

**The Dual Missionary: Revisiting The Depth and Intent of Joseph Tuckerman's
Theological Vision and Work**

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Preface



The thesis of this paper is that the theological vision and work of Joseph Tuckerman, in the creation of a Unitarian ministry-at-large in 19th century Boston, has been under appreciated and inadequately understood by those who have treated him historically to date, as well as by some of those who followed him in his work after his early death. Principally, this paper will focus on a select group of Tuckerman's writings that illustrate his integrated Christian theological view as relational and transformative in nature, and visionary in relation to society as well as the world, such that it was a precursor of liberation theology in many ways. While Tuckerman's sole biographer to date, Daniel McColgan, a Catholic priest, captured several elements of Tuckerman's theological viewpoints in his extensive review of Tuckerman's writings, the centrality of Tuckerman's Christian belief system as relational and transformative is not grasped in its fullest depth. Other writers who have included significant material on Tuckerman but who also miss this underpinning will be considered as well, such as Peter Richardson and Sarah Louise Snow. (Attached picture of Joseph Tuckerman taken from <http://www.foundationnews.org/CME/articles.cfm>, 11/12/04).

In writing this paper, however, a significant debt is owed to Daniel McColgan for bringing attention to the range of Tuckerman's work (including on an international level) in his lengthy 1940 biography of Tuckerman. It is clear that Tuckerman's work was intriguing enough to capture the attention of this Catholic priest 100 years after Tuckerman's death and caused him to designate Tuckerman as a pioneer in American social work. Tuckerman continues to be under-recognized today within Unitarian Universalist history and American social work history and is overdue for another serious historical treatment, particularly in light of the extent of his organization of the Boston social relief community in the first half of the 19th century and his forays into the international community and reported impact, per McColgan, in Great Britain. However, even more importantly, Tuckerman's efforts as a dual missionary to both the privileged and the underprivileged continues to speak to contemporary Unitarian Universalists today as we struggle with finding a theological underpinning to an integrated transformative vision of social justice and community ministry – including possibly an emotional comfort with being evangelical or missionary in the public proclamation of our faith. There was a unique strength in Tuckerman born of his theological convictions, personal experiences, and pastoral strengths. He remains an enduring role model in his relational experiential orientation, and his transformative social message continues to inform the evolving mission statements of the Unitarian Universalist Urban Ministry today.

This paper is divided into four sections: (1) this preface; (2) a biographical overview of Joseph Tuckerman and setting of his historical context, primarily drawing from McColgan's work; (3) an in-depth exploration of his community ministry philosophy and theology in the creation of ministry-at-large, utilizing specific key

Tuckerman writings; and (4) concluding remarks on the contemporary relevance of an ongoing exploration of Joseph Tuckerman's life and work and what he very consciously termed *ministry-at-large*. This paper cannot treat the theology of Joseph Tuckerman and his work on an extensive basis, but it is hoped that it will continue to inspire others to further investigate his life and work, including the possibility of his more mutual impact on William Ellery Channing's evolving thinking and beliefs rather simply being viewed as a practitioner operating in Channing's shadow.

Biographical Overview

Joseph Tuckerman was born on January 18, 1778 in Boston, to a noisy, active, but loving home, a sixth child and third son of a merchant patriotic father and a religiously devout mother. As he grew into adulthood, he was noted to be frail by disposition and to have a close bond with his mother, through whom he received his first biblical studies. However, his innate frailty did not stop him from engaging in outdoor activities with his brothers "under the watchful eye of a faithful colored servant named Nero Prince." (McColgan, p. 2)

Tuckerman would go on to be the first in his family to attend college at Harvard in 1794 rather than enter the mercantile field. Theologically, many at Harvard at this time were struggling between what they viewed as false alternatives of God and human nature – the negative deterministic views of the Puritan Calvinist legacy regarding human nature and the new Enlightenment Deism that some saw leading to the disaster of the French Revolution because of its tendency toward an aloof view of God and thus skepticism. "Both systems were bitter to tastes that craved the sweetness of a kindly

Christianity, a Christianity drawing creature and creator closer together in real communion.” (McColgan, p. 14)

It was at Harvard that Tuckerman’s close and enduring friendship with fellow classmate William Ellery Channing developed. Both Tuckerman and Channing were devout Christians concerned with ethical *relations* between people and to God. In fact, the Unitarian historian Conrad Wright has pointed out that the evangelical liberal Christian side and writings of Channing, particularly in his younger years, is often overlooked by contemporary UU’s. Channing did not glorify innate human goodness and overlook human failings. In his sermons, “there is an emphasis on the actual sinfulness of human beings but not on original sin; there is emphasis on the need for human beings to be awakened, to turn from corruption, but there is no doctrine of election or predestination that says they lack the capacity to do so...Channing’s concept of the dignity of human nature is based on an assertion of the potential capacity of human beings to achieve spiritual greatness, not on their actual condition.” (Wright, The Unitarian Controversy, pp. 158-159). (Attached picture of W. E. Channing taken from http://www.shsu.edu/~eng_wpf/amlitchron_18th.html, 11/12/04).



In achieving this human potential for spiritual greatness, Christ was to be viewed as the greatest living model of the way – of the path of human development and human relations. In his historic Baltimore sermon in 1819, Channing would state that Christ:

“was sent on a still nobler errand, namely, to deliver us from sin itself, and to form us to a sublime and heavenly virtue. We regard him as a Saviour, chiefly as he is the light, physician, and guide of the dark, diseased and wandering mind...Among the virtues, we give the first place to the love of God...We

conceive, that the true love of God is a moral sentiment, founded on a clear perception, and consisting in a high esteem and veneration, of his moral perfections... We would not, by these remarks, be understood as wishing to exclude from religion warmth, and even transport. We honor, and even highly value, true religious sensibility... But we think, that religious warmth is only to be valued, when it springs naturally from an improved character, when it comes unforced, when it is the recompense of obedience, when it is the warmth of a mind which understands God by being like him, and when, instead of disordering, it exalts the understanding, invigorates conscience, gives a pleasure to common duties, and is seen to exist in connexion with cheerfulness, judiciousness, and a reasonable frame of mind.” (Wright, Three Prophets, pp. 78-82)

In Tuckerman, Channing would come to believe he had found a man whose piety represented the highest example of liberal Christianity. But initially, Tuckerman was something of a late bloomer. In college, he was described as fun-loving and rather unserious, “an effusive emotional type...[with] a flair for the poetic...[having] a preference and decided predilection for those poets who appealed to his feelings and imagination.” (McColgan, p. 9) However, his benevolence and sympathy toward those less privileged was already a remarked upon characteristic, including the allotment of a portion of his weekly allowance to the poor. (McColgan, p. 10) It was in his preparation for ministry that Tuckerman began to evolve a more serious mindset and struggled with a natural sociability that drew him away from his studies:

“My reason is too much under the domination of feeling – my affections control my thoughts. This I have frequent occasion to lament. I will however endeavor to restrain my conduct; and making feeling subservient to reason, cause my affections to be so regulated that their indulgence shall neither give me present pain nor future sorrow.” (McColgan quote of Tuckerman, p. 19)

It was through 25 years of ministry in Chelsea, starting in 1801, that the mature pastoral and Christian theological strength and thinking of Tuckerman began to emerge. While not recognized in these years for his preaching abilities, Tuckerman had a keen interest in home visiting and the implementation of the social principles of Christianity.

(McColgan, pp. 33-35) He exhibited a dedication to this cause such that he overcame obstacles of weather and his own squeamishness in certain areas, showing an early tendency toward social work. “Moreover his ministrations were not limited or restricted to strictly spiritual concerns, he was guide, counselor, benefactor and physician...Nor was his kindness confined to his own church. Whenever in the vicinity he heard of anyone who was in distress of any kind, and in need of assistance, he hurried there and did all in his power for their relief.” (McColgan, p. 34)

Starting in 1811, Tuckerman would be instrumental in founding the Society for the Religious and Moral Improvement of Seamen in Boston. The ultimate failure of this work motivated him to broaden his learning and look for deeper causes and more systemic approaches to social reform, including thinkers and practitioners in Europe. Due to Tuckerman’s periodic repeated health problems, he would travel to Europe and to the South, which also had the effect of supporting his exposure to a broad range of learning experiences – from Southern slavery to the development of urban problems in Europe – learning which he brought back to Boston in the form of essays and reports to his friends and colleagues. Tuckerman would also garner tremendous respect in Europe in his final years as he spread information on the development of ministry-at-large in Boston. At times this would be to mutual influence as well. (McColgan, Chap. XI) On one of his final trips to England in 1833, Tuckerman found himself challenged regarding slavery in America. While McColgan (p. 222) is incorrect that Tuckerman had never wrote of slavery as incompatible with Christianity (which will be explored later), the experience did serve to confront Tuckerman on his personal prejudices and his failure to

follow his own beliefs fully. To his credit, Tuckerman resolved to enter more directly into ministerial relations with people of color upon his return to Boston.

As Tuckerman was evolving in his ministry in Chelsea, Unitarianism was also evolving and the two would intersect at a crucial historical juncture. Pivotal events for Unitarianism in the early 19th century included the 1805 appointment of the Unitarian Henry Ware as the Hollis Professor of Divinity at Harvard, Channing's 1819 Baltimore address, the Dedham case in 1820 in which the sitting members of a congregation (most often being the Unitarians rather than the Congregationalists) retained the church property when members withdrew, and the 1825 formation of the American Unitarian Association. By this point, Tuckerman's health was continuing to decline and he felt that he could no longer preach but still wanted to engage in ministry. Channing recalled:

“In a favored hour the thought of devoting himself to the service of the poor of this city entered his mind, and met a response within which gave it the character of a divine monition. He consulted me; and in obedience to a long-rooted conviction that society needs new ministries and agencies for its redemption, and that men inspired with self-sacrificing zeal for its redemption are God's best gifts to the world, I encouraged his faith and hope.” (Channing, p. 586)

Channing does not say where this conversation took place, but Peter Richardson (p. 78) notes that an “Association for Religious Improvement” had been formed in 1822 and lasted for 13 years out of a desire to improve the condition of the city's poor. Tuckerman and Channing were members of this group, and it was pivotal in the later formation of the Benevolent Fraternity of Unitarian Churches in 1834. (McColgan, p. 68, also points out the formation of this group in 1822 as important, but termed it “The Wednesday Evening Association” or “Beneficent Association” and records as its objects to advance Christianity and improve the condition of society and unity of Unitarians.)

In the ministry-at-large begun in 1826, to which he felt called by “divine monition,” Tuckerman flowered to his fullest development in pastoral relational ministry and an integrated Christian theological vision. This vision was focused on the transformative realization of a Christian society in Boston and on the ideal of a Christian world in which all were equal in love before God and each other. McColgan’s biography records Tuckerman’s numerous accomplishments in the specifics of ministry-at-large – ranging from the organized relief of the poor in Boston to prison reform to juvenile delinquency reform efforts to the creation of Sunday schools and chapels for religious education of the poor, etc., etc. This paper will instead focus on the theological and relational core of Tuckerman’s beliefs and practices through examination of selected Tuckerman writings.

Tuckerman’s Theology of Ministry-At-Large

Tuckerman’s ambitions, born out of his deeply held religious beliefs, feelings, and experiences, were not limited simply to charity or the love of the poor of Boston, as he is sometimes portrayed in history. He was a passionate advocate of a Christian social theology that appears to be a precursor of both the social gospel movement and the liberation theology movement. Unfortunately, his ill health (resulting in an untimely death in 1840), the practical demands and growth of the ministry-at-large as it dealt with the increasing problems of immigration and urbanization later in the 19th century, and the increasing secularization of Unitarianism as it continued to evolve into the 20th century, have all contributed to overshadowing and at times misinterpreting both Tuckerman’s contributions and his motivation and message.

In Conrad Wright's works on the history of Unitarianism, Tuckerman is only briefly mentioned in A Stream of Light, pp. 39-40, and then only in the context of being a pioneer in social work (relying on McColgan's work) and as a precursor of the social gospel movement but without a treatment of his Christian theology. Likewise, Peter Richardson's recent work The Boston Religion also treats Tuckerman superficially as a pioneering social worker and philanthropist, also clearly relying on McColgan's work. A master's thesis submitted by Sarah Louise Snow on the theology of urban policy shifts within the Benevolent Fraternity of Unitarian Churches treats Tuckerman extensively, but primarily through secondary sources and contemporary interviews. While the then Senior Minister and Executive Director of the Unitarian Universalist Urban Ministry, Elizabeth Ellis-Hagler, did state in interviews her belief that Joseph Tuckerman exhibited beliefs consistent with liberation theology (p. 42, p. 47), there is no supporting materials cited from Tuckerman's original writings. Snow thus fails to grasp the depth of Tuckerman's religious beliefs and vision when she notes the shifting policies and theological orientations of the Benevolent Fraternity from its foundation with Tuckerman's work to a missionary stage to a social work stage. For example, in pp. 76-77, Snow summarizes this shift but appears more entranced by the scientific "sociological" social reform vision of Tuckerman as original and lost when "those who followed him in carrying on the work of the Ben Frat could not encompass a full vision as futuristic as his. They focused on the more distinctly *religious aspects* of his vision [emphasis added]." In point of fact, the Ben Frat shifted to a more *conservative* Christian missionary theology after Tuckerman's death. The religious aspects that were lost or not

implemented were the liberal relational and transformative aspects of Tuckerman's Christian vision, which he strove to embody and which were his primary motivation.

Thus the fullest treatment of Tuckerman's beliefs and life work, a pioneer not just in American social work but also in Unitarian Universalist social justice and community ministry history, remains that done by a Catholic priest in 1940 rather than by a Unitarian Universalist. Yet he is clearly a pivotal figure in early 19th century Unitarian history for the above mentioned reasons as well as for representing Unitarianism abroad.

McColgan (Chap. XIV) summarizes Tuckerman's mature philosophy as consisting of three areas: (1) a Christian emphasis on brotherly love and human dignity; (2) a commitment to the efficacy of scientific charity; and (3) a belief in the need to distinguish pauperism from poverty in seeking to eliminate poverty. (Bayard Tuckerman's history of The Tuckerman Family also points out these areas as important, pp. 67-71.) The wealth of material covered by McColgan and his emphasis on the manner in which Tuckerman was ahead of his time as a social worker (similar to Snow's fascination with this) tends to highlight inadequately Tuckerman's fundamental drive and motivation – that by disposition he embraced all human relationships with love and dignity, particularly those who were poor or in need; *that he experienced this expansive internal feeling as God*; and that intellectually he believed that only when society (and the world) followed the example of Christ's life and the Christian religion could ultimate and truest happiness be attained *equally* by all, rich and poor alike.

In a little examined but crucial essay written in 1826 just before he began his ministry-at-large, Tuckerman wrote for the AUA a letter on “The Principles of the Missionary Enterprise” in which he considered the call for Unitarian Christian missionary

work to India. While McColgan cites this letter among his multitude of resources, he does not appear to have given it much attention as he continued to believe that Tuckerman had made no integrated statements on his Christian beliefs nor related them to the abolishment of slavery. This essay is significant in both of these areas, as well as in describing Tuckerman's beliefs about international missionary efforts given that he was about to begin a missionary effort himself within Boston.

In this essay, Tuckerman lifts up 3 key principles in any missionary enterprise (it is important to remember that the word "heathen" in this context means non-Christian). In the first principle of a missionary spirit there is a "Christian sense of the moral and religious conditions of those, who are living under the influences of heathenism, and of false religion." (p.7) Tuckerman goes on at length to affirm that "there were in the time of our Lord, and there are now, virtuous and good men under every form of religion in the world." (p.8) It is virtue and righteousness that determines one as "a child of God," not a particular religion. But it is the "sentiments, the feelings, and conduct, of Christ and his apostles" in regard to heathens that must be considered. (p. 10) Tuckerman goes on to quote scripture that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son...not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." (p. 13) In this sinners are viewed not as victims of original sin and thus to be condemned but as suffering from delusion and in need of rescue: "Our religion contemplates idolatry, and all false religion, even in their best state, and least corrupting influence, as a delusion, from which God in his mercy would rescue those who are living under them." (p. 14)

Men are ignorant and do evil deeds out of ignorance. "They were immortal beings; yet '*alienated from the life of God*, [emphasis added] through the ignorance that

was in them;’ ...degraded from the condition, and lost to the purposes, for which God designed them.” (p.14) It is significant that Tuckerman focuses on language that has relational connotations (“alienated”) and points to the possibility of restoration to a higher state that is natural by God’s design. Continuing to illustrate this first principle, Tuckerman points to the example of Paul in the Bible. He stresses Paul’s “pity towards the miserably deluded multitude; of zeal for the cause of God and of human nature; and of earnestness for the reformation, and the salvation of men, so lost in ignorance and sin...It was the movement of a mind, which felt the infinite worth of the religion of Christ; which felt an unquenchable zeal for the extension of its blessings; and which could not be satisfied with itself, while any thing was neglected, that could be done to reform, and to save the world.” (pp. 16-17) Tuckerman deeply admired evangelical conviction, zeal, and education for salvation. Additionally it is worth quoting at length:

“I would then ask any one, who is opposed to the missionary cause, or who is indifferent concerning it here to pause and seriously to consider, whence was this sympathy of Paul in the moral condition of the heathen world? Was it unreasonable? Was it excessive? Were his efforts, or his sacrifices, beyond the fair demands, or the true importance, of the object? Or, did he in truth feel no more for this cause, *than ought to be felt for it by every Christian?* [emphasis added] The true view of heathenism is, not that it is a condition, in which, if a man die, he is therefore necessarily under eternal condemnation. Terrible thought; and most dishonourable alike to God, and to Christianity! But, still, that it is a condition of darkness, of sin, and wretchedness, from which it is God’s purpose to redeem the world...Paul saw in them the human nature degraded and debased; and his was a deep, and strong feeling of the greatness of the change, in character, in condition, and *in happiness,* [emphasis added] which a cordial reception of Christianity would bring to them...He saw the moral image of God in the soul to be marred and defiled; and he saw, and felt that, by the religion of Christ alone, its beauty and its purity could be restored. *In these sentiments, and these feelings,* [emphasis added] is the first element of the missionary spirit; or of a spirit alive to the cause of the greatest practicable extension of the gospel of Christ...And if we see our fellow creatures in the darkness, and debasement, and misery of superstition, idolatry and crime, and have none of *the sympathy* [emphasis added] with their condition which Paul felt, and none of the interest which our religion breathes from every page of its records, in the cause of their

deliverance, their redemption, have we the spirit of the disciples of Christ? *Or are we Christians?* [emphasis added]” (pp. 18-19) “May I not then say to you, reader, whoever you may be, cultivate a Christian sense of the religious and moral condition of those, who are living under the influences of heathenism, and of false religion, and, like Paul’s, your spirit will be ‘stirred in you,’ when you look upon the nations that are ‘wholly given up to idolatry?’ Yes, carry with you into those dark regions of the earth, the light and spirit of the gospel of Christ, and *your heart will ‘burn with you,’ with compassion* [emphasis added] for their miserable condition, and with Christian zeal in the cause of their deliverance from it.” (p. 21)

Thus in Tuckerman’s first principle, relational and emotional qualities and convictions, *an experience of compassion*, are of utmost importance for the missionary effort. Paul’s life as the first Christian missionary deeply informed Tuckerman’s beliefs.

In the second principle, the missionary spirit exhibits “a deep and strong sense of the reality, and power, and worth of our religion; and of the inestimable blessings which it will not fail to impart to those who shall cordially receive, and faithfully obey it.” (p. 22) He repeatedly refers to “experience” in the “consciousness which the Christian has of the power, and the worth of his religion.” (p. 23)

“In each one of its principles, and in every object of it, Christianity is stamped with a character of *universality*, which belongs to no other religion...Christian benevolence, the love which Christianity inspires, is a principle that cannot lie inactive in the soul that receives it. It will even expand itself beyond the sphere of its capacity of action. It will wish, and it will pray for, the amelioration of the suffering, to which it can extend only the emotions, and the breathings, of its compassionate desires...it will ever delight to *concentrate its power*; and here, and there, and every where, as it may, to accomplish the greatest good of which it is capable. Christian benevolence will never hesitate upon the question, whether it *shall* act, wherever it *may* act, for the good of others. It can no more live without this action, than the selfish principle can live without action for its own indulgence.” (pp. 23-24)

According to Tuckerman, Christianity is so superior by example alone that miracles are no longer needed for its proof, and in this he points to the various associations under the influence of Christianity that have uplifted humankind, including “the new rank” given to

women and the emancipation of the poor and “*in the work of abolishing slavery*, [emphasis added]” etc. (pp. 28-29)

Finally, Tuckerman cites the third principle that “God designs that man shall be his instrument, for imparting the blessings of christianity to man; and he who has the means, and the opportunities, thus to benefit his fellow creatures, will be held responsible at the bar of heaven, for the execution of the work which God thus requires of him.” (pp. 30-31) Tuckerman goes on to argue that it is *a law of human nature* that we are *interconnected by feeling*:

“That man should sympathize with man, that he should feel an interest, deep and strong, in the condition of his fellow-men; and, especially, that we should be affected, and strongly affected, by the wants and sufferings, not alone of those around us, but of our whole race, I fear not to say is as much a law of our nature, as it is that we should feel a deep and strong interest in those, who are immediately connected with us, in the nearest relations of life; or, as it is, that we should love ourselves.” [This natural feeling can be restrained or enfeebled by circumstances], “but there are occasions in the life of every one, whose heart has not been shut up by bands of brass, or iron, or adamant, when this feeling, chilled and dead as it may have seemed to be, is warmed into life, and puts forth its strength, and breaks from its enclosures, and speaks in a language not to be misunderstood;...demonstrating that it is the purpose of God, that man shall be his instrument for the communication of all possible blessings to man. I need not refer you to the effects, which are produced within us, while we are reading narratives of real, or of imaginary scenes and circumstances of distress. These effects alone demonstrate, not only that God has made us for one another, but that, *in an important sense, he has made each one of us for the whole of our species.* [emphasis added]” (pp. 31-32)

Tuckerman thus argues that by nature we feel the pain and suffering of each other, unless we are somehow damaged by the process of life and shut down on that capacity. He points to imagined empathy conjured by literature as well as real empathy from seeing the bonds of tyranny broken and people experiencing happiness, etc. His repeated emphasis on relation and feeling in human nature as a *biologically built in* bond of

interdependency (rather than beliefs or reason and natural individuality) is striking and continues to be worthy of quotation:

“Yes, it is not less a law of our nature, that we should go out of ourselves, that we should feel a strong interest in others, and not only in the wants and the happiness of our family, our neighborhood, our country and our age, but in those too of men in every country, and in all time, than it is that we should love ourselves. I say not, that one principle is as strong, and steady, and active at all times, or that it is as generally manifested in human conduct, as is the other. It is not. In many it is bound in the chains of a sordid avarice. In many, it is kept in subjection by a miserable ambition....But the principle of sympathy, - of sympathy, I mean, with the cause of human nature, of human good and happiness, - dead and buried as it sometimes seems to be, does also sometimes rise, and manifest itself; and, *with an electric influence*, [emphasis added] at once animate, and give new vigor, to thousands, and millions. *How has the thrill of its power been felt, in the cause of the abolition of the slave trade?* [emphasis added]” (pp. 33-34)

In concluding this remarkable essay, Tuckerman says to his fellow Christians:

“Let us feel that we are to give account to God for the use which we make of our powers of mind and of body, of our property, of our influence, and of every means which we have of being good, by doing good...Admit that the heathens are safe, as far as that idolatry is concerned, the evil of which they know not. The great question to engage our attention is, are we safe, while we possess the means of their instruction, their reformation, and their best happiness, and yet fail to employ them to the purposes, for which God has entrusted us with them? Are we safe, if this talent shall be kept by us, laid up in a napkin? Can we render our account with joy at the bar of heaven, if, having freely received this unspeakable gift, we have cared nothing for the condition of those who have it not; and have done nothing...And can there be a question, in this case, concerning our duty? I leave it with every man’s conscience, in the sight of God.” (pp. 36-37) “We live in a time, peculiarly favorable to every attempt that can be made for human improvement and happiness....for the universal extension of our religion, is, the principle of voluntary association. And if we may infer what it may do, from what it has done, where shall we fix the limits of its power, and of its consequences? Look alone to the Bible societies, *the anti-slavery societies*, [emphasis added] the peace societies, and the religious missionary societies of England and of America, and say, what is to arrest their progress, and their effects?...and with God’s blessing on the work, it will not long be doubtful to any mind, whether indeed the enterprise be feasible, of *the conversion of the world.*” (pp. 39-40)

Tuckerman’s Christian theology is clearly rooted in experience, in a life of feeling and relation and natural interdependence, and is evangelical for the transformation of society

and the world. In many ways his views are consistent with Channing's views that there is no original sin, though human beings are clearly capable of sin, and that there is the possibility of goodness and perfection. But Tuckerman's emphasis is on language that is more relational and feeling, rooted in human nature in which the natural impulse untainted by social wounds is to be empathic to the condition of one's fellow humans.

Tuckerman's openness to and expression of his emotional side appears to have been beneficial in inspiring both the trust of those less privileged, to whom he ministered, as well the admiration of his more privileged colleagues, whom he sought to enlist in his visionary work. Bayard Tuckerman quotes Samuel Eliot 75 years later as saying:

“Joseph Tuckerman was a seed sower. There was nothing imitative in his enterprise. It was not the repetition of something that had been done a hundred times before. It was fruitfully original. *It had in it the prophetic element.* [emphasis added] You may, indeed, say that it was nothing more than the application of the teaching and example of Jesus Christ to the conditions of the modern American town. Nevertheless, even that was a daring novelty. There his work constitutes an epoch in the history of human helpfulness. Therefore it enlisted and still enlists the enthusiastic and patient devotion of consecrated men and women. Therefore, it became the promoter of numberless similar enterprises in other fields.” (pp. 71-72)

Channing also acknowledged the uniqueness and inspirational quality of

Tuckerman's ministry on himself:

“At first he entered almost tremblingly the houses of the poor where he was a stranger, to offer his sympathy and friendship. But ‘the sheep knew the voice of the shepherd.’ The poor recognized by instinct their friend, and from the first moment a relation of singular tenderness and confidence was established between them. That part of his life I well remember, for he came often to pour into my ear and heart his experience and success. I remember the effect which contact with the poor produced on his mind. He had loved them when he knew little of them; when their distresses came to him through the imagination. But he was a proof that no speculation or imagination can do the work of actual knowledge. So deep was the sympathy, so intense the interest, which the poor excited in him, that it seemed as if a new fountain of love had been opened within him...How often have I stood humbled before the deep spiritual love which burst from him in those free communications which few enjoyed beside myself! I cannot forget one

evening, when, in conversing with the late Dr. Follen and myself on the claims of the poor, and on the cold-heartedness of society, he not only deeply moved us, but filled us with amazement, by his depth of feeling and energy of utterance; nor can I forget how, when he left us, Dr. Follen, a man fitted by his own spirit to judge of greatness, said to me, '*He is a great man.*'" (Channing, p. 586)

Channing was so impressed with Tuckerman that he lifted him up after his death as a religious martyr on behalf of social transformation:

"One affecting view remains to be given. Dr. Tuckerman was a martyr to his cause. That his life was shortened by excessive toil cannot be doubted. His friends forewarned him of this result. He saw the danger himself, and once and again resolved to diminish his labors; but when he retreated from the poor they followed him to his house, and he could not resist their supplicating looks and tones. To my earnest and frequent remonstrance on this point he at times replied that his ministry might need a victim, that labors beyond his strength might be required to show what it was capable of effecting, and that he was willing to suffer and to die for the cause." (Channing, p. 594) "When he began his work he had no anticipation of such an influence and such an honor. He thought that he was devoting himself to an obscure life. He did not expect that his name would be heard, beyond the dwellings of the poor...But gradually the idea that he was beginning a movement that might survive him, and might more and more repress the worst social evils, opened on his mind. He saw more and more clearly that the Ministry at Large, with other agencies, was to change the aspect of a large portion of society. It became his deliberate conviction, and one which he often repeated, that great cities need not be haunts of vice and poverty; that in this city there were now intelligence, virtue, and piety enough, could they be brought into united action, to give a new intellectual and moral life to the more neglected classes of society. In this faith he acted, toiled, suffered, and died. His gratitude to God for sending him into this field of labor never failed him." (pp. 594-595)

The experience and training and beliefs generated by his work as a Christian minister were so important that Tuckerman deliberately termed his work "ministry-at-large" rather than missionary work and believed that the success of "the elevation of the poor" was dependent on increasing the number of ministers in the field, rather than lay people. (Tuckerman, On The Elevation of the Poor, pp. 19-20) Above all things, a minister needed to walk humbly with God and understand that "the most untaught, the poorest and the most degraded of our race possesses the principles of a common nature

with ourselves, and is equally with ourselves a child of God, and as our Father's child, is *our brother*; who can thus comprehend his own soul, and thus feel his relation to his fellow man, and not feel his heart drawn out in sympathy with human weakness, and ignorance, and want, and wretchedness, and sin?" (McColgan quoting Tuckerman, p. 119)

Corresponding with a British Unitarian Society that had undertaken a ministry-at-large under the acknowledged inspiration of Tuckerman, he wrote:

"Everything, I am ready to say, depends on the character of the men to be employed in this ministry. Do not commit this office to the raw and undisciplined nor to the worn out or broken clergyman. A man who engages in this service, should know human nature as well as Christianity; should know how to find his way to the rough heart without irritating it; to deal faithfully with a bad heart without dealing cruelly with it. He must know how to inspire the poor with true sentiments of their own nature and a true sense of the worth of character. He should know how to sympathize with human weakness and how to call forth human strength; how to count and characterize the pulsations of the mind; and like a skillful physician, to direct his attention to the prevailing symptoms of moral disease." (McColgan quoting Tuckerman, p. 188)

McColgan lists several other quotes on Tuckerman's approach to the less privileged:

"My first thought in approaching them is not, 'how may I give them the greatest immediate relief?' although I will not fail, in the best manner that I can, to give them this relief, but 'who, and what are they?'...These are your brethren; children of your own Father in heaven; and the fellow-beings and brethren of every one who calls himself a man....I have not a capacity of mind or heart, of knowledge or virtue, which is not an essential part of their nature. Nor have they an appetite, a passion, a propensity, an instinct, the essential elements of which are not in myself, and constituents of my own nature." (p. 135)

Tuckerman believed that Christianity was a superior religion, but crucially, in his fundamental pastoral manner toward others, he did not believe *his nature* to be superior in any way. Available records are of observations by Tuckerman and his privileged colleagues on his success rather than from those that he served, yet at least in these there

are present elements that would support a relationship of fundamental equality, though sheer circumstances differed (e.g. a “there but by the grace of God go I” philosophy). This appears to have lent itself to Tuckerman’s more ready acceptance by and entry into a world enormously different from his own.

While Tuckerman’s work was focused on the relief of the poor, in his mind the rich were an intricate part of the problem and needed equally to be called to account. As a dual missionary to the poor and to the rich, Tuckerman again focused on relationship and the personal knowledge and investment and transformative possibilities that come from relationship:

“Let any one look about him and ask, who were the grandfathers and the fathers of our rich men? And who were the fathers and grandparents of our paupers and criminals? And he will find that it is not poverty alone which produces poverty....the rich are in truth accountable for much of the abject poverty of the world; and that right sentiments, Christian sentiments of property, and of human relations and duties among the rich, are to be among the most effectual of the means of salvation from pauperism and crime....I would say, therefore, in the first place, that if a few of our most intelligent and philanthropic men, men of leisure and influence, would unite for the study of these subjects; not merely or principally by consulting books, *but by an extensive personal communication with the poor and with criminals* [emphasis added]; if these gentlemen would meet frequently – for example, one evening in every week – to bring together their facts and to compare their opinions; if they would occasionally publish these facts and opinions with the sanction of their names; and when they shall see clearly what are the demands of justice, of humanity, and of religion, if they would combine their efforts, now for the suppression of one and now of another of the springs of evil, and now to obtain one and now another establishment for the salvation and greatest happiness of those who must otherwise be irretrievably lost to all the higher purposes of their being, a great and glorious reform might soon be effected in our city. Am I told that the plan of such an association is impracticable? I ask, why? And I appeal to the sober judgment of the intelligent, the affluent, and influential....A few judicious and energetic minds, combined and resolved to accomplish all which they may for the suppression of pauperism and crime, would accumulate for themselves, in this work, a better treasure than all their wealth, let them be as rich as they may; and, in a few years, might do more for the advancement of society than, without these services, would probably be accomplished in half a century.” (Tuckerman, Elevation, pp. 125-126)

Tuckerman's deep belief in an interdependency created by his Christian vision of God in human nature meant that he could no less work on behalf of the poor without advocating for a transformation of relation and consciousness among the rich. In this perhaps he is not entirely a contemporary liberation theologian because he viewed the liberation of the poor as dependent on the moral education and liberation of the rich. The poor were trapped in a caste system, which he most specifically pointed to as existing in England in its worst form (McColgan, pp. 223-224), and America needed to retain its voice of liberal relational Christianity to transform dangers inherent in its own system. In 1835, still trying to reach the heart and minds of the privileged, Tuckerman would publish Gleams of Truth or Scenes from Real Life: Scenes and Characters Illustrating Christian Truth. In this small thick book, Tuckerman recounted many factual encounters with those he served as a morning walk, an evening at home, and a review of the day. In these encounters, he brought a privileged friend along for a consciousness raising effort on the equal noble character of those who are less privileged – in fact on their superior Christian character in the face of adversities that are often not within their control such that the privileged never face.

Without a deep understanding of the Christian theological vision driving Tuckerman, and its underpinning in his view of human nature as essentially relational and interdependent, Tuckerman's force of originality in researching and advocating for scientific charity and stress on distinguishing pauperism from poverty is inadequately understood and lacks grounding. Tuckerman was a passionate evangelical utopian liberal Christian, for whom all available means of scientific knowledge could only contribute to his cause, prompting him to search and compare experiences internationally. Influenced

by particular European writers and experiments in social relief, Tuckerman also advocated against a type of public charity that created dependence on alms by the poor (institutionalized pauperism) – but a fuller understanding entails that this also made deep personal moral sense to him as he did not want to institutionalize and make *impersonal* charity. The social bonds must not be broken or weakened – “Tuckerman considered every man (rich and poor alike) his ‘brother’s keeper.’” (McColgan, p. 282) Tuckerman could not have predicted the massive immigration and deepening problems of urbanization following his death, nor the further secularization of the culture and eventual professionalization of social work, but undoubtedly he would have remained true to his Christian convictions of love and interdependence and of the responsibility of the privileged to work closely with those less privileged to find the most effective path to true equality. He would have remained uncomfortable with impersonal charity.

Concluding Reflections on the Contemporary Relevance of Tuckerman

Tuckerman’s historical role model as a dual missionary remains relevant today for discussion in many respects. For example, one important question raised is: Are those who are less privileged or oppressed to be empowered and relied upon to *take* their freedom and liberate themselves (traditional liberation theology)? Or is the plight of the oppressed bound to the oppressor, with *both* requiring liberation but in different ways (a different vision and definition of liberation theology)? This is certainly a significant guiding question in the development of programming and social efforts as to who needs to be at the table or controlling the table when power and decision-making are at stake.

Tuckerman's work embodies elements of both approaches, though ultimately it is less of a traditionally defined liberation theology approach in which freedom resides with the consciousness raising and empowerment of the oppressed (see Boff). Tuckerman believed too keenly in the strength and power of systemic class oppression. As a member of the privileged class, he believed that only through a religious conversion of the privileged and a bringing together in relation of the privileged and non-privileged could 'the kingdom of God' be experienced on earth. What happens then when the non-privileged community rejects the assistance of the privileged community and themselves believe in and prefer a self-empowerment 'liberation theology' approach? We can point to certain elements of this happening in the black empowerment controversy of the UUA in the 1960's. And this remains a tension in the direction of the Unitarian Universalist Urban Ministry today and contemporary mission statements that have continued to incorporate Tuckerman's vision and stress the need for the education of the privileged classes in addition to direct service to the poor.

Regardless, as we come upon the 21st century and a world increasingly and obviously interdependent through globalization and an increased capacity for mutual self-destruction (whether through ethnic warfare, nuclear weapons, biological terrorism, economic collapse, or ecological disintegration, etc.), where do we search for a theological language that is equally reflective of individual human dignity and of interdependence? Where do we search in particular as contemporary liberal Unitarian Universalists when our congregations contain theological diversity ranging from Christianity to Judaism to Buddhism to Humanism to Earth-Centered to Pagan, etc. etc.?

Contemporary UU theologian Thandeka posed exactly this question in her first book when she turned to the works of a 19th century Christian German theologian, Schleiermacher:

“First, I believe that as we approach a new millennium, we need to identify categories within our Western philosophic and theological traditions that affirm interconnection rather than isolation as a basic source of meaning and moral agency in our lives...Second, Schleiermacher’s use of categories that affirm the self as a part of the natural world allowed him to move beyond conceptual inadequacies he found in the theories of self developed by Kant, Fichte, and Hegel, among others...My goal in this book is to provide contemporary readers with a way to affirm unity rather than fragmentation, community rather than disruption, compassion rather than aggression as the sacred site of our humanity.” (Thandeka, The Embodied Self, p. xi)

In a recent taped lecture at a Unitarian Universalist General Assembly, Thandeka has also stated that she is writing a comparative systemic theology based on an analysis of theological views of human nature. She argues that it is a contradictory view of human nature at the core of Unitarian Universalist beliefs that has made it difficult for contemporary UU’s to be unified theologically, and thus unable to replenish themselves and create a vital religion that holds and engages its young people. In this same taped lecture, she argues that it is the Unitarian emphasis on reason at the expense of the embodied feeling self, represented by Channing’s theology, vs. a greater integration of mind and body and feeling represented in Universalist theology that is particularly problematic today.

Tuckerman, as a Unitarian, represented an almost more Universalist style and way of being, not without controversy and discomfort by his colleagues, including Channing, at times. Tuckerman’s relationship with and mutual influence upon Channing deserves further exploration. Tuckerman’s nephew, Henry Tuckerman, would write of their relationship:

“It was a curious speculation to me, even in boyhood, to reconcile the moral superiority I early learned to appreciate in my excellent relative, and revered pastor, - Dr. Channing, - with the total diversity of manner and expression in the two friends. It is impossible to imagine a greater diversity than they presented when engaged in conversation, whether argumentative, serious or playful, the one all impulse, and the other profoundly calm and self-possessed. When I learned how to discriminate, it became evident to my apprehension, that the one was indebted to contemplation, and the other to sympathy for the influence each exerted and the interest of their individual characters – perhaps it was this very contrast in disposition that attached them so strongly...” (B. Tuckerman, p. 107)

Tuckerman’s emotional exuberance somewhat anticipates the Transcendentalist style as well, though he was clearly more interdependent than individualistic in his focus. It is also interesting to note that Channing’s “Discourse on the Life and Character of the Rev. Dr. Tuckerman” after his death takes on a flowery emotional appeal that stylistically seems similar to Tuckerman in many respects, with just one example selected below:

“Why is it, my friends, that we are brought so near to one another in cities? It is, that nearness should awaken sympathy; that multiplying wants should knit us more closely together; that we should understand one another’s perils and sufferings; that we should act perpetually on one another for good. Why were we not brought into being in solitudes, endowed each with the power of satisfying to the full his particular wants? God has room enough for a universe of separate, lonely, silent beings, of selfish, unshared enjoyment. But through the whole range of nature we find nothing insulated, nothing standing alone. Union is the law of his creation. Even matter is an emblem of universal sympathy, for all its particles tend toward one another, and its great masses are bound into one system by mutual attraction. How much more was the human race made for sympathy and mutual aid! How plain is the social destination of man! Born, as he is, into the arms of love, sustained from the beginning by human kindness, endowed with speech and plunged among fellow-beings to whose hearts he yearns to pour his own, and whose rights, feelings, and interests are commended to his regard by a law of love and justice written within him by a divine hand...” (Channing, pp. 578-579)

Is this Channing in his normal style preaching, or Channing influenced by years of talking to his close friend Tuckerman and now waxing somewhat emotional missing him? Their historical relationship and recognized mutual influence deserve further study.

It remains another important and urgent question for Unitarian Universalists and liberal religion in general as to: What motivates, engages and sustains religious participation, community, and faith in action? Thandeka raises crucial issues when she points out demographics that show that UU's are not retaining their youth. A recent article in the Boston Globe Magazine entitled "God on the Quad" points to the increasing success of fundamentalist evangelical groups on college campuses, but groups that are generally on the far right politically and advocate for ethical values that are antithetical to liberal religion and Unitarian Universalists in particular. Opportunities as an adolescent to explore one's developing identity on a feeling level, with the uncertainty and confusion that can entail, while still retaining a sense of safety and group solidarity and stability are crucial. An idealistic belief in the possibility of utopian visions for society, of improvement, and concrete social action projects that allow personal involvement and relationship to connect with and understand larger issues have been one way of connecting to youth. Tuckerman believed that this was fundamentally crucial for adults as well – that the privileged will not be effectively engaged on an affective and committed level *unless they are in relationship and active dialogue with the less privileged*. He also believed that the privileged will not arrive at adequate solutions through book learning alone – that it is in and through ongoing relationship, and all the pain and struggle and joy that can represent, that effective solutions are to be found.

Can liberal Unitarian Universalists today reclaim their roots and find a theological language that allows a successful tension to be maintained between a recognition of human suffering and "evil" and the possibility of hope and freedom from suffering and "progress?" Examining the 19th century world of Channing and Tuckerman, and what

Richardson argues is a “loss of nerve” (p. 210) by liberal religion in the 20th century, is an increasingly important task as liberals religiously or politically seek to find firm ground upon which to stand that recognizes both individual human dignity and the reality of interdependence without violating either principle.

Richardson quotes Edward Everett Hale in describing the early vision and feelings of the 19th century:

“Dr. Channing was preaching the gospel of the divinity of man. Dr. Tuckerman [and others] were introducing practical illustrations of improvement. There was plenty of money, and the rich men of Boston really meant that here should be a model and ideal city. The country was prosperous; they were prosperous, and they looked forward to a noble future.” (p. 210)

But then, according to Richardson, things began to go wrong and continued to go seriously wrong over the next 100 years (his analysis is worth quoting at length):

“A massive challenge came with the Irish immigrations of the 1840’s when almost overnight a quarter of the city population was abjectly poor, uneducated, unskilled and fiercely loyal to an authoritarian church. Their estimate of human nature was pessimistic and society, fatalistic....The presence of so many unemployed made industrialization possible in Boston in competition with larger cities and markets. As the Unitarians were the bankers they participated in this exploitation and with time social positions tended to harden. The presence of extensive poverty and attendant issues of public health and safety, new public works and proliferating slum tenement housing taking over successive neighborhoods, Unitarian social agencies were overwhelmed and the sense of society-wide improvement discouraged....The combination of massive population shifts and the Civil War along with critical rising social issues facing the nation such as the women’s suffrage movement, and the growth of the city to a major industrial and commercial center with hundred of thousands of residents, contributed to a general realization that the old order had passed. No longer were small networks of life-long acquaintances running the city so that each knew all aspects, social, economic, cultural, and political...A kind of loss of nerve characterized the subtle but inexorable shifts until eventually the idea of creating a model city devolved into dealing with the city. Some of course accommodated a tragic sense that they would hold things together as long as possible, that it was better to die than change. Others searched for ways to be a vital minority witness in a city which needed healing and guiding influences.

“The popular line in the late nineteenth century, ‘the progress of mankind onward and upward forever’ came in for a rude awakening with World War I, the

Great Depression, and World War II. How can the word ‘progress’ be interpreted in the face of Nazism or the unwillingness of a society to maintain its citizens at a minimum of well-being? ‘Progress’ devolved to a cataloguing of scientific and technological advancement. By and large liberal theologians ceased modifying use of the word, ‘progress.’ The phrase fell into disuse. Can the presence of a Hitler or of serial killers in the world countervail original confidence of Unitarians in the human potential for greatness? The schools of ‘human potential’ psychology reinforced religious humanism while theologians debated the pros and cons of ‘Neo-Orthodoxy.’ The twentieth century with its many challenges to Unitarian confidence in human nature and its potential for the abundant life, may in the course of time be seen as a mine field of distractions and blind alleys on the way towards a robust global embrace.” (pp. 208-210)

How does one have a *strongly felt and held* belief system about “right relations” in a society which is motivating and sustaining? Liberals frequently are caught by the fear of external conflict – that one is imposing one’s belief on others who have just as equal a right to their strongly held beliefs to the contrary (i.e. one is being too evangelical or missionary). Or they are caught by the fear or shame of internal conflict that one is being naïve, simplistic, emotional, adolescent or too utopian (criticisms of this nature were frequently made of Tuckerman, even by a friend such as Channing – so much so that Tuckerman internalized this shame and felt that he had to control his feelings). This is an immobilizing position that has led one 20th century interpreter of Christian ethics and culture, Richard Niebuhr, to locate liberal Christians, and Unitarians in particular, of necessity in a Christian typology where they are never in a position of transforming culture, only of accommodating to it. Yet, this rejection of sin and salvation was not what Tuckerman and Channing represented. In their early liberal Christian theology they sought to retain a view of human nature that recognized human failure and “sin” in relationship, while also envisioning the possibility of transformation and perfection.

In any democracy, the minority will at times lose out to the majority, despite safeguards. Do liberals simply need to recognize this and move on? Do they need to

own up to their deeply held beliefs and values and risk taking stands despite the pain of conflict? Is too much time spent on trying to minimize pain? Do liberals sacrifice on a *social level* when they cannot find a powerful language reflective of “evil” and “social sin” with which they are comfortable and can hold the full weight and strength of their *affectively based* beliefs about human nature and the ideal society? As we struggle with reclaiming “God” language theologically, will the language of “right relations” and “wrong relations” hold sufficient power in ethical language? How do we point to consequences, from our *very biological human nature*, of living in a chronic situation of “wrong relation” – consequences that hold motivational power for those with privilege, who can ward off pain, to change radically their ethical choices and actions?

And on the other hand, is something sacrificed *internally* by our very human nature when we fear to express the strength and power of our feelings? Do we deaden our spiritual commitment and source of motivation by holding back and bringing dialogue and ritual down to the lowest common denominators? Do we continue to swing between the extremes of Channing’s reason and Transcendentalist mysticism because, as Thandeka suggests, we have not resolved our view of basic human nature theologically? This was a tension that Tuckerman’s life and work embodied.

In conclusion, another 20th century typology of faith and ethics, Fowler’s Stages of Faith, represents an alternative vision that is more universal rather than Christian because it is based on a psychology of human nature. It recognizes that there are advanced mature stages of faith that deal with this inherent tension between the individual and the community, between particular truth and universalizing faith – stages that seek to go beyond simple duality and the question of either/or, of individual win/lose,

of isolation/community, etc., and that incorporate at their most advanced level those who martyr themselves on behalf of a deeply *affectively* held and integrated belief system for a cause, such as Tuckerman, such as Martin Luther King, Jr, such as Gandhi, etc.

Contemporary feminist relational psychologists such as Carol Gilligan and the writers from the Stone Center at Wellesley College have also offered alternative visions of ethical development and human nature. Finally, even scientists are taking another look at human nature and the biological basis of and need for spirituality through the site of *mystical affective* experiences in the brain. (Recent article from the magazine Spirituality and Health) In an era that poses dangers such as ours, these voices have never been needed to be heard as they do now. With Unitarian Universalism also facing unresolved challenges in the 21st century, including defining and implementing a shared vision of social justice and community ministry within a denomination organized by congregational polity, revisiting the dual missionary vision and dilemmas of Joseph Tuckerman seems a continued worthwhile exercise at least to clarify the questions.

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