Jenkins, 1960), 7-8. It is worth considering whether Jeeves, an avowed disciple of Spinoza, whom Martineau criticized, might have wanted to wrest Bertie away from hostile philosophical influences. For Jeeves’ Spinozism, see P. G. Wodehouse, *Joy in the Morning* (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 2002), 15.


\(^{4^7}\) Ralph Waller, “James Martineau: His Emergence as a Theologian, his Christology, and his Doctrine of the Church, with some unpublished papers” (Ph.D. dissertation: King’s College, London, 1986); parts of this dissertation have been published as “James Martineau: The Development of his Religious Thought,” in Barbara Smith, ed., *Truth, Liberty, Religion: Essays Celebrating Two Hundred Years of Manchester College*, ed. Barbara Smith (Oxford: Manchester College, 1986), 225-264. Waller’s work on Martineau’s ecclesiology is especially helpful as a counterbalance to Webb’s stress on the new school of Unitarianism’s individualism. Yet, Waller’s reliance on Martineau’s own “Biographical Memoranda” of 1877 prevents a more thorough assessment of important occasions in Martineau’s career and an exploration of his influence.
and cultural life, taking into account his extensive contributions to Victorian periodicals. Before Martineau published the massive tomes that crowned his career, Victorian intellectuals knew and respected him for these articles. Because Martineau was usually engaged in controversy of one sort or another, studying these writings can shed important light on how Martineau responded to contemporary events. The difficulty of placing Martineau in context becomes greater because Martineau needed to speak to both his fellow Unitarians and the general public; he was known for different things among different groups. To a degree almost unparalleled among Victorian intellectuals, Martineau spent a large portion of his life managing a congregation, teaching students and lecturing in public, and a large portion of his output does not fit precisely into the categories used to analyze other “Victorian sages” and cultural critics such as Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, George Eliot or Matthew Arnold. It is time to put Martineau’s reputation as a denominational reformer and a public moralist back together.

The difficulty of relating Martineau’s individual development to the broader story of Victorian intellectual and religious life has resulted in a historiography acknowledging some aspects of Martineau’s life and projects without sufficient attention to the full vision out of which they grew. The foremost historian of nineteenth-century Unitarianism, R. K. Webb, has portrayed the rise of James Martineau and the new school as a struggle inside the denomination over the ability to impose creeds on members but has neglected the broader questions of cultural engagement that animated Martineau and the new school.49


Webb uses Rev. Samuel Bache of Birmingham’s proposal at the 1866 meeting of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association for a Unitarian creed and its rejection as the key piece of evidence within his interpretation; when the measure was defeated, so was any possibility of imposing an authoritative creed on Unitarianism. Yet, Bache’s motion was oddly anti-climatic, for his closest allies deserted him before it even reached the floor of the meeting. In addition, as much as they resisted an imposed creed, Martineau, Tayler and Thom all wished to strengthen institutional authority through more intensive ministerial education, stricter ministerial licensing, and more developed congregational life. Without an account of their plans for reforming the denomination and indeed all of British life, Webb exaggerates the individualism of the members of the new school at the expense of the strong communitarian elements in their thought.\(^\text{50}\) In their work with domestic missions, participation in municipal politics and proposals for the national church, Martineau, Tayler and Thom stressed the power of individuals to cooperate freely and emphasized the important role of communities--congregations, municipalities, nations--in shaping human character. Above all, they stressed the reform of the Church of England and British religious life as the basis for any proper national community. The debates over miracles and the authority of the Scriptures were part of a conversation about the function and education of religious ministers, the place of theological education within a

\(^{50}\) R. K. Webb, “John Hamilton Thom: Intellect and Conscience in Liverpool” in The View from the Pulpit: Victorian Ministers and Society, ed. P. T. Philips (Toronto: Macmillan, 1978), 210-243. Webb closes his essay with a comparison between the personal charity approach of Thom and the new school and the 1970s British welfare state in the light of Margaret Thatcher’s then recent call to cut back the welfare state. When viewed in that way, the charitable work of the Liverpool Unitarians will undoubtedly seem individualistic. Yet, the minister to the poor, John Johns, made arguments for increased civic activism to remedy the condition of the poor, suggesting that this individualism/welfare state distinction is overdrawn and there is room for a type of communitarianism at the civic level. Gerald Parsons has also commented on the communitarianism of Johns’ proposals. See Gerald Parsons, “From Dissenters to Free Churchmen: The Transitions of Victorian Nonconformity,” in Religion in Victorian Britain, volume 1: Traditions, ed. Gerald Parsons (Manchester: Open University Press, 1988); 93.
religious denomination, and the role that denominations should play in municipal and national life. My more complete contextualization of the work of Martineau and the new school shows how the anti-dogmatism that Webb highlights developed out of a long Nonconformist tradition and became a full-fledged engagement with the question of how the Nonconformist principle of religious liberty could shape mid-Victorian religious life.\footnote{It is notable that Webb has given no attention to the struggle over Presbyterian chapels and the Dissenters' Chapels Act (1844), though he has called for a study. See Webb, "Quakers and Unitarians," 104.}

Scholars of Victorian politics and social life have maintained that mid-Victorian Unitarianism grew increasingly socially and intellectually conservative, but have not recognized the significance of its struggles to define itself as a denomination. In a series of articles, John Seed has argued that by the 1820s and 1830s prosperous, well-educated and middle-class Unitarians used religious free inquiry to support a polite provincial culture dedicated to practical improvement and scientific inquiry.\footnote{John Seed, "The Role of Unitarianism in the Formation of a Liberal Culture, 1775-1851: A Social History" (Ph.D. dissertation: Hull University, 1981), 364-66.} Although congregations might attract a relatively wide array of social classes, a small clique of local elites managed the chapel's affairs.\footnote{Ibid., 135.} As they articulated their own middle class conception of the world, the members of Unitarian congregations used institutions such as pew rents and family seating to reinforce the authority of male fathers and masters.\footnote{John Seed, "Theologies of Power: Unitarianism and the social relations of religious discourse, 1800-50," in Class, Power and Social Structure in Nineteenth-Century British Towns, ed. R. J. Morris (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1986): 138.} The preaching at these chapels was solidly middle class, containing "vindications of self-help, the confidence in the blessing of Providence, celebrating moderate worldly pleasure, the disdain
for those who fail to become independent and successful."

Howard M. Wach sharpened and focused this interpretation of the social politics of Unitarians with a study of the preaching of John James Tayler as uniquely appropriate to the turbulent economic and social conditions of Manchester in the first half of the nineteenth century. By emphasizing the benefits of family life and middle class virtues of honesty and adherence to principles, Tayler helped naturalize the middle class way of life into the "common sense" of the age. By blending this individualistic message with references to Romantic organism, Tayler reassured his audiences with a vision of the city as an ordered place in which individuals and groups had their assigned ranks and roles.

In addition, a series of scholars have argued that the generation of Unitarians after 1830 abandoned the intellectual radicalism of their predecessors. In the early nineteenth-century, Unitarians followed in Priestley's footsteps and advanced materialistic and monistic interpretations of nature against orthodox Christians who defended the existence of a soul. According to the historian of science, L. S. Jacyna, mid-Victorian physiologists continued this project with theories of the correlation of mental and physical phenomena, culminating in a monistic cosmology in which "the order of the cosmos was uninterrupted; the spiritual could not interfere with the material." By extension, the clergy of the Established Church, the representatives of the spiritual realm, could not interfere with scientists, the investigators of nature. Boyd Hilton has argued that the acceptance of

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55 Ibid.


57 Ibid., 448.

these monistic theories was part of a mid-nineteenth-century transition from mechanical and static views of the universe and society to dynamic and evolutionary conceptions of the universe and social life. Even religious believers—such as F. D. Maurice and Alfred, Lord Tennyson—began to emphasize the closeness between God and human beings through attention to the doctrine of the Incarnation.59 Against this, James Martineau and his close friend, the Unitarian physiologist, William Benjamin Carpenter, abruptly abandoned Priestley’s monism and argued for a dualism between matter and mind that would preserve freedom, morality and a God independent of nature.60 In particular, Martineau and his allies abandoned the tradition of evidential miracles and prophecies and “spiritualized” Unitarianism into a creed that did not rely on science for confirmation.61 Drawing on Hilton’s work, John Money has recently suggested that Martineau’s ideal of a national church foreshadowed the authoritarian regimes of twentieth-century Europe.62

59 Hilton, Age of Atonement, 298-339.

60 Jacyna, 123-4. Hilton, The Age of Atonement, 302-3. Hilton repeats this in his recent, A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People?, 634-5, though the weakness of his argument shows when he attributes this turn to a temperamental Unitarian need to be different. Concern with human freedom was a long-standing theme in Unitarian thought. As R. K. Webb has noted, even the followers of Priestley believed in human freedom. See Webb, Harriet Martineau: A Radical Victorian (London: Heinemann, 1960), 85-88 and, more recently, Webb, “The Background: English Unitarians in the Nineteenth Century,” in Unitarian to the Core: Unitarian College, Manchester 1854-2004, ed. Leonard Smith (Manchester: Unitarian College, 2004): 22. Although Webb does not mention it, the Nonconformist concern with religious liberty also supported a long-standing commitment to human freedom more generally.


The conservative reading has been given support by James Martineau's troubled relationship with his sister, Harriet. As children, they were especially close. It was James who suggested that the Priestleyan doctrine of necessity might provide an antidote to some of her religious doubts. Later, James suggested that, in his absence, Harriet should write for the Unitarian *Monthly Repository*. After she gained widespread acclaim for her *Illustrations of Political Economy* (1832-4), the balance of the relationship shifted and she repeatedly asked James to join in several of her projects, ranging from a proposed new journal to a trip to America. As a popular writer, she produced a sociological work on America (*Society in America*, 1837), two innovative novels (*Deerbrook*, 1839 and *The Hour and the Man*, 1841), a groundbreaking exploration of invalidism (*Life in the Sickroom*, 1844), a tract supporting mesmerism (*Letters on Mesmerism*, 1844) and an exploration of the origins of Christianity (*Eastern Life, Present and Past*, 1848). Historians have used these works to trace the treatment of women and the development of social thought in the early Victorian period. When James, who was increasingly exasperated by her embrace of mesmerism, wrote a stinging critique of her atheistic *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development* (1851), they ceased all communication. Few have explored this break but James has generally been assumed to be speaking for the outraged religious believers in Victorian society.

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Characterizing Martineau and mid-Victorian Unitarianism as socially and intellectually conservative, however, fails to appreciate the roots of the new school in the Dissenting principle of religious liberty. Seed and Wach focus too narrowly on individual congregations. Although Unitarians lacked the central governing bodies of other Non-conformist groups, they founded the British and Foreign Unitarian Association (1826) and came together to defend the principle of freedom of religious inquiry against orthodox Nonconformist attempts to take over their chapels in the 1820s and 1830s. The struggle over the chapels led Martineau and Tayler to defend religious liberty against sectarianism through a reformed religious establishment and new approaches to philosophy of religion and Biblical criticism. Jacyna, Hilton and Money overlook how Martineau's entire intellectual career grew out of this pre-occupation with religious liberty. In the early 1830s, Martineau criticized the tendency of Priestley to make religion a matter of external authorities (Scriptures) and evidences (miracles).\textsuperscript{65} In his moral philosophy, Martineau explicitly criticized contemporaries, such as the Cambridge polymath, William Whewell, who argued that moral behavior required external authorities.\textsuperscript{66} When the High Churchman, H. L. Mansel made a philosophical argument against religious liberals that religion could never be critically discussed and must always be a matter of authority, Martineau joined with other religious liberals, such as F. D. Maurice, to maintain the natural human knowledge of God. Martineau explicitly criticized Mansel for the social

\textsuperscript{65} James Martineau, "Joseph Priestley: Life and Works," \textit{Essays, Reviews and Addresses: volume 1: Personal and Political} (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1891), 1-42. The essay was originally published in 1833.

and political conservatism implicit in drawing a strict boundary between the natural and the supernatural, the very fault for which contemporary scholars have criticized Martineau. Martineau did argue against evolutionary science and agnostic science, but only on the grounds that removing religion from the realm of knowledge would destroy the possibility of religious free inquiry. His proposals for a comprehensive national church were intended to guarantee the social and financial independence of ministers, which, in turn, supported free inquiry. In fact, in their desire that theology draw out and probe the deepest human religious intuitions, Martineau and Tayler consciously echoed the German ideal of Wissenschaft, the conviction that scholarly work could integrate different areas of human concern. For all the scorn and rage in James’ review of Harriet’s book, his assertion of religious free inquiry and the possibility of knowledge of the supernatural touched on themes of the development of the natural capacities of human beings that had been common to both their intellectual journeys. Thus, as this dissertation suggests, the parting of this brother and sister reflected the fraying of the ties that connected the scientific and religious radicals of the early Victorian period. In fact, James Martineau used the developmental modes of science put forward by scientific radicals in the 1840s to suggest how religious free inquiry and Biblical criticism might remove non-


69 Wissenschaft has a complex history. It combined elements of late-eighteenth-century German classicists’ attacks on utilitarian education, Rousseauian and Pestalozzian stress on the student’s uniqueness, and Idealist impulse on the interconnectedness of all knowledge. It was institutionalized in the research programs of the founders of the University of Berlin in 1810. For the impact of Wissenschaftsideologie on German Theology, see Thomas Albert Howard, Protestant Theology and the Making of the Modern German University (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 137-142.
essential beliefs, thereby drawing out the natural religious feelings of individuals and making unnecessary an authority imposed from outside. The followers of the new school of Unitarianism—such as William Rathbone VI, H. W. Crosskey and Charles Beard—exemplify how Martineau’s philosophy could be applied in the service of progressive municipal reform.

One of the key contributions of this dissertation is to reveal the understudied intellectual networks that linked religious and scientific radicals in the 1830s and 1840s. James Martineau was aided in his efforts to reform Unitarianism by Rev. John James Tayler. Although Martineau’s role in the reorientation of Unitarianism in the mid-Victorian period is recognized, Tayler has received virtually no attention. Tayler supported Martineau’s efforts at denominational meetings, at Manchester New College and in the editorship of The Prospective Review (1845-54). In addition, Tayler devoted as much effort as Martineau to thinking through the implications of German Biblical criticism and to reflecting on the training and role of the Unitarian minister. Finally, Tayler’s gentler personality helped smooth over many of the difficulties created by Martineau’s sharper language and won Tayler the friendship of many prominent intellectuals such as Henry

70 See James Martineau, “Church and State,” in Essays, Reviews, and Addresses: volume 2: Ecclesiastical and Historical (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1891), 1-46. This essay was originally published in 1845. For Tayler’s similar views, see [J. J. Tayler], “Christian Theology in its Relation to Modern Ideas and Modern Wants,” Prospective Review 3 (1847), 297-325.

71 Pietro Corsi, Science and Religion: Baden Powell and the Anglican Debate, 1800-1860 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 207-208 and “A Devil’s Chaplain’s Calling?” Journal of Victorian Culture 3, no. 1 (1998): 132 has argued that the intensive focus on Darwin has obscured the extraordinarily broad intellectual networks out of which developmental and evolutionary ideas appeared. In particular, he has noted the close links between F. W. Newman and W. B. Carpenter in the early 1840s and their involvement with Robert Chambers and Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation (1844), which Carpenter was thought to have written.

72 The exception, of course, is Howard Wach’s “A ‘Still, Small Voice’ from the Pulpit,” but Wach focuses on some of Tayler’s sermons to the exclusion of his Biblical criticism and his work as Principal of Manchester New College (1853-1869).
Crabb Robinson and the geologist Sir Charles Lyell. Tayler and Martineau were joined in their journalistic work by Martineau’s greatest student, Richard Holt Hutton (1826-1897), a journalist and literary critic, later editor of The Spectator (1861-1897). His contemporaries, such as W. E. Gladstone, recognized him as one of the foremost editors and writers on literary and theological matters in the second half of the nineteenth century.73 Because his papers were accidentally incinerated, he has received relatively little attention but, as a Unitarian and later an Anglican follower of F. D. Maurice, he helped articulate the idea of a broad, comprehensive Christianity that bound together so many religious believers against the atheists and agnostics in the late nineteenth century.74 In addition, Francis William Newman, like James Martineau caught in the shadow of a famous sibling, cooperated with the new school of Unitarianism by teaching at MNC and writing for The Prospective Review. His books on the natural roots of religious belief and his spiritual autobiography, Phases of Faith (1851), helped define a generation of honest doubters’ search for a nobler religious faith; he was, as George Eliot said, “our Saint Francis.”75 He served as Martineau’s primary interlocutor in his attempts to draw out the full religious significance and meaning of contemporary departures from religious orthodoxy. Finally, through W. B. Carpenter, the greatest physiologist of the Victorian period and one of its foremost scientific popularizers, Martineau stayed current with the most important scien-

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tific developments of the time. In addition, he guided Carpenter’s attempts to find a physiological explanation of human freedom.

The networks of religious thinkers who surrounded Martineau and their projects for the reform of British religious life help shed light on the relatively understudied reception of German Biblical criticism in Victorian Britain and the mid-Victorian fascination with German culture more generally. From the 1820s, both Tayler and Martineau were well attuned to the significance of new developments in Biblical criticism in Germany. For Martineau and his associates, Biblical criticism was not a threat to faith but a potential aid to rediscovering the essentials of Christianity and reforming the Church of England. Tayler visited Germany in 1834-35 after a nervous breakdown. Martineau learned to read German in the late 1820s but did not visit until 1848-49, when his congregation was building its new church at Hope Street. Tayler especially saw in Germany—especially the culture of Wissenschaft in its universities—possibilities of entirely new ways of relating religious, intellectual, and political life. In his interpretations of German intellectual life for the readers of Unitarian journals in the 1830s, 1840s and 1850s, Tayler emphasized the freedom of German universities at a time when Oxford and Cambridge still imposed tests on their graduates. Yet, even as he criticized English universities, Tayler also came to appreciate the possibilities of government funding for pre-

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serving professors from the pressures of sectarianism and, thereby, fostering truly free inquiry. Moreover, Tayler came to see mythical interpretations of the Scriptures developed in Germany as essential to the process of stripping away human doctrines and discovering Christ’s essential spirit of submission to the will of God. Martineau also made German Biblical criticism a cornerstone of his attempts to foster a more comprehensive national church.

Like many in the networks of scientific and religious radicals of the 1830s and 1840s, Martineau was dissatisfied with empirical philosophies and worldly influences in religious matters and was receptive to the growing influence of Romanticism in British intellectual life, yet his unique circumstances as a Nonconformist minister at an important urban congregation reveal much about the diffusion of Romantic ideas in particular contexts. Scholars have found Romantic influences in a wide variety of religious movements ranging from Thomas Chalmers’ parish missions in Glasgow to John Henry Newman and the Oxford Movement to Thomas Arnold and the Broad Church Movement and Edward Irving and premillennial Protestantism. As Hugh McLeod has pointed out, however, there is a danger of forcing Romanticism to explain too much. Newman emphasized authority, dogma and tradition, aspects of religion beyond the reach of empirical

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reason and ended his religious journey in the Roman Catholic Church. Thomas Arnold, the charismatic Master of Rugby School, challenged Newman and argued that the Church of England ought to maintain its role as a national cultural institution by relaxing dogmatic definitions. The antics of Edward Irving’s followers at the Catholic Apostolic Church in Gordon Square, where they prophesied and spoke in tongues, repelled both Tractarians and Liberal Anglicans, who saw Irving as the epitome of Protestant sectarianism. More work is needed to show how a common dissatisfaction with worldly influences and empirical philosophies led religious believers in different directions. For Martineau, Tayler and the new school of Unitarianism, Romanticism was not necessarily opposed to science but complemented the growing fascination with general laws of development that undermined the Unitarians’ simple, empirical approach to Biblical criticism in the 1830s. Romanticism helped the new school of Unitarianism transform their Non-conformist adherence to religious liberty from a fractious and destructive principle into a potentially unifying principle. Now, free inquiry in theology was not an end in itself, but a means of drawing out the religious principles and intuitions fundamental to all human beings. In particular, the new school argued that ministers could now act as great

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prophet-like figures who used their theological acumen and insight into human religious longings to unite England into a more comprehensive religious community.\textsuperscript{82}

Even though Martineau and the members of the new school responded in unique ways to Romanticism, they helped Victorian religion make the transition from the sectarianism and strife of the early nineteenth century to the relatively non-dogmatic, sentimental religion of the mid-Victorian period. The growing confidence in the government’s ability to manage religious affairs after 1850 helped cool disputes among Church parties.\textsuperscript{83} At the same time, Victorian intellectuals embraced a creed that minimized dogmatic belief and emphasized the cultivation of character and the fulfillment of social duties and obligations to others.\textsuperscript{84} They further agreed that the best way to inculcate such behavior was through education of the emotions and feelings, particularly the noble emotions of admiration, hope and love. It was the job of writers and educators to extend the range of students’ sympathies by providing ideals and heroes who would draw out those feelings.\textsuperscript{85} The non-religious sources of such beliefs are well known. In fact, a sense of moral rectitude often motivated those who refused to subscribe to articles of faith. As Alfred Tennyson wrote when mourning Arthur Hallam, “There lives more faith in honest

\textsuperscript{82} The figure of the prophet was immensely important in Romantic thought. See M. H. Abrams, \textit{Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature} (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971), 12, 134-140, 375.

\textsuperscript{83} See Turner, \textit{John Henry Newman}, 610 for the failure of the Oxford Movement in the early 1840s to recognize the success of Church reform in the 1830s. For the cessation of Evangelical secessions from the Church of England after 1850, see Carter, 391-5.

\textsuperscript{84} Collini, \textit{Public Moralists}, 60-118.

\textsuperscript{85} Houghton, 263-304.
doubt," Believe me, than in half the creeds." In his study of the "public moralists" who guided Victorian public discussions, Stefan Collini highlights the role John Stuart Mill played in the 1860s as the inspiration for a generation of writers and journalists. Yet, the religious sources of this "public moralism" are relatively underexplored, particularly the role of Nonconformist intellectuals.

In this dissertation, I argue that British Unitarians developed liberal religious ideas--such as mythic interpretations of the Scriptures and critiques of miracles--in order to reshape their Nonconformist heritage of religious liberty and negotiate the twin challenges of sectarianism and growing social and political responsibility. In essence, Martineau and his allies wished to develop new forms of knowledge that would help religious leaders cope with the threats to freedom of conscience in an increasingly pluralized religious marketplace. In nineteenth-century Europe, as the authorities and structures of ancien régime Europe broke down, both new nation states and religious denominations emerged, raising the problem of religious pluralism. England was no exception. The Industrial Revolution brought together large numbers of people outside the traditional parish boundaries of the Church of England, giving the space for a variety of new, evan-


gelical groups to flourish. Religious groups of all kinds began to consolidate their institutional power and resources to compete for converts. Just as many politicians and commentators worried about the fitness of ordinary people to exercise increased political responsibility, James Martineau and the new school of Unitarianism feared that competition for followers in the religious marketplace would make religious groups captive to the whims of the marketplace and, thereby, destroy the possibility of free religious inquiry. These Unitarians focused their criticism on contemporary uses of religious doctrine to set up exclusive groups. Many of the innovations associated with the “secularization of the European mind,” such as Biblical criticism and developmental approaches to science, sprang out of a concern about ethics and politics triggered by the assumption of new positions of political responsibility after the reforms of the early 1830s.

The argument proceeds in five chapters. Chapter Two contends that, although early-nineteenth-century Nonconformist campaigns for the repeal of grievances, the abolition of the slave trade, reforms of the penal system and passage of Catholic Emancipation have attracted the most scholarly attention, some of the most central reasons for the split of the early-nineteenth-century Nonconformist alliance originated in lawsuits over Presbyterian chapels and trusts between 1818 and 1844 that raised fundamental questions of who actually was a Nonconformist. In 1836, when the Court of Chancery ruled that, because Unitarians had departed from the religious beliefs of their Presbyterian ancestors,

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90 For the radical concern about the character of the English people after the Reform Act of 1832, see Peter Mandler, *The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 39-52.

they were no longer entitled to chapels and trusts left for explicitly Christian purposes, the orthodox Dissenters ejected the Unitarians from the Protestant Dissenting Deputies and the General Body of Protestant Dissenting Ministers. Both sides argued that they adhered to the traditional Nonconformist principle of religious liberty but, in stating their cases, each side began to develop different interpretations of that principle. Some Nonconformists argued that this principle meant that all religious groups ought to be supported solely by their members’ voluntary offerings, while Unitarians and their orthodox allies maintained that the principle allowed free inquiry in matters of theology. The dispute was only resolved when Parliament passed the Dissenters’ Chapels Act in 1844, allowing Unitarians to keep chapels to which they could demonstrate twenty-five years’ title. In the chapel disputes, Nonconformist denominations touched by the evangelical revival began to make stricter doctrinal distinctions and to search for resources to carry out evangelization. The chapel disputes also indicate the tension that existed between Nonconformist traditions and the innovations of the evangelical revival. The Unitarians, who grew out of Nonconformity but had not been touched by evangelicalism, experienced that tension in its sharpest form.

Chapter Three argues that, in order to preserve religious liberty from sectarianism, James Martineau and other younger Unitarian ministers drew on Romanticism to produce a new approach to public life. Like many British intellectuals in this period, Martineau, Tayler, and Thom, were influenced by Romanticism. While some, such as the Anglican Thomas Arnold, emphasized an organic national church, the new school of Unitarianism used Romanticism’s emphasis on human freedom to critique claims of the need for exter-
nal authorities in religious matters. Similarly, like many of its Whig allies who became increasingly morally serious and turned from preoccupation with the constitution and corruption to moral self-regulation, the younger generation of Unitarians gave greater thought to the devotional resources of their religious beliefs.\textsuperscript{92} The struggle with evangelical Dissenters, that had shattered the gentlemanly-led reform movement of the early nineteenth century, had shown the new school the dangers of religious sectarianism.

Now, the new school began to examine those tendencies within their own traditions that had come down from Joseph Priestley. In 1833, Martineau contributed one of the first Unitarian critiques of Priestley’s ethics and psychology to \textit{The Monthly Repository}. He argued that Priestley had been skilled at detecting discrepancies between ideas but he had little appreciation for the distinctive principles of various disciplines, especially religion.

In his sermons and religious polemics of the 1830s, Martineau slowly began to investigate the roots of religious belief in human nature. He argued that true religious belief was not a reaction to external authorities and temporary changes but the direction of the natural human religious intuitions toward God. As part of this exploration of the internal evidences of religion, Martineau and the new school began to deprecate the value of miracles and other external evidences that had traditionally been employed to convince unbelievers. Rather than wrangle over the interpretation of passages from Scripture, Martineau and Thom attempted to show the spiritual superiority of Unitarianism in speaking to the human religious affections. Martineau, Tayler and Thom founded a new, non-

sectarian religious journal, *The Christian Teacher* (1836-1845). As their ideal, the new school proposed highly educated and professional ministers, modeled on the legal and medical professions. Martineau and Tayler hoped that through their training in Biblical criticism and religious philosophy, these ministers would be able to appeal to and move the human religious affections. Finally, Martineau, Tayler and Thom were active in Liberal politics during the 1830s, supporting the cause of non-sectarian religious education and fighting the anti-Catholic demagogue, Hugh M'Neile. Their religious theories supported the claims of the newly enfranchised Unitarians to exercise disinterested, responsible government at the local level.

Chapter Four charts how Martineau and the new school extended their critique of Priestleyan philosophy and investigation of the internal evidences of religion into a general renovation of mid-Victorian Unitarianism, particularly its seminary, Manchester New College (MNC). As evangelical Nonconformist attacks on Unitarian chapels gained force in the 1820s and 1830s, Unitarians had to decide how best to meet this threat. One group—led by Robert Brook Aspland, the son of a prominent follower of Priestley and Samuel Bache, minister at the Church of the Messiah, Birmingham—argued that Unitarians needed to return to their distinctive principles and arguments about the Scriptures. The new school of Unitarianism, as they quickly came to be called, maintained that the legacy of Priestley was itself part of the problem. As long as Unitarians insisted on engaging in sectarian debates over theology, they would incur sectarian attacks in return. After 1840, Martineau, Tayler and Thom sought to bring the approach to religious apologetics pioneered in the Liverpool Controversy and their higher conception of ministerial
duty into the key institutions of British Unitarianism: MNC and the BFUA. As professors at MNC, Martineau and Tayler reoriented the curriculum around philosophy of religion and Biblical criticism over the vociferous attacks of their opponents. They also inculcated in their students a sense of the dignity and importance of the ministerial vocation and, in doing so, trained a generation of municipal leaders.

Chapter Five argues that Martineau and the new school used their editorship of the quarterlies, *The Prospective Review* (1845-54) and *The National Review* (1855-64), to draw out some of the religious longings in recent departures from religious orthodoxy and propose a new national religious community. The new school of Unitarianism did not consider itself simply a radical movement within Unitarianism but saw itself as part of a wider intellectual trend in mid-Victorian Britain. Through their familiarity with many of the mid-Victorian doubters of religious orthodoxy, Martineau, Tayler and Thom sensed that, like themselves, others were growing disenchanted with the demands of religious orthodoxy. In *The Prospective Review* and *The National Review*, they attempted to bring out the religious yearnings present in these doubts and forge them into a more coherent and positive faith. In fact, the new school of Unitarianism sought to use new developmental approaches to science to describe natural human religious intuitions. In their essays and reviews, Martineau, Tayler and Thom argued that new discoveries in science and Biblical criticism would help unveil the workings of natural human religious intuitions. With these natural human religious capacities in clear sight, sectarian disputes over doctrine could be marginalized and the Church of England could be enlarged.
Although Martineau gained a great deal of fame as an essayist, the failure of *The National Review* in 1864 foreshadowed his difficulties in communicating his full vision of a reformed British religious life to a wider audience. Chapter Six argues that Martineau’s contrasting fame as an apologist for theism and failure as a religious reformer reflect the decline of a distinctive Nonconformist identity in these years. Although the end of the nineteenth century was the golden age of the “Nonconformist Conscience,” this phrase actually refers to broadly evangelical concerns about the moral health of society, rather than to distinctively Nonconformist programs such as religious liberty and disestablishment, which lost steam after the 1870s. By the late 1860s, Martineau’s earlier associates, Tayler and Thom, had largely retired from their public careers. He gained his greatest success as a defender of theism and penned some of the most widely respected replies to John Tyndall and Herbert Spencer, even winning an invitation from prominent Broad Churchmen to join the Metaphysical Society (1872-1881), a non-denominational society that discussed science and religion, but he never again gained the forum for his views that he had had with *The National Review*. In 1866, when he applied for the vacant post of Professor of Moral and Mental Philosophy at the University of London, he was defeated by the young disciple of J. S. Mill, George Croom Robertson, on the grounds that no religious believer could adequately fulfill the duties. In 1869-71, after the agreement that the B. F. U. A. needed to be replaced by a non-doctrinal religious union, Martineau and Tayler founded the Free Christian Union. Although it gathered a great deal of

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interest in its early months, the Free Christian Union never coalesced into an adequate religious body, largely because it did not attract the interest of the younger academic liberals then coming to prominence. Moreover, Martineau’s further efforts to create a liberal religious union (1887-88) gathered virtually no support.

Increasingly, the Nonconformist social and political institutions that would have supported Martineau’s projects were weakening and losing their coherence. After the economic difficulties of the 1880s, Nonconformist congregations dedicated to civic improvement began to encounter serious difficulties in maintaining their denominations on a strictly voluntary basis. As resources dried up, once dynamic and active congregations had to rein in their charitable work and activism. Similarly, by the 1890s, the mid-Victorian generation of dedicated, self-sacrificing municipal leaders who had made their chapels sites of civic reform and activism were passing from the scene; in their place came a generation with broader prospects and less active commitment to their native towns. At the same time, national institutions were coming to dominate British intellectual and educational life. The academic liberals of the 1860s had made the ancient universities from seminaries into training grounds for public-spirited administrators and writers. Nonconformists of all denominations increasingly educated their children at these prestigious institutions. In the 1880s, Unitarians decided to move MNC to Oxford,


95 Simon Gunn, The Public Culture of the Victorian Middle Class: Ritual and Authority and the English Industrial City, 1840-1914 (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2000), 187-200; See Dr. Williams’ Library (DWL) 24.153.66 (20 April 1892, J. H. Thom to Martineau) in which Thom laments the Renshaw Street congregation’s decision to move to the suburbs.

despite Martineau’s pleas to remain faithful to the principle of free inquiry in theology.

Thus, Martineau’s contrasting success and neglect in the late nineteenth century indicates the paradoxical success of the Anglican Church in associating itself with the emerging national British educational and cultural institutions.  

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97 Grimley, 15.
Chapter 2: Protestant Dissent and the Conflicting Legacies of Religious Liberty: From The Restoration (1660) to The Dissenters’ Chapels Act (1844)

I. Introduction

James Martineau and Victorian Unitarians inherited from their forebears a strong legacy of commitment to religious liberty. Admittedly, people have denied the Trinity virtually from the moment the doctrine was articulated, but the organized religious denomination grounded in that belief arose only in the late eighteenth century as Dissenters reentered public life in order to maintain freedom of religious discussion against the subscription requirements of the Church of England. Before that, in the midst of the theological and political struggles generated by the English Reformation, only a few, isolated souls—such as John Biddle—had denied the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity became a matter of public debate after the Glorious Revolution, when both Churchmen and Dissenters grappled with the philosophy of John Locke. Stimulated by Samuel Clarke’s *Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity* (1712), which, in Lockean fashion, compared the idea of the Trinity with the Biblical evidence that supported it, Latitudinarians appeared in the Church of England and English Presbyterians refused to close the discussion. These groups might have discussed doctrine quietly enough, but for the intellectual, social and political changes of the late eighteenth century that spurred believers of all types to greater activism. Influenced by David Hartley’s extension of Locke’s theory of the association of ideas into an account of the origins of all knowledge and human personality in sense perceptions, Anglican Latitudinarians argued that the progress of knowledge required free discussion of all matters, including the Trinity. Similarly, Joseph Priestley, a Congregationalist minister in Leeds, believed in the progress of knowledge but also ex-
tended David Hartley’s materialist metaphysics into a powerful argument that because no soul could exist without matter, Jesus Christ was not a pre-existent being but a human being. In the 1770s, 1780s and 1790s, Priestley and the Latitudinarians directed their zeal for free inquiry against the religious and political authorities who refused to relax the subscription requirements for clergy. By 1800, “Rational Dissenters,” as they were known, had woven together a network of chapels, colleges and periodicals sympathetic to their efforts to defend religious liberty against the corrupt alliance of civil and ecclesiastical power.

Martineau, Tayler, and the generation of Unitarians who came of age in the 1830s, however, had to rethink their support for religious liberty in the face of a serious of vicious chapel and trust disputes between 1816 and 1844.\(^1\) While some Dissenters were questioning the doctrine of the Trinity, most Dissenting denominations were reversing their slow eighteenth-century declines and actively proselytizing the British people. Whereas Rational Dissenters used Locke’s philosophy to reconsider their religious doctrines, orthodox Dissenters used Lockean epistemology to argue that firm knowledge of salvation was possible, thereby forging the fading Puritan tradition into a more activist, populist, and mission-oriented faith. Between 1770 and 1820, Rational Dissenters and evangelical Dissenters could often stand together for religious liberty against an oligarchical ancien régime based on an alliance of Church and State. By 1820, however, the demands of free inquiry and the financial and theological requirements of evangelization were fostering competing visions of religious liberty, hitherto a source of unity among

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\(^1\) Harris Manchester College, Oxford (HMC), MS V. D. Davis 1, 44 (James Martineau to V. D. Davis, 22 December 1891).
Dissenters. Unitarians cast religious liberty in terms of freedom of thought, while orthodox Dissenters understood religious liberty as freedom of action and organization. According to the orthodox principle of Voluntarism, all religious denominations ought to be supported by the free choice and free contributions of their members. This chapter shows that scholarly discussions of the split of the Dissenting political interest by the 1830s have not paid close enough attention to the internal disputes over Presbyterian chapels and foundations between 1816 and 1844. The break up of early-nineteenth-century Dissenting political groups in 1836 was not just a matter of political tactics, but a complex argument about the history and identity of Dissent. Dissenters were asserting their presence in British life, but could not agree on how their principle of religious liberty--so effective in critiquing the injustices of the Church-State alliance--could positively reshape British political and religious institutions.

II. The Enlightenment Transformation of the Puritan Legacy

Up to the mid-eighteenth century, Protestant Dissent existed within the parameters set down by the legacies of Puritanism. In the aftermath of the Restoration, the English state had instituted an oath to The Book of Common Prayer and the Thirty-Nine Articles. The groups who dissented from these conditions ranged from Presbyterians, who believed in church government through regional synods, to Independents, who held that each congregation must be self-governing, and Baptists and Quakers, who believed that the Holy Spirit worked much more directly on individual believers. To further regulate Dissent, the government strictly limited the number of people who could assemble for religious purposes outside the Church of England (Conventicle Act, 1664) and the
movements of Dissenting ministers (The Five Mile Act, 1665). Although these groups disagreed on many matters of belief, the common experience of persecution brought them closer together. Dissenters were generally members of the middle class, ranging from wealthy merchants to lower middle class shopkeepers, who fell outside the established patronage networks.² By the mid-eighteenth century, only a handful of aristocrats supported Dissent.³ Although they were especially prominent in London and Lancashire (at over 5%), Dissenters were spread fairly evenly across the country (around 3% of the population).⁴ In the late seventeenth century, Presbyterians were the wealthiest, most highly educated, and most socially prominent Dissenters and took the lead in political and religious causes.⁵ After the Glorious Revolution, Dissent settled into a fairly quiet existence. Through the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK, 1699) and the Society for the Promotion of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG, 1701), the Church of England combated heterodoxy and reinforced its hold on the people of England.⁶ Dissenters, by contrast, maintained the Puritan tradition of introspection, concentrating on working out their salvation through their “personal dealings with the Lord.”⁷ In the 1690s, one attempt to unite Dissenters for political action fell apart quite quickly over

² Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters, volume I: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 353. Yet even if the absolute top of society was not represented, surviving pew rent records of congregations suggest that each congregation had a local elite who led and governed the humbler class. See Watts, I, 356.

³ Ibid., 359-60.

⁴ Ibid., 272-276.


⁷ Spurr, 258-9.
questions of theology and church order. In 1732, the congregations of Protestant Dissenters within ten miles of London created the Protestant Dissenting Deputies, a group that worked quietly through the patronage networks of Robert Walpole’s government to police the limited toleration granted in 1689 and to repeal the laws preventing Dissenters from holding political office.

By the 1730s and 1740s, the deepening influence of Lockean philosophy was disturbing this early-eighteenth-century quiescence and fostering new forms of belief, cooperation and activism. Taking their lead from Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), Anglicans and Dissenters broke Christian doctrines—especially the Trinity—into the simplest pieces of evidence, paving the way for what came to be called Rational Dissent. By the late eighteenth century, influenced by David Hartley’s development of Locke’s theory of the association of ideas into an account of the universe linked by uniform cause and effect, many Rational Dissenters began to urge the Established Church to open itself to free inquiry and relax subscription requirements. Yet, at the moment in the 1770s when Rational Dissenters were coalescing into Unitarianism, orthodox Dissent was changing as well. Using Lockean psychology, many orthodox Dissenters began to justify the arguments of revivalists that human beings could have assurance of their conversion. Thus, as it campaigned for greater intellectual freedom, the

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8 Watts, I, 289-97.

nascent Unitarian movement found itself allied with enormous numbers of the poorly educated but ardently orthodox lower classes.

Rational Dissent emerged as groups and individuals from across the eighteenth-century religious spectrum--Anglican Latitudinarians such as Theophilus Lindsey, Dissenters such as Joseph Priestley and Richard Price, and Presbyterian congregations throughout the country--came together to protest limits on theological free inquiry. Although there had been Anglican Latitudinarians in the seventeenth century, the origins of eighteenth-century Latitudinarianism can be found in Samuel Clarke’s *Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity* (1712), an exhaustive consideration of Scripture that endorsed the Arian position that Jesus was a divine being but not the equal of God the Father. Clarke found his promising clerical career cut off, but many fellow questioners still found secure spots within the Church of England, particularly at Peterhouse, Cambridge under the chancellorships of the Duke of Newcastle (1748-68) and the Duke of Grafton (1768-1811) and the patronage of Edmund Law (1703-1787), master of Peterhouse and later bishop of Carlisle. Among Dissenters, Presbyterians--with their emphasis on a learned ministry--took the lead in criticizing received doctrines. In 1718, when pressed to discipline two ministers who had refused to affirm their belief in the Trinity as a test of membership, the Presbyterians gathered at Salter’s Hall simply reaffirmed the Bible as the rule of faith. Presbyterians were content to simply loosen doctrinal standards, but the renegade Congregationalist, Joseph Priestley, first trumpeted Unitarianism in his *Theological Repository* series between 1768-1771. As minister at Mill Hill chapel, Leeds (1767-1773),
Priestley began to make connections with Latitudinarians in the Yorkshire circle around Francis Blackburne, Archdeacon of Cleveland (1705-1787).

While Anglican Latitudinarians found reasonably comfortable places within the Established Church in the first half of the eighteenth century, the changing political landscape after 1760 radicalized them. From the time of Samuel Clarke and Bishop Benjamin Hoadley onwards, Latitudinarians found favor by supporting the revolutionary settlement of 1688 and, later, the Hanoverians. At Cambridge under the chancellorships of the Duke of Newcastle (1748-68) and the Duke of Grafton (1768-1811), Edmund Law cultivated an extensive network including John Jebb, Henry Liddell, Henry Cavendish, James Lowther, Sir William Meredith, George Tierney and Capel Lofts. Similarly, Archdeacon Francis Blackburne of Cleveland cultivated connections with William Paley and Richard Watson. The Cambridge graduates Theophilus Lindsey, John Disney and William Frend married Blackburne’s step-daughter, daughter and grand-daughter respectively. The favor of George III toward the Tories increasingly closed off opportunities for preferment after 1760. The beginning of Latitudinarian radicalization came in 1766 when Blackburne published The Confessional, an argument against clerical subscription to specific doctrinal articles. In this long-meditated tract, Blackburne used David Hartley’s theory of associationism to argue for the unity of truth, thereby destroying the traditional Latitudinarian distinction between essential truths of the Christian faith and secon-


dary matters. Without this distinction, many of Blackburne’s followers became much more open about their beliefs than previously. Blackburne went back to the seventeenth-century Anglican Thomas Chillingworth and proposed that clerics simply affirm that the Scriptures were the Word of God. In the aftermath of the controversy over publication, Blackburne led the Feathers’ Tavern meeting (July 1771) that drew up a petition against subscription. Theophilus Lindsey, Vicar of Catterick, rode over 2000 miles in pursuit of signatures.

Like members of Blackburne’s circle, Priestley was driven toward activism by David Hartley’s associationism. Priestley formulated and loudly proclaimed a thoroughgoing Unitarianism based on a potent combination of Hartley’s necessitarianism and searching Scriptural criticism. As a student at Daventry Academy, Priestley read Hartley’s Observations on Man (1751) and accepted the necessitarian argument that all beliefs and actions are formed out of previous sense impressions and combinations of impressions; the entire universe followed a course superintended by God’s Providence. Priestley also formulated his own theory of matter in which the balance of forces of at-

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traction and repulsion determined the various states of matter. There was no longer any need to posit a distinction between spirit and impenetrable matter, and no ground to argue Christ's pre-existence. While such materialism might seem anti-religious, Priestley professed that God had providentially arranged the entire universe so that the pleasures and pains of life inculcated virtuous behavior. Though merely human, Christ was commissioned by God to give human beings knowledge of the eternal rewards and punishments sanctioning human behavior; the miracles he performed proved his commission. The necessitarian belief in a universe governed by immutable laws seemed to promise individuals a unique mastery of their circumstances. Secure in their knowledge of the laws of human nature, Unitarians had the duty to use scholarship, journalism and debate to break down barriers to free discussion of the confused laws and institutions of England that seemed designed for little more than preserving a useless elite in its privileges. Something of the extraordinary nature of Priestley's beliefs can be gathered from his reaction to the burning of his laboratory in Birmingham in 1792:

You and I, Sir, rejoice in the belief, that the whole human race are under the same wholesome discipline, and that they will all derive the most valuable advantages from it, though in different degrees, in different ways, and at different periods; that even the persecutors are only giving the precedence to the persecuted, and advancing them to a much higher degree of perfection and happiness; and that they must themselves undergo a more severe discipline

16 Joseph Priestley, Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit. To which is added the history of the philosophical doctrine concerning the origin of the soul, and the nature of matter: with its influence on Christianity, especially with respect to the doctrine of the pre-existence of Christ, 2 vols., second edition (Birmingham: Pearson and Rollason, 1782), I, 17-18.

17 Joseph Priestley, Additional Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever, in Answer to Mr. William Hammon (Birmingham: Pearson and Rollason, 1782), 44.

18 Webb, Harriet Martineau, 88.
than that which they are the means of administering to others.
With this persuasion, we cannot but consider every being
and every thing in a favorable light. Every person with
whom we have any connexion is a friend, and every event
in life is a benefit, while God is equally the father, and the
friend of the whole creation.\textsuperscript{19}

In no branch of public life did Priestley's natural philosophy raise more
controversy than in the realm of religion and theology. For Priestley and his followers,
the greatest bulwark of privilege among British institutions were theological orthodoxies
that prevented free discussion. As with all matters, they began with the psychology of
Locke and Hartley. They compared complex theological ideas--such as the Trinity--with
the words of the Bible.\textsuperscript{20} They concluded that the Trinity--understood as three divine
persons with the same nature--had no support in Scripture.\textsuperscript{21} In fact, the Bible contained
many examples of Christ treating God the Father as a superior being.\textsuperscript{22} If the doctrine of
the Trinity were swept away, the absurd doctrine of Christ's atoning death for sins would
be done away with and the whole structure of superstitious religion would crumble.\textsuperscript{23} To
support free discussion of the real meaning of the Bible, Priestley began, and his
successors finished, \textit{The Improved Version of the Scriptures} (1806), a translation of

\textsuperscript{19} Joseph Priestley, \textit{An Appeal to the Public on the Subject of the Riots in Birmingham, to which are added
Strictures on a Pamphlet, entitled "Thoughts on the late Riot at Birmingham," second edition (Birmingham:
J. Thompson, 1792), xxi-xxii.

\textsuperscript{20} Schofield, 186-88.

\textsuperscript{21} Corsi, \textit{Science and Religion}, 23, which argues that the entire orthodox--Unitarian debate in the early
nineteenth century took place within a "Lockean framework," in which each side attempted to show that
the other's doctrines misinterpreted Biblical revelation.

\textsuperscript{22} [Joseph Priestley], \textit{An Appeal to the Serious and Candid Professors of Christianity by a Lover of the
Edward Whitfield, 1850; first edition, 1814), 65. A typical example of a Scriptural proof of Unitarianism
would be 1 Corinthians 8:6: "To us there is but one God, the Father."

\textsuperscript{23} [Priestley], \textit{Appeal by a Lover of the Gospel}, 8-9.
Griesbach’s edition of the Greek texts that made clear that the doctrines of the Trinity and the Atonement were not in the Bible. By the generation after Lindsey and Priestley, Unitarian ministers—especially Robert Aspland, Thomas Belsham and John Kentish—had produced a highly developed system of Scriptural citation and arguments against the Trinity.24

Because Priestley thought that Christ was an ordinary human being, he did not accept the orthodox position that Christ came to redeem human beings from Original Sin but, instead, contended that God chose Christ to promulgate the moral law and provide an ethical example. Because he did not believe Christ came to bring the sacramental means of salvation, Priestley developed a radically new conception of the Church and its place in society, emphasizing its status as a man-made society for limited ends. Thus, Priestley vigorously criticized those, such as Edmund Burke, who held that society needed established churches. Religion was God’s way of providing the proper ethical incentives to human beings; religious establishments tied religion to temporal interests and, thereby, perverted the system of ethical incentives.25 Similarly, Priestley criticized the aristocratic system for encouraging idleness and luxury rather than fostering moral progress through the development of human faculties in commerce and free conversation.26 By rejecting

24 A typical example is John Kentish, Notes and Comments on Passages of Scripture, 2 vols. (London: John Chapman, 1844), which consists of short expositions of passages showing how they can be interpreted in simpler and more rational ways than in orthodox doctrine. These were published in The Monthly Repository in the first thirty years of the nineteenth century and collected later. For a study of Kentish’s work and its contradictions, see Kennedy, “John Kenrick,” 131-32.


the common eighteenth-century concern that commerce and prosperity brought their own unique problems with them, Priestley sided with the commercial middle classes.\textsuperscript{27}

Therefore, Priestley could consistently campaign for the repeal of penalties against Dissenters but not protest the class distinctions within congregations.\textsuperscript{28}

By the 1770s, Latitudinarian Anglicans, disgruntled Dissenting intellectuals and various Presbyterian congregations were building an increasingly formidable network. In 1774, after the Feathers Tavern petition was rejected, ten clergymen left the Church of England. The most prominent of them, Theophilus Lindsey, founded a chapel at Essex Street, London. Although Lindsey identified the chapel as “Protestant Dissenter,” he catered to an Anglican circle and remained deeply involved in Anglican issues.\textsuperscript{29} Lindsey used Samuel Clarke’s revised, non-Trinitarian liturgy, a significant distinction at a time when few Dissenting congregations used liturgies. In addition, Lindsey preferred to have ex-Anglican ministers at Essex Street.\textsuperscript{30} At various times in his ministry, the congregation included Benjamin Franklin, Lord Despenser, the Duke of Grafton, Charles James Fox (the ex-prime minister), the Duke of Norfolk, and Lord Shelburne.\textsuperscript{31} Finally, Lindsey remained concerned with the religious grounds of Establishment. Along with the barrister Michael Dobson, Andrew Kippis and John Jebb, he founded the Society for Pro-


\textsuperscript{29} Ditchfield, \textit{Theophilus Lindsey}, 7-8.

\textsuperscript{30} Andrews, 43-4.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 45.
moting Knowledge of the Scriptures in 1783. Before Jebb’s death in 1786 ended the enterprise, they published several original pamphlets and republished many others in support of Unitarianism and critical of religious establishments, most notably Priestley’s *Theological Repository* (1768-1771).

At the same time as they were attracting attention for their views in the metropolis, Lindsey and his associates were making Essex Street Chapel the focal point of a national network of sympathetic Dissenting chapels. Typically, these were Presbyterian chapels in which the minister and congregation had gradually--almost imperceptibly--moved from orthodoxy to Arianism and beyond in the course of the eighteenth century. By the 1780s and 1790s, the members of once Puritan chapels had shed their strictness as economic growth expanded opportunities for leisure and cultural pursuits. Most significantly, they also turned their attention to political pursuits. Though seemingly well-integrated into society, they were profoundly aware of past persecutions.\(^{32}\) The radical Unitarian critique of corruption found fertile ground in this milieu of “gentlemanly Dissent.”\(^{33}\) Furthermore, close-knit family circles played a crucial role in religious education and, by preserving memories of past persecutions, reinforced the Dissenters’ sense that their place in society would only be secure when the corrupting alliance of religious and political power was smashed.\(^{34}\) Thus, in the 1780s, many ministers and congregations almost naturally took up the cause of constitutional reform. George Walker, the Arian minister of High Pavement chapel, Nottingham, wrote for radical publications in

\(^{32}\) Seed, “Gentlemen Dissenters,” 315-16.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 317.

\(^{34}\) Ibid., 322; Andrews, 1-5.
the Midlands during the 1790s and was active in anti-slavery circles when he moved to Manchester.\textsuperscript{35} The Manchester Constitutional Society--well-filled with members of Cross Street Chapel--chose two Unitarians, Thomas Cooper and James Watt, Jr., as its representatives in Paris in April 1792.\textsuperscript{36}

In addition to circulating their publications and constructing chapel networks, Unitarians used Dissenting academies to spread unorthodox ideas and bind their followers together. These academies originated in the period after 1660 when Dissenters circumvented the religious tests of ancient universities by either traveling to Scottish and foreign universities or starting their own institutions. In the seventeenth century, the former fellows of Oxford and Cambridge who staffed the academies taught the standard classical curricula. As the eighteenth century progressed and distance from the ancient universities grew, teachers began to abandon Latin for English and incorporate contemporary subjects, especially in natural philosophy. At Daventry, Priestley read Descartes, the Cambridge Platonists, Locke and many contemporary developments in Newtonian science.\textsuperscript{37} Allowances must certainly be made for the relatively small numbers of students at these academies, but the freedom from subscription to creeds and willingness to encourage debate made a lasting contribution to the continuation of a scholarly Dissenting ministry in the eighteenth century. As the experience of many students of Doddridge’s Academy at Daventry shows and Joseph Priestley’s own experiences at its successor suggest, such an education could be a memorable experience.


\textsuperscript{36} Andrews, 124.

\textsuperscript{37} Schofield, 41.
In the late-eighteenth century, more orthodox Dissenters began to stem the tide of Rational Dissent in their academies with subscription requirements. Members of the chapel and publishing networks that supported Rational Dissent began to found their own academies as early, more liberal academies shut their doors. Often, these newer academies were quite closely involved in radical political causes. Hackney College, founded near London in 1786 after the demise of Warrington Academy, began with a great deal of support—financial and intellectual—but alienated it all in the early 1790s with loud support for the increasingly radical phases of the French Revolution. Manchester College (founded 1785) originated in equally progressive circles—Cross Street chapel, the Anti-Slave Trade Committee of Manchester and the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society. Most of its teachers and students were very sympathetic to those activities. On the college’s faculty were many self-avowed radicals—including Thomas Barnes and George Walker. Thomas Percival, its leading financial supporter in its early years, was involved in all three radical political groups. Although Unitarians supported political radicalism more than most Dissenters did, Manchester College avoided the fate of Hackney College by linking its radicalism to anti-slavery.

While the influence of Lockean philosophy encouraged departures from religious orthodoxy, other Dissenters used those ideas to give ordinary, uneducated people increased confidence in their spiritual perceptions, creating a mass movement. In the 1730s and 1740s, ministers across the North Atlantic took stock of the simultaneous revivals

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38 The critic William Hazlitt was one of its students. See A. C. Grayling, The Quarrel of the Age: The Life and Times of William Hazlitt (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2000), 31-34, 41-43.


40 Ibid., 206, 212.
ranging from Jonathan Edwards' congregation in the Connecticut River valley to the
Wesley brothers' missions in England to Count Zinzendorf's estates in Central Europe,
and used the theories of John Locke to make sense of the quick conversions they had
witnessed.41 While Locke's religious beliefs are largely uncertain, his argument in the
Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1689) that all human knowledge originates in
the senses spurred many Protestants to consider how they might clarify their own tradi-
tional practices of introspection. John Wesley used Locke's argument to support his ef-
forts to get behind theological systems and discern the workings of salvation in the hearts
of individuals. Wesley even went so far as to term his approach "experimental
religion."42 Furthermore, Jonathan Edwards used Lockean psychology to demonstrate
that conversions could be known with a reasonable degree of certainty.43 While many
elements of Puritan piety and practice did continue, certitude and conviction about con-
version transformed Puritan traditions of introspective piety directed toward discerning
personal salvation.44 With optimism about the ability to discern the state of one's soul
went what David W. Bebbington has called "an optimism of grace," a conviction that
God has offered salvation to all and ordered widespread missionary work to make good

41 Historians have increasingly realized that revivals were not local events but took place within an interna-
tional network of information and communication. See Susan D. O'Brien, "A Transatlantic Community of
Saints: The Great Awakening and the First Evangelical Network, 1735-1755," American Historical Review
91, no. 4 (October 1986), 811-832. The most important study of the links among different areas of revival
in the first half of the eighteenth century is W. R. Ward, The Protestant Evangelical Awakening (Cam-

42 Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Great Britain, 57-8.


44 Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Great Britain, 74.
that offer.\textsuperscript{45} Along with a commitment to empirical philosophy came a renewed emphasis on efforts to trace the workings of God in the universe through natural theology.\textsuperscript{46}

The conviction and confidence fostered by evangelical religion transformed Dissenting denominations—hitherto, gathered communities of the elect—into powerful missionary organizations, committed to actively carrying out God’s will in the world. Wesley’s strong commitment to the Church of England kept Methodists in the national church longer than otherwise, but by the end of the eighteenth century Dissenting denominations—especially Baptists and Congregationalists—were also reaping the benefits of evangelical style religion, drawing in larger numbers and appealing to less educated classes of society. Often, in the Established Church, evangelical ministries were unsustainable, for when an evangelical pastor died or departed, he might be replaced by an unsympathetic minister. For this reason, many Anglican parishes went over to local Dissenting chapels where the power of congregations to decide their own affairs for themselves, however attenuated by chapel cliques and oligarchies, made them more responsive to local needs than the hierarchies of patronage in the Established Church.\textsuperscript{47} By the later eighteenth century, large influxes of converts overwhelmed the cautiousness of earlier Dissenters—most notably Philip Doddridge—who had questioned the compatibility of evangelical revivals and Calvinist orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{48} Instead of producing learned divines, Dissenting academies reorganized their curricula and instruction to produce personnel for

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\textsuperscript{46} Bebbington, \textit{Evangelicalism in Great Britain}, 58-59.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 32-3.

\textsuperscript{48} Webb, “The Emergence of Rational Dissent,” 35-36.
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itinerant preaching and missionary work. As these missionaries travelled throughout
the country, they founded local meetings that looked much different from meetings estab-
lished in the seventeenth century. Those meetings had closely monitored their members’
spiritual status and doctrinal beliefs, the newly-founded meetings loosened the older
standards of membership to attendance. Perhaps even more significantly for the nine-
teenth century, in 1792, Baptists--struck by the possible millenarian implications of the
French Revolution--started the first of many overseas missions aimed at the conversion of
the world.

III. The Early Nineteenth-Century Dissenting Alliance

Although by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries their theologies had
diverged, Unitarians and orthodox Dissenters shared similar activist impulses. In the
1770s and 1780s, Dissenters broadened their attack on the alliance of Church and State
into a critique of the economic injustices of late-eighteenth-century England. The alli-
ance fell apart under government repression in the early 1790s, but aristocratic leaders
such as Smith exercised enough discretion to bring the two groups back together and win
major victories by the second decade of the nineteenth century. In 1811, the Dissenting
alliance quickly organized mass opposition to Lord Sidmouth’s Bill requiring registration
of Dissenting ministers. Moreover, their cooperation--often surprising and even

49 Deryck W. Lovegrove, *Established Church, Sectarian People: Itinerancy and the Transformation of Eng-
50 Ibid., 165.
51 Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire: British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700-
52 Michael A. Rutz, “The Politicizing of Evangelical Dissent, 1811-1813,” *Parliamentary History* 20, no. 2
counter-intuitive—helped sustain an entire network of reform movements, especially anti-slavery, criminal law reform and Bible publishing.

By criticizing the close link between Church and State, Dissenters became part of a wider movement protesting the corruption of much late-eighteenth-century British society. For these Dissenters, the American War was an instance of Parliament exercising unlawful authority over the colonies.\textsuperscript{53} The debates over the American War became a forum in which Dissenters pointed out the entire range of ways in which the Anglican state abused its power. The crux of their position was the principle of religious liberty. The authority of the Scriptures transcended the authority of Church and State and, therefore, limited and checked ecclesiastical authority.\textsuperscript{54} Because they were especially aware of their anomalous legal position, Dissenters protested the often very visible connections of state and ecclesiastical power in local corporations. Mandatory shop closures on royal fast days and requirements of communion in the Anglican Church before holding office violated the principle that people are responsible to God alone for their religious beliefs.\textsuperscript{55}

The chief Unitarian contributor to these efforts was John Jebb, the ex-Cambridge fellow, who founded the Society for Constitutional Information in 1780. In his view the close alliance of Church and State perverted moral and religious principle and fostered superstitious and unhealthy religious practices and beliefs. Only when the Scriptures were taught in their purity, apart from human institutions and interests—for instance, the main-


\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 135.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 175.
tenance of a priestly class--would people recognize true moral and religious principles.\textsuperscript{56} When criticizing the often closed nature of eighteenth-century English municipal government, these Dissenting ministers were also able to mobilize Anglican artisans, shopkeepers and laborers discontent with existing social conditions more generally. Their critique of authority in religion, though not necessarily connected with egalitarian politics, did suggest the power and legitimate right of common people to decide matters for themselves.\textsuperscript{57}

Although political crusades waned in the 1790s, in 1811, when Lord Sidmouth proposed licensing Dissenting ministers, he unintentionally provoked a firestorm of criticism. In the twelve days after the bill’s reading in Parliament on 9 May, Dissenters petitioned Parliament through Dissenting members and formed the Protestant Society for the Protection of Religious Liberty. Congregationalists, Baptists, Methodists and Unitarians all viewed Sidmouth’s proposals as an encroachment on the toleration granted them in 1688, for they had gradually come to think of the privilege of toleration granted by the state as a “natural right to liberty of conscience and religion.”\textsuperscript{58} In their alarm over the bill, all Dissenters, including even Methodists, who usually stood aloof from Dissent and politics in the early nineteenth century--produced over 700 petitions against the bill.\textsuperscript{59} When the government realized how badly it had miscalculated the Dissenting response, it withdrew the bill. To prevent disgruntled Dissenters from making common cause with

\textsuperscript{56} Gascoigne, 233.

\textsuperscript{57} Bradley, Religion, Revolution, and English Radicalism, 185.

\textsuperscript{58} Rutz, 194.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 197.
Catholics, the government extended toleration by repealing the Conventicle Act and the Five Mile Act in 1812 and the prohibitions against Unitarians in 1813.\textsuperscript{60}

The campaigns of the British evangelicals against the slave trade are well known. William Wilberforce and his associates emphasized the grave moral offense of the trade, the harm it inflicted on its victims, and its threat to the Providential moral order ordained by God.\textsuperscript{61} In a similar way, Unitarians extended their desire that people recognize and apply the “great principles of religion and morality” to support of involvement in campaigns to end the slave trade.\textsuperscript{62} Cooperation against slavery eased the tensions created by doctrinal disputes. Evangelicals wondered at the way William Smith could combine steadfast Unitarianism with an equally firm commitment to their favored cause.\textsuperscript{63} Smith himself was merely carrying on an established tradition of Unitarian anti-slavery that went back to Joseph Priestley. Similarly, the group of tutors and subscribers at Manchester College helped push the Manchester Anti-Slave Trade Committee toward greater radicalism in the 1790s.\textsuperscript{64} In the early years of the nineteenth-century, two prominent London Unitarians—the man of letters, Henry Crabb Robinson, and the poet, Anna Laetitia Barbauld—were among the most outspoken critics of slavery.\textsuperscript{65} In Liverpool, William

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 199.

\textsuperscript{61} Turley, 44.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 20-1.

\textsuperscript{63} Davis, 109-10; Turley, 86.

\textsuperscript{64} Ditchfield, “Manchester College and Anti-Slavery,” 196.

\textsuperscript{65} Turley, 85.
Roscoe and William Rathbone IV stood up to the interests of slave traders and merchants to campaign for abolition of the slave trade.66

Wilberforce's evangelical allies in Parliament--particularly Thomas Fowell Buxton--also employed arguments about the spiritual welfare of individuals in their campaign for reform of the criminal code. By the early nineteenth century, the English criminal code had such harsh penalties--including hanging for shoplifting--that it was known as "the bloody code."67 The harsh penalties the law inflicted actually made the problem of crime worse by deterring prosecution and fostering resentment among criminals.68 Expanding on this theme, the Unitarian Monthly Repository contended that such harsh penalties destroyed the distinction between serious and minor offenses.69 These harsh sentences lessened respect for the law, especially when juries witnessed judges struggling to mitigate harsh sentences. In addition, just as evangelicals were concerned about the moral effects of punishment, Unitarians believed that hanging criminals did away with possibilities for reformation.70 Building on Priestley's belief in the moral benefits of pain, Unitarians argued further that incarceration might allow a degree of pain that would be conducive to the reform of the criminal.71

66 Turley, 68.
67 Follett, 27-29.
68 Ibid., 89.
70 Ibid., 161-3.
Perhaps, most surprisingly, Unitarians and evangelicals could cooperate even in the field of religious evangelism. They worked together in the British and Foreign Bible Society, an effort to ensure that every person in the British Isles and the world owned a Bible in his or her native language. The problem of Bible printing came to light between 1802 and 1804 when the Religious Tract Society tried to coax the Anglican SPCK into printing more Welsh-language Bibles. Since evangelicals of all denominations considered private reading of Scripture essential to the formation of religious character, they formed a business venture to print and distribute copies of the Bible with the backing of such prominent evangelicals as the Anglican, William Wilberforce, the Methodist Adam Clarke, and the Lutheran C. F. Steinkopf. In order to protect itself from the SPCK's charges of association with Nonconformists, the Bible Society portrayed itself as a respectable business venture and disclaimed all missionary activities. As John Owen, the Society's Anglican secretary, remarked, sectarian considerations ought not to affect the publishing of the Bible any more than if the same members were underwriting an insurance policy.\(^{72}\) The group held its meetings at non-religious sites and had no prayers or sermons at its meetings. The group also introduced the new principle of licensing auxiliary groups in the provinces, quickly allowing the Society to expand into almost every province of England by 1814 and establish branches in America and continental Europe, including over 300 in Russia by 1824.\(^{73}\) Many observers--Churchmen and Nonconformist alike--praised the Society for promoting better relations among religious groups.\(^{74}\)

\(^{72}\) cited in Martin, 85.

\(^{73}\) Martin, 92.

\(^{74}\) Ibid., 94.
Churchmen, however, had their reservations about cooperating with those who did not believe in religious establishments. When these disputes boiled over during the attempt to start an auxiliary society at Cambridge, the Unitarian Monthly Repository came to the defense of the Bible Society and urged its fellow Unitarians to do the same, contending that Unitarians everywhere had the duty to support peoples’ right to examine the Scriptures for themselves.

IV. The Breakdown of the Alliance

Despite nearly forty years of cooperation, by the 1820s all Dissenters were beginning to reconsider these alliances in the face of the increasing costs of evangelization projects, increasing discomfort with the compromises in evangelizing necessary to remain part of the Church of England, and the increasingly vocal presence of Unitarians in Dissenting groups. In the heat of the Evangelical Revival, Dissenters embarked on a series of vigorous domestic and foreign missionary projects, often with little sense of the financial requirements; as several funds and projects went bankrupt, groups began to pay more attention to the careful allocation of funds. Similarly, radical evangelicals such as Edward Irving criticized the prevalence of interdenominational cooperation and began to emphasize that evangelism and personal conversion must take precedence over more worldly entanglements, even participation in the Church of England. By the early 1830s,


76 “Marsh and Clark on the Bible Society,” Monthly Repository, 7 (1813), 255-63.

77 D. W. Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Great Britain, 100. The secessions of John Nelson Darby and Edward Irving among many others are covered in Carter, Anglican Evangelicals.

78 Ward, Religion and Society, 97-98.
evangelical Dissenters in both Scotland and England were embracing Voluntarism, the position that all individuals must make a personal decision to join a church and all churches must be supported by the voluntary contributions of their members. As a matter of principle, these Dissenters thought that the established churches must be “liberated” from corrupting worldly alliances and associations with heretics. Finally, the leaders of the Unitarian press and colleges began to identify themselves with Priestley’s positions more closely, excluding Arians and harshly criticizing orthodox Trinitarians as “idolators.”

In addition, after the extension of toleration to Unitarianism in 1813, they began to identify themselves as Unitarians without reference to Protestant Dissent. Thus, the activism that brought Dissenters more prominently into public life in support of religious liberty also fostered contradictory tendencies that undermined cooperation and made religious liberty a source of disunity.

The progress in evangelization by the 1820s left these groups financially stressed, stress that required the formation of much more unified and efficiently-run denominations. Itinerant preaching—the most widespread form of evangelization around 1800—was relatively cheap. Yet voluntary organization made Dissenting finances quite unstable—sometimes changing drastically with deaths or departures in congregations.

Because evangelism took place on a local level, the craze for chapel building was often

79 The key figure in this transformation was Thomas Belsham, a close associate of Priestley and Lindsey’s successor at Essex Street. He systematized much of Priestley’s philosophy and associated Unitarianism with it. Despite his protestations to the contrary, he was a tireless and relentless controversialist. By the second decade of the nineteenth century, he was even anathematizing William Frend, one of the original Cambridge seceders in the 1780s. See “Letter from W. Frend,” *Monthly Repository* 10 (1815), 354-5 and “Mr. Belsham’s Reply to the Animadversions of the Rev. Reginald Heber,” *Monthly Repository* 11 (1816), 237-259.

80 Lovegrove, 157.
driven by local demands, leading to overextension by the 1820s. In 1819, as chapel mortgages increased, the Legalized Fund, a group insurance scheme for the widows of Methodist preachers, went bankrupt. By 1827-28, the Baptist Home Missionary Board was running a deficit of £131.\textsuperscript{81} Furthermore, as denominational identities strengthened, members began to prefer to worship in one place and inside, and, as different Dissenting groups settled down, they accorded greater importance to settled ministries and the pastoral function of ministers. New chapels and settled ministers required more money. Finally, meeting the demands of a rapidly growing denomination and the creation of adequate institutions required more personnel, more facilities to train them and more funds to support these operations.\textsuperscript{82} Orthodox Dissenters created the Baptist Union (1813) and the Congregational Union (1833) in order to coordinate and monitor all these activities.\textsuperscript{83}

At the same time as evangelicals were dealing with financial and institutional stresses, significant groups of them began to radicalize their theological beliefs and evangelization practices. The central figure in this transformation was Edward Irving, who criticized the worldliness and accommodation he saw in early-nineteenth-century evangelical leadership. In 1824, already known as a charismatic preacher, he delivered a three hour sermon before the London Missionary Society, criticizing it for weighing down the preaching of the Gospel with a worldly bureaucracy.\textsuperscript{84} Against this, Irving re-emphasized


\textsuperscript{82} Congregational Library (CL), H. a 10 (Haddfield to Joshua Wilson, 15 January 1832); Lovegrove, 160.

\textsuperscript{83} Against Helmstadter, who argues in “The Nonconformist Conscience,” that Victorian Nonconformity was characterized by a common evangelical consensus, Gerald Parsons maintains that the period was one of increasing denominational consolidation and organization. See “From Dissenters to Free Churchmen,” 110.

\textsuperscript{84} Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain, 78-80.
the Calvinistic belief in the gathered church of the elect in contrast with the nominal and fashionable Christians found in the Established Church. Eighteenth-century evangelicals were quite confident in their ability to discern their assurance of salvation, but Irving and his followers applied that empiricism even more strictly. Henry Drummond, the Vice-President of the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews, convened a series of conferences on his estate at Albury between 1826 and 1830 at which he and his followers discussed the prophecies of the end of the world and their implications for missionary efforts. While most evangelicals believed that the world would end after the universal preaching of the Gospel, Irving and his followers held that it would end unexpectedly, just as the Jewish dispensation ended suddenly. With a more literal treatment of the Bible went an emphasis on the reality of the Apostolic gifts. Thus, when Irving heard reports of speaking in tongues in rural Scotland, he accepted them and soon members of his own London congregation were speaking in tongues as well. These activities alarmed his superiors in the Church of Scotland and in 1833, they ejected him. Irving, however, maintained a large and fashionable following, who eventually built the neo-Gothic Catholic Apostolic Church in Gordon Square. If Irving and his followers seem hopelessly eccentric, they do, however, indicate the anxieties about the worldliness of the Church that plagued many evangelicals in these years.85

Unitarians’ similar confidence in their ability to discern the proper doctrines of Scripture drew them together and apart from their fellow Protestant Dissenters. Codifying Priestley’s associationism and materialist metaphysics, Unitarian controversialists

85 Carter, 29-30, 176-82.
deployed them against all orthodox believers, whether friend or foe. In their view, progress demanded that there be free and open discussion, out of which truth would emerge almost automatically. Thus, Unitarian controversialists and publicists—such as Thomas Belsham and Robert Aspland—relentlessly attacked belief in the Trinity and all attempts to establish opinions. As the denomination’s colleges and papers developed in the 1820s, Unitarians came to be more and more closely associated with Priestley’s metaphysical and scientific beliefs, especially his arguments for materialism and his denial of the soul, the pre-existence of Christ and human sin.

V. Religious Liberty Contested: The Struggle Over Presbyterian Chapels

Orthodox Dissenters and Unitarians were forced to confront the full magnitude of different understandings of the nature of Dissent when they contested the ownership of formerly Presbyterian chapels in the 1820s and 1830s. Disputes over chapels reflected imbalances and tensions among Dissenting groups quite well. As anti-Trinitarianism came to predominate among Presbyterians and evangelicalism among Independents and Baptists, many Presbyterian chapels lost members. The members who remained were usually descendants of the original founding members, but they held quite different beliefs. Many of these Presbyterian chapels had become quite wealthy over the years, further stoking the outrage of orthodox Nonconformists desperate to fund their own projects.

While few people noticed these changes in the late eighteenth century, denominational

consolidation, funding requirements and denominational statements of belief made doctrinal differences and chapels an increasing source of irritation. Resolving these disputes was no easy matter, for both sides quickly ratcheted up the stakes from the control of individual chapels to the nature of Dissent itself. On the one hand, Unitarians argued that they stood squarely in the tradition of Protestant Dissent. They allowed only the Bible as a rule of faith without reference to human creeds. In the process of interpreting the Bible, they had concluded that there was only one God, the Father, but, because they still dissented from the Church of England, they were entitled to these chapels and funds. Orthodox Dissenters, by contrast, argued that the founders of these chapels had intended to propagate specific doctrines—the Trinity in particular—and Unitarians had perverted those trusts. Although they were not Presbyterians, these orthodox Dissenters were entitled to the funds because their beliefs were substantially the same as those of the founders.

The disputes originated in a disagreement between the trustees and the minister of the Presbyterian chapel in Wolverhampton. In 1813, the trustees appointed James Steward as minister on a three year probation. Near the end of the period he became a Trinitarian and started to preach that doctrine from the pulpit. When the trustees asked him to leave, Steward sought the support of neighboring orthodox Dissenters, in particular Mr. Benjamin Mander, a trustee who had attended an Independent chapel after the Presbyterians appointed an Arian minister in 1781. In 1817, because his name was still on the trust deed, Mander supported Stewards’ claim to the pulpit on the grounds that the chapel was meant to support orthodox belief. After the trustees ejected Steward, refused him sight of
the trust deeds and even changed the locks on the chapel, he and Mander assembled a
mob and broke open the chapel. Finally, the dispute ended up in the court of Chancery.

The arguments by the two sides gravitated toward the issue of trustee rights and
duties. For Unitarians, the case was simply a matter of trustee governance. They argued
that the chapel was founded for the use of Protestant Dissenters and that, as duly elected
successors to the trustees, they were perfectly within their rights to decide how the wor-
ship was conducted. Furthermore, Mander’s long wait to press his claims cast doubt on
his real motives. The orthodox Dissenters argued that a majority of trustees could man-
age a trust but could not divert it from its original purposes. Sir Samuel Romilly, the
leading counsel for the orthodox Dissenters, argued that the perversion was quite obvious
because trusts could not support illegal activity and Unitarianism was illegal in the early
eighteenth century. The Unitarian argument from the principles of Protestant Dissent was
misleading because turning a lecture series supporting the Trinity into a series supporting
Unitarianism was undoubtedly a perversion of trust. Allowing a minister to preach Uni-
tarianism from the pulpit was no less a breach of trust. The Vice-Chancellor agreed with
the orthodox Dissenters. Under no circumstances could even a majority of trustees alter a
trust for the propagation of certain religious doctrines, no matter how their own views
had changed. Chapel trustees did not always mention the Trinity explicitly in trust deeds,
but they did recognize that their existence depended on legal toleration; thus, trustees
would not have thought their views at the time were in any way illegal. In his decision,
the Vice-Chancellor stated that money could not be left in trust for illegal activities, a

87 "Proceedings in Chancery with regard to the Meeting House at Wolverhampton, deeply affecting the
principle that threatened virtually all Unitarian chapels in Great Britain. For this reason, trustees were strictly limited in their rights, and "institutions of this kind must not be sacrificed to the changes of the persons in whom they are vested, who have no right over their charge but to perform their duty to the founders."^{88}

The orthodox Dissenters had a seemingly perfect weapon with which to strike anti-Trinitarians, but they actually disagreed over whether or not to pursue the case. After reading a triumphal account of the proceedings in the Congregational Magazine for January 1818, a Congregational Minister, James Robertson wrote to protest the seeming abandonment of Dissenting principles in favor of the tactics of the Established Church. According to Robertson, Dissent originated in the maintenance of the principle of religious liberty, the position that:

Religious responsibility can have respect only to God, the sole Lord of conscience, to whom, for his religious sentiments and practice, every man, or any body of men, to show a title to the right of dictation and control over their fellow-creatures in matters purely religious, it is the duty of every individual possessing a moral nature to resist such a claim; and on all occasions to assert and maintain the rights of religious profession as personal rights with which no other individual can be suffered to interfere.\(^{89}\)

For Protestant Dissenters, the Bible was the sole rule of faith and they must persecute no one for whatever doctrines he or she drew from it. The Wolverhampton chapel was not like other property because it belonged to the entire society worshipping there rather than the trustees or first generation. By using the courts, orthodox Dissenters were

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^{88} Ibid., 433, 434, 435, 437, 440, 441.

^{89} James Robertson, *Religious Liberty Applied to the Case of the Old Meeting House, John Street, Wolverhampton: including Remarks on the Conduct of the Editors of the Congregational Magazine; and the Resolution of the Congregational Board, 7 July* (London: Josiah Conder, 1818), 1.
using human authorities to define religious doctrine, and, however vociferously they might deny the fact, they were adopting the tactics of the Established Church. Bringing these suits might seem attractive but, by using the law as a standard of belief, Dissenters were putting themselves at risk. Blackstone--often cited as a legal authority--held that Dissent itself was a crime under common law. Furthermore, Robertson warned, as different doctrines--such as baptismal regeneration--were brought within the definition of orthodoxy, many Dissenters might find themselves at risk of prosecution.⁹⁰

The Congregationalist ministers--including a young John Angell James--argued that the denomination needed to maintain the integrity of its property for the sake of evangelization. Bringing a suit in Chancery was the only way to view trust deeds and determine the precise uses of the property.⁹¹ Such requests should not be seen as unusual. Lord Brougham's attempt to lead Parliamentary inquiries into the uses and abuses of charities had shown that all types of religious property were liable to abuse. As the overseers of the administration of trusts, courts were essential tools for investigating and discovering the proper uses of religious trusts. The Chancellor was not surreptitiously persecuting Unitarians or attempting to reinstate legal penalties through the law but merely "shewing that its professors being then proscribed by law, could not now be the legal proprietors, but that as Unitarians were then out of the protection of the Toleration Act, it was to be presumed, they were not the builders and founders of a place that was unquestionably placed within the provisions of that act." As corporate bodies, chapels main-

⁹⁰Ibid., 16, 20, 21, 46.
⁹¹Religious Liberty Not Infringed by the Proceedings in the Case of the Meeting House, John Street, Wolverhampton: An Appeal to the Public, in answer to the remarks of the Rev. James Robertson by the Dissenting Ministers who originally signed the Case: With an Appendix containing a detail of the Facts by Mr. C. Mander (London: Josiah Conder, 1819), 29.
tained their identity and set purpose irregardless of the beliefs of their members and were liable to court oversight.\textsuperscript{92}

As the Wolverhampton case proceeded through the appeals process, many Congregationalists remained divided over whether or not to institute more suits. In 1825, the Manchester solicitor and Independent, George Hadfield struck out on his own in spectacular fashion by publishing \textit{The Manchester Socinian Controversy}. The fact that the controversy happened in Manchester--previously a place of cooperation--indicates the increasing breakdown of friendly relations between orthodox and Unitarian Dissent. \textit{The Manchester Socinian Controversy} collected the articles and letters responding to a Unitarian banquet in honor of the Rev. John Grundy, then departing Cross Street chapel for Paradise Street chapel, Liverpool. In the course of several hours of toasting and speechmaking, Rev. George Harris, inspired to join the Unitarian ministry by Grundy, delivered a denunciation of the “spirit of orthodoxy” as a “slavish spirit” whose essence was the “prostration of the human understanding.”\textsuperscript{93} The orthodox Dissenters quickly responded through anonymous letters to the \textit{Manchester Gazette}. After a preliminary exchange of insults, the orthodox Dissenters quickly focused on the Unitarian ownership of once orthodox chapels, for them key evidence that Unitarian pretensions to social prominence and gentility were founded on lies and deceit.

While Hadfield’s hatred of heretical beliefs showed through the polemics quite clearly, he also placed the ownership of Unitarian chapels in the context of contemporary efforts to reform charitable endowments and Unitarian claims to the political and social

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 49, 52, 57, 66.

\textsuperscript{93} [George Hadfield], \textit{Manchester Socinian Controversy} (London: Francis Westley, 1825), 11.
leadership of Dissent. According to Hadfield, Unitarians' behavior at this banquet reflected their increasing openness, stridency, and noisy boasting of their preeminence among Dissenters. Yet, the lack of ladies at this banquet, the excessive toasting and the unprovoked attacks on other denominations showed just how far short Unitarians fell of their aspirations to gentility and leadership. Even sympathetic orthodox Dissenters wrote to Hadfield during the controversy, urging him to avoid terms such as "bragging, boasting, noisy system" lest he undercut the orthodox case and alienate potential supporters. George Harris and his attack on orthodox beliefs exemplified the minister who had rejected the label of "Dissenter" in favor of "Unitarian." By calling orthodox belief "slavish," Unitarians impugned their forebears who died for those same beliefs. Nevertheless, Unitarians were willing to hold the chapels of their orthodox forebears and usurp the inheritances for their own purposes. As Hadfield sharply put it, Unitarians were quite willing to renounce the beliefs of their forebears but not to renounce property dedicated to those beliefs. Hadfield surmised that Unitarian beliefs were so unattractive that they could make up for their lack of converts only by usurping the means of others. The Unitarians drove orthodox believers away from their very own chapels and diverted resources from the evangelization of Britain. No change of belief among the members of

94 [Hadfield], i, ii, iv, v.
95 CL, H. a. 2: (Slate to Hadfield, 7 December 1824).
96 [Hadfield], 15.
97 Ibid., ix.
98 Ibid., 29.
99 Ibid., 36.
100 Ibid., xlvii, 109.
a congregation could justify diverting resources from their proper purposes; as Hadfield put it, “trust property is not left to do what they please with it, but for purposes which are to be promoted by it.”\textsuperscript{101} If trustees were to be allowed to determine the uses of trusts, the stability of all property and society itself would be overturned.\textsuperscript{102}

Unitarians replied that their chapels had been founded for the use of Protestant Dissenters and, whatever their current beliefs, Unitarians were still Protestant Dissenters. The Unitarian correspondents in the Manchester Gazette used historical examples showing that they stood in the Dissenting tradition of non-subscription to creeds to buttress their original point that the chapels were governed according to the wishes of the congregation. They emphasized that the principle of Dissent had always been non-subscription to creeds. Their forebears of the seventeenth century had resigned from the Church of England rather than allow political authority to define religious belief; the current members of the chapels believed the same.\textsuperscript{103} To stress their belief in this principle, they signed their letters as “English Presbyterian” and “Nonconformist.”\textsuperscript{104} Unitarians believed that allowing for change in religious belief over time was common sense. When he heard of Hadfield’s accusations, Charles Wellbeloved, the principal of Manchester New College, was incredulous, suggesting that if all trust funds must be used according to the exact intentions of their founders, then Catholics might recover lands and funds

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 50.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., xxvi, 88.

\textsuperscript{103} Joseph Hunter, \textit{Letter from Joseph Hunter in reply to Dr. Pye Smith on the Right of Presbyterians to their Chapels} (London, 1825), 258.

\textsuperscript{104} Hadfield, 41.
lost at the Reformation.\textsuperscript{105} Furthermore, the orthodox Dissenters knew nothing of the histories of the chapels. The same congregation and its descendants had worshipped at the chapel for many years; there was no precise transition from orthodoxy to Unitarianism.\textsuperscript{106} Just as there was no clear line dividing Unitarians from their orthodox ancestors, so too the endowments grew from contributions by many different people over many different years. Unitarians returned the charge of want of liberality by accusing orthodox Dissenters of letting their greed get the better of their judgment.\textsuperscript{107}

By publishing the collected correspondence as the \textit{Manchester Socinian Controversy}, Hadfield made the status of Presbyterian chapels into a national cause. At the end of the correspondence, Hadfield added an appendix naming all the Unitarian chapels in England, Scotland and Wales with their dates of foundation.\textsuperscript{108} Hadfield decided to strike first not at single chapels but at the Lady Hewley charity, the richest fund for the support of Dissenting ministers and students in the North of England. It was created in 1710 by the will of Lady Sarah Hewley, a wealthy Presbyterian widow in Yorkshire, to support “poor and godly preachers of Christ’s Holy Gospel.” By 1829, when the suit was filed, a disproportionate amount of its income supported students at Manchester New College, a Unitarian school, and Rev. Charles Wellbeloved, its Principal and minister at St. Savior’s, York. The London minister, Joshua Wilson, brought suit on behalf of Highbury College, an ambitious new institution for training Independent ministers, that the denomination

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item\textsuperscript{105} HMC, MS Wood 1, 245 (14 November 1824, Charles Wellbeloved to George William Wood).
\item\textsuperscript{106} Hadfield, 38; Hunter, \textit{Reply to Dr. Pye Smith}, 259.
\item\textsuperscript{107} Hadfield, 38, 54.
\item\textsuperscript{108} CL, H a. 2 contains the enormous correspondence that Hadfield conducted in order to collect this information.
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was raising money to support. Although Independents already received the majority of grants from the charity, Hadfield argued with the cautious Wilson that Independent county union funds were already stretched and deserving ministers who held the same opinions as Lady Hewley were being denied funding.\textsuperscript{109} Hadfield was even prepared to brave the criticism of fellow Independents, rejecting pleas for compromise from those who had lost grants due to the lawsuits.\textsuperscript{110} Independents, he maintained, ought to be satisfied with nothing less than the entire charity. Even if a proportional distribution were proposed, Hadfield would press for a settlement recognizing the greater number of evangelization projects that Independents undertook.\textsuperscript{111}

The strategy of Hadfield and the other orthodox Dissenters was straightforward. They took publications of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association and compared them with Lady Hewley’s beliefs. The contrast was intended to show that the Unitarian trustees shared certain beliefs and that the Hewley Fund had been perverted from the wishes of its founder. Just as the newly founded Congregational Union and Baptist Union issued statements of belief, no matter how general and loose, the orthodox Dissenters undertook to discern the Unitarians’ beliefs from the publications of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association and the teachers at Manchester New College. Their crucial piece of evidence was the notorious Improved Version of the Scriptures, Priestley and his successors’ annotated translation of the Scriptures from Archbishop Newcome’s text. Orthodox believers reviled its alteration of all potential references to the doctrine of the

\textsuperscript{109} CL, H. a 10: (Hadfield to Joshua Wilson, 22 October 1824).
\textsuperscript{110} CL, H. a 2: (W. Vint to J. Wilson, 12 May 1832; Howell to J. Wilson, 16 August 1832).
\textsuperscript{111} CL, H. a 2: (Hadfield to J. Wilson, 14 September 1835).
Trinity. Without the doctrine of the Trinity, orthodox Dissenters argued, Unitarians could not be considered as teaching “Christ’s Holy Gospel,” because there was no need for Christ’s atoning sacrifice and the good news of salvation from sin.¹¹²

The Unitarians, by contrast, repeated that by acknowledging only the Scriptures without any doctrinal tests, they remained within the tradition of Protestant Dissent. Presbyterians had founded their chapels and Lady Hewley had founded her trust in order to secure Biblical worship without political and legal regulation.¹¹³ Because they acknowledged Scripture as their rule of faith, they were ministers of “Christ’s Holy Gospel” as designated in Lady Hewley’s will.¹¹⁴ Unitarians could state their argument quite simply, but few lawyers and members of the Established Church could understand the mass of detail and explanation marshalled to support the case.¹¹⁵ Charles Cooper, the attorney for the Unitarians, made Dissenting history the centerpiece of his closing speech in court, resulting in eighty-one printed ages.¹¹⁶ Cooper hoped that by showing that Dissenters had always allowed for doctrinal change, Unitarians would be clearly seen as lawful trus-


¹¹⁵ Ibid., 8.

tees of these chapels and charities. For the greater part of his speech, Cooper analyzed examples of Dissenting disagreement about doctrinal matters in the late seventeenth century.\(^{117}\) Even in the first generation after the Restoration, Presbyterians—led by Richard Baxter—were questioning Calvinist teachings on predestination and embracing Arminianism. It was almost certain that Lady Hewley knew of these discussions during her lifetime.\(^{118}\) By the 1690s, Dissenting ministers were probing the Scriptural evidence for the doctrine of the Trinity.\(^{119}\) While it was impossible to know Lady Hewley’s opinions on all these questions, Cooper pointed to indications that she did not condemn the speculation automatically. In her will, she designated the standard of belief as Bowles’ Catechism, which was not as particular and explicit on these matters as the Westminster Catechism of 1648. Its questions on the Trinity did not specify the exact relationship among the persons of the Godhead, allowing the possibility of Arian interpretations.\(^{120}\) Furthermore, the executor of Lady Hewley’s will, Mr. Hotham (d. 1756), had no qualms about taking Mr. Cappe, an early Unitarian, as his assistant.\(^{121}\) The Presbyterian Association, the Unitarian group coordinating resistance to these suits, suggested that the orthodox party were departing from the Dissenting tradition by demanding doctrinal tests. In fact, because the Independents gained so many converts in the Great Awakening, the pre-

\(^{117}\) *History, Opinions, and Present Legal Position*, 20.

\(^{118}\) Cooper, 23-4; Brooks, 43-44.


\(^{120}\) Cooper, 23-4; Stock, 24; *A Letter to the Right Honorable Lord Holland, on the Joint Opinion of Mr. Baron Alderson and Mr. Justice Patteson, and on the Judgment of Lord Lyndhurst, in the Case of Lady Hewley’s Trust* (London: Rowland Hunter, 1836), 25.

\(^{121}\) Cooper, 63; Stock, 39.
sent denomination was not really part of the Dissenting tradition, and, hence, they confused the nature of the chapel trust for those worshipping outside the Church of England with an institution for evangelization. 122

According to the Unitarians, the argument that the law of the time is a standard of belief was not flexible enough to account for religious change. Lady Hewley herself violated the law in the 1660s when she sheltered ejected ministers. 123 If this standard were applied strictly and consistently, many funds of the Established Church would have to be restored to the Catholics. 124 Furthermore, there was no wronged party in the chapel suits. There were no disruptions in the history of the chapels; the descendants of the original congregations still worshiped there. 125 Finally, the meaning of the toleration granted Unitarians was at stake. If successful, these suits would allow repealed legislative penalties to be reinstated through the courts. 126 Dissenters ought to be especially careful of making the courts the arbiters of their beliefs if they valued their tradition of forming their doctrines for themselves.

The judges who decided these cases and the appeals interpreted the Unitarian case as an attempt to evade the fact that anti-Trinitarians were a denomination. The Vice-Chancellor decided so decisively against the Unitarians that he allowed orthodox Dis-

122 History, Opinions, and Present Legal Position, 30, 35.

123 Cooper, 71.


125 History, Opinions, and Present Legal Position, 26.

126 EBK, 35; William Hincks, The Attorney-General v. Shore and Others, Trustees of Lady Hewley's Charity: An Appeal to the Public, Against the Imputations of Mr. Knight, in a Speech, Delivered by him as one of the Counsel for the Relators, in the Above Named Cause (London: Rowland Hunter, 1834), 72; [Joseph Hunter], English Presbyterian Charities, 25.
sented to republish the judgment as Unitarianism Defeated. The judges in both cases refused to acknowledge the fundamental claim of the Unitarians that they believed in religious liberty without specific doctrines. As Lord Lyndhurst, the Chancellor, stated, charities were meant to propagate certain doctrines rather than enact speculative denominational schemes. Thus, there was no ground for Unitarians to argue that while the British and Foreign Unitarian Association might circulate the Improved Version of the Scriptures, the book did not represent their beliefs. In Shadwell’s opinion, the commentaries and notes of the Improved Version showed that Unitarians definitely had a creed. In his decision, he strongly criticized the Unitarians for consistently translating certain words such as “substance,” “adopted,” and “person” to conform to Unitarian belief without regard or the explanation of possible alternatives. In response, Unitarians argued that the Vice-Chancellor’s argument—especially after the Unitarians successfully challenged its relevance in court—was a remarkable instance of bias. Furthermore, the Improved Version was not a doctrinal manifesto but a scholarly edition. It carried on the work of Bishop Newcome and was endorsed by Bishop Richard Watson of Llandaff, both members of the Established Church, and built upon the work of generations of scholars—

127 Lancelot Shadwell, Unitarianism Defeated, Substance of the Judgement Delivered December 23, 1833, by his Honor the Right Hon. Sir Lancelot Shadwell, Vice-Chancellor of England (London: James Fraser, 1834).


129 Stock, 8.

130 Shadwell, 13-14.


132 History, Opinions, and Present Legal Position, 135.
including Beza, Grotius, Glass, Nathaniel Lardner, Dr. Chandler, Schleusner, Lindsey, Cappe and Belsham. In no way could it be considered a specially "Unitarian Bible." Unitarians themselves complained that their lawyers and representatives at these trials were not more clear about the distinction between free inquiry and set doctrines. The Rev. James Yates, Secretary of the BFUA, reiterated that his support for the Improved Version was merely his own private opinion rather than the position of the BFUA. In fact, the notes and commentaries of various scholars were intended to facilitate private judgment. Rev. William Hincks, the Mathematics tutor at Manchester New College, whose testimony had been taken as proof that Unitarians did have certain beliefs, argued that because legal proceedings focused on ascertaining distinct religious beliefs, they were unsuitable forums for explaining the principles of religious liberty.

The decision of the court affected more than simply the possession of chapels and access to trust funds. The judgment that Unitarians were not Presbyterians supplied the necessary precedent for orthodox Dissenters to eject Unitarians from the key political bodies representing Dissent, the General Body of Protestant Ministers and the Protestant Dissenting Deputies. In the 1820s, Unitarians held important positions in Dissent out of proportion with their actual numbers, partly due to the personal influence of William Smith and partly due to the concentration of Unitarians in London. During the Catholic Emancipation campaign, Smith and Rev. Robert Aspland carefully guided the Deputies to

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signing a supportive petition. In the aftermath of the passage of this legislation, many orthodox Dissenters unsympathetic to Catholics began to resent the association with Unitarians, especially because Anglican newspapers such as the Record regularly pointed out the link between Dissent and heterodoxy. Although the Baptist minister Joseph Ivimey failed to eject Unitarians from the General Body in 1833, he stirred up enough resentment for later attempts after his death to succeed. Matters came to a head when Dr. Thomas Rees was elected as secretary of the General Body. Alarmed at the prospect of another lengthy Unitarian secretariaship, the Baptists and Independents met and decided to propose George Clayton as an alternative. Even Unitarians, such as the Rev. John Kenrick, a professor at Manchester New College, thought that recent attacks on Unitarian property dictated a Unitarian withdrawal from these groups. At this point, the Unitarians withdrew, claiming that orthodox Dissent violated the traditional agreement that the General Body had been founded to pursue civil rights without regard to doctrine.

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137 One of the leading critics of the Unitarian role in bringing the Protestant Dissenting Deputies to support Catholic Emancipation was the Baptist, Joseph Ivimey. See Joseph Ivimey, Neutrality the proper ground for Protestant Dissenters respecting the Roman Catholic claims: being a vindication of the author’s conduct at two meetings of the general body of Protestant Dissenting ministers, of the three denominations, in London and its vicinity, held at the library, Redcross Street, the 2nd of February & the 2nd of March, 1813, containing a reply to the remarks of the Rev. John Evans, M. A. on what he designated “an extraordinary correspondence” in six letters to a friend (London: T. Smith, 1813). Robert Brook Aspland, Memoir of the Life, Works and Correspondence of the Rev. Robert Aspland, of Hackney (London: E. T. Whitefield, 1850).

138 Short, 391.

139 HMC, MS Wood 3, 228 (John Kenrick to W. R. Wood, 8 May 1835).

140 The Case of the Body of Protestant Dissenting Ministers of the Presbyterian Denomination, in relation to their withdrawal from the Independent and Baptist Boards, and the Consequent Dissolution of the General Body of Protestant Dissenting Ministers of the Three Denominations, residing in and about the cities of London and Westminster: being an Examination and of and Reply to, the Resolution of the Two Boards, dated April 18, 1836 (London: Smalfield and Son, 1837), 28.
afterwards, however, the two groups attacked each other over the status of the Dissenting groups without the Presbyterians.\textsuperscript{141}

After the appeals of these verdicts failed, the Unitarians were left with no choice but to ask Parliament to extend the statute of limitations to cases in which a trusts’ beneficiaries were not explicitly defined. In the initial petition to Parliament, however, the Rev. Robert Aspland modified the Unitarian case by shifting the emphasis from arguments over the nature of Dissent to considerations of legal expediency. Not only did Aspland make the Unitarian case more clear but he also made it more modest. Instead of asking for official recognition for controversial religious beliefs, he now asked for the clarification of certain ambiguities in the legal code. Aspland began by pointing out that the state of the law at a certain time was never an infallible guide in cases of trust property. Roman Catholics possessed trust property such as churches and schools long before they received civil rights. Applied to Unitarian chapels, this standard would disturb people who had possessed the properties for a long time. In most instances, their ancestors were buried in the adjoining cemeteries. Over time, these congregations added their own money to the original foundations and made repairs to the facilities, giving the present tenants a stake. Yet, these properties were not valuable enough to pay for a Chancery suit. Finally, as the orthodox Dissenters’ own disputes over Lady Hewley’s trust indicated, no parties had better claims to the property than the Unitarians. No one lacked a

\textsuperscript{141} Short, 392.
place of worship; the alleged Unitarian usurpation would seem to be a crime without a victim.\textsuperscript{142}

When they learned of the Unitarian initiative, orthodox Dissenters organized their own counter-petitions. In many cases, these orthodox Dissenters found allies among the evangelicals of the Established Church. For both these groups, the government’s sponsorship of this measure—when seen in the context of the Tractarian movement at Oxford and the massive 1843 secessions from the Church of Scotland—was part of a backlash against evangelical Protestantism.\textsuperscript{143} Worse yet, the government’s unwillingness to stamp out heresy seemed to indicate the possibility of disestablishment and national apostasy led by Peel’s government.\textsuperscript{144} In addition to these points, the opponents of the bill raised their original concerns about the stability of property. Jabez Bunting signed several petitions and took a prominent role in the opposition out of concern that the bill would give seceders among Methodists rights to their chapels against the central agency.\textsuperscript{145} According to the orthodox Dissenters, the bill created a right where none existed, effectively telling Unitarians that they could keep these properties because they had usurped them for so long.\textsuperscript{146} The orthodox arguments, so effective in the courts, seemed exaggerated when

\textsuperscript{142} British Library (BL), Gladstone Papers, MS Add. 44564, ff. 27-9, “Reasons in Favor of a Bill..., March 1843.”

\textsuperscript{143} Report of a Meeting of Opponents to this Bill, held at the Freemason’s Tavern, Great Queen Street, London, on 25th April 1844, with an introduction and notes (London: J. Chapman, 1844), 9.

\textsuperscript{144} Brown, National Churches, 327-28; BL, MS Add. 44564 f. 65: “Petition of the United Synod of Original Secessers, Edinburgh, 30 April 1844.”


directed against the "purely defensive" measure that the Unitarians now proposed to remedy situations in which a trusts' beneficiaries were unspecified.147

The new alliances that the orthodox Dissenters formed and the principles they championed indicate the influence of concerns about evangelization in reshaping the Dissenting political stance. Like James Robertson in the Wolverhampton Case, Edward Baines, the editor of the Leeds Mercury, criticized the other orthodox Dissenting papers—the Patriot and the Evangelical Magazine—for hypocritically agitating for redress of their own grievances but using the courts to penalize fellow Dissenters for their religious beliefs. Dissenters further undermined their credibility when they sought to gain control of chapels from descendants of the original members without any real need for them.148 As a result of setting aside their core principles, Baines reminded his fellow orthodox Dissenters that by collecting petitions with Anglican parish priests and cooperating with Jabez Bunting, the president of the Methodist Conference, who feared that the bill would give Methodist dissidents rights against the central governing bodies of Methodism, Independents were joining with those who a short time before willingly excluded Dissenters from public life.149 Although all these groups' claims about the threat of doctrinal change to the stability of property seem apocalyptic, they were rooted in

147 Dr. Williams' Library (DWL), Crabb Robinson Correspondence, Bundle 5.XV, 20, "Brief Reply to the Allegations...".

148 DWL, Crabb Robinson Correspondence, Bundle 5.XV (2), "Printed Extract from the 'Leeds Mercury' of 13 April 1844."

149 For examples of the work of local Anglican priests, see BL, MS Add. 44564, ff. 62-80, App. 511 (Manchester) and the records of the large non-denominational meeting at Exeter Hall on 29 May 1844 at f. 106. For Jabez Bunting's concern, see BL, MS Add. 44564, ff. 25-6: "Resolution of the Meeting Appointed for the Civil and Religious Privileges of Wesleyan Methodists, Centenary Hall, London, Tuesday, 2 April 1844."
quite basic concerns about the ability of their denominations to function as united instruments for the evangelization of Britain.

If divisions among orthodox Dissenters their case, the Unitarians organized a petitioning campaign that was exemplary in its funding, organization and clarity of message. Altogether, the total cost of the two year campaign— including printing, advertising, shorthand writers, stationary, committee rooms and salaries— was £ 2000. The central committee regularly sent out circulars to Unitarians chapels in the British Isles instructing them in how to describe their property, chapel, school, cemetery, original founding and the consequences that might follow if they lost them. The committee was also careful to keep pressure on Parliament with petitions at regular intervals. They told chapels to emphasize their unique situations and lengthy possession, to give

more historical facts of your own case, showing that your chapel owes its foundation to parties abjuring subscription to all creeds and articles of faith; the length of time to which the present doctrinal opinions of the congregation can be traced, whether by the evidence of aged persons now belonging to it, or in any other manner; the repairs and rebuildings which the property has undergone since the open profession of Antitrinitarianism, and the additions or endowments which have been derived from sources plainly Unitarian. It should also state any circumstances tending to prove that the families now attending the Chapel are descendants of the founders, and that their kindred are interred in the burial grounds; that their title has never been hitherto questioned, and that other sects of Dissenters in the neighborhood are fully provided with places of worship.

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150 HMC, MS Lant Carpenter 4, 23 (Charles F. Tagart to Rev. Russell Lant Carpenter, 18 July 1844).
151 HMC, MS Lant Carpenter 4, 1 (C. F. Tagart to R. L. Carpenter, 27 January 1843).
152 HMC, MS Lant Carpenter 4, 3 (6 April 1844, C. F. Tagart to R. L. Carpenter).
Presbyterian chapels from Leeds, Exeter, Maidstone, Manchester, Liverpool, Cirencester, Nottingham and elsewhere argued and provided details of their long refusal to adopt creeds, steady contributions to the foundations' improvements (in most cases, thousands of pounds) and the long attendance by the same families.\textsuperscript{153} Accompanying these petitions were local notables and ministers who helped canvas MPs, answer questions and distribute pamphlets. One of the most affecting memorials came from Mary Armstrong, a widow of the minister at Strand Street, Dublin. If the bill were not passed, she would lose the stipend that was the sole support for her and her daughters.\textsuperscript{154}

As they read the Unitarian petitions, W. E. Gladstone and Robert Peel repeatedly noted the length of possession and amount of money invested by various congregations. Drawing on these petitions, the Tory government easily convinced most of Parliament that the Dissenters' Chapels Bill was a measure of simple justice.\textsuperscript{155} As it appeared to T. B. Macaulay, the petitions against the bill were grounded in purely theological animosities. He thought that the religious beliefs involved in the matter were irrelevant; it was simply a matter of confirming the rights of people long settled in certain properties.\textsuperscript{156} Furthermore, when Macaulay considered the matter as a whole, support for the measure was something noble, for the members were defending justice and equity for a defenseless minority against a group powerful enough to unseat many members of Parliament at the next election.\textsuperscript{157} In the final votes, even a considerable number of bishops supported

\textsuperscript{153} BL, MS Add. 44564, ff. 65-70.

\textsuperscript{154} BL, MS Add. 44564, f. 103, "Petition of Mary Armstrong."

\textsuperscript{155} Parliamentary Debates on the Dissenters' Chapels Bill (London: John Chapman, 1844), 177-78, 199.

\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 129-30.

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 142.
the bill, with the Bishop of Norwich telling the House that “it was no question of theology and doctrine, but one of equity and justice.” The bill passed on 14 July 1844 with a majority of 161.

VIII. Conclusion

Unitarianism received much of its initial impetus from the events and personalities of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Like all Dissenting denominations, Rational Dissenters grew more politically and socially active by 1800. The extraordinary personality of Joseph Priestley and the arguments of Anglican latitudinarians helped mobilize Rational Dissenters against the corrupt alliance of Church and State. Developing the associationist philosophy of David Hartley and Lockean approaches to the Scriptures, Unitarians made the case that the divinity of Christ was a fabrication and the divinely sanctioned Church a fraud. The hard work of provincial chapels and scores of writers supplied seminaries and periodicals, forging the collection of radicals into a denomination.

The very success of Unitarians and other Dissenters in reentering public life, however, brought problems and challenges in its wake. The core Dissenting principal of religious liberty was most successful as a negative protest. Much of Dissenting political unity was achieved through astute management by London-based ministers. By the 1820s, as all Dissenting groups began to consolidate the gains they had won through evangelization and to clarify their beliefs, this fragile unity was coming undone. As Independents and Baptists consolidated their own denominational institutions and funds,

158 Ibid., 360.
they reiterated that they were dedicated to the teaching of certain beliefs and would not support the spread of heretical beliefs. They linked religious liberty to Voluntarism, the principle that all religious activity must be self-supporting. By contrast, Unitarians stressed freedom of religious inquiry. This divergence became apparent during the struggle over Presbyterian chapels and trusts. Although the Unitarians prevailed, they still faced the challenges of an age of increasing popular participation in religion, politics and social causes. This moment was the very reverse of secularization, however, for as they consolidated their denominational structures, Dissenting groups asked how they could extend their distinctive principles to all of British life. Over the next generation, James Martineau, John James Tayler and John Hamilton Thom and other Unitarians answered for themselves how they could be both a collection of free inquirers and a religious denomination with clear structures and authorities.159

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159 Crabb Robinson thought that the campaign had brought Unitarians closer together than hitherto (DWL, Crabb Robinson Correspondence, Bundle 5.XV 1/a, 19 September 1844). Yet, especially because the bill was based on a minute point of law, Unitarians could say it recognized the denial of the Trinity and that it recognized freedom of inquiry in matters of religion. When Unitarians created trusts after 1844, there was controversy over whether to dedicate the chapel to Unitarianism or to freedom of inquiry.
Chapter 3: Unitarianism’s Romantic Generation: James Martineau and the New School of Unitarianism

I. Introduction

Dissenters alone had to grapple with the meaning of religious liberty raised in the fight over Presbyterian chapels, but like all other religious denominations, Dissenters—especially Unitarians—had to make sense of their position in British life amid the social and economic dislocation of early industrialization, the political changes of the reforms of 1832, and the cultural influence of Romanticism. The migration of large numbers of people into industrial towns burst the bounds of the existing parish system of the Church of England and offered evangelical Dissenters opportunities to send their own missionaries among these people, build national networks of chapels, schools and charitable institutions and attack the influence of the Church of England. Astute Parliamentary managers used Dissent’s increasing numbers to gain Dissenters political rights and a say in the governance of the Church of England. Yet, redrawing the religious boundaries of the British state triggered an enormous amount of sectarian warfare. Many members of the Established Church rejected utilitarian justifications of the Church of England and, sharpening the sectarian conflict by drawing on Romantic influences, reasserted the importance of the Church as a spiritual institution and as the embodiment of a Christian state. Increasingly militant orthodox Dissenters were threatening Presbyterian chapels and breaking off traditional political alliances, but, at the same time, Unitarians were enjoying increasing prosperity and prominence in local government. Thus, the paradoxical growth of both religious sectarianism and social and political acceptance called into question many of the former Unitarian justifications of liberal
religion as a protest against a corrupt Church-State alliance.

The 1830s were a decade of intellectual and political turmoil for radicals of all stripes. Hitherto, both Unitarians and utilitarians had critiqued the corruption of the ancien régime Church-State alliance, but now all searched for new principles and goals for their political radicalism. This chapter argues that James Martineau and other younger Unitarians defended the Dissenting principle of religious liberty against sectarianism and found new roles for religious radicalism by appropriating Romantic critiques of utilitarian ethical and political thought. As young ministers, Martineau, Tayler and Thom argued that the increasing activism of the Established Church and the increasing willingness of orthodox Dissenters to impose doctrinal tests (as in the Lady Hewley case) were equal threats to the Dissenting principle of religious liberty. As religious denominations multiplied, ministers were at the financial mercy of their audiences and could only attract and hold followers through competing theological orthodoxies and exclusive creeds, thereby preventing free inquiry into theology and limiting charitable work and religious cooperation. In an important re-orientation of Unitarian thought, this new school of Unitarianism suggested that corruption was no longer solely located in the Church-State alliance, but also in the hearts of individuals. Martineau and his associates fought exclusive creeds with the argument that religion was the product of the human intuition of God’s presence in human nature. Dogmatic theology, which attempted to systematize those intuitions, was inevitably partial and incomplete. Martineau’s explorations of human feeling and emotion in the context of religion directly influenced the young J. S. Mill who was struggling to find a more
adequate view of human nature than that offered by his father's utilitarian political economy. As Martineau and his associates worked out the implications of their Romantic turn in the late 1830s, they argued that traditional uses of miracles to prove religious beliefs failed to speak to the natural human religious consciousness. By shifting the focus of religious apologetics away from Scriptural evidences, Martineau helped pave the way for the introduction of David Strauss' mythical interpretation of the Gospels into Britain in the 1840s. The radical ministers who broached Strauss' ideas used Martineau's work to justify their enterprise. Out of these circles came the young Marian Evans' definitive translation of Das Leben Jesu in 1846.

Criticisms of utilitarianism and the turn to historical and developmental accounts of human nature and society influenced radicals on both sides of the Atlantic in the 1830s and 1840s. Under these influences, radicals such as J. S. Mill and Herbert Spencer proposed new conceptualizations of social life and advanced early systems of social science. The Unitarians were keenly aware of their work, and in the 1830s they deepened their familiarity with the latest work in German Biblical scholarship and, more importantly, with the entire German culture of Wissenschaft and academic freedom. Among American Unitarians, Martineau's criticisms of miracles stimulated the growth of the Transcendentalist movement, a loosely connected group of Boston ministers and intellectuals dedicated to breaking down the barriers between the churches and the rest of society. Although ministers such as George Ripley and Theodore Parker shared many of the theological views of Martineau and his allies, their radicalism quickly carried many of them out of Unitarianism altogether and into radical communal living experiments, such
as the famous Brook Farm Community.\textsuperscript{1} By contrast, Martineau, Tayler and Thom pioneered new roles for ministers within Unitarianism. Drawing on the Romantic fascination with prophetic heroes who redeemed society and German stress on the importance of scholars and their pursuit of \textit{Wissenschaft}, the new school urged ministers to abandon attempts to create religious union through theological orthodoxies and controversy and instead cultivate the religious sentiments and affections of their congregations and direct their followers toward charitable work. In order to maintain religious free inquiry, Martineau argued against the traditional Unitarian reliance on utilitarian ethical theories, placing a belief in free human beings and their natural capacity for virtue at the center of his ethical and religious thought. In place of fiery criticism of a corrupt Church-State alliance, Martineau stressed the need for the cultivation of character. This chapter proceeds chronologically from the new school’s initial questioning of the utilitarian assumptions of early-nineteenth-century Unitarian intellectual and political life through their development of new practices in congregational life, religious journalism, denominational organization and apologetics. The chapter concludes with an assessment of how the new school’s emphasis on the innate moral and religious capacities of human beings supported the post-1832 efforts of Unitarians to transform themselves from radical outsiders into municipal leaders who could responsibly enact reforms in the interest of the entire community.

\textsuperscript{1} Anne C. Rose, \textit{Transcendentalism as a Social Movement, 1830-1850} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 28-37, 93-108. There were, of course, famous exceptions to the Transcendentalist fascination with communal experiments in living, such as Henry David Thoreau, but Rose makes a compelling case that even Thoreau’s year at Walden grew out of similar ethical, social and political concerns.
II. The Contexts of the New School of Unitarianism

For the first two-thirds of the eighteenth century, Churchmen and political thinkers debated the legitimacy of British institutions in terms of the origins of political society, the theological origins of political rights, and the right of revolution. The Wilkes movement (1760s), Gordon riots (1780), the aftermath of the American War and the support for the French Revolution (1792-93) called into question the ability of the Church of England to maintain its position in the political and social order. As a consequence, religious authorities shifted their defense of their privileges and powers into narrower and more pragmatic terms. No longer did religious thinkers justify their beliefs and the Established Church through the first principles of political obligation and the right to rebellion, but, rather, they focused instead on the contributions of religious institutions to social order.² Although Jeremy Bentham and his circle of legal reformers were the only ones who called themselves “utilitarians,” a wide variety of religious thinkers retreated from more dangerous topics and narrowed religious and political discourse. In his critique of the French Revolution, Edmund Burke criticized the political use of abstract principles.³ The Archdeacon of Carlisle, William Paley, rejected a priori justifications of government but grounded the legitimacy of government in its ability to provide for the greatest happiness, a much more forgiving standard than any abstract principle of justice.⁴

Clergymen from a variety of backgrounds attempted to synthesize political economy and Christianity. In the early years of the nineteenth century, different religious groups--both Anglicans and Dissenters--competed to show how their religious groups could contribute to social order.

Religious groups focused their arguments on the evidential basis of Christian belief. They drew from a long tradition of eighteenth-century religious apologetic dating back to John Locke’s argument in The Reasonableness of Christianity (1695) that Christianity rested on the testimonies and miraculous events recorded in Scripture. In the early nineteenth century, Dugald Stewart (1753-1828), the professor of moral philosophy at the University of Edinburgh, and Richard Whately (1787-1863), the Provost of Oriel College, Oxford, pushed the evidential tradition a step further to argue that the human mind required some sort of intellectual authority. These thinkers modeled science on mathematics and mathematical physics, particularly these disciplines’ statements of their conclusions in a series of necessary, deductive propositions. Without systematic forms and the achievement of necessary knowledge, natural sciences--such as geology and anatomy--could not claim the name of science. Radicals who used scientific discoveries to question God’s Providence and the necessity of the Church could be criticized for exceeding the bounds of their evidence. In this spirit, Whately wrote his famous Historical Doubts Relative to Napoleon Bonaparte (1819), in which he argued

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5 Hilton, Age of Atonement, 36-49.


8 Corsi, Science and Religion, 71.
that the doubts raised by religious radicals about the existence of Jesus Christ could be raised about the existence of similar historical and contemporary figures, such as Napoleon. Although other groups weighed the evidence in different ways, all grounded their arguments in the miraculous testimonies of the Scriptures. Unitarians--led by Joseph Priestley--worked from the same premises, affirming the authority of the Scriptures as a guide to faith but denying that the Trinity was a Scriptural doctrine. Moreover, like the Anglican moralists Paley and Joseph Butler, Unitarians argued that the miracles of the Bible and the workings of Providence formed a system of checks and constraints designed to discipline and govern the human race.\footnote{Hilton, \textit{The Age of Atonement}, 32-35.}

In the 1820s, as a wide variety of thinkers contributed to efforts to Christianize political economy, turned the economy into a system of checks and constraints. Although many Christian intellectuals criticized the pursuit of gain, they endorsed policies of self-denial that were quite similar to the political economists' arguments for greater discipline and self-denial as the path to economic prosperity. The chief of these was the Scottish clergyman, Thomas Chalmers, who outlined a theodicy in which the unimpeded workings of the market were God's providential means for instilling virtue and responsibility in human beings.\footnote{Hilton, \textit{The Age of Atonement}, 17. See also A. M. C. Waterman, \textit{Revolution, Economics and Religion, 1798-1833} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 230.} In the debates over the reform of the Poor Law in 1834, many Christian political economists--such as Nassau Senior, the first Drummond Professor of Political Economy--urged that a harsher Poor Law would encourage thrift and responsibility
among the poor.\textsuperscript{11} Lord Brougham founded the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge (SDUK) in 1827 to spread the doctrines of political economy in pamphlets, Mechanics Institutes sprang up to offer classes in it and, from 1832, Harriet Martineau wrote stories to instruct the nation in its intricacies.\textsuperscript{12}

In the late eighteenth century, well before Sir Robert Peel’s Ecclesiastical Commission (1835), the Church of England made significant efforts to reform itself and extend its reach into all areas of English life.\textsuperscript{13} In the early nineteenth century, Parliament made extensive grants to raise the pay and status of curates, the clergy who usually shouldered the vast majority of day to day duties.\textsuperscript{14} In addition to raising the status of parish clergy, between 1817 and 1831, at the behest of the High Church group in Hackney centered around the wealthy merchant, Joshua Watson, Parliament made £1,440,000 in church extension grants, leading to the construction of 188 new churches.\textsuperscript{15} In many dioceses, these Parliamentary initiatives encouraged local church-building societies and fostered a renewed sense of purpose among bishops and clergy.\textsuperscript{16}

Although the Church of England was remarkably successful in extending its reach, those very successes generated an increasingly militant Dissenting opposition


\textsuperscript{14} Stewart J. Brown, \textit{National Churches}, 65. The grants totaled £ 1,100,000.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 71.

\textsuperscript{16} Burns, \textit{Diocesan Revival}, 23-32, 41-49. Local building societies raised over £ 6,000,000 in the 1820s.
prepared to push utilitarian arguments further. Between the 1790s and the 1820s, the threat of revolution caused most Dissenters to abandon their radicalism during the American War for a largely apolitical stance.\textsuperscript{17} The new taxes required by the Church of England's postwar extension campaign, however, made the Church-State connection more visible to many people, leading many Dissenters to abandon their moderate petitions for the removal of grievances in favor of agitation for the abolition of all religious establishments.\textsuperscript{18} In particular, Congregationalists and Baptists drew on their own traditions of religious liberty to argue that religious establishments corrupted Christianity by linking it with worldly interests, especially the preservation of a hierarchical social order and that all churches should be supported by the free will offerings of their congregations.\textsuperscript{19} These reformers who wished to make the religious life of the nation self-regulating explicitly linked their case to Ricardian political economy's portrayal of a naturally operating system of checks and constraints.\textsuperscript{20} Nevertheless, their motives remained wholly religious. Once "liberated" from worldly interests, religion would benefit from a more competitive marketplace that would foster enhanced religiosity.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{17} For Dissenting radicalism during the American War, see Bradley, \textit{Religion, Revolution and English Radicalism}. With rare exceptions such as the outcry over Lord Sidmouth's proposal for licensing Dissenting ministers in 1811, what activism Dissenters did undertake was carried out through the astute Parliamentary maneuvering of William Smith and the Unitarian-dominated Protestant Dissenting Deputies. See Davis, 185. Jabez Bunting famously disciplined and marginalized political and social radicals among the Methodists and firmly identified the group with the Tories. See Hempton, \textit{Methodism and Politics}, 85-115.


\textsuperscript{21} Brown, \textit{National Churches}, 178.
The Voluntarist campaign of the early 1830s took shape as Dissenters in various localities began resisting tax levies on behalf of the Established Church. In 1833, Dissenters in Edinburgh boycotted the Annuity Tax, an imposition of 6 percent on rentals of houses and shops in the city that funded the city’s clergy. Although the dispute remained officially unresolved, Church officials began to draw their activities back within more easily supported levels.\(^{22}\) This successful campaign quickly attracted the attention of English Dissenters, embroiled in their own debates about religious establishments in the aftermath of the Reform Act. The cautious central London committee of Dissenters, dominated by Unitarians, insisted on remedying specific grievances while many orthodox Dissenters in the provinces—led by the redoubtable Congregationalist solicitor George Hadfield, who was already known to Unitarians from the Lady Hewley case—wanted to overthrow the Established Church altogether.\(^{23}\) Mobilized by Hadfield and the Manchester Scottish Presbyterian minister, William McKerrow, the more radical Dissenters attended the local vestry meetings that levied the church rates and voted against them. The Voluntarists gained decisive victories across northern England, defeating church rate impositions in Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds and Rochdale.\(^{24}\) This campaign for the disestablishment of the Church of England gained new life in the debates over national education in the late 1830s, especially after Graham’s proposed Factory Bill (1843) and its educational clauses, and was organized

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into the Liberation Society by Edward Miall in 1844.\textsuperscript{25} In addition, the Scottish
campaigns laid the groundwork for the protest against lay appointment privileges and the
subsequent secession of one third of the Church of Scotland and the foundation of the
Free Kirk in 1843.\textsuperscript{26}

Like their orthodox counterparts, Unitarian ministers translated their belief in the
benefits and urgent necessity for education and free inquiry into a wide variety of
educational activities, journalism, lecturing and political lobbying. Local chapels were
key places for presenting petitions for signature and mobilizing support through sermons
and lectures.\textsuperscript{27} One of the foremost Unitarians in the generation after Priestley, the Rev.
Robert Aspland, ministered at the Gravel Pit chapel in Hackney, near London, but spent
the majority of his time editing the \textit{Monthly Repository} and the \textit{Christian Reformer} and
coordinating the political lobbying of the Protestant Dissenting Deputies. Because
Unitarianism crystallized through religious controversy in the eighteenth century,
Unitarian ministers spent a large amount of their time engaged in public debate. In the
early 1820s, the Rev. George Harris, minister at Renshaw Street chapel and later
instigator of the Manchester Socinian Controversy, challenged the orthodox Christians of
Liverpool to debate the Trinity; he attracted large audiences but earned the congregation
general notoriety and the nickname, “No Hell chapel.”\textsuperscript{28} When Tayler went to the Lower

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{25} For the formation and campaigns of the Liberation Society, see Larsen, \textit{Friends of Religious Equality}, 39-78.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Brown, \textit{National Churches}, 348-362.
\item \textsuperscript{27} LRO 288 ULL 3/7/1, “Minute Book of Renshaw Street Chapel,” 3 March 1828 (signing of petition for
repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts) and 10 March 1833 (petition for the repeal of Dissenting disabili-
ties).
\item \textsuperscript{28} Andrew M. Hill, ‘Harris, George (1794–1859)’, \textit{Oxford Dictionary of National Biography}, Oxford Uni-
\end{itemize}
Mosley Street Chapel in Manchester, he rarely mentioned the religious services of the congregation but detailed his work lecturing at the Literary and Philosophical Society and his participation in debates with orthodox Dissenters. Whatever their own predilections, ministers had to supplement their poor salaries with work as journalists, lecturers and teachers. In his first years in Liverpool, when he was assistant to the ailing Rev. John Grundy, Rev. James Martineau taught a class for young men at 7am two times per week; seven other classes from 11 to 4:30 three days per week; two Sunday classes; and a chemistry class at the Liverpool Mechanics Institute. In addition, he was preparing an extended essay on Joseph Priestley for the *Monthly Repository* and the normal weekly sermons. Finally, he spent his evenings visiting members of his congregation.

Faced with drastic divergences and irreconcilable differences that emerged from utilitarian approaches to religion, clergy and philosophers of all persuasions searched for alternative conceptions of social life and intellectual inquiry. One obvious approach was to question utilitarianism's reduction of the complexity of human nature to pleasure and pain. John Stuart Mill famously rebelled against the philosophy of his father and its refusal to acknowledge love and beauty. In a sharp critique of his father's close associate, Jeremy Bentham, Mill charged that Bentham's philosophy dealt only with the "business side of life." Bentham had made important contributions in the field of law, but by reducing all human motivation to self-interest, he neglected the conscience, the sense of honor, the love of beauty, the need for sympathy and objects of admiration and

29 DWL 24.102, 15 (J. J. Tayler to Richard Tayler, 15 February 1823).
30 HMC, MS J. Martineau 2, 54 (Helen Martineau to Emily Higginson Bache, 11 February 1833).
reverence. In short, he overlooked human devotion to an ideal and gave no attention to the formation of character. Similarly, even the young Herbert Spencer began his prolific career by rejecting Bentham's "doctrine of expediency." Against Bentham, Spencer argued that judgments of happiness were uniquely individual, the result of influences besides logic, and, hence, could not be generalized into a universal principle of greatest happiness. At Oxford, the Tractarian movement questioned the equation of secular progress with progress in religion, criticizing Sir Robert Peel's linkage of progress in Useful Knowledge to personal moral improvement and reasserting the need for almsgiving and charitable work.

This concern with the full range of human capacities altered the orientation of ethics and suggested the limitations of Ricardian political economy as a full account of social life. At Cambridge, William Whewell and Richard Jones sought to overcome political economy's reduction of human nature to self-interest and complex social systems to economic interactions by extending the range of induction in the study of human nature and society. Fascinated by the St. Simonian science of society and Alexander von Humboldt's development of complex inductive procedures, they supported the establishment of a Statistical Section in the British Association for the

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33 Ibid., 97, 98, 112.

34 Herbert Spencer, Social Statics (1843), 13, 24. Cited in Diana Postlethwaite, Making It Whole: A Victorian Circle and the Shape of their World (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1984), 183.

Advancement of Science. After criticizing the utilitarianism of his father’s generation quite harshly, J. S. Mill transformed “political economy” into the “science of society” in his *System of Logic* (1843). The shift from “economy” to “society” signaled Mill’s determination to incorporate factors unacknowledged by political economy into his study. He captured the spirit of his project quite well when he wrote that he was working “deductively indeed, but by deduction from many, not from one or a very few original premises; considering each effect as (what it really is) an aggregate result of many causes, operating through the same, sometimes through different mental agencies, or laws of human nature.” Mill aimed to move political economy and utilitarianism away from simplistic accounts of human personality and social processes.

In similar fashion, both High Churchmen and Liberal Anglicans looked beyond utilitarianism and political economy to defend the sacredness and national importance of the Church of England. The most famous response to the Dissenting attack on the Established Church and the perceived weakness of its utilitarian supporters was the Oxford Movement. Beginning with John Keble’s sermon on “National Apostasy” (1832), Keble, Edward Pusey and John Henry Newman rallied their followers around the principle of the Apostolicity of the Church. In a series of *Tracts for the Times* (1833-41),

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38 Prickett, 260-1.
they used scholarship on the Fathers of the Church to argue that the Anglican Church was a representative and branch of the Church founded by the Apostles, the successors to the authority of Christ. Hence, the Church was something greater than its local manifestation in England, and the English government and people had no right to abridge its privileges and authority. Even many who claimed to be defenders of the Established Church, such as Thomas Chalmers, dangerously compromised its authority with their utilitarian claims. Just as the Tractarians urged that the Church of England did not merely serve utilitarian functions, so too they sought to encourage liturgical and personal practices that emphasized religion’s transcendence of simple logic. Even before the movement began, Keble was famous as the author of a bestselling series of religious verses, *The Christian Year* (1827). The movement emphasized the high office of the minister, indeed his closeness to Christ. In addition, they placed statues in their churches and incorporated new, more emotional hymns into their liturgies. In their personal work, they taught the need for Christians to form their personal characters through fasting and ascetic practice.

High Churchmen, however, did not have a monopoly on claims for the importance of the Church. The importance of the Church of England as a national cultural institution had first been articulated by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In the midst of

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debates over Catholic Emancipation, he published *On the Constitution of Church and State* (1829), in which he traced the contentious politics of the time to a growing imbalance between the demands of commercial interests for change and the desire of landed interests for permanence. He argued that these competing interests could be reconciled only through a national clerisy, a united body that would educate the people in the shared values and history of the nation.\(^{42}\) The Anglican who developed Coleridge's thoughts on the national importance of the Church in the 1830s was Thomas Arnold, a former fellow of Oriel College, Oxford and later Master of Rugby. In *Thoughts on Church Reform* (1833), Thomas Arnold envisioned a national church including both Anglicans and Dissenters that would reassert religion's importance and influence in national life. Arnold was a vehement critic of utilitarianism and political economists generally, particularly those who wished to found the state on interest alone. According to Arnold, religion was the one bond capable of raising the state above the level of a simple police force into an ethical force. Only with a fully comprehensive national

church could the religious nature of the state be maintained. Narrow doctrinal definitions prevented the Church from being truly national and fully expressing the Christian character of the State. Thus, the Church of England ought to admit Dissenters. There were strict limits to this toleration, however, for Arnold considered Jews as “voluntary strangers” in Britain and fought hard to keep them from receiving degrees at the University of London after 1838.

III. Unitarianism and the Problem of Sectarianism

Amidst the economic, social and political turmoil of the early-nineteenth century, Churchmen developed arguments for the social utility of a religious establishment, while Voluntarist Dissenters critiqued the establishment’s failures to spread the Gospel. Using their own traditions of empirical philosophy and utilitarian ethics, Unitarians formulated a critique of the early-nineteenth-century Church of England as an impediment to free inquiry. As prominent young Unitarian ministers in Manchester and Liverpool respec-

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43 H. S. Jones, *Victorian Political Thought* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 46. Although Coleridge and Arnold received attention and exercised some influence in the 1830s, there was no “Broad Church” party properly speaking until the 1850s. The term was widely used after its pejorative use in W. J. Conybeare, “Church Parties,” *English Review* 98 (1853), 273-342. Attempts to assemble a clear Broad Church intellectual position, such as those made in S. F. Cannon, *Science in Culture: The Early Victorian Period* (New York: Science History Publications, 1978) and Richard Brent, *Liberal Anglican Politics*, fail to do justice to the differences among those clergy and politicians grouped together. Pietro Corsi points out that there were serious differences among the scientific network that Cannon calls the “Broad Church.” See Corsi, “Science in Culture: The Early Victorian Period,” *Isis* 70.4 (December 1979), 593-95. Likewise, Boyd Hilton argues that Brent’s “Liberal Anglicanism” was a political position rather than a thought out intellectual position. For instance, though Brent’s two key Liberal Anglicans, Richard Whately and Thomas Arnold, desired a more doctrinally flexible national church, Arnold was seeking to reassert the ethical character of the British establishment, while Whately argued that Church should not interfere in the most areas of national life. See Hilton, “Whiggery, Religion and Social Reform: The Case of Lord Morpeth,” *Historical Journal*, 37.4 (December 1994): 832-3. Furthermore, Ieuan Ellis postpones the emergence of a “Broad Church” party until after 1845, when the Tractarian influence at Oxford began to seriously diminish. Even for the 1850s, however, Ellis prefers the term “Stanleyites” to describe those such as A. P. Stanley, Benjamin Jowett and H. B. Wilson who were pioneering literary and non-dogmatic interpretations of the Scriptures. This term suggests that these clergy were linked by common friendships rather than a common agenda. See Ieuan Ellis, *Seven Against Christ: A Study of “Essays and Reviews”* (Leiden: J. Brill, 1980), 12.

44 Jones, 47.
tively, Tayler and Martineau naturally participated in the reform campaigns of the day, but, as orthodox claims on Presbyterian chapels grew, they increasingly criticized the intellectual foundations of this radicalism and argued, against prior Unitarian teaching, that the sectarianism of a pluralized religious environment was itself a problem.\(^{45}\) In his first public appearance, at the Munster Synod in Ireland in 1830, Martineau sized up the religious environment in which he found himself. In his synod sermon on “Peace in Division,” Martineau argued that when there were a number of competing sects, ministers who depended on their congregations for a livelihood would prefer cultivating sectarian feeling rather than true religious belief.\(^{46}\) Martineau went further and qualified the psychological theory of association by tracing the variety of sects to the existence of fundamental psychological dispositions guiding association.\(^{47}\) On first arriving in Manchester in 1822, Tayler strongly criticized the tendency of his fellow ministers to ignore true learning in favor of popular enthusiasms.\(^{48}\) Likewise, in 1824, Tayler gave a lecture “on genius” to the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society in which he suggested that not all aspects of mind and character were constructed through the association of ideas.\(^{49}\) Tayler finally voiced his doubts about the radical Dissenting campaign for disestablish-

\(^{45}\) Martineau was involved with combating orthodox Dissenter claims against Presbyterian chapels from an early stage of the controversy. See his letter, “The Liverpool Standard and the Unitarians,” to The Liverpool Mercury, 3 February 1834, 43c-e and Liverpool Mercury, 14 February 1834, 56b-d. He also went to London in 1844 to help the central Unitarian committee canvas members of Parliament. See LRO 288 ULL 3/7/1, “Minute Book of Renshaw Street Chapel,” 20 July 1844.


\(^{47}\) Ibid., 485-6.


\(^{49}\) John James Tayler, Some Remarks on Genius (Manchester: printed for the author, 1824).
ment in a much more public manner than Martineau. At Hadfield’s disestablishment rally at Manchester in March 1834, after seconding a motion that all religious establishments violated freedom of conscience, Tayler had a “mental crisis.” For the next six months, he agonized over his actions. He confided in one of his fellow ministers that, the more he considered the matter, the principle of religious equality, which might appear just in theory, could not be applied without consideration of Britain’s own particular circumstances. In particular, Tayler was concerned about the ability of purely voluntary contributions to maintain religion in those areas too poor to fund a minister.51

In order to recuperate, Tayler spent a year in Germany studying ecclesiastical history and Greek antiquities with J. K. L. Gieseler (1792-1854) at Göttingen. In this year off from ministerial duties, Tayler absorbed new approaches to Biblical criticism and reflected more generally on the relation between theology and public life. Coming from Manchester, he was particularly struck by the absence of feuding Protestant sects in Germany. According to Tayler, the split between the Church of England and Dissent had fractured the links between learning and national religious life. Although the Established Church might control the institutions of power, each group was so attached to its own peculiar dogmas that the absence of free inquiry warped intellectual life.52 Tayler admired the lack of sectarianism in Germany and thought that because the Church represented the entire people rather than special interests, it could play an effective role in national life.53

50 Tayler, Letters, I, 111-12 (Tayler to Lower Mosley Street Congregation, 14 October 1834).
51 Ibid., 105 (Tayler to Hugh Hutton, 1835).
53 Ibid., 292. On the self-conscious identity that many theologians sought to achieve with the modern Prussian state in the nineteenth century, see Howard, 18-27.
Tayler particularly admired the "Lehrfreiheit" or freedom of scholarship in German universities. Unlike England, where Dissenters were excluded from the ancient universities, German universities were open to all. Scholars were paid a salary by the government and allowed to pursue their studies wholeheartedly. No professor was required to teach a particular theological system but each could teach what they thought true without reference to particular theological systems. Yet, for all his envy of German academic freedom, Tayler expressed concern at the lack of fervor among German Christians. There seemed to be a gulf between the learned professors and pastors and their congregations. As he reflected on these issues in a series of letters to the Mosley Street congregation, Tayler set himself to think about how to join free and vigorous scholarship with fervent popular religious belief.

While Tayler was in Germany, Martineau gave a fiftieth anniversary sermon to the trustees and students of Manchester New College (MNC) in which like Tayler he explored the place of Unitarian ministers in the changed religious landscape following the reforms of the early 1830s. As Unitarianism failed to keep pace with the growth of other denominations, students and trustees wondered if the six years of theological training prevented Unitarian ministers from reaching the large number of poorly educated people. Martineau admitted that highly educated ministers might be at a disadvantage in making popular appeals. Yet, Martineau thought that social transformation and recent reforms would benefit Unitarians by eroding artificial distinctions and merely external

54 Tayler, "Retrospect," 55-6.
55 Ibid., 389.
56 Tayler, Letters, I, 131 (J. J. Tayler to Mosley Street Congregation, 18 January 1835).
authorities. During a time in which religious orthodoxy was less enforced than ever before, Unitarians could adapt well because they had always appealed to human reason rather than authorities such as the Bible or Tradition. They would already be expert in the type of argument required by a more open society. Martineau ended his sermon by reiterating his call for extending the intellectual traditions of Dissent into a fully cultured ministry, combining knowledge of Scripture with a deeper study of human motives and psychology.

Like all British intellectuals, Unitarians of the 1830s absorbed many Romantic influences, but three unique streams of influence shaped their reassessment of the Priestleyan inheritance amid the sectarianism of the 1830s. All three influences emphasized the natural religious possibilities of human beings. First and foremost was the work of American Unitarians. Although each arrived at the same theological conclusions, American and British Unitarianisms emerged from diametrically opposed intellectual traditions. By contrast with Priestley, who rejected the moral sense, American Unitarians emphasized the natural human capacity for benevolence and disinterestedness. Confident in human moral capacities, American Unitarians rejected Calvinism and its teaching of total human depravity that seemed to have little to do with human moral improvement. In particular, anti-slavery and moral reform networks brought to Britain the writings of William Ellery Channing, minister of Federal Street Church, Boston. Channing’s use of hu-
man moral feeling to critique the doctrines of orthodox Christianity was a standing ex-
ample of the possibility of a non-Priestleyan Unitarianism.60 Secondly, younger ministers
on both sides of the Atlantic were absorbing the Idealistic philosophies of France and
Germany. The primary conduit for these influences was the work of Victor Cousin, a
student of Hegel at the University of Berlin and later professor at the Sorbonne.61 After
serving time in prison as an enemy of the restored Bourbon monarchy, he assumed a posi-
tion of national importance as architect of France’s system of national, non-religious edu-
cation under the July Monarchy.62 As a key thinker on education in the 1830s, his works
were especially influential in Britain, where they were cited in education debates, J. J.
Tayler even going so far as to publish Cousin’s reports as appendices to his own
sermons.63 Cousin’s philosophical system itself developed out of a rejection of Lockean
empiricism and emphasized the distinctly active and spiritual nature of the mind.64 Cous-
in’s work had already attracted harsh attacks from Sir William Hamilton, professor of
civil history at the University of Edinburgh and an agnostic who was eager to refute
Cousin’s case for the possibility of substantive knowledge of God.65

60 W. E. Channing, “Unitarian Christianity,” in Unitarian Christianity and other Essays, ed. Irving H.

61 University of Liverpool, BW I/125 (George Ripley to Joseph Blanco White, 4 December 1837).

62 Jan Goldstein, The Post-Revolutionary Self: Politics and the Psyche in France, 1750-1850 (Cambridge:
Harvard University Press, 2005).

63 J. J. Tayler, On the Moral Education of the People: A Discourse, Preached on the Evening of December
1st, 1833: With An Appendix Containing Extracts from M. Victor Cousin’s Report to the French Gover-
ment on the State of Popular Education in Germany (London: Rowland Hunter and Manchester: Robert
Robinson, 1833).

64 Goldstein, 139-181. On Cousin’s interpretation of Kant’s argument about the logical preconditions
of experience in psychological terms, see Warren Schmaus, Rethinking Durkheim and His Tradition (Cam-

The final and most immediate influence on Tayler and Martineau was the ex-Roman Catholic and Anglican, Joseph Blanco White. This rather extraordinary character had fled Spain after Napoleon’s 1810 invasion, become an Anglican minister, and after contributing to the anti-Emancipation campaign with a book exposing the errors of Roman Catholicism (1826), been made a fellow of Oriel College, Oxford. In 1832, he went to Dublin as the guest of Archbishop Richard Whately. Despite his comfortable position, after several years of private study and correspondence with German scholars, he left Dublin for Liverpool. Fortuitously, he found himself in the midst of an extraordinary circle of friends. In *Heresy and Orthodoxy* (1835), he extended his critique of Roman Catholic authoritarianism to all religions that required adherence to specific dogmas. In opposition to the pretensions of religious authority, Blanco White affirmed the immediate presence of God in every soul.66

**IV. The Critique of Priestley**

A great deal of Martineau’s Romantic dissatisfaction with the Priestleyan legacy in Unitarianism found its way into an 1833 essay in the *Monthly Repository*. W. J. Fox, the *Monthly Repository*’s editor, was also dissatisfied with Unitarianism’s pre-occupation with criticisms of orthodox theology and wished to make it less sectarian.67 According to Martineau, Priestley had contributed the most to English intellectual life by detecting and sweeping away the inconsistencies of inherited systems of thought in fields as diverse as


theology and chemistry. In theology, he compared the doctrines of the churches to the Scriptures and concluded that doctrines such as the Trinity were unfounded. In the process, he set Unitarianism on the right path but left it as merely a criticism of existing orthodoxy. Martineau concluded that, if Unitarians wanted to develop the positive aspects of their belief in the humanity of Christ, they would have to move beyond simply examining the consistency and inconsistency of ideas. Priestley’s religious work could contribute little to an understanding of the sectarianism plaguing British life in the 1830s, because it gave no account of how allegedly similar minds working from the same evidence could reach opposing conclusions. Similarly, Unitarians would have to examine what intuitive truths human beings naturally held in common as well.

Martineau’s essay on Priestley was enthusiastically received by another contributor to The Monthly Repository, the young John Stuart Mill, in what was the start of a lifelong mutual respect, if not necessarily agreement. Mill, who at that time was tentatively stepping beyond the utilitarianism of his father, wrote to Martineau in 1835 that the Priestley essay “made an impression on [him] that will never be effaced.” He mentioned that he had tried to follow up the implications of Martineau’s argument in a later piece on

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69 Ibid., 13-14.

70 Ibid., 18.

71 Ibid., 40.

72 HMC, MS J. Martineau 2, 133 (John Stuart Mill to James Martineau, 26 May 1835).
“Two Kinds of Poetry.” In his new position, as editor of the new radical journal, *The London and Westminster Review*, Mill offered to print anything that Martineau might write for him. Mill agreed with Martineau that the vital issue for church reform was not simply destroying the Established Church but replacing a system that encouraged party agendas in theology with one that fostered truly free inquiry. Although Martineau contributed a couple of articles to Mill’s review, they drifted apart over the next few years. Yet, even in 1840, when he detected an increasing “German” element to Martineau’s thinking, he repeated his offer to print whatever Martineau gave him. As Mill attempted to meet utilitarianism’s critics in the early 1840s, he encouraged Martineau to publish his own thoughts on the subject, so that the public would not have to wait for the publication of his college lectures. Even in the 1850s, he waited for Martineau’s response to his work more than anyone else’s.

In 1836, in a series of lectures published as *The Rationale of Religious Enquiry*, Martineau returned to the intellectual problems created by conflicting religious authorities. Martineau’s starting point was every religious group’s attempt to ground its claims of divine sanction and inspiration for their beliefs in empirical evidence. According to Martineau, such derivations could never be conclusive, for the Scriptures themselves did not make any assertion of divine inspiration. No conclusions about Christian doctrine

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74 HMC, MS J. Martineau 2, 133 (John Stuart Mill to James Martineau, 26 May 1835).

75 HMC, MS J. Martineau 2, 134-5 (J. S. Mill to James Martineau, 21 May 1841).

could be described as divinely inspired because the writers seemed to be normal people attempting to describe supernatural events.\textsuperscript{77} Moreover, even people who claimed divine inspiration--such as Joanna Southcote and Edward Irving--were in the same position as others in attempting to evaluate their own experiences.\textsuperscript{78} Martineau applied the standards of evidence and probability to the claims of Catholics for tradition and of Protestants for the Bible. For Catholics, the claim to infallibility rested on a variety of sources (e.g., the council, the Pope, or their union) and, thus, could only be verified through a fallible process.\textsuperscript{79} Protestants claimed the Bible as their authority but had interpreted it in a multitude of different ways, forcing the inquirer to compare the evidence and probability of competing interpretations.\textsuperscript{80} Similarly, Unitarians tended to reduce the Bible to cold ethical generalizations because they brought to the reading of Scripture their own philosophical assumption that all truth must be universal laws.\textsuperscript{81}

Martineau’s arguments followed Priestley’s critiques of orthodoxies and creeds but sharpened the traditional point that religion was a stage in the progressive development of human faculties into the argument that revelation was best thought of as an anticipation of truths to be discovered. Not only could revelation never contradict reason but, as Martineau famously put it, God would have to work according to human reason,

\textsuperscript{77} James Martineau, The Rationale of Religious Enquiry, or the Question stated of Reason, the Bible and the Church, second edition (Liverpool: Whittaker and Co., 1836), 18, 32-3.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 26.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 50.

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 73.

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 111.
for "there is no divine right to dictate an unreasonable faith."82 Thus, Martineau, who at his ordination had acknowledged the "word and character of Christ as the authoritative rule of faith and life," was now making human faculties the rule and measure of Revelation.83 The reviewers in the Unitarian press praised Martineau for dealing effectively with Catholic and Protestant claims to religious authority but also noted that his arguments had unsettled the justifications of Priestleyan Unitarianism. The first reviewer in *The Christian Teacher* suggested that Martineau's arguments against inspiration were a better alternative to the Unitarian tradition of treating miracles as evidence of inspiration.84 In the aftermath of the lectures, however, Martineau was unwilling to follow his devaluation of miracles to its inevitable conclusions. When Blanco White suggested a correspondence on whether or not Christians must accept miracles, Martineau begged off because of ministerial duties.85 In the third edition of the *Rationale*, published after White's death in 1841, Martineau acknowledged his claims to be a Christian despite his denial of miracles.86 Followers of Priestley, however, worried that by questioning miracles, Martineau removed the need for a distinct revelation with supernatural sanction. Furthermore, by treating religion as the expression of "quenchless" human capacities, Martineau contradicted Priestley and Belsham's materialist argument that the mind dies

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82 Ibid., 49.


84 "Martineau's Rationale," *Christian Teacher* 2 (1836): 484.

85 University of Liverpool, Blanco White papers, BW 1/124 (Blanco White to Miss Lupton, 27 September 1836).

as its organization decays. Just because human beings have yearnings does not mean they are fulfilled. In New England, the Unitarian minister George Ripley reviewed the *Rationale* and, by radicalizing Martineau’s arguments against miracles and the need for supernatural sanctions in religion, touched off the Transcendentalist movement among American Unitarians.

In his sermons of the mid-1830s, Martineau traced the insistence on miracles as proofs of religion back to misguided theories of ethics underlying both utilitarianism and evangelical Protestantism, that appealed to external constraints and interests, without truly effecting the transformation necessary to become an ethical person. Martineau expressed his dissatisfactions with utilitarian moral theories in a review of Bentham’s *Deontology* in 1834. Martineau asked what effect utilitarian calculation would actually have on people and their moral practice, specifically what would become of moral language if reduced to calculations of the likely effects of human actions. Against utilitarianism, Martineau argued that appealing to self-interest might produce ethical behavior part of the time but that appeal was contingent on any number of other factors and

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89 Martineau was quite astute in noting the mutually reinforcing influences of utilitarianism and evangelicalism in this period. Young, 30 argues that this combination shaped the early Victorian period. This has been developed in Hilton, *The Age of Atonement*.

circumstances. According to Martineau, acting ethically meant following the dictates of duty, but examining the effects of actions can never cultivate a sense of duty. Likewise, evangelicals hoped to achieve a sudden change of heart by the preaching of the doctrine of the Atonement. Martineau thought that producing a feeling of gratitude for Christ's redeeming sacrifice was a small substitute for the years of effort to build habits and form dispositions to act ethically. Martineau made his own position clear in a criticism of Priestley's reduction of religion to an intellectual matter. Religion was grounded in human intuitions of a divine and perfect God. As such, religion would not wipe out human capacities but presented the ultimate ideal and realization of those capacities in Christ. With their emotions and affections engaged by the image of Christ, especially his character as presented in Scripture, people would have the strength of principle to resist temptation (as utilitarians did not) and a clear understanding of the eternal value of earthly actions (as evangelicals did not).

V. The Inward Turn: Domestic Missions and Congregational Renewal

They proposed that Unitarians redress the imbalances caused by Priestley's narrow focus on evidences by turning inward from religious controversy and renewing their own congregational life. Unitarians were not making this turn alone, for by 1830, under the influence of strong intellectual, cultural and social trends exalting the religious possi-

91 HMC, MS J. Martineau 18/i: "The Moral Strength of Christianity," 7 September 1834.
ibilities of close-knit communities, both Churchmen and Dissenters were rejecting the model of large, bureaucratic charitable organizations to explore the religious possibilities of close-knit communities.95 The Romantics, especially Wordsworth and Southey, were fascinated by the closeness of the rural parish and idealized it in their writings.96 The Oxford Movement emphasized the importance of the minister in the parish as the primary agent of spiritual and practical improvement.97 As Dissenting denominations of all sorts made the transition from itinerant evangelization to settled congregations, they increasingly stressed congregational ministry above itinerant preaching.98 Most important, however, was the St. John's experiment, in which Thomas Chalmers placed all the charitable work of his Glasgow parish in the hands of church elders and domestic visitors.99 Chalmers' *Civic and Christian Economy of Large Towns* (1819-1826) spread these ideas through England and even to America. Its appeal went across denominational boundaries for, in 1833, Harriet Martineau was surprised that James could find anything to like in

95 Bebbington, 76-77.


97 Skinner, 139-57. Although the Oxford Movement was notable for its attention to parish ministry, they were building on already strong traditions of parochial service, as is made clear in Burns, *Diocesan Revival* and Knight, 16-17, 166-7, 134-6.

98 Ward, *Religion and Society*, 236; Lovegrove, 155-61; Deborah M. Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 274-81. Unitarians had never developed the itinerant networks that evangelical Dissenters had. Yet, the ministers in the generation after Priestley emphasized political work and theological controversy at the expense of building up and maintaining a strong congregational life. After Robert Aspland died in 1845, his son, Robert Brook Aspland, a Unitarian minister in Dukinfield and prominent opponent of Martineau, wrote that his father had left the congregation very poorly organized. John Rylands University Library of Manchester (JRL), Unitarian College MSS (UCC), Brook Aspland to John Gordon, 3 September 1848.

someone as strongly evangelical as Chalmers. On his return from Germany, as he began preaching against sectarianism, Tayler established a more intensive religious education program for the young members of the congregation and re-introduced a communion service to strengthen the bonds among the members. In the first quarterly issue of *The Christian Teacher*, Thom suggested that the key to strengthening the religious affections was the minister. Since the time of Priestley, ministers had preached Unitarianism by critiquing religious orthodoxy and by fomenting public controversy with orthodox ministers, but only by accentuating the positive benefits of their doctrines could Unitarians develop a faith that would strengthen their own spiritual and communal lives. These arguments found a receptive audience on both sides of the Atlantic.

In 1836, Unitarians committed their congregations to improving the lot of the poor by founding the Liverpool Domestic Mission. The inspiration for this project was the visit of Joseph Tuckerman to Liverpool in 1833-34. Tuckerman was the ex-minister of Chelsea, Massachusetts, who after resigning due to a failing voice became “minister at large” in Boston. Although his charge was merely to minister to those without a congregation, after reading Chalmers’ *Christian and Civic Economy*, Tuckerman began visiting

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100 HMC, MS J. Martineau 1 (Harriet Martineau to James Martineau, 3 December 1832). Harriet does not name the specific book that interested James but it was probably not a work of theology.

101 For sermons against sectarianism, see HMC, MS J. J. Tayler 11: “Truth Divided Among Men but United in God,” 27 December 1835. For a description of the controversy with Dr. Ralph Wardlaw over his sermon, *On Communion with Unbelievers*, see Tayler, *Letters*, 1, 80 (John James Tayler to his father, 24 February 1829).


103 University of Liverpool, Rathbone Papers, RP XIII. 112-113 (Orville Dewey to John Hamilton Thom, 25 April 1835 and 3 December 1838). Dewey was an influential Unitarian minister in New York.
the homes of all people in the area of his responsibility. Tuckerman was not an original scholar but took the philosophical basis of his project from William Ellery Channing. Channing alone had shown that practical improvement in Christianity required the transformation of character. Something of Tuckerman's methods can be gleaned from his correspondence with the young William Rathbone VI, whom he exhorted to cultivate right principles at an early age in order to remain steadfast against temptations in the future. Yet, Tuckerman was not simply an individualist, for strict adherence to duty meant that the rich should use their wealth “as a trust from the common Father” for the help of the poor. By strengthening personal connections, he hoped to recreate the organic society he had known in the village of Chelsea. While Priestley had been confident about the prospects of commerce training men and women to virtue, Tuckerman raised questions and doubts.

As they established domestic missions on Tuckerman's model, British Unitarians began to rethink many of their strongly held assumptions about evangelization of the poor. In his Christmas 1835 sermon, Thom took the usual question, “Why do the poor not believe?” and turned it into the question, “Why have the poor not had the Gospel preached to them?” thus placing the burden back on the Renshaw St. congregation.


105 University of Liverpool, RP IX.1.95 (23 October 1837, Joseph Tuckerman to William Rathbone VI).
106 University of Liverpool, RP IX.1.97 (20 November 1837, Joseph Tuckerman to William Rathbone VI).
107 UL, RP IX.1.81 (25 September 1836, Joseph Tuckerman to William Rathbone VI). Kersten: Quote??
108 University of Liverpool, RP XIII.1.139 (26 November 1838, Tuckerman to Thom).
Rather than blame the poor for their lack of education, Thom urged Unitarians to bring the Gospel to the poor. Unitarians would have to abandon the overly intellectualized and controversial religion practiced by Priestley, and, instead, they would address themselves to the "moral experiences" of the poor, particularly as these were found in the houses of the poor and as they were displayed in the affections. For this reason, they could only work on an individual basis, as Martineau recalled sixty years later, through the "moral and religious development of character through personal influence of the higher [principles] on the lower."111

Although the domestic missions demanded one-on-one work with the poor, the idea that character was developed through encounters with others turned domestic missions into vehicles of congregational, municipal, and denominational regeneration. From the first, Thom insisted that the mission was not another denominational advancement project and must remain non-sectarian.112 John Gooch Robberds, the domestic missionary in Manchester, suggested that domestic missions were not ends in themselves but could support non-sectarian religious organization through cooperation in works of charity.113 As Tayler wrote to his friend, Rev. Charles Wicksteed of Mill Hill, Leeds, domestic missions could become the nucleus of Unitarian congregations reoriented to non-

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111 LRO 288 ULL 3/22/5 (James Martineau to L. P. Jacks, 9 October 1892). It is worth noting, however, that, despite his emphasis on character, Martineau rejected the harsh measures of the New Poor Law of 1834. See: Inquirer, 6 March 1847.


113 "The Domestic Missionary," The Christian Teacher 3 (1837), 47.
doctrinal organization. Like Tuckerman, Thom saw in domestic missions the possibility of recreating organic social unity. Thom ended his Christmas Day sermon with the hope that the mission would help reform Liverpool politics and ultimately ease sectarian rivalries—among Unitarians, Catholics, orthodox Dissenters, Anglicans—to a significant enough degree to allow the local government to undertake and support this work.

The congregations at Renshaw Street and Paradise Street responded enthusiastically and hired a minister to the poor and founded a mission within a year. Thom had set nearly impossible criteria for the minister, emphasizing both high ideals and a practical sympathy with the poor, but Rev. John Johns of Crediton proved to have a combination of warm poetic fancy, love for his charges and dogged perseverance that made him an almost perfect minister to the poor. Indeed, an almost perfect candidate would have been needed to keep faith in the face of Liverpool’s problems in 1836. In addition to the usual problems of a rapidly increasing population in an inadequate infrastructure, the city also had a unique problem of thousands of poor people living in cellars with little air or light. Johns, who was an amateur poet as well as a minister, filled his reports with extended, moving descriptions of life among the poor. Yet, he offered few statistics or other tangible data. Johns implemented the policies of spiritual regeneration and character development that Tuckerman and Thom had preached. He generally handed out blankets and clothes for fear that any money would be spent on drink, in his view the primary cause of individual weakness and poverty. He started a savings bank and ran a night

114 Taylor, *Letters*, I, 201 (Taylor to Charles Wicksteed, 8 October 1842).


school. He distributed books and magazines, such as *Chambers Edinburgh Journal*, anything that would help awaken an awareness of individual power and conscience in the poor.

Johns attributed poverty to individual weakness, but in his missionary reports he called for a collective response by municipal and national governments. Early in his career, Johns acknowledged the importance of individual regeneration, but he reminded his readers that “a man sinks into moral evil from the pressure of physical evil upon his heart and frame.” From the beginning of his ministry, he blamed the exceptionally poor housing of Liverpool for the misery and immorality of the lower classes. As he described the buildings, Johns returned again and again to the idea that character needed space and relief from pressure in order to develop. The only force capable of removing these obstacles was collective action. He took up Martineau’s suggestion that municipalities license and regulate taverns. He also endorsed Thom’s suggestion that the municipal government buy land for public parks. Yet, for Johns, these were only small steps compared to what needed to be done. Therefore, throughout his eleven year ministry in Liverpool, Johns reiterated the need for the local government to clean up housing.

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119 R. K. Webb, “Intellect and Conscience” especially 241-3, argues that the domestic mission was essentially individualistic in its outlook. This contrast between individualism and the welfare state is overdrawn. Domestic missions bridged the two by facilitating action by local collectives, i.e., municipal reform.


121 LRO 266 DOM: “Second Report” (1838), 20-1.

122 LRO 266 DOM: “Seventh Report” (1844), 26-7; Martineau’s measured endorsement of abstaining from alcohol and his call for the municipal regulation of drink shops is in *The Inquirer*, 6 September 1845, 571.

123 LRO 266 DOM: “Ninth Report” (1846), 9.
regulate taverns and reduce the harsh treatment of the young in prisons.\textsuperscript{124} Indeed, only the inadequate resources of local governments prevented the domestic mission from going beyond individualized attention.\textsuperscript{125} At the close of his “Seventh Report,” he acknowledged the importance of inward change but suggested that “we cannot but think that their operations and effects will be made much more rapid, complete and enduring, when we can bring to bear upon them the force of outward circumstances altered greatly for the better.”\textsuperscript{126} In his final report, Johns criticized how “the state’s parental duties are chiefly exercised in the form of banishment, imprisonment, and strangulation.” Invoking “the great Spartan principle” that the “children of every citizen also are children of the state,” Johns proposed that the government go beyond enforcing negative prohibitions and take seriously its duty to educate and form children to fulfill their common obligations.\textsuperscript{127}

The effort to strengthen congregational life that began with the foundation of the domestic mission culminated in the 1850s, when John Hamilton Thom attempted a large scale reorganization of the Renshaw Street Chapel in order to bring the members into closer cooperation for charitable work. From the 1830s, Thom had worked diligently to strengthen the bonds of communal life in the congregation and turn people away from

\textsuperscript{124} LRO 266 DOM: “Sixth Report” (1843), 24-5. Martineau explicitly rejected the argument against regulation of drink shops that governments should allow the market to operate unimpeded. See Inquirer, 20 March 1852, 187.

\textsuperscript{125} LRO 266 DOM: “Seventh Report” (1844), 27.

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{127} LRO 266 DOM “Ninth Report” (1846), 20.
sectarian exclusiveness. He cultivated the younger members of the congregation. During the 1840s, Thom fought to have chapel seats—hitherto allotted in sections to wealthy members—vested in the community as a whole. In 1846, Thom ended the collection of the yearly assessment during the “divine service” because he thought it “objectionable.” No doubt, as one who emphasized the importance of the congregation as a worshipping community, Thom thought that the intrusion of everyday business into these services detracted from their spiritual purposes. In 1850, when Thom first raised the issue of reorganization with one of his notable congregation members, William Rathbone VI, a wealthy merchant, he said that he wanted the congregation to become a “church” united by its Christian worship rather than a simple collection of charitable organizations. In essence, he wanted to strengthen the link between Sunday worship and everyday efforts at moral improvement. With a higher view of church worship went a tendency to exchange the traditional Dissenting term, “chapel,” for “church.” This project of overcoming some of the dichotomies of market society bore certain similarities to the Fourierist projects of Brook Farm. Although no records survive to show the outcome of the proposal, the efforts to consolidate the Renshaw Street chapel’s charitable outreach by W. H. Channing, Thom’s successor from 1854-7 and by Charles Beard after 1867, suggest that the proposal did shape the congregation well into the late nineteenth century.

128 LRO, 288 ULL 3/16/15 (John Hamilton Thom to W. A. Jevons, George Holt, Jr. and other younger members of the congregation).

129 LRO, 288 ULL “Minute Book of Renshaw Street Chapel,” 3 June 1846.

130 University of Liverpool, RP XIII.1.37 (Thom to William Rathbone VI, 1850).


VI. The Christian Teacher

Strengthening congregational life could help Unitarians move away from Priestley’s use of denominational controversy, but Martineau, Tayler and Thom also needed to change how their own denomination and the British generally discussed religion. After 1836, the new school of Unitarianism used Thom’s editorship of the monthly magazine, *The Christian Teacher*, to initiate a wide-ranging discussion about the traditional tenets of Unitarianism. Thom’s new series of the *Christian Teacher* was unique among Victorian periodicals. Hitherto, Unitarian periodicals—*The Monthly Repository* and *The Christian Reformer*—had been quite similar to those of other denominations.\(^{133}\) In Thom and Tayler’s hands, the journal covered a wide range of literature, moral writing, and religious thought and highlighted their common religious and spiritual bonds. From its opening issue, the journal struck the note of disinterestedness and distanced itself from sectarian disputes. Thom himself, recently married to the daughter of the wealthy merchant, William Rathbone V, took no salary as editor. In 1838, Thom made their journal into a quarterly, the first quarterly religious journal in Britain. In the first issue of the new series, Thom hoped that a new format would allow the editor to do without filler pieces and turn

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\(^{133}\) Just as the Tories, Scottish Whigs and radicals had the *Quarterly Review, Edinburgh Review*, and *Westminster Review* respectively, so too religious denominations and organizations published their own journals. Within the Church of England, though parties were less strictly defined before 1832, the high Church party gravitated to the *British Critic* and evangelicals of the Clapham Sect to *The Christian Observer*. When more radical evangelicals grew discontented with the *Observer*, they founded *The Record*. The Church Missionary Society published the *Missionary Register* from 1813 to 1855. Outside the Established Church, the situation was even more complex. Both *The Evangelical Magazine* and *The Eclectic Review* attempted to represent evangelicals of all denominations, with varying degrees of success. Again, each denomination had its own magazine. Methodists published *The Arminian Magazine* (founded 1778) and Congregationalists *The Congregational Magazine*. These religious journals were central clearinghouses for the missionary work of the denominations. Thus, these journals usually consisted of tracts, reprints of sermons, reviews of religious literature, religious poetry and attacks on other denominations. This account of religious journalism is indebted to Francis Mineka, *The Dissidence of Dissent: The Monthly Repository, 1806-1838: Under the Editorship of Robert Aspland, W. J. Fox, R. H. Horne, & Leigh Hunt, With a Chapter on Religious Periodicals, 1700-1825* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944), 27-64 and Joseph Altholz, *The Religious Press in Britain, 1760-1900* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989).
away those who lived by their journalism and, instead, attract those "voluntary and disinterested contributors, who gratuitously undertake the severe toil of preparing their best thoughts for the public." Reflecting on "the influence and responsibility of periodical literature" in the same issue, Tayler argued that the links between intellectual forums such as religious journalism and competing sects hampered free inquiry and obstructed the possible benefits of the explosion of popular religious and educational material.

With Thom as editor, The Christian Teacher united the thoughts on the training and function of ministers and proper intellectual method raised separately by Martineau, Tayler and Thom into a distinctive new version of Unitarianism. Several contributors blamed the increasing sectarianism of religious debate for Unitarian ministers' difficulties in articulating their positions. Many Unitarians thought that their ministers should take more visible roles in social and political reform movements, but others thought Unitarian ministers needed to bring their unique perspective on religious liberty to bear on contemporary problems. In two articles, Tayler proposed that Unitarians rethink the nature of the ministry by changing the place of theology in religious life. According to Tayler, religion is spiritual; it is the sense of a non-material, good, holy, and wise agency at work in the universe, felt most particularly in human aspiration to moral goodness and beauty.


137 Ibid., 395, 401.

Tayler believed that in every human heart, "there is an original capability of faith, a predisposition to recognize a spiritual power beyond and above itself."\textsuperscript{139} The influence of this spirit of God precedes any intellectual work because it is a recognition of the relationship between human beings and God.\textsuperscript{140} Both Scripture and theology were attempts to create a symbol or "outward vehicle" to communicate spiritual influences.\textsuperscript{141} Thus, Biblical criticism must not compare individual words and phrases with particular doctrines but focus on the relation of the letter to the spirit.\textsuperscript{142} In addition, miracles would become much less important for religious belief.\textsuperscript{143} In this reading of Scripture, Jesus Christ did not promulgate an external code (e.g., Moses and the Decalogue) or resort to external proofs (miracles) but completed the gradual revelation of God's Fatherly love for humanity by embodying the spirit of God in his character.

Tayler urged ministers and theologians to stop sowing sectarian discord and use theology's exploration of the spiritual power at work in Scripture to illuminate those aspects of religion common to all denominations.\textsuperscript{144} Because theology is the attempt to articulate these spiritual elements in ordered form, "it will be the work of a leisured and cultured few," ministers trained for the task.\textsuperscript{145} In contrast to theology's traditional focus on set doctrines, Tayler suggested that theology derives from "the individuality of [the

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid, 3.

\textsuperscript{140} [John James Tayler], "The Influence of the Spirit," \textit{Christian Teacher} (1837): 258.

\textsuperscript{141} [John James Tayler], "God our Father," \textit{Christian Teacher} 3 (1837): 128.

\textsuperscript{142} [Tayler], \textit{Letters}, I, 192-4 (Tayler to John Hamilton Thom, 28 January 1840).

\textsuperscript{143} [Tayler], "God our Father," 128.

\textsuperscript{144} [Tayler], "Religion and Theology," 193.

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 131.
minister’s] own mental and moral nature, it is one with—and inseparable from—his religion; nay, in this case, it becomes a creative act, which gives to his religion its life and endues it with a rational vitality.” Echoing his earlier thoughts on the German university system and German Wissenschaft, Tayler hoped that this new link between religion and theology would give rise to

such a chain of influences reaching from the highest seats of learning and science down into the broadest masses of popular life, would go far toward binding the whole framework of society in an amicable and sympathizing bond of reciprocal service and good-will—divesting learning of its monkish and exclusive character, and making it appear as the active friend and intelligent helper of the great work of human civilization and happiness.147

Because theology would no longer be the distinguishing point of religious denominations, theologians would carry out their studies and share their ideas without fear. As they followed their thoughts and the logical investigations wherever they led, ministers would also be developing their religious feelings as well. Cultivating and training their religious feelings would help them to discern those feelings in other people, irregardless of social class or religious group.

VII. The Aggregate Meeting, 1838

Martineau, Tayler and Thom’s efforts to rethink the nature of Unitarianism first gained widespread attention in June 1838 at the Aggregate Meeting of all Unitarians in London. At the June 1837 meeting of the BFUA, in the aftermath of the negative verdict in the Hewley Case and the Unitarian withdrawal from the Protestant Dissenting Depu-

146 Ibid., 129-30.
147 Ibid., 264.
ties, the General Secretary, Rev. Robert Aspland, called a meeting of Unitarians in a year’s time to discuss the future of the denomination. Although poor health prevented his attendance, Aspland sent an open letter telling the assembled that “as a denomination we are in crisis” and urged them to find some counter to the attacks from all sides.\(^{148}\) The discussions spread over two days and ranged over the causes of misconceptions about Unitarians, missionary work, treatment of the poor, denominational organizations and the role of the minister.\(^{149}\) Eventually, the discussion became a debate between a party who wanted to redouble the missionary and proselytization efforts and others who wanted to strengthen the denomination’s congregational life and ministers. George Harris, the instigator of the Manchester Socinian Controversy, now in Glasgow but unabashed as usual, argued that critics of Unitarianism were prejudiced and ignorant. The only solution was to turn the BFUA into an equivalent of the Congregational and Baptist Unions that would manage publicity and increase knowledge of Unitarianism through tracts and missionaries.\(^{150}\) Others agreed and urged Unitarians to return to their Scriptural roots and demonstrate the appeal of Unitarianism as a rational medium between the imposition of Trinitarian dogma and complete skepticism.\(^{151}\) As Thomas Wood summed up, Unitarians needed to accentuate their differences from other denominations. After several hours on the second day, James Martineau intervened to protest against any union around specific


\(^{149}\) Ibid., 3.

\(^{150}\) Ibid., 7.

\(^{151}\) Ibid., 31.
dogmas. Not only was doctrinal union a threat to free inquiry, but recent court decisions in the Lady Hewley case held that chapels and funds could not be dedicated to specifically Unitarian beliefs. Supported by Tayler in particular, Martineau argued that Unitarians could only protect themselves from external attacks by strengthening their bonds with each other. In particular, the denomination and congregations needed to support the ministers. Tayler proposed that ministers develop institutions akin to those of other professions: central licensing committees, funds for the relief of poor ministers, and regional meetings for mutual education. At the congregational level, Unitarians needed to foster bonds of fellowship through worship and service to the poor. When some criticized him for departing from Priestleyan traditions, Martineau responded equally pointedly by making fun of his critics, Unitarians all, for accusing anyone of heresy. Martineau and Tayler’s resolution against doctrinal union was passed but only narrowly, and the issues would reverberate over the next thirty years.

VIII. The Liverpool Controversy, 1839

The new school of Unitarianism’s resolve to avoid doctrinal controversy was immediately tested when Reform politics in Liverpool reached a crisis over education. After 1832, successive Whig governments attempted to institute some form of universal elementary education. Yet, if the ideal of national education were to be realized, Catholics, Dissenters and Anglicans would all have to be brought into the same classrooms. In

152 Ibid.
153 Ibid., 38.
154 The target of Martineau's mockery was Rev. Thomas Madge, who had ministered at the Octagon Chapel in Norwich where James Martineau grew up.
Ireland, the National Board of Education managed to secure non-denominational religious instruction through the reading of selections of *Scripture Extracts*.\(^{155}\) When the Whigs took power in Liverpool after 1835, they introduced the Irish System to accommodate the large population of Irish Catholics. This, however, attracted the wrath of the newly appointed curate of St. Jude’s, Liverpool, Rev. Hugh McNeile, a product of the circle around the radical evangelical, Edward Irving. Particularly suspicious of allowing Catholics into the English school system, McNeile urged that all true Protestants unite in preserving the English and Protestant character of their schools. Borrowing the Order of the Orange from Ireland, McNeile helped the Tories mobilize working-class and middle-class support.\(^ {156}\) McNeile went so far as to disrupt public meetings of opponents of the Established Church in Liverpool.\(^ {157}\) As leaders of the Liberal proposal for non-denominational education, the Unitarians were prime targets for McNeile.

Unitarian controversies had not been occasions for producing original arguments. Usually following a well-worn path of Scriptural citations, accusations and innuendoes toward conclusions that swayed few on either side. Yet, from the time McNeile and his associates announced their series of anti-Unitarian lectures in early 1839, Martineau and Thom sought to differentiate this controversy from countless other ones. In the past, Unitarians had tried to convince their orthodox opponents that disputing complicated dogmas such as the Trinity and Christ’s atonement prevented them from concentrating on living upright moral lives. By contrast, orthodox evangelicals would argue that by doing away

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\(^{155}\) Brent, 218-251.


\(^{157}\) *Liverpool Mercury*, 5 May 1837, 144c.
with the doctrine of Atonement Unitarians deprived the Gospel message of salvation of all power. Martineau and Thom attempted to separate the controversy from "platform demagoguery" by attending the orthodox lectures and inviting McNeile and his associates to attend the Unitarian lectures. Even after McNeile declined to attend, Martineau and Thom refused to fit orthodox stereotypes of Unitarian belief and, instead, used the lectures as a time to inquire freely after theological truth.

Martineau, Thom and Henry Giles all concentrated on the ethical and devotional shortcomings of orthodox theology, but Martineau especially developed an argument about the moral character of God that surprised their opponents. From the beginning of the controversy, the Unitarians did not claim that their beliefs were superior interpretations of Scripture but, instead, argued that the doctrines of the Trinity and the Atonement interfered with the Christian effort to be of one mind with Jesus in doing the will of the Father. Citing Blanco White's Heresy and Orthodoxy, Thom suggested that defending orthodox dogmas at all costs fed human pride and, ultimately, led to irrationalism. Martineau returned to his earlier criticisms of orthodox Protestantism and contended that reliance on the Bible was self-defeating. Working from the Bible alone would never produce settled evidence for creeds and doctrines, for the Bible did not teach any clear doc-

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159 "Liverpool Trinitarian and Unitarian Controversy," Christian Teacher 5, no. 4 (1839), 374-414. This article contains the collected correspondence in The Liverpool Mercury. See especially the letter of 7 February 1839 at 393 in Christian Teacher.


161 Thom, Practical Importance, 52-53.
trines about the divinity of Christ, something that should give orthodox believers pause when they assert the importance of their doctrines.\textsuperscript{162} Furthermore, religious ministers only alienated ordinary people by engaging in difficult to follow Scriptural arguments.\textsuperscript{163}

Thom went as far as to suggest that orthodoxy and skepticism were two sides of the same coin. Rejection of absurd doctrines often led people to doubt the rationality of Christianity altogether. Though doctrines were uncertain, the Gospels did clearly communicate the character of Christ, as one who did the will of God to such a degree that Paul could rightly call him “the image of the invisible God.”\textsuperscript{164} Presenting the character of Christ would speak to the natural spiritual capacities of human beings. As Thom said,

> If the essentials of Christianity had not been made by Divines and Theologians to consist in disputed doctrines, if it had been offered to faith on the ground of its inherent excellence, how readily, how universally would it have been received by all who felt it had echoes within the soul, and that Jesus was indeed the brightest image of God, and the very ideal of humanity!\textsuperscript{165}

In a lecture on the doctrine of the Atonement, the linchpin of the evangelical system, Martineau drew out the direct opposition between evangelical theology and the moral character of God. According to the evangelical doctrine of the Atonement, Christ,

\textsuperscript{162} James Martineau, \textit{The Bible: What it is and What it is not: A Lecture Delivered in Paradise Street Chapel, Liverpool, February 19, 1839} (Liverpool: Willmer and Son, 1839), 40.

\textsuperscript{163} John Hamilton Thom, \textit{Christian Not the Property of Critics and Scholars but the Gift of God to all Men. A Lecture delivered in Paradise Street Chapel, Liverpool, on Tuesday, February 26, 1839} (Liverpool: Willmer and Son, 1839), 5.

\textsuperscript{164} Thom, \textit{Practical Importance}, 22. James Martineau, \textit{The Proposition “That Christ is God” proved to be false from the Christian and Jewish Scriptures: A Lecture, delivered in Paradise Street Chapel, Liverpool, on Tuesday, March 12, 1839} (Liverpool: Willmer and Smith, 1839), 57.

\textsuperscript{165} John Hamilton Thom, \textit{Christianity not the Property of Critics and Scholars but the Gift of God to all Men. A Lecture delivered in Paradise Street Chapel, Liverpool, on Tuesday, February 26th, 1839} (Liverpool: Willmer and Smith; London: John Green, 1839), 5.
though sinless and divine, gave himself on the cross as the only possible pleasing offering for human sins. For evangelicals, faith in this atonement was the means of salvation. Martineau argued that a moral God would not deal with people in this way. A God who transformed people into elected saints in a moment, without any actual sanctification would be dealing rather lightly with sin, precisely what evangelicals argued that Unitarians did. As a more reasonable alternative, Martineau argued that sanctification and justification in the eyes of God happened at the same time, as human beings come to know God and reject sin. Coming to know Jesus Christ required an internal transformation, cultivating the right affections and centering those affections on Christ rather than being driven by external constraints such as hope of reward and fear of punishment. Finally, comparing God’s work to a financial transaction--paying to redeem a sinner from his or her punishment--was distasteful and completely failed to suggest the love of God for all human beings.

In Lecture 9, on moral evil, Martineau made the boldest departure of the lectures by extending his moral criticism of evangelicalism to the necessitarianism so prevalent in Unitarian circles of the time. Martineau set out the problem of evil as a clash between an intellectual view of the Universe, that traced all action back to God as cause, and a moral


167 Martineau was not unique in criticizing the evangelical use of the doctrine of the Atonement. In his own sermons, John Henry Newman criticized the preaching of the doctrine (especially the Atonement) in order to produce quick conversions. See Turner, Newman, 135.


169 Ibid., 70-1.

170 Ibid., 80.
view of the Universe, that considered God as the moral judge of all human beings. The problem of evil originated in the fact that some people try to extend intellectual explanations to moral phenomena. Necessitarianism--especially as explained by Joseph Priestley--stated that God allowed evil things to happen--even the burning of Priestley's own Birmingham laboratory--in order to bring about good results. Martineau contended that this theory misrepresented the nature of God and encouraged irresponsible attitudes toward evil. Philosophical necessity limited God's ability to produce good and produced an illogical situation in which God produced evil simply to do away with it. Believing that suffering was part of God's will might encourage confused passivity in the face of evil. In particular, the doctrine of original sin summed up the misguided notions of evil in orthodox theology. It weakened personal conscience, for "no doctrine which shuffles with the sinner's moral identity, contains the prerequisites of a 'doctrine according to godliness.'" Furthermore, original sin encouraged suspicion of others' motives and one's own common sense moral judgments, thereby undermining the trust necessary to all good social relations. All evil is personal; human beings commit sins and can correct them. In a provocative conclusion, Martineau argued that Christians should not attempt to resolve the question of evil, but simply think of God as a Platonic demi-urge, creating the world from pre-existent material.


172 Ibid., 38. He cited F. Schlegel's essay on Indian philosophy to show the pernicious effects of pantheism on conscience.

173 Ibid., 51.
The originality and force of the Liverpool Unitarians' response won them attention from across Britain and even from America. Although the trio's efforts did not prevent the Whigs from losing control of the Liverpool Town Council in 1841, they did convert two of their opponents. American Unitarians followed the controversy keenly. When it was finished, William Ellery Channing, the elder statesman of Boston Unitarians, praised Martineau for inspiring all Unitarians and also for shifting British Unitarianism away from its materialist tendencies. Orthodox Dissenters sat up and took notice of Martineau as well. The Congregational Magazine praised the orthodox clergy for embodying the ideal of the “church militant” but acknowledged that their criticisms had missed the mark. McNeile and his followers had culled Scripture for arguments but had not reckoned with the spiritual dimensions of Unitarianism that Martineau had drawn out so skillfully. The writer wondered whether the orthodox party even understood what they were attacking. Of all the Unitarians, the writer singled out “Mr. Martineau [who] is evidently the presiding genius.” The writer praised Martineau for his compelling images and use of language. Although Unitarianism remained a cold and barren system, Martineau’s lectures gave it “a fascination not its own, breathes into it a life, and causes wonder that the skeleton forms of his theological ideas can be so clothed with beauty and

175 HMC, MS J. Martineau 3, 168 (William Ellery Channing to James Martineau, 13 September 1841).
177 Ibid. The confusion of the orthodox party can be followed in the correspondence in the Liverpool Mercury. See the correspondence published in the Christian Teacher. “Liverpool Unitarian and Trinitarian Controversy,” Christian Teacher (1839), 374-415. They demanded that the Liverpool Unitarians defend the Improved Version of the New Testament.
impregnated with power.”178 He grouped him with the American Unitarian Channing as one who attended to the moral aspects of religion.

IX. The Supernaturalism Controversy

By 1840, the new school had become key participants in a more general discussion about the direction of the denomination in the aftermath of the Aggregate Meeting and the fate of religious radicalism more generally. The debate, however, crystallized around the seemingly arcane topics of the Gospel miracles and apologetic strategies. The Brixton minister, Thomas Wood, touched off the debate with a sermon on “The Mission of Jesus Christ.” Like other younger Unitarians, Wood raised the issue of sectarianism and the proper approach to religious apologetics. Wood was especially worried by the tendency among religious groups to create exclusive orthodoxies, thereby confusing religion with the interests of a particular group.179 Unitarians were just as guilty of these faults, for they claimed the Bible as an authoritative rule of faith and believed the Gospel miracles as proof of Jesus’ teachings. Claiming an exclusive and inspired sanction for Unitarian doctrines encouraged divisions with other Christians. Furthermore, scientists were extending the scope of regular natural laws, undercutting religious apologetic based on miracles. Citing Martineau’s Rationale, Wood suggested that Unitarians should not emphasize miracles to establish the authoritative credentials of the Gospel as orthodox

178 Ibid., 197.

Protestants did, but rather the internal evidences of Christianity. Christianity was not a true religion because of the miracles that Jesus Christ performed, but because of its suitability to the internal, moral dimensions of human existence.

Other Unitarian ministers moved quickly to criticize Wood and his doctrine of what came to be known as “anti-supernaturalism.” Although Unitarians were notorious for asserting that Christ was merely human, miracles--God’s interruption of the natural order of events--were an important part of their theological system. Jesus Christ had come to teach human beings the proper way to understand God and the proper code of ethics. To show that his mission was divinely sanctioned, God allowed Christ to perform miracles. Without these miracles Christianity was simply one more form of natural religion and Christ would be merely one more wise man. In fact, William Hincks suggested that opposing internal and external evidences for Christianity was contradictory, for if miracles were lies and fabrications, then Christ's character was less attractive.

Along with Rev. Hugh Hutton of Birmingham, Hincks brought up several Scriptural texts in which Christ's miracles were an express cause of belief.

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180 Wood, Mission of Jesus Christ, 10, 12. He cites Martineau, Rationale of Religious Enquiry, 17, 18, 127. Significantly, in 1843, toward the harshest phase of this supernaturalism controversy, Martineau published a third edition of the Rationale with a letter from Blanco White arguing that those who did not accept Christ's miracles could still call themselves Christians. Although Martineau did not accept White's claims in 1836, he did so in 1843, showing that the anti-supernaturalist appropriation of his work had its merits.


182 Ibid., 26. See also: Edward Higginson, The Christian Miracles and the Place they hold in Gospel evidence; considered in reference to the Anti-Supernatural Theology (London: J. Green, 1842), 3. It is illustrative of the close-knit family networks in Unitarianism that Higginson was Martineau's brother-in-law.

183 Hincks, Anti-Supernaturalism Considered, 8 citing In 3.2; Hugh Hutton, Jesus Christ our Teacher by Divine, Not by Self Appointment; A Sermon Preached on Sunday, January 24th, 1841, in reference to the Rev. Thomas Wood's lecture at Brixton on the Mission of Jesus Christ (London: John Green, 1841), 12 citing In 13.13.
Wood's sermon, however, quickly brought an even more radical voice into the debate: Philip Harwood, the assistant to W. J. Fox at South Place. Harwood was educated in Bristol and briefly at the University of Edinburgh before becoming minister at a Unitarian chapel in Edinburgh. From there, his steadily increasing intellectual dissatisfaction with mainstream Unitarianism propelled him beyond Unitarian congregations to his post at W. J. Fox's congregation in South Place, Finsbury. Like Wood, Harwood argued that the problems of Unitarianism in the early 1840s were reflected in its intellectual system. As the Aggregate Meeting showed, Unitarians recognized problems with their denomination but could not bring themselves to change. Harking back to Martineau's 1833 article on Priestley, Harwood said that Priestley's contribution had been merely negative, "the skepticism of an English Presbyterian divine, dissatisfied, on specific grounds, with a great part of the English Presbyterian theology, and relinquishing, on special grounds, article after article of that theology." Thus, according to Harwood, Unitarianism was stuck halfway between being a religion grounded in the authority of Scripture and a religion based on the authority of human reason. Harwood argued that Unitarians need to abandon the effort to construct authoritative creeds and the complicated Scriptural exegesis that limited their mass appeal. Harwood ended with a call to apply Priestley's own method of free inquiry to his conclusions and theology.


185 Ibid., 21-2.

186 Ibid., 23-4.

187 Ibid., 31.
In a lecture on "the Question of Miracles," Harwood—like Wood—presented an historical case for grounding Christianity in its appeal to human nature alone. According to Harwood, Christianity had emerged among the Jews, a notoriously superstitious people who linked their religion to hopes for an earthly kingdom.\(^{188}\) Similarly, the sectarian warfare of contemporary Britain was fed by the deluded political claims that people made for their religious beliefs.\(^{189}\) Miracles were precisely the means by which Jesus had sought to convince Jews that he was the Messiah or political savior. Because those political expectations were unfulfilled, miracles were irrelevant to Christian religion. For the British in the 1840s, doing away with miracles would eliminate the need for a notion of a supernatural authority in religion and would undermine notions of certainty and, thereby, reduce bigotry and sectarianism; all would inquire into Christian doctrine as they pleased.\(^{190}\) If his audience thought that Harwood had eviscerated the core of Christianity, he reminded them that, even though he rejected miracles, he taught what the Gospels taught:

first CHRIST ONE WITH GOD; the mind that is in him of Nazareth one with the plan of Providence; carrying on, as it so marvelously has carried on that plan, stage by stage and generation after generation, in the great progression of human good, preserving, reforming, emancipating, uniting; and secondly, CHRIST ONE WITH MAN; drawing all men unto himself with the power of a moral sympathy; and thirdly, MAN ONE WITH MAN, in the fellowship of a common convergence toward the center of moral unity; and lastly, MAN IMMORTAL, in energies, hopes, affections,

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\(^{189}\) Ibid., 6.

\(^{190}\) Ibid., 6-8.
that demand an immortality for their growth and consummation.  

In order to purify Christianity from its Jewish origins, Harwood joined forces with the Unitarian radical, Charles Christian Hennell, in publicizing the work of David Friedrich Strauss. Hennell had written *An Inquiry into the Origins of Christianity* (1839), a work which caused the young George Eliot to lose her evangelical faith. In this work, Hennell had followed the principles of Priestley and resifted the Biblical evidence of Christianity but, unlike Priestley, come to the conclusion that the evidence for miracles was empirically weak. In his sermon on the question of miracles, Harwood referred his listeners to Hennell’s work for an expanded version of his argument. In 1841, Harwood also undertook a series of lectures introducing Strauss’ *Das Leben Jesu* to Britain. In *German Anti-Supernaturalism*, Harwood argued that Strauss had shown the appropriate method for dealing with the Jewish superstitions and political ideas that obscured the moral truths of human nature. The Bible should not be rejected as a tissue of lies but sympathetically analyzed to determine how those stories expressed moral truths, for

they are not frauds, inventions, artificial manufactured things, or they would have worn out long before now—but growths of the Hebrew and the human heart, natural growths; and the poetry that ever grows around a great divine reality, concealing much but suggesting more, obscuring somewhat of the

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191 Ibid., 19-20.


194 Philip Harwood, *German Anti-Supernaturalism: Six Lectures on Strauss’ Life of Jesus, Delivered at the Chapel in South Place, Finsbury* (London: Charles Fox, 1841).

195 Ibid., 4-5.
mere distinctness of outline and detail, but enhancing the general moral expressiveness of the whole. Nature is always right: all her growths are beautiful and good in their season.\textsuperscript{196}

Thus, the stories in the Gospels were the result of the Hebrew mind reflecting on the life of Christ for around fifty years.\textsuperscript{197} Hennell and the circle of radicals around him in Coventry clearly recognized the potential value of Strauss, as he also recognized the similarities between their work and his own.\textsuperscript{198} Hennell’s fiancé, Rufa Brabant, originally undertook the rather tedious translation of Strauss into English before passing the task on to the young George Eliot.\textsuperscript{199}

\section*{X. James Martineau and Unitarianism’s Devotional Revolution}

While Martineau’s early writings and criticism of Priestley’s philosophy and theology, especially in the \textit{Rationale}, inspired more radical freethinkers to move beyond doctrinal Unitarianism, after 1840, he began developing new and distinctively Christian Unitarian cultural practices centered on the life of local congregations. After 1840, he was lecturer in mental and moral philosophy at the Unitarian seminary, Manchester New College, and slowly began the development of his anti-utilitarian ethics and philosophy of religion that would culminate only in the 1880s. While his lectures influenced the younger Unitarian ministers, after 1845 he also began his contributions to the \textit{Prospective Review} and the \textit{National Review}, in which he engaged the positions of some of the most

\textsuperscript{196} Ibid., 69.

\textsuperscript{197} Ibid., 97.

\textsuperscript{198} Strauss appreciated Hennell’s book and had it translated into German. See Timothy L. Larsen, “Biblical Criticism and the Crisis of Belief,” \textit{Contested Christianity}, 45.

important Victorian intellectuals—John Stuart Mill, George Eliot, Herbert Spencer, the Broad Churchmen, and F. D. Maurice. Finally, he issued a series of devotional works: his hymnbook of 1840 and the two volumes of *Endeavors after the Christian Life* (1843, 1847). These books did much to suggest practical alternatives to Priestleyan Unitarianism. Previous Unitarian hymnbooks had adopted orthodox hymns but altered references to the Trinity. Now, Martineau introduced original hymns, usually his own, aimed at drawing out the spiritual and devotional resources of the Unitarian teaching on the Fatherhood of God and the steadfast character of Christ. By focusing on Christ as the appropriate object of the human religious intuitions, Martineau separated his own thought from those who embraced simple non-Christian theism or those such as George Eliot who, inspired by Ludwig Feuerbach, suggested humanity as a new object of worship. Martineau acknowledged that religion did have its ultimate foundation in human nature but contended that through his perfect devotion to the will of God, Christ was a worthy external model and object of devotion.

In a remarkable philosophical preface to his 1840 hymnbook, Martineau explicitly criticized the influence of Priestley on Unitarian devotional life. Priestley’s utilitarianism had stifled the practice of communal worship as the natural, spontaneous expression of

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201 Winter, 309-20 charts the British fascination with mesmerism in this period and, more broadly, with great figures (e.g., conductors) who could unconsciously draw out and coordinate the efforts of those around them. Martineau was notoriously opposed to his sister, Harriet’s, fascination with mesmerism, going so far as to write a withering review of her collaboration with H. G. Atkinson on the *Letters on the Laws of Man’s Nature and Development* (1851) in *The Prospective Review* 1851. Yet, the common fascination with the grounds of human sociability in human nature suggests important similarities underneath these differences.
the soul's consciousness of God. More traditional Unitarians grumbled at Martineau’s veneration of Jesus Christ as the image of God, something they thought no human being deserved. Although the incompleteness of congregational records does not allow a full investigation of how and why it was adopted, most congregations quickly adopted it as their hymnbook. Even those ministers generally critical of Martineau, such as John Gordon of Coventry and Samuel Bache of Birmingham, used it in their congregations.

In his introduction to the first volume of *Endeavors*, Martineau reiterated his belief that religion was closer to poetry than to the understanding. As in the preface to his hymnbook, Martineau criticized Paley’s mechanical understanding of the universe. Comparing God’s work to the carefully balanced parts of an engine appealed merely to the understanding but did not reach any sort of religious spirit. Religion came about only when the mind found an object of reverence, something that “kindles” its greatest longings. Ordinary preachers had exacerbated the problem by focusing on doctrines. As a result, they had “disfigured Christianity, by constructing it into a rigid metaphysical form, and setting it up on a narrow pedestal of antiquarian proof.”

Rather than allow the natural human intuitions of God to express themselves, preachers had confined the

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203 *Inquirer*, 25 December 1852, 825-26. Martineau is responding to a review by Edmund Kell.

204 John Rylands University Library (JRL), Unitarian College Collection (UCC), James Martineau to John Gordon, 8 April 1846.


infinite majesty and love of God in human dogmas and definitions. Martineau main-
tained, as he had in the Liverpool Controversy, that the preacher must act as a prophet
and give voice to the human heart and its consciousness of the divine.208

In Endeavors, Martineau developed his account of religious life out of the inter-
play between the intuition of God’s presence in the soul and the sharpening of that intui-
tion in times of trial. Martineau departed from previous Unitarian polemic when he sug-
gested that the orthodox doctrine of the Incarnation (of God becoming a human being )
indicated the importance of Christ’s entire life, rather than a few ethical teachings, as a
model for human beings.209 Christ himself was the model of how the human mind and
will could be brought into communion with the will of God.210 Amidst the everyday
events of life, human beings struggled to act from the highest motives of self-less dedica-
tion to duty as manifested in Christ rather than from motives of prudent self-interest.211
In a sermon on the education of children, Martineau suggested that children not be bur-
dened with formal theology too soon. Rather their spiritual longings and instincts should
be encouraged, so that they recognize Christ as the fulfillment of those longings when
more formal Christianity is presented to them.212

208 Martineau, “Preface to the Second Series,” Endeavors, xii.
209 Martineau, Endeavors, 21.
210 Martineau, Endeavors, 1, 10. For a larger exploration of this theme in Martineau’s Christology, see
Ralph Waller, James Martineau, chapter 2.
211 Martineau, Endeavors, 28, 35.
212 Ibid., 374. In 1845, Martineau also sparked an enormous controversy when he preached a sermon arguing
that the Bible, especially the bloody scenes of the Old Testament, was not necessarily suitable material
for the religious education of children. See James Martineau, “The Bible and the Child,” Essays, Reviews
As observers, both sympathetic and unsympathetic, noted, *Endeavors* was utterly different from anything Unitarians had produced previously. In the *Christian Reformer*, an organ of more traditional Unitarians, Rev. David Lloyd of Carmarthen spent nearly all of 1844 excoriating the book for its departures from the rational certitudes of Priestleyan orthodoxy. First, Martineau's "unintelligible jargon" reflected a lack of rigor and logic, as indeed his whole style and approach suggested a falling away from the careful presentation of evidence to the audience. Lloyd saw Martineau's emphasis on the innate moral capacities of human beings as a return to the theory of innate ideas and a rejection of the notion that conscience grows in a Lockean fashion, through the accumulation of sense impressions and associations of providential rewards and punishments. Martineau’s new emphasis on Christ as an example rather than a performer of miracles verged on anti-supernaturalism or, at the very least hinted at a disregard for the divine sanctions for Christian belief. In addition, as a separate, rather cranky, pamphlet reiterated, human beings could not act ethically without God’s imposing his authority on them through rewards and punishments.

Although Martineau did not defend himself in print on this occasion, others suggested that Lloyd's attack had been "vituperative." Busy with the Dissenters' Chapels Act agitation in London, the man of letters, Henry Crabb Robinson wrote a defense. He ac-

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213 David Lloyd, "Strictures on Mr. Martineau’s Sermons," *Christian Reformer* (1844), 186

214 Ibid., 186-7.

215 Ibid., 188-89.

knowledged that, although Martineau’s ideas were certainly Unitarian, his presentation and style were not.217 Robinson's brother, Thomas, agreed that Martineau was different from his fellow Unitarians but thought that the differences went beyond style, for with older Unitarians, "utilitarianism is perpetually confounded with religion'. It is so and the one party that makes a boast of this, that, the Unitarians know Religion only as a bigger kind of usefulness."218 Thomas Robinson speculated that this lack of religious and devotional depth had hampered the appeal of Unitarianism. Although he did not agree with all of Martineau’s positions, Thomas welcomed him as a sign of increasing seriousness and spirituality among Unitarians.219

While Endeavors emphasized the individual soul's encounter with God, Martineau also hoped that emphasizing common religious sentiments would overcome the current divisions in British society. The second volume was published in 1847, in the midst of the last Chartist campaign, a time of economic instability and class strife. The fundamental principle of Martineau's treatment of social problems was that "society becomes possible only through religion."220 Only a shared reverence for a higher principle could diffuse spiritual sympathies through groups of people.221 Yet, religion could never be merely an instrument of social control, for human beings would never reverence some-

217 Dr. Williams' Library (DWL), H. Crabb Robinson Correspondence, Bundle 5, XVI 1/d, 1 April 1844, Henry Crabb Robinson to Thomas Robinson.

218 Ibid., 1/1, 19 April 1844, Henry Crabb Robinson to Thomas Robinson.

219 Ibid.

220 Martineau, Endeavors, 119. See also James Martineau, “Church and State.” It was first published in the Prospective Review (1845).

221 Ibid., 121.
thing they had created for themselves. Many of the problems of England in the 1840s could be traced to a lack of any organic unity. In a sermon against “Mammon-worship,” Martineau contended that the cause of the social disorders in contemporary England was the tendency to make money the measure of all things. As money came to be the measure of all things, people emphasized their legal rights at the expense of their moral duties, disturbing the proper social relations among individuals and groups. They treated those less well-off than them with contempt and those above them with obsequious servility. Distinctions of rank and ability allowed real, organic connections to develop among people. This happened in the family: combinations of opposites formed based on mutual dependence. Yet, the increasing tendency as society developed was to group equals together, as in the increasing formation of social classes. The mission of religion and the church was to overcome these divisions, for “every true church reproduces the unity which the world has dissolved, and for the precarious cohesion of similar elements substitutes again the attraction of dissimilar.” When reverence was fostered and moral duties developed, those duties could be applied to the poor around them for “the loving service of the weak and wanting is an essential part of the discipline of the Christian life.”

In Martineau’s own Liverpool, this sense of mutual obligation and social service found its clearest expressions. As the Liverpool Controversy has shown, no matter the best intentions and competence of Unitarian and radical town councillors, bigoted dema-

222 Ibid., 61.
223 Ibid., 75.
224 Ibid., 383.
225 Ibid., 384.
gogues quite often mobilized rowdy opposition. In such circumstances, the appeal to principle became a rallying cry, as when William Rathbone V at a public meeting called on his opponents to come “forward energetically, by looking back on the past, asserting the cause of the evils under which they suffered, and adopting the measures necessary to remove them. The existence of these evils showed a want of energy, a want of principle on the part of the people of England.”226 Yet, such an emphasis on duty and the willingness to lead also brought difficulties on the Liverpool Unitarians in 1849, when George Holt and William Rathbone V signed a contract to bring water from a nearby lake to secure running water in Liverpool. The populace at large were infuriated by what they saw as the arrogant presumption of a few elites and Rathbone, George Holt and their fellow radicals again lost their seats.227 This tradition of principled leadership and beneficence culminated in the local and Parliamentary work of William Rathbone VI (1819-1902).228 The brother-in-law of John Hamilton Thom, Rathbone VI served on the District Provident Society and helped administer the £100,000 that Liverpool sent to Ireland during the Potato Famine. In 1859, he started the District Nursing project, in which nurses were trained to work in the homes of the poor. When one district was without a supervisor for a year, he did the work himself.

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The completion of this devotional revolution was undoubtedly the construction of the gothic Hope Street Church to replace the neo-classical Paradise Street chapel in 1849. Hope Street was in the vanguard of the Gothic revival among Unitarians.\textsuperscript{229} The most important was Tayler’s Lower Mosley Street congregation which built a Gothic church in Upper Brook Street in 1839. Martineau, however, closely supervised the building of this structure. He not only helped design the heating system but, most notably, supervised the stained-glass windows, statues and images, all unprecedented fixtures for a Unitarian chapel.\textsuperscript{230} With the construction of this new church for his congregation, Martineau had succeeded in institutionalizing the new school impulse within Unitarianism. No longer would the congregation listen to sermons in a barren wooden building but, instead, it would worship in a Gothic, stone church whose images called forth their religious impulses. Finally, the building stood as a monument to Martineau’s ability to bring together a congregation of socially prominent and philanthropic individuals and direct their charitable efforts toward municipal regeneration.

\textbf{XI. Conclusion}

In the 1830s and 1840s, Martineau and the new school of Unitarianism drew upon, rejected and transformed the traditions handed down from Joseph Priestley. In doing so, this group helped change Unitarianism from a collection of radicals at odds with much of British society into a constructive force supporting the ambitions and reforming projects of the provincial middle classes then rising into positions of responsibility. As

\textsuperscript{229} On the Gothic revival among Unitarians, see Leonard Smith, “Unitarians and the Gothic Revival,” \textit{Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society} 17, no. 2 (1980), 81-87.

\textsuperscript{230} LRO, 288 HOP 3/21 (5): excerpt from \textit{Liverpool Journal} for 13 October 1849.
this chapter argues, the vehicle for this change was the reinterpretation of religious liberty on Romantic lines. The older generation of Unitarians engaged in almost unceasing controversies in order to spur free inquiry and educate their audiences. Under the influence of James Martineau, John James Tayler and John Hamilton Thom, Unitarians provided structure for free inquiry by elevating the position of ministers through more professional education, higher pay and ministerial organizations. In addition, they placed free inquiry in the context of religious life as a whole. Ministers would no longer preach on arcane Scriptural controversies but use their unique prophetic gifts to cultivate the spiritual intuitions of their congregations. In this way, free inquiry could draw out the bonds of religious feeling uniting the congregation members and ease the strains of sectarian feeling in contemporary Britain. Finally, Martineau’s anti-utilitarian ethic, which exalted adherence to duty and Christ’s example in the face of difficulties, molded the ethos of the middle classes, who were often caught between threats of popular disorder and the entrenched privilege of the upper classes.

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231 In emphasizing the unique qualities of the minister, the new school of Unitarianism was part of a broader trend in English religious life. The Oxford Movement reasserted the sacerdotal qualities of the priesthood and, as Dissenters developed more a more settled ministry, they elevated the pastoral office, emphasizing that the minister differed essentially from every other member of the church. For the Oxford Movement, see Nockles, 146-152. The most well-known instance of this trend among Dissenters is the Methodists, for whom their centralized structure makes these developments easier to discern. See: Ward, Religion and Society, 103, 256.
Chapter 4: Making the New Unitarian Minister: The New School of Unitarianism and Manchester New College, 1840-1866

I. Introduction

By the 1840s, James Martineau, John James Tayler and John Hamilton Thom had created a "new school of Unitarianism" in which free theological inquiry could combat religious sectarianism and support a responsible municipal activism. To reform their denomination, they re-examined its statements of faith and ministerial training at Manchester New College (MNC). From 1840 onwards, Martineau and Tayler used their teaching positions at MNC to introduce idealistic religious philosophy and German Biblical scholarship into the curriculum. Furthermore, they modeled their exalted conception of the scholarly vocation on the German conception of Wissenschaft and defeated attempts to require subscription to specific doctrines. In opposition to the new school, a group of clergymen defended Priestley's associationism and his approach to Biblical criticism. They argued that Martineau and Tayler had replaced a certain revelation in Scripture with mere human feeling. This group--led by Robert Brook Aspland of Dukinfield and Samuel Bache of Birmingham--maintained that Unitarians could only overcome prejudices and misconceptions by preaching their distinctive theories of Biblical interpretation, necessitarianism and utilitarianism more zealously. Accordingly, they used all institutional means within their power to prevent the new school from consolidating its hold over the denomination and propagating its vision of the duties of a minister.

The dispute between the new school and the old school was a seemingly pervasive feature of Unitarian life in the mid-nineteenth century. From the 1840s into the 1870s, almost every issue of the weekly Inquirer and the monthly Christian Reformer
contained statements by members of one school or the other. As the early-nineteenth-century generation of controversialists and activists passed away, a new generation replaced them. Because Unitarianism was so rooted in particular family heritages and chapel networks, these disputes often seem like family quarrels. Robert Brook Aspland, the son of Robert Aspland, carried on *The Christian Reformer*, served as Secretary of the BFUA, and used his positions on key Unitarian committees to combat the influence of the new school. Samuel Bache, Martineau’s brother-in-law, and the minister at Priestley’s old congregation, The New Meeting, Birmingham, countered Martineau’s moves at every opportunity. They were supported by Edward Higginson, Martineau’s brother-in-law and the minister at Hull as well as a distinguished Biblical critic and teacher; John Gordon, a convert from Methodism, who ministered at Coventry and Edinburgh; and Edward Tagart, also Martineau’s brother-in-law, and Secretary of the BFUA.¹ The new school mentioned the controversy less often in its quarterly journals, the *Prospective Review* (1845-55) and the *National Review* (1855-64), but only because its members thought a cultured ecumenism the best alternative to theological controversy. Martineau, Tayler and Thom won over some of their contemporaries, such as Charles Wicksteed of Mill Hill chapel, Leeds, but exercised their strongest influence as teachers of the next generation of Unitarian ministers, often the sons of their opponents. By the 1850s, they were supported by the important literary critic, Richard Holt Hutton; Charles Beard, an historian and journalist as well as the minister at Gee Cross and, later, Renshaw Street,

¹ R. K. Webb has argued that the Martineaus’ anger over the remarriage of their sister-in-law to Edward Tagart suggests the prejudices of their social class. See Webb, "Limits of Religious Liberty," 138. Although James might have initially been unhappy about it and Harriet made her anger clear in no uncertain terms, he later did his part to mend relations. James’ fiancé’s sister, Emily, kept writing to Helen and told her that she had heard wonderful things about Tagart from James. See JRL, UCC, Martineau Family Papers, E119, Emily Higginson to Helen Martineau, 31 October 1827.
Liverpool; Henry William Crosskey, the geologist and minister at Glasgow and at the New Meeting, Birmingham; Richard Acland Armstrong, the minister at High Pavement Chapel, Nottingham and Hope Street Church, Liverpool.

As Unitarians reassessed their place in the increasingly pluralized religious and political debates of the 1830s, they considered whether to confront the errors of orthodox religion or to seek some common agreement among all religious groups. The family ties among Unitarians and a general aversion to explicit dogma helped ease tension, but these disputes crystallized in the discussions over how the chief Unitarian school, Manchester New College (MNC) could respond to the loss of lay students to the non-denominational University College, London. In 1840, the committee moved the school from York to Manchester in order to attract more lay students. Even at Manchester, however, the school was wracked by contention. Martineau and Tayler had been appointed as professors of mental and moral philosophy and ecclesiastical history respectively. As Martineau and Tayler assumed these prominent positions, their fellow Unitarians began to notice their criticisms of Priestleyan necessitarianism and utilitarianism. In addition, the college could not support scientific and literary departments for small numbers of lay students; as a result, many Unitarians proposed to turn the school into a simple theological institute. Martineau and the new school proposed that MNC relocate to London and use its tradition of religious liberty to show the increasing numbers of intellectuals growing disenchanted with religious orthodoxy in the 1840s and 1850s that there was an alternative to complete scepticism. With their understanding of the relationship between religious dogma and natural human religious intuitions, Unitarian ministers could act as a
new clerisy that would draw out the common elements in the religious life of all Britons.\footnote{In many ways, the new role for ministers that Martineau and Tayler proposed was similar to proposals for a national clerisy advanced by Anglicans and agnostic intellectuals. See Knights, 1-17.}

The old school, led by Aspland and Bache, argued that, without their traditional teachings about the nature of God and the authority of the Bible, Unitarians would lose their distinctive identity and, ultimately, disappear. Martineau, Tayler and Thom had established domestic missions as models for non-denominational Unitarian activism, but their students completed the translation of the theological shift from the critical intellect to an emphasis on common religious feeling into a new responsible municipal politics led by settled congregations who could reach out to others. This chapter considers briefly the career of H. W. Crosskey, the Birmingham minister, who linked his confidence in the religious possibilities of human life to the gospel of civic reform proposed by his congregation member, Joseph Chamberlain.\footnote{Asa Briggs was the first scholar to draw attention to the importance of the “civic gospel” to late Victorian history in *Victorian Cities* (London: Odhams Press, 1963), 208-9. This has been developed in E. P. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons: Ideal and Reality in Nineteenth-Century Urban Government* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1973), 61-79. Although both mention Nonconformist ministers as some of the key proponents of the “civic gospel,” H. W. Crosskey is relatively understudied.} In the debate over Martineau’s 1859 essay, “Church Life or Sect Life?” and Bache’s proposal for a Unitarian creed in 1866, the new school eventually consolidated its pre-eminent position within the denomination.

II. The Early History of Manchester College

As chapter 2 showed, Unitarianism was shaped by the eighteenth-century Dissenting academies. The practice of free inquiry at these institutions allowed students to question received dogmas and formulate their own answers. At Philip Doddridge’s Daventry Academy, Joseph Priestley assimilated the latest developments in science and, as a
teacher at Warrington Academy, he pursued groundbreaking research in chemistry, theology and history. As orthodox Dissenters grew nervous at the heretical ideas in their schools, they imposed doctrinal tests. In response, Rational Dissenters in the north of England founded Manchester College in 1786. In its early years, the school weathered the political repression of the 1790s by appealing to a wide range of radical activists and offering a wide range of classes to young businessmen.

In 1803, the trustees of the college changed the location, focus and public image of the college when they appointed Rev. Charles Wellbeloved as the Divinity tutor and moved the college to York in order to secure his services. Whereas the college in Manchester had educated mostly lay students for commercial careers, the new location drew ministerial students and wealthier lay students who could afford to come to York. Because it trained more candidates for the Unitarian ministry, the college also became associated with Unitarianism. Although not all of the professors were strong adherents to necessitarianism, Priestley’s doctrines also made quick progress among many of the students in the college in the early nineteenth century. As tutors, Wellbeloved and John Kenrick were notably successful, training future members of both the old and new schools of Unitarianism. James Martineau, John James Tayler, Robert Brook Aspland, Samuel Bache and Edward Higginson all recorded their later debts to Wellbeloved and Kenrick. Unfortunately, as the college became associated with Unitarianism in particu-

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5 Martineau wrote official memorials for both Charles Wellbeloved and John Kenrick. See James Martineau, “John Kenrick: In Memoriam,” Essays, Reviews and Addresses: volume 1: Personal and Political (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1890), 397-424. On Kenrick’s help to Tayler during his first years at Manchester, see: Tayler, Letters, I, 46 (Tayler to Kenrick, 19 September 1822), 97 (Tayler to Kenrick, 16 September 1833).
lar, it lost the connections to a wider range of radical causes that had served it so well in the past. As chapter 2 described, in 1826, George Hadfield successfully brought suit against the college’s principal source of funding, the Lady Hewley charity, by claiming that MNC was an explicitly Unitarian institution and, hence, unfit to receive funds from a trust established by an orthodox Christian. Wellbeloved, Kenrick and the trustees tried to explain that the college was committed to freedom of inquiry in matters of religion, but the courts and orthodox Dissenters pointed to its faculty’s extensive connection with Unitarian organizations and causes as proof of its Unitarian allegiances.⁶

The Hewley trial highlighted the growing association between MNC and Priestley Unitarianism. By the late 1830s, national educational institutions and a rapidly changing religious marketplace forced many lay and ministerial leaders to justify the existence of MNC. Since the eighteenth century, Unitarians had educated their ministers and laymen together in order to prevent separations between the two groups of future leaders. After its founding in 1826, however, many of the lay people sent their sons to the University of London and, as a result, the enrollment at MNC dwindled down to a rump of ministerial students.⁷ The existence of a national, English university that did not require subscription called into question the traditional Unitarian need for separate educational institutions. Furthermore, many laymen and ministers thought that the traditional Presbyterian emphasis on a learned ministry prevented students from competing in a religious marketplace defined by the explosion of the popular press and religious evangelism.⁸ Finally, few

⁶ Cooper, 71.
first-rate teachers would work at a school located in York.\textsuperscript{9} Just before the Aggregate Meeting (1838) considered denominational problems as a whole, the Committee of MNC, cognizant of the impending retirement of Charles Wellbeloved, asked two young ministers, James Martineau and John James Tayler, to canvas the most prominent members of the denomination on the state of the college.\textsuperscript{10}

As chapter 2 showed, the chapel disputes of the 1820s and 1830s fostered Unitarian critiques of religious sectarianism. Now, as MNC entered a financial crisis, the denomination had to decide whether or not to maintain its own educational institutions or merge them into national institutions.\textsuperscript{11} MNC at York required a great deal of money to provide complete arts and sciences and divinity courses. Not only did the school have to hire teachers for all these subjects but it had to provide subsidies for the ministerial students. Debating how to contain the costs of theological education quickly became a debate about the future of the college and the denomination. Edward Tagart, the prominent minister at the Little Portland Street congregation in London, wrote to the committee of MNC on behalf of the London area Unitarians, urging them to move the college to London. He proposed that in London MNC provide the theology lectures that lay Unitarians at University College lacked. Furthermore, if the ministerial students took the arts and sciences portion of their curriculum at University College, MNC could cut its own costs.\textsuperscript{12} In addition, if Unitarians took pride in their high cultural attainments, they

\textsuperscript{9} HMC, MS MNC Misc. 71, 107-8 (Wellbeloved to J. J. Tayler, 1 May 1839).

\textsuperscript{10} HMC, MS MNC Misc. 2, 10-23, “Report of the Subcommittee appointed by the General Committee to inquire into the State of the College.”

\textsuperscript{11} HMC, MS MNC Misc. 71, 156-7.

\textsuperscript{12} HMC, MS MNC Misc. 71, 116: (Edward Tagart to Committee of MNC, 29 May 1836).
should educate their future ministers at the center of national intellectual life in order to produce the type of cultivated ministers who could interact with people of all educational backgrounds.13 Other ministers thought that an alliance with the University of London might aid MNC’s finances only to exacerbate the tension between cultured ministers and their congregations. They wished to keep Manchester College in the north of England, where Unitarians were the most numerous.14 Educating the students close to their roots would give more opportunities for pastoral work and keep the college practically connected with the denomination.15 Finally, as James Martineau pointed out, the trust deeds of Manchester New College specified that the college serve the north of England. In order to change that clause of the trust deed and move to London, the college would have to petition the court of Chancery.16

III. “The Manchester Experiment”

Influenced by the arguments of James Martineau and by Dissenting traditions, the committee of MNC decided to move the college back to Manchester and return to its roots in the eighteenth-century Dissenting academies. Early-nineteenth-century Britain was awash in popular education projects. As a Unitarian minister, Martineau did a great deal of educational work, teaching in schools, tutoring children of congregation members,

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13 HMC, MS MNC Misc. 9: 38. See also Edward Talbot (41).
14 HMC, MS MNC Misc. 9: 1, 3 (Robert Wallace), 12 (J. H. Rylands), 13 (John Kentish), 14 (Joseph Hunter), 20 (Samuel Sharpe), 24 (J. A. Yates).
15 HMC, MS MNC Misc. 9, 35 (Joseph Hunter, Robert Wallace, Edward Enfield).
16 HMC, MS MNC Misc. 2, 39 (Edwin Field to M. Philips, 4 March 1848).
and giving public lectures on various subjects. In 1837, he declined the headmastership of the local Mechanics’ Institute in order to wait for a more opportune time to enact his educational ideas. When the college returned to Manchester, Martineau became professor of mental and moral philosophy. Just as he and Thom had proposed domestic missions as a form of non-denominational social action, he hoped that boldly proclaiming the principle of religious liberty would attract the widest possible support and allow MNC to assume a national position akin to the University of London. He also urged the college to commit to the ideal of free inquiry by recruiting well-known faculty from outside the denomination. He recommended Francis William Newman, a former fellow of Balliol College, Oxford, then teaching at Bristol College, for the position of classical tutor. Newman was hired with glowing recommendations from John Kenrick, the retiring classics tutor at MNC and the most distinguished Unitarian classicist of his generation, and by Baden Powell, the Savilian Professor of Geometry at Oxford and a prominent liberal Churchman. Martineau might also have been attracted to Newman because, though not a strict Unitarian, he was in favor of free inquiry in religion. Martineau hoped to use

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17 Martineau was an inspiring teacher, even in the early mornings. For memories from the 1840s, see HMC, MS V. D. Davis 1, 94: recollection of Caroline Cox, 7 October 1843, in which she calls him “my type of intellectual and moral beauty.” Martineau’s chemistry lectures are mentioned in Drummond and Upton, I, 70.

18 HMC, MS J. Martineau 2, 65 (Helen Higginson Martineau to Emily Higginson Bache, 14 February 1837).

19 HMC, MS MNC Misc. 72, “Special Committee for appointing tutors at the college in Manchester, 1840,” 14 August 1840. Although people respected his qualifications for the position, Martineau pressed the case for Manchester cautiously, lest people think that he was advocating the move in order to secure a position for himself. See HMC, MS MNC Misc. 9, 54 (James Martineau to J. J. Taylor, 15 December 1839).

20 HMC, MS J. Martineau 2, 134 (J. S. Mill to J. Martineau, 21 May 1841). See also HMC, MS MNC Misc. 8, 1 (Martineau to William Gaskell, 15 January 1840).

21 HMC, MS MNC Misc. 8, 3 (Kenrick) (8, 3 (Gaskell), 4 (Tayler)) and Baden Powell (29 March 1840 to George Wood).
Newman's presence to attract the Unitarian William Benjamin Carpenter, a close mutual friend and already an acclaimed writer of medical textbooks, as the scientific and medical tutor.22

Unfortunately, by the mid-1840s, the comprehensive institution that Martineau and the MNC committee planned had failed to materialize. Martineau and Tayler did exercise a great deal of influence among the younger students for the ministry. Lay students, however, were discouraged by the inadequate scientific and medical departments and the complete absence of an engineering department and continued to attend University College, London.23 In 1847, despite his close friendship with Martineau and Tayler, Francis Newman took an appointment as professor of Latin at University College, London. Without a sizable number of lay students in the science and literature classes, the expense of separate tutors, departments and buildings in Manchester became very burdensome.24 By 1844, the college committee was reconsidering the move to Manchester. The committee members eventually decided to ask subscribers to renew their pledges and hoped that the abatement of uncertainties surrounding Presbyterian chapels and endowments and Chartist protests might encourage more students to enroll.25

When the financial situation of the college did not improve by 1848, many ministers and lay trustees began to recognize that MNC must be turned into a theological insti-

22 HMC, MS MNC Misc. 8, 1 (Martineau to William Gaskell, 15 January 1840).

23 HMC, MS MNC Misc. 72, "Special Committee for Appointing Professors at Manchester New College," 98-99 (7 July 1841).

24 HMC, MS MNC Misc. 14, "Special Report of the General Committee to the Subscribers and friends of the College, 30 October 1844."

25 HMC, MNC Misc. 2, 28-32: "Report of the Committee appointed to take into consideration the present position and prospects of Manchester New College to the general Committee of the College, 13 August 1844."
tute. As the college focused on training candidates for the ministry, the trustees subordinated their discussions of the college’s location, its curriculum and staffing to the question of what theology ought to be taught. Martineau had hoped to reinvigorate the Dissenting tradition of free inquiry in all branches of learning, but, with the failure of the Manchester experiment, he gave his support to a move to London, where he hoped that an institution dedicated to theological free inquiry could influence the most advanced minds of the age.26 By 1848, however, a fairly coherent “old school” party had emerged in favor of staying in Manchester. Above all, this group worried that Martineau, Tayler and Thom were undermining the essential tenets of Unitarianism and would only weaken them further by moving the college to London. Already, Martineau and Thom had drastically altered traditional Unitarian emphasis on the evidential value of miracles in their Liverpool Controversy lectures.27 As early as the 1840 move to Manchester, Thom, a member of the college committee, had attempted unsuccessfully to have Tayler appointed to teach the Christian evidences class.28 In addition, the intellectual and cultural attractions of London would distract students from pastoral work. University College’s honors exams distracted students from their studies. The members of the old school hoped that keeping the school in Manchester would keep ministerial candidates connected to the industrial heartland and the task of proselytizing the people with the fundamental tenets of

26 *Christian Reformer* 9 (1853), 383-393.

27 By the 1840s, Unitarians were recognizing Tayler’s innovations as well. See “Tayler’s Retrospect,” *Inquirer*, 25 October 1845, 677, a review of Tayler’s *Retrospect of the Religious Life of England* (1845).

28 JRL, UCC (Robert Brook Aspland to John Gordon, 29 January 1846).
Unitarianism.29 This group wanted to solve MNC’s financial problems by delegating the non-theological subjects to Owens College which was about to begin construction in Manchester.

After 1848, Unitarians focused on merging MNC with University Hall, a residence hall for Unitarian students at the University of London, designed to commemorate the victory in the Dissenters’ Chapels Act (1844).30 The project was born when many of the participants in the Dissenters’ Chapels Act agitation decided that the most appropriate memorial to their victory would be a center for free inquiry at the major national university, University College, London. A university hall of residence with a staff of qualified tutors would strengthen the presence and reinforce the claims of English Presbyterians to a place on the national stage.31

The simultaneous effort to raise money for University Hall and the discussion of the future of MNC crystallized the existing divisions over the nature of Unitarian education. Even at a very early date, John Hamilton Thom, who sat on the committee of MNC, thought that the creation of University Hall would be a perfect opportunity to bring MNC to London.32 The success of the University Hall supporters at raising money in difficult economic times encouraged others to voice their dissatisfaction with the current difficulties of MNC. At one meeting, held in Martineau’s own Paradise Street chapel, the mer-


31 Ibid.

32 DWL 12.90.8 (Thom to William Rathbone Greg, 13 October 1846).
chant Swinton Boult called MNC “decrepit” against Martineau’s protests and urged MNC to join University Hall.33 Yet, as Martineau pointed out, by asserting their own presence on the national stage, Unitarians had, in effect, lost sight of the principle of free inquiry and proposed a “denominational lodging house.”34 Although University Hall’s proponents saw the seriousness of any accusation of infringing religious liberty, they argued that future lay and ministerial leaders ought to be educated together. Since the current MNC had failed to attract many lay students, who instead attended University College, London, MNC should follow the students and join University Hall in London.35 When the trustees searched for an appropriate Principal, they chose Francis William Newman, the prominent exponent of free religious inquiry, in the hope that his familiarity with the existing committee and faculty of MNC might prepare the way for a unification of the two institutions.36

As construction of University Hall proceeded, however, the initial optimism gave way to a uncertainty over its staff, educational purpose and relation to Unitarianism. Nowhere were these tensions more felt than in the successive Principals appointed by the trustees. The trustees hoped that their first selection, Francis William Newman, would establish the institution at the vanguard of the struggle for religious liberty, ensure University Hall a warm reception at the University of London, and, by virtue of his friend-

33 DWL 12.90.9: “Meeting of Gentlemen held in the Committee Room of Paradise Street Chapel on Monday, November 30, 1846.”

34 DWL 12.90.9: “Meeting of Gentlemen held in the Committee Room of Paradise Street Chapel on Monday, November 30, 1846,” speech of Martineau.

35 DWL 12.90.23: “Minutes of a meeting held in Cross Street Chapel Room, Manchester, 5 February 1847” (Manchester: Thomas Forrest, 1847), quoting Henry Crabb Robinson. This call was echoed in The Inquirer, 11 December 1847.

36 DWL 12.82.72: “Minute Books of University Hall, 20 January 1848.”
ship with Martineau and Tayler, facilitate a future union with MNC. Newman took the position quite willingly but made no progress on daily services that would combine devotional depth with broad inclusiveness.37 His successor, Arthur Hugh Clough, the prominent ex-Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford and agnostic, took the position for a year but, likewise, resigned and took a more attractive position. William Benjamin Carpenter, the famous Unitarian physiologist, solved the problem with uncontroversial Scripture readings but, by that time, MNC had arrived. Although Newman, Clough and Carpenter were all academically distinguished, none of them could adequately tutor the variety of students they hoped to attract.

If the Principals could not formulate adequate services, the committee could not agree on the precise nature of the theological education that University Hall would offer. In his speech at the laying of the cornerstone, the minister of Essex Hall chapel, London, Thomas Madge, emphasized that the Hall would be dedicated to free inquiry in theology, especially the propagation of the great rational truths of the Unitarian system.38 The summer before the opening of the Hall, a group of Unitarian ministers--Edward Tagart, Thomas Madge, Samuel Sharpe, and Benjamin Mardon--found money from the Hackney Fund and proposed a series of public lectures over the next year on the truths of Unitarianism. Richard Holt Hutton, Martineau’s prize pupil and an M. A. of University College, London, strongly opposed the institution of non-scholarly, controversial lectures, as out of keeping with the Hall’s academic mission.39 By 1852, University Hall was not attract-

37 Tayler, Letters, I, 261 (Tayler to Francis William Newman, 7 May 1848).
39 DWL 12.83.118-21.
ing enough students to pay the costs of the building and the Secretary of the Trustee Committee warned his fellow members that they might have to sell the building if they could not make up the shortfall in the income.\textsuperscript{40} Thus, the committee turned its efforts to joining forces with a similarly beleaguered MNC.

In order to relocate MNC, the trustees appealed to Chancery to change the trust deed of the college, which stipulated that the college should serve the north of England. In their testimony, the trustees emphasized that, as a training place for ministers, the college served the entire denomination; its location in Lancashire was not part of that mission. The distinguished classicist and historian, John Kenrick, pointed out that the original trustees located the college in Manchester in order to gain the services of Dr. Barnes and the Rev. Ralph Harrison. Even then, however, the college had always provided ministers for the entire body of English Presbyterians and Unitarians.\textsuperscript{41} Prominent outsiders such as Francis Newman testified to the benefits of educating lay and ministerial students together.\textsuperscript{42} Many donors testified that they now educated their children at the comprehensive arts and sciences institutions at Owens College, Manchester and University College, London, instead of at MNC. The theological departments produced ministers for the entire denomination and did not need to remain in a certain locality. Furthermore, two prominent Members of Parliament testified that they gave money to support MNC and its work for the entire denomination, not to benefit a particular locality.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{40} DWL 12.84.105: 9 December 1851.

\textsuperscript{41} *Christian Reformer*, June 1853, 385-6, petition of John Kenrick.

\textsuperscript{42} *Christian Reformer*, June 1853, 386-7, petition of Francis William Newman.

\textsuperscript{43} *Christian Reformer*, June 1853, petitions of Mark Philips and Robert Needham Philips and James Heywood, 389-90; also petition of J. J. Tayler, 389.
While Tayler and Thom had long supported moving MNC to London, Martineau had preferred Manchester.⁴⁴ Now, Martineau, who had supported the move to Manchester in 1840 and still valued Warrington Academy’s tradition of comprehensive instruction, publicly gave his support to the move to London. In his view, the growth of publicly endowed educational institutions at University College, London and Owens College, Manchester meant that MNC had to decide on the proper institution with which to associate itself. Since the Warrington ideal was no longer possible, Martineau hoped that MNC could influence the intellectual and religious elites of British society. Unitarianism required too much learning to ever achieve widespread popularity among the masses. Freedom of inquiry in religion, however, could attract and guide many of the most advanced minds of the age, who were already questioning theological orthodoxy. If Unitarians were to abandon a comprehensive institution for a theological institution, they should attempt to make it a place of the most “advanced intellectual culture and the highest attainments of philosophy and theology.”⁴⁵

The laymen and ministers who disagreed with the decision to move to London came together and founded the Unitarian Home Missionary Board in Manchester under the leadership of John Relly Beard, a minister and prolific writer of popular educational literature. These malcontents predicted that the move to London would eventually harm the denomination. The highly cultured education provided in London would not prepare students for their eventual humble situations and limited circumstances as ministers.⁴⁶

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⁴⁴ For Tayler’s support, see Tayler, *Letters*, I, 249 (Tayler to John Kenrick, 5 August 1847). For Thom’s support, see DWL 12.90.8 (Thom to William Rathbone Greg, 13 October 1846).


⁴⁶ *Christian Reformer* 9, no. 6 (1853), 390-1, petition of William Rayner Wood.
Furthermore, the growing influence of the teachings of Martineau and Tayler meant that ministers trained at MNC lacked the knowledge of Christian evidences needed to convince most ordinary people. If Unitarians simply wanted to reduce the costs of the arts and sciences curriculum for their ministerial students, they could follow the example of Congregationalists, who had established a relationship between Lancashire Independent College and Owens College.\footnote{Christian Reformer 9, no. 6 (1853), 392-3, petition of Eddowes Bowman.} The Home Missionary Board affiliated with Owens College.

**IV. The New School’s Curriculum at Manchester New College**

At the opening of MNC in London in October 1853, however, both Tayler and Martineau argued that whereas early-nineteenth century Unitarians had harshly criticized the dogmatic orthodoxy of the Established Church, the now widespread questioning of religious orthodoxy would allow Unitarians to use the Nonconformist tradition of religious liberty to draw together all Englishmen. Tayler thought the various younger intellectuals questioning theological orthodoxy in the early 1850s--such as F. W. Newman, A. H. Clough, J. A. Froude, F. D. Maurice, Benjamin Jowett and A. P. Stanley--indicated that British religious life was passing out of an age of sectarianism.\footnote{“Inaugural Address at MNC,” Christian Reformer 9, no. 11 (1853): 688-89.} Unitarians might congratulate themselves on these developments, but Tayler maintained that simply pointing out the limits of orthodoxy could not draw out the “common vitality at the root of all our different forms of Christian faith.”\footnote{Ibid., 687.} When speaking to these honest doubters, religious ministers needed to suggest how the discoveries of the regularity of natural phenomena...
indicated a governing Mind giving the universe coherence and moral significance. Ministers needed to show how freeing religious inquiry from the limitations of dogmas would cultivate a clearer sense of natural religious impulses to reverence and worship in all people. New modes of communication, such as the lecture room, the concert hall and the theater, might make the weekly sermon and scholarly inquiry seem ineffective and outdated, but Tayler contended, only properly educated ministers could bring together the scattered spiritual influences at work in society and illustrate their connection with the "sense of duty and dependence on God, subjected to the grand formative law of our moral being, and interpreted in the light of that divine character which is the religious type of humanity." The ministry demanded men like the ancient prophets, conscious of "a sympathy with the work and spirit of Christ" and able to inspire similar sympathy in others. By drawing out the underlying religious unities among people, Tayler hoped to avoid using dogma to limit British religious institutions to certain people.

In order to speak to society in a new way, religious ministers needed new training and status within society. For this reason, Tayler followed Martineau's proposal that the endowments of the Church of England be taken away from the clergy and their patrons and dedicated to the religious and educational needs of the entire people of England. Against the common Nonconformist proposal to simply abolish religious establishments altogether, Tayler reiterated his concern that making denominations self-supporting

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50 Ibid., 691.
51 Ibid., 693.
52 Ibid., 693.
53 Ibid., 689.
54 Ibid., 689.
would destroy a potential source of stability and support for free inquiry. The government ought to pay qualified ministers, whatever their beliefs, an annual stipend that would free them from their traditional dependence on secondary employment and improve their often tenuous social status.\textsuperscript{55} Spreading financial support more equally, Tayler contended, would help both the establishment and Nonconformity rise above petty sectarian differences and develop their own distinctive principles into nobler results.\textsuperscript{56}

Despite their seemingly conservative intention to work within the framework of an established church, both Tayler and Martineau used some of the most radical intellectual tools of the age in order to maintain the possibility of free and authentic inquiry into theological matters against conservative orthodoxies and radical skepticism. Tayler used his position as the Professor of Ecclesiastical History to emphasize the possibilities of German university life, especially its conception of \textit{Wissenschaft} and the vocation of scholars, whereas Martineau used his position as Professor of Mental Philosophy to make the case for philosophy of religion as the cornerstone of Unitarian religious belief. According to Martineau, the Nonconformist tradition of liberty of theological inquiry assumed that scientific inquiry into religious matters was possible and not a matter of authority. Ironically, the increasing scope of scientific explanation according to regular laws that encouraged questioning of theological dogma could actually prevent free inquiry by limiting human knowledge to phenomena. Martineau contended that all who were interested in the possibility of free inquiry in religion needed a philosophical de-

\textsuperscript{55} All Nonconformist ministers experienced the need for supplementary income at some point in their lives. See Kenneth Brown, \textit{Social History of the Nonconformist Ministry in England and Wales, 1800-1930} (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1988), 151-62. As Martineau’s early experiences with teaching classes shows, Unitarian ministers—even relatively wealthy ones like him—were no different.

\textsuperscript{56} “Inaugural Address at MNC,” 689, 693.
fense of the possibility of real knowledge of the supernatural.\textsuperscript{57} In the past, Unitarians had defended free inquiry against the authoritative creeds of the Church of England and orthodox Nonconformity; now they would also have to criticize a skepticism about human knowledge that, likewise, threatened to make religious inquiry a matter of authority. Martineau argued that human beings do know real existences that are not phenomenal, such as space, time and causation. Human beings do not perceive space, time or causation in the manner in which they perceive other phenomena because the former are infinite, yet they are real because no perception can take place without them. Theologians needed to take account of moral and religious facts (especially causation and conscience) and put science's regular succession of phenomena in the broader context of causal power at work in the universe.\textsuperscript{58}

Martineau contended that because human beings shared fundamental intuitions of supernatural realities, "the things about which we teach are given in perpetuity; but the things to be taught about them are open to revision in every age."\textsuperscript{59} His colleague and close friend, John James Tayler, turned to German Biblical criticism in order to show the relationship between the fundamental realities of human religious experience and their changing expression. According to Tayler, Unitarianism was not attracting new members because its traditional doctrines were not properly related to the fundamental human religious intuitions. As he and other members of the new school had argued before, pecu-

\textsuperscript{57} James Martineau, "Theology in Relation to Progressive Knowledge," \textit{Essays, Reviews and Addresses, volume 4: Academical and Religious} (London: Longman, Greens and Co., 1891), 116-17. This address was delivered at the opening of the new school year in October 1865.


\textsuperscript{59} Martineau, "Theology in Relation to Progressive Knowledge," 116-117.
liar historical circumstances prevented Unitarians from putting their advantages in wealth and education to the best possible use. For a long time, Unitarians struggled against the Church-State alliance for freedom of thought. Thus, the word, “Unitarian,” suggested a mere negative principle.

Tayler argued that Unitarians needed to examine the Scriptures using the techniques of German Biblical criticism in order to distinguish the fundamental religious feelings expressed in Scripture from ancient Jewish superstition and later doctrinal accretions. As a more distinct, yet non-doctrinal, exposition of the Christian faith, Tayler suggested a spiritualized creed that focused on the historical person of Jesus Christ rather than later doctrines. According to Tayler, human beings had a natural intuition of their “personal relation to a living God—an infinite consciousness responding to our finite consciousness—involving in our minds a sense of dependence and responsibility.”

Out of this intuition and the sense of the difference between the perfections of this Infinite personal being and finite human existence developed the sense of duty and morality, “a painful warfare between the knowledge of what they are, and the consciousness of what they ought to be.” Although human beings faced with this situation might be inclined to

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61 “Mr. Tayler on the State of Religion in Germany, and Among the Unitarians in England,” Christian Reformer 12, no. 10 (1856), 709-11.

62 Ibid., 712.

63 Ibid. Similarly, Martineau wrote that “this overshadowing identification of God with whatever is felt to be claiming us, this overshadowing sense of His communion with us in ever higher trust and admiration, this investiture of the moral life with a sacramental value, is the distinctive characteristic of the Christian temper.” James Martineau, “The Christian Student,” Essays, Reviews, and Addresses, volume 4: Academical and Religious (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1891), 40.
despair, there was an answer in the life of Jesus Christ, who showed that a union between the human and the divine will is possible. As an “unreserved self-sacrifice to the Divine in the spirit of an infinite love for the Human,” Christ provided to all human beings “the historical realization of true religiousness—the concrete expression of that moral and spiritual ideal which haunts our highest thoughts, and to which our noblest aspirations and endeavors are incessantly turned.”\(^{64}\) In short, Christ was of enduring importance because he had shown that human beings could dedicate themselves totally to high ideals. Tayler even went as far as to suggest that the doctrine of the Resurrection was secondary to Christ’s manifestation of this “bond of union” between Christ and God. In fact, Tayler maintained that Biblical criticism could help counteract the skepticism fostered by the “scientific intellect” by showing that prophecies and miracles were not essential parts of Christian faith.\(^{65}\)

V. Free Inquiry and the “Civic Gospel”: The New School’s Students

Martineau and Tayler wished to make ministers the propagators of a renewed religious, political, and social order, but only a few of the students who passed through MNC fully measured up to those expectations. Martineau and Tayler envisioned well-qualified students who would achieve high university degrees and bring a thorough knowledge of Latin, Greek and Hebrew and the elements of philosophy and theology to their work in the divinity course at MNC. Yet, as had been the tradition, many poorer ministers used MNC to educate their own children free of charge.\(^{66}\) While most students

\(^{64}\) “Mr. Tayler on the State of Religion in Germany,” 713.

\(^{65}\) Ibid., 716.

\(^{66}\) HMC, MS MNC Misc. 12/ii: “File of Testimonials Index.”
knew Latin and even some Greek, they almost always had problems with Hebrew.\textsuperscript{67} Tayler and Martineau both agreed that many students did take advantage of MNC’s free education without much intention of becoming ministers. Tayler even proposed that students not be given funding until they had proven themselves with academic achievement.\textsuperscript{68} Martineau confided in the trustees, Rev. Charles Beard and R. D. Darbishire, however, that 4/5 of the students would not have come without funding.\textsuperscript{69} Members of the old school criticized the curriculum of MNC as too “heavy with metaphysics.” The curriculum was not suited to the capacities of the students and wasted time that might have been spent in more worthwhile practical pursuits.\textsuperscript{70}

Early-nineteenth century Unitarian ministers had engaged in journalism, religious controversy, and political activism, but Martineau and Tayler encouraged their students to center their ministries around their congregations. Upon his arrival at Renshaw Stret, Liverpool in 1822, the firebrand George Harris stirred up the area with a series of lectures attacking orthodox Christianity; he brought such unwelcome attention on the chapel that he was quickly fired.\textsuperscript{71} Brook Aspland regretted that the Gravel Pit chapel, Hackney could not find a successor to his father but acknowledged that his father had not built up a strong congregational spirit, and, hence, the members could only muster an offer of

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\textsuperscript{67} HMC, MS MNC Misc. 6: notebook containing Principal’s reports on students.

\textsuperscript{68} [J. J. Tayler], “Christian Theology in its Relation to Modern Ideas and Modern Wants,” \textit{Prospective Review} 3 (July 1847), 297-325.

\textsuperscript{69} HMC, MNC Misc. 4, 161-4 (James Martineau to Charles Beard and R. D. Darbishire, 14 May 1864).

\textsuperscript{70} JRL, UCC, Robert Brook Aspland to John Gordon, 21 April 1861. Aspland was quoting Alexander Gordon, the son of John Gordon and a student at MNC.

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£250. The ministers of the new school continued the political activism of their predecessors but also strengthened congregational life and cultivated new social habits needed to succeed among the middle classes. They attended and organized chapel meetings, held open houses and made themselves available to counsel and console their congregation members. Writing to his friend, the old school minister, John Gordon, then at Coventry, Martineau recommended that he wait until he could find a public-spirited congregation with sound finances and socially prominent members. Many of Martineau and Thom’s congregation members in Liverpool—especially from the Holt and Rathbone families—served on municipal councils and even in Parliament.

In order to unify their congregations, the new school of Unitarianism developed new forms of ritual and liturgy that could draw out the natural human religious intuitions. Tayler’s Manchester congregation moved into one of the first Gothic revival chapels at Upper Brook Street in 1838. Martineau’s congregation demolished the chapel at Paradise Street and built Hope Street Church in 1849, complete with an altar that was never used. In these new surroundings aimed at fostering deeper devotion, the new school of Unitarians also instituted communion services in order to draw the congregation closer to each other. Instituting these services among rationalistic Unitarians required proceeding delicately but Martineau, Tayler and Thom all persevered. Both Martineau and Tayler argued that a communion service, especially among the younger members, would help

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72 JRL, UCC, Aspland to Gordon, 3 September 1848 or 1849.
73 HMC, MS J. Martineau 2, 62 (Helen Martineau to Emily Higginson Bache, 18 February 1836).
74 JRL, UCC, J. Martineau to Gordon, 27 May 1845.
75 Tayler, Letters, II, 262 (Tayler to W. H. Herford, 23 January 1866); Carpenter, Martineau, 328-29.
solidify their commitment to the congregation in which they had grown up.\textsuperscript{76} With a strong community life, the congregation could grow from within rather than winning converts through public controversy. James Martineau, too, moved into the new suburban development, Prince's Park, in Liverpool along with his congregation members. His sister, Harriet poked fun at his growing prosperity and success.\textsuperscript{77} Jane Welsh Carlyle, visiting family in Liverpool, attended fashionable parties at the Martineaus' house as well.\textsuperscript{78}

Although the old school ministers criticized them, the ministers of the new school won over many lay people by relating their ethics of duty to the traditional Priestleyan emphasis on proclaiming the truth. The people in the pews could not follow the intricacies of theological debate but recognized a continuity with the previous generation's emphasis on the duty to proclaim and follow the truth.\textsuperscript{79} As mentioned in the previous chapter, the prosperous members of these congregations took the new school's stress on duty as religious sanction for their attempt to provide impartial reforming leadership in their towns. Among women, the new school's emphasis on duty reinforced their service and sacrifice for their children and families. It also encouraged moral discipline and serious-

\textsuperscript{76} "Presbyterian Provincial Meeting of Lancashire and Cheshire," \textit{Christian Reformer} 9, no. 8 (1853), 516-17.


\textsuperscript{78} Charles Richard Sanders, ed., \textit{The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle} (Durham: Duke University Press, 1970), XVIII, 141 (JWC to TC, 17 July 1844), 154 (JWC to TC, 22 July 1844); XIX, 138 (JWC to TC, 10 August 1845), 144 (JWC to TC, 13-14 August 1845).

\textsuperscript{79} R. Aspland, \textit{Courage and Confidence in the Cause of Christian Truth, A Sermon preached at the New Gravel-Pit Meeting House, Hackney, on Sunday, November 19, 1829, in reference to the death of the Rev. Thomas Belsham, who departed this life Nov. 11, 1829, in the eightyieth year of his age, together with the address at this interment in Bunhill Fields, November 20th} (London: Rowland Hunter, 1829).
ness of purpose in charitable work. Martineau, Tayler and Thom all expended a great deal of work on Sunday Schools and were respected by the young members of the congregation. Sunday schools helped the new school build up a membership from within existing congregations without resort to controversy.

The education at MNC was heavy on theology, philosophy and Biblical criticism, but most ministers spent their professional lives as pastors of congregations. The best of their students, such as Charles Beard of Liverpool and Henry William Crosskey of Glasgow and Birmingham, became pillars of middle class life in their provincial towns. They attracted prosperous congregations whose members took their public responsibilities seriously and who brought community effort to bear on the problems of the day. The Unitarian radicals of the early nineteenth century stood outside of political power and spent much of their time writing totalizing critiques of the Anglican establishment. The new school’s emphasis on religious devotion and duty helped Unitarians take part in municipal government and justify their leadership roles and suggested a common basis for uniting often fractious towns.

The career of H. W. Crosskey (1826-1893), the Unitarian minister at Glasgow (1852-1869) and the Church of the Messiah, Birmingham (1869-1893), shows how the followers of the new school linked their intellectual radicalism to congregational, com-

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80 HMC, MS J. Martineau 2, 61-2 (Helen Martineau to Emily Higginson Bache, 10 January 1836). She praises J. H. Thom’s sermon on the merits of self-sacrifice and adherence to duty. See also LRO 920/4/26/1: the personal diary of Anne Holt, 1 October 1848; 3 December 1848.

81 One example of Martineau’s dedication to the task of running the congregation’s Sunday School is provided in the letters in DWL 24.95, James Martineau to Thomas C. Clarke. Also, Carpenter, Martineau, 418-419. For Thom’s great influence on the Renshaw congregation, see LRO 3/16/2: 15: J. H. Thom to the younger members of the Renshaw Street congregation.

munity and municipal reform. In 1854, shortly after his arrival in Glasgow, Crosskey published an essay on religious belief dedicated to the founder of the Secularist movement, George Jacob Holyoake (1817-1906). An Owenite socialist, Holyoake believed that human beings need to take control of their own circumstances from religious and political authorities.\(^{83}\) He was an aggressive debater and by the mid-1850s had been prosecuted for public blasphemy twice. In the dedication of *A Defence of Religion* (1854), Crosskey stated that Holyoake was a “man who notwithstanding his inability to share the theist’s faith, must permit a theist to regard his brave sincerity, and reverence for truth and justice, as acceptable worship at the altar of the Holy of Holies.”\(^{84}\) Crosskey worked from the arguments of Martineau and Tayler that human beings naturally sought out higher beings to worship and reverence. Although Holyoake argued that there could be nothing beyond the laws of nature, Crosskey suggested that Holyoake was in the same position as most theists. Holyoake did not completely understand nature, but he did not deny it; similarly, human beings did not completely understand God but were not justified in denying His existence.\(^{85}\) Crosskey suggested that just as laws governed the course of natural events, certain moral laws governed the use of human freedom and spiritual power.\(^{86}\) Religion came into being as human beings attributed the laws governing their own personal fulfillment, the laws of their own natures, to the will of a personal Father,

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\(^{85}\) Ibid., 3.

\(^{86}\) Ibid., 5, 8.
known not as a mathematical proof but known personally, as people know one another. Crosskey argued that the religious sentiment, belief and worship of a personal God, was natural because it supplied a supernatural hope and assurance that the fulfillment of the moral laws of human nature would bring eventual happiness. According to Crosskey, a religious life was lived trusting in God and his Fatherly assurances, not necessarily in miracles or prophecies.

As a minister, Crosskey sought to use the chapel and its religious services to draw out the natural religious and social energies of human beings and direct them to their proper ends. After twenty successful years in Glasgow, in which he built up his congregation and won the respect of the entire city, Crosskey was invited to replace the retiring Samuel Bache at the Church of the Messiah, Birmingham. Although Crosskey doubted his fitness for a position in such a prominent congregation, James Martineau, no doubt seeing an opportunity to replace his erstwhile rival Bache with an ally, convinced him to take the position. As the new minister, Crosskey worked out how a free religion might be institutionalized at the local level. Drawing on the teachings of Martineau and the new school, he emphasized that a free religion without defined theology would better allow

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87 Ibid., 8.
88 Ibid., 20, 23-4.
89 R. A. Armstrong, H. W. Crosskey, LL.D., F.G.S.: His Life and Work (Birmingham: Cornish Brothers, New Street, 1895), 89. In the controversy that followed in the Inquirer, Crosskey defended his dismissal of miracles by citations from the writings of Martineau and Tayler.
91 Armstrong, 135. See also JRL, UCC, H. W. Crosskey to John Gordon, 8 March 1869. When Bache had first looked for an assistant in the early 1860s, “young Mr. Chamberlain” (undoubtedly Joseph Chamberlain) suggested that Bache write to Martineau for recommendations. Although Martineau was often consulted because he was a professor at MNC, Bache sensed that Chamberlain’s views diverged from his own and was loathe to do it. See JRL, UCC, Samuel Bache to John Gordon, 25 November 1861.
the expression and development of natural human religious intuitions and prevent sectarian considerations from standing in the way of social and political reform. Martineau, Tayler, and Thom had consciously cultivated congregational life in the 1830s and 1840s by starting communion services, enhancing religious education opportunities and founding domestic missions. Forty years later, Crosskey found himself faced with the task of preventing his congregation from becoming a collection of separate voluntary organizations. In order to build up a common sense of purpose, Crosskey ensured that the different organizations would be centrally coordinated and that the members assembled together in religious worship.92 Within his first year in Birmingham, Crosskey had visited every member of the congregation. He also conducted services for the students at the Sunday School and initiated a program to bring the graduates of the school into the congregation.93 Finally, he allowed the Domestic Mission to hold religious services in the Church of the Messiah in order to overcome whatever class division might have arisen between the wealthy congregation and its charity recipients.94

Like virtually all Victorians, Crosskey hoped to bring about individual moral and religious regeneration, but he insisted that only civic revival and community influence could accomplish this goal. One of Crosskey's favorite images was the "communion of saints." In an address to his congregation, Crosskey argued that all who guided their ac-

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92 Armstrong, 257. R. W. Dale, one of the most important Congregationalist ministers of the last third of the nineteenth century, who worked at Carr's Lane chapel, Birmingham (1858-1895), recognized that Crosskey was an intellectual disciple of James Martineau but thought that Crosskey revealed a more practical side of Martineau's focus on mental philosophy and Biblical criticism. Dale praised Crosskey as one of the key ministers who helped spread the "civic gospel" of municipal improvement in Birmingham.

93 Birmingham Central Library, Church of the Messiah Papers, UC2/ 139: "Church of the Messiah, Annual Report for 1869."

94 Ibid., "Church of the Messiah, Annual Report for 1870."
tions by principles beyond their own narrow interests, who followed duty and sacrifice over self-indulgence, were saints in the eyes of God.95 This emphasis on altruism and self-sacrifice was ubiquitous in Victorian Britain, but Crosskey believed that because Unitarians were the only religious group that truly valued free expression of the natural human religious impulses, Unitarianism alone could cultivate virtue and bind people together. Convinced of the unifying influence of religion, Crosskey carried on the work of George Dawson, the famous minister at the nondenominational Church of the Savior in Birmingham, who preached a “civic gospel” of urban renewal and reform in the interests of the entire community.96 Crosskey praised Dawson for cultivating a comprehensive Christianity and applying it to the social, political and cultural improvement of Birmingham. Dawson had shown that religion must not be “regarded as an instrument employed by prosperous persons who consider themselves superior to its claims, to keep in order a weaker and more ignorant world. It is the fulness of the noblest life of man.”97 Crosskey worked closely with Joseph Chamberlain, an important member of his congregation and mayor of Birmingham, to advance the cause of public education. He was even elected to the local school board as a member for the Liberal Association. As he explained to his congregation members in the annual report, a minister had the “duty of showing that the

95 H. W. Crosskey, “I believe in the communion of Saints”: A Discourse delivered February 9th, 1873 in the Church of the Messiah, Birmingham (Birmingham: E. C. Osborne, 1873), 7.

96 Briggs, Victorian Cities, 198 and Hennock, Fit and Proper Persons, 61-79. It is interesting to note that when Samuel Bache, the most prominent Unitarian minister in Birmingham heard Dawson speak, he thought he was simply “carrying out what brother Martineau wrote and taught some years ago.” See JRL, UCC, Samuel Bache to John Gordon, 5 December 1855.

97 H. W. Crosskey, The Memory of George Dawson: A Discourse delivered in the Church of the Messiah, Birmingham, on the 3rd December 1876 (Birmingham: E. C. Osborne, 1877), 12. James Martineau had George Dawson preach for him in 1846, at the very beginning of Dawson’s long career. See LRO 920 1/2 : Holt family diary, 18 January 1846.
religion he preaches is not a mere Sectarian interest, but a manifestation of God for the salvation of the community at large, from its ignorance, its sorrow, and its sin." Crosskey joined reforming causes in order to regenerate individuals by incorporating them within the municipal and national community.

Even though he was fully involved in a prosperous congregation and in local politics, Crosskey also found time to become an accomplished amateur geologist and a member of the Royal Society. Crosskey treated geology as far more than a hobby; it was a positive duty enjoined upon religious believers. At the British Association for the Advancement of Science meeting in Bristol in 1875, he gave a widely reproduced sermon on the religious implications of scientific study. Crosskey took as his starting point the increasingly common assertion that the regularity of natural laws precluded the existence of God. Crosskey, however, maintained that this argument assumed that the Christian God acted arbitrarily, as a pagan deity did. However, the Christian God acted by the nobler method of natural law. Crosskey argued that science simply described the changes and progress in the outward world. Reiterating his argument in *A Defense of Religion*, Crosskey claimed that Christ, by contrast, showed that human beings could actually freely live according to their highest principles. Thus, as there was a harmony in the physical world governed by immutable laws, so too did Christ reveal a harmony in the moral world between human aspirations and their fulfillment.

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99 H. W. Crosskey, *The Religious Worth and Glory of Scientific Research: A Discourse delivered in the Lewin's Mead Chapel, Bristol, on Sunday, August 29th, 1875, on the occasion of the 43th meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science* (London: E. J. Whitefield, 1875), 17.

100 Ibid., 19.
VII. The Old School of Unitarianism

In the 1840s and 1850s, Martineau, Tayler and Thom used their work in The Prospective Review and as teachers at MNC to guide an increasing number of younger ministers in abandoning sectarian controversy and pursuing non-denominational social and political reform. Adherents of Priestleyan Unitarianism, however, accused Martineau and the new school of substituting empty feeling and mere human intuition for the traditional authorities of Scripture and reason. Even when Martineau largely adhered to the tenets of Priestley’s theology in his early career, many thought that his rhetorical gifts and sharp formulations would damage Unitarianism rather than help it. In an 1836 review of Martineau’s Rationale of Religious Enquiry, The Christian Reformer praised Martineau for giving an eloquent account of the Unitarian system and demolishing the pretensions of opposing systems. The reviewer, however, worried that by associating Catholicism and Protestantism with authority and Unitarianism with reason and conscience, Martineau might actually further alienate fellow Dissenters and isolate Unitarians. For instance, Martineau’s famous assertion that “there is no divine right to dictate an unreasonable revelation,” though of great effect, led to troubling questions about the Unitarian system itself. Although Martineau might have simply meant by “unreasonable,” something that was unsupported by evidence, the reviewer in The Christian Reformer wondered if Martineau had not repeated Hume’s criticism of miracles, in effect, urging the rejection of anything contradicting common experience. Without miracles and the Resurrection to confirm Christ’s teaching and mission, Unitarianism would become another form of
free-thought. The reviewer closed with a warning that at a time when Unitarians were struggling to maintain control of their property, they would be unwise to support anything that might allow orthodox Dissenters to refuse them the name of Christian.

After Martineau and Tayler intervened at the Aggregate Meeting (1838) against stronger doctrinal statements, Unitarians began to scrutinize his opinions of miracles more closely. They could not understand Martineau and Tayler's position that miracles, even if true, were relatively unimportant for religious life. The critics of the new school reiterated the teaching of Priestley that God had commissioned Jesus Christ to confirm the truths of morality and endorsed his teachings with miracles. Without miracles, Christianity would be weak and insubstantial. If Martineau were right and Christianity was uniquely adapted to the human mind, then human beings would have no resources or bulwarks beyond their own nature when their faith was tried and "in a season of emergency when we are thrown back upon our meditations, we shall be filled with doubt and mistrust, as were our pagan forefathers." Even when members of the old school grudgingly acknowledged Martineau's claims of adherence to the theological tenets of Unitarianism, they thought that his poetic language and extravagant rhetoric obscured those beliefs and proofs. After the publication of Endeavors after the Christian

102 Ibid., 889. Martineau's effect on how other denominations might view Unitarianism was a persistent worry. See also: John Fullagar, "The Christian Name," Inquirer, 12 August 1848, 522.
103 Inquirer, 22 November 1847, 741.
104 "Review of Martineau's Rationale," 895.
105 Ibid., 896.
106 "Review of Martineau, 'Pause and Retrospect,'" Christian Reformer 4 (September 1848), 559-561: 560. This was the final sermon that Martineau preached in Paradise Street Chapel before spending a year in Germany.
Life (1843), The Christian Reformer published a whole year’s worth of letters picking over the volume’s poetic metaphors and lack of discussion of miracles. When Martineau produced a second series in 1847, The Christian Reformer’s editor, Robert Brook Aspland assigned the review to his close friend, Rev. John Gordon of Coventry, and thanked him for reminding younger Unitarians that they needed more than religious sentiment. In 1848, a debate flared up in the pages of the Unitarian weekly paper, The Inquirer, over whether or not those who rejected the Gospel miracles ought to be granted the name of Christian. The famous Unitarian physiologist and friend of Martineau, William Benjamin Carpenter, argued that God could work through all human circumstances and to say otherwise limited the possible ways in which people could experience God’s presence in the world. As the Secretary of the BFUA, Edward Tagart replied, the issue at stake was not simply miracles but authority. Miracles were vitally important to show the supernatural sanction given by God to Christ’s teachings. Without supernatural sanctions, Christianity became simply another human invention and human beings would never achieve any certainty over the claims of Christ.

Against the innovations of Martineau and the new school, the old school of Unitarianism reiterated an intellectual vision linking the authority of Scripture and a sensationalist epistemology. As Dissenters, Unitarians had long maintained the sufficiency and authority of the Scriptures apart from all human creeds. Robert Brook Aspland contended that Unitarians were the primary representatives of the Reformation tradition, for

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107 JRL, UCC, Robert Brook Aspland to John Gordon, 14 January 1848.
they alone allowed people “to interpret the Bible for themselves without the interventions of authorities, especially man-made creeds.”¹¹⁰ Although Martineau and Tayler presented their arguments in a religious light, emphasizing intuition seemed to be “setting human nature as sufficient for itself” and might eventually circumvent the authority of the Bible itself.¹¹¹ According to their critics, Martineau and Tayler crossed over the line between Unitarianism and a pantheism that subsumed God within human nature.¹¹² Samuel Bache argued that Tayler’s denial of the importance of the Resurrection made no sense, for all philosophy and scientific investigation must be grounded in facts; the Resurrection was the most important fact in the Christian religion. Tayler’s emphasis on Christ’s close consciousness of God and his purposes could not be empirically investigated, unlike the miraculous credentials of Christ’s message as presented in the Gospels. Bache warned that without these credentials “it will be impossible to shew that Jesus might not have been himself deceived.”¹¹³ In 1862, Bache named the new building of the New Meeting, Birmingham, “The Church of the Messiah” in order to emphasize the divine mission of Jesus Christ as the cornerstone of Unitarian faith.¹¹⁴

Old school Unitarians embedded the reading of the Bible within David Hartley’s sensationalist epistemology in which all human knowledge—scientific, moral and


¹¹¹ JRL, UCC, Bache to Gordon, 5 December 1855.


religious—was built up out of associations of sense perceptions. Conversely, all authentic knowledge was to be traceable to sense perceptions. Old school Unitarians argued that Hartleian and Priestleyan theories of sensation showed that the mind was not self-sufficient but was modified by sensations from the outside.115

In 1855, Edward Tagart, minister at Little Portland Street, London and Secretary of the BFUA, produced an enormous defense of the philosophy of John Locke and its development in the writings of David Hartley and Joseph Priestley. Tagart did not name names but justified the enormous volume as a vindication of Locke against the criticisms of those “from whom better things were to be expected,” most likely indicating James Martineau and the new school as his targets.116 Surveying the debate over Locke’s sensationalist epistemology, Tagart argued that Thomas Reid, James Beattie, Dugald Stewart and others brought the charge of atheism against Locke because they mistakenly believed Hume’s sceptical critique of him.117 Tagart, however, contended that Hartley’s associationist philosophy showed that the stream of sense perceptions could be shaped into moral knowledge; ultimately, the pursuit of rational self-interest would lead to a more complete understanding of one’s social obligations.118

The old school and the new school encountered each other frequently at the local and regional levels. Unitarian denominational life was a constant round of chapel open-

115 "Tayler’s Retrospect," Inquirer, 22 November 1845, 741. It is instructive to compare the old school’s use of Hartley and Priestley to show the need for an external revelation with Boyd Hilton’s contention that the Unitarian followers of Priestley were pantheistic materialists. See Hilton, The Age of Atonement, 305.

116 Edward Tagart, Locke’s Writings and Philosophy, historically considered and vindicated from the charge of contributing to the scepticism of Hume (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1855), vi.

117 Ibid., v-vi.

118 Ibid., 469.
ings, mission meetings, association meetings and pulpit exchanges that brought these figures together constantly. Thus, as strongly as different ministers might disagree with each other, a strong institutional and family matrix kept disputes from fracturing the denomination. Brook Aspland complained to John Gordon that the family connections within Unitarianism made many reluctant to sign the 1857 protest against Martineau’s appointment as professor at MNC.\textsuperscript{119} When American Unitarians grew uncomfortable with the theology of Theodore Parker, they simply stopped exchanging pulpits with him, in effect excluding him from denominational fellowship.\textsuperscript{120} Significantly, British Unitarians never did this to Martineau, Tayler, Thom and their followers. Throughout the 1840s and 1850s, members of the new school met members of the old school at various denominational events and gatherings. Tayler preached for the West-Riding Tract and Mission Society, of which Edward Higginson was the secretary.\textsuperscript{121} When Martineau inaugurated the new Hope Street Church, he invited Thomas Madge, a representative of the old school, who had been the minister in Norwich in the 1820s.\textsuperscript{122} Robert Brook Aspland invited Tayler to speak at the opening of the new Hackney chapel in 1858, helping to ease tensions created in the dispute over Martineau’s appointment to MNC. By the mid-1850s, however, the disputes were growing more frequent and harsh and could not be prevented from boiling over into a series of controversies over the direction of MNC and the denomination itself.

\textsuperscript{119} JRL, UCC, Aspland to Gordon, 6 March 1857.

\textsuperscript{120} Grodzins, 299-307.

\textsuperscript{121} “West-Riding Tract and Mission Society,” \textit{Christian Reformer} 8, no. 6 (1852), 432.

\textsuperscript{122} HMC, MS J. Martineau 3, 254 (Thom to Martineau, 28 June 1849).
VII. Martineau’s Professorship at Manchester New College, 1857

At the beginning of 1857, the antagonism between the old school and the new school emerged into open conflict when the committee of MNC decided to appoint Martineau as a full professor of philosophy. At the time of the move to London in 1853, Tayler and Rev. George Vance Smith, a member of the old school and a distinguished linguist, had occupied the professorships. Martineau served as tutor in philosophy and took a train to and from Liverpool during the middle of the week to give his lectures. When Vance Smith resigned, Tayler initially recommended that John Kenrick return to teach Old Testament interpretation. A little later, however, Tayler changed his mind and recommended that he and Martineau divide the classes among themselves. Tayler hoped to fulfill a long-held dream that he and Martineau could both find prominent positions at the center of national intellectual life in London. The old school, however, could not abide the thought of Martineau enlarging his position within the denomination. Samuel Bache proposed an obscure minister, Rev. Samuel Hunter of Wolverhampton, as a replacement for Vance Smith. Edward Higginson proposed that the trustees keep the duties of teaching Hebrew attached to the vacant professorship in order to prevent Martineau from becoming a candidate. Neither proposal gained any support. Robert Brook Aspland complained to John Gordon that, though the reduction from three to two teachers was presented as a cost-cutting measure, the two professors would receive higher salaries, possibly making Martineau the highest paid Unitarian minister ever. Aspland thought that the appointment of Martineau represented the maneuvers of one clique and specu-

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123 Tayler, Letters, II, 57 (J. J. Tayler to Thom, 25 July 1856).

124 JRL, UCC, Samuel Bache to John Gordon, 3 February 1857.
lated that Martineau’s young follower and MNC trustee, Rev. Charles Beard, would be rewarded with the pulpit at Hope Street, Liverpool when Martineau came to London.\textsuperscript{125}

When the committee appointed Martineau as a professor, the new school seemed to have triumphed. The members of the old school, however, were determined to prevent MNC from being handed over entirely to members of the “metaphysical school,” as Bache put it.\textsuperscript{126} Led by Robert Brook Aspland, the members of the old school signed a petition to the committee of MNC against Martineau’s appointment as professor. In it they complained that the process for appointing a replacement for Vance Smith had not been open and honest. The committee had not considered any alternatives to Martineau. Martineau was a distinguished philosopher and contributor to journals but he could not fill the college’s needs for a teacher of Hebrew. Finally, with both professorships in the hands of one school, a large part of the denomination would be excluded and free inquiry would be stifled in a denomination that claimed to prize it.\textsuperscript{127} Martineau and Tayler were assigned the teaching of Christian evidences, though both had criticized the use of miracles and prophecies in Christian apologetics. Their opponents claimed that they would never be able to do justice to opposing viewpoints.

Martineau’s appointment was still secure, but both Martineau and Tayler sensed the seriousness of the accusations that had been entered in the minutes of the committee. Tayler even suggested that Martineau withdraw from the appointment. Nevertheless, Martineau remained resolute and asked the committee of MNC to either reaffirm his ap-

\textsuperscript{125} JRL, UCC, R. B. Aspland to John Gordon, 6 February 1857.

\textsuperscript{126} JRL, UCC, Samuel Bache to John Gordon, 19 January 1857.

\textsuperscript{127} DWL 93 A29: “Protest against the Recent Proceedings of the Committee of Manchester New College.”
pointment or vote against him. At a special meeting of the trustees at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester on 16 April 1857, Martineau’s supporters and opponents had their most momentous showdown. Martineau did not make personal appeals on his own behalf, but his allies worked to bring in support. In what turned into a lengthy meeting filled with interruptions, Martineau’s opponents were firmly vanquished. John Hamilton Thom, one of the trustees, set the tone with an opening address in which he rebutted the petition’s statements point by point. He began by recalling that the opponents of Martineau had authorized the committee to consider the organization of the professorships but would not follow the committee’s recommendations. Most importantly, by attempting to disqualify Martineau because of his theological opinions, the signers of the petition were attempting to set up a theological creed for Unitarianism. Moreover, as a teacher, Martineau’s own particular opinions would not matter. Martineau had shared the opinions of the old school when he wrote his Rationale of Religious Enquiry and knew the views of other Unitarians quite well. Rev. Charles Beard, the promising young minister at Gee Cross, reiterated that the signers of the petition could have stated their positions at earlier meetings but had not bothered to be present; thus, they were misinformed about the role of the committee and simply uncooperative as well as simply misinformed.

By contrast, Martineau’s opponents were not as well-prepared to defend their petition. A Mr. Long opened with a lengthy defense of the importance of miracles in confirming the teachings of Christ. Unfortunately, Martineau’s opponents weakened their

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130 Ibid., 111-12.
case by expressing their frustration at what they saw as the machinations of a tiny clique determined to usurp control of the college. For over an hour, Eddowes Bowman, one of the trustees who had signed the protest, described Martineau and Tayler’s underhanded maneuverings since 1853 to displace Vance Smith. He even accused them of encouraging the students to refuse to work for Vance Smith. He was interrupted and rebutted by John Kenrick and Samuel D. Darbishire, who received a round of applause for their efforts. Even after this, however, Benjamin Mardon accused Martineau and Tayler of forcing out Robert Wallace as Principal in 1846. Again, Kenrick, who had replaced Wallace, interrupted Mardon, while others threatened to leave. Later, W. R. Wood complained that Martineau had long been seeking to move to London in order to advance his career, at which point the audience shouted him down with cries of “for shame.”

In a vain attempt to restore practicality, Brook Aspland gave a speech in which he argued that Martineau’s metaphysical approach to religion had simply confused the students, making them ineffective preachers and ministers. In the end, most of the original signers of the petition voted to confirm Martineau’s appointment.

In the aftermath of the meeting, the members of the old school admitted their defeat but would not allow that they had been fairly beaten. They attributed Martineau’s confirmation to the inarticulate and long-winded critics. Both Bache and Aspland rejected the argument that the critics of Martineau were attempting to impose doctrines on Unitarianism, though Bache did, in fact, say that Unitarianism needed a creed. Both

\[131\] Ibid.

\[132\] JRL, UCC, Bache to Gordon, 16 April 1857; R. B. Aspland to Gordon, 7 May 1857.
thought that the decision deprived Martineau’s critics of liberty. As Aspland put it, Martineau and the new school had started a “religious liberty panic” among Unitarians in order to avoid a substantive defense of their theology. Furthermore, the Unitarian laity were not educated enough to understand the issues at stake in the debate. In addition, Martineau did not come forward and make his case for himself but worked indirectly through agents and intermediaries, such as Robert Darbishire, Joseph Hutton and John Hamilton Thom. Although the old school let matters cool a slight amount, Aspland complained to Tayler that the current arrangements at MNC were “tainted with injustice” and would never satisfy those who signed the petition.

VIII. Church Life or Sect Life?

As the new school established itself at MNC and in London, members of the old school tried to force Martineau to make positive commitments to denominational Unitarianism. In the fall of 1859, the BFUA offered Martineau the chair at its annual meeting but he declined. When this became known, several Unitarians wrote pointed letters to The Inquirer and The Christian Reformer emphasizing that, as the most prominent professor at the chief Unitarian seminary, Martineau ought to be able to endorse Unitarianism. When the matter became public, Martineau replied that he did not want to criticize Unitarianism or even clear theological definitions but to suggest that Unitari-

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133 JRL, UCC, 16 April 1857, Bache to Gordon.
134 JRL, UCC, R. B. Aspland to Gordon, 7 May 1857.
135 JRL, UCC, R. B. Aspland to Gordon, 6 March 1857.
136 JRL, UCC, R. B. Aspland to Gordon, 11 November 1857.
137 “Mr. Martineau’s Recent Letter on the Unitarian Position,” Christian Reformer 15 (October 1859), 603.
ans reassess the place of theology in their denominational life.\textsuperscript{138} Martineau argued that religious bodies ought to define themselves according to their sense of common spiritual devotion to Christ and God, that is they ought to be churches rather than sects.\textsuperscript{139} As the history of Christianity showed, doctrines could change over time and even the relative importance of certain doctrines could change. Unitarians ought to be especially aware of the subtleties of doctrinal change because, as the Dissenters’ Chapels Act (1844) had recognized, they were the legitimate successors to previous generations of orthodox believers.\textsuperscript{140} If Unitarians persisted in demanding that all members subscribe to certain doctrines, the denomination would lack the flexibility to adapt to the changing needs of the times.\textsuperscript{141} Martineau thought that Unitarianism in the 1850s needed to develop more devotional power but it could only do so by placing the doctrine of the unity of God in proper perspective. In the eighteenth-century, the doctrine had helped expose the follies of orthodox Christianity, but in the mid-nineteenth-century, the old school of Unitarianism seemed, as Martineau put it in terms calculated to enrage his opponents, little more than a “sort of miraculously confirmed Deism.”\textsuperscript{142}

In his response, Martineau powerfully expounded his vision of a broader Christian fellowship, but his sharp words also suggested a paradoxical alienation from those Uni-

\textsuperscript{138} James Martineau, “The Unitarian Position,” \textit{Essays, Reviews, and Addresses: volume 2: Ecclesiastical and Historical} (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1891): 371. This letter was originally printed in \textit{The Inquirer} for 27 August 1859.

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 372.

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 373.

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 376.

tarians to whom he ought to have been closest. His opponents argued that at a practical level theological doctrine and ecclesiology could not be separated. Groups that worshipped together needed to be sure that they were worshipping the same God.\textsuperscript{143} Hence, Martineau’s distinction between churches and sects was forced and unconvincing.\textsuperscript{144} Furthermore, Martineau fell into the paradoxical situation of urging greater religious open-mindedness but criticizing Unitarians for not being open-minded. In effect, Martineau was rejecting the group of people who were closest to him in the name of broader religious fellowship. At the same time as he was urging Unitarians to discern the spiritual impulses at work in other religions, he was insulting Unitarian beliefs. He seemed to want to learn from everybody but Unitarians.\textsuperscript{145}

**IX. Bache’s Defeat**

After Martineau gained the professorship at MNC and increased his influence over the younger generation of ministers, Samuel Bache became increasingly dissatisfied with the direction of the denomination. In 1861, he sent his son, Kentish, to the Presbyterian college at Carmarthen, Wales instead of to MNC.\textsuperscript{146} At the meeting of trustees in Manchester, Bache had mentioned that Unitarianism needed a creed. Increasingly, he made attempts to have Unitarian groups recognize certain fundamental beliefs of Unitarianism. In 1864, he resigned from the Birmingham District Unitarian Association after it

\textsuperscript{143} “Mr. Martineau’s Recent Letter on the Unitarian Position,” *Christian Reformer* 15, no. 10 (October 1859), 609.

\textsuperscript{144} JRL, UCC, Bache to Gordon, 29 October 1859.

\textsuperscript{145} “Mr. Martineau’s Recent Letter,” 609.

\textsuperscript{146} JRL, UCC, Bache to Gordon, 12 October 1861.
refused to "clearly define" Unitarianism in terms of the Scriptures. After The Christian Reformer was discontinued and replaced by The Theological Review, Bache confronted its editor, Rev. Charles Beard, over an article that urged Unitarians to purge the supernatural elements of Biblical accounts of Christ.

Finally, in 1866, he gave notice to the BFUA that he would present a creed for Unitarianism at the upcoming meeting. In his address, Bache noted that Unitarians needed a creed because in recent years, there had been numerous attempts to empty the words, "Unitarian Christianity," of their meaning. In particular, the "professors at Manchester New College" had attempted to replace the clear proofs and evidences of the Scriptures with diffuse "spiritual influences." Bache closed with a warning that British and Foreign Unitarian Association had been established for certain, defined purposes and that those who could not adhere to them ought to leave.

Bache's proposal actually was not voted on but it opened the possibility of defining Unitarianism in other ways. As a counterweight to Bache's proposal, a group of ministers and laymen sought to create a new religious group dedicated to free inquiry, of which the BFUA would be a sub-organization dedicated to a single cause. Backed by the eminent Unitarian lawyer, Edwin Field, this group argued that because the BFUA carried a doctrinal designation, its purposes ought to be limited to advancing that doctrine, Unitarianism. There was still a need for an adequate religious organization defined only by

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147 JRL, UCC, Bache to Gordon, 21 January 1864.

148 JRL, UCC, Bache to Gordon, 15 March 1864.

149 Samuel Bache, Address to the Members of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association at their Annual Meeting, held in the Unitarian Chapel, Hackney, London, on Wednesday, May 23, 1866 (London, 1866). See also: Thomas Cromwell, Whither are we tending? (London, 1866), 4.
non-subscription to creeds. After much wrangling, a committee was selected to discuss these matters. In a contentious meeting, representatives of both the old and the new school agreed to limit membership in the BFUA to individuals and to lay groundwork for a more comprehensive, liberal religious organization.

X. Conclusion

By the mid-1860s, the new school of Unitarianism had triumphed within their denomination. To be sure, many still disagreed with Martineau, Tayler and Thom but never again would they be threatened with exclusion from the denomination. As the professors at MNC, Martineau and Tayler solidified their influence over the rising generation of Unitarian ministers and trained ministers who could effectively direct the voluntary societies and municipal activism that dominated mid-nineteenth-century Britain. The new school of Unitarianism did not confront the Established Church and expose its errors but, rather, it sought out the common religious feelings at work in all religious denominations.

In the process, Martineau and Tayler had provided Unitarianism with a new intellectual framework. Martineau replaced Priestley’s necessasarian metaphysics in which human beings were guided through external rewards and punishments with a religious philosophy emphasizing the freedom of human beings and fulfillment in adherence to duty in the face of difficulties. They did not view the Scriptures as a series of evidences and proofs to be weighed and analyzed but as a record of the various expressions of human religious

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150 DWL 93F, 2 (J. J. Tayler to R. B. Aspland, 19 March 1866).

151 DWL 93F, 1-28. These letters cover the negotiations between Tayler and Aspland over the composition of the committee.

feeling, culminating in Jesus Christ. The new school inspired a generation of professionally trained and civic-minded ministers, such as H. W. Crosskey of Birmingham, who united their congregations into vehicles for municipal reform and regeneration. Martineau and Tayler hoped that their reformed Unitarianism could ultimately become the basis for a newly united British religious life. As their work in *The Prospective Review* and *The National Review* shows, they could contribute to the overall conversation of mid-Victorian intellectual life but, as the next chapter will show, could not control its course.
Chapter 5: Forging a Common Culture: The New School of Unitarianism and the Higher Journalism, 1845-1864

1. Introduction

In the 1830s, Unitarians faced the loss of their chapels and an increasingly obvious failure to win converts. By the late 1840s, however, Martineau, Tayler, and Thorn had met the crisis of early-nineteenth-century Unitarian radicalism by drawing on Romantic currents of thought to propagate a new ethical outlook, shift apologetic emphasis to the internal evidences of religion, and reinforce Unitarians' claims to responsible municipal government. In the pages of The Christian Teacher, in the supernaturalism controversies, and in debates over the direction of the denomination, these ministers attacked the system of Joseph Priestley by elevating the personal and psychological aspects of religious faith. They replaced his understanding of a God who worked mechanically through external constraints with a vision of a God organically linked to and present in human nature. The natural human spiritual capacities and intuitions made human beings more than slaves of circumstances and suggested a human capacity to act morally without external rewards and punishments. Blending a more optimistic conception of the human capacity to know God with the Nonconformist tradition of religious liberty, they rejected the traditional Unitarian emphasis on the authority of Scriptural evidences and natural theology in favor of the study of how the natural human capacity to know God expressed itself over time.

At the root of the new school's critique of Priestleyan science and natural theology was a Romantic affirmation of the individual's spiritual and ethical capacities. This turn, however, was not anti-scientific, for the new school linked its new religious vision
to German *Wissenschaft* and new approaches in science emphasizing development of phenomena out of simple principles according to regular laws. With this intellectual framework, they appealed to the need that many felt for broader, non-sectarian intellectual and cultural institutions. Although Martineau, Tayler and Thom did relatively little original scientific work, they participated enthusiastically in the scientific associations of the 1830s and 1840s and were deeply aware of changes in science.\(^1\) As a prominent member of the Liverpool Literary and Philosophical Society (LLPS), a group of Liverpool gentlemen interested in science and its practical applications, Martineau opened his home to visiting dignitaries of the British Association for the Advancement of Science (BAAS) in 1837.\(^2\) As the President of the LLPS in 1839, Martineau invited William Benjamin Carpenter, his childhood friend and a leading advocate of developmental and evolutionary approaches in science, to lecture on the laws guiding the development of all life

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\(^1\) HMC, MS J. Martineau 5, 7 (James Martineau to Russell Martineau, 9 July 1840). Like many others, James Martineau shared the popular fascination with geology. While on vacation, James wrote to his son to describe an interesting formation of rocks that he had seen.

\(^2\) An example of the reforming projects of this group is one of the papers read while Martineau was President: Mr. Cunningham on “The Sanitary State of Liverpool: The Causes of its Alleged Great Mortality and the Means of Lessening Them.” (9 March 1840) Cunningham injected some of the water found in the streets of Liverpool’s poorest districts into dogs and they contracted typhoid. He ended his paper with a call for a system of garbage collection, efficient sewers and building regulations. See LRO 060 LIT 1.4 “Minutes of the Literary and Philosophical Society, January 1837 to June 1846.” These calls for greater municipal responsibility and activism are echoed by the proposals put forward by Rev. John Johns at the Domestic Mission, who was also a member of the Literary and Philosophical Society. For Martineau’s hosting of receptions for the BAAS, see HMC, MS J. Martineau 2, 66: 17 August and 17 September 1837, Helen Martineau to Emily Higginson Bache. Despite their founding by elites, such peripatetic annual meetings were vitally important in cultivating middle class interest in science during the 1830s. For the cultural significance of the BAAS, see Morrell and Thackray, *Gentlemen of Science*, 11, 33. In his diary, the wealthy merchant George Holt notes that Martineau also presided at public gatherings of the Royal Institution in Liverpool (LRO 920 1/1: Holt family diary, 1830-1844, 25 October 1839).
out of single cells. During this period, many natural scientists and political economists were questioning whether or not strictly deductive models of science narrowed the scope of science and prevented the growth of knowledge that careful inductive work might allow. By the late 1840s, many members of the Established Church thought that the increasing possibilities of developmental science made the miracles, prophecies and other external evidences that supported their apologetic efforts problematic. Several Oxford scholars—Benjamin Jowett, A. P. Stanley, and Mark Pattison—joined together to lead the emerging Broad Church movement and call for a reform of the Church of England, while others—such as Francis William Newman, James Anthony Froude and Arthur Hugh Clough—went beyond orthodox Christianity altogether. Finally, John Stuart Mill, whose father raised him in the radical utilitarian tradition, searched for ways to incorporate criticisms of utilitarian mental philosophy and social theory into his work.

This chapter argues that using its ideas about religious evidence and public discourse, the new school of Unitarianism attempted to forge the changed intellectual radicalism of the 1830s and 1840s into a new liberal religious culture. Traditionally, Unitarian ministers had advanced their cause by attacking orthodox religion and engaging in public controversies with their critics. Martineau, Tayler and Thom, however, pioneered roles as, what Stefan Collini has called “public moralists,” writers and scholars who took it upon themselves to remind their more self-interested contemporaries of the need to

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1 Liverpool Record Office (LRO), O60 LIT /7/1: “Minute Book of the Natural History Society,” 11 November 1839. LRO O60 LIT 1.4, “Index of Papers Delivered at the Liverpool Literary and Philosophical Society.” Martineau delivered papers on “Epicurus and Modern Utilitarian Philosophy” (11 January 1836); “Higginson’s Plan for Extinguishing Fires on Ships” (22 February 1836); “An Exposition of the Anemometer and Rain Gauge” (2 December 1839). For Martineau’s election as President, see LRO O60 LIT 1.4, “Minute Book of the Literary and Philosophical Society, January 1837 to June 1846” at 4 November 1839.
maintain a strenuous commitment to the common good. Collini’s study focused on the post-1860 academic liberals who modeled themselves on J. S. Mill, but there were many religious sources of these intellectual practices as well. Martineau and his associates made a reformed, non-sectarian religion the center of their vision for British intellectual life. The chapter begins by exploring the shift in the cultural meaning of science during the 1830s and 1840s. In their journals, The Prospective Review (1845-1854) and The National Review (1855-1864), James Martineau and the new school of Unitarianism argued that developmental science could bring to light fundamental human religious and ethical capacities underneath sectarian institutions. To educate a new generation of intellectuals who could discern these common religious intuitions, the new school of Unitarianism initiated new approaches to mental philosophy, ethics, and Biblical criticism that uncovered the common root of religious devotion in human nature. With these tools, they engaged both religious believers and radicals (such as F. W. Newman, J. A. Froude, the Broad Church party and J. S. Mill), setting aside sectarian disputes and attempting to draw out the devotional aspirations at work in even the most skeptical books. In a truly momentous move, Martineau and Tayler argued that the State, which many Unitarians considered the protector of a close-minded Church, could become the guarantor of free theological inquiry and, thus, bring all citizens into a national religious community. Martineau’s project foundered, however, as growing numbers of younger liberal intellectuals from Oxford and Cambridge used agnosticism’s strict separation of religion and science

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4 Collini, 58.

5 In this, Martineau and his allies exemplify recent work emphasizing the varied religious and cultural possibilities of developmental science before the publication of Origin of Species (1859). See Secord, Victorian Sensation, 515-532.
to distance themselves from religious controversy and support their claims to professional status. In addition, as many Anglicans began to emphasize the centrality of the Incarnation and the supernatural dignity of human nature, they developed an orthodox answer to Martineau’s exaltation of human religious capacities. Martineau spoke to many of concerns of the mid-Victorian period, but Anglicans and more secular intellectuals found alternative ways of meeting those needs.

II. The Common Context of Scientific and Religious Radicalism

As chapter 3 argued, early nineteenth-century Anglican and Unitarian arguments centered around the relative limits of human reason and the need to carefully weigh scientific, prophetic, miraculous and historical evidences. Religious apologists from all denominations shifted the grounds of religious discussion away from the first principles of religious establishments toward more pragmatic matters of social policy. Especially after the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789, most religious groups stressed their loyalty and competed to see who could spread the principles of religion and morality necessary to maintain social order. As they sought to extend their influence and evangelize the populace of Britain, religious groups presented the Christian faith in terms of evidences. Properly understood, miracles and prophecies in the Bible pointed to orthodox Christianity. Influenced by the philosophers Dugald Stewart and Richard Whately, Anglicans and

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6 James A. Secord argues that scientists established their professional credentials by emphasizing their careful procedures and measured conclusions against amateur syntheses, such as Vestiges. The “scientific method” was a much better way to maintain consensus and marginalize controversies. See Secord, Victorian Sensation, 471-514. In Mesmerized, Alison Winter also points out how the nascent medical profession contrasted itself quite favorably with the disorderly procedures of popular mesmerism (300-5). Similarly, Bernard Lightman argues that agnostics, such as T. H. Huxley and Herbert Spencer, strictly separated science from religious controversy but, simultaneously, maintained a reverent attitude toward “The Unknown.” See Lightman, The Origins of Agnosticism: Victorian Unbelief and the Limits of Knowledge (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).
orthodox Christians argued for the limits of empirical scientific investigation. The narrow focus on the evaluation and weighing of specific evidences protected orthodox Christian belief against Unitarians and radical scientists who threatened to push science so far as to exclude God’s Providence and use scientific and historical conjecture to reject many miracles and events narrated in Scripture.\footnote{Desmond, 101-51. When J. S. Mill was attempting to develop a more adequate version of Bentham’s utilitarianism in the late 1830s, he recognized that the intuitionist school’s use of mathematics and closely related sciences was one of its major advantages over empiricism and would have to be directly challenged. See Richard Yeo, \textit{Defining Science: William Whewell, Natural Knowledge, and Public Debate in Early Victorian Britain} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 184-85.}

As non-clerical groups entered the scientific world and scientists made new discoveries in the 1830s and 1840s, however, they removed the sciences from their narrowly empirical straightjacket. David Ricardo’s deductive formulation of political economy, new discoveries in geology and physiology, and new scientific syntheses forced scientists to return to methodological questions of what counted as science and what did not. One group of scientists centered around the Cambridge polymath, William Whewell, argued that by forcing political economy to fit the deductive model of science, David Ricardo had neglected a great deal of the actual workings of social and political life and robbed the science of intellectual value. As a remedy, Whewell and his fellow don, Richard Jones, argued that scientists needed to take the role of induction in science more seriously. In \textit{The Mechanical Euclid} (1837), Whewell argued that the philosophy of science put forward by Richard Whately and Dugald Stewart was inadequate because it simply treated the inductive sciences as areas in which no certain knowledge was possible.\footnote{Corsi, \textit{Science and Religion}, 155.}

Drawing on the nascent science of statistics, Saint-Simonian social theory and von Hum-
boldt’s scientific theories, Whewell and Jones suggested that induction properly conducted could disclose the great law-like regularities governing the natural world.⁹ In his _History and Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences_ (1837, 1840), Whewell argued that, because scientific necessity was not the result of deduction but the product of the human mind’s categories of understanding, there was no distinction in the objects investigated that made for differing degrees of certainty. Thus, as long as proper procedures were developed and followed, the necessity of deductive sciences was, in principle, available in the inductive sciences.¹⁰

In the 1830s, scientific and political radicals also explored the possibilities of induction in the natural sciences. Radical doctors proposed theories of transformism in which organic life evolved from inorganic matter. The hopes and fears surrounding transformism erupted in 1837 when Andrew Crosse published experiments in which he synthesized insects through galvanic action. Although the claims were discredited, many radical scientists redoubled their efforts.¹¹ The most famous synthetic account of scientific knowledge put forward in these years was Robert Chambers’ _Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation_, published anonymously in 1844. Taking his departure from the popularity of the nebular hypothesis (the universe originated in a cloud of primordial gas) and geological speculation, Chambers suggested that the entire universe (including the human race) had developed according to regular laws and was, in fact, evolving further

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⁹ Goldman, 594-5.

¹⁰ Corsi, _Science and Religion_, 155.

under God's benevolent guidance. Although couched in theistic language, the book
drew savage responses from clerics versed in science, such as William Whewell and the
Cambridge geologist, Adam Sedgwick, who castigated the notion that human beings de-
developed out of non-human species as sheer speculation without any basis in facts whatso-
ever.

After John Henry Newman’s departure from the Church of England in 1845 re-
laxed party tensions, younger scholars began to see science’s increasing confidence in the
law-like regularities of nature as an opportunity to replace Anglican theology’s reliance
on the external evidence of miracles and fulfilled prophecies with a consideration of in-
ternal experiences. Younger scholars—such as A. P. Stanley, Benjamin Jowett and Mark
Pattison—drew upon Coleridge’s philosophical idealism and the recent work of German
Biblical critics to explore the internal, psychological and subjective dimensions of relig-
ious belief. In the first major work of this school, a four volume commentary on St.
Paul’s epistles, A. P. Stanley and Benjamin Jowett set aside the traditional concern with
document and sought to discover the “subjective mind” of St. Paul. Examining the liter-
ary style and the conventions of the Apostolic period, Jowett and Stanley did not treat the

12 For Whewell’s reaction, see Secord, Victorian Sensation, 228-29.

13 The term, “Broad Church,” was first used as a criticism of a group of liberal clergymen around A. P.
Stanley in [W. J. Conybeare], “Church Parties, Past and Present,” Edinburgh Review (1853), 273-342. As
Ieuan Ellis has argued at length, the “Broad Church” party in the 1850s was simply a group of interlocking
friendships of intellectually sympathetic individuals. See Ieuan Ellis, The Seven Against Christ: A Study of
Essays and Reviews (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 1-35.

14 Ellis, 13. Stanley and Jowett, Sermons on the Apostolic Age, vi, vii, 4, 69. Writing a generation later, the
curch historian, John Tulloch, remarked that this book was vitally important in spreading the fruits of
German Biblical criticism. See Tulloch, Movements of Religious Thought in Britain During the Nineteenth

15 Benjamin Jowett, The Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, Galatians, Romans, with Critical Notes
books as direct revelations from God but inquired into how the books expressed the attitudes and religious consciousness of the authors. By downplaying the traditional link between Scripture and the study of doctrine and evidences, Jowett marginalized the penal substitutionary view of the Atonement, the keystone of much evangelical preaching and theology, and even downplayed the doctrine of the Church as the objective manifestation of Christ, the crucial point in Anglican apologetics, in favor of an immediate subjective union between the individual and Christ.\textsuperscript{16} Jowett concluded that Christianity was the perfection of the natural human religious sentiments and, hence, not completely different from other religions.\textsuperscript{17} Less willing to draw strict lines between themselves and other Christians, these Broad Churchmen urged the Anglican Church to open itself to the latest intellectual developments, to liberalize doctrinal subscription and open university degrees to all citizens.\textsuperscript{18} The group helped the University Reform commissions change degree guidelines and fellowship requirements at the ancient universities in the 1850s.\textsuperscript{19} Two of the leading lights of this school, Mark Pattison and Henry Bristow Wilson, Oxford fellows and proponents of an enlarged Christian communion, joined forces with avowed enemies of the Established Church in the pages of the radical \textit{Westminster Review} to promote reform of the Church of England.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{16} Ellis, 16. Jowett, 583.


\textsuperscript{20} Mark Francis, “The Origins of Essays and Reviews: An Interpretation of Mark Pattison in the 1850s,” \textit{Historical Journal} 17, no. 4 (1974): 805. Mark Pattison praised Martineau’s contributions to the \textit{Westminster Review}. 
Scientific discoveries played a large role in breaking down religious dogma, but new critiques of the partial and incomplete pictures of life put forward by Ricardian political economists and Benthamite utilitarians directed many thinkers toward recovering the fullness of human experience. The book that crystallized much of the experiential dissatisfaction with political economy and utilitarianism was Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1833), the fruit of his lengthy study of German Idealism.21 In this book, the narrator wrote a biography of the German scholar, Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, and explains Teufelsdröckh's philosophy of clothes. At one level, the "philosophy of clothes" satirizes the often obscure titles and subjects of German scholarship, but the idea of clothes also sums up an abiding concern with the tension between appearances and more fundamental realities. After an education in science that portrays the world in purely material terms, Teufelsdröckh suffers a crisis of belief. His only guide for action is utilitarianism, or what he calls a "Profit-and-Loss Philosophy" that makes the soul synonymous with the stomach and attempts to produce "Virtue from the Husks of Pleasure."22 Teufelsdröckh overcomes this crisis only through the realization that the imaginative powers of his mind give insight into a transcendent spiritual reality behind the ordinary world of space and time. Contrasting his education with his new viewpoint, Teufelsdröckh asks "To the eye of vulgar Logic, what is man? An omnivorous Biped that wears Breeches. To the eye of

21 In the first half of the 1830s, a trio of Bildungsroman made clear that the Benthamite doctrine of self-interest was only a partial development of human character. See John Sterling, *Arthur Coningsby* (1833), F. D. Maurice, *Eustace Conway* (1834), and, most famously, Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* (1834). In all these novels, the protagonists must confront the shortcomings of an ethic of self-interest as they grow up.

Pure Reason what is he? A Soul, a Spirit, and divine Apparition." In an earlier essay, Carlyle had described the powers of Reason: "Not by logic or argument does it work; yet surely and clearly may it be taught to work; and its domain lies in that higher region whither logic and argument cannot reach; in that holier region where Poetry and Virtue and Divinity abide, in whose presence Understanding wavers and recoils, dazzled into utter darkness by that 'sea of light,' at once the fountain and termination of true knowledge." Spiritually reborn, Teufelsdröckh urges his readers to reject utilitarianism and to "do the duty which lies nearest [them]" by discovering their particular vocations and working at them. To return to the metaphor of the book's title, Carlyle's message was that his readers ought to disregard the clothes themselves and form the self who wears the clothes.

The dissatisfaction with traditional creeds that Carlyle inspired carried many out of the Church of England altogether. By 1850, a number of young Anglicans had pointed out the moral failures and experiential inadequacies of contemporary orthodox approaches to scientific knowledge and religious faith. These "honest doubters" thought that turning skepticism against science and human knowledge was merely equivalent to a dismissal of questions and doubts. Even if such dismissals were logically sound, the "honest doubters" contended that such arguments reduced religious faith to simple assent

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23 Ibid.

to propositions and took no account of interior spiritual yearnings and experiences. Finally, these “honest doubters” could not bring themselves to submit to authorities when they did not believe in the reasons for doing so. The most notable of this group were Greg and several former fellows of Oxford colleges, including Newman, Clough, and Froude. Significantly, they all spent time in Unitarian circles. Greg was born into a prominent Unitarian manufacturing family and, after an unsuccessful political career, became a journalist. The three Oxford fellows put aside their ingrained prejudices and spent time among Unitarians. The earliest of them, Newman, took the claims of Christianity to be a Biblical religion seriously. After declining to take Anglican orders because he did not believe in infant baptism, he fell under the influence of the proto-fundamentalist, John Nelson Darby (1801-1882) and the Plymouth Brethren. As he intensified his study of Scripture, however, he came to the conclusion that the dogma of the Trinity had been invented and the Bible itself contained misleading statements about the person of Christ. By the time he finally settled at University College, London, in 1847, he had become a non-Christian theist. Arthur Hugh Clough left Oriel College, Oxford in 1848 and secured a recommendation from James Martineau to become Principal of University Hall, the Unitarian residence at University College, London. Finally, after publishing two widely-publicized novels, James Anthony Froude resigned his Oxford fellowship in 1849 and spent several years as tutor to the Unitarian Darbishire family in


27 DWL 12.83, University Hall Committee Minutes, 1848-1850: 44 (18 January 1849).
Manchester.28 Taken together these scandalous disavowals of traditional Christian belief suggested the narrowness of many apologetic approaches and religious arguments and brought more fundamental issues to the table.

III. The Prospective Review Project

As developmental science, the Broad Church movement, and “honest doubt” fractured the framework and certain boundaries of early-nineteenth century life, members of all parties considered how they could communicate religious truth more effectively and bring more people within the institutions of British religious and intellectual life. One of the key initiatives of the new school was establishing new journalistic forums for the discussion of ideas. In 1836, Thom had taken over the small monthly magazine, The Christian Teacher, and made it a forum for critical discussions of Unitarian organization and intellectual life and gave favorable reviews to the work of Martineau, Channing, and German Biblical critics. The venerable Rev. Robert Aspland, widely regarded as the successor to Joseph Priestley as head of the denomination, wanted to make Unitarianism a vehicle for political activism, but Thom and his allies used the magazine to teach Unitarians how to think about religious belief and denominational life in an altogether different way.29 In 1838, they took the next step by transforming The Christian Teacher into a quarterly, the first quarterly publication among Nonconformists, a publication that would link their own struggles to reform Unitarianism to broader intellectual trends in science and religion. In 1845, they renamed it the Prospective Review, doing away with any lin-


29 John Rylands University Library of Manchester (JRL), Unitarian College Collection (UCC), Robert Brook Aspland to John Gordon, 1846. For the elder Aspland’s role in the Catholic Emancipation fight, see Davis, Dissent in Politics, chapter 12.
gering denominational overtones. James Martineau acknowledged many years later that the new journal was intended to be “anti-Unitarian,” for even if Unitarians funded and supported the journal, the editors hoped to create an alternative to the usual denominational magazine that propagated a single religious party’s doctrines and viewpoints.\textsuperscript{30} Thom was joined as editor by Martineau, Tayler and Charles Wicksteed (1810-1885), the young minister of Mill Hill chapel, Leeds. The editors explained in their prospectus that they were replacing “Teacher” and all its dogmatic associations with “Prospective” to admit that they did not have a monopoly on truth and to signal their forward-looking willingness to inquire freely wherever truth might be found. In the sectarian religious climate of the time, there was a pressing need for “honest minds to attach themselves openly to whatever is vital in obnoxious truths.” Thus, rather than announce their conclusions and party affiliations in the title of the journal, they chose a word “which expresses what ought to be the perpetual relation of meek Faith and Discipleship to God and his Christ, and promises the onward-looking spirit.”\textsuperscript{31}

The editors’ hope that the journal would attract sympathetic elements of liberal religious life from all denominations existed in tension with the journal’s Unitarian connections. The four editors of \textit{The Prospective Review} planned the contents of each number at quarterly meetings in either Liverpool or Manchester. Although these occasions were memorable for the intellectual exchange, the editors had to fit work into their already busy lives as fathers and ministers.\textsuperscript{32} As the years went by, the journal failed to

\textsuperscript{30} Harris Manchester College, Oxford (HMC), MS J. Martineau 13, “Biographical Memoranda” (1877).

\textsuperscript{31} “Prefatory Note,” \textit{Prospective Review} 1, no. 1 (1845), ii.

\textsuperscript{32} HMC, MS J. Martineau 13, 17-18.
secure an undisputed audience among Unitarians and, without a sizable subscription base to pay contributors, they had to shoulder much of the burden of writing, editing, collecting money and arranging publication.\textsuperscript{33} Without outside contributors, they relied on firm allies and became associated with a party. They might have hoped to replace Robert Aspland’s \textit{Christian Reformer} as the primary Unitarian journal after his death in 1845, but his son Robert Brook Aspland, the minister at Dukinfield, kept the journal alive, thereby dividing Unitarian loyalties and preventing either from finding a sure financial footing. A determined opponent of Martineau and his plans for Unitarianism, Brook Aspland kept the journal going into the 1860s, enduring financial losses and a lack of contributors, in order to keep an alternative to Martineau’s views alive.\textsuperscript{34} Yet, as the young political essayist, Walter Bagehot, confided to Crabb Robinson, no matter how respected its authors and essays, \textit{The Prospective Review} remained too associated with Nonconformity to attract many non-Unitarian contributors.\textsuperscript{35} When combined with the heavy duties of a minister to prepare new sermons each week and organize the life of large urban congregations, the editorial duties could quickly become crushing.\textsuperscript{36} It is no coincidence that by

\textsuperscript{33} JRL, UCC, J. Martineau to J. Gordon, [late 1840s?]; Tayler, \textit{Letters}, I, 326 (John James Tayler to Richard Holt Hutton, 17 May 1852).

\textsuperscript{34} JRL, UCC, R. B. Aspland to J. Gordon, 21 January 1847: Brook Aspland told Gordon that \textit{The Christian Reformer} does not pay its expenses but he carries it on as a matter of duty. One must wonder if a certain degree of perversity and contrariness drove Brook Aspland, for when \textit{The Prospective Review} came out against Edward Miall’s Voluntarism in 1853, though he agreed with their position, he gave space for a favorable review in \textit{The Christian Reformer} (see JRL, UCC, R. B. Aspland to J. Gordon, 5 May 1853). By 1850, the journal’s financial position was so dire that Aspland considered joining \textit{The Christian Reformer} to \textit{The Prospective Review}, since their competition kept both from finding a secure financial footing. Only a timely donation prevented the magazine from going under (see JRL, UCC, R. B. Aspland to J. Gordon, 2 December 1850 and JRL, UCC, Robert Brook Aspland to John Gordon, 9 August 1849).

\textsuperscript{35} DWL, Crabb Robinson Correspondence, volume 1855, 11: Walter Bagehot to Henry Crabb Robinson, 8 February 1855.

\textsuperscript{36} Tayler, \textit{Letters}, I, 230 (John James Tayler to Richard Tayler, 29 October 1845). In a letter to his son, J. J. Tayler describes himself sitting up late at night to finish an article for \textit{The Prospective Review} before it goes to press.
the early 1850s all the editors were scaling back their commitments and Martineau was writing for money in the Westminster Review.

The editors self-consciously strove to cover a wide range of subjects, but Francis William Newman summed up the spirit of their enterprise best in his review of Vestiges in the first number of The Prospective Review, when he chided the book’s critics for missing the paths it opened to a nobler religious life and a transformed social and cultural life. Newman traced opposition to Vestiges to the philosophical theories of Dugald Stewart and Richard Whately, who had protected the miracles and other external evidences that guaranteed the truths of religion by strictly limiting the scientific value of empirical research.37 The anonymous author of Vestiges, however, reversed the traditional priority of deductive logic over induction and described a scientific procedure beginning with facts and discoveries and gradually drawing out more encompassing regularities, ultimately using new evidence to make science more fruitful.38 Scientists would only be able to fulfill their potential if the use of science for religious apologetics was limited. Newman encouraged believers to use the discoveries of science to prune away the superstitious elements of their faith and ground religious belief in the the best human “feelings concerning the imperfectly known.”39 A science grounded in ideas of gradual development through regular laws would replace a God known through external evidences and special providences with a God apprehended through human awe and reverence at an or-

38 Ibid., 50.
39 Ibid., 53.
derly creation. Newman concluded by chiding his fellow religious believers for their worries and assured them that religion "has its roots far too deeply fixed in the heart of man, its branches far too broadly overshadow his whole social life, to be harmed by sciences which trace out Cause and Effect." Newman remained confident in the continued vitality of religion as science extended understanding of the universe because he believed that religion was natural to human beings and did not need to be imposed from outside.

In his review of Vestiges, Newman had suggested that the growth of scientific knowledge and a new willingness to accept all scientific results could unveil the roots of religion in human nature. Taking his lead from a similar call by Sir John Herschel in his Presidential address to the BAAS for the extension of the study of law in science into the fields of psychology and ethics, James Martineau argued that the methods of developmental science could be applied to the faculties of the human mind, especially in ethics and religion. Since the 1830s, Martineau had contended that, because the field of ethics was divided between phrenologists and metaphysicians, little attention had been paid to the actual character of the moral agent. Phrenologists reduced ethics to physiological categories, while metaphysicians deduced ethical principles a priori. Martineau argued that moral philosophers ought to model their approaches after developmental science.

Close attention to human faculties and capacities and how they expressed themselves in

40 Ibid., 65. In this, Newman aligned himself with his former teacher, the Anglican Noetic and Professor of Geometry at Oxford, Baden Powell, who argued in The Connexion of Natural and Divine Truth (1838) that the idea of creation needed to be reworked to include continuous creation through natural laws.

41 Ibid., 60.


43 Ibid., 339, 372-3.
different situations would strike a balance between the reductionism of the phrenologists and the unempirical abstractions of the metaphysicians. Martineau praised J. S. Mill's recently published *System of Logic* (1843) for partially overcoming this dichotomy but maintained that more work needed to be done.

Martineau laid out his ethical theories in counterpoint with the work of William Whewell, the Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, and one of the most formidable polymaths of early Victorian Britain. J. S. Mill had criticized the conservative political implications of intuitionist philosophy, but Martineau suggested that intuitionism could support political and religious liberalism. He agreed with Whewell that ethics dealt with the judgments of conscience rather than utilitarian considerations but maintained that, by confusing the proper order of induction and deduction, Whewell interpreted conscience in politically and culturally harmful ways. Whewell proceeded by defining the proper ends of human behavior and then reasoning about how to achieve those ends, in effect, imposing ends on natural human tendencies and making conscience the "absolute monarch" of the human soul. It was but a short step from arguing that conscience imposed ends absolutely to supporting political and social institutions which imposed ends on the natural desires and aspirations of human beings. By induction from the range of human activity, Martineau argued that conscience, though introspective, did not intuit the goodness of

44 Ibid., 339.
48 Ibid., 352, 357.
single actions but, rather, compared two motives for action and chose the higher one. Moral judgments were relative. In addition, there was no need for an absolute conscience to impose ends on human actions because human beings would recognize authoritative principles naturally. Martineau compared this inevitable natural tendency in human nature to reverence higher principles and motives to the natural law of gravity in the physical world.\textsuperscript{49} Thus, conscience did not need to impose authoritative ends but simply regulate and proportion the pursuit of natural ends.\textsuperscript{50} According to Martineau, the more fitting comparison for human conscience was a “natural aristocracy or complete system of ranks, among our principles of conduct, on observance of which depends the worth and order of our life.”\textsuperscript{51} Martineau spent the better part of the next forty years developing and refining his table of the relative worth of the “springs of action.”

\textbf{IV. Creating a New Religious Intellectual}

The new school of Unitarianism focused on the possibilities of developmental science to explore natural human religious capacities, but realized that it would change little in British life unless it formulated new ways of connecting Scripture, theology, public discourse, and personal religious life. Following Martineau’s lead in mental philosophy and ethics and building on his own earlier travels in Germany, John James Tayler forged a new understanding of Scriptural criticism and the nature of religious ministry by using the developmental approach to science to bypass sectarian dogmas and articulate fundamental human religious intuitions. Tayler did not want to reinstate the doctrine of

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 351.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 357-8.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 350.
innate ideas but maintained that when human beings reflected on the faculties of their own minds, they could naturally intuit the presence of God as the ordering mind of the universe.52 Reviewing F. W. Newman’s *History of the Hebrew Monarchy*, Tayler highlighted its application of ideas of development from fields as various as ethics, the natural sciences, statistics and social economy to the Scriptures.53 Newman wrote his *Hebrew Monarchy* (1847) to break the ecclesiastical domination of Scripture scholarship by applying the principle of the uniformity of human nature to Old Testament history. The book traced the growing power of the priestly caste in Jewish society and the consequent weakening of Jewish society before the Babylonian Captivity.54 Tayler thought that applying the laws of the development of natural human faculties to history would demonstrate the relationship between the permanent truths of religion and their various temporal manifestations, for “principles strictly identical are disguised from us by the changing forms in which they are clothed.” By this means, Tayler hoped that human beings could understand different sectarian usages and practices as expressions of common intuitions of God.55 In particular, scholars could use these procedures to restore proper perspective to discussions dominated by minute philosophical investigations and dogmatic agendas.56

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53 [J. J. Tayler], “The Hebrew Monarchy,” *The Prospective Review* 4.1 (January 1848), 1-33: 3. For the development of the fields of statistics and social economy as alternatives to more individualistic approaches to social and political life, see Goldman, 594-596.


56 [J. J. Tayler], De Wette review.
As he pondered the mid-Victorian religious scene, Tayler increasingly defined the task of theology as directing the human religious intuitions toward Christ as their perfection. According to Tayler, religious ministers needed to coordinate critical inquiry into religious matters with an exuberant popular religious life. If the two lost touch with each other, free inquiry could degenerate into a sterile rationalism, as happened in the eighteenth century, and exuberant religious life could kindle into sectarian enthusiasms, as was happening in their own time. In a review of three recent works of German Biblical scholarship, Tayler chided the authors for trumpeting their orthodox doctrinal conclusions when the real need was to do away with "every attempt at constructing theological systems, and to view the Bible merely as the record of a great historical development of religious feeling and belief." Tayler argued that the study of human religious intuitions and Scriptural criticism need not destroy religious belief, for understanding those capacities revealed Christ as the ideal of religious excellence, "blending in a unison, which has never yet been approached and, as we believe, cannot be surpassed, the clearest, profoundest consciousness of intimate relation to God with the sweetest, calmest, faithfulest exercise of human virtues and affections--reaching that highest point in the scale of spiritual development, when God and man coalesce morally in one harmoni-

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57 Tayler, Letters, I, 192-94 (John James Tayler to John Hamilton Thom, 28 January 1840); see also Tayler, Letters, I, 194 (Tayler to Thom, February 1841).


ous nature." Stripped of historical accretions, Christianity was the culmination of the Biblical revelation of God, the provision of the purest religion, given not in laws and dogmas but in the person of Jesus, who exemplified the union of reason and sentiment that should exist between God and human beings.  

Although Tayler used his exploration of human religious intuitions to undermine the authority of dogma, he contended that ministers who were trained in developmental science and Scriptural criticism could exercise an authority grounded in appeal to the natural human religious sentiments. To different degrees, human beings possessed a natural intuition of and reverence for the divine. In all cases these capacities needed to be fostered, developed and directed through the proper influences. Those who had developed and strengthened their intuitions to a significant degree could exercise an influence over others. Just as Martineau argued that people could naturally recognize and rank ethical motives, Tayler contended that people would voluntarily recognize in others the proper development and fulfillment of their own intuitions and submit to the guidance of these ministers.  

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60 [J. J. Tayler], “Harmony of Intuitional and Logical Elements,” 499. As an example of just how close Tayler and Martineau were in their thought, it is interesting to note that Martineau’s brother-in-law and chief opponent, Rev. Samuel Bache of Birmingham, thought that Martineau had written this article. See JRL, UCC, Samuel Bache to John Gordon, 8 November 1851.

61 Ibid., 311. This stripping of accretions could be quite drastic. In an essay on “The Early History of Messianic Ideas,” James Martineau stated “Till we are prepared to discharge from the Christian Scriptures, as the mere temporary vehicle of their higher significance, their whole inherited system of Messianic doctrine, the demonology, the ‘preaching’ to the spirits in prison, the Parusia with its throne and judgment, the ‘Gehenna of fire,’ the ‘reign of the saints,’ the ‘table of the kingdom,’ and to penetrate behind this veil to the individuality of Jesus, expressed in his deepest words and his characteristic life, the divine essence of Christianity will not be reached, and its eternal truth will remain hid.” See James Martineau, “The Early History of Messianic Ideas,” National Review 16 (April 1863), 466-483 and 18 (April 1864), 554-579 in Essays, Reviews, Addresses, III, 279


63 [Tayler], “Harmony,” 492.
creeds but would have an authority consisting "in the superior force and clearness of those primary intuitions of religious truth, of which all men have a dim sense and glimmering in the depth of their moral being".\textsuperscript{64}

By the end of their studies minister-prophets would be thoroughly familiar with the natural human religious intuitions and their manifestations. As recent developmental science had shown, such a course ought to start with empirical investigation of human religious experience, discuss the psychological conditions of such experiences and, after arriving at an understanding of the religious aspects of human nature, give an historical analysis of how those dimensions of human nature manifested themselves in the Bible, Christian history and contemporary religious life.\textsuperscript{65} Through his understanding of the different forms which the natural human religious impulses assumed in different circumstances, the minister could speak to all classes and denominations and draw them together.

Martineau, Tayler and Thom hoped to make their new understandings of natural human religious and moral capacities the basis for new forms of political and religious community. The new school of Unitarianism thought that developmental science and the changing religious landscape of mid-Victorian Britain were bringing these natural instincts to light, but the insistence of most Anglicans and Nonconformists on external authorities and doctrinal orthodoxy frustrated the common intuition of human beings and

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 495. Thus, as Martineau argued that human beings had a natural understanding of the relative worth of the various motives to action and could naturally recognize superior leaders, Tayler argued that human beings naturally had the capacity to recognize and follow spiritual leaders.

\textsuperscript{65} [Tayler], "Christianity in its Relation to Modern Ideas and Modern Wants," 324.
split them into warring camps. Anglicans merely imposed a false unity between Church and State through the Thirty-Nine Articles, a unity that had little relation to the underlying natural human capacities, while denominational competition among orthodox Dissenters fostered a proliferation of doctrinal divisions that frustrated any possible unity. Institutional and legislative measures might solve some of these difficulties, but the new school placed its hope in using the Prospective to elaborate a new set of intellectual identities and practices that would place theology in its proper relation to natural religious feeling.

Reviewing the spectrum of Anglican reflections on Church and State issues in the aftermath of the Reform Act (1832), ranging from Thomas Arnold’s attempt to fuse them to Richard Whatley’s disestablishment proposal to W. G. Ward’s highly abstract conception of a united Christendom, Martineau emphasized how each represented a different attempt to fit a certain political program onto religious principles. In his Ideal of a Christian Church (1844), W. G. Ward, one of the leading Tractarians, argued that the church fulfilled the function of conscience in society, regulating not only all the actions but also the thoughts of each individual in society. In The Kingdom of Christ (1841), Richard Whatley, the Archbishop of Dublin, argued that the model for Christian ecclesiastical organization could be found in the Jewish synagogues. Each was independent of the other and the ministerial offices grew out of the needs of the local community. Furthermore, each local community was dedicated to religious worship and governed by the sanctions

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66 James Martineau, “Church and State,” 45. This essay was originally published in The Prospective Review (May 1845).

67 Ibid., 8-9.
of a future life and, hence, not connected to secular powers.\textsuperscript{68} Although Thomas Arnold also favored a broadly inclusive church, he believed strongly in the unity of religious and political concerns. He argued that Church and State had the same aim of facilitating the moral elevation of the people, and, thus, in its normal course of business, the State ought to undertake the moral and religious education of the people.\textsuperscript{69}

Although Martineau, Tayler and Thom criticized the Anglican church for defining its membership in narrow sectarian terms, they refused to join their fellow Nonconformists in calling for the complete abolition of State support of religion. Voluntarists, as they were known, claimed that making all religious activity self-supporting could spur religious groups to greater evangelical zeal.\textsuperscript{70} Martineau and Thom believed that by the mid-1840s, voluntary organizations had already failed on their own terms to meet the religious needs of the British people.\textsuperscript{71} As Thom pointed out, even if all existing religious organizations could provide for themselves, they would leave work to do in areas where money was inadequate. Their local focus, however, prevented religious organizations from reaching those areas, for "if the inhabitants are poor, the gentry few or careless, the clergyman indifferent, or unsupplied with funds, or not born with a school genius, nothing is done."\textsuperscript{72} Voluntarism left religion at the mercy of local circumstances, but worse still, the

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 10-12.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 19.

\textsuperscript{70} Larsen, \textit{Friends of Religious Equality}, 121. Although there were Nonconformists who did not support the Liberation Society (such as Robert Vaughan, the editor of \textit{The British Quarterly Review}), it was viewed as fairly representative of militant Dissent.

\textsuperscript{71} Although the Liberation Society was a strong political force through the late Victorian period, by the late 1840s, many different groups thought Voluntarist approaches were inadequate and were exploring less individualist approaches to education and social service provision. See Ward, \textit{Religion and Society}, 280-2.

\textsuperscript{72} John Hamilton Thom, "National Education," \textit{Prospective Review} 3 (January 1847): 127.
competition of the religious marketplace encouraged religious leaders to build zeal through exclusive dogmas, rather than “the natural operations of sympathy, wisdom and love” among individuals. As groups competed with each other they wasted a great deal of money. Although Voluntarism claimed to be a moral principle against unjust state control, it mirrored and perpetuated the Anglican practice of defining religious membership through theological beliefs rather than the natural human religious intuitions.

Martineau responded to both Dissenters and Churchmen by returning to the principles enunciated in his ethical writings. Both sides had produced rather arbitrary collections of Scriptural texts, Apostolic parallels and party programs but ignored how all these proof texts and historical examples must be manifestations of something more basic. Just as human beings naturally have knowledge of the relative worth of their motives, social order did not need to be imposed from outside; human beings could naturally come together in reverence for a higher principle. All the different arrangements of Church and State throughout history were but expressions of fundamental principles and tendencies of human nature. Thus, according to Martineau, the current differences between Church and State were simply historical contingencies. In the past, when the need for defense became pressing, the strong military leader took on a separate identity from the spiritual leader. These differences were reinforced by the distinctive history of Christi-

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73 Ibid., 134.
74 Martineau, “Church and State,” 33.
75 Ibid., 36-7. See also: [Richard Holt Hutton], “The Ethics of the Voluntary System,” Prospective Review (January 1852): 87.
76 Ibid., 33.
77 Ibid., 36-7.
anity. Christians developed their institutions outside the official pagan institutions, so, Church and State were only incompletely consolidated in the time of Constantine.78 The teachings of the Protestant Reformation tended to set the purely supernatural ends of the Church against the purely natural and secular ends of the State.79 Martineau concluded, however, that contemporary international cooperation and the growing dissatisfaction with artificial dogmatic distinctions had opened up possibilities of reconciliation. Martineau thought that Church and State could find common ground in the moral law, because the State concentrated on those parts of the moral law in which compliance could be achieved through external rewards and punishments, whereas the Church concentrated on compliance with the whole moral law through reverence for God. Both Church and State could create agencies and organizations to guide domestic life, education and charitable work.80 Thus, although the purposes and means of each could not be reconciled, there was ground for cooperation between Church and State, especially in the State funding of religious and educational institutions.81

As Anglo-Catholic disputes flared up again around 1850, the new school of Unitarianism had an opportunity to make several concrete proposals about the organization of British religious life. The extended legal wrangling over whether a minister who rejected infant baptism could be a pastor in the Church of England (Gorham Affair) and the enormous popular outcry over the re-establishment of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in

78 Ibid., 38-9.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid., 43.
81 Ibid., 44.
Britain (known as the “Papal Aggression”) reminded the British that sectarian differences remained strong. Martineau worried that unless these different groups could set aside their dogmatic wrangling over the “pedigree of manuscripts, the surmises of tradition, and the slippery chain of episcopal anointments,” ordinary people would become increasingly sceptical of religion and religious believers themselves would lose sight of practical charity and morality. In two articles in *The Westminster Review* in the early 1850s, Martineau proposed reorganizing national religious resources by cutting the link between dogma and political power. The key to Martineau’s plan was to remove doctrinal limitations on different funds dedicated to religious purposes. First, the requirement for all ministers to affirm the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England (the Act of Uniformity) would be repealed and the right of lay patrons to select ministers would be abridged. After a national study of religious needs and resources, money would be reapportioned to the areas that needed it the most. Without the obligations of religious conformity pressing on them, each local congregation would be able to elect the properly credentialed minister who fit its views. With assured funding, the broadened Church could extend its reach into poorer areas.

With the reorganization of religious funding went a determination to use their philosophical explorations of human nature to reform of the harsh theological presuppositions behind much social policy. After the revolutions of 1848, a group of Churchmen led by F. D. Maurice began to propagate a more sympathetic attitude to the poor and or-

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ganized the cooperative movement and the Working Man's College in London. Writing on socialist and communist theories in the aftermath of the 1848 revolutions, J. J. Tayler agreed that the great disparities of wealth between the laboring classes and their masters were unhealthy. Tayler, however, did not call for a complete recreation of the social structure in order to remedy these problems but pointed out that social and community life played a key role in developing and training human mental and moral faculties. He did not agree with evangelicals who thought poverty was a blessing that fostered virtue but thought it ought to be remedied by cooperative measures that incorporated people into social life. For this reason, he endorsed J. S. Mill's proposal to remedy disparities of income by granting outstanding workmen a share in their businesses' profits.

The new school of Unitarianism lent its support to the work of Mary Carpenter in establishing reformatories. Carpenter was the daughter of Rev. Lant Carpenter of Bristol and the sister of the physiologist, W. B. Carpenter. She had known James Martineau since his years there as a student. Like other British Unitarians of her generation, she was deeply influenced by the teachings of the American Unitarian, Joseph Tuckerman, who inspired the domestic mission movement among British Unitarians. In 1846, she started

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a Ragged School in Bristol that worked with the poorest of poor children. Carpenter believed that the greatest obstacle to reforming the poor was "the vindictive principle of [corporal] punishment, which is based on the popular theology [of atonement], and has taken firm possession of the minds of many who should, I think, have arrived at more true conclusions." Neglected children could only be reformed through personal attention aimed at touching their inner spirit and transforming their character. As in John Johns' Liverpool domestic mission, social workers had to balance cultivation of the individual with consideration of harmful circumstances and influences. Therefore, helping poor children sometimes required attention to communal life. Carpenter aimed to have a child's "affections called forth by the obvious personal interest felt in his own individual well-being by those around him; he must, in short, be placed in a family." Carpenter's vision of how this personal regeneration occurred echoed Martineau's theories of ethics. Carpenter never sought to impose her will on her charges but, rather to draw out their trust and ultimately to change their trust in her into a self-sustained effort to act according to the right principles. Between 1854 and 1857, Parliament recognized Mary Carpen-

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90 Carpenter, *Mary Carpenter*, 132. Quoting Mary Carpenter to Rev. Theodore Parker (Boston, MA), 29 April 1852. In *The Age of Atonement*, 289-339, Boyd Hilton argues that the transition from a harsh social outlook that found no problems with corporal punishment to a kinder outlook that emphasized rehabilitation was characteristic of Britain after 1850.


92 J. E. Carpenter, *Mary Carpenter*, 144-45. Although the terms in which she expressed herself were quite different, in practice, it was sometimes necessary to resort to strong discipline and control. See Martin J. Wiener, *Reconstructing the Criminal: Culture, Law and Policy in England, 1830-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 139-40.

ter's work when they passed a series of laws allowing voluntary groups to obtain funding to operate reformatories according to these principles.⁹⁴

Martineau’s reorientation of Unitarianism which began in the 1830s and 1840s culminated in the 1850s when he articulated a positive role for the State in maintaining religious life. In the eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-centuries, Unitarians had generally criticized the State, especially for its alliance with the Church of England. Joseph Priestley traced the corrupt orthodox doctrines of the Trinity to the Church’s entanglement with worldly power. Now, Martineau looked to a reformed State to guarantee freedom of theological inquiry.⁹⁵ In addition, Priestley and his fellow Unitarians criticized the British involvement in war against France, highlighting the corruption and repression of the British State. In the early 1850s, as Martineau was proposing a drastic reconfiguration of the Church of England, he was also articulating theological justifications for national loyalties and patriotism. Like many Nonconformists in the 1850s, such as George Dawson, the charismatic minister of the Church of the Savior in Birmingham, Martineau supported the Crimean War and the nationalist movements in Europe.⁹⁶ According to Martineau, Christianity had long been dominated by a strict separation of Church and State, one dealing with matters of the soul and the other dealing with matters of the body. Yet, this distinction, Martineau contended, did not do justice to the intermediate groupings of hu-

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⁹⁵ As Hutton noted in “The Ethics of the Voluntary System,” the state could actively combat excessive sectarianism (89).

⁹⁶ Catherine Hall, *Civilizing Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830-1867*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 363-6. In Hall’s account, Dawson served as the “middleman” who popularized Thomas Carlyle’s racist ideas and directed Nonconformist energy away from solidarity with black slaves toward sympathy with the white European nationalists on the continent.
man society—the family, the neighborhood, the country. Martineau went so far as to say that society is the condition for individual development; only so far as individuals come to understand that there is something besides themselves could they develop a sense of morality. Furthermore, the different ways in which groups of people articulate the goods they hold in common with others distinguish them from other groups of people. Martineau repeatedly emphasized the unique individuality of different peoples and their claims to proper recognition. For this reason, Martineau strongly supported the European nationalist movements that appeared after the revolutions of 1848. During the Crimean War, he argued in the pages of The National Review that Britain needed to extend its campaign to liberate the oppressed national groups under Russian control, especially by invading Poland.

V. Science, Religion, and Moral Power: Hutton and Carpenter as Disciples of the New School of Unitarianism

From the start of their journals, Martineau and Tayler wanted to draw in sympathetic and able younger thinkers who would take up the task of providing disinterested religious and political commentary. Among the foremost of these followers were the literary critic, Richard Holt Hutton (1826-1897), and the scientist, William Benjamin Carpenter. Excited by the use of developmental science to explore the natural spiritual

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99 Tayler, Letters, I, 255 (Tayler to Martineau, 14 October 1847). Tayler praised a submission by the young banker, Walter Bagehot.
capacities of human beings, they staked out moderate positions between intellectual radicals and reactionaries. Hutton thought that Martineau’s emphasis on moral power could mediate various forms of pantheism and coldly logical apologetics and that his conception of free intellectual inquiry offered an exciting new type of intellectual practice. Carpenter used Martineau’s account of moral power to understand the role of professional intellectuals in mid-Victorian society.

Richard Holt Hutton, later the editor of The Spectator (1861-1897) and one of the most important Victorian literary critics, was the son of Joseph Hutton, the minister at Eustace Street, Dublin, where Martineau received his first early start. He came under Martineau’s influence when he studied at University College, London between 1841-45. Under Martineau’s tuition, he gained the University’s gold medal in philosophy. In 1845-46, he studied classical history with Theodor Mommsen at the University of Bonn. After returning, he spent 1847-48 at MNC, preparing for the Unitarian ministry. He cemented his close friendship with Martineau by spending part of 1848-49 with him in Berlin studying German philosophy and historical scholarship.

Influenced by the devotional power of Martineau’s Endeavors (1843) and his vision of a new Unitarianism, Hutton decided to study for the Unitarian ministry. Before his encounter with Martineau, Hutton faced a choice between the cold, utilitarian moral-

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100 Although Hutton was recognized by his contemporaries as one of the leading literary and theological thinkers of the period, his papers were incinerated in the 1920s (Woodfield, 194) and little work has been possible. Nevertheless, Harold Orel estimates that in addition to his 3600 signed articles, he contributed nearly that many unsigned ones to various periodicals (Orel, ODNB, [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14312](http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14312), accessed 11 March 2007). Although they split over Irish Home Rule in 1886, Hutton was a long time confidant of the Prime Minister, W. E. Gladstone. See British Library (BL), MS Add. 44215.

101 HMC, MS J. Martineau 3, 288 (Richard Holt Hutton to James Martineau, 3 July 1849).

102 HMC, JM 3, 278 (Hutton to J. Martineau, 18 September 1847).
ity of Priestleyan Unitarians and the exaltation of human capacities by pantheists and Transcendentalists. Hutton thought that Martineau struck a perfect balance between treating morality as something imposed externally and annihilating external standards altogether by directing the religious capacities of human beings to the "historical life and character of Christ" as an object.103 Thanking Martineau for his help in preparing for the University College philosophy examinations, Hutton urged Martineau to publish his lectures on the foundations of morality to counteract the essentially selfish principles of all classes of the time. The lower classes relied on "vulgar radical notions of rights" without paying any heed to duties, while the ruling classes were ill-equipped to provide a better understanding, for they thought of morals in terms of the "neat, clever, sharp system of Bentham" and its reduction of ethics to interest. Hutton thought that Martineau had developed an adequate account of ethics as duty and disinterestedness that could change the hearts and minds of the lower classes, educating them so that they could exercise power responsibly. In a rapturous letter, Hutton told Martineau that "when I read your lectures over again, I felt more deeply than ever, that if this is to be done at all in England, you are the one and only fit person to do it, whom we know of at least. And I do believe my dearest Mr. Martineau, that if you would attempt and carry it through, you could find that you had interpreted the wants of large numbers amongst us, in fact that you had 'revealed the thoughts of many hearts' and accomplished a great national work."104

Poor health prevented him from becoming a minister, but Hutton used his work as a journalist and teacher to expound Martineau's new approach to religious apologetics.

103 Ibid.
104 HMC, MS J. Martineau 3, 288 (Hutton to J. Martineau, 3 July 1849).
He served as tutor and vice-principal of University Hall. He edited the Unitarian weekly, *The Inquirer*, and gave Martineau a sympathetic forum among Unitarians. He also contributed to the *Prospective* and, when it began to lose energy with the loss of its editors after 1854, worked with his close friend, Walter Bagehot, to put out its final numbers.¹⁰⁵

Inspired by Martineau’s contributions in moral philosophy, Hutton recast contemporary debates about science and religion as a struggle between two alternative styles of religion that transcended single denominations. Hutton grouped together theologians as diverse as the Anglicans, William Paley and Richard Whately, and the Nonconformist, Henry Rogers, as the “Hard Church,” a group who reduced religious experience to a series of logical formulas.¹⁰⁶ By emphasizing logical consistency at the expense of religious experience, the group treated religion as a matter of authority imposed from outside a person and marginalized the religious intuitions of human beings.¹⁰⁷ Linking Martineau’s work to Thomas Carlyle’s elevation of the individual over inherited creeds and dogmas, Hutton self-consciously set out to address and unite thinkers who felt that the logical certainties propounded by Paley and Whately had failed to meet the religious needs and spiritual experiences of their own times.¹⁰⁸ Hutton thought that Christian apologists needed to respect the integrity of “honest doubters” such as Francis Newman

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¹⁰⁵ DWL 12.83, University Hall Minutes, 1850-1852: 39, 14 November 1852; and DWL H. Crabb Robinson Correspondence, volume 1853, 69b: 17 August 1853, Walter Bagehot to Crabb Robinson.


¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 342, 352.
but show how their doubts and ethical struggles pointed toward fulfillment in the model character of Christ rather than atheism.¹⁰⁹ Doubt of cold logical formulas was simply a moment in a dialectic that would uncover deeper and richer religious faith grounded in the ethical integrity of human beings. According to Hutton, only Christianity could provide the proper sense of the eternal significance of the human affections and supply the proper models of ethical action.¹¹⁰

Hutton put this new approach to religious apologetics into practice in his reviews of radical intellectuals. In one of the first reviews of George Eliot’s translation of Ludwig Feuerbach’s *Essence of Christianity* (1854), Hutton ventured onto the turf of pantheistic radicals. He criticized Feuerbach’s account of moral experience as a development from the blind play of forces as untrue to human moral experience. According to Hutton, however, works of genius and prophetic religious inspiration showed that people could transcend circumstances and produce something of their own.¹¹¹ He made similar criticisms of W. J. Fox’s book, *On the Religious Ideas* (1849). By then, far beyond the bounds of Unitarianism and a prominent political radical, Fox argued that religious belief developed out of the human aesthetic faculty and its need for harmony. Hutton thought that while Fox did give attention to human intuitions of God, his emphasis on the universal presence of God in nature ignored the significance of moral conscience and tended toward pantheism.¹¹²

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Like Hutton who used Martineau’s ideas to explore human moral and spiritual capacities, William Benjamin Carpenter related Martineau’s understanding of moral conscience to the latest results of scientific research. Martineau and Carpenter had known each other since Martineau attended the school of Carpenter’s father, the Rev. Lant Carpenter, in Bristol. Although few letters survive, they remained in close contact throughout their lives. Like most of his generation among Unitarians, Carpenter grew up following the ideas of Priestley. When he began to publish extensively on physiology in the late 1830s, Carpenter used Priestley’s thoughts on the material basis of consciousness to trace the role of the nerves in cognition and consciousness. In the early editions of his Principles of General Physiology (1839), he aligned himself with those who sought to strengthen the claims of empirical science and boldly articulated general laws for physiological phenomena, going so far as to seem to subordinate all human behavior to natural laws.113 In 1845, however, Carpenter had a “mental crisis” over the questions of human freedom and self-determination. Few details remain, but his son recorded that Martineau’s articles on Whewell’s moral philosophy in 1845 helped him to salvage his belief in free will and conscience.114 Carpenter thought that Martineau’s argument that ethics was a judgment of the relative worth of two motives showed that there was a free and undetermined element of human nature, which traditional, more autocratic understandings of conscience could not adequately explain.

113 Desmond, 210-222.

Carpenter developed Martineau's insistence on the significance of choice in ethics into a scientific theory of character formation. According to Carpenter, the human being was a hierarchy of sensations, self-command and judgment. The will judges and enacts the suggestions of desires. Depending on the degree of self-control built up through steady practice and exercise, the will could guide and direct the desires. As Martineau thought that moral action meant obeying the highest possible principles, Carpenter thought that human beings should have their wills trained from early age by presenting new and gradually higher principles to the child as he or she grew older. Self-control would be achieved as "the result of the overpowering influence of the higher motives suggested to it over the lower or selfish emotions which we desire to bring into subjection."  

Ideally, a person would be able to choose the highest principles almost instinctively.

In his later work on scientific education, Carpenter used his notion of mental reflex to justify the public role of the scientist in the mid-Victorian period. Although Carpenter refused to follow Huxley and other supporters of Darwinian evolution into agnosticism, he was one of the foremost popularizers and synthesizers of scientific knowledge in the mid-Victorian period. He lectured across the country on scientific topics and the practical importance of science. Like moral education, scientific work required training one's mental reflexes to make judgments quickly, but true expertise required intensive training. Because they shared similar mental capacities, most people could possibly be-

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116 This paragraph is indebted to Winter, 300-4.
come scientists but only after intensive training. Thus, Carpenter established professionalizing scientists as a *via media* between scientific radicals, who hoped to democratize scientific institutions, and the aristocratic gentlemen who maintained that scientists were born with innate gifts. Furthermore, because Carpenter linked the professional status of scientists to the cultivation of will-power, the pursuit of knowledge and science became a morally praiseworthy activity. Like the new school of Unitarianism's elevated conception of the professionally trained minister, who could use his training in high ideals to attract and guide those around him, Carpenter envisioned scientists as professionals who had trained their natural instincts to a high level and, therefore, could influence and guide others.

### VI. Free Theological Inquiry and Mid-Victorian Religious Life

The success of Hutton and Carpenter suggested that Unitarians were no longer a sect "everywhere spoken against." In particular, their explorations of moral effort and character offered a wide variety of scholars and writers models of intellectual practice. Similarly, when Martineau surveyed the intellectual scene, he discerned a growing stress on the spiritual capacities of human beings that encouraged sympathy with free theological inquiry. For many years, British religious life had been defined by the evangelical Clapham Sect and its narrow, unimaginative approach to religious questions. With the resolution of the political, social and economic upheaval that allowed this group to come to power, thinkers as various as Anglican theologians and Thomas Carlyle were begin-

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ning to explore the personal side of faith and the importance of conscience. As a result, religious believers turned their attention to the Incarnation, the mystery of God assuming human nature and a newfound appreciation of the mingling of the natural and the supernatural. By emphasizing the mystery of God becoming a human being in the Incarnation, Martineau said, thinkers ranging from the Oxford Movement to F. D. Maurice had established “a uniform constitution of our nature and our world, in a steady relation to supernatural realities, broken by no revolutionary jerks of local exemptions; and which, therefore, opens a welcome to a scientific ethic, and metaphysic and history.”

As Tayler noted, religious apologists were beginning to realize that the power of arguments from design rested not on their logical cogency but on their appeal to fundamental human intuitions, for example, that “every design proves a designer.”

Although Martineau was optimistic that the religious authorities and institutions of the early-nineteenth century were losing their force, he maintained that liberal religious thinkers and radicals would never form an adequate new religious community until they appreciated the intimate relationship between free inquiry and the moral importance of Jesus’ character. Because many Anglicans and orthodox Nonconformists began to develop more positive understandings of human religious potential by probing the sig-

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118 Ibid., 223.
119 Boyd Hilton has argued that this emphasis on the mystery of the Incarnation and the union of the natural and the supernatural was, perhaps, the most important thread in mid-Victorian intellectual life, appearing in F. D. Maurice’s theological writings, Tennyson’s poetry and scientific naturalism. See Hilton, The Age of Atonement, 298-339.
120 Martineau, “Present Influences on Contemporary Theology,” 263-4.
122 Martineau, “Present Influences on Contemporary Theology,” 259-60.
nificance of Jesus’ becoming a human being in the Incarnation, they did not fully understand the need for free theological inquiry and would not acknowledge much of the critical work that undermined the doctrine of the Incarnation. Thus, religious liberals’ efforts to forge a more inclusive Church of England were hampered by their continuing attachment to certain dogmas. By contrast, the radicals who rejected orthodox Christian dogmas altogether did not understand that their assertion of human religious feeling suggested new and unique types of religious fellowship. To be sure, the new school’s engagement with the Broad Church and endorsement of a type of national religious community reflected the increasing social status and elitism of mid-Victorian Unitarians, but this engagement was simply one step in an effort to widen the circle of intellectual and religious free inquiry. Not only did James Martineau and the new school reach out to the Broad Church movement but they also gave sympathetic attention to the American Unitarian, Theodore Parker, and the younger “honest doubters,” such as J. A. Froude and F. W. Newman.

First, the new school of Unitarianism turned away from the tradition of polemic against the Established Church and reached out to the liberal intellectuals coming together as the “Broad Church” party. As early as 1844, Martineau sent a copy of *Endeavors after the Christian Life* to A. P. Stanley, the biographer of Thomas Arnold, because Harriet reported that he might be sympathetic. Although it is impossible to chart the

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124 HMC, MS J. Martineau 1: Harriet Martineau to James Martineau, 30 December 1844. Stanley thanked Harriet for the copy of *Endeavors* and read it but said that he would discuss it with her in person.
impact of Martineau’s writings on Stanley, his sermons did have a profound impact on F. W. Robertson, one of the greatest Anglican preachers of the nineteenth century and a theological liberal who questioned dogmas such as the inspiration of the Scriptures. As noted in chapter 4, Martineau knew Arthur Hugh Clough and helped him find a position as head of the Unitarian residence at University College, London, University Hall. Finally, Martineau joined with Broad Church clergy and younger academic liberals to help agitate for the repeal of religious tests at the ancient universities. Martineau deeply appreciated their work to open up national institutions to religious free inquiry and, in later life, became close friends with several of them, particularly Benjamin Jowett, the Master of Balliol College, Oxford.

While Martineau and the new school had to push the Broad Churchmen to further separate the boundaries of communion from dogmatic tests, they had to convince younger religious radicals that exalting personal religious experience did not destroy Christian community altogether. Among their fellow Unitarians, Martineau and Tayler gave sympathetic attention to the American Transcendentalist movement, whose ideas had spread quickly across the Atlantic through the visits of Ralph Waldo Emerson and anti-slavery networks. The most notorious Transcendentalist minister was Theodore

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127 Harvie, 86.

128 Balliol College Library, Jowett Papers Group I, Class E 21/16/3 (2 August 1873). See also: HMC, MS J. E. Carpenter 1, 139 (Martineau to J. E. Carpenter, 8 March 1892), in which Martineau states that he will be staying with Jowett while he visits Oxford.
Parker of West Roxbury, Massachusetts, who was both reviled and praised for his sermon, "The Transient and the Permanent in Religion," which proclaimed that the essential truth of Christianity, the immediate presence of God in the soul, was a metaphysical fact and true even if Jesus Christ had never lived.\textsuperscript{129} Outraged, the Unitarian ministers around Boston refused to exchange pulpits with him, essentially ostracizing him from the Unitarian community. Martineau and the new school sympathized with Parker who, like them, was trying to overcome the evidential emphases in Unitarian apologetics but found himself faced with a de facto imposed creed. Martineau acknowledged the stubbornness of Parker's opponents, but still thought that Parker's attempt to find God at work in all aspects of the universe had gone too far and slipped into pantheism. Without any appreciation of the distinct personality of God, Parker could not recognize the importance of Jesus' revelation of the spirit of God.\textsuperscript{130} Thus, Parker was not able to recognize the need for Christ in the Christian Faith. Even though Martineau, Thom and Tayler did not agree with all Parker's ideas, Martineau did allow him to preach from the Paradise Street pulpit when he visited Liverpool in 1844.\textsuperscript{131} In a review of the pamphlets generated by the Parker controversy, Thom argued that the Unitarian ministers around Boston were wrong to exclude Parker from Christian fellowship because, in spite of his denial of Jesus' miracles, he understood the same practical message. Thom contended that because Parker

\textsuperscript{129} For the early years of Theodore Parker, see Grodzins, 245.

\textsuperscript{130} James Martineau, "Theodore Parker," in Essays, Reviews and Addresses, volume 1: Personal and Political (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1891), 164-5, 170. Although Martineau was generous in his review of Parker, he later remarked to Benjamin Jowett that Parker was not a rigorous thinker. See Balliol College, Jowett papers, Group I, H37 640, 44-8, 27 August 1879.

\textsuperscript{131} For Martineau's admission of Parker to Christian fellowship, see JRL, UCC, James Martineau to John Gordon, 20 January 1843.
believed that “the aim and highest result of the Christian Mission, is to form men in his
[Jesus’] image, to fill them with his spirit, to make their holiness and their mercy to pro-
ceed, like his, not from constraint, but from the connections of their souls with God,”
there was no need to exclude Parker just because he arrived at that conclusion in a differ-
ent way.\footnote{132}

Similarly, Martineau, Tayler and Thom did not condemn the sceptical novels of
mid-century, as orthodox believers did, but carefully appreciated the religious and devo-
tional longings at work in these books.\footnote{133} As already mentioned, J. J. Tayler praised the
work of the renegade Congregationalist, J. D. Morell and, even though he disagreed with
Morell’s precise explanation of the religious significance of intuition, pushed him to de-
velop his ideas further. Likewise, although the group disagreed with some of the ideas of
Joseph Blanco White, they published his memoirs after his death and wrote reviews
praising his ideas.\footnote{134} Although Blanco White had died beyond the pale of Unitarianism,
they praised him as a hero of free inquiry, who followed his fearless love of God where-
ever it led him.\footnote{135} When John Anthony Froude left the Church of England after publish-
ing two controversial novels, he found work as a tutor to the Unitarian Darbishire family
in Manchester. James Martineau even lent him money.\footnote{136} Although Tayler suspected that

\footnote{133} William Palmer, “On tendencies toward the subversion of faith,” English Review 10 (1848), 399-444 and
11 (1849), 181-94.
\footnote{134} Joseph Blanco White, The Life of the Rev. Joseph Blanco White, Written By Himself: With Portions of
His Correspondence, ed. John Hamilton Thom (London: John Chapman, 1845).
\footnote{135} [J. J. Tayler], “The Life and Character of Blanco White,” Prospective Review 1.3 (August 1845), 465-
496.
\footnote{136} Markus, 71.
the novels advanced Spinozistic ideas, he sympathized with their illustration of the plight of clergymen forced to subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles.\textsuperscript{137} Even when reviewing William Rathbone Greg’s \textit{Creed of Christendom} (1851), which was explicitly deistic, Tayler pointed out that Greg had underestimated the devotional resources of his understanding of God. The view of a lawful universe that Greg had carefully laid out revealed a different and grander God than that presented in the orthodoxies of the day. In addition, although Greg suggested that no creed or denomination understood the character of Christ, Tayler thought that Greg remained stuck in his criticisms without proceeding to develop the positive religious implications of Christ as a model of character.\textsuperscript{138}

The carefully balanced interplay between critique and sympathy were displayed most prominently in their ongoing debate with their friend Francis William Newman, the former tutor at MNC and sometime contributor to the \textit{Prospective}.\textsuperscript{139} Like Carpenter and Hutton, Newman thought that Martineau’s ethical and religious theories of character offered possibilities for linking free inquiry with moral duty and, thereby, transcending the narrow utilitarian ethics of the time.\textsuperscript{140} After his arrival in London, Newman began expounding his religious views in \textit{The History of the Hebrew Monarchy} (1847) and \textit{The Soul} (1849). In \textit{The Hebrew Monarchy}, Newman used conceptions of human nature from the developmental sciences to recast religious history as the study of expressions of natural religious feeling. In \textit{The Soul} (1849), Newman explained and defended his assump-


\textsuperscript{139} For the hiring of F. W. Newman, see HMC, MS MNC Misc. 8, 1 (James Martineau to William Gaskell, 15 January 1840). For the close friendship between Martineau and Newman in London, see DWL, Henry Crabb Robinson Diary, 26 April 1858.

\textsuperscript{140} HMC, MS J. Martineau 4, 63 (F. W. Newman to James Martineau, December 1849).
tions about the religious principles of human nature through a study of the faculties and aspects of human nature that gave knowledge of God and the supernatural. As the subtitle of the book expressed it, the book replaced the study of the creeds of the different churches with a study of the natural faculties of the soul. Although Tayler wished that Newman had emphasized the possibility of a future life and the need to cultivate and develop this spiritual faculty, he praised the book for pioneering an approach that threaded the Scylla of prescribed creeds and the Charybdis of complete skepticism.

Martineau and Tayler thought Newman the most profound and religious of the "honest doubters." When he followed the success of The Soul with the story of his own religious journey, Phases of Faith (1851), they criticized him for destroying the possibility of any authority for the natural human religious capacities. In the book, Newman described his relationship with his famous older brother, his election as a fellow of Balliol College, Oxford, his growing doubts about the Biblical support for certain doctrines, the influence of the radical evangelical John Nelson Darby, his time among Unitarians and his ultimate arrival at a non-Christian Theism. Almost the mirror image of his brother's later and much more famous Apologia pro Vita Sua (1864), the book concen-


142 Newman, Soul, 207. The chapter headings of the book give a good idea of Newman's naturalization of evangelical theology: infancy of the soul; spiritual phenomena of unworthiness; soul struggling after a sense of God; spiritual excellence; grounds of a future life. Newman also coined the terms "once-born soul" and "twice-born soul" to describe the different personal understandings of the relationship to God. This distinction became the basis for William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (New York: Modern Library, 1999), esp. 93.


brates on Newman’s increasing consciousness that he could not and ought not to rely on any external authority in his religious life. Martineau was quite impressed with the “rapturous faith” of the book but thought Newman’s delineation of the nature of that faith problematic.\textsuperscript{145} In an especially controversial section, Newman criticized Jesus Christ for flouting the social conventions of his time. Against this, Martineau maintained that Newman unfairly neglected the differences in historical circumstances and created an ahistorical faith.\textsuperscript{146} Granted that there was a difference in historical circumstances, Martineau contended that Christ must be judged perfect until shown to be otherwise.\textsuperscript{147} In fact, Martineau went so far as suggest that Newman’s version of religious faith was still oddly evangelical in its insistence on each individual having a personal relationship with God without allowing for the mediation of Christ’s influence through churches and other believers.\textsuperscript{148}

Although he criticized Francis Newman and other religious radicals for going too far, Martineau sympathized with his concerns for natural religious sentiment and religious authority. Martineau criticized most strongly those who used developmental science to argue against any supernatural realm. These writers—such as the Scots philosopher, Sir William Hamilton, the French intellectual, Auguste Comte, and the Danish scientist, Hans

\begin{footnotes}
\item[146] Ibid., 30.
\item[147] Ibid., 38. In his fine book on Baden Powell, Pietro Corsi argues that Newman’s criticisms of Jesus’ violation of social norms reflected an increasing alliance between Unitarians and other elites against the lower classes. While Corsi is certainly correct to suggest that historians must take seriously the broad intellectual sympathies among W.B. Carpenter, F. W. Newman, James Martineau, Baden Powell and other Anglicans, one must also be careful not to overlook the significant disagreements among them. See Corsi, \textit{Science and Religion}, 200-1.
\end{footnotes}
Oersted—argued from the law-like regularity of natural phenomena that the human mind could not know a God who manifested himself in exceptions to those regularities.\(^{149}\) Accordingly, they severely circumscribed the relevance of theology and theologians to intellectual life. Both sides appealed to developmental science but Martineau thought that these writers reinstated the distinction between the human and the divine against which he had fought so hard. In particular, Martineau argued that they neglected the human religious faculties and intuitions that established a continuity between the natural and the supernatural. Martineau argued that while scientific laws did describe certain regularities of phenomena, they could not describe what actual forces caused the succession of phenomena.\(^{150}\) Thus, he contended that because human beings are conscious of power within themselves when they make decisions, they can apply that consciousness to the arrangements of phenomena that they see outside of themselves. Furthermore, because all varieties of force at work in the world could be resolved into one fundamental force, human consciousness of causal power indicated the existence of some infinite source of power.\(^{151}\)

Mid-Victorian disputes over the implications of developmental science, however, became a family matter, when he publicly criticized the religious views of his sister, Harriet, one of the most famous celebrities and journalists of her time. In their early lives,

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\(^{151}\) Martineau, “Nature and God,” 159.
they had been closer to each other than to any other members of their family, and they remained close throughout the 1830s by sharing their different intellectual projects. It was James who suggested that she write for the *Monthly Repository*, in which she eventually published her famous series of short tales illustrating the theories of political economy.¹⁵²

By the early 1840s, there were signs of a growing tension. Harriet did not like James’ 1840 hymnbook and in 1843, when Harriet asked James to burn her letters, he refused.¹⁵³ The turning point came in 1844, when Harriet found relief from her health problems in mesmerism. The family were split over the value of the cure, especially since she used it as proof of the failings of her brother-in-law, Edward Greenhow, as a doctor.¹⁵⁴ James was reportedly “contemptuous” of mesmerism and she claimed that he had called her “insane.”¹⁵⁵ Afterwards, she began to develop mesmerism into an all-encompassing theory of the world. In 1851, she proclaimed her unbelief in a collaboration with Henry Atkinson on the mesmerist tract, *Letters on the Laws of Man’s Nature and Development*. In the work, Atkinson (with Harriet’s wholehearted encouragement) argued that the insights of mesmerism into human psychology would provide all the solutions to problems of personal health and social organization. James responded with a blistering review of the work in *The Prospective Review*, entitled “Mesmeric Atheism.” Recalling the incident in the 1870s, Martineau defended himself by saying that the book

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¹⁵² HMC, MS J. Martineau 1 (Harriet Martineau to James Martineau, 12 December 1837).
¹⁵³ Sanders, 77.
¹⁵⁴ Winter, 227-28.
¹⁵⁵ HMC, MS J. Martineau 2, 89 (Emily Higginson Bache to Helen Higginson Martineau, 16 March 1845).
was simply part of his duties as head of the “mental philosophy” section of the review.\textsuperscript{156} In the review, however, James took advantage of Atkinson’s obvious failings as a writer and thinker to pour scorn on mesmerism and to pointedly remark that it was a pity that Harriet Martineau should waste her undeniable talents in support of someone so obviously her inferior, an undeniable failure in Martineau’s ethical system.\textsuperscript{157} The break did not become official until three years later (1854) when she refused him permission to visit her during a summer holiday but, when asked for a reason, would not explain herself.\textsuperscript{158} Harriet went on to translate Comte’s \textit{Philosophie Positive} into English, weeping tears of joy as she did so, while Martineau fought the influence of Comte wherever it was to be found and never hesitated to point out bizarre aspects of Comte’s system.\textsuperscript{159}

Although James has been portrayed as the conservative, religious foil for Harriet’s own assertion of self, it might be better to avoid over-scrutinizing the lacunae in their private papers and focus on what their separation tells about the overlapping trajectories of science and religion in Victorian intellectual life.\textsuperscript{160} The significant changes in the religious and scientific views of both Harriet and James suggest that there was no simple

\textsuperscript{156} HMC, MS J. Martineau 13, “Biographical Memoranda,” 38-9.

\textsuperscript{157} [James Martineau], “Mesmeric Atheism,” \textit{Prospective Review} 7 (May 1851), 224-262. Martineau’s decision not to reprint this review when he published his essays in the 1890s suggests some degree of regret at writing the piece.

\textsuperscript{158} University of Birmingham, Harriet Martineau papers, HM 249-52, letters from Helen Martineau (wife of James) to Harriet Martineau, 1854. For Harriet’s reaction to James’ Atkinson review, see University of Birmingham, HM 631-7.

\textsuperscript{159} Harriet Martineau, \textit{Autobiography}, II, 391. For James’ views, see Martineau, “August Comte,” 337, in which Martineau pokes fun at Comte’s exaltation of his love for Clotilde.

\textsuperscript{160} Sanders, 69-78 is the best account of their quarrel. So much of the commentary on this quarrel has approached it from the perspective of Harriet and been sympathetic to her revolt against religious orthodoxy that it is worth noting that other prominent Victorian intellectuals found her difficult to deal with. George Eliot had a particularly negative experience when Harriet spread nasty gossip about her trip to Germany with G. H. Lewes in 1854.
straightforward path from a religious to a scientific worldview but, instead, a complex process in which both science and religious struggled to come to terms with the increasing complexities of human knowledge.¹⁶¹ Under similar influences, individuals often made very different choices. James had struggled against the shallowness and cold rationality of Priestley’s system and urged the natural religious potentialities of human beings. Similarly, though she remained indebted to many aspects of Priestley’s necessitarianism, Harriet shared the mid-Victorian fascination with regular laws and their potential for describing the natural world. Indeed, her fascination with mesmerism reflected an interest in accessing the fundamental human capacities and directing them to their proper ends.¹⁶² Yet, for Harriet, these discoveries helped lead her away from her faith. This separation reveals a deeper tension in James Martineau’s religious project, for it suggested that if one explored the potentialities of human nature too deeply, God could be lost sight of.

VII. The National Review

By the mid-1850s, beset by the financial and editorial weaknesses of The Prospective Review and concerns about the directions of radical intellectuals, Martineau created a new, more open forum. Thom, who had served as the editor of the journal since 1836, was in poor health and could no longer shoulder his share of the editorial duties.¹⁶³ Similarly, Wicksteed’s health was beginning to break down under the strains of running a


¹⁶³ DWL 24.153.5 (Thom to Martineau, 17 October 1855).
major urban congregation and in 1854 he retired to a farm in Wales.\textsuperscript{164} Finally, in 1853, Tayler became Principal of MNC and reduced his commitments with the \textit{Prospective}. In addition, Martineau began to write for \textit{The Westminster Review} because they paid for articles.\textsuperscript{165} With all the editors so pre-occupied, the 1854 volume was only published due to the unpaid efforts of Hutton and Bagehot.\textsuperscript{166} Martineau's first plan was to take advantage of the \textit{Westminster Review}'s financial problems and buy it in order to merge it with the \textit{Prospective}. In August 1854, when the publisher of \textit{The Westminster Review}, John Chapman, admitted that he could not pay his debts, Martineau saw his opportunity. As a creditor of Chapman, he demanded that Chapman hold a meeting at which the magazine itself would be among the assets for sale. In the meantime, he assembled a group of financial backers who would help him to purchase the magazine. \textit{The Westminster Review} was only saved when Harriet Martineau (seeing an opportunity to frustrate her brother) intervened and wrote Chapman a check for the entire amount of the debt and Chapman arranged to have the money secretly deposited in his bank account.\textsuperscript{167}

Left with financial supporters but no journal, Martineau gathered together some of the key contributors to the \textit{Prospective}, such as R. H. Hutton and Walter Bagehot, and lured the political commentator W. R. Greg away from \textit{The Edinburgh Review} to found a


\textsuperscript{166} DWL, Henry Crabb Robinson (HCR) correspondence, volume 1855, 11: Walter Bagehot to Henry Crabb Robinson, 8 February 1855.

\textsuperscript{167} Haight, 76-9.
new review. Although Greg quickly returned to the Edinburgh when he realized that the new journal would not completely suit his ambitions, Bagehot and Martineau organized the journal as an organ of religious liberalism and responsible, liberal politics.\textsuperscript{168} The new journal still would not pay its contributors but, as editors, Hutton and Bagehot would split £ 150.\textsuperscript{169} At Bagehot's suggestion, the name was changed in order to shed some of the Unitarian associations of the Prospective.\textsuperscript{170}

Drawing together such a range of contributors required a great deal of negotiation but the editors and contributors shared a vision of themselves as public moralists. In defining themselves, they expanded on Tayler's vision of ministers who could use critical inquiry to overcome sectarian divisions and articulate the natural interest of the public. W. R. Greg, who most likely was responsible for a large portion of the Prospectus, presented the doctrines of political economy and free trade as the proper tool for adjudicating disputes among classes.\textsuperscript{171} Martineau reiterated the claims of religious liberalism and aimed "to convince English thinkers that religion is profoundly interested in the most fearless use of religious freedom, that every form of bigotry is a form of latent distrust, that every noble type of national and political faith springs from a religious root, that no great nation's literature can be calmly and deeply studied without reaching the natural sources of religious life."\textsuperscript{172} In what was surely a programmatic statement for the first

\textsuperscript{168} DWL, HCR correspondence, volume 1855, 23: March 1855, Walter Bagehot to H. Crabb Robinson.

\textsuperscript{169} DWL, HCR correspondence, volume 1855, 25: 5 April 1855: Walter Bagehot to H. Crabb Robinson.

\textsuperscript{170} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{172} Ibid., 139 (letter from Martineau to the donors, 1858).
issue, Greg argued that because periodicals controlled the literature and art that flowed through public life, journalists had high vocations. Because they surveyed the national scene as few others could, they ought to serve as arbiters among conflicting groups in society. In addition, they needed to act as impartial advocates for victims in society and unmask corruption wherever it might be found. Finally, they needed to remind statesmen of their obligations to the entire nation.  

Although some Unitarians gave financial support to Martineau’s journalistic ventures, many thought that his pursuit of a non-sectarian intellectual identity had left behind important truths that made Unitarianism distinctive. Even Martineau’s close friend, John James Tayler, felt that the new review was paying too much attention to transitory political matters at the expense of speaking to the fundamental religious elements of human nature. Although he contributed to the National Review, and even wrote one of its most controversial pieces, Tayler contributed less often and focused on religion. Similarly, Crabb Robinson was impressed with the essays that appeared in the journal, particularly those by James Martineau, but he thought that whatever its virtues, the journal had ceased to be Unitarian.  

Orthodox Nonconformists appreciated Martineau’s attempts to develop the spiritual power of Unitarianism but thought that linking free inquiry and national institutions robbed Christianity of its redemptive power and violated the consciences of those who

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174 DWL, Crabb Robinson Correspondence, volume 1855, 13a: J. J. Tayler to H. Crabb Robinson, 21 February 1855. Tayler was requesting a meeting with Robinson, Hutton and Bagehot in order to make the case for building more directly on the legacy of the Prospective Review as a journal of free religious inquiry.

175 DWL, Crabb Robinson Diary, 3 July 1858 and 8 July 1858.
already believed. One reviewer charged that even though he rejected Priestley and
couched his ideas in poetic language, Martineau had simply repeated the previous Unitarian
destruction of the authentic saving power of the Gospels by wiping out its message of
salvation from sins. According to orthodox Dissenters, grounding religion in intuitions,
as Martineau had done, simply replaced historical Christianity with a weak philosophical
substitute. Although Martineau fought strenuously to distinguish himself from radicals,
such as F. W. Newman, J. A. Froude and W. R. Greg, orthodox Dissenters viewed Mar-
tineau as representative of the shift of modern Unitarianism into pure Deism.176 Against
Martineau’s claim that he had uncovered the roots of Christianity in human nature, ortho-
dox Dissenters wondered why, if his version of Christianity were so natural, Christianity
had not already swept the globe and why Unitarianism remained a small sect.177 Even
granting that Martineau was not a simple Deist, his combination of theistic belief and
heterodox theology was not a coherent combination and he would ultimately embrace a
purely philosophical non-Christian religion.178 In particular, they deplored his mixture of
national ecclesiastical institutions with freedom of inquiry. Voluntarist Nonconformists,
who maintained the strict priority of conscience and its divine duties prior to any political
organization, found his mingling of religious duties (grounded in conscience and the per-

176 [Robert Vaughan], “Naturalism versus Inspiration,” *British Quarterly Review* 14 (August 1851), 178-
256: 179-180. This claim was made in a review of Greg’s *Creed of Christendom*.

177 [Robert Vaughan], “Memoir of William Ellery Channing,” *British Quarterly Review* (November 1848),
295-328: 321 and [Isaac Taylor], “Unitarianism--Mr. Martineau,” *British Quarterly Review* (October 1859),

178 [Taylor], “Unitarianism--Mr. Martineau,” 296.
sonal duty to God) and political duties “monstrous.” In particular, his proposal to subsidize all religious groups in Britain would simply violate the consciences of all.\textsuperscript{179}

Martineau’s project of preserving religious liberty originated in the 1830s challenges to religious and political radicalism. Like Martineau, Mill had experienced the shortcomings of utilitarian ethics and necessitarian metaphysics, but, unlike Martineau, Mill rejected any sort of metaphysical basis for religious liberty. Mill had nuanced utilitarian ethics and political economy with discussion of the role of self-cultivation in human life and a detailed account of the interplay of human freedom and external circumstances.\textsuperscript{180} In his review of Mill’s \textit{Dissertations and Discussions} (1859), Martineau acknowledged Mill’s revisions of utilitarianism but argued that Mill lacked an adequate conception of causality with which to connect his investigation of human freedom and social development.\textsuperscript{181} On the one hand, Mill affirmed that human beings knew only phenomena and that scientific laws described only regularities in the succession of phenomena.\textsuperscript{182} In his essay on poetry, however, Mill acknowledged aspects of human nature beyond the pleasure and pain affirmed by utilitarians and argued that human beings must cultivate and perfect these aspects of themselves.\textsuperscript{183} Yet, Martineau wondered,


\textsuperscript{181} Ibid., 497-8.

\textsuperscript{182} Ibid., 505.

\textsuperscript{183} Mill, “The Two Kinds of Poetry,” 714-724. Mill had written this article as a response to Martineau’s own essay on Priestley.
if human beings could never have knowledge of reality beyond their perceptions, would their ethical self-formation ever be more than "a kind of spiritual firework going off of itself in infinite night?" At the same time as he maintained that human beings knew only phenomena, however, Mill portrayed human beings as themselves phenomena of the world, shaped entirely by external circumstances. Against Mill’s argument that human beings know only phenomena, Martineau argued that human knowledge of their own self-activity, especially conscious choice, disclosed the presence of a real causality at work in the world around them. Furthermore, the understanding that all causality is personal leads human beings to the conclusion that there exists an ultimate cause or God. Although Martineau did not convince Mill to qualify his theories further, Mill respected Martineau’s opinion and waited eagerly to hear what Martineau thought.

VIII. From High Church Reaction to Agnosticism: The Debate over H. L. Mansel’s Limits of Religious Thought (1859)

Although the period after 1850 witnessed fewer cataclysmic intellectual controversies, the debates that erupted around 1860 did clarify where different parties stood. Origin of Species (1859) and Essays and Reviews (1860) have received the most attention and have been used to show the increasing acceptance of a scientific worldview over re-

184 Martineau, "John Stuart Mill’s Philosophy," 518.
185 Ibid., 520, 527.
186 Ibid., 526.
igious worldviews. Yet, the contemporary controversy over H. L. Mansel's Bampton lectures on *Limits of Religious Thought* (1859), in which High Churchmen found themselves allied with agnostic scientists, suggests that significant differences existed over what "scientific worldviews" and "religious worldviews" really were. The Bampton lectures were intended as apologetics and the restatement of Christian truth. By the late 1850s, Oxford was split among the High Church party, the evangelicals and the Broad Church group. The Broad Church, led by Stanley and Jowett, had been successful in pushing Parliament to exert some oversight over the universities and gradually open them to non-Anglicans and end the clerical domination. In addition, they had secured places for themselves in the Oxford colleges and won over many of the younger generation.

In order to stop them and maintain the clerical and religious functions of the university, the High Church party and the still numerous evangelicals enlisted Rev. Henry Loungeville Mansel, one of the most prominent younger High Churchmen and unique at Oxford for having studied contemporary German philosophy and Biblical criticism. For the sermons he delivered as Bampton lecturer, Mansel took clear aim at the religious liberalism of the time, specifically its claims about the presence of God in the human soul. Claiming from the outset that he intended to find the limits of human knowledge in theology, just as Kant had done in metaphysics, Mansel asked "Does there exist in the human mind any direct faculty of religious knowledge, by which in its speculative exercise, we are enabled to decide, independently of all external Revelation, what is the true nature of God, and the manner in which He must manifest Himself to the world; and by which,

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189 Philip Appleman, ed., *1859: Entering an Age of Crisis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959). This re-evaluation of the tumultuous reception of *Origin of Species* has been supported by Secord, *Victorian Sensation*, 511.
in its critical exercise, we are entitled authoritatively to decide for or against the claims of any professed Revelation, as containing a true or false representation of the Divine Nature and Attributes? Like Kant, who suggested that thinkers who pushed human reason beyond the limits of the understanding would fall into contradictions, Mansel suggested that religious thinkers of his age had fallen into extremes of dogmatism and rationalism because they attempted to make belief perfectly equivalent to thought.

Dogmatists applied Scripture to situations to which it did not apply and rationalists cut down Scripture based on their own preconceived notions. Using Sir William Hamilton’s “philosophy of the unconditioned,” Mansel argued that such attempts were bound to fail because Scripture was the representation of the “unconditioned” or infinite God and the finite human mind could not grasp such things. Thus, whatever religious difficulties human beings encountered were part of the general difficulties facing the human mind.

Thus, human beings could not hope to reason their way out of theological difficulties; instead, they ought to submit to the authoritative religious teachings of the church, the custodian of Christ’s revelation.

Skepticism directed against human reason was a powerful weapon and scientists such as T. H. Huxley were quick to turn it back upon religious believers. The first thinker to make use of Mansel’s work was Herbert Spencer, who used Mansel’s argument for the limits of human religious knowledge to argue for the consignment of religion to a

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191 Ibid., 9.

192 Ibid., 6-7.

193 Ibid., 54.

gradually shrinking realm of mystery.\textsuperscript{195} As the 1860s progressed, other thinkers and scientists who were dissatisfied with religious orthodoxy used Mansel’s ideas to give a respectable religious dimension to their beliefs.

Martineau placed Mansel’s work in a tradition of Anglican apologetics dating back to Bishop Joseph Butler that attempted to overcome the difficulties that reason creates for religion by criticizing reason.\textsuperscript{196} Although this approach might achieve logical resolution, it did not foster piety in believers.\textsuperscript{197} Like others, Martineau pointed out that Mansel’s weapons against free thinking also created difficulties for religious believers, specifically raising the question of how such a God would ever reveal himself to finite human beings at all.\textsuperscript{198} As Martineau put it, Mansel’s “logic, then, in mowing down its thistle-field, inconsiderately mows off its own legs.”\textsuperscript{199} Against Mansel, Martineau suggested that human beings could grasp the concept of infinity because they regularly thought about space and time which are infinite.\textsuperscript{200} As Martineau noted further, there was a convergence between an argument for fideism and a reactionary political program based on external constraints and penalties.\textsuperscript{201} Just as Martineau had struggled to over-


\textsuperscript{197} Ibid., 121.

\textsuperscript{198} Ibid., 131.

\textsuperscript{199} Ibid., 133.

\textsuperscript{200} Ibid., 138.

come authoritarian conceptions of conscience, so now he strongly criticized an understanding of metaphysics that sought to reintroduce those distinctions.

The debate over agnosticism and the limits of religious knowledge was important for another reason. In evaluating the debate, Richard Holt Hutton decided that the Anglican F. D. Maurice had put forward the most compelling case for the human capacity for knowledge of supernatural realities and joined the Anglican church, in which he became one of Maurice’s most fervent disciples. According to Hutton, Maurice showed that there was more to religious faith than the logic that Mansel had emphasized. Whereas for Mansel religious faith must stand or fall on its ability to grasp the infinite, Maurice taught that all intellectual work, especially theology, was simply a groping to better articulate the faith already present in the human heart. Hutton contended against Mansel that his logic could not account for the sense of unused faculties straining to develop their full potentialities, itself a revelation from God that there is something more than the merely human. In 1861, when Martineau criticized Maurice’s dependence on the doctrine of the Incarnation as defined in the Gospel of John without acknowledgment of the critical difficulties in that text, Hutton came to Maurice’s defense. Against Martineau, Hutton maintained that there was clear evidence in support of the Incarnation. Not only did Hutton think the Incarnation amply supported by the words of St. John and St. Paul but he also found it a compelling statement of the reality of God’s presence in the human soul.


204 Martineau made this criticism in “Present Influences on Contemporary Theology” and repeated it in “Tracts for Priests and People,” National Review 13 (October 1861), 420-451.
and the world.\textsuperscript{205} As logically contradictory as it might sometimes sound to say that God became a human being, the doctrine of the Incarnation alone reconciled "the contradictory facts of a double nature in man—the separate individuality which has no health of its own, and turns every principle to evil directly it begins to revolve on its own axis—and the divine nature which lends it a true place and true subordination in the kingdom of God."\textsuperscript{206}

**IX. The Demise of The National Review**

Although Hutton's departure from *The National Review* was a blow, the journal still managed to become something of a forum for younger academic liberals entering public life around 1860. Many younger liberals recently down from Oxford and Cambridge had found a home writing for *The Saturday Review*, but after it condemned *Essays and Reviews* in 1860, they migrated over to the *National*.\textsuperscript{207} Indeed, in its last couple years, edited by C. H. Pearson, it published essays by a glittering array of young liberals, including Matthew Arnold, Goldwin Smith, Fitzjames Stephen, Mark Pattison, Frederic Harrison, Grant Duff and the liberal Congregationalist Samuel Davidson.\textsuperscript{208} After his first two years in London, Martineau returned to his congregation at Hope Street, Liverpool and told them of the success of their ideas among the younger generation.\textsuperscript{209}

\textsuperscript{205} For Hutton's evaluation of the critical evidence for the Incarnation, see Hutton, "The Incarnation and the Principles of Evidence," *Theological Essays*, 286.

\textsuperscript{206} Ibid., 264.


\textsuperscript{208} Houghton, *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals*, III, 143.

\textsuperscript{209} *Inquirer*, 12 January 1861.
Despite the wide respect enjoyed by the journal, it went under at the beginning of 1864 and there was no successor. Martineau began the National as an alternative to the increasingly atheistic and positivistic Westminster, but many quickly regarded the National with the Edinburgh and Quarterly as one of the leading quarterlies of the day.210 Although the review became self-supporting by the early 1860s, the American Civil War cut off many sales. Even though Martineau replaced Hutton as editor with the King's College, London, historian Charles H. Pearson in order to bring in subscriptions and submissions from Broad Church Anglicans, it did not make good the loss. Now, Unitarians--already suspicious of the journal's openness--became discontent with the predominance of topics of interest to Anglicans.211

Afterwards, The National Review broke into its component parts: disinterested reflection on matters of national importance and discussion of contentious religious issues. On the one hand, many of its contributors migrated to the new, well-funded open forums, known collectively as "the higher journalism"--The Fortnightly Review, The Contemporary Review and The Nineteenth Century. On the other hand, J. J. Tayler was instrumental in replacing the finally expiring Christian Reformer with a Unitarian journal dedicated to free discussion of religious matters, The Theological Review (1864-79) under the editorship of their younger disciple, the Rev. Charles Beard.212


211 Charles H. Pearson, Charles Henry Pearson, fellow Oriel and education minister in Victoria: Memorials by himself, his wife and his friends (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900), 95. See Tayler, Letters, II, 231 (Tayler to Martineau, 22 August 1863) in which he complains that the National Review is now more of a "Broad Church" periodical than a Unitarian one.

212 Tayler, Letters, II, 231 (Tayler to Martineau, 22 August 1863).
XII. Conclusion

Mid-Victorian intellectuals recognized the importance of character. In a period when social and political arrangements were in flux, a wide variety of religious, political and intellectual figures emphasized that individuals must develop strong abilities to act for themselves. As Stefan Collini has shown, character and duty, rather than utility, were the lodestones of ethical discussion in mid-Victorian Britain. Yet, as the work of James Martineau and the new school of Unitarianism shows, the bases of a proper framework for character and moral growth were sharply contested. Although it is relatively neglected in Collini's account, religion shaped these conversations. For Mill and Arnold, religion--especially Nonconformity--threatened the healthy and well-rounded development of individual personality. By contrast with these writers, Martineau and his allies sought a national religious community that would combine free inquiry and moral development. In this quest, the liberal scientific and religious thought of the 1840s and 1850s represented an opportunity rather than a threat.

While James Martineau's rise to intellectual prominence in the 1840s and 1850s sheds new light on the nature of Victorian intellectual discourses, it also provides new insights into the development and overall course of Victorian intellectual life. The new school of Unitarianism's work in the Prospective Review and the National Review represents the last push by the ministers who had dominated early-nineteenth-century denominational intellectual life to guide national intellectual life. On a personal level, these

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213 Collini, 111.

214 Ibid., 60-90.

215 Mark Francis, “Who still has 'sweetness and light'?” 1088.
journals failed because a simple lack of time and energy prevented ministers from following Martineau's example of high-level public intellectual reflection. It is no coincidence that Tayler, Thom and Wicksteed all suffered health problems that cut short their public careers. At the same time, however, the growing distance between religious ministers and national intellectual life was an indication of ministerial success in achieving recognition for their special religious functions; prosperous and busy congregations generally left little time for intensive outside work. Finally, the closeness established between Martineau and other liberal religious leaders indicated a paradoxical broadening of the intellectual parameters of British life without any fundamental transformation of institutions. Indeed, although liberal religious and scientific ideas held a great deal of promise in the 1840s, by 1860 the impulse was fragmenting as agnostics staked claims to respectability on their distance from religious dogmatism and academic liberals used free inquiry to carve out positions for themselves in the newly competitive ancient universities.
Chapter 6: James Martineau and Late-Victorian Intellectual Life

I. Introduction

James Martineau and the new school of Unitarianism had contributed to mid-Victorian intellectual and religious life by proposing a new understanding of free religion. Martineau, Tayler and Thom had come of age in the 1830s, a period when the early nineteenth-century Dissenting political alliance was dissolving amid disputes over Presbyterian chapels. Thus, they argued that the greatest threat to religious liberty was religious sectarianism and controversy. In the years that followed, this new school of Unitarianism proposed that the various competing theologies of different religious groups were different expressions and systematizations of the natural human religious sentiments. They urged Unitarian congregations to abandon religious controversy in favor of a more devotional religion and to develop social outreach programs. At the center of this vision of a renewed religious life was the educated minister, who had cultivated and strengthened his natural religious sentiments to such a degree that he could draw out, attract and guide those sentiments in others. Their influence within Unitarianism and in British intellectual life rested on three pillars: their congregations in Liverpool and Manchester, their professorships at Manchester New College (MNC), and their editorships of the widely respected Prospective Review (1845-54) and The National Review (1855-1864).

After The National Review failed in 1864 and theological disputes within the British and Foreign Unitarian Association (BFUA) slowed Martineau’s efforts at reform, Martineau increasingly turned to the younger academic liberals of the 1860s as a possible group of new intellectuals who could enact his vision of reformed and free religious life.
in England. Martineau had known many of the key "honest doubters" of the 1840s--F. W. Newman, A. H. Clough, and J. A. Froude. He had attracted the attention of many of the Broad Churchmen and even influenced one of the greatest preachers of the mid-century period, F. W. Robertson. After Martineau came to London in 1857, he came to know many of the first generation of academic liberals--Goldwin Smith, Henry Sidgwick and James Bryce. These younger liberals were the first to study at Oxford and Cambridge after the reforms of the early 1850s and, although they held fellowships after their graduations, they were not preparing for careers as ministers. Instead, they often went to London and studied for the bar or made careers in journalism. Martineau met many of them in the final days of The National Review. As a prominent writer on issues of free theological free inquiry, Martineau was also well-known to them. When Martineau returned to visit his former congregation at Hope Street, Liverpool in 1859, he spoke confidently of the large number of sympathizers for theological free inquiry whom he had met in London.¹ Because Unitarians, and especially Martineau, were concerned about freedom from dogmatic restrictions, they made ideal allies for the academic liberals who wanted to loosen the test requirements for university fellowships. Thus, Martineau became one of the key links between the academic liberals and Nonconformists more generally.²

In the late-nineteenth century, Martineau sought to harness the dissatisfaction of many liberals with dogmatic tests to his vision of an English Church grounded in free theological inquiry. However, in the last third of of the nineteenth century, Martineau’s

¹ Carpenter, James Martineau, 403.
² Harvie, 86.
proposals to reform the Church of England attracted little sustained support, but he did become one of the most respected defenders of traditional theistic belief. Chapter Six argues that Martineau's contrasting fame as an apologist for theism and failure as a religious reformer reflect the decline of a distinctive Nonconformist commitment to religious liberty in these years and the growing consolidation of a national, relatively non-denominational religious life around the Church of England. The chapter begins with Martineau's attempts to find a new vehicle for his views after the demise of The National Review in 1864. In these years, Martineau had to come to terms with the changing situation of Unitarians in late-Victorian Britain. At a very basic level, Martineau was getting older, as were his allies. By 1870, Tayler was dead and Thom had retired. Martineau retired from his pulpit at Little Portland Street in 1872 after a bout of ill health. Martineau also faced the increasing weakness of the wealthy, progressive and civic-minded chapels in the North of England that had supported his efforts for so long. The chapels certainly remained wealthy, but the economic slowdown of the last third of the nineteenth century (1873-1896) inhibited new initiatives and weakened existing ones. As a new generation of lay leaders came of age, they found political and social causes outside of chapel life and Martineau and his students lost the receptive audience that had listened to their ideas and translated them into concrete measures. In these circumstances, Martineau's proposals for the reform of Church and State increasingly fell on deaf ears. In 1867, he helped start the Free Christian Union, a new religious group that would not define itself through dogma. Despite the interest of academic liberals, Martineau could not build the organiza-

3 HMC, MS J. Martineau 6, 42 (Martineau to William Knight, 17 October 1872).
tion into a national religious denomination. Academic liberals generally focused on free
discussion alone and were content to gradually reform the universities and the Church of
England. Thus, the organization could gain little traction and Martineau dissolved it at
the beginning of 1870. By then, however, Martineau had joined the Metaphysical Soci-
ety, a non-denominational discussion group composed of Broad Churchmen, Roman
Catholics and agnostic scientists, who met nine times per year to discuss fundamental
matters of the relationship between religion and science. In two articles from the 1870s,
Martineau established himself as the leading philosophical critic of agnosticism. He fol-
lowed this in the 1880s with the publication of his college lectures, awaited by many
since the 1840s.4 Yet, because he had waited so long to publish his views, his philosophi-
cal theories’ contexts in a vision of a reformed Church and State were obscured. Mar-
tineau’s religious apologetics fit well into the broadly Christian culture of late nineteenth-
century Britain but the distinctively Nonconformist aspects of it were lost.

II. Candidacy for the University College Professorship

Since its founding in 1826, Unitarians had strongly supported the University of
London as a non-denominational alternative to Oxford and Cambridge. Unitarians served
on its Council and sent many of their children there. As a consequence, Manchester New
College had moved to London in 1853 and become a theological institute in which candi-
dates for the Unitarian ministry took their arts and science requirements at University
College. Although they were not officially on the faculty of University College, Mar-
tineau and Tayler were well-known and respected within the school. Thus, when the ag-

4 J. B. Schneewind, *Sidgwick's Ethics and Victorian Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
1977), 237.
ing Rev. John Hoppus retired as Professor of Logic and Mental Philosophy in 1866, James Martineau put his name forward.

In fact, for many years, Martineau had been recognized as far superior to Hoppus in both teaching and scholarship. Hoppus’ appointment had been something of an accident. In its early years, two members of the College council, the utilitarians George Grote and James Mill, had steadfastly refused to allow a religious minister in the philosophy chair, allowing it to remain empty for three years.

At this point, some of the more orthodox members of the Council suggested Hoppus, a graduate of the University of Glasgow who had published an exposition of Bacon’s *Novum Organon* but fallen out with his congregation at Carter Lane, London. Hoppus was appointed after assuring Grote and Mill that he was a follower of David Hartley’s necessitarian philosophy. As a lecturer, however, he based his teaching on the historical and systematic work of Dugald Stewart. He produced no large scale synthesis of his own and only a scattering of undistinguished articles in larger collections.\(^5\) As one historian of University College has said, Hoppus nearly “killed” the teaching of philosophy in the school.\(^6\) By contrast, Martineau’s students had done exceptionally well in the exams for honors in philosophy. The most notable of them had been Richard Holt Hutton, who won the gold medal in philosophy in 1849.\(^7\) In addition, Martineau had published his series of influential articles in *The Prospective Review*, *The Westminster Review*, and *The National Review*. Since his arrival in London in 1857 and his acceptance

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\(^7\) HMC, MS J. Martineau 3, 254 (28 June 1849, J. H. Thom to Martineau).
of the pulpit at Little Portland Street chapel, he had become something of a religious celebrity in London.\footnote{DWL, Crabb Robinson Diary, 14 and 25 November 1857. An article in the St. James' Magazine described his Little Portland Street congregation as distinctly fashionable, attended by members of Parliament and visitors from America. Reproduced in Inquirer, 11 June 1870.} Because of its location, the congregation had always been small, but, with the assistance of Tayler, Martineau drew in many religious believers who were uncomfortable with religious orthodoxies. Even George Eliot, though not sympathetic to Martineau's brand of "Liverpool theology," made a point of attending services at Little Portland Street.\footnote{Gordon Haight, ed., The Yale Edition of the George Eliot Letters, 6 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), III, 433 (George Eliot to Sara Sophia Hennell, 2 July 1861).}

Although Martineau and his family were spending the summer in Switzerland as the guests of Sir Arthur Wills, R. H. Hutton managed Martineau’s candidacy.\footnote{University College, London, Letter Book, November 1864 to August 1866, 559 (Charles Atkinson to Richard Holt Hutton, 16 July 1866). By this time, Hutton had left Unitarianism but it shows the broad support that Martineau could still attract that Hutton helped organize the effort.} Martineau seemed to have little serious competition, for the other candidates were obscure, unaccomplished, or simply interested in collecting the stipend.\footnote{University College, London: College Correspondence, Appendix to the Minutes, AM/113, “Report of the Committee appointed to consider the testimonials of the candidates for the Professorship of Logic and Mental Philosophy.”} By contrast, Martineau presented testimonials from Adolf Trendelenburg, the Professor of Philosophy at the University of Berlin, F. W. Newman, Professor of Latin at University College, eminent visitors who had listened to his lectures, and enthusiastic former students. Even John Stuart Mill, who declined to write for Martineau in favor of his twenty-four year old disciple, George Croom Robertson, reassured Martineau of his great respect for his abilities and
accomplishments. Martineau also presented several published essays that the Senate Committee praised for their "remarkable literary talents." Finally, the Committee also noted the convenience of having the teaching of logic and mental philosophy at University College unified under one professor.13

After several close debates, however, the College Council reached the controversial decision that, because Martineau was a minister, he was unqualified to hold the position and, instead, elected the twenty-four year old Croom Robertson. When the College Senate evaluated the candidates in August, they recommended Martineau as "the fittest candidate."14 The College Council, however, split 4-4 on the Senate's recommendation. Even at this stage, however, members of the Council worried about the effect on public opinion of having both a minister and a Unitarian as Professor of Logic and Mental Philosophy. Some worried that a Unitarian would alienate orthodox believers of all types. Parents would never allow their children to be educated by a Unitarian. The greatest opposition to Martineau's candidacy, however, came from the utilitarian George Grote (1794-1871), author of a famous eleven volume History of Greece (1846-53). Grote had helped found University College as a non-denominational alternative to Cambridge and Oxford. Throughout his long association with the college, Grote maintained that the college was dedicated to the principle of religious neutrality and, for that reason, no religious


13 University College, London: College Correspondence, AM/113.

14 HMC, MS J. Martineau 13, "Biographical Memoranda," 47.
minister could teach there. Although the Unitarians held a significant number of seats on the Council, an unfortunate series of incidents prevented them from firmly uniting behind Martineau. In August, Crabb Robinson, Edwin Field, and Edward Enfield were all on vacation. In addition, as the Egyptologist and old school Unitarian, Samuel Sharpe confided in Crabb Robinson, many Unitarians—especially those influenced by Martineau—were so unwilling to avow their Unitarianism that they stayed away or abstained from voting. When the Council reconsidered Martineau’s nomination in November, Grote was able to convince them to set it aside once more. Although they were not his natural allies, the Anglican members of the Council supported Grote.

In the ensuing controversy, most of the public sympathized with Martineau. As Martineau reflected years later, Grote and his supporters on the Council had simply imposed a religious test. They did not disqualify religious ministers when they advertised the position but they imposed a religious test after the fact. Although Martineau professed indifference to holding the chair, he listened to friends who urged him to not withdraw his candidacy in order to make the point that religious tests had no place in intellectual inquiry. Several members of the Council and the College recognized how incongruous the Council’s decision had been. Dr. Hodgson, a prominent Unitarian, resigned in

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15 Martineau heard the news while he was in Switzerland. See BL, MS Add. 63084, ff. 136-7 (29 September 1866, Martineau to Sir Alfred Wills). Harriet Grote, Personal Life of George Grote, compiled from family documents, personal memoranda, and original letters to and from various friends, second edition (London: John Murray, 1873), 281.
16 DWL, HCR Correspondence XXXII, f. 59a: Samuel Sharpe to HCR, 8 August 1866. Sophia Elizabeth de Morgan, Memoir of Augustus de Morgan, with selections from his letters (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1882), 362.
17 De Morgan, 339-40.
18 HMC, MS J. Martineau 13, “Biographical Memoranda,” 47.
19 BL, MS Add. 63084, f. 136-7 (Martineau to Sir Alfred Wills, 29 September 1866).
January 1867. Similarly, Augustus de Morgan, the Professor of Mathematics but not a Unitarian, also resigned in outrage at what he saw as the imposition of a religious test.20 Although Hodgson and Hutton threatened some sort of lawsuit against University College for an unfair election, there was little evidence of actual wrong-doing and the affair ended quietly when the Board of Proprietors supported the Council decision.21

**III. The Free Christian Union**

Martineau was disappointed at his rejection by University College, but the public outcry afterwards confirmed his belief in the growing cross-denominational sympathies among British intellectuals, just as he was trying to expand Unitarianism into a non-dogmatic Christian church. In the summer of 1866, as he was putting forward his name for the philosophy chair at UCL, Martineau was also finally defeating the members of the old school who wished to impose a creed on Unitarians. At the annual meeting of the BFUA in 1866, when Samuel Bache had proposed a motion for a creed, it was resoundingly defeated, deserted even by its sympathizers who valued the denomination’s traditional profession of religious liberty. Martineau and his allies saw their chance to set a new course for their religious denomination. Along with Tayler, their young ally, Charles Beard and sympathetic lawyers, Martineau proposed to confine the BFUA to propagating Unitarian beliefs--the unity of God, the humanity of Christ--and to create a broader group that could encompass sympathetic religious liberals.22 As he negotiated with the Secre-

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20 University College, London, Letter Book, August 1866-December 1875, 76 (Charles Atkinson to Augustus de Morgan, 10 December 1866).

21 University of Birmingham, HM 38: Alexander Bain to Harriet Martineau, 4 March 1867. de Morgan, 346-57.

22 DWL 93F, 2: John James Tayler to [Mr. Aspland], 19 March 1866.
tary of the BFUA, Robert Brook Aspland, Tayler pointed out that those who would create an alternative to the BFUA had history on their sides. When Unitarian chapels had been threatened by orthodox Dissenters who claimed that Unitarians had forfeited the chapels because of their changed doctrinal beliefs, Unitarians responded that their Presbyterian ancestors had been committed to free inquiry and, thus, the chapels were not created to propagate certain doctrinal beliefs.\(^{23}\) Martineau and Tayler saw themselves as fulfilling Nonconformist and Unitarian traditions rather than abandoning them.

From the beginning, Martineau and the Unitarians who were looking beyond the BFUA wanted to associate their cause with other 1860s crusades for freedom of thought among academic liberals and orthodox Nonconformists. The committee members examined the list of supporters for the “Natal Fund,” raised in 1864 to give money to the missionary bishop of Natal, John William Colenso, who was deposed after he published a book questioning the historical veracity of the Pentateuch.\(^{24}\) Martineau extended an invitation to the leading Broad Churchman, A. P. Stanley, the Dean of Westminster, who had invited Colenso to preach from his pulpit. He also invited the younger academic liberals whom he had met in the campaign against the University Tests. At the first official meeting of the FCU in June 1868, Goldwin Smith, the Professor Modern History at Oxford, spoke of the desirability of having a forum for discussing issues of common interest in an impartial manner. Stopford Brooke, the preacher in the royal household and a prominent liberal, was present as well. Like Goldwin Smith, he urged the benefits of simply allowing sympathetic Churchmen and Nonconformists to meet on another, often for the first

\(^{23}\) DWL 93F, 2: Edward Enfield to [?], 16 March 1866.

\(^{24}\) DWL 24.132.1, 10: “Bishop of Natal (23 May 1865).”
time, in an open forum.\textsuperscript{25} As the organization began to take shape, P. W. Clayden (1827-1902), a Congregationalist convert to Unitarianism; Charles Kegan Paul (1828-1902), the Broad Churchman and future publisher; and Henry Sidgwick (1838-1900), a prominent philosopher and fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, also joined the committee. George Dawson (1821-1876), the enormously influential non-denominational minister at the Church of the Savior, Birmingham, also attended the early meetings and joined one of the committees.\textsuperscript{26}

The FCU held its first public meeting in November 1867. The hopes of the Unitarians who organized the group were clearly set out in Tayler's pamphlet, "A Catholic Christian Church the Want of Our Time." As Tayler, Martineau and other members of the new school of Unitarianism had argued for thirty years, the competing religious groups in Britain had set up competing authorities and fostered a harmful sectarianism. The Church of England had simply become one more sect among many. Tayler argued that these problems were simply the result of the incompleteness of the Protestant Reformation. When the Reformers smashed the authority of the earthly Church, they replaced it with the authority of the literal sense of Scripture, yet people interpreted it in different ways. Tayler thought that the scholarly advances of the nineteenth century offered a chance for weakening the authority of competing interpretations of the Scriptures and re-discovering Jesus' Christianity, a life led in submission to the will of God. Freely acknowledging John Henry Newman's recent contention in his \textit{Apologia pro vita sua} (1864) that Protestantism was grounded in the principle of individual judgment, Tayler

\textsuperscript{25} DWL 24.132.1, 7: "My Notes of the Conference, June 1868, Goldwin Smith speaking."

\textsuperscript{26} DWL 24.132.1, 9: "List of Special and Consultative Committees."
contended that only free theological inquiry would fulfill Protestant Christianity. Even
the recent attempts by F. D. Maurice and his disciples to make the Incarnation the center
of Christian belief fell short of this goal because they emphasized a dogma. Because
Christianity was a way of life, no organized Church could ever encompass all the people
who possessed these sentiments and affections. Tayler recognized that theological differ-
ences would persist but argued that if the FCU could succeed it would allow educators
and social workers to reach a broader range of people.27

In spite of its initially favorable reception, the challenge of forging the collection
of intellectuals from different denominations into a coherent religious body proved ex-
traordinarily difficult. The first and most fundamental difficulty facing the organization
was defining its status as a religious organization. Although the FCU had grown out of
discussions among Unitarians, no one knew whether the FCU would attempt to become
another religious denomination. When the FCU had to decide whether individuals or
congregations would be admitted as members, few Unitarians were willing to abandon
their rights to free discussion and individual judgment and allow their congregations to
speak for them. Yet, if the FCU wanted to become a new, alternative religious organiza-
tion, it would have to attract congregations.28 Anglican members, especially ministers,
did not want to be seen as joining a new denomination, lest they lose their livings
altogether.29 Furthermore, even when the FCU did limit membership to individuals, a
significant minority remained dissatisfied that the group would not allow non-Christians


28 Inquirer, 30 November 1867, p. 766 (letter of John Page Hopps).

into the group. At the first meeting, on 21 November 1867, William Shaen, an important Unitarian philanthropist, proposed to admit non-Christian members but his amendment was defeated after vigorous debate. On the other hand, the mathematician, Augustus de Morgan, who had supported Martineau’s candidacy for the professorship at University College so vigorously, wondered how anybody could doubt Christ’s miracles but still trust his character.

Without any clear articulation of its status as a religious organization, the FCU struggled to find a function and a mission. At its first meeting, many of the members had talked of building a church at a central location in London, a project that the Unitarian Inquirer, normally sympathetic to Martineau, referred to as the FCU’s “crowning folly.”

The FCU published some pamphlets by dissatisfied Churchmen who joined the group and proposed a volume of essays on Church reform, perhaps a religious equivalent to Essays on Reform (1868), the well-received intervention in the debate over the Second Reform Act by several liberal young Oxford fellows. The proposed volume of essays bogged down in difficulties over finding contributors and collecting contributions. Martineau was prepared to edit a volume on church reform and recent theological developments, but, after the sudden death of John James Tayler in June 1869, he became Principal of MNC and, as a result, had no time for editing the proposed volume. Henry Sidgwick tried to find contributors for the theological section but with little success or

30 DWL 24.132, “minute book.”
31 De Morgan, 366.
32 Inquirer, 23 November 1867. For the proposal, see DWL 24.132.1, 7: “My notes of the Conference.”
33 DWL 24.132.3: 30 October 1869.
assurance of timely contributions. By 1870, Sidgwick had been elected to a special lectureship at Cambridge that did not require subscription and could spare little time for the project.\textsuperscript{34}

Even the contributions by Anglican fellows revealed their distance from Martineau's aspirations for the FCU. The most dedicated Anglican participant in the FCU was Henry Sidgwick, a fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge and important logician and moral philosopher. In the course of his studies he became deeply unsure about the Thirty-Nine Articles to which his fellowship required that he subscribe. Although his ability and connections won him the position of Vice-President of the FCU in 1868, he never quite fit the expectations that Nonconformists had for him. In 1869, when he resigned his Cambridge fellowship rather than resubscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles, the FCU published his pamphlet on "The Ethics of Subscription and Non-Subscription," an agonized consideration of the relative obligations to follow one's conscience or to carry out one’s duties to others. However sympathetic Sidgwick might have been to Martineau's type of free inquiry, he still emphasized the personal dimensions of the question of subscription with little attention to church reform.\textsuperscript{35} As Martineau said, the work was typical of the "legalistic" mindset of members of the Established Church.

Realizing that the group's momentum had stalled by 1870 and that other duties were claiming the energies of the members, Martineau proposed to dissolve the Union.\textsuperscript{36} In a letter to William Knight, a teacher at the Aberdeen College of the Free Kirk of Scot-

\textsuperscript{34} DWL 24.132.3: 11 December 1869.

\textsuperscript{35} Henry Sidgwick, \textit{Ethics of Subscription and Nonconformity}, 18.

\textsuperscript{36} DWL 24.132.3: 14 May 1870.
land who had begun a correspondence with Martineau, James Martineau attributed the FCU's demise to the difficult circumstances of the time. There was a felt need in many denominations for a broader religious fellowship, but the religious issues of Gladstone's first government—the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland and religious education in the schools—polarized religious parties and tightened religious bonds. Few Anglicans especially could experiment with altering the basis of the Church of England when the Liberation Society was braying loudly for the complete disestablishment of the Church of England and all its endowments. Thus, although Martineau found a sympathetic audience for his views on the importance of freedom of theological inquiry, but he attracted less interest in fundamental reform of the Church of England. The university liberals of the 1860s and 1870s, whose dissatisfaction with creeds and dogma Martineau hoped would fuel a reform of church structures, were content to find their place within British institutions. As Christopher Harvie has argued, the academic liberals who made their careers in London helped connect the ancient universities to metropolitan intellectual life and make them into truly national institutions.\footnote{Harvie, 14.} The chief cause of the FCU's demise, Martineau told Knight, was its failure to find a young journalist or academic to champion its cause.\footnote{HMC, MS J. Martineau 6, 5 (Martineau to William Knight, 25 July 1870).}

Martineau was disappointed that the group had not been able to attract dedicated younger liberals to its cause, but the project did, in effect, make Martineau into the most widely-known representative of a more spiritual, less dogmatic religion. In 1876, after taking the lease at a chapel in Bedford Park, Stopford Brooke, one of the greatest Broad
Church preachers of the late-nineteenth century, left the Anglican Church and entered into sympathetic relations with the Unitarians. Just as Knight picked up his pen to write Martineau when he heard of the FCU, the doubting Dominican friar, Robert Rodolph Suffield, wrote to Martineau seeking spiritual guidance. By the Spring of 1870, Suffield had grown increasingly uncertain about the historical basis of religion but still maintained an attachment to the notion that the spirit of God could work in people, though that working was not confined exclusively to the Roman Catholic Church. Martineau replied graciously to Suffield’s plea for guidance and rushed off within a few days, in the middle of term time at MNC, at a time when he had told the FCU that he had pressing duties. Martineau viewed Suffield as the modern equivalent of a martyr, one who had surrendered long held ties to close friends for the sake of conscience. Under Martineau’s guidance, Suffield quickly left the Catholic Church and became the minister to a Free Christian congregation at Croydon.

IV. The Metaphysical Society, 1869-1880

Martineau’s failures to find new forums to spread his influence were paradoxical, for both the failure to win the philosophy chair at University College, London and to establish the FCU indicated a felt need for forums and institutions without religious tests. Although tensions among Catholics, Anglicans and Dissenters remained high, the growth

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41 Ibid., 84 (25 September 1871, Martineau speech at Hope Street, Liverpool); Ibid., 165 (15 August 1870, Martineau to Suffield).

42 Ibid., 215.
of a new scientific naturalism that claimed human beings could know nothing beyond sense data pushed many of them to seek a common ground.\textsuperscript{43} Agnostics were a distinct group of critics of religious belief. Freethinkers, materialists and atheists had criticized religious belief for centuries, but agnostics distinguished themselves by their respectful tone and modest claims. In fact, the agnostics of the 1860s took their lead from the High Churchman H. L. Mansel's lectures on the limits of religious thought. In the first volume (1860) of his ambitious \textit{System of Synthetic Philosophy}, Herbert Spencer used Mansel's investigations of the contradictions in human knowledge of a first cause, the infinite and the absolute to argue that human beings can make no legitimate claims about these topics. Hence, Spencer referred to the ultimate basis of reality as "The Unknowable." The actual codification of agnostic theories of knowledge and belief was done by the young scientists, T. H. Huxley, John Tyndall, W. K. Clifford, and the journalist, Leslie Stephen. T. H. Huxley first coined the term "agnostic" in 1869. In the 1870s and 1880s, these writers took great delight in pointing out the contradictions in various Christian attempts to talk about God and the natural world. In fact, the agnostics were generally animated by a religious reverence for the Unknowable and an ethical demand that the mind submit to its rightful limits.\textsuperscript{44} Their true target was theology and its claims to knowledge. Once these were shown to be hopelessly inadequate to resolve the thorny problems of God's omnipotence, human freedom, and the problem of evil, human beings could proceed by simply testing experience through science. They did not call for the abolition of religion but merely for its confinement to the intellectual world of feeling.

\textsuperscript{43} John Tulloch, \textit{Movements of Religious Thought}, 329.

\textsuperscript{44} Lightman, 160.
The Metaphysical Society was the brainchild of Alfred, Lord Tennyson, the poet laureate, and James Knowles, the editor of *The Contemporary Review*. Concerned about the growing progress of agnostic and Positivist ideas of science, Tennyson and Knowles proposed to bring together some of the leading religious thinkers of the day to discuss these matters among themselves and devise some sort of countermeasures. Although the inspiration was Tennyson’s, Knowles did much of the work of assembling the members. As a prominent and successful editor, he was quite skilled in coaxing contributions from famous figures of all sorts. He convinced the Broad Churchman, A. P. Stanley, Dean of Westminster, and William George Ward, editor of the Catholic *Dublin Review*, to join the group. He even secured the participation of the ultramontane Archbishop Manning of Westminster. He asked R. H. Hutton, by then, editor of *The Spectator*, and a prominent religious thinker and literary critic. Tennyson and Knowles also asked Martineau to join. Martineau’s close friend, W. B. Carpenter, by then Registrar of the University of London, also joined and delivered four papers. In the interest of having materialists and agnostics represent themselves, Knowles also solicited the membership of such famous non-believers as J. S. Mill, Herbert Spencer, Frederic Harrison, T. H. Huxley, James Fitzjames Stephen and Henry Sidgwick. Despite the earnest entreaties of Knowles and other, both Mill and Spencer declined to join. Mill claimed that he was too busy and Spencer declined because he thought the excitement would hurt his health. Spencer’s refusal to join was, perhaps, the greatest blow, since many of the members had him in mind as the pre-eminent representative of agnosticism. Indeed, up until the first meeting, June 2, 1869, several members tried to attract him so that he could respond to the initial paper, R. H.
Hutton's "On Mr. Herbert Spencer's Theory of the Gradual Transformation of Utilitarian into Intuitive Morality by Hereditary Descent."[45]

Tennyson opened the first meeting with a poem on "The Higher Pantheism" that pondered the possibility of theistic belief in a world described by scientific laws. [46] The papers and discussions at the meetings centered around scientific naturalism and its attempt to explain all aspects of reality. All the religious believers in the Society had a healthy respect for the achievements of science, but focused their attention on the extension of empirical science to morality, human freedom and knowledge of causality. [47] At the center of these debates were Martineau and his allies, R. H. Hutton and W. B. Carpenter. Hutton opened the first meeting with a paper on Herbert Spencer's attempt to find the origins of seemingly intuitive moral principles in sense impressions. [48] W. B. Carpenter delivered the second paper, the first of several contributions on the nature of causation. [49] Both these figures relied on the arguments put forward by Martineau, who opened the second year of the society with a paper entitled "Is there Any Axiom of Causality?" [50] In his paper, Martineau continued his critique of arguments that human beings can only know the succession of phenomena. As he had argued against Oersted, Hamilton, Mansel and Spencer in the 1850s and 1860s, Martineau contended that scientists required a no-

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[50] The paper was delivered on 15 June 1870. See A. W. Brown, 320.
tion of force and causality to conceive of the laws of uniform succession with which they explained the natural world. Scientists were right that such a notion of absolute connection between phenomena could not be found empirically; the only access that human beings had to an experience of active power was in their wills and through their own choices, whence they learned to attribute active power to the world around them. Thus, human beings resorted to the type of a personal power in order to understand change in the world around them. 51 Thus, empirical science was not as self-sufficient as Huxley, Spencer and Tyndall suggested.

In a series of papers that grew out of conversations at the Metaphysical Society, Martineau established himself as perhaps the foremost critic of scientific naturalism in his day. Martineau’s arguments grew out of his fundamental contention in his paper for the Metaphysical Society that human beings can have knowledge beyond the regular succession of phenomena. In an address at the beginning of the 1874 academic year at MNC, Martineau took aim at one of the most notorious recent affirmations of scientific naturalism, the chemist John Tyndall’s Address to the British Association for the Advancement of Science. Tyndall argued that science was increasingly demonstrating the continuity of nature, even opening the possibility that organic life evolved from inorganic matter. Scientists were not immanentizing the creative, organizing power that religious believers had traditionally attributed to God in matter itself. 52 Tyndall concluded that all religions must


leave explanations of physical phenomena to science alone. Martineau began by questioning Tyndall's fundamental assumption that religion must always rely on miracles and exceptions to the natural order of things. Because Tyndall began with such a stark dichotomy between reason and law, he put himself in the odd position of trying to show the intelligibility of the universe by sundering its relation to any intelligence. In effect, these scientists acknowledged that only mind could understand the world but denied the power of mind to create the world. Martineau suggested that Tyndall was resorting to a crude debater's trick by attributing to matter all the powers that he wanted to evolve out of matter; he was defining the terms in his favor. Against Tyndall's argument that human beings can only know the succession of phenomena, Martineau maintained that all human beings apply the concept of cause to the interpretation of phenomena a priori.

Human beings first realize the notion of force through their own consciousness as they experience resistance and effort. At the same time, they recognize active power and causality at work in the world around them. Because they cannot conceive of a Will separate from mind, people conceive of the type of all causal power as a personal God.

Martineau's criticisms of scientific naturalism and defense of philosophical theism were widely noticed and appreciated by Churchmen and Dissenters alike.

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53 Ibid., 491.


55 Ibid., 175.

56 Ibid., 177.

57 Ibid., 179.

ing Martineau’s controversy with John Tyndall, Hutton praised Martineau for showing the emptiness of a religion grounded merely in an unknown object.\textsuperscript{59} Hutton especially praised Martineau for showing how Tyndall’s attempt to explain the universe in terms of the mechanical interactions of atoms failed to account fully account for the qualitative uniqueness of human emotion and thought.\textsuperscript{60} In 1889, on his 83rd birthday, a large collection of eminent British writers, scholars and scientists paid tribute to his defense of theism.\textsuperscript{61} After his death in 1900, writers from different denominations who disagreed with particulars of his theological or philosophical positions acknowledged the importance of his criticisms of scientific naturalism. A. M. Fairbarn, the Principal of Mansfield College, Oxford, the chief Congregationalist seminary, confessed that “it is largely owing to him that our age was not swept off its feet by the rising tide of materialistic and pseudo-scientific speculation.”\textsuperscript{62} According to Fairbarn, Martineau brought an elegance of expression to his defenses of theism that few of its orthodox exponents could match. His ethical fervor helped doubters and even non-believers recognize that religious believers were not simply obscurantists but acted out of high moral principles.\textsuperscript{63} Likewise, A. S. Pringle-Pattison, the Idealist and Professor of Logic and Metaphysics at the University of Edinburgh, pointed out that Martineau’s late publications had taken shape far earlier, in the debates between Sensationalists and Intuitionists in the 1820s and 1830s. He sug-

\textsuperscript{59} R. H. Hutton, “Mr. Martineau on Materialism,” \textit{Aspects of Religious and Scientific Thought} (London: Macmillan and Co., 1899), 82-84.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 85.

\textsuperscript{61} HMC, MS J. Martineau 25.


\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
gested that his commitment to human freedom had prepared the groundwork for the Idealist revival in late-nineteenth-century Britain. As several of these commentators noted, Martineau's influence transcended the bounds of his actual system and found responses in all who could be touched by his strong sense of duty. In recognition of Martineau's services, he was awarded honorary degrees from Harvard (1872), Leyden (1875), Edinburgh (1884), Oxford (1888), and Dublin (1892).

As A. W. Brown says in his benchmark study of the Metaphysical Society, by 1873, the members of the Metaphysical Society were beginning to repeat themselves and the Society entered on a period of stagnation until it was finally dissolved at a meeting at James Martineau's home in Gordon Square on 16 November 1880. Brown's book grew out of the mid-twentieth-century concern with building a sufficiently cohesive liberal culture. Thus, in the conclusion, Brown laments the decline and dissolution of the Metaphysical Society as the fragmentation of a common universe of intellectual discourse. While Brown is certainly correct that the members of the Metaphysical Society found less and less to say to each other, the degree to which most of the members came to write for many of the same periodicals, belong to many of the same clubs, elaborate many of the same concerns in a respectful way, and share the same aspirations indicates that a new national intellectual culture had been forged, a new culture that centered around the ancient universities, the Church of England (seen in an appropriately national but non-

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65 A. W. Brown, 70-1.

66 Ibid., 301-2.
doctrinal way), and the literary professions.\textsuperscript{67} To a large extent, the seemingly intractable disputes between Nonconformists and Anglicans, radical scientists and believers, radical reformers and Tories had been minimized, if not totally resolved.

V. The Changing Shape of British Unitarianism

The success of the Metaphysical Society shows how in the late nineteenth century Christians of all religious denominations focused on fundamental matters of religious faith. The Church-chapel split that had dominated so much of the nineteenth century was giving way to a more fundamental split between believers and non-believers. In a sense, Martineau had achieved his long-hoped-for rapprochement among Christians, but only at the intellectual level. In the late-nineteenth century, Martineau found that an increasingly confident and consolidated Anglican church could speak to this culture of public moralism and broad Christian belief more effectively than Unitarianism or Nonconformity could. As has been pointed out, the growing number of Oxbridge graduates who made careers in London helped make the ancient universities truly national institutions. John Wolffe has argued that the growing theological liberalism and dissolution of boundaries among all Christians reinforced a trend to invest national and imperial institutions with religious significance.\textsuperscript{68} In this climate, many Churchmen drew on Liberal Anglican traditions of the Anglican Church as the national community to establish themselves as the

\textsuperscript{67} T. W. Heyck, \textit{The Transformation of Intellectual Life in Victorian England} (New York: St. Martin's, 1982), 227. Heyck emphasizes professionalism, but, for an important corrective that emphasizes moral concerns and an amateur ethos, even in scholarship, see Collini, 203. Both, however, stress the cohesiveness of this group of intellectuals.

representatives of the common religious beliefs of British men and women.\textsuperscript{69} Thus, even in a period when fewer people were involved with religious institutions, Anglican clergymen--such as William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury--could speak to and for all British Christians. This broad Christian consensus, however, was notably Anglican and Catholic; distinctively Nonconformist strains of piety had little resonance.\textsuperscript{70}

In the 1830s, Martineau and the new school of Unitarianism had come to prominence by calling for a renewal of congregational life. They had translated their Romantic discontent with the intellectual and political legacies of Joseph Priestley into an appeal for a stronger devotional life within Unitarianism, more social outreach work and a disinterested moral leadership, especially at the municipal level. The movement away from Priestley's legacies had not been achieved without a great deal of polemical ink and wounded feelings, but by the 1850s, Unitarians of all types were responding to these calls enthusiastically. Martineau's students who became ministers in the 1840s, 1850s and 1860s heeded his calls for an active and influential ministry, and developed his ideas further. H. W. Crosskey made Martineau's treatment of doctrine the basis for his own support for the "civic gospel" in Birmingham that would bind together and cultivate a sense of duty in all members of the community. Charles Beard, Thom's successor at Renshaw

\textsuperscript{69} Grimley, 12-14.

Street, Liverpool, continued the congregation's social outreach, produced several well-received historical studies and was a leader-writer for the Liberal Liverpool Daily Post.

The economic downturn of the late nineteenth century (roughly 1873-1893) hit Nonconformity's heartland in the industrial towns of Northern England especially hard, sapping much of the money and energy that allowed Nonconformist chapels to exercise such influence. In the 1850s and 1860s, during a booming economy, many expanding and prosperous congregations had left their original white, clapboard buildings for more expensive Gothic chapels in the suburbs. As their social outreach work increased, they put up school buildings, mission buildings, and gathering halls. As they grew increasingly respectable, chapels also took pride in their cultured ministers, paying them salaries that allowed them to live as equals with their congregation members. This building boom, however, could only be sustained with mortgages. Even Hope Street Church, Martineau's congregation in Liverpool, had debts from the new church it built in 1848-49. With the economic downturn after 1870, many congregations were suddenly strapped for cash and some even forfeited their chapels altogether. Less discretionary income meant a decline in chapel receipts. The economic downturn effectively ended the chapel building boom and, in their straightened financial conditions, few chapels could sustain the outreach work of earlier times.

Even the prosperous congregations of the Church of the Messiah, Birmingham and Renshaw Street, Liverpool encountered severe difficulties. Both congregations were

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71 Gunn, 112.
72 LRO 288 HOP 3/19.
73 Green, Religion in the Age of Decline, 155-59.
extraordinarily wealthy and both had highly effective ministers. By the mid-1880s, however, both congregations were in financial difficulties. The Church of the Messiah, Birmingham had a proud heritage as the successor to the New Meeting, at which Joseph Priestley had ministered. By the 1880s, it boasted members such as Joseph Chamberlain, then a former Mayor and rising Liberal MP. Yet, in the 1880s, as the generation who had built the congregation to its current prosperity passed away, the vestry committee had to consider how to make good the shortfalls in income.\textsuperscript{74} Of course, the congregation held on to its building and Crosskey continued to be well-paid. Yet, by this time, the ministry to the poor was in regular financial difficulties; in 1885, it curtailed its activities for lack of funds. The annual report acknowledged that the congregation was in an unfortunate position, for the extended decline in trade had stressed their own resources just at the moment when larger numbers of poor people were entering the cities from the countryside.\textsuperscript{75} In 1887, the ministry put off repairing its buildings indefinitely. Although the ministry to the poor solved that problem by moving into recently vacated buildings, it was running at a deficit through the end of Crosskey’s pastorate in 1892.\textsuperscript{76} Throughout the period there was no hope for help from the congregation itself because the vestry committee itself was searching for ways to make up for the contributions of older members who were passing on.

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\textsuperscript{74} Birmingham Central Library, Church of the Messiah papers, UC2/141, “Church of the Messiah, Birmingham, Annual Reports for 1884,” Report of the Vestry Committee.

\textsuperscript{75} BCL, UC2/141, “Church of the Messiah, Birmingham, Annual Reports for 1885,” Report of the Mission to the Poor.

\textsuperscript{76} BCL, UC2/144, Annual Reports for years 1888, 1889, 1890, 1891, 1892.
In these straightened financial circumstances, Martineau’s 1887 proposal for a new federal organization for British Unitarianism had little chance of success. Martineau proposed that Unitarian congregations contribute to a Support Fund that would guarantee all ministers a yearly salary of £150, not a great deal but enough to ensure ministers could work for their congregations alone. As a qualification, however, ministers would need a university degree.\(^7\) Furthermore, Martineau proposed an elaborate series of local and regional synods that would oversee the qualifications of ministers and facilitate cooperation. In its essence, the plan represented the culmination of Martineau’s thinking about the place of ministers in religious life and the importance of congregational life. What Martineau proposed was nothing less than a revival of the Presybterian system of church government for English Unitarians. Reduced to its most basic points, Martineau’s proposals meant that wealthier chapels would subsidize poorer chapels. By the late nineteenth century, few congregations were willing to make this sort of commitment, especially when they were themselves running deficits. Few records of the debates surrounding Martineau’s 1888 proposal for a federal church union survive but it was voted down in congregation after congregation. Although Martineau had designed his scheme to maximize freedom of theological inquiry, a member of the Renshaw Street congregation, which Thom still attended, worried about congregational autonomy under such a scheme.

Even William Rathbone VI, normally a reliable ally of the new school, advised the

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\(^7\) In “Transplanting the Vine,” Webb sees the university degree requirement as an indication of Martineau’s snobbishness and wealthy background (84-85). Although Martineau was certainly from a wealthier background and appreciated the benefits of a degree, the degree requirement also summed up much of his thinking about ethics, human personality and the life of religious congregations. This is especially clear in the writings of Tayler. See above, pages 219-222.
Renshaw Street congregation that the time was "not right" for such a proposal. 78 At the Church of the Messiah, the minutes record that the congregation members believed the proposal inopportune. 79

By 1900, as local chapels were increasingly unable to support as much social outreach and political mobilization as they had in earlier years, many of the Nonconformists who had contributed to the movement for civic improvement in the second half of the nineteenth century began to loosen their associations with local municipalities and view themselves as part of a national elite. Simon Gunn has argued that in the mid-Victorian period, the provincial middle classes created distinctive forms of public culture--clubs, concerts, public processions, and chapel attendance--that reflected the prestige and power of the industrial middle classes. 80 At the center of middle class life was weekly chapel attendance. Chapel attendance was a religious matter, but the character of one's chapel indicated much about its members. Chapel committees carefully considered the most suitable architecture, most suitable liturgies and, most importantly, the most cultured and charismatic ministers, preferably taken from the increasingly rigorous and cultured Nonconformist colleges. 81 Ministers were especially important because they were the public representatives of the chapel. Chapel members committed great amounts of time and

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79 Birmingham Central Library, UC2/ 86 (Church of the Messiah, Annual General Meeting Minutes, 1869-1912), 316.

80 Gunn, 21-30.

81 For the increasing Nonconformist pre-occupation with the cultural attainments of its ministers, see Johnson, Dissolution of Dissent, 115-20. For Unitarians, see the writings of Tayler cited earlier. For orthodox Nonconformists, see A. W. W. Dale, Life of R. W. Dale, of Birmingham (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1899), 39-42, 44.
money to the activities of the chapel; men served on committees and as deacons; women
did philanthropic work; children attended Sunday school classes. By the 1890s, however,
the children of this generation were establishing their identities in other ways. Gunn has
stressed that this new generation was characterized by its lack of attachment to any par-
ticular locality. Employer paternalism declined as impersonal forms of business organi-
ization, such as the limited liability company, took hold. Furthermore, the upper-middle
classes were increasingly mobile themselves. They spent part of the “Season” in London,
part of the year in the countryside or by the seaside and only the remainder in their pro-
vincial residence.

The economic downturn of the late-nineteenth century weakened Nonconformist
chapels, and the split of the Liberal Party over Home Rule in 1886 also weakened the po-
itical power of Nonconformists. Like virtually all Nonconformists and Unitarians, Mar-
tineau and his students had been Liberals. Yet, by the late 1870s, they were increasingly
disillusioned with Gladstone and the Liberal Party. They had emphasized disinterested
leadership and Gladstone’s increasing confidence in the political discernment of ordinary
people seemed simply irresponsible. Like many other Liberal intellectuals of the period,
most of them abandoned Gladstone and became Liberal Unionists after 1886. Marti-
tineau supported the Liberal party well into the 1870s, but by the 1880s, he was increas-
ingly uneasy with Gladstone’s populist appeals. Finally, in 1886, when Gladstone pro-
posed Home Rule for Ireland, Martineau broke with the Liberal Party, bitterly denounc-
ing Gladstone’s “political madness” to William Knight. Like many Liberal Unionists,

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82 For the different views of politics at stake in the split over the 1886 Home Rule Bill, see Parry, *Democ-
raty and Religion*, 435-36.
Martineau was not against the Irish or even Catholicism but he was worried about the fate of British government when scoundrels like Parnell were admitted into ruling alliances and when cobbling together coalitions took priority over sound judgment and principle. Richard Holt Hutton, who had maintained close contacts with Martineau after becoming an Anglican, had become the respected editor of The Spectator and a close confidant of Gladstone himself. Yet, in 1886, Hutton too left the Liberal Party over Irish Home Rule; it was said that his departure wounded Gladstone the most. Similarly, many of Martineau's students found themselves marginalized in Liberal politics after they protested Irish Home Rule. Crosskey played a key role in campaigning for non-denominational education and supporting Chamberlain's efforts to reform the municipality of Birmingham. He lost much of his access to wider Liberal circles after he supported Chamberlain in 1886. Charles Beard succeeded Thom at Renshaw Street, Liverpool and worked as a leader writer for the Liverpool Daily Post and helped found University College, Liverpool. His political career ended rather abruptly, however, after he criticized Irish Home Rule.

In the period of economic downturn, mass politics and the growth of a national culture at the end of the nineteenth century, the younger generation of Liberals began to emphasize state intervention and collective solutions to social and political problems. Although this dissertation has argued for an important communitarian and collective dimension to the chapels of the mid-Victorian period, the growing stress on state intervention was a new development. By the 1880s, as local authorities struggled to deal with

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83 HMC, MS J. Martineau 6, 90 (Martineau to Knight, 17 June 1886).
84 Woodfield, 21.
rampant poverty, many Nonconformists were looking at the problem in a new light. One of the landmarks of this turn was *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* (1883), the result of an investigation by the Congregational Union into the slums of London. Its author, the Congregationalist pastor, Andrew Mearns, reiterated that the poverty in these slums was not the fault of individuals but the result of faulty social systems and circumstances. Within Unitarianism, the younger ministers and lay people looked to socialism and government action to remedy the problems of the day. Beatrice Potter, later to marry Sidney Webb and become an influential socialist, rejected the perceived narrowness of her upbringing in favor of social work and investigation. From the 1870s onwards, the student debating society at Manchester New College considered favorably the possibility of increased government aid to labor and the future viability of socialism. At the opening of new buildings for the Liverpool Domestic Mission in 1892, L. P. Jacks, the minister at Renshaw Street Chapel, asked Martineau to say a few words about the founding of the mission. Although declining hearing prevented Martineau from coming in person, he wrote that, although he sympathized with recent proposals for social reorganization, the mission still spoke to the need for the regeneration of individual character. As Timothy Larsen and David Bebbington have pointed out, orthodox Nonconformists—especially in the Liberation Society—turned away from religious liberty after 1874 as they were integrated more closely into the political counsels of the Liberal Party. Furthermore, as many Nonconformists turned to the state to solve social and political problems, the purely nega-


86 HMC, MS MNC Misc. 45: Unfortunately, this book only records the topics, speakers and only occasionally the results of any votes.

87 LRO 288 ULL 3/22/5 (James Martineau to L. P. Jacks, 9 October 1892).
tive principle of religious equality and disestablishment provided little positive
guidance. 88

Within Unitarianism itself, the appeal of distinctively Christian ideas began to
loosen appreciably after 1870. The old school-new school debate that had convulsed
Unitarianism for so long ran out of steam as a new generation of ministers came to
prominence and took many of Martineau's innovations for granted. Just as many of Mar-
tineau's allies had died or retired by the late 1860s, so too had many of his chief oppo-
nents departed the scene as well. Brook Aspland died suddenly in 1869, shortly after
Tayler. Soon afterwards, Bache was afflicted by a fatal softening of the brain set in and
he rarely appeared in public again. After Martineau became Principal of MNC in 1870,
he had many of his own students and disciples as colleagues. His future biographers,
James Drummond (1835-1918) and Charles Upton (1830-1920), taught New Testament
and mental philosophy respectively. His other biographer, Joseph Estlin Carpenter
(1844-1927), the son of William Benjamin Carpenter, taught Hebrew and Old Testament.
Thus, for the most part, Martineau did not have to fight battles over the authority of the
Scriptures and the value of miracles. Yet, just as Martineau had sought to transcend
Priestley's negative criticisms and turn Unitarianism into a positive religion, Martineau's
own pupils began to expand his spiritual understanding of Christianity into the ground-
work for a much wider ecumenism. The common characteristic of all these movements
was a decreasing attention to Christ, whom Martineau had made the summation of the
human religious sentiments. In the 1880s, Martineau had to make clear repeatedly to his

88 Larsen, Friends, 267.
student Valentine D. Davis the importance of Christ as the exemplar of the union between
the conscience of a human being and God. Christianity was a distinctly personal religion,
not the impersonal theism preached by Matthew Arnold.89 J. Estlin Carpenter, who
would write Martineau's biography, became interested in Buddhism and Eastern reli-
gions. He even resigned his pulpit in order to spend more time studying them. Although
he justified the study of Eastern religions as the study of the manifestation in other reli-
gions of the spirit of God that was in Christ, Martineau had nothing but scorn for the deci-
sion. He compared the move from the study of Christianity to the study of non-Christian
religions to a reversion from adult speech to childish gibberish.90 Finally, L. P. Jacks
(1860-1955), an 1885 graduate of MNC, resigned his position at the prestigious Church
of the Messiah in 1902 to become the first editor of The Hibbert Journal (1902-1947) and
professor at Manchester College, Oxford. As he left, he explained to the congregation
that he was taking up the professorship at Manchester College in order to carry on "Dr.
Martineau's project," the advancement of not just one God but one religion, the funda-
mental beliefs underlying all the religions of the world.91

In the 1880s, even the traditional Unitarian commitment to freedom of intellectual
inquiry was marginalized as trustees began pressing to move MNC from London to Ox-
ford. The groundwork for the move was being laid even as Martineau delivered his series
of addresses as Principal in which he explained the significance of MNC as the only
place for free theological inquiry in Britain. Already in 1853, when MNC followed lay

89 HMC, MS V. D. Davis 1, 2 and 57 (31 March 1878 and 22 August 1894, Martineau to V. D. Davis).
90 HMC MS J. E. Carpenter 1, 151 (James Martineau to Russell Martineau, 15 July 1898).
91 Birmingham Central Library, Church of the Messiah papers, UC2.86, "Annual General Meeting Min-
utes": Address of the Minister (1900).
Unitarians to London, the grounds were shifting under its feet. As the University Reform commission began to ease subscription requirements at Oxford and Cambridge, lay Unitarians began to attend those schools. By 1871, all tests at Oxford had been repealed, except in Divinity. In 1872, the Hibbert Trustees, who supplied many of the fellowships for ministerial students at MNC, raised the possibility of establishing a Unitarian presence at one of the ancient universities. 92 Martineau and Thom helped organize opposition to any move to Oxford or Cambridge at this point. 93 By the early 1880s, however, other events were forcing their hands. University Hall was losing many of its lay student residents. Many trustees viewed the ancient universities shorn of their religious tests as truly national institutions and, thus, as suitable sites at which Manchester New College could continue its mission in the religious life of England. 94 Staunch allies of Martineau, such as William Rathbone VI of Liverpool, sent their children to Oxford as a matter of course. Similarly, many trustees hoped that a Unitarian presence at Oxford would protect lay students from the Church of England. No doubt, the trustees were also aware that the Congregationalists had recently bowed to the wishes of many of their prominent scholars and members and relocated Spring Hill College from Birmingham to Oxford and renamed it Mansfield College. 95

Martineau resisted this proposal with all his might, reiterating the school’s historic mission as the sole place of absolutely free theological inquiry in the British Isles, but this

92 DWL 24.153.9 (J. H. Thom to James Martineau, 5 March 1872).
93 DWL 24.153.17 (J. H. Thom to James Martineau, 26 November 1877).
95 For a study of this Congregationalist move and its significance, see Mark D. Johnson, The Dissolution of Dissent, 165-224.
merely secured him the consolation of not having the college move until he had retired as Principal in 1885. Martineau reiterated what he had told them over the course of many years in his sermons and college addresses. Manchester College had grown out of the Protestant Dissenting tradition of non-subscription to religious creeds. Oxford may have ended many of its subscription requirements but it still required subscription to the Thirty-Nine Articles when awarding Divinity degrees. Thus, Oxford did not allow free inquiry in theology and the core Dissenting claim was still not met.\textsuperscript{96} Given Martineau's standing within the denomination, and especially outside the denomination, the college trustees realized that they could only move the College after his retirement. Thus, in 1889, after Martineau had retired as Principal of the College, the trustees voted narrowly to move MNC to Oxford.\textsuperscript{97} Although the decisive vote of all the trustees was quite narrow, the relative ease with which the college raised a £55,000 fund suggested a good deal of underlying support for the move.\textsuperscript{98}

\textbf{VI. Conclusion}

Although Martineau continued as a respected figure within his denomination and within British intellectual life, the pillars of his influence—Nonconformist chapels, MNC and the religious press—had all changed significantly by the end of the nineteenth century. After the failure of \textit{The National Review} in 1864, Martineau could not find a regular pub-

\textsuperscript{96} HMC, MS J. Martineau 16, "On the Question of Removal to Oxford, 25 June 1888." Martineau was not content to voice his opposition prior to the move, but, when asked to address the gathering at the opening of the new buildings in Oxford, reasserted the superiority of the Nonconformist, and specifically Unitarian, understanding of free religion. See HMC, MS J. Martineau 16, "On the Opening of the College Buildings, 19 October 1893."

\textsuperscript{97} Webb, "Transplanting," 81-82.

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 82.
lic forum for his views. Unitarians replaced it with *The Theological Review* (1864-1879) which, although it was committed to free inquiry in theology, attracted mostly Unitarian contributors and confined itself to relatively technical discussions of theological matters. Even though Martineau’s contemporaries respected his philosophical defenses of theism, Martineau could not draw together the liberal elements in different religious denominations. The Free Christian Union (1867-1870) failed to articulate a clear mission. The younger academic liberals whom Martineau had supported in the struggle to repeal the religious tests at the ancient universities stopped short of reforming the entire British religious establishment. They achieved an open forum for discussion in religious matters with the foundation of the Metaphysical Society in 1869. Martineau contributed a great deal to the organization and came to know many of its members quite well, but the group was in no way a vehicle for the reform of British religious life. Even within Martineau’s own denomination, the commitment to his vision of religious liberty waned by the end of the nineteenth century. Few congregations wished to follow his plan for a federal union of all Unitarian congregations in Britain. Moreover, the local chapels that Martineau and the new school had championed as the proper focus of religious life were increasingly irrelevant as a younger generation of intellectuals looked to the national government in social, educational and political matters. Instead, when Martineau retired as Principal in 1885, the trustees of MNC voted to move the school to Oxford, still, as Martineau vehemently pointed out, not a place of fully free religious inquiry. In the 1890s, as Martineau pondered the future of Unitarianism, he worried that it had not achieved all it might have
in the religious life of Britain. Yet, the failure was not for lack of commitment. Just as the ancient universities had made themselves into national institutions, so too the Anglican Church was increasingly successfully making itself the natural representative of the religious life of the English people.

99 DWL 24.95: 6 (James Martineau to Priestley Prime, 3 January 1892).
Chapter 7: Conclusion

W. R. Ward has called the period overshadowed by the French Revolution, 1790-1850, the most important in the modern history of Western European religion. The political and social upheaval of this period forever altered the relationship among ordinary people, religious organizations, and governments.\(^1\) In Britain, the enfranchisement of Dissenters (1828) and the passage of Catholic emancipation (1829) capped a period of nearly fifty years in which thriving forms of popular religion gradually undermined the Anglican Establishment. The almost cataclysmic effect that the opening of political opportunities to Dissenters had on the Church of England is well-known. The members of the Oxford Movement thought that these events amounted to "national apostasy," while Liberal Anglicans proposed further broadening the Church of England.

Relatively little attention, however, has been paid to how Dissenters--the growing numbers of Protestants outside the Church of England--made sense of these changes and new opportunities. In particular, the responses of Unitarians, who had organized and led opposition to the Established Church before 1832, have been little known. What work has been done either has focused on the internal history of the denomination or has treated the Unitarian loss of Dissenting leadership as a result of its growing

\(^1\) W. R. Ward, *Religion and Society*, 1.
conservatism. To reveal the complexity of the Unitarian response to the declining power of religious establishments and the thriving forms of popular religion, this dissertation has used Stefan Collini’s notion of a “public moralist” to capture how Martineau, Tayler, and Thom—the generation of Unitarian leaders who came of age in the 1830s—shaped their denomination’s public stance and reached out to other Victorian scholars and intellectuals. As their early assimilation of developmental science, Romantic thought, and German *Wissenschaft* indicates, these ministers were profoundly aware of the intellectual changes taking place around them. In the midst of increasing religious sectarianism during the 1830s and 1840s, they used these intellectual resources to rethink their Dissenting heritage, especially the principle of religious liberty. Separating religion from theology, they maintained that exploration of the fundamental human religious intuitions could draw people together and reform municipal, denominational, and national life. In a remarkable turn, they abandoned Priestley’s criticism of the alliance of Church and State and called for the State to positively support free theological inquiry. Only in this way could religious sectarianism be ended.

One important contribution of this dissertation is its examination of the struggle over formerly Presbyterian chapels and trust funds in the 1820s and 1830s that culminated in the Dissenters’ Chapels Act (1844). These lawsuits brought home to Unitarians

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2 As noted in chapter 1, Webb and Waller are in the first category and Hilton and Jacyna in the second. Webb’s histories of Unitarianism, while insightful, neglect the extraordinary degree to which what it meant to actually be a religious denomination was itself a matter of debate in this period. While Waller has brought to light Martineau’s theory of the church and Martineau’s influence on F. W. Robertson and J. W. Colenso, he has given relatively little attention to Martineau’s group of allies within Unitarianism and in his journalistic projects and to the significance of Martineau’s ideas in nineteenth-century Church-State debates. Meanwhile, Jacyna and Hilton argue that Martineau’s resistance to materialism and agnosticism were conservative, but this neglects Martineau’s keen desire to keep religion as a matter of free intellectual inquiry, rather than relegating it to mere feeling as agnostics aimed to do.
the problem of religious sectarianism. The Evangelical Awakening increased the ranks of Congregationalists and Baptists, but did not affect Unitarians. In the early nineteenth century, Dissenting politicians used these numbers to make their political agitations into truly national campaigns. By the 1820s, however, the increasing consolidation of Dissenting denominations undermined this relatively open and unsectarian political cooperation. Congregationalists and Baptists needed more money for evangelization projects that reached across Britain and across the globe. In addition, as denominations consolidated their institutions, they defined their beliefs and often issued basic creeds. Thus, it only made sense for orthodox Dissenters to look more closely at their Unitarian allies, who were often quite wealthy and increasingly open about their heterodox beliefs. In their court battles, Unitarians and orthodox Dissenters were forced to define what it meant to be a Dissenter.

Instead of supporting a Unitarian Association similar to the Congregational and Baptist Unions, Martineau and the new school of Unitarianism critiqued the bases of contemporary religious sectarianism. Against those Unitarians who wished to consolidate themselves and revitalize their tradition of denominational controversy, Martineau, Taylor, and Thom distinguished between religion, which was grounded in fundamental human intuitions of God, and theology, which was a human attempt to systematize those intuitions. Ministers needed free rein to inquire as they pleased, but, for no reason, could they use theological systems to define religious communities. Thus, in their view, even their fellow Unitarians who insisted on the primacy of Priestley’s system were basically the same as orthodox Christians who defined denominational creeds.
In contrast to many religious radicals in the 1830s and 1840s who became pantheists and freethinkers, the new school of Unitarianism made free theological inquiry, devotional preaching and a renewed congregational life the source of responsible political and social reform. Martineau and his allies proposed professional training stressing the relation between the fundamental human religious impulses and their changing manifestations. They also urged their fellow Unitarians to cultivate congregational life rather than sectarian controversy. Controversy, however, was sometimes unavoidable. Thus, when Tories and evangelicals protested Liverpool's proposed non-denominational education scheme and criticized the local Unitarians, Martineau and Thom stressed the superiority of free theological inquiry in drawing out the natural religious sentiments and elucidating the true character of Christ.

Although the new school quickly rose to prominence and were widely admired, a determined group argued that Martineau and his allies were threatening the certainty of religious belief. The debates between the new school and the old school defenders of Priestley dominated Unitarianism from the 1840s through the 1860s, centering around the location and curriculum of the main Unitarian seminary, Manchester New College. After a long series of arguments, Martineau and Tayler became professors at MNC and replaced the older curriculum of Biblical evidences and utilitarian ethics with Biblical criticism and philosophy of religion. One of the new school's most important institutional innovations was the domestic mission, an effort to preach non-denominational Christianity and cultivate the natural religious intuitions of the poor. Although the missionaries to the poor cultivated the religious sentiments of individuals, Martineau and the new school
hoped that the missions’ example of religious cooperation could stimulate the social, political and religious regeneration of the local community and town. In their influential positions at MNC, Martineau and Tayler trained the next generation of Unitarian ministers, such as H. W. Crosskey of Birmingham, Charles Beard of Liverpool and Richard Acland Armstrong of Nottingham, who made their chapels into centers of municipal reform and civic activism.

The new school’s efforts to combat sectarian religion were not part of the secularization of British life, but rather were an attempt to shape the British state according to its interpretation of the Dissenting principle of religious liberty. In its journals, The Prospective Review and The National Review, the new school of Unitarianism engaged the religious doubters and liberals of the day and made the case that only the Nonconformist principle of free theological inquiry would create an adequately broad and free British religious community. From the 1840s onwards, Martineau and his allies reached out to Broad Churchmen, “honest doubters,” theists and agnostics to show that misgivings about specific religious dogmas were the manifestation of a more fundamental religious trust in free inquiry. As editors, they sought contributions from a wide variety of writers--Richard Holt Hutton, Walter Bagehot and Francis William Newman. In their articles, the new school linked critiques of miracles and Scriptural authority to the new developmental approach to science, which explained phenomena as the expression of basic principles. By exploring basic human religious intuitions, they would distinguish Jesus’ character from changeable dogmas. They supported gentler, less authoritarian social institutions that concentrated on drawing out and strengthening the natural human religi-
ious intuitions and moral capacities. They hoped that these explorations of common hu-
man attitudes would become the basis for a broadened and strengthened British religious
community.

As this dissertation has shown, the new school of Unitarianism's attempts to
change ministerial training, reform religious denominations and fundamentally reorient
British religious discourse were grounded in a unique fusion of the Nonconformist tradi-
tion of free inquiry and more recent Romantic influences. Yet, differentiating Unitarian
Romanticism from the traditionalism of the Oxford Movement and the radical Protestant-
ism of Edward Irving requires a more nuanced understanding of how Romanticism oper-
ated in particular historical contexts. In particular, as this dissertation has stressed, the
Romanticism of Martineau and the new school of Unitarianism was not anti-scientific.
The new school moved Unitarianism away from its origins in Priestley's natural philoso-
phy by expanding the Nonconformist principle of non-subscription to creeds into an af-
firmation of human freedom and capacity to act without direction from authorities.
Against opponents who argued that human beings required incentives, punishments and
external authorities in order to act properly, the new school sought to show that people
could naturally recognize higher principles and cooperate accordingly. Like Coleridge
and Matthew Arnold, the new school of Unitarianism hoped to create a clerisy of
prophet-ministers who would regenerate a sectarian society. In order to elevate the status
of ministers, they proposed professionalizing measures, specifically training and associa-
tions to free them from dependence on the religious marketplace. These ministers would
not be trained in Priestley's natural philosophy but in the new developmental science and
in German *Wissenschaft*. Like J. S. Mill and others who searched for a synthetic science of society, Martineau hoped that a knowledge of fundamental human religious and ethical principles would guide the reform of British institutions. Like many Victorians, the members of the new school of Unitarianism traveled to Germany; instead of taking away individual criticisms of the Bible, however, they assimilated a grand picture of the role of the scholar and disinterested knowledge in the making of the modern nation state. Thus, Martineau proposed reforms of British religious life that would guarantee the status, salaries and intellectual freedom of ministers.

Martineau’s Romantic transformation of the Nonconformist tradition shows both how some of the fiercest critics of the British Establishment in the late-eighteenth century became the responsible liberals and reformers of the mid-Victorian period and how that consensus unravelled in the late nineteenth century. In the 1830s and 1840s, Martineau was part of a broad range of religious and scientific radicals who were fascinated by developmental approaches to science and free inquiry in theology. Martineau’s attacks on the devotional poverty of utilitarianism and evangelicalism and his ringing endorsements of free inquiry in theology were echoed by many of the “honest doubters,” who criticized the narrow, evidential approach to religion and science. Similarly, the new school’s work in ethics, philosophy of religion and Biblical criticism reflects the new developmental approaches in science pioneered by Mill and others. Yet this attack on creeds in the name of personal integrity that seemed to threaten all religious belief became an effective social and political glue. In the pages of their journals, Martineau and his allies could call on their Anglican, Nonconformist, and agnostic contemporaries to set aside their sectarian
differences and cultivate the strength of character necessary to fulfill their obligations to society as a whole. Through their support for domestic missions and progressive municipal reform, the new school helped reinforce the voluntary social institutions that structured so much of mid-Victorian middle-class and urban life. Martineau sought to ground this type of public intellectual activity in an understanding of human religious capacities, but by the 1860s intellectuals were defining themselves by their distance from contentious religious disputes. With this gradual reorientation went an interpretation of developmental science in a more positivistic manner that destroyed the possibility of religious knowledge, and scientific and religious radicalism parted ways. By 1900, Martineau’s hope of a national religious community grounded in the Nonconformist principle of non-subscription to creeds was an obvious failure, as the ancient universities and the Church of England consolidated their positions as representatives of British national identity.

Martineau and the other members of the new school of Unitarianism were well-aware that their own search for a modus vivendi between religion and political life was part of much larger nineteenth-century European dilemma of how religious groups would participate in social and political life as state establishments weakened considerably in

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4 In the history of science, both Alison Winter and James Secord have argued that the ability of doctors and scientists to separate themselves from popular controversies triggered by mesmerism and popular evolutionary syntheses was vitally important to their efforts to achieve professional status. See Winter, 177-183 and Secord, *Victorian Sensation*, 504-514.

5 In the case of Germany, Thomas Albert Howard has noted the difficulties that liberal theologians as Wissenschaft assumed a narrower, more positivist cast (Howard, 273). In the case of the American historical profession, the transition from Ranke’s Romanticism to positivism happened quite easily. See Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The ‘Objectivity Question’ and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 31.
the aftermath of the French Revolution. Their own Romantic transformation of Nonconformist traditions was unique, but they drew upon the ideas and lessons of similar religious liberals in Germany and New England. In all these situations, theologians and clergy formulated liberal theologies as attempts to defuse sectarianism and establish new forms of social cohesion. In Germany, what Thomas Howard has called an "Erastian modernity" took shape as reformers in the Prussian state bureaucracy managed church institutions and theological education. Theologians at the University of Berlin—especially F. D. E. Schleiermacher, F. C. Baur, and W. M. L. de Wette—embraced the model of Wissenschaft, a concern with systematically elaborating the principles and foundations of a body of knowledge, and marginalized the traditional confessional and apologetic purposes of theology. In their scholarship, these Germans took religious feeling as immanent in human consciousness and sought to explain the varying its varying historical manifestations. By marginalizing the study of dogma, these professors lent their support to the ecumenical policies of nineteenth-century Prussia and the German Empire that strove to blur confessional boundaries. The British Unitarians were especially impressed by German scholarship, universities, and religious institutions, but their liberal theological impulses grew out of local and pastoral concerns and were expressed most strongly in municipal government. Still, like their German counterparts, Martineau and Tayler emphasized the ethical importance of the state and sought to transcend sectarian divisions and create a truly national religious community. Similarly, the Congregationalists and Unitarians of New England had to reconsider their social and political func-

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tions as they lost their remaining establishment privileges and new evangelical sects won an increasing number of converts. The New England Transcendentalists absorbed many of the new theological ideas spreading from Germany and thought that they could use them to break down denominational barriers. Yet, ultimately, unlike English Unitarians and German liberal Protestants, they left organized religion in favor of communal and personal experiments in authentic living.

Finally, this study of the Unitarian response to the enormous religious changes ushered in by the French Revolution suggests the relationship between European history and general models of religious change. As Jeffrey Cox has recently urged, historians must “provincialize Christendom.” They must recognize how the uniquely close alliance between elite institutions of government, education, cultural life and social welfare and religious authorities in Europe determined the course of religious change. Liberal theologians in the nineteenth century Britain, Germany, and America thought that their approach to theology and religious life was uniquely suited to the modern world. Most obviously, this liberal theology took its bearings from the latest developments in science and knowledge. In addition, liberal theology distinguished itself against the sectarian squabbling of various confessional religious groups and aligned itself with the emerging nation states. Yet, as this dissertation has shown, religious liberalism, especially in the case of the Victorian Unitarians, was very much the product of a specific place and time. James Martineau and his allies had to rearticulate the Nonconformist tradition of free inquiry in

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a religious marketplace dominated by a resolute Church of England and proliferating popular religious groups. Many of the developments associated with the "secularization of the European mind"--Biblical criticism, questioning of miracles, marginalization of dogma--originated as tactics to come to terms with religious pluralism. As such, religious liberalism was not one uniquely modern path, but, rather, simply one voice in a conversation about how to define religion in a post-confessional age. Other options pursued at this time include the Oxford Movement's reassertion of an authoritative religious tradition and Voluntarist Dissent's call for a religious marketplace free from establishments. The current religious situation in Britain and Europe--plunging church attendance, institutional decay, and growing hostility--has roots in relatively recent events. But the dilemmas of religious pluralism do not seem to have been transcended, for the influx of non-European immigrants has raised many of the same questions of officially supported beliefs, free speech, government funding, and equal opportunity all over again.
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