Religion and Discourse Theory

Critical Postliberalism and Social Cognition: Towards a Typology of Church Based on Social Practice

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Postliberalism in the Starting Gate

'Postliberalism' is of course a term which is more problematic to define than one might at first think. Quite a good point of departure is to be found in George Hunsinger's illuminating chapter entitled 'Postliberal theology' in the recently published *Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*.[i] Hunsinger points out that whilst Lindbeck, Frei, and the 'Yale School' provided a major point of focus, the shadow of Postliberal theology can be seen to stretch both back and forward in the twentieth century – to Barth and von Balthasar, as well as, for example, to the missiologist Newbigin.[ii] My own project – inspired by theolinguistic concerns—has been to both narrow and widen the perspectives. On the one hand simply to 'appropriate' Lindbeck's theory of religion as a cultural linguistic system,[iii] whilst at the same time seeking to gain wider insights by essentially re-defining 'cultural-linguistic' in terms of recent linguistic theory – where today context tends to be paramount over structure. A final and crucial procedure has been to try to bring the re-newed theory before

the court of scripture, indeed ultimately before the account of Christ's final social act on the cross. Thus, as Postliberals – indeed George Lindbeck— generally have it, bringing the world into the biblical text.

Lindbeck's Postliberal model brings together the concept of a two-level generative grammar and the idea of religion seen as 'idioms for dealing with whatever is most important—with ultimate questions...'.[iv] From the 'second-order' set of grammar rules are generated the 'first-order' 'sentences' of belief and practice. Lindbeck's avowed aim was to use the theory to work on certain aspects of the relationship between church community and theology, leaving other matters to one side. In particular he was interested in a formulation which would encourage and support ecumenical perspectives – he was of course famously an observer at Vatican II. This is in any case one of the general, default ways in which the cultural-linguistic theory is typically understood. There are however, as it were, 'many Lindbecks',[v] and I tend to take the view that this default perception gives us a kind of 'polite (view of) Lindbeck' which may not fully take into account syntagmatic or diachronic forces in the history of thought, theological and secular. I suspect that, post-Wittgenstein, Lindbeck's viewpoint was inevitably going to arise in the period of 'late liberalism'. Also that, once escaped from the box, the notion of religion as a cultural-linguistic system would inevitably take on a life of its own, not only because of the rise and rise of Postmodernist perspectives in general terms, but also because Lindbeck's theory clearly resonates with practices in the real world in a very cogent manner. Certainly, to a contemporary linguist such as myself, with decades of church-going behind me, the theory seems to provide a strong framework for all sorts of interesting reflections as well as practical actions empowered by recent linguistic discussion.

Towards *Critical* Postliberalism

Elsewhere[vi] I have attempted to outline how Critical Postliberalism (CP) emerges as the child of a union between Lindbeck's theory, and critical realism embodied in the popular linguistic methodology *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA). Ultimately CP relies on a kind of updating of Lindbeck's theory based on recent linguistic theorising. As I mention in the *Scottish*

Journal of Theology article, in 1984 the enormous prestige enjoyed by Chomsky had led to his theory of Transformational Generative (TG) grammar being the dominant paradigm for thinking about language. TG encourages a view of language processing which focuses on the rules which produce sentence structure. Meaning and context were not really in the frame at all. Following something of a sea change in main linguistic concerns, issues of context and discourse are of course now much more prominent. Perhaps the ultimate reflection of this shift of emphasis recently is found in the Oxford-based movement of linguistic integrationists who stress the need to see linguistic knowledge as inextricably bound up — like the notes in a musical score — with the extra-linguistic knowledge to which it refers.[vii]

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the linguistic methodology I espouse, seems particularly apposite for theological reflection because it focuses on issues of *community*. (This is of course a focus Lindbeck shares – the cultural-linguistic system is that of the *believing community*.) CDA derives of course from Discourse Analysis (DA), which addresses issues such as implied agenda and socio-cognitive structures (eg the 'invisible noticeboard' found in all churches — of which more below), *genre*, the coherence of ideas, the cohesion of language, and intertextuality. One 'moves on' from DA to CDA: *Critical* Discourse Analysis, which exploits DA techniques to highlight social inequality and the desirability of social change.[viii]

A fundamental of CDA is the perception of discourse 'situating' participants according to roles determined by relations of power. Social actors are assigned 'prescribed' roles within many discourses, leading to 'subject positions', the occupation of which gives rise to fundamental aspects of the individual's identity. The label *subjectivity* is applied to the model that individuals have a composite identity engendered by the combined influence of occupying many role-playing scenarios controlled by many discourses.

Beyond the individual's identity – and mindset—lies that of the group, defined in terms of social cognition ('the public mind'). This is developed in ways cognate with the construction of individual subjectivity. Individual and social cognition can be represented by (socio-)cognitive structures, typically schemata such as *frames*. These are at least partially

encoded by the language-identity loop to which worshippers are typically exposed in their ecclesial environment. One continuing *caveat*, however, focuses on the risk of over-interpreting texts. Perhaps the most prominent criticism of CDA revolves around the claim that texts do not necessarily influence people's subjectivity as much as is sometimes asserted because a typical reader may be 'reading for gist' rather than doing deep-structure analysis. (Allied to this is the suggestion that the analyst doing deep-structure work may just be looking for items which support her/his own agenda.) Much of this particular long-standing critique of CDA has been expertly explored recently by Kieran O'Halloran in his *Critical Discourse Analysis and Language Cognition.*[ix] O'Halloran's questioning along the lines of 'how much of the *text* actually gets into the *discourse?*' seems likely, however, to prove less problematic for discussions of how exposure to (eg church) discourse reflects and affirms the theological cultural-linguistic system. O'Halloran's focus is on the 'consumption' of newspaper 'hard news' text, with its typically ephemeral status in the life of the average reader. In the ecclesial-theological world, however, one can assume at the very least that as worshippers/readers have made a specific choice to be at church, or read a theological text etc, their level of processing is typically more than 'for gist'. Presumably the 'believing' reader/hearer of theological/church texts etc may well be motivated to process the material more actively than a newspaper reader 'casually perusing' a hard news story. One assumes the believer's greater motivation arises not only from aspirations towards experiencing the numinous, but also from a (perhaps subconscious?) desire to have affirmed, or gain further appreciation of, the group cultural-linguistic system to which she/he belongs. (This of course begs all sorts of obvious questions – including ones with a humorous edge perhaps — about levels of commitment, some of which I shall attempt to address partially below.)

In trying to identify key aspects of the cultural-linguistic system, I have applied CDA-type analyses to texts/sermons/interviews with informants etc from many (mostly Protestant until recently) churches and allied organisations in the UK[x] (I have also considered TV and radio material as well, and have jointly published research into services held in

Multi-user Virtual Reality over the Internet.[xi]) Exposure to a wide variety of contemporary religious discourse – after 'cutting my teeth' theolinguistically through a research background in French biblical poetry of the sixteenth century—has produced interesting, intriguing and sometimes quite shocking results. Overall, however, interesting correlations have become apparent between real-world linguistic observation, CP theorizing, and scripture. Ultimately –the focus of our title here, the research seems to have explanatory power in aiding (UK) church typology in terms of a basic dialectic, with two intermediary forms. The easiest way of approaching this ecclesial topographical mapping is to perceive the terrain in terms of a basic (R1-R2) discoursal dialectic, then see how this can be combined with the socio-cognitive structures associated with these two contrasting discourses: the Strong Commitment Frame (SCF) which supports R1 discourse, and the Social Normalcy Frame (SNF) supporting R2. Hence overall there can be said to be an R1/SCF-R2/SNF dialectic.

The R1-R2 Dialectic

It is important to underline first of all that this is just a very general model – like contrasting English people as tea-drinkers with Continental French people as red wine drinkers. No doubt a very large number of each drink only the 'wrong' beverage, but the model does have explanatory power at a common sense level.

Here is one version of the basic dialectic which is about to appear in a popular UK Evangelical magazine (with a circulation of one million):

R1 Discourse	R2 Discourse
Doctrinally 'tight'	Doctrinally 'looser':
More 'walk'.	More 'journey of faith'.
More 'top-down'.	More 'bottom-up'.
More 'business'	Less 'business'.

Spiritual colleagues/siblings.	Socially/domestically similar/dissimilar.
Community.	'Incarnational'.
Exploring more 'who we are'.	Exploring more 'who I am'.
Prayer for the *isolated* (in-groupish)	Prayer for the *lonely* (out-groupish)
1.christian 2.young/old	1.young/old 2.christian
Promotes *spiritual* normalcy:	Promotes *social* normalcy.
Evening Service.	A Short Act of Worship.
Promotes the Gospel.	Assumes the Gospel.
Assumes 'family values'.	Promotes 'family values'.
More church community emphasis.	More domestic community emphasis.
More 'being a family'.	More 'being family-friendly'.
More 'my Father's house'	More 'your Father and I'
(Luke 2: 49).	(Luke 2: 48).

Figure 1. R1 and R2 Discourses

Like many situations where an insider view is likely to be much more nuanced than an outsider perspective, the UK R1-R2 dialectic may contain surprising elements for the previously uninitiated. First some basic orientation parameters. R1 represents the Evangelical-shading into fundamentalist wing, and R2 the more liberal, and indeed (at one level/in another branch perhaps) the less Protestant wing. One background parameter is that R1 tends to be infused with a more 'gathered model' ethos, and R2 a 'catholic model' one. This distinction provides part of the

answer for distinguishing features of R1 which resonate with a 'church family' ethos rather more than R2 seems to. Very striking are subtle features like the fact than R1 people tend not to pray for the 'lonely': their *euphemistic* use of 'isolated' as an affinity-marked substitute seems to highlights issues of 'more one of us' 'familyness'. (One may also in R1 – though rarely—observe the euphemistic use in a similar vein of 'middle aged' to refer to the elderly.) The ultimate expression of this kind of R1 tendency to describe social actors in more family – less modally distanced—terms is the R1 absolute exclusion (except in one PC case) of the combination 'especially/special' with a social category. This combination is ubiquitous in R2. So except in PC cases such as 'appreciated by all adults, but especially the elderly', R1 people never say or write phrases such as 'especially the young', or 'especially young families'. The very common use of this type of phrase in R2 can at one level be seen as part of a kind of 'panic discourse': because pews are emptying these days, R2 churches often increase their consumerist techniques, targeting particular groups (and typically thereby marginalize eg the elderly). This tends not to happen in R1 where *the group is everything.*

Elsewhere (in many of my publications cited below) I attempt to outline the reasons for this R1 group-focus at a biblical-theological level. Basically UK R1 folk take very seriously the socio-theological (and thus cultural-linguistic parameters) which seem to emerge quite naturally from a reading of the Gospels. Here Christ – the *Alpha* and *Omega*—pointedly has as *both first* and *last* recorded social acts accounts of his separating his mother from her biological offspring. In the last case taking Mary from her (apparently at least) seven children, and handing her over (in a classic anthropologically standard act for many a primitive society) to a *male sibling* – but it is of course a male *ideological/spiritual* sibling.(One remembers that on the way to the cross Christ stops to say something – he has an infinite choice—and ('Daughters of Jerusalem') chooses *to problematise something to do with motherhood.*) This all provides what appears to be dramaturgical evidence (compare further 'let the dead bury their dead', and the repeated 'blessed rather...' etc) for Christianity being, unlike Judaism, more a collectivist than an individualist/family-oriented religion.

North American folk raised in stereotypical understandings of Evangelical thought are typically surprised by this line of argument. Not so UK Evangelicals, for whom 'family values' are an absolute, 'hardwired' part of what Acts calls 'the Way', but are not something to be constantly and 'globally' foregrounded. (Any more than one would think of continually attacking the immorality of armed robbery.) A 'natural' reading of the Gospels would seem to exclude such an emphasis. The obviously rather different typical approach often adopted by Evangelicals in North America can, it would seem, be explained in terms of an understandable, cultural-linguistic 'creole' emerging from largely immigrant family cultures – rather like black Christians singing Gospel for similar historico-social reasons.

Another perspective which brings further levels of explanation to this R1-R2 dialectic is that for UK classic R1 Evangelicals, going to church is rather like going to work (R1's 'More business'). The evidence for this is multi-facetted and there is only space to include one or two viewpoints on this here. Against the background, typically, of the 'gathered model' view, together with the scriptural encouragement to associate with 'spiritual siblings' ('especially the household of faith') analogous to the 'beloved disciple', UK R1 ecclesial environments tend to background the *domestic self,* just as such issues (age, race, marital status etc) are typically backgrounded to a personnel file *at (secular) work.* (And there is of course 'no male or female in Christ'.) One symptom of this is that R1 people would be more likely to use the terms 'community' rather than 'incarnational'. This throws into relief the typical situation—in my view—whereby the 'incarnationally' inclined Anglican Church (whose discourse generally allows 'incarnational') tends really to be *'about' (social) difference* rather than (as it would like to see itself) *about community.* (And with a tendency to be more (R2) 'about' *social* normalcy whilst R1 is more 'about' *spiritual* normalcy.) One is reminded of similar anomalies whereby, eg English Public Schools (Eton, which I live near, for example) are anything but 'public'. Of course this naturally gels conveniently with my own reformed background, but I believe the objective, theolinguistic evidence supports this view. My research has led me to see the Anglican church (of which I am technically a member) as a collection of different

discourses, contained within, rather than unified by a single institution. I find this a little difficult to square with Christ's strong emphasis from the cross on collectivism centred around the notion of the 'spiritual sibling'.

So far we have considered a few aspects of the R1-R2 dialectic (and further related, real-world evidence will be adduced later in relation to the two linked schemata). As a general rule the language I experience in UK churches today tends to contain items which can implicitly link the discourse in question to one or other poles of this dialectic.

Supporting the basic R1-R2 parameters of the dialectic are the two related schemata cited above – the SCF and the SNF. (My explanation of these aspects of the matter draw largely on an account which recently appeared in an online sociological journal.[xii]) After examining the parameters of these two schemata and attempting to qualify the basic ecclesial environments to which they may be attached, I will explore the way the nature of certain churches may be profitably addressed in terms of combinations of either the whole or parts of the two frames.

R1's Strong Commitment Frame (SCF)[xiii]

This socio-cognitive structure ('invisible   noticeboard' in popular contexts), which has two components – social and theological—appears to have a shape something like this:

The *strong commitment frame* (SCF):

Frame name:	strong commitment
Slots include	
[Social component]	
domestic-self messages:	downgraded position
church-self messages:	upgraded position
tension:	high
overt references to 'keenies':	not permitted
keywords:	*walk* (*not* 'journey' [except UK Anglicans]), *work*, (prayer for the) *isolated* (*not* 'lonely')

[Theological component]

doctrine   'tighter'

In the classic UK Evangelical-type environment, references to 'the keenies' (the 'keen ones' in the church) is typically disallowed by the discourse, as this would imply that not being 'keen' / committed would at some level be an option / be tolerated. The use of 'walk' with its more prescriptive connotations tends to replace the more exploratory (?) 'journey' of R2. 'Work' or 'ministry'when attached to a specific activity ('the children's work') appears to be a quite strongly distinguishing feature, and has interesting connotations cognate with those of the 'many as part of the one' perspective implicit in an employee's subconscious vision ('Betty in Accounts') of the many different departments of a secular business being unified. So this supports the R1/SCF model mentioned above of going to church being like going to a place of secular employment in terms of 'group-focus' social cognition.

R2's Social Normalcy Frame (SNF) and Reflections on the Contrasting Discourses

The contrasting SNF appears something like this:

The *social normalcy frame* (SNF):
Frame name: social normalcy
    Slots include

    [Social component]
        domestic-self messages: upgraded position
        church-self messages: downgraded position
        tension: low(er)
        overt references to 'keenies': permitted
        keywords: *journey* (*not* 'walk')
                                       (prayer for the)
                                       lonely (*not* [just] 'isolated')

use of 'special'/'especially'
with a social category: very common (almost
                             entirely
                             excluded in SCF)

talking to another
person's spouse: 'secular' caution required
                             (less in SCF as s/he is your
                             'spiritual sibling')

[Theological component]

doctrine   'looser'

Among UK classic Evangelicals, gender differences – even the status of motherhood – tend not to be highlighted in any particular way because of their 'business church' culture which strongly focuses on 'spiritual siblinghood'. One thing has occurred quite often in my research which is an unexpected piece of evidence supportive of this model — in a curious way and not without a touch of humour or social satire. The fact is I have got use to the 'R2/SNF *scoop*'. What in the world is this? Well it's very simple and I have observed it fairly commonly. I have drunk a lot of church coffee after the morning service in many churches and talked to a wide range of folk. After doing quite an amount of this I suddenly realised that a pattern was emerging. When I am talking in R2/SNF to a married woman, her husband will typically come and 'scoop her up' (we are of course happy he's there in church!). *This doesn't tend to happen in R1/SCF.* My intuition is that, mentally policed by discoursal controls –though of course whether subconsciously or consciously one cannot quite know – the R1/SCF husband *knows he must not give the impression that he sees me as a man talking to his wife.* The R1/SCF discourse/culture turns me into a brother talking to my spiritual sister. There are two corollaries of this of a somewhat unexpected kind.

Firstly, as I discuss in my *Theology* (2002) article on the 'linguistic physics' of church, all the R1/SCF mothers without exception said the

exact words 'That's interesting' (with appropriately positive intonation and (to use a now 'ageing' concept) paralinguistics) when I explained the nature of the SCF. (I usually explained this by reference to the 'invisible noticeboard' analogy.) I assume that the reason for this is that among classic UK Evangelicals (who don't go in for nativity plays etc for allied reasons), it is implicitly quite a serious act for a mother to go to church, because the discourse *converts her from a mother into a sister*. This clearly has some resonances with the Christ/Mary/John episode at the cross. Moving closer in, one might say that the SCF's combination of (1) (*group* focused) *social* component + (2) *strong doctrine* theological component, resonates with the two major features of this cross episode: (1) the *group* (backgrounding the domestic/biological self) focus + (2) the *spiritual/strong ideological* sibling focus of the 'beloved disciple'.

The reactions of the R1/SCF mothers to my explaining the research were surprising (though did resonate with the model), but the reactions of all the R2/SNF fathers were even more remarkable. It does not give me any pleasure to report that all these fathers attempted to punish me verbally for explaining this research. Incredibly, without exception.[xiv] (None of the R1/SCF fathers tried to punish me in this way.) Faced with this fascinating though uncomfortable fact, what kind of conclusions can I come to? Let me give an illustration involving the personal discourse of a famous UK religious leader. This gentleman is fascinating to listen to and I have immense respect for him. However he has one endearing characteristic which is perhaps a little surprising from a person of such obvious quality. He refers to the fact that he went to a certain prestigious university (PRU) on very many occasions – virtually as a matter of routine, in fact, in articles, talks etc. This is an example of quite a common phenomenon in UK life – having a very close association between the self / one's sense of identity and the fact that one has been to a PRU. (People will sometimes hand you their card in the UK – this has happened to me twice recently — just because this is indicated on it: B.A.Hons ([PRU]).) Analogously, because my kind of research often highlights things to do with the family in biblical context which R2/SNF fathers may typically feel uncongenial, I have come to the conclusion that their sense of self and their

sense of parenthood are often quite 'co-extensive', as it were. (A pretty normal phenomenon within secular society, though, church society is supposed to be a little different?) So my 'problematising youth', as my shorthand has it, is at least for the fathers, apparently, also *an affront to the self* – with concomitantly instinctual reactions. This might be idle speculation if it were not for the fact that none of this happens in R1/SCF – with either gender of parent (who, as we have seen, seem to be converted from parents into 'spiritual sisters/brothers' by the R1 discourse). My conclusions based on the research, together with intuition based on my being a 'native speaker' of Evangelicalese with its group focus, is that R1/SCF folk are constructed as having a 'separate group self'. This is distinct from the domestic self (the 'work self' is a good parallel in the secular realm), and represents a 'mode of self' into which my R1/SCF informants typically seem to have moved as I talk to them, and which leads them not to try to punish me verbally for 'problematising youth'. Also germane to this is the fact that in R1/SCF everything tends to be seen through an ideological filter. So R1/SCF fathers, working in their group-self mode, are trained by their discourse, notionally at least, to ask, something like'what's the scripture here, brother?'. This seems to be rather in contrast with the behaviour of the aggrieved R2/SNF fathers, for whom 'problematising youth' seems typically also to be perceived as 'problematising the self'. [xv]

Further evidence supporting this line of interpretation comes in two forms. Firstly, Evangelicals—like the ants of an ant hill—appear to benefit from *intersubjectivity*, which gives them a high level of 'family type' mental bonding. This seems to somewhat separate them from typical R2/SNF father habits of punishing people verbally in the way described above. Secondly, and more empirically, *no R1/SCF informant has ever asked me whether or not I have children.* By contrast, some 40-50% of R2/SNF (male and female parent) informants do this. (I have recently interviewed my first Roman Catholic mother after mass on Sunday and, although obviously the sample could hardly be smaller, I was intrigued that she did in fact ask me this question.)

As an explanation for this kind of phenomenon, I have concluded that R2/SNF people have a much greater tendency than do R1/SCF folk to process what I say in secularly normative, less ideologically-driven, *probabilistic* terms. (In plain language, they are applying plain common sense!) I see the R2/SNF people therefore as seeking to arrive at a *best fit* calculated from the data they are extracting from my questions and explanations. R1/SCF people, on the other hand, seem more likely to process what I ask/say by reference to a *pre-defined*, ideologically intense, background script/frame like the SCF: so making a *best match* relative to my verbal data.

This whole perspective of R1/SCF-R2/SNF is certainly curious, and sometimes leads to amusing observations and events (as when, very recently, in R2/SNF I am explaining the 'scoop' to a woman over coffee in church and her husband comes and 'scoops her up' as I am doing so – much to the amusement of us both!). The whole approach can also, more functionally, be used to posit a further level of typology for the 'in-between' churches. In UK terms the Methodists and Evangelical Anglicans appear – to the passing theolinguist—classically to be in this situation, though in rather different modes.

Middle-Ground Mode 1: The '*Mixed Components*' Church

Some churches appear to mix part of one schema with part of another. The UK Methodist Church is the first to come to mind in this respect. This church is of course exceptionally broad, so the objections some critics make about the R1-R2 dialectic in regard to its alleged 'too general' nature may perhaps appear again in some people's minds with even greater intensity. However, once again, I would argue that the model here does have explanatory power, despite the possible presence of anomalous cases at a detailed level. As a very general rule of thumb, then, one gets the impression from contemporary Methodism of a mixture of the *social component* of the SCF, with the *theological component* ('Doctrine – looser') of the SNF. This model of the socio-theological tendencies of contemporary Methodism might be summarised as:

SCF

    [social component]   YES

    [theological component]   NO

                       +

SNF

    [social component]   NO

    [theological component]   YES

There is of course – especially now – quite a strong Evangelical wing in the UK Methodist Church (though some of it with New Age tendencies, I gather). However, there does seem to be explanatory power in the general observation that UK Methodists have maintained the inclusive social ethos foregrounded by their founding fathers, whilst perhaps generally moving towards a more 'open', less traditionally Wesleyan approach to doctrinal 'tightness'. Certainly, on the social level, 'egalitarian'-speak is still very much in evidence in my experience of Methodism in England and Scotland – especially among 'very active' Methodists. For example (and thinking of an informant's precise language), if you were acknowledging in a conversation after church your temporary preferment within the Methodist Church at, say, a regional level, it might be natural for you to add something like: 'Of course after your year in post you return to anonymity'. At an impressionistic level, this kind of quite well-attested speech appears also to be accompanied by a genuine sense of modesty and 'collegiality' – one of the nicest social phenomenon it has been my privilege to observe during my research. Another similar or typical kind of observation from a Methodist might be that if you were relating problems you were facing later that day, you might, in a Methodist context, add in a phrase such as: 'though I'm sure my problems aren't any worse than anybody else's' (again from an informant's actual words). In church also, Methodists may stop to collectively speak words of blessing to the children as they leave 'at half time' for their morning Sunday school, say. ('May God go with you.') Again, very 'collegial' (also quite moving to experience) and very reminiscent of the 'group self – upgraded' slot of the SCF's *social component.*

This (at least residual) retention within Methodism of the SCF's *social component* may however typically – though by no means always — be seen to co-exist with the *theological component* of the SNF ('doctrine – looser'). Thus, whilst in some Evangelical Methodist Churches (and currently among the higher reaches of the Church's leadership) the 'old' doctrinal ways may be in evidence, you are also likely elsewhere within Methodism, and without too much difficulty, to come across anything upto very postmodernist views on scripture and key contemporary moral issues.

Middle-Ground Mode 2: the 'Combined Schemata' Church

Whilst the Methodists may mix their components from the SCF and the SNF, another category of church may be perceived as combining both schemata – including *all four components of the SCF and the SNF*. This perspective seems to have reasonable explanatory power for objectifying the typical socio-theological status of Evangelical Anglicans (EAs) at a very general level.[xvi] EAs may show signs – in CDA terminology – of being 'contradictorily constructed' in terms of (taking the force of the colloquial here) *both* 'invisible noticeboards'.

SCF

[social component]		YES
[theological component]	YES	

+

SNF

[social component]		YES
[theological component]	YES	

You may typically hear among EAs both classic Evangelical (SCF-type) 'exploring who we are' *motifs* (even upto tithing), whilst at the same time also witnessing (SNF-type) statements at a social level essentially unknown in the classic domain. Such anomalous combinations would seem to represent, as it were, 'leaves' which have drifted in through the open door which leads from the EAs to other forms of Anglicanism.

A typical discursive practice of EAs which emerges from their apparently 'dual voiced' status, is the device whereby 'what most people want' or 'what most people think' (the type of phrase sometimes used by SNF clergy informants) is mapped onto *everybody* as being 'naturally' 'how *we all* are'. This may come through in anything from references to parenthood (so *pace* the single) to allusions to car driving. This may to the uninitiated appear to constitute very minor or even rather curious issues, but the fact is that classic Evangelicals just don't do any of this kind of 'social normalcy' referencing (eg in relation to even quite mundane things like car driving), which may commonly be perceived among EAs. Perhaps most prominent of all is the relative openness of EAs to the adoption of Mothering Sunday / nativity plays / and even Sunday morning 'toy services'. (None of these is typical for classic UK Evangelicals – though Mothering Sunday may now appear among Charismatics — who are in any case (though this is changing now) traditionally suspicious of 'the social' as in some way threatening to, or at best a distraction from, 'the spiritual'.) You may also in EA-land hear pragmatic statements with anomalous doctrinal connotations which have 'drifted in' from Anglicanism in general. For example (and perhaps resonating with R2/SNF's 'panic discourse' discussed above): 'the spiritual needs of our young people are our first priority as a church'. Again unthinkable in classic Evangelicalism (in which age is backgrounded, as *all need to be saved.*).

I tend to gauge this apparent, socio-theological 'contradictory construction' typically observable among Evangelical Anglicans as a temporary phase. I see it as perhaps concomitant with the gradual decline of the catholic model in this general ecclesial-theological arena since, say, the middle of the nineteenth century. The EAs seem to be in transition as they gradually return to the classic Evangelical fold to which they obviously belong. Water, I suspect, is slowly finding its own level again, even if for EAs the pragmatism of the parish system (with its 'non-business', R2 connotations) is in the meantime continuing to be exploited as long as possible. Like so much in the church since Acts, a rather messy situation, but temporarily practical and proper for all that.

Conclusion

My research does suggest, therefore, that observation of social cognition in church situations can profitably be used for typological purposes across a good spectrum of ecclesial environments. As we have seen, transitional or intermediate forms, it would seem, can be accommodated by the model. There is clearly space for a great deal of interesting research work which could impact both ecclesial and theological studies. But, at the end of the day, there is scripture and the 'music' of inclusion which drifts out of the Gospels. Legion, the Widow of Nain, the 'woman with the issue of blood'. This seems so collectivist – even the children who, being invited to the Saviour, are through him invited to the group-focused kingdom of heaven.

From a less theological, more 'cultural physics' kind of perspective, I suspect that Christianity, being strongly collectivist, lends itself most easily to the approaches of Evangelicals and Catholics. Both are very group-focused, though in rather different ways. Hopefully, this article has shown how contemporary linguistics, combined, with recent theological reflections – leading to Critical Postliberalism—has highlighted avenues for understanding church and scripture in helpful ways.

Endnotes

[i] Ed Kevin Vanhoozer (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), Chapter 3, 42-57.

[ii] Other background works particularly relevant to the present discussion are: Brad Kallenberg, "Unstuck from Yale: Theological Method after Lindbeck," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50, no.2 (1997), 191-218, Mike Higton, "Frei's Christology and Lindbeck's Cultural-linguistic Theory'," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50, no.1 (1997), 83-95, and T. R. Phillips and D. L. Okholm (eds.), *The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals and Postliberals in Conversation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1996).

[iii] Famously outlined in George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984).

[iv] Lindbeck, 40.

[v] For a good spectrum of further perspectives on Lindbeck's theory, see T. R. Phillips *et al.*, *The Nature of Confession.*

[vi] "The 'Linguistic Physics' of Church: Introducing Critical Postliberalism," *Theology* 105, no.824 (2002):99-109, "Modern Believing and Postmodern Reading: Critical Discourse Analysis and the Worship Song," *Modern Believing* 43, no.1 (2002): 28-38, "Critical Postliberalism and Socio-theological Grammars: What the Language Details Say," *Theology* 107, no.837 (2004): 184-194, "Critical Postliberalism in Action: Religious Social Cognition Today and the People Perception Spectrum," *Modern Believing* (forthcoming), "Critical Postliberalism: Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic system and the socially extrasystemic," *Scottish Journal of Theology* (forthcoming). More related analysis is contained in my monograph, *Religious Language and Critical Discourse Analysis: Ideology, Identity and Christian Discourse Today*, Religions and Discourse, Vol.5 (Berne: Peter Lang, 2000).

[vii] See eg. R. Harris and G. Wolf (eds.), *Integrational Linguistics: A First Reader* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1998), and R. Harris, *Introduction to Integrational Linguistics* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1998).

[viii] See, for example, Teun van Dijk, "Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis," in J. Cheshire and P. Trudgill (eds.), *The Sociolinguistics Reader*, Vol. 2 (New York: Arnold, 1998), 367-93, and C. R. Caldas-Coulthard and M. Coulthard (eds.), *Texts and Practices: Readings in Critical Discourse Analysis* (New York: Routledge 1996).

[ix] Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003.

[x] This is against the background of being an adherent of churches in each of the four main constituent parts of the UK (including a Welsh bilingual chapel), and 3-4 areas of France. Though an English Reformed Baptist by background, I am currently 'domiciled' in an Anglican church in Southern England, and also regularly visit churches in central Scotland (I usually worship in Methodist and Church of Scotland churches when 'north of the border') where my wife (originally a Northern Ireland Presbyterian) and I have a base.

xi R. Schroeder, N. Heather and R. Lee, 'The Sacred and the Virtual: Religious Services in Multi-user Virtual Reality', *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* 4, no.2 (1998), http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol4/issue2/schroeder.html.

xii 'A UK Sociolinguistic Perspective: Gene, Geoffrey and Evangelical 'Broad Inclusion' Intersubjectivity', *Sociological Research Online* 9, no.1 (2004), <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/9/1/heather.html>.

xiii For further background to frame theory as applied to religious discourse, see R. Schroeder, N. Heather and R. Lee, 'The Sacred and the Virtual'.

xiv The R2 fathers involved ranged from an Australasian academic I met at an Oxford linguistics conference, to a candidate for ministry in the UK Anglican Church. (Note: sadly perhaps, as a fourth-generation landlord I am not unfamiliar with the typical discursive practices of verbal punishment.)

xv A longer version of the R1-R2 dialectic includes the contrast:

R1	R2
Problematising *youth*. OK – everything read through ideological filter.	Problematising *youth*. typically read as an affront to the self.

From my observations, this binary pair is not felt to be congenial by R2/SNF fathers. In strong contrast, a recent R1/SCF informant commented quite casually as I outlined my research, 'Yes, of course, you must love God more than your children'.

xvi Here I shall briefly outline this perspective which is further discussed in the online.