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Victorian Sermonic Discourse:  
The Sermon in Nineteenth-Century British Literature and Society

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
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in

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by

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Dr. John Ganim, Chairperson  
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The Dissertation of Jeremy Michael Sell is approved:

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## Acknowledgements

Anyone who has been through the trials and tribulations of graduate school and writing a dissertation knows that as solitary as it may at times seem, it is not a journey taken alone. I have many people to thank for helping bring this nearly-decade long sojourn to a successful conclusion.

To begin, I want to remember Dr. Emory Elliott. His first book, *Power and the Pulpit in Puritan New England*, was one I discovered when I was first applying to PhD programs, and it gave me hope that there would be a professor at UCR who could relate to my interest in studying the sermon. After taking a course from him, I approached Dr. Elliott about chairing my committee; a journal entry I wrote the following day reads, “Dr. Elliott on board and enthusiastic.” But, not long afterwards, I received word that he unexpectedly and suddenly passed away. I trust that this work would have met with the same degree of enthusiasm he displayed when I first proposed it to him.

With Dr. Elliott’s passing, I had to find someone else who could guide me through the final stages of my doctorate, and Dr. John Ganim was the first who came to mind. From the freedom he provided in a seminar on medieval literature to explore the themes of the course within the context of my field of Victorian literature and religion, to my discovery that he was a former Victorianist himself—something I learned from another student; he had only told me, quite humbly, that he had “some experience” with Victorian literature—I knew he would be the right person for the job. His suggestions and encouragement throughout the writing of the dissertation were ever helpful, and I am so grateful that he agreed to work with me.

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take advantage of the “free ride” even when no one else seemed to mind. For these reasons (among others), I was honored to have him on my qualifying exam committee. A couple of years ago, I acquired a copy of *The King James Version*, the novel he wrote, and I had hoped to have brought it in for him to sign for me. While I’m sorry to have missed that opportunity, I look forward still to reading it and remembering the man who wrote it.

In the winter quarter of my final year of coursework in 2008, my son was born in Ohio. Between his birth and one of the worst blizzards to hit the state in 90 years, I missed a full week of class and access to a research library. Two of my fellow grad students (who have long since graduated) went above and beyond the call of collegiality to help me out at that time. Dr. Gretchen Bartels graciously agreed to post notes to Blackboard during class and voiced in class the comments and questions I posted. Though there was a bit of a time lag, it worked. Gretchen was also one of my officemates, and I enjoyed the opportunities to talk and chat with her. Dr. Rory Moore responded to an email request I sent from Ohio to find and photocopy and arrange to have scanned and sent to me an article from UCR’s Eaton Collection which was indispensable to the seminar paper I wrote for the course. In the years since then, Rory has remained a steady friend, and our occasional email exchanges about dissertation progress, work, new and growing families, and life generally have been valued.

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invaluable asset Tina was. Now, having been through the exam process and winding down the dissertation process, I can only say that I didn't know the half of it then. She has patiently answered all of my questions, expertly guided me through paperwork, and warmly provided encouragement every step of the way. When she told me in the fall of 2015 that this would be her final year, I knew I had to get things done while she would still be around. I am thrilled that she will get to see me graduate.

Facebook was both one of my chief distractions from dissertating as well as one of my chief motivators: so much work would “earn” me some time on Facebook. But, I found it an important way to keep myself accountable for making progress. In particular, two former work colleagues of mine, Roslynn Pryor and Brandon Leighton, who were working on finishing their Master's theses, and I started a “Mastermind PostBacc” group to post weekly progress reports on our research and writing or just ideas without worrying about sounding coherent. The motivation to have something to post, and the encouragement of “likes” and comments on those posts kept me going. For bigger milestones, like completed chapters, I posted to my general page, and again the “likes” and encouraging comments from friends proved motivating. For all who ever commented or liked one of my dissertating posts, I offer you a sincere thumbs-up like and thank you.

Finally, and most importantly, I want to thank my family: my wife, Mitra, my son, Michael, and my daughter, Leila. My wife endured stretches of time as a virtual “single parent” while I was locked away reading and writing, and she never once complained about it. When I wanted to give up, she kept me going. Her encouragement and support, and her efforts to keep the fire lit under me when needed, make this

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For Mitra, Michael, and Leila

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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by

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Dr. John Ganim, Chairperson

This dissertation analyzes the role of the sermon in nineteenth-century British literature and society. In particular, it examines the way sermonic discourse—discourse that includes sermons themselves as well as discourse directly inspired by, responding to, or imitative of sermons—permeated Victorian literature and discussions of key issues in the Victorian era. Contributing to the growing field of sermon studies, the dissertation focuses first on Victorian homiletics and the novel, then shifts to two major Victorian concerns: the growing realm of science, and the growth of the industrial city. Drawing on the published sermons of many of the “greats” of the Victorian pulpit, homiletical manuals, periodical press accounts of and reactions and responses to sermons, novels, lectures, and letters, I seek to show that the sermon’s scope and reach extended well beyond the pulpit and make it an essential component of Victorian studies both in its own right and for the influence it exercised throughout the period.

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## Introduction

“[I]t is not quite so easy to know a poem without reading it as to know a sermon without listening.” George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*

The Victorian era has been called the “golden age of preaching,” and virtually no segment of Victorian society was untouched by the sermon, either heard or read. Yet, while the Victorian sermon has been studied extensively and continuously by theologians and preachers, it has sometimes had an uneasy relationship with literary studies, being seen as something of an embarrassment to scholars. One obvious reason for this embarrassment is the ridicule Victorian preachers receive at the hands of Victorian novelists: the sermon and its evangelical preachers are routinely satirized in the works of authors like Dickens, Trollope, and Eliot, and even in the popular religious novels of the period, the sermon can often come across as an unwarranted bit of authorial didacticism. But perhaps another reason for the awkward status of the Victorian sermon is that many literary scholars are simply unaware of either the genre conventions or the range of types of sermons. Such obstacles notwithstanding, there has been a recent surge of new scholarship that seeks to regain a place for the sermon in the canon of Victorian studies. In recent works on specific Victorian preachers and sermons, Robert H. Ellison, Carol Marie Engelhardt, and Don Randall have examined ways the sermon can illuminate our understanding of “the Victorian world picture,”<sup>1</sup> while Jennifer Stolpa, Karen Dieleman and Dawn Coleman have shown how an understanding of homiletics can lead to

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<sup>1</sup> I’m here quoting the title of David Newsome’s book on the Victorians, *The Victorian World Picture*.

improved, more nuanced understandings of the Victorians' belletristic literature. Working from within this emerging field of sermon studies, I will argue that the sermon, once properly read and understood, contributes to our understanding of the Victorians and their world, not merely for the ways it can illuminate the other literature of the period, but also in the ways it functions and deserves to be treated as a body of literature in its own right.

In "Evangelical Teaching: Dr. Cumming," an essay which Gordon Haight characterizes as her "liveliest assault on the religion of her adolescence" (153), George Eliot describes an evangelical preacher as a "Goshen of mediocrity" with "small ability," "superficial knowledge," and "middling morale," and full of "bigoted narrowness" and "unctuous egoism" (*Selected Essays* 38). Charles Spurgeon, the famed Baptist preacher, fares little better at the end of Eliot's pen: his preaching tone is "utterly common and empty of guiding intelligence or emotion," his anecdotes are "all poor and pointless—Tract Society anecdotes of the worst kind," his doctrine "the most superficial, Grocer's-back-parlour view of Calvinistic Christianity" that "seemed to look no farther than the retail Christian's tea and muffins," and he himself has "no instinct of rhythm, or music, in his soul" and is "destitute of insight."<sup>2</sup> Such unflattering portraits of preachers are reinforced in the fiction of the period as well. Whether one considers the scheming, crafty, and ever-perspiring Reverend Slope from Trollope's *Barchester Towers* or the hypocritical preacher Mr. Chadband from Dickens's *Bleak House* or the smooth-talking, stage-performer-style preacher Godfrey Ablewhite in Collins's *The Moonstone*, the

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<sup>2</sup> Letter to Sara Hennell, 18 November, 1870. In *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, ed. Gordon Haight, New Haven: Yale UP1985. 382-383.

preacher, especially the Evangelical preacher, does not fare well at the hands of Victorian novelists. Indeed, as George P. Landow memorably puts it, “after reading the novels of Dickens, Trollope, Kingsley, and many lesser figures, we would be tempted to assume that all Evangelical clergymen had oily, florid complexions, damp handshakes, and portly stomachs waiting to be filled with tea-cakes” (18). Though the sermon was arguably one of the most read genres of the Victorian era, and celebrated well into the early twentieth-century, it has continued to suffer from such effectively damning portraits in the literature that has survived from the period.

Also contributing to the sermon’s loss of reputation is the attractiveness of the Victorian “crisis of faith” narrative. Many prominent public figures of the day experienced a loss of faith. The essence of these crises is succinctly phrased in the famous line from Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*: “there is more faith in honest doubt than in half the creeds” (96.11-12). The sermon, on the other hand, tends almost by definition to maintain and proclaim an orthodox faith, and it can also appear reactionary and retrogressive, a viewpoint which seems to be notoriously confirmed in a sermon by Samuel Wilberforce:

Whilst irreverence and doubt are the object of your greatest fear; whilst you would gladly [*sic*] retain a childlike and unquestioning reverence by abasing, if need were, your understanding, rather than gain any knowledge at the hazard of your reverence; you are doubtless in God's hands, and therefore safe... Fly,

therefore, rather than contend; fly to known truths.(155)<sup>3</sup>

In the context of Victorian literature, “at a time when ‘fiction became the pulpit, the confessional and the battlefield’ of theology,” T. R. Wright argues that most of the religious novels of the period (such as those catalogued by Robert Lee Wolff in *Gains and Losses: Victorian Novels of Faith and Doubt*) “have little literary or even theological merit; they are of interest primarily to the historian as representative and illustrative of their age” (152). Nonetheless, Wright makes an exception for those novels that explore crises of faith, specifically singling out works like Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* or Mrs. Humphrey Ward’s *Robert Elmsmere* for their realistic and in-depth examinations of characters’ psyches. Such a claim only reinforces the complaint George P. Landow made thirty years ago, namely that “when literary and cultural historians have considered Victorian religion, they have focused narrowly on themes of honest doubt and consequent loss of belief” (3).

Miriam Burstein points out, however, that it is possible to “construct an entirely different narrative about Victorian literary studies, in which faith exists at the center, with doubt coming into play but not at the core of things,” and she goes on to cite no fewer than 14 book-length works spanning a period from 1932 to 2004 to support her case, and she adds that she “wouldn’t be surprised if the next decade sees the slow erosion of the survey-level crisis of faith” (“When narratives attack”). I would, of course, agree, and could add a number of other works to her list. Nevertheless, much of the work she cites is

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Altholz, “The Warfare of Conscience with Theology,” in *Religion in Victorian Britain Volume IV: Interpretations*, ed. Gerald Parsons.

familiar to scholars like Burstein precisely because she has taken “religion and literature” as a research focus. For those not specifically studying religion, or only passing or tangentially so, the crisis of faith and secularization narratives still seem to be the more familiar at this time. Furthermore, even if we granted the parity of the faith/crisis of faith narratives in literary studies, the sermon still has not received the attention it deserves.

Against such stances as Victorian novelists’ stereotypical caricatures, George Eliot’s sneering dismissal, Wright’s narrow criteria for merit, or general neglect, scholars like Robert H. Ellison and Carol Marie Engelhardt argue that “we must retrieve” preachers of the period—they focus specifically on John Cumming—from the “almost too effective caricature” of their contemporaries, for “if we merely mimic Eliot’s contemptuous dismissal of him, we will not fully understand the larger landscape in which justifiably more famous figures [. . .] lived, worked, and prayed” (386). And it is not only the religious landscape of more prominent Victorians that we risk losing. The *Oxford Handbook of the Modern British Sermon* notes that sermons were “easily the most widespread and sustained form of intellectual activity in the country [Britain] in this period [1689-1901]” (Francis and Gibson xiv). Landow explains that “Two sermons were the rule each Sunday—one in the morning and one in the afternoon—and during the reign of Victoria, which seems to have been a golden age of preaching, people would often travel long distances to hear famous ministers” (15), and Webb notes that religious publishing, much of which would have been inclusive of or exclusively sermons, outpaced all other publishing, including novels, combined (cited in Ellison and Engelhardt 373). But perhaps Eric Mackerness puts the prominence of the Victorian



sermon into the best perspective:

Among cultured people of the Victorian age, sermons were regarded with a seriousness which now seems almost ludicrous. “A young man brought up in a careful home,” writes G. M. Young, “might have heard, whether delivered or read aloud, a thousand sermons; an active clergyman was a social asset to a rising neighbourhood [. . .]. The form of preachers was canvassed like the form of public entertainers, and the circulation of some Victorian sermons is a thing to fill a modern writer with despair. . . . The sermon was the standard vehicle of serious truth, and to the expositions and injunctions of their writers and statesmen the Victorian public brought the same hopeful determination to be instructed, and to be elevated, which held them attentive to the pleadings, the denunciations, and the commonplaces of their preachers.” (xi-xii)

If, as Robert Lee Wolff claims, to understand Victorian literature and culture one must have at least a basic handle on Victorian religion,<sup>4</sup> then I would add that to understand Victorian religion, one must have at least a basic handle on the Victorian sermon, which would have comprised the bulk, if not the entirety, of many Victorians’ experience of religion.

Fortunately, there have been many promising signs of change within Victorian studies in the last two decades, beginning with Robert H. Ellison’s 1998 *The Victorian Pulpit: Spoken and Written Sermons in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. In this work, Ellison

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Lee Wolff, *Gains and Losses: Novels of Faith and Doubt in Victorian England* (1977).

makes the claim that “the story of Victorian religion is being told well,” even though there remains “a significant omission” in the scope of this story: “virtually none of [the scholarly studies of Victorian religion] takes preaching as its primary focus” (132, 11). The one exception Ellison highlights is Eric Mackerness’s *The Heeded Voice: Studies in the Literary Status of the Anglican Sermon, 1830-1900* (1959), yet he faults Mackerness’s work for its drift into biography and cultural/social analysis and away from a more homiletical or rhetorical analysis. His own work, Ellison argues, fills this void in literary studies, promising a rhetorical analysis of Victorian preaching. However, in her 2001 review of Ellison’s book, Mary Wilson Carpenter, who has herself contributed some important works to the story of Victorian religion,<sup>5</sup> takes exception to Ellison’s claim, noting his failure to consider (or even mention, for that matter) P. T. Phillips’s *The View from the Pulpit: Victorian Ministers and Society* (1978), George P. Landow’s *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows* (1980), or two works on women’s preaching, Deborah M. Valenze’s *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial England* (1985) and Christine Krueger’s *The Reader’s Repentance: Women Preachers, Women Writers, and Nineteenth-Century Social Discourse* (1992). Furthermore, Carpenter laments the inevitable distortion of Ellison’s focus on just three Victorian preachers, and those only in terms of orality-literacy studies, a restriction which, Carpenter says, “squeezes an enormous sector of Victorian literature and culture into such a narrow compass” (305).

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<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, her “Ambiguous revelations: the Apocalypse and Victorian literature,” which she coauthored with George P. Landow, or her more recent *Imperial Bibles, Domestic Bodies: Women, Sexuality, and Religion in the Victorian Market* (2003).

Carpenter's critique is, to some extent, justified. On the one hand, while Ellison's work does take preaching as its primary focus, it simply leaves too much ground uncovered to serve as a comprehensive introduction. On the other hand, the works Carpenter mentions also fall short of filling this gap, too. Phillip's *The View from the Pulpit*, while providing important biographical sketches of prominent Victorian preachers and placing them in the context of their times, fails to examine their sermons or preaching *per se*; Landow's work, which does provide a good introduction to perhaps *the* distinctive Victorian hermeneutic (*viz.*, typology), and which often does so with explicit reference to Victorian preaching, spends the bulk of its space analyzing typology in non-sermonic literature; and Valenze's and Krueger's works, while focusing much more on preaching, limit themselves to female preaching, which necessarily omits the vast majority of Victorian sermons.

Nonetheless, in the decade and a half since Carpenter's review of Ellison's work, there have been several further works on the Victorian sermon. Jennifer Stolpa (2003) and Karen Deileman (2007) consider the ways that homiletics, the art of preaching or, as Stolpa's subtitle puts it, "sermon style and delivery," can deepen our appreciation of previously ignored novels (like Anne Brönte's *Agnes Grey*) or correct our interpretation of a poet's poetics (like Elizabeth Barrett Browning), respectively. Though focusing primarily on the American side of the Atlantic, Dawn Coleman's dissertation (2004),<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Coleman's work was published in 2013 as *Preaching and the Rise of the American Novel* (albeit with the chapter on George Eliot omitted). For this study, I have used her 2004 dissertation—a copy of which she kindly sent me in 2008—and her 2008 article, "Daniel Deronda' and the Limits of the Sermonic Voice," which was the published version of the George Eliot chapter of her dissertation.

develops the idea of Victorian-era novelists being in competition with preachers as sources of moral authority and the ways some novelists sought to appropriate the preacher's voice and ethos. In developing her argument, Coleman not only considers novelistic representations of preaching (such as the Father Mapple sermon in Melville's *Moby Dick* or Dimmesdale's Election Day sermon in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*<sup>7</sup>) but also develops the concept of the "sermonic mode" in which novelists adopt many of the techniques of preachers. Robert Ellison has himself continued to work on the sermon as well. Besides articles written on such important Victorian preachers as John Keble and John Cumming, Ellison is the editor of *A New History of the Sermon: The Nineteenth-Century*, which was published in 2010. Following that work, Ellison contributed an essay to another edited volume on the sermon, *The Oxford Handbook of the British Sermon, 1689-1901*, which was published in 2012 and includes many fine essays focusing specifically on the Victorian sermon.

As heartening as all of this work is for the developing field of sermon studies, there remains much room for development in telling this aspect of the story of Victorian religion. But the significance of (Victorian) sermon studies is not limited to religious studies. When we consider the ways in which novelists may have pitted themselves in competition with preachers, or have adopted sermonic modes and structures, we can begin to see that an improved knowledge of the sermon—a knowledge more akin to that which most Victorians would certainly have had—can lead to an improved understanding

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<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, though, in her chapter on George Eliot, Coleman does not consider Dinah Morris's sermon in *Adam Bede*.

of the Victorian novel itself. And, certainly, understanding the sermon and homiletics can shed light on the fiction of such novel-writing clergymen as George MacDonald or Charles Kingsley, to name just two of the better known preacher-novelists. This is, in fact, what Gregory Jackson argues in his article on the nineteenth-century American homiletical novel. Jackson suggests that these works have been ignored because current critical perspectives and present reading practices lack an understanding of the ways that the homiletical novel's audience would have approached them, which would not have been from a literary-aesthetical perspective, but rather as a moral script to be followed in daily life. But this is precisely the mistake that Jackson is trying to correct. He suggests that to recover the role that religious novels played, it is necessary to consider older models of reading based on homiletics and the sermon, not the conventions that would apply to the realist novel.

Similarly, Jennifer Stolpa's reading of Anne Brönte's *Agnes Grey* shows how the novel itself is styled after the structure of a sermon, both as a whole and in isolated passages which she treats as mini-sermons. Being able to recognize such passages as sermons-in-brief, Stolpa suggests, can help us better understand what Brönte is doing, essentially allowing her narrator to preach to the audience in a form that would be readily familiar to her readers. Her article also reveals how *Agnes Grey* addresses one of the homiletical debates of the day through her comparison of the two novel's two preachers and their handling of sermon texts. Such a detail as this might seem a trifle if one were not familiar with the homiletical literature, which Brönte, as the daughter of an evangelical preacher, would likely have been; knowing of these kinds of debates, though,

we can come to appreciate that a work like *Agnes Grey*, far from unproblematically endorsing patriarchal religion, inserts itself publically into a debate about sermon style and delivery that was typically the domain only of men, a point which is lost if one looks only for psychological realism or does not recognize styles of reading (and writing) based on the sermon.

Perhaps of equal importance, and more interest, from a cultural perspective, is the way in which sermons could shape the way the Victorians understood their world. As a case in point, in October of 1857, Queen Victoria proclaimed a national fast day in response to the Indian “Mutiny” that had just occurred. In “Autumn 1857: The Making of the Indian ‘Mutiny,’” Don Randall argues that it was the fast day sermons that shaped the meaning of the mutiny for England. All across the country, thousands attended sermons preached by some of the most famous preachers of the day, like John Cumming, R. W. Dale, and C. H. Spurgeon. What did the mutiny mean? How was the Queen’s proclamation that there were national sins to be forgiven interpreted for the average person? These were some of the questions the fast day sermons addressed. Spurgeon’s sermon was especially important, not only because he was the most famous preacher of the day (he was considered to be an indispensable tourist attraction for those who went to London), but because he preached the sermon in the Crystal Palace, before an audience of 24,000. Here, in the architectural heart of the British Empire, was a Baptist preacher discussing what the fast day meant, what national sins were, and the need for forgiveness (significantly, he lays most of the blame on the colonial government of India, and he describes the mutineers as “spoiled children”; this certainly mitigates the degree of

responsibility those in attendance would have to shoulder). The following day, articles about the sermons generally, and Spurgeon's specifically, were the focus of the periodical press. Randall's argument is that these sermons consolidated the varied information that the British public was receiving (via telegraph) about the events that took place in India and interpreted it in a way that gave a definitive stamp on how the Indian "Mutiny" was to be understood by the general public. A study of the sermon and its ability to consolidate, interpret, and disseminate information about events like the Indian "Mutiny," or the latest discoveries of science, or the various cholera epidemics can deepen our understanding of how national opinion on such issues was formed.

Along those lines, it is important to recognize how the Victorian sermon's reach extended well beyond actual sermons whether preached or printed. Sunday sermons would be analyzed in Monday papers. Various journals and reviews might take up a topic discussed in a sermon for further consideration or treatment, which could then in turn prompt yet another article in response. Beyond these kinds of direct responses to and interactions with sermons, the sermon provided a model and form of discourse for other genres. Thus, freethinkers might offer Sunday alternatives to church, or a scientist like Thomas Henry Huxley might preach and publish "lay sermons." Further, it is not even always so easy to distinguish between sermons and other forms of oral discourse, which might be described or published as "lectures," "addresses," or "discourses" as well as "sermons"; sometimes more than one of these descriptors would be applied to the same

discourse.<sup>8</sup> In the realm of belletristic literature, there were novels that included descriptions or even transcripts of sermons, or which were written in such a manner as to be described by contemporaries as lay sermons. Generally speaking, then, the Victorians engaged in a broad sermonic discourse, of which sermons were the foundational, but not the only, component.

While this present study will be anchored in “actual” sermons, it will draw from the full range of the sermonic discourse as described above. However, it is not my intent to define the sermon or sermonic discourse so broadly as to collapse any distinction between sermonic discourse and religious discourse, generally. I would not consider a periodical essay touching on a religious topic, for instance, as part of sermonic discourse, unless some relationship to a particular sermon or preacher could be established. Similarly, a novel that references some religious issue or includes religious characters would not necessarily qualify as a “sermon novel” or as being “sermonic” unless it meets certain defining features. Throughout this study, specific definitions and qualifying details will be given as needed for particular cases, but perhaps an illustration here will help clarify what I mean by “sermonic discourse.”

The ripple effects of the sermon from the pulpit to the periodical press can be seen in the case of the debate between Thomas Huxley and the Duke of Argyll over a sermon

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<sup>8</sup> For example, the Bampton Lectures were specifically established as “Lecture Sermons,” and while they were published as “Lectures” after 1857, until at least 1916, even when described as lectures, the full title noted that they were “Preached before the University of Oxford.” Similarly, Thomas Chalmers popular astronomical discourses were published under the title *A Series of Discourses . . .*, but it is noted in the preface that they were delivered primarily as week-day sermons.



preached by H. P. Liddon. On December 5, 1886, Liddon preached a sermon, “The End,” in which he touched on the topic of miracles and uniformitarianism. This sermon was reported on in *The Pall Mall Gazette* on December 6, 1886. In the February 1887 issue of *The Nineteenth Century*, Huxley takes exception to aspects of Liddon’s sermon as it was reported in the *Gazette*. This prompted, in turn, a response in the March 1887 issue of *The Nineteenth Century* by the Duke of Argyll (George Campbell), who defended Liddon and attacked Huxley. This debate continued in the April, September, and November issues of *The Nineteenth Century* before concluding in the letters section of *Nature* between November of 1887 and February of 1888.<sup>9</sup> Although the debate ended fairly far afield from the sermon which served as the catalyst for it, the first essay by Huxley was very much a direct response to the sermon, and the Duke’s first essay was a direct defense of Liddon’s sermon, specifically, and the pulpit, generally. Thus, as I’m using the term, Liddon’s sermon, the *Pall Mall Gazette* report, and Huxley’s and the Duke’s first essays would all be considered as part of Victorian sermonic discourse, while the remainder of the debate between Huxley and the Duke could be considered at least as being inspired by that discourse.

Keith A. Francis says, “To use a biblical analogy, ‘our name is Legion for we are many’ could apply as well to published sermons in the 19th century as the demon-possessed man in the Gadarenes. The 19th century was the age of the sermon”

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<sup>9</sup> Liddon’s sermon, “The End,” can be found in his *Advent in St. Paul’s*, volume 2. The documents by the Duke of Argyll and Huxley are listed, and many are linked, through the bibliographies provided at Clark University’s online *The Huxley File* (Blinderman and Joyce).

(“Nineteenth-Century British Sermons” 275-276). Indeed, when working with “the age of the sermon,” wading through the sheer volume of available sermons (which is only a fraction of those that would have been preached!) and deciding which ones to use often times did feel like battling an affliction of demons. Narrowing the selection down by preacher helped some, but presented challenges of its own. While some preachers would be widely known, perhaps even outside of Victorian circles (Charles Kingsley, George MacDonald), and some would likely be known to those at least passingly familiar with Victorian religion (Charles Spurgeon, maybe John Cumming via George Eliot's essay on him), others might not be known except to those more familiar with the contours of Victorian religion (H.P. Liddon, J. B. Mozley), and others may be all but forgotten now except to specialists (William Gresley, Thomas Hancock).<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, all of these preachers, including the latter, would have been known in their time even beyond their immediate circles and had something significant to contribute to Victorian sermonic discourse. For this reason, I have opted to draw broadly from a wide range of preachers of the period, allowing the chapter topics to narrow down the selection of specific sermons.

Through the process of reading and analyzing many individual sermons, two ideas emerge in each of the chapters that follow. The first is the presence of a dynamic sermonic discourse, which has been described above. The second is the important role the novel plays even within the context of sermon studies. That is to say, when read through

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<sup>10</sup> As an aid to the non-specialist, an appendix with brief biographies of most of the preachers discussed in this study will be included.

the lens of sermon studies, the novel's claim as one of the sermon's chief rivals can be understood not only for its scope and reach into the Victorian reading public (and even beyond when novels became topics of conversation), but also more directly in the ways in which the novel appropriated sermonic features. While the first chapter specifically focuses on the novel in its relation to the sermon, novels are also part of the discussion in chapters two and three, on the sermon's relation to science and the city, respectively. Thus, as much as I hope that this study can help make the case to literary scholars that the sermon is worthy of attention and study, so do I hope to demonstrate to sermon studies scholars that the novel can be a meaningful element of their work as well.

The first chapter focuses on the relationship between the sermon and the novel. Although the relationship could be competitive in nature, it could also be complementary, with each borrowing features commonly associated with the other. Homiletical treatises of the period will be examined to see how sermons drew upon basic literary techniques, like various forms of illustration. Features of the sensational could also be employed by preachers to heighten the emotional impact of their sermons, as will be seen in Charles Spurgeon's conversion narrative, which he often related from the pulpit. Conversely, Victorian novelists sometimes appropriated sermonic elements for their own purposes. Two of George Eliot's works, "The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton," from *Scenes from Clerical Life*, and *Adam Bede* will be examined in depth to see this dynamic at work. The chapter then considers the work of George MacDonald, who was a preacher before becoming a novelist, and whose novels well-illustrate the complementarity between the sermon and the novel. The chapter concludes with a look at the sermonic

discourse surrounding Mary Ward's *Robert Elsmere*, which illustrates well the competition that could emerge between the sermon and the novel.

The next chapter considers the engagement between the sermon and Victorian science. First, I survey the ways science was often presented in sermons, both as a source of illustration and as a topic in and of itself. Then, I consider the primary models used in sermons to characterize the relationship between religion and science: conflict, compartmentalization, and conciliation. While these models should be seen as existing on a continuum, they provide useful reference points for understanding the range of ways preachers presented science in their sermons to their congregations. Besides, however, looking at the ways science influenced the sermon, this chapter also examines how the influence could work in the other direction. Looking briefly at John Tyndall and more extensively at Thomas Huxley, I suggest that the form and techniques of the sermon had a direct influence on the way science was communicated to the public.

In the third chapter, I examine the evolving attitudes in sermons for and about the working classes, an issue that almost invariably focused on the city, where the poor masses were most concentrated. Although the varying attitudes, ranging from an emphasis on submission and control to liberation and equality, could be found throughout the Victorian era, the balance shifted from the former to the latter as the century progressed. And, along with their focus on the working classes, many preachers became increasingly aware that it was not only the poor but the city itself that needed to be transformed. Starting with a look at early-Victorian sermons about the working classes—which were generally quietistic in nature—the chapter goes on to consider the mid-

Victorian Christian Socialism of Charles Kingsley, the civic or municipal gospel of R. W. Dale in Birmingham, and the Christian Socialist Revival and the rise of the Salvation Army in the last quarter of the century.

The study concludes with an investigation of the causes of the sermon's decline as Victoria's reign came to a close. Several contributing factors are given—the death of the great preachers of the age; increasing competition from other religious and philosophical movements, other sources of moral instruction, and entertainment; the rise of modernism and secularization; and an increase in “diffusive” Christianity. While no one of these factors can account for the sermon's fall, taken together they helped knock the sermon out of its position of prominence in society even as it remained a widespread, nearly ubiquitous feature of the British landscape well into the twentieth century.

## Chapter 1: The Sermon and the Novel

In the opening of *The Oxford Handbook of English Literature and Theology*, Elisabeth Jay describes the relationship between theology and literature as a “wrestle between theological authority and the human imagination for supremacy in detecting or imposing patterns and meaning” (“Now and in England” 5). On the other hand, in their preface to *The Oxford Handbook of the British Sermon*, Keith Francis and William Gibson mention the “intimate relationship between the sermon and literature in this period,” and note that “these two literary forms were not necessarily in competition with each other and in some respects they were complementary. Sermons employed the forms of literature being poetic and lyrical as well as imaginative and speculative, and they were, like other aspects of everyday life, frequently featured in novels” (xv). Andrew Hass characterizes the relationship between literature and theology as one manifestation of “culturality” in which literature and religion are manifestations of ‘spheres’ of cultural experience. These spheres:

are no longer seen as individual components of an overall aggregate, but are part of an organicism, which is open and dynamic, yet ultimately inseparable, functioning as a co-evolving, co-adapting, co-determining system. [. . .]

‘culturality’ is the dynamic *interplay* between various realms of experience and between the conceptualizations of those experiences as they feed into one another [. . .]. (“The Future of Literature and Theology” 847).

In this chapter, I will explore this sometimes contentious, sometimes complementary relationship and interplay through the sermon and the novel as representative of “theological authority” and “human imagination,” respectively.

On the one hand, sermons of the period did not often make more than passing reference to the novel (though the late-Victorian novel *Robert Elsmere* made for some notable exceptions), but they did frequently make use of literary techniques, those “forms of literature being poetic and lyrical as well as imaginative and speculative,” like characterization or plotting and certain qualities of Victorian sensation fiction. Further, nearly every homiletical treatise of the period that I’ve read encourages not only using such techniques but also using illustrations *from* novels. At the same time, though, these same homiletical manuals and preachers can elsewhere be found criticizing fiction, particularly sensation fiction, and warning of its dangers. On the other hand, many novels of the period did have much to say about sermons and preaching, with preachers and their sermons often playing key roles. Furthermore, just as the sermon borrowed from elements of fiction, the Victorian novel also borrowed sermonic techniques and could work as sermons themselves both in form and function. Finally, there are also a number of novel-writing clergymen—such as Charles Kingsley and George MacDonald, to name just two of the better known—whose novels especially evince the interplay between the sermon and the novel.

### **Sermons and Art: Of preachers and storytelling**

In Victorian homiletical literature, preachers are explicitly advised to make use of literary resources. As R. W. Dale put it:

I believe in the duty of consecrating to the exposition and defence of Divine truth every faculty and resource which the preacher may happen to possess. There is no power of the intellect, no passion of the heart, no learning, no natural genius, that should not be compelled to take part in this noble service. The severest and keenest logic, the most exuberant fancy, the boldest imagination, shrewdness, wit, pathos, indignation, sternness, may all contribute to the illustration of human duty and of the authority and love of God. [. . .] the loftiest heights of intellectual majesty, the most dazzling intellectual splendours, every brilliant constellation in the firmament of genius, the lightnings and tempests of noble and eloquent passion, may also praise the Lord and show forth His excellent greatness. (*Nine Lectures* 25-26)

In the discussion to follow, I want to demonstrate how this worked in both sermons and homiletical treatises by focusing on two significant and commonly discussed devices: illustrations (which variously includes figures, metaphors, anecdotes, and parables depending on the preacher or homilist) and the use of literature, especially novels, itself.

Let us begin with the theory of illustrations, broadly understood here to include not only picturesque images but also figures, parables, and anecdotes as well as symbols, metaphor, and “imaginative paraphrase.”<sup>11</sup> In “Illustrations in Preaching” and “The Uses of Anecdotes and Illustrations,” two lectures he originally delivered to the students at his

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<sup>11</sup> See Joseph Parker, *Ad Clerum* 236-248; R. W. Dale, *Nine Lectures* 46-47. The phrase “imaginative paraphrase” is George Eliot’s, used in “Evangelical Teaching: Dr. Cumming” (*Selected Essays* 110). As a counterpoint to her derisive use of the phrase, cf. Dale 51-55 on the benefit of such imaginative paraphrasing.



pastor's college, Charles Spurgeon explains his understanding of the place and the purpose of illustrations in sermons. Spurgeon says that an illustration in a sermon is like a window in a building, and, like a window, they must be "subordinate to the entire design" (*Lectures* 3.5). That is to say, the illustration is there for the sake of the sermon; it is "*an opportunity for introducing ornament into [the] design*" but "is not the main point to be considered" (3.3, emphasis in original). For this reason, illustrations "are not the strength of a sermon any more than a window is the strength of a house," and so "*they should not be too numerous*" lest they weaken the structure (3.4, emphasis in original). While allowing, and even commending the place of ornament in a sermon, which he says needs "to be broken up, varied, decorated, and enlivened" (3.3.), Spurgeon is emphatic about not letting ornamentation take over because the effect would be to turn the sermon into a "mere pastime" "only suitable for an assembly of simpletons" (3.3, 5). R. W. Dale makes a similar point, explaining that it is no "merit for a sermon to be overlaid with ornament," which might conceal its meaning (*Nine Lectures* 44).

We can appreciate Spurgeon's point if we consider what he says the purposes of the illustration are: to attract and keep the attention of the audience, and to explain and clarify abstract concepts to the audience. On the matter of holding the audience's attention, Spurgeon knew that an inattentive audience is no audience at all; sleeping listeners hear nothing.<sup>12</sup> Citing the example of the Puritans, Spurgeon says:

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Lectures* 3.34, "We cannot endure a sleepy audience. To us, a slumbering man is no man."

The reason why the old Puritan preachers could get congregations was this—they did not give their hearers dry theology; they illustrated it; they had an anecdote from this and a quaint passage from that classic author; here a verse of poetry; here and there even a quip or pun—a thing which now-a-days is a sin above all sins, but which was constantly committed by these preachers, whom I have ever esteemed as the patterns of pulpit eloquence. (*Sermons* 3.153)

But even after an audience’s attention is secured, the illustration’s work is not finished.

The second purpose of the illustration is to illuminate the subject matter. Just as a window lets light into a house, so the illustration sheds light on the subject. While, Spurgeon explains, “You may build up laborious definitions and explanations and yet leave your hearers in the dark as to your meaning [, . .] a thoroughly suitable metaphor will wonderfully clear the sense” (*Lectures* 3.1). By way of illustration, let me compare two passages on the nature and role of Christ’s substitution in the scheme of salvation.

The first comes from an untitled sermon by Francis Covell, a Baptist preacher at Providence Chapel in Croyden, preached in 1878:

Therefore says my text, “God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation. Then He tells us how, “Through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us.” Here is a glorious truth, a wonderous tale, a glorious revelation! How certain is the salvation of God’s elect. Paul tells us “Christ gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world.” He gave Himself; soul for soul, body for body, God and man in one glorious Person, Immanuel, God with us. No man can redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him; “for the

redemption of the soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever;” therefore Christ gave Himself. Therefore the poet saith,

“Well might the sun in darkness hide,  
And shut his glories in,  
When God, the might Maker, died  
For man, the creature’s sin.” (102)

Covell’s sermon continues in this vein, giving some explication of or commentary on the text, offering other Scripture texts and the occasional excerpts of poetry which reiterate rather than illustrate the point. While there is nothing in this passage that is especially complicated, it is rather unremarkable, unlikely to leave any definite or lasting impression. On the other hand, consider this illustration from one of Spurgeon’s sermons on the same theme:

A woman is overwhelmed with debt: how shall she be discharged from her liabilities? A friend, out of his great love to her, marries her. No sooner is the marriage ceremony performed than she is by that very act clear of debt, because her debts are her husband’s, and in taking her he takes all her obligations. She may gather comfort from that thought, but she is much more at ease when her beloved goes to her creditors, pays all, and brings her the receipts. First she is comforted by the marriage, which legally relieves her from the liability, but much more is she at rest when her husband himself is rid of all the liability which he assumed. Our Lord Jesus took our debts, in death he paid them, and in resurrection he blotted out the record. (“Jesus, The Substitute for His People”)

This passage, like the sermon from Covell, explains the idea of Christ's substitutionary atonement, assuming our debts and releasing us from the bondage, or liabilities, those debts imposed on us, but does so in a concrete, not abstract way, drawing simultaneously on the common Christian trope of the Church as the bride of Christ as well as the sort of domestic scenery and plot (albeit in brief) that was common in popular domestic fiction of the time.

On this point of the illuminating purpose of illustrations, Dale adds a useful qualification, reminding his audience that "if fancy is active and imagination vigorous, the walls will not merely be pierced with occasional windows—the walls themselves will be transparent, the light will come through everywhere" (*Nine Lectures* 44). Dale presses this point, urging preachers to "clothe" their thoughts "in flesh and blood, so that they can be seen and handled by people who are listening to us" (47). This incarnating and animating work of the preacher must reach even to the very words he uses. Dale says that "every word that stands for a spiritual idea was at first a picture and a poem" but most of them have had their image "worn away and become undistinguishable" (47). The preacher's task is to keep his imagination vigorous enough so that he can "so use these words as to restore to the worn coin the sharpness of the original impression" (47).

Another type of illustration that figures prominently in sermon literature might be broadly categorized as storytelling, and could include anecdotes, parables, and, borrowing George Eliot's term, "imaginative paraphrase" (*Selected Essays* 42).<sup>13</sup> Joseph

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<sup>13</sup> While these terms are usually discussed separately, the distinctions made are not always significant for our purposes. Thus, I sometimes will use a quotation from a

Parker explains that “All men have somewhat of the dramatic element in them; hence they watch with eagerness the development and consummation of the plot. [. . .] *How will it end?* is the anxious inquiry” (244 emphasis in original). However, it is at this point that critiques about lowering the “dignity of the pulpit” grow loud. Dale notes, “Perhaps I may be warned that if the kind of advice which I am giving you just now is followed, it will be likely to lower the dignity of the pulpit” (*Nine Lectures* 35); Parker writes, “I know that you will ask, whether this, that, or the other is legitimate, or is in keeping with the dignity of the pulpit” (244) ; and Spurgeon says that “the prudes of the pulpit” might warn younger preachers, “Beware how you lower yourselves and your sacred office by repeating anecdotes, which are best appreciated by the vulgar and uneducated” (*Lectures* 3.15). Indeed, George Eliot—whose evangelical upbringing left her with a lifelong interest in theological matters even after she abandoned her childhood faith—complained of precisely this sort of vulgarity in the pulpit after finally hearing Charles Spurgeon preach: “We had plenty of anecdotes, but they were all poor and pointless—Tract Society anecdotes of the feeblest kind. [. . .] I was shocked to find how low the mental pitch of our society must be, judged by the standard of this man’s celebrity” (Haight 382). While stories for their own sake were discouraged (Spurgeon *Lectures* 1.147), anything that would help in “getting hold of the public ear,” even if it was “not up to [the preacher’s] usual average in weight of doctrine,” was not to be put aside (3.32, 33). Parker defends the use of parables by citing the example of Jesus: “We must seek the readiest entrance to

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discussion of parables to illustrate a point not only about parables but perhaps also about anecdotes.

the human mind [. . . It is e]nough for me to know that Jesus Christ dramatized truth: all the elements of a most exciting romance are to be found in the parable of the prodigal son [. . .]. Everywhere there is keen interest in life, character, destiny; little children feel it, and old men are not superior to it” (244).

Besides illustrating anecdotes or parables, the exposition of doctrine itself could be enlivened by the storyteller’s art. To illustrate this point, Dale commends William Gladstone’s expositions of financial proposals “with all the art with which a skilful [*sic*] novelist develops his plot” (*Nine Lectures* 38). Dale writes:

There were alternations of hope and fear. At the very moment when you expected that your eager curiosity would be satisfied, and that you would hear how everything was going to turn out, some new complication arose, of exciting interest, and you began to suspect that you were only half through the second volume of the story, instead of being at the end of the third. It was not merely in the way in which he kept all the commercial “interests” on the stretch that he showed his power. The statement of the revenue and expenditure for the past year had appeared in the morning newspapers, but when he went through the statement at night, and explained it to the House, the figures which you had seen a few hours before, printed in black ink, were full of life and light. (38-39)

The merits of this sort of exposition, according to Dale, were that it made fascinating what was an otherwise dry and uninteresting subject, enabled comprehension without effort, and fixed the idea in the memory (40). Besides merely capturing the interest of the audience, such storytelling animates sermons, giving them life and warmth (cf. 36, 47).

Scriptural paraphrasing provided another arena for preachers to exercise their storytelling abilities with which they could enliven their preaching. Dale encouraged preachers to (re)invigorate the “Divine revelation” to make it “real and alive” to their audiences (*Nine Lectures* 51). Speaking of D. L. Moody, the famed American evangelist and preacher, Dale says, “At times his realisation of the story he is telling becomes so intense that he almost makes you feel as though you as well as he had been in the upper chamber and listened to our Lord’s last discourse to His disciples” (54). George Eliot critiques this sort of habit in John Cumming, the popular Presbyterian minister of the Crown Court Church of Scotland in Covent Garden, London, who “Like all preachers of his class, [ . . . ] is more fertile in imaginative paraphrase than in close exposition, and in this way he gives us some remarkable fragments of what we may call the romance of Scripture, filling up the outline of the record with an elaborate coloring quite undreamed of by more literal minds” (*Selected Essays* 42). Eliot’s derision and the perhaps overdone examples of Cumming’s she cites notwithstanding, imaginative paraphrasing could be of great use to the preacher and his audience so they would not “remain untouched by the story” of the Scriptures (Dale *Nine Lectures* 51). Dale does add, though, an important qualification. Moody is at fault in making Biblical characters “talk as though they had been born in Chicago,” and “His reproduction of the ancient stories is wanting in exact historical truth, because the whole costume in which he clothes the characters is modern and western—not ancient and oriental” (54). However, “With the knowledge of ancient life and manners which you have acquired in this university,” Dale tells his audience<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Dale delivered these lectures at Yale University.

that they could follow Moody's example in respect to his "dramatic imagination" without reproducing his error.

Seen in this light, Eliot's critique of Evangelical preaching, generally, and Cumming or Spurgeon, specifically, concerning the use of storytelling, whether through anecdotes, parables, or paraphrase, does not touch so much on the essence of this aspect of preaching and teaching as it does on storytelling done badly (as she sees it). As a novelist, this is a fair complaint for her to make, and, as we've seen, these complaints are sometimes shared even by preacher-homilists like Spurgeon, Dale, and Parker.<sup>15</sup> However, Parker makes an important distinction between the preacher's vocation and the artist's:

There must be no display of mere cleverness in the construction of the parable [or, we might add, any other form of storytelling in sermons]; the moment the hearers are so far released from the grasp of the thought as to think anything about the forms, the highest object of teaching is lost. This being so, the Christian parabolist cannot allow himself to dally over points on which the mere artist may lawfully linger; the preacher is more than an artist, and is therefore bound to watch himself jealously lest art become a temptation to him. The preacher is an architect, it is true; but he is especially a *builder*. (245-246 emphasis in original)

Along these same lines, Spurgeon cautioned his students that "It is a small matter that you should be able to write the most brilliant poetry, as possibly you could, unless you

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<sup>15</sup> In fact, many of the specific critiques made in "Evangelical Teaching: Dr. Cumming," besides the few I've noted, can be also be found in the homiletical literature of the period.



can preach a good and telling sermon, which have the effect of comforting saints and convincing sinners” (*Lectures* 2.24). For the preacher, artistry—whether achieved through poetry, illustrations, parables, anecdotes, or paraphrases—must be subordinate to the sermon’s aim as a whole: the building up of the audience. Or, as Phillips Brooks, an American preacher and homilist whose Yale lectures on preaching were popular on both sides of the Atlantic, put it, the aim of the preacher and his sermon “must be nothing less than the making of a man. *It cannot be the mere training to certain tricks.* [ . . . ] It must be nothing less than the kneading and tempering of a man’s whole nature till it becomes of such a consistency and quality as to be capable of transmission” (9 emphasis added). Thus, the preacher might be obliged to take—or at least be forgiven for taking—artistic shortcuts that would be less forgivable in a work of art like a novel. I will have more to say about this shortly, but first let us move on from a consideration of the place and purpose of illustrations to their sources.

On the one hand, we might dispense of this section by saying that anything and everything might provide a potential illustration: current events, history, literature, and science, for example, are all sources Spurgeon recommends. But, most often, Spurgeon’s illustrations came from what Walter J. Ong calls “the human lifeworld” of his audience (qtd. in Ellison *The Victorian Pulpit* 74). Or, as one anonymous reviewer in the *Evening Star* of November 5, 1856, put it:

His colours are taken from the earth and sky of common human experience and aspiration. He dips his pencil, so to speak, in the veins of the nearest spectator, and makes his work a part of every man’s nature. His images are drawn from the

homes of the common people, the daily toil for daily bread, the nightly rest of tired labour, the mother's love for a wayward boy, the father's tenderness to a sick daughter. His anecdotes are not far-fetched, they have a natural pathos. (qtd. in Ellison 71)

Or, as Spurgeon himself explains, "No illustrations are half so telling as those which are taken from familiar objects. Many fair flowers grow in foreign lands; but those are dearest to the heart which bloom at our own cottage door" (*Lectures* 3.11).<sup>16</sup> Perhaps the quintessential example of this is a sermon Spurgeon preached in 1858, entitled "Everybody's Sermon" (*Sermons* 5.112-128). In this sermon, Spurgeon makes parables out of the daily routine of waking up, going to work, coming home, and going to bed (114-117); the four seasons (117-121); common places like the farm-yard, mountains, and hills (121-123); and varying tradesmen, like butchers, bakers, writers, pharmacists, or builders. For Spurgeon's largely working-class audience, such illustrations could not have been any closer to their "human lifeworld."

Nonetheless, it was precisely this fact that provided fodder for some of the most vehement critiques of Spurgeon's sermonizing. George Eliot, in a letter she wrote to a friend, complained that his tone was "utterly common and empty of guiding intelligence" and that his sermon was "destitute of insight" (Haight 382). As to his illustrations, Eliot laments, "We had plenty of anecdotes, but they were all poor and pointless [. . .]. It was the most superficial, Grocer's-back-parlour view of Calvinistic Christianity," and the

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<sup>16</sup> Note, by the way, how Spurgeon uses an illustration to illustrate his point about illustrations!

doctrine “seemed to look no farther than the retail Christian’s tea and muffins” (382, 383). Piling on, she laments that “He said, ‘Let us approach the throne of God,’ very much as he might have invited you to take a chair” (Haight 383). Another critic bemoans “the vulgarity, indecency, if not profanity, of his rhapsodies” (qtd. in Ellison *The Victorian Pulpit* 74).

Putting aside, for now, the possibility that these charges are only thinly veiled instances of “snobbery aimed towards [sermons] aimed at a popular audience” (Knight and Mason 127),<sup>17</sup> I think the charges actually contain the seeds of their own rebuttal. “Of course my illustrations come from the grocer’s back parlour and the retail Christian’s tea and muffins!” Spurgeon might answer. “Those are just the sort of illustrations that will make sense to the grocer and the ‘retail’ Christian.” Eliot’s charge that his tone was “utterly common” and her complaint that he invited his audience to approach the throne of God “very much as he might have invited [them] to take a chair” are similarly answered by Spurgeon: “Everything theatrical in the pulpit, either in tone, manner, or anything else, I loathe from my very soul. Just go into the pulpit and talk to the people *as*

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<sup>17</sup> Knight and Mason make this comment specifically with reference to George Eliot’s critical essay “Evangelical Teaching: Dr. Cumming.” The quotation originally said “writings,” not “sermons,” but Eliot’s essay was in response to the published sermons of Cumming (another popular evangelical preacher in the mid-1800s), and I think the charge of snobbery fits in equally well with the letter she wrote about Spurgeon’s sermon, especially as it employs the common stereotype of Dissenters as grocers. In *Everywhere Spoken Against*, Valentine Cunningham notes “that the novelists are often merely dealing with a conventional set of types, in a zone where ‘Everyone knows’—and therefore most people only vaguely know—what is the case,” and one such instance he provides is that “Everybody knew that Dissent was a shopkeepers’ religion” (200, 203). As for the anonymous critic I mentioned, Ellison points out the writer is in many respects simply expressing “his own preference for a more literate approach to sacred speaking,” and thus he “denigrates [. . .] the ties to the oral lifeworld he finds in Spurgeon’s preaching” (74).

*you would in the kitchen, or the drawing-room, and say what you have to tell them in your ordinary tone of voice*” (*Lectures* 3.33-34, emphasis added). Reaching an ordinary audience requires speaking to them in an ordinary way. As to the charge of vulgarity, Spurgeon does say, “we have long learned that vulgarity is a very different thing from what some men suppose” (*Sermons* 3.154). The same might be said about his so-called “profanity.” Spurgeon does indeed “profane” the pulpit, if by that we understand profane in the sense that Giorgio Agamben employs it in his notion of profanation. In this sense, to profane something is to take something that has been previously consecrated, removed from the realm of ordinary people, and return it to their use (Agamben 73).

This is in fact precisely what Spurgeon has done with theology. In respects to the doctrine of reserve, Spurgeon writes, “It is not true that some doctrines are only for the initiated. [ . . . ] The sublimest views of divine sovereignty have a practical bearing, and are not, as some think, mere metaphysical subtleties; the distinctive utterances of Calvinism have their bearing upon every-day life and ordinary experience” (*Lectures* 1.77). By clothing the sublimities of the Christian faith in the garments of the ordinary, Spurgeon puts them back into use, makes them into something that even the poor and uneducated could take hold of and use in their everyday lives. Thus, when Eliot complains that “He said, ‘Let us approach the throne of God,’ very much as he might have invited you to take a chair,” we might see this as an illustration of Spurgeon’s “profanation” as he invites his hearers to approach the throne of God without “the uneasy hesitation [ . . . ] before forms—and formulae—that must be observed in order to respect the separation between the sacred and the profane” (Agamben 75). We might also add that

the sacred and the profane exist on a continuum which can be traversed in either direction, and Spurgeon would likely note that in approaching the throne of God, the Christian is consecrated as much as, if not more than, the throne is profaned. So in a sense, by drawing on his audience's "lifeworld" to illustrate Christian doctrine, Spurgeon brings the poles of the sacred and the profane closer together, all of which relates to the "crisis" concerning "the distinction between sacred and profane" that Agamben discusses in regards to the incarnation (79).

Of course, as Spurgeon was well aware, "profaning" the preacher's work in this sense opened himself up to criticism. He notes that "if we adopt such a style, [critics] will call us clownish, vulgar, and so on" (*Sermons* 3.154). Likewise, R. W. Dale comments on this kind of criticism as it touches on various rhetorical devices at the preacher's disposal: "Congregations which have not been accustomed to the play of humour and fancy, to the flow of a fervid imagination, to the keen edge of sarcasm, will be perplexed and alarmed if sermons have too much intellectual vivacity in them. [. . .] they will not only fail to recognize familiar truth in its unfamiliar form; they will be shocked at what they will regard as the secularization [*i.e.*, profanation] of the pulpit" (*Nine Lectures* 57). But neither Spurgeon nor Dale was advocating vulgarization or secularization of the message of the sermon; instead, they are advocating that the preacher adapt his *style of delivery*—not the substance of his message—to his audience. Spurgeon himself notes that "When you begin with a people who have not heard the gospel, and whose attention you have to win, you can hardly go too far in the use of figure and metaphor," but the more familiar an audience is with the subject matter, the "less figurative, and more plainly doctrinal"

the style of teaching can be (*Lectures* 3.7). Joseph Parker cautions young preachers not to focus too much on “great accuracy, refinement, and variety of expression,” or “close argument” and “the niceties of refined expression” “at the expense of the instruction and edification of many hearers” who have not “received other than a common school education” (*Ad Clerum* 36-37). The guiding principle for using rhetorical devices, figures, or illustrations is to use that which “is best adapted to the capacity, the habits, and the wants of the congregation as a whole” (37).

Another source from the “human lifeworld” of their audiences from which preachers could draw was literature. While common prejudices and stereotypes about “vicious novels and corrupt dramas” certainly abounded, Joseph Parker reminded young preachers that “this is no argument whatever against novels and dramas that are good” (244-245). R. W. Dale, after recommending that aspiring clergymen read sermons, speeches, history, and science, also goes on to encourage them to read books “which, through century after century, have succeeded in charming the imagination and the hearts of men,” works like *Don Quixote*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *Pilgrim’s Progress* (*Nine Lectures* 101). But even more, Dale writes “that I do not recommend you to refuse to read books that have a merely ephemeral popularity,” for “If we know nothing of the books that our congregations are reading, they will soon learn to think of us as intellectual foreigners—strangers to their ways and thoughts, ignorant of a large part, and in some respects the most interesting part, of their lives” (101-102). Similarly, in his lecture to the (Anglican) Church Homiletical Society, “Study in Its Bearing on Preaching,” Alfred Barry, Canon of Worcester Cathedral, says “I cannot conceive that a man can speak to his

fellow-men with full persuasiveness, who is altogether ignorant of the currents which are actually swaying and directing their thoughts” (200). Consequently, he argues, “A preacher must not only think, but read [. . .] with a view not to what is merely human, but to what in literature is the word of God, heard through all human voices” (200). Although Barry denounces sermons that are “a mere *pasticcio* of quotations, perhaps from every book except the Bible” or those which are “a mere reflexion of the literature of the day,” he also notes that “so far as men speak what is good and true and beautiful, it is God who speaks in them” (200). In this sense, Barry recognizes literature as a part of the “Book of Humanity,” one of the two “lower books of God” (the other being the Book of Nature) which clergyman ought to study (199, 201).

Besides the role literature could play in providing illustrative material and intellectual stimulation to keep clergymen current and connected to their congregations, literature could also help preachers develop skills useful for their preaching. For example, in discussing the importance of the imagination in preaching, John Broadus, whose popular *Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* went through twenty-four editions, including two in England, lauds the role of poets and even novelists in developing the preacher’s imagination and commends their study as “exceedingly profitable” “if properly managed.” “From them,” he writes, “we may learn how to observe and compare, how to depict and interpret” (428). However, he also notes an important difference similar to the one I referenced earlier about the distinction between a preacher’s and an artist’s vocations: “we must not forget that they [artists] aim mainly to

please, while we [preachers] must subordinate everything to spiritual profit, and that such difference of aim should lead to great difference of method” (428).

However, if literature could be instructive and useful for the preacher, it could also be dangerous. R. W. Dale laments that “When sensuous poetry is corrupting the public taste; when coarse, sensational fiction is popular [. . .]; it is only natural that we should be in danger of adopting a melodramatic and hysterical kind of preaching, which stimulates the passions, but conveys no solid instruction and produces no wholesome moral or religious results” (*Nine Lectures* 25). But, despite the colorful descriptions of and the many warnings against sensational preaching found throughout homiletical treatises, how precisely to avoid it, how to know exactly where forceful preaching crossed the line and became sensational preaching, was not always so clear.

On the one hand, Broadus urges preachers to maintain “freshness” in their preaching through careful study not only of Scripture and theology, but also of current events, individual people, the age, and one’s self (147-149). Again drawing a comparison between preaching and literature, he writes, “Excellence in preaching, like the truly excellent in literature and art, must either take hold of things present, even transient things, and penetrate through them to permanent eternal principles; or, if it begins with general principles, it must always bring them to bear upon living characters and actual wants” (148). Broadus’s call for freshness essentially comes down to an appeal for relevance in preaching, for “pertinency and timeliness in the application of Christian truth to the real present life and its grave problems” (149). He then goes on to contrast such freshness with sensationalism, which he describes as “ministering to the prurient curiosity



of the excited crowd, assailing men and measures with cheap and unseemly invective, spending valuable time and strength in discussing mere side issues which have been unduly exaggerated for the time being into momentous concerns,” and which, he suggests, is motivated by a “love of applause, or, worse yet, of notoriety” (149-150). However, despite his earlier claim that “there is a marked difference between freshness and *sensation* in preaching,” Broadus admits that “in this whole matter discrimination is both necessary and difficult. A man is not likely to think himself sensational, —he is only keeping up with the times; the ranter around the corner is the blatant sensationalist!” (149, 150). Broadus’s description of sensationalism, though, contributes to this problem of discrimination and self-recognition, for it amounts to the same sort of caricature of sensational preaching one might expect to find in the pages of Dickens or Collins or Trollope.

Joseph Parker, in his advice to young preachers, considers such representations of sensational preaching to be scarcely worthy of answering. In addressing this “ambiguous expression,” Parker introduces an important distinction between *sensationless* preaching and sensational preaching. Concerning sensationless preaching, Parker quickly and emphatically declares his opposition, but before affirming a commitment to sensational preaching, he draws a further distinction between the stereotypically sensational and the genuinely sensational. The former he variously describes as:

a kind of pulpit mountebankism, in which the irreverent mountebanks play all sorts of grotesque and ridiculous tricks, pulling off their coats, swaggering from side to side of the pulpit, setting up what they are pleased to call penitent forms,

and treating with contempt all the decencies of public worship[. . .] a screaming noise, “an idiot’s tale, full of sound and fury signifying nothing” [. . .] an incoherent raving about things in general and nothing in particular; a perversion of every text; an insult of common sense; a recital of anecdotes which are untrue, and a use of illustrations which are unmeaning. (53-54)

If this is what is meant by sensational preaching, Parker says, “I need not put my indignant answer into words” (54). He then proceeds to a consideration of ministries—from Jesus Christ’s to the apostles’ down to the Victorians’—which were, “in the highest and best sense, sensational” (55 ff.). Parker even notes favorably that the ministry of the apostles’ “must have been marked by extreme excitement, must have been sensational in an unparalleled degree” (57).

The issue for Parker, then, is one of producing an “appropriate effect” upon an audience (57). The effect, of course, is paying adequate attention to the preacher’s message, the Gospel, and, hopefully, conversion; its appropriateness may be determined with reference to “emotional preaching” with which Parker concludes this chapter of his treatise. Here Parker states his “strong conviction that our sermons should be more and more marked by deep Christian *feeling*” (61). Without any touch of “natural pathos,” sermons are sensationless, void of heart and full of “a cold scholastic air” (61, 62). Instead, he writes, what is needed is preaching filled with “the spirit of sympathy, tenderness, and anxious importunity [. . .]. The gospel is adapted to the heart of the world; it seeks to bind up the broken-hearted, and comfort all that mourn, and therefore should be preached in a spirit kindred with its own” (62).

This discussion of Parker's on "emotional preaching" provides a useful position from which to distinguish between the two opposite, and perhaps equal, errors of sensationless preaching, on the one hand, and stereotypically sensational preaching, on the other. His discussion of the former we have already considered. But Parker adds a caution about emotional preaching that I believe directly relates to his earlier consideration of the latter. Parker writes that "nothing is more odious than an affectation of pathos, and nothing more likely to be resented than an artificial attempt upon the emotions of our hearers." Such an "hypocritical and abominable" attempt at emotional preaching Parker rejects out of hand (61), I think precisely because it would lead to the sort of stereotypically sensational preaching he has already condemned. Forced, unnatural, or artificial emotions in the preacher, or the attempt to force or unnaturally or artificially produce emotions in the audience is precisely the sort of sensational preaching Parker and others so vehemently condemn, not least because it can be—or at least can seem to be—so effective. R. W. Dale discusses this "peril to the souls of men," noting that:

Dramatic power in the pulpit as well as on the platform or the stage may move to laughter or tears; impassioned rhetoric, when used by the religious orator as well as by the politician, may lash the most sluggish nature into vehement agitation; and a sermon, by the native force of the preacher, may produce an effect on the emotions *which may be mistaken for penitence, adoration, or faith.* (*Nine Lectures* 26 emphasis added)

To avoid mistaking the effect a sermon produces on an audience, Dale adds an additional criteria by which to judge a sermon: “if the effect which we produce is not produced by the clearness and energy and earnestness *with which we illustrate the very truth of God*, we shall save neither ourselves nor them that hear us” (26 emphasis added).

All of this brings us back to that “highest and best” kind of sensational preaching Parker advocates. In order to reach a contemporary audience, Parker even goes so far as to advise that “upon the indifference which may have lulled the public mind we should pour the terrors and threatenings of the Lord; in the hearing of the luxurious and effeminate we should preach the doctrine of the Cross; and on the attention of the worldling and the scoffer we should force the realities and claims of eternity” (57).

Similarly, Dale sanctions the use of “the most exuberant fancy, the boldest imagination, shrewdness, wit, pathos, indignation, sternness, [. . .] the loftiest heights of intellectual majesty, the most dazzling intellectual splendours, every brilliant constellation in the firmament of genius, the lightnings and tempests of noble and eloquent passion” so long as it is in the service of “the exposition and defence of Divine truth” (*Nine Lectures* 25).

While it is not hard to see that such advice, in the hands of unskilled preachers, could lead to just the sort of sensationalism cautioned against, it can also help reveal where the sort of sensationalism commonly found in the sensation fiction of the period could find its counterpart in preaching and conversion narratives, which puts on display that “dynamic *interplay* between various realms of experience and between the conceptualizations of those experiences as they feed into one another” noted earlier (Hass 847). Charles Spurgeon’s conversion story provides an illustrative example.

In “The Great Change—Conversion,” the eleventh chapter of his *Autobiography*, Spurgeon gives a complete account of his conversion narrative, a story which he told in one form or another in his sermons more than 280 times (Jeffreys). Spurgeon begins his narrative by describing the overwhelming sense of sin he experiences as a teenager. He describes the heinousness of his sin, the “evil which slew my best Friend” (99), not directly—which wouldn’t do because, apart from its nature as *sin*, there were no lurid details that would make it appear heinous to someone who doesn’t accept his theology—but in graphic terms of the consequences his sin had for the savior, who had to bear the penalty of his sin. In great detail, Spurgeon paints the picture of Christ crucified: the misery of the dead countenance; the emaciated figure; the blood-stained, scourged back; the blood dripping from the brow, a result of the impress of the thorns; the pierced hands and feet (99). Spurgeon then says that as he contemplated this image of Christ crucified, he feels outrage that so innocent, so pure a man would suffer: “I wondered who could have been a wretch so vile as to pierce hands like His. I said within myself, ‘Where can these traitors live? Who are these that could have smitten such an One as this?’” (100). Then, he senses that the murderer was near, but in the dark; he cannot see him. He gropes about, but cannot lay hold of the killer who is drawing ever nearer, until finally he lays his hand on his own breast and realizes that *he* is responsible for Christ’s condition (100).

Convinced of his guilt, he still doesn’t know where to turn. Comparing himself to a bird flying over an ocean, Spurgeon says he was weary, but had nowhere to rest. He sees a crow “feeding itself upon the carrion of some drowned man's carcass,” but he has nowhere to land (103). He sees “the ship of the law,” but it is nothing but an “airy

phantom,” offering no rest (103-104). Finally, he sees “the barque *Christ Jesus*,” but too tired to carry on, begins sinking, falling into the waters to drown, until Christ reaches out a saving hand and brings him safely onboard (104). In another image, Spurgeon describes the process by which God had tried to reach him before, but in “the strong old castle of my sins,” he refused the offer of salvation until Christ, “lifted up His cross, [and] using it as a hammer,” strikes at “the gate of my prejudice” once, and it “shook”; twice, “it trembled more”; a third time, and, finally, “down it fell,” and he conquers Spurgeon, who then submits (102). In yet another image, Spurgeon says “the cross can be used to slay sin, even as the old warriors used their huge two-handed swords, and mowed down their foes at every stroke” (99).

This brief sketch scarcely does justice to the narrative itself, but it does show how the conversion narrative shares many of the same elements of the more sensational fiction of the period: the fallen individual who does not know where to turn; a foul murder committed, with the murderer on the loose and possibly lurking closer than one realizes; the desperate flight and near-death of the protagonist, who is then rescued by the hero; repentance and confession, followed by forgiveness; and, of course, the hyped-up, sensational diction and imagery employed to evoke an emotional response in the audience—with the intent of converting the audience, of course.

For some, such elements in preaching were a necessary concession to the times. In 1856 the *London Journal*, for instance, maintained:

We do not mean to assert outright that the people want stimulating as to the vital truths of religion, but it is quite evident that the masses cannot be drawn to places

of worship in which the pulpits are occupied by very pious, but very dull preachers. The mental pulse of England is beating rapidly, the national mind is voracious, it revels in excitement, and the pulpit must keep pace with it, or be content to occupy an inferior position. (qtd. in Bizzotto 300)

Such a sentiment echoes the argument by Parker noted above for the “highest and best” kind of sensational preaching needed to break through the indifference of contemporary audiences. And, as that discussion should have made clear, what constituted “sensationalism” in the negative sense often lies in the eye of the beholder.

Nevertheless, Spurgeon was criticized for his sensationalism. The notion of provoking emotional responses in congregations is precisely the point where these kinds of stories, especially when told from the pulpit, become subject to all of the cautions in the homiletic literature about manipulation noted earlier, for if the outward signs of revivalism could be similarly achieved through other kinds of sensationalism, like sensational fiction, then one might call into question the efficacy of conversions achieved through sensationalistic or revival preaching.<sup>18</sup> As we will see shortly, this problem of false or only temporary conversions for the preacher was dramatized in Victorian fiction.<sup>19</sup> However, it was not only a matter of being sensational or emotionally manipulative that some found fault with, but also a blurring of boundaries between preaching and literature. To borrow too much from the storyteller’s art—or at least

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<sup>18</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this problem, see Knight and Mason pages 136-141.

<sup>19</sup> Specifically, I will take up the issue as it appears in George Eliot’s *Adam Bede*.

certain kinds of it—was to risk adulterating the power that was supposed to be inherent in the preacher’s art.

Julie Bizzotto notes, “Spurgeon’s performative preaching style, combined with his vast popularity, positioned him, in the language of many critics, in a similar vein to sensation novels: both were derided for eliciting physical and emotional responses; for their melodramatic style; and their mass-market, cross-class appeal and popularity” (Bizzotto 299). Indeed, critiques like those leveled against sensational preaching were also leveled against sensation novels, too. In an 1863 *Quarterly Review* article, H. L. Manse begins with just such a critique of sensation sermons to launch his own criticism of sensation novels:

“I DON’T like preaching to the nerves instead of the judgment,” was the remark of a shrewd observer of human nature, in relation to a certain class of popular sermons. The remark need not be limited to sermons alone. A class of literature has grown up around us, usurping in many respects, intentionally or unintentionally, a portion of the preacher’s office, playing no inconsiderable part in moulding the minds and forming the habits and tastes of its generation; and doing so principally, we had almost said exclusively, by “preaching to the nerves.” (482)

Not surprisingly, Manse goes on to raise many of the typical complaints against sensation fiction—it’s morbid appeal to “Action, action, action!”, it’s inculcation of and preparation for vice, for instance (486, 495). But Susan M. Griffin notes that while Manse deplores sensationalism’s “‘preaching to the nerves’ instead of to judgment, as



preachers should do,” the larger issue was not “that religious discourse informs the sensation novel [. . .] as content [but] as form. The rhetorical persuasions of the pulpit are now displaced onto the pages of the sensation novel” (55).<sup>20</sup> Bizzotto says of this same excerpt from Manse’s article that it “highlights how sensational and contemporary religious discourses are directly interlinked through a parallel rhetoric that promotes emotional stimulation, both physically and mentally, within an audience” (300). In their *Nineteenth Century Religion and Literature: An Introduction*, Mark Knight and Emma Mason make a similar point, suggesting that one possible motivation for the stringent critiques aimed especially at sensation fiction was “an anxiety arising out of the recognition that sensation fiction and the conversion narratives favoured by Evangelicalism in general and Revivalism in particular, shared much in common” (139). Seen in this light, the comparison of Spurgeon’s “sensational sermonizing” (to borrow Bizzotto’s title) with some common elements of sensation fiction well illustrates the sort of competition—that “wrestle between theological authority and the human imagination for supremacy in detecting or imposing patterns and meaning” (Jay “Now and in England” 5)—that could arise between purveyors of the two forms and elicit such critiques of sensation fiction’s perceived encroachment on religious territory.

### **Art and Sermons: Of novelists and sermonizing**

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<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that Griffin attributes the *Quarterly Review* article to John Murray. However, John Murray was the publisher of the *Review*. Various sources I’ve found online, including *The Victorian Web*, attribute the article to H[enry] L[ongueville] Manse, an Oxford professor and Dean of St. Paul’s.

Comparisons of novels or novelists with sermons or preachers were not uncommon in Victorian times, as seen in—though hardly limited to—the comparison between sensational fiction and sensational novels. In the latter twentieth-century, a handful of works continued to make such comparisons, such as “*Hard Times: The Style of a Sermon*” (Green 1970), “Preachers and the Schemes of Nature in *Adam Bede*” (Herbert 1975), “*Alton Locke: Kingsley’s Dramatic Sermon*” (Muller 1976), “Preaching and Performance: The Rhetoric of High Seriousness in Carlyle and Dickens” (Vanden Bossche 1982), and *The Reader’s Repentance: Women Preachers, Women Writers, and Nineteenth-Century Social Discourse* (Krueger 1992).<sup>21</sup> But in the last decade or so, there has been a marked increase in attention to the ways novels engage and interact with the sermon and even appropriate its techniques. Most notable among them for our purposes are Jennifer Stolpa’s “Preaching to the Clergy: Anne Brontë’s *Agnes Grey* as a Treatise on Sermon Style and Delivery” (2003), Dawn Coleman’s *The Novel and the Preachers: Religious Oratory and the Cultural Value of Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (2004)<sup>22</sup> and “*Daniel Deronda* and the Limits of the Sermonic Voice” (2008), Tamara Wagner’s “The

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<sup>21</sup> While not exhaustive, this list includes all those works that included some form of the words “sermon” or “preach” in their titles I was able to find using MLA’s searchable database and the University of California’s Melvyl search engine. There are, of course, other works that address similarities or relations between literature and religion more generally, some of which will be included in the discussion that follows.

<sup>22</sup> This was her 2004 Stanford University dissertation, a copy of which she graciously sent me in 2008. It has recently (2013) been published by Ohio State University Press in a revised and expanded form as *Preaching and the Rise of the American Novel*.

Victorian Sermon Novel: Domesticated Spirituality and the Sermon's Sensationalization” (2010), and Linda Gill's “The Sermon and the Victorian Novel” (2012).<sup>23</sup>

A common consideration among these works is the ways novels appropriate elements of the sermon and could even function as sermons themselves. Dawn Coleman identifies “a distinct form of novelistic speech identifiable as the sermonic mode” (*Novel* 4). She defines the sermonic mode “by a cluster of stylistic features”:

a tone of conviction and certainty; Biblical and theological diction; stylistic structures characteristic of, but not limited to, oratory, such as parallelism, anaphora, and antithesis; and an apparent attempt to persuade an audience to correct thought or action. [. . .] It may be spoken by either a narrator or a character [. . .] and anguishes over a variety of philosophical and social problems [. . .]. It tackles vital human problems with heightened emotional intensity and emphasizes their human or divine solutions; it operates in the spirit of hope or faith. [. . .] The sermonic mode is preaching idealized and concentrated—passionate, eloquent, commanding, and brief. (4-5).

Along these lines, Jennifer Stolpa says the novel allowed women entry into the “forbidden zone” of theological commentary, and drawing on the work of other scholars

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<sup>23</sup> Another important work that has influenced my thinking on this matter is Gregory Jackson's “‘What Would Jesus Do?': Practical Christianity, Social Gospel Realism, and the Homiletic Novel” (2006). Jackson's article has since been incorporated into his book, *The Word and Its Witness: The Spiritualization of American Realism* (2009). Julie Bizzotto's “Sensational Sermonizing: Ellen Wood, *Good Words*, and the Conversion of the Popular,” which was referenced in the previous section, would be another example of such recent scholarship.

before her, describes the novel as “an opportune ‘pulpit’ from which to preach moral lessons” (227).

Although Stolpa’s article focuses specifically on Anne Brontë’s *Agnes Grey*, she makes an interesting observation which is more broadly applicable. Stolpa says:

Brontë self-consciously styles Agnes’s narrative as a sermon. This allows Agnes, acting as a female minister, to preach to a wide audience. Simultaneously, it allows Brontë, as a novelist, to enter into the debate carried out by her male contemporaries about sermon structure and delivery. Brontë’s novel preaches a sermon which at the same time acts as a “metasermon,” exemplifying effective preaching techniques. (227)

Commenting on Stolpa’s characterization of *Agnes Grey*, Tamara S. Wagner describes this kind of “metasermon” novel as “one of the most self-conscious sermon novels that at once features good and bad sermons and works as a sermon itself” (319). Wagner uses the term “sermon novel”<sup>24</sup> in a twofold way, first as “any fictional narrative, of a certain length, that contains or centrally features sermons, their composition, delivery, or reception” and in so doing “analyzes fictional sermons,” and secondly as one that “operates as a fictionalized sermon itself,” or “as a sermon in narrative form” (312, 325). In the discussion to follow, we will consider a number of works that exemplify some or all of these sermonic characteristics.

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<sup>24</sup> The term “sermon-novels” also appears in a *London Quarterly Review* of George MacDonald’s works, albeit derisively. See “George MacDonald as a Teacher of Religion” (423).

To begin, let us take up a mode of Biblical interpretation that was especially popular in Victorian sermons, *viz* typology, and examine George Eliot’s “The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton,” from her early work *Scenes from Clerical Life*, which addresses the use of typology within the context of what is really a larger critique of a certain kind of evangelical preaching. In *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows*, George Landow explains that typology is mode of symbolic interpretation of the Bible in which past events or personas (typically from the Old Testament) are taken as having a greater, higher meaning and fulfillment (typically representing Christ). Unlike other modes of symbolic interpretation, though, the signifier—the past event or persona—has its own, historical existence apart from the signified. Thus, as Charles Spurgeon cautioned his students in employing typological interpretations, preachers should “in no case allow [their] audience to forget that the narratives which you spiritualize [his term for typological interpretation] are facts, and not mere myths or parables” (*Lectures* 1.108). As an example of this type of interpretation, let us consider the ways in which Moses striking the rocks in the books of Exodus and Numbers can be interpreted typologically.

In an elaborate but fairly standard account of this passage, C. H. Spurgeon, in his sermon “Christ—The Rock,” develops a series of parallels detailing the ways in which the rocks represent Christ. Spurgeon begins with an analysis of the account in Exodus in which Moses is commanded by God to strike the rock to bring forth water for the Israelites to drink. This, Spurgeon says, represents Christ *personally*. Analyzing the various place names in the account, one of which means “barrenness” Spurgeon points

out that just as a rock in the wilderness is an unlikely source of water, so Jesus himself, in his earthly appearance, seemed to be an unlikely source of salvation. Moving on to the actual striking of the rock, he notes that the rock was struck publicly before all the Israelites as a testimony of God's provision, and likewise Jesus had to be crucified publicly for all to behold. Thirdly, Spurgeon comments on the fact that it was the rod of Moses, the "Law-giver," that struck the rock. As applied to Christ, Spurgeon notes that the Law is what damns all sinners, and it was the penalty of the Law that Christ bore.

The second striking of the rock, in the account from Numbers, Spurgeon says represents Christ *mystically*, that is, in the body of the Church, of which Christ is the head. In this incident, God had commanded Moses to speak to the rock to bring forth the water, but that Moses sinfully struck the rock twice to bring out the water. As a consequence of his disobedience, God tells Moses that he will not be allowed to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. Spurgeon typologically applies these details to the Church thusly: it was God's intention that the Church would be a source of spiritual sustenance to the world through speaking, that is, through preaching; further, that the striking of the rock represents the persecution which the Church will go through, the double-striking indicative of the long-lasting duration of the persecution; as a result of persecution, the Church would spread the water of the gospel, as in the case of martyr's whose testimonies proclaimed the gospel through their deeds; finally, Spurgeon notes that as it was sinful for Moses to strike the rock, and he was punished for it, so, too, will persecutors of the Church be guilty of sin and be punished accordingly.

As with the use of illustrations and anecdotes noted earlier, Spurgeon commends the use of “spiritualizing”—of which he considers typology to be one specific sort—in sermons for its ability to keep preachers “out of the rut of dull formality” and yield “a sort of salt with which to give flavour to unpalatable truth” (*Lectures* 1.103). However, despite the popularity of this mode of interpretation, it was not without certain pitfalls, and it had its share of critics. Even Spurgeon begins his lecture “On Spiritualizing” by noting that “Many writers upon Homiletics condemn in unmeasured terms even the occasional spiritualizing of a text,” and he footnotes some representative strictures against it (1.102). He then goes on to provide a number of cautions and guidelines for its effective employment.

In her story “The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton,” George Eliot also addresses and illustrates some of the pitfalls of typology. In the story, Amos Barton is an Anglican curate who finds himself in a town with a large Dissenting population. As one way of combating the Dissenters influence among the working classes, he places some books in his lending library “that would be a pretty sharp blow to the Dissenters” (*Scenes* 18). What is more,

Dissent, he considered, would have its head bruised in Shepperton, for did he not attack it in two ways? He preached Low-Church doctrine—as evangelical as anything to be heard in the Independent Chapel; and he made a High-Church assertion of ecclesiastical powers and functions. Clearly, the Dissenters would feel that “the parson” was too many for them. Nothing like a man who combines

shrewdness with energy. The wisdom of the serpent, Mr. Barton considered, was one of his strong points. (18)

Of course, the reader has been given plenty of evidence that Barton is anything but wise, about which more will be said soon, but for our purposes now, it is important to recognize that he has applied to himself the type from Genesis 3:15 in which God tells Eve that her offspring (typologically interpreted to represent Christ) shall bruise the head of the serpent (representing Satan), but that in turn the serpent shall bruise his heel (typologically interpreted to represent Christ's crucifixion).

In reality, though, "that notable plan of introducing anti-Dissenting books into his Lending Library did not in the least appear to have bruised the head of Dissent, though it had certainly made Dissent strongly inclined to bite the Rev. Amos's heel" (48). While Amos's troubles in Shepperton—a mild scandal, the passing of one of his children and his wife, the loss of his curacy—cannot even figuratively be equated with being crucified, Eliot does allow them to have somewhat of a redeeming effect on his congregation, for "his recent troubles had called out their better sympathies, and that is always a source of love. Amos failed to touch the spring of goodness by his sermons, but he touched it effectually by his sorrows" (74). In this case, the application of the type, though strained, at least partially fits, but not in the manner Amos Barton imagined, and this brings out one of the problems with typology Eliot critiques. Landow explains that although it was common for individual congregants to find the fulfillment of types in his or her own life, doing so was problematic. Landow continues:



However stirring it might seem in the abstract to apply types to the lives of all believers—if only because such applications provided powerful stimuli to act in a Christian manner—this procedure appears foolish when followed by a specific, very fallible person like Amos Barton. Not only does Barton fall short of the standard created by the type, but the very notion that typology could involve individuals seem called into question. (102)

So here we have one critique of typology, the application of the type to the individual. But Eliot's critique of typology is not limited to this sort of personal appropriation of the type, but also extends to its efficacy as a teaching device in sermons in the wrong hands.

The problem with Amos's appropriation and application of typology is Amos himself. "It is a flexible imagination," Eliot writes, "that can take such a leap [to bridge the gap between a minister's university-taught mind and the poor, uneducated working classes], and an adroit tongue that can adapt its speech to so unfamiliar a position. The Rev. Amos Barton had neither" (*Scenes 27*). This leads Eliot to a warning about the dangers of typological interpretations in preaching, occasioned by Amos's sermon on unleavened bread from Exodus 12:

Nothing in the world more suited to the simple understanding than instruction through familiar types and symbols! But there is always this danger attending it, that the interest or comprehension of your hearers may stop short precisely at the point where your spiritual interpretation begins. And Mr. Barton this morning succeeded in carrying the pauper imagination to the dough-tub, but unfortunately

was not able to carry it upwards from that well-known object to the unknown truths which it was intended to shadow forth. (27)

Ladow succinctly captures the problem: “Barton is sadly unsuited to the practice of his profession” (100). I suspect Eliot is not intending to discredit typological interpretation altogether so much as she is intending to discredit its use by Amos Barton, and any other preachers like him. In fact, I would argue that she is setting up Amos Barton—insofar as his preaching and his profession is concerned—as a type to be discredited.

Elsewhere Eliot compares Amos’s oratory with “a Belgian railway-horn, which shows praiseworthy intentions inadequately fulfilled” (*Scenes* 25), and she also describes the man himself as “superlatively *middling*, the quintessential extract of *mediocrity*” whose chief fault “was confidence in his own shrewdness and ability in practical matters” (47 emphasis added). This high opinion of himself is what led him to the Anglican ministry, and without which “he might have indulged in halting rhetoric at prayer-meetings, and have spoken faulty English in private life; and these little infirmities would not have prevented him [. . .] from *being a shining light in the Dissenting circle of Bridgeport*” (25 emphasis added). Reading these descriptions, one can’t help but think of Eliot’s characterization of Evangelical preachers in her essay “Evangelical Teaching: Dr. Cumming,” written just two years prior:

Given, a man with moderate intellect, a moral standard not higher than the average, [. . .] what is the career in which, without aid of birth or money, he may most easily attain power and reputation in English society? Where is that *Goshen of mediocrity* in which a smattering of science and learning will pass for profound

instruction, where platitudes will be accepted as wisdom [. . .]? *Let such a man become an evangelical preacher*; he will then find it possible to reconcile small ability with great ambition, superficial knowledge with the prestige of erudition, a *middling* morale with a high reputation for sanctity” (*Selected Essays* 38 emphasis added).

Though Eliot is far more charitable toward Amos Barton than she is toward John Cumming, the sting of her critique of Amos, read in light of her essay on Cumming, cannot be missed. Amos’s middling mediocrity is like a cheap candle, stuck in the silver candlestick (of a university education) and introduced into the drawing-room (of Anglican ministry), where its “plebian, dim, and ineffectual” qualities become apparent (*Scenes* 25). One particular sermon of Amos’s that Eliot critiques “was an extremely argumentative one on the Incarnation; which, as it was preached to a congregation not one of whom had any doubt of that doctrine, and to whom the Socinians therein confuted were as unknown as the Arimaspias, was exceedingly well adapted to trouble and confuse the Sheppertonian mind” (36). Nonetheless, this sermon wins the praise of the Countess Czerlaski, a woman of high standing but “small brain” who extols its “depth” and delights that it has been printed (33, 36). Again, Eliot’s critique of Dr. Cumming in “Evangelical Teaching” could just as well be applied to Amos here: “instead of honestly and seriously endeavouring to meet and solve what he knows to be the real difficulties, [he] contents himself with setting up popinjays to shoot at, for the sake of confirming the ignorance and winning the cheap admiration of his evangelical hearers and readers” (*Selected Essays* 52).

Amos's doctrines of sin and Hell are likewise problematic. Mrs. Patten, another of Amos's parishioners, objects to his extemporaneous preaching, "these new sort o' doctrines," (presumably the Low-Church, evangelical doctrines he prides himself on preaching) and his talk about "my sins and my need o' marcy" (13). Although the details of some of Mrs. Patten's complaint are called into question, the characterization of Evangelicalism's extemporaneous preaching and focus on personal sin and need for salvation would be accurate enough. We also can see a glimpse of Amos's methods in employing these doctrines with his parishioners in his handling of a "naughty" seven-year old boy who is being beaten and dragged to Amos for rebuke by Mr. Spratt, who is not the boy's father. When the boy's mother, Miss Fodge, tries to defend him, Amos yells "Silence!" and chastises the mother, then says to the boy "what a silly boy you are to be naughty. If you were not naughty, you wouldn't be beaten. But if you are naughty, God will be angry, [. . .] and God can burn you for ever. That will be worse than being beaten. [. . .] But [. . .] if you will be a good boy, god will love you, and you will grow up to be a good man" (29). Granted, he is talking to a child here, and attempting to head off an argument between Mr. Spratt and Miss Fodge, but given Eliot's distaste for the doctrine of eternal punishment (cf. "Evangelical Teaching" in *Selected Essays* 60-61), we could not for a moment imagine she would approve of threatening a child with it (to say nothing of the tacit approval for the here-and-now beatings).

Nor is Amos Barton Eliot's only evangelical preacher whose doctrine could fall under the condemnation of her essay on Evangelical teaching. Dinah Morris, from *Adam Bede*, is likewise implicated. Christopher Herbert, making precisely this point, notes that

while Dinah “is generally assumed to represent for George Eliot a saintly moral ideal,” her sermon in chapter 2 of *Adam Bede*, “The Preaching,” is “violently Calvinistic and accusatory” and creates a “mood of terror and anguish, [a] sense of prevailing sin, which is the core of Dinah’s official vision of life” (413, 415). Herbert does mention that:

Eliot [. . .] makes a point of offering a Feuerbachian defense of the sorts of superstitious beliefs that go along with Dinah’s Methodism: “It is possible, thank Heaven! to have very erroneous theories and very sublime feelings” [. . .]. But Dinah’s theories, her theological ideas as such, are not therefore to be set aside as unimportant. A distinction is to be made, and it is a sharp one, between her angelic personal qualities and her official role as preacher [. . .] and this official self of Dinah’s is given considerable play in the novel. We are meant to observe it carefully. (414)

Herbert goes on to make explicit the comparison between Eliot’s portrayal of Dr. Cumming and Dinah’s theology. I can’t help but feel, though, that Herbert is too harsh in his condemnation of Dinah; he draws less of a distinction between her personal qualities and her theology than the above passage would seem to suggest.<sup>25</sup> If his assessment is correct, how is it that critics still find Dinah to be such a sympathetic character? How is it that readers can find sympathy with Amos Barton given all of his personal flaws (even if middling), and his objectionable doctrine of sin and Hell?

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<sup>25</sup> At one point, he writes, “In the way Dinah nourishes herself with others’ suffering and with her own sense of sainthood there is the quality almost of the vampire” (416)!

The answer lies, I believe, in Eliot's narrators' ability to do for Amos and Dinah what she herself did not do for Dr. Cumming, and what I believe Herbert does not do for Dinah, and that is the ability to "discern and love sincerity of purpose amid all the bungling feebleness of achievement" (Eliot, *Scenes* 25). In "Evangelical Teaching," Eliot admits that "Of Dr. Cumming personally we know absolutely nothing: [. . .] our judgement [*sic*] of him is founded solely on the manner in which he has written himself down on his pages. [. . .] For aught we know, he may not only have the gift of prophecy, but may bestow the profits of all his works to feed the poor" (*Selected Essays* 40). Had she taken more care to learn of him personally, that is, had she exerted the effort to "discern and love [his] sincerity of purpose" as she does for her characters, she might "have realized that he was a philanthropist as well as a controversialist; like many Evangelicals, he demonstrated his living faith by good works. [. . .] We may not sympathize with some of Cumming's ideas, but we must retrieve him from Eliot's almost too-effective caricature" (Ellison and Engelhardt 386). This sort of retrieval from "almost too-effective caricatures" of critics is precisely what Eliot does for Dinah and Amos, and which provides a model for the kind of religion (and, by extension, preaching) for which she seems to advocate.

In "The Sad Fortunes of Amos Barton," Eliot's narrator anticipates the complaint of a reader "who prefers the ideal in fiction" that she is "doing a bold thing to bespeak your sympathy on behalf of a man who was so very far from remarkable" (*Scenes* 43). She claims further that "my only merit must lie in the faithfulness with which I represent to you the humble experience of an ordinary fellow-mortal. I wish to stir your sympathy

with commonplace troubles—to win your tears for real [*i.e.*, ordinary] sorrow” (59). In these brief passages, we can see the beginnings of ideas about religion and sermonizing that Eliot develops much more fully in *Adam Bede*, and it is to that work that we will now turn our attention.

In Chapter 17 of *Adam Bede*, “In Which the Story Pauses a Little,” the narrator addresses her audience directly, anticipating their objection to her characterization of the local clergyman, Mr. Irwine, who fails to live up to the ideal. The narrator’s response, in brief, is that her job as storyteller is not to paint pictures of ideals that rarely if ever exist in actual society, but to paint portraits of people as they actually are. Rather than holding forth images of what people *ought* to be, her role as a novelist is to reflect them as they are, and to do so sympathetically and with generosity.

Commenting on this chapter, Linda Gill writes:

Eliot chastises the reader for expecting her to create a sermonizing rector for, she argues, sermons are not the province of novels [. . .]. Instead, she goes on to assert, the novel's province is to create life as it really is, and thereby create sympathy with our fellow men and women through empathy rather than argument. [. . .] representations *of* life, not narratives *about* life, were the province of the novel and the means through which morality and proper social conduct were to be conveyed. (603)

Nevertheless, Gill does note that *Adam Bede* does include one complete sermon—the one preached by Dinah Morris earlier in the novel—and that “the novel itself functions as a sermon,” though she is somewhat vague on *how* it functions as a sermon (603). Tamara

Wagner also says that “*Adam Bede* may be classified as a sermon novel only in that it features a well-received sermon” by Dinah (323 n.55). However, I would argue that by its structure and technique, its exposition of a moral (and implicitly Biblical) theme, its employment of a sermonic voice, its use of “real” and “imagined” interlocutors, and the self-presentation of the narrator, Chapter 17 demands to be read itself as *Adam Bede*’s second complete sermon, and that it is this chapter that qualifies *Adam Bede* as a sermon novel.

J. Hillis Miller’s succinct summary of the chapter’s argument, that it “is not so much that I should know my neighbor as that I should love him or her,” calls to mind Jesus’ words to love one’s neighbor as one’s self, which could serve as an epigraph for the chapter (Miller 71; cf. Luke 10:27).<sup>26</sup> In Luke’s account of Jesus’s words, Jesus was asked by a Pharisee, “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29). Jesus answered by telling the parable of the Good Samaritan. A religious Jew, especially a Pharisee, would not have considered a Samaritan a neighbor, yet Jesus specifically holds up the Samaritan—not the priest, nor the Levite of the parable—as the exemplary figure his audience should admire and emulate. Likewise, it is not “prophets,” “sublimely beautiful women,” or “heroes” that Eliot holds up as the neighbors to whom we must “give all [our] love and reverence” (177); rather, it is our “fellow mortals, every one,” the “more or less ugly, stupid, inconsistent people” we must learn to accept, admire, and cherish—in short, to love—for “bless us, things may be lovable that are not altogether handsome, I hope?” (175, 176).

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<sup>26</sup> See also Matthew 22:39, Mark 12:31; cf. Leviticus 19:18



The chapter also includes characteristic features of the sermonic voice. For one, the chapter is laced throughout with moral imperatives: “These fellow mortals, every one, *must be* accepted as they are”; “it is *needful* you *should* tolerate, pity, and love” them; “you *should* be able to admire” them; and “you *should* cherish all possible hopes, all possible patience” for them; “It is *so needful* we *should* remember their existence”; “It is more *needful* that I *should* have a fibre of sympathy connecting me with that vulgar citizen [. . .]—more *needful* that my heart *should* swell with loving admiration at some trait of gentle goodness” in them (175, 177, 178 emphasis added). In addition to using direct, authoritative language like “needful” and “should,” Eliot also uses less direct, more suggestive, forms of address: “*Let us* cultivate [the beauty of form] to the utmost in men, women, and children—in our gardens and in our houses. But *let us* love that other beauty too, which lies in no secret proportion, but in the secret of deep human sympathy. [. . .] *Let* Art always remind us of [common coarse people]; [. . .] *let us* always have men ready to give the loving pains of a life to the faithful representing of commonplace things” (177 emphasis added). These authoritative proclamations well-illustrate the “preachy” quality of Eliot’s novels Gil points out, wherein Eliot “unabashedly pushes her ideological agenda [. . .] rather than allowing readers free play to come to their own conclusions” (604).

Despite this acknowledgment, Gil still goes on to comment that “this ideological ‘preaching’ is always a part of a dialogue; given the dialogic nature of the novel, it cannot help but be so,” and that as part of a fictional narrative it “is a far cry from the [monologic] sermon during which the congregation listens to a clergyman who claims to

be speaking the words of God from the Word of God” (604-605). Earlier Gil explains that however much a novel’s “sermonizer, and even the novelist who creates the sermonizer and the sermon, may intend that the sermon be the conveyor of God-given truths and unimpeachable lessons, [. . .] because the sermon is only one voice in the midst of others, it cannot help but be modified or even undermined by the multi-voiced context in which it appears” (596). Gil even extends this same point about the dialogic nature of the novel even to overtly religious novels that represent opposing viewpoints solely for the purpose of rebutting them, for they still represent multiple voices (605).

Seen in that light, Chapter 17 can indeed be read dialogically, for besides the narrator’s voice, it also includes the voices of an imagined reader, an “idealistic friend,” and Adam Bede. But then again, even monological sermons do as much. In fact, one of Eliot’s critiques of evangelical preaching is the way it includes such imagined interlocutors in sermons. She complains that “Like the writer of imaginary conversations, [the preacher] may put what imbecilities he pleases into the mouths of his antagonists, and swell with triumph when he has refuted them” (*Selected Essays* 39). Further on she complains specifically of John Cumming’s preaching that he “is so slippery and lax in his mode of presentation, that we find it impossible to gather whether he means to assert, that this is what a peasant on the mountains of Braemar *did* say, or that it is what such a peasant *would* say: in the one case, the passage may be taken as a measure of his truthfulness; in the other; of his judgment” (51). While we might grant Eliot’s point that evangelical preachers, generally, and Dr. Cumming, specifically, are careless in presenting these “dialogues,” or that his representation of such interlocutors are gross

caricatures (the “griffins” instead of the “lions” to use the illustration from Chapter 17) merely there to help them make their points, we might also raise similar questions about this chapter.

The novelist, just as easily as the preacher, may put whatever words she wishes into the mouths of characters or imagined interlocutors. That George Eliot typically does so with sympathy and charity, even toward Evangelicals whom it was fashionable to disparage, is beside the point. For one, such an assessment becomes a matter of judgment, and, we might, along with Miller, “note how condescending Eliot is here to her ordinary fellow citizens. They are all more or less ugly, stupid, vulgar, and distressingly inconsistent” (71). Still, the issue is not how sympathetically or charitably one invents or presents characters or interlocutors. Nor, for that matter, is it a question of the unfeignedly fictional world of the novel vs. the purportedly truthful world of the sermon, especially given the pains to which the narrator of Chapter 17 takes to present herself as a faithful, truthful reporter of humanity. Instead, the point I want to make here is that creating interlocutors to be argued against, or representing characters as illustrations for the audience’s consideration is not the exclusive domain of the dialogic novelist; it is a technique shared by novelists and preachers alike. And, as seen in the imperatives noted above, spoken with a “tone of conviction and certainty,” the novel, at least as seen here in Chapter 17, is not only “preachy” but sermonic (Coleman, *Novel* 4). Thus, the dialogic nature of Chapter 17 is not quite the “far cry” from the sermon as Gil would have it.

Chapter 17’s use of grammatical and rhetorical structures typical of oratory is also important. Besides the repetition and anaphora that can be seen in the examples of the

imperatives noted above, there is also a parallel series of rhetorical questions—another characteristically, though not exclusively, oral form of speech—in which Eliot asks her readers what they will do with those neighbors who oppose, pain, worry, gossip about, or irritate them (175). These and other oratorical features of the chapter, I would argue, are more than merely incidental. Coleman notes Eliot’s:

persistent interest in the power of the human voice to provide moral and religious leadership. From early to late, Eliot's fiction takes as one of its founding principles the idea that, as Walter Ong has put it, voice ‘relates in a special way to the sacral, to the ultimate concerns of existence’ [. . .] Fiction's very medium of print might seem to assert the spiritual power of writing, but when Eliot's characters want to offer moral insight or wisdom to one another, they speak, often passionately and eloquently. (“Limits” 408)

This last point perhaps explains in part why Eliot chose to structure the chapter as a series of dialogues. As already noted above, the chapter begins with an imagined reader interrupting the narrative: “‘This Rector of Broxton is little better than a pagan!’ I hear one of my readers exclaim. ‘[. . .] You might have put into his mouth the most beautiful things—quite as good as reading a sermon’” (174). Eliot then answers her reader’s critique, noting that “I feel as much bound to *tell* you” what she has observed “as if I were in the witness-box, narrating my experience on oath” (174 emphasis added). The chapter proceeds in this fashion—critiques from her reader, given as direct quotations, to which she responds—for a few pages. Then, her interlocutor changes, and it is her “idealistic friend” whose spoken objection she must answer. Following that exchange, the

narrator's discourse on loving one's neighbor seems to have concluded, and she returns her attention to Mr. Irwine, the Rector of Broxton, and begins a discourse on homiletics, in which *she* assumes the role of questioner and Adam Bede speaks at some length in response to her questions, much as if *he* were in the witness box and Eliot the (friendly) prosecuting attorney. In arranging the chapter in this way, as a conversation that her reader not only listens in on, but in some way is a part of, Eliot can tap in to that relation of speech to the sacred that Ong refers to, and to bring the reader along with her.

But there is even more to this aspect of Chapter 17, something which ties together the first half's argument about loving one's neighbor and the second half's argument about homiletics: the need for a narrative or a sermon to effect a change in the audience. Miller says the function of language in a realist novel "is performative, not merely descriptive. The obligation [. . .] is to generate the right feelings in the reader or beholder of such representations. These feelings bring the people who feel them to do the right thing" (74). Eliot argues for the importance of accurately—that is to say, realistically—describing people in the first half of the chapter. Her role as a novelist, she says, is not "to represent things as they never have been and never will be," but rather "to give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind" (174). Doing this, though, is not enough. The novelist, like the preacher, cannot stop at conveying "notions about doctrine," however accurate those notions might be (178). This was precisely the problem with Mr. Ryde as a preacher: despite being "very knowing about doctrine," "after all [his preaching] he left you much the same" (179, 180). No, the novelist or preacher must also "attempt to persuade an audience to correct [. . .] action,"

which Coleman identifies as another of the defining features of the sermonic mode (*Novel 4*). To accomplish this requires a recognition that, in Adam Bede's words, "religion's something else besides notions. It isn't notions sets people doing the right things—it's feelings" (179). Producing such feelings was precisely what Mr. Irwine was able to do: though he was not "much of a preacher," and all he "preached [were] short moral sermons," he gave to his hearers "a resolution [*i.e.*, the feeling] to do right" (180, 181).

But it is at just this point of the necessity of inspiring action that Eliot's homiletic runs into trouble. If, as Miller claims, realist fiction "must make something happen in the pragmatic world of things and people" (80), and this is done by producing the right motivational feelings, then how can a novelist know if she has succeeded? First, concerning the question of what language will "give a faithful account of men and things" and produce the "resolution to do right" (Eliot *Adam Bede* 174, 181), Eliot implies, according to Miller, "that the proper language of storytelling will be like the sermons of Mr. Irwine and unlike the sermons of Mr. Ryde" (79). Miller takes this point into an extended discussion on the nature and theory of language which is well-worth considering in full. However, for my purposes, I want to address a point Miller leaves untouched, and that is the respective lives of the two preachers. Superficially, the difference between and Mr. Ryde's and Mr. Irwine's sermons is that the former's are primarily doctrinal and the latter's are primarily moral. But the real difference between them, why Mr. Irwine's sermons are effective and Mr. Ryde's are not, lies in the lives of the two preachers. Despite his shortcomings as a preacher, Mr. Irwine "acted pretty much

up to what he said; he didn't set up for being so different from other folks one day, and then be as like 'em as two peas in a pod the next. And he made folks love him and respect him" (Eliot 180). Mr. Ryde, on the other hand, "was sourish-tempered, and was for beating down prices with the people as worked for him; and his preaching wouldn't go down well with that sauce" (179).

This concern with the life of the preacher was not something new or unique to the Victorians or their novelists. Similar concerns can be found in the New Testament, as in Jesus's admonition to his disciples to "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5: 16). Similarly, in one of his pastoral epistles Paul encourages Titus to "speak thou the things which become sound doctrine" and adds, "In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you." (Titus 2:1, 7-8). In one of the earliest Christian rhetorics, Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine specifically addresses the importance of the preacher's integrity as an essential element of his eloquence, even going so far as to allow that right living can compensate for weak preaching when he writes, "But the life of the speaker has greater force to make him persuasive than the grandeur of his eloquence, however great that may be" (IV.59.482).

The concern for the integrity of the preacher is likewise present in Victorian homiletical manuals. Spurgeon devotes an entire lecture to "The Minister's Self-Watch" in which, quoting Robert Murray M'Cheyne, an influential early-nineteenth century

Scottish preacher, he argues that “It is not great talents God blesses so much as likeness to Jesus” (*Lectures* 1.1.2). In Chapter 17 of *Adam Bede*, we can see Eliot voicing just such a concern for the novelist’s life when she writes, “let us always have men ready to give the loving pains of *a life* to the faithful representing of commonplace things” (177 emphasis added). And, this same concern can help explain the narrator’s confession at the end of the chapter:

I confess I have often meanly shrunk from confessing to [that lofty order of minds who pant after the ideal] what my own experience has been. I am afraid I have often smiled with hypocritical assent [. . .]. But I herewith discharge my conscience, and declare [. . .] that the way in which I have come to the conclusion that human nature is lovable [. . .] has been by *living* a great deal among people more or less commonplace and vulgar. (181-182 emphasis added)

Unable to claim a spotless life, the narrator makes a confession of her “sin”—an admission of guilt—in failing to confess—to bare faithful witness to—the truth of her experience. But now, in this chapter, she does so “as if I were in the witness-box, narrating my experience on oath” (174) (and it’s worth remembering the religious, as well as the legal, connotations of testifying), and she grounds her testimony in her lived life among the common people she now represents in her novel. This then, the life of the preacher behind the sermon or of the novelist behind the novel, is what can produce the desired effect in the audience, for it is through her good example that her audience can find inspiration; as Spurgeon puts it, “if your life be excellent, if your virtues be like a



precious ointment, you will soon invite your charges to run [. . .] ‘after your precious odours’ [. . .] and men will strive to be like you” (*Lectures* I.14-15).

But, whereas a preacher might be able to see the changes wrought in his audience through his daily or weekly interaction with his congregation, the novelist cannot.

Coleman explains the dilemma thusly:

Eliot complained to [Harriet Beecher] Stowe that “no exquisite book tells properly and directly on a multitude however largely it may be spread by type and paper” [. . .], a lament that suggests a certain frustration with the inability of print to have an immediate emotional impact on a mass audience. The morally impassioned speakers of Eliot's fiction continually struggle against this inescapable muteness of the page. (“Limits” 410)

Miller likewise notes that “Like all performatives [speech acts], this one is ultimately ambiguous. Its 'undecidability' is characterized by the way it is impossible to know whether anything really happens as a result of its force, or whether it only happens fictively, so does not 'really' happen at all” (82). Of course Eliot contrives the narrative in such a way that Adam Bede along with the rest of the parish benefited from Mr. Irwine and was moved to right action by him, but were any of the novel's readers? Who can know?

Of course, inspiring action and not just conveying “notions” is not only the concern of Eliot's narrator (and, presumably, Eliot herself). The Victorian preacher would likewise be concerned with the effect of his sermons on his audience. Thus, the same dilemma noted above could be applied to preachers and sermons, too, and Eliot

does so in *Adam Bede*. In Chapter 2, “The Preaching,” Dinah Morris delivers a complete sermon to a large audience. Toward the close of the chapter, Dinah has turned the focus of her sermon onto Bessy Cranage “whose bonny youth and evident vanity had touched [Dinah] with pity” (40). Reminding Bessy of the Saviour who died for her, warning her of the dangers of vanity, Dinah admonishes Bessy to “tear off those follies [her earrings]! Cast them away from you as if they were stinging adders” (41). Then, “Bessy could bear it no longer: a great terror was upon her, and wrenching her ear-rings from her ears, she threw them down before her, sobbing aloud. [. . .] this impression on the rebellious Bess [struck her father] as nothing less than a miracle” (41). On the one hand, Dinah receives what seems to be public confirmation of the efficacy of her preaching: Bessy has cast aside the symbol of her vanity, much to the amazement of those around her. But, by the midpoint of the novel we see her again, and the narrator informs us that “Bessy, I am sorry to say, had taken to her ear-rings again since Dinah’s departure, and was otherwise decked out in such small finery as she could muster” (266). Not only has Bessy taken up the ear-rings again, but her disappointed vanity in winning a prize of a drab gown and piece of flannel produces tears even as Dinah’s preaching had (267). Despite Dinah’s impassioned preaching, despite its emotional impact on Bessy, the sermon has no lasting impact, produces no real change in Bessy’s life. Thus, while the preacher might have the satisfaction of seeing the immediate results of her work, she might be deceived as to its effectiveness in the long term.

So yes, Eliot’s lament over the problem of the novel’s ineffectiveness—or at least the novelist’s inability to know of its effectiveness—can be applied to sermons as well.

Spurgeon, for instance writes of “a certain archbishop”<sup>27</sup> who once said “I have passed through many places of honour and trust, both in Church and State, more than any of my order in England, for seventy years before; but were I assured that by my preaching I had but converted one soul to God, I should herein take more comfort than in all the honoured offices that have been bestowed upon me” (*Lectures* 2.12). While this quotation was intended to display Archbishop Williams’s piety, preferring spiritual to worldly gain, Spurgeon says it “would be a miserable thing to have to say” this, for the Archbishop, like Eliot, was *not* assured of the success of his ministry (2.12). After all, Spurgeon writes about the importance for preachers of producing:

the right sort of effect: the inspiring of saints to nobler things, the leading of Christians closer to their Master, the comforting of doubters till they rise out of terrors, the repentance of sinners, and their exercise of immediate faith in Christ.

Without these signs, what is the use of our sermons? [. . .] *Miracles of grace must be the seals of our ministry* [. . .]. (2.1.12 emphasis added)

How, then, does a preacher avoid the misery of not knowing if one has been an effective preacher? One might rely upon interactions with his congregation, or letters from readers of his sermons. However, that does not entirely safeguard the preacher from the danger of misreading signs, or of not knowing the real long-term effects. But Spurgeon elsewhere writes:

The grand object of the Christian ministry is the glory of God. Whether souls are

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<sup>27</sup> The archbishop was John Williams, Archbishop of York (1582-1650). The following quotation was widely reprinted in books of anecdotes and quotations for preachers in the 1800s.

converted or not, if Jesus Christ be faithfully preached, the minister has not laboured in vain, for he is a sweet savour unto God as well in them that perish as in them that are saved. Yet [. . .] for the most part, the work of preaching is intended to save the hearers. It is ours to sow even in stony places, where no fruit rewards our toil; but still we are bound to look for a harvest, and mourn if it does not appear in due time. (2.179).

Herein the preacher finds a resolution of the tension that confronts preacher and novelist alike—being faithful in one’s preaching of Jesus or giving of an account or representation of men and commonplace things, on the one hand, and its efficacy and its impact on the audience, on the other hand.

For the novelist, however faithful one may be, her work is either persuasive or not, and there are only two actors in the transaction, the novelist and the reader. The Christian character of a preacher’s sermon, though, allows for both a human and divine perspective, and introduces a third actor, God, in addition to the preacher and the congregation. While the preponderance of homiletical manuals and similar works for preachers speaks to the preacher’s role in persuasion, they also recognize the limitations of merely human effort: while “miracles of grace must be the seals” of ministry, “who can bestow them but the Spirit of God? Convert a soul without the Spirit of God! Why, you cannot even make a fly, much less create a new heart and a right spirit. [. . .] Our ends can never be gained if we miss the co-operation of the Spirit of the Lord” (Spurgeon, *Lectures* 2.12). Spurgeon and other Christian homilists do not deny that the preacher has his role in persuasion, but that role is subservient to God’s. So long as he is

faithful in his preaching, he can leave the results to God and still consider himself a success. Thus, Eliot (or Eliot's narrator) may call into question the effectiveness of Dinah's preaching, but from a preacher's perspective, insofar as she faithfully preached Jesus Christ, she was successful regardless of the ephemerality of Bessy's "conversion."

Before leaving off our consideration of George Eliot, it is perhaps worth mentioning that her own anxiety about the efficacy of her writings was not shared by at least some of her contemporaries. In an obituary for Eliot published in the *Contemporary Review*, Julia Wedgwood had this to say about Eliot's fiction:

In reading her books, that numerous class which hankers after originality found two of the strongest literary tastes gratified at once—the liveliest fiction held in solution by the most eloquent preaching. The latter element can be ignored by no one. No preacher of our day, we believe, has done so much to mould the moral aspirations of her contemporaries as she has, for none other had both the opportunity and the power. [. . .] She had a voice to reach the many and words to arrest the few. (qtd. in K. K. Collins 69)

It is worth noting, too, that the *Contemporary Review*, though nonsectarian, was a religious periodical, and while Wedgwood's obituary may be less restrained in its praise for Eliot, it was not the only religious periodical (to say nothing of the secular periodicals) that had positive things to say about Eliot's works.<sup>28</sup> Even among those with

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<sup>28</sup> K. K. Collins's *Identifying the Remains: George Eliot's Death in the London Religious Press* (2006) does a masterful job of surveying the often conflicting perspectives about George Eliot in the religious press, stating "the most revealing moments in these obituaries are those expressing or implying uncertainty, hesitation, even confusion, and an acknowledged inability to label or condemn (71).

less positive things to say about her or her works, K. K. Collins observes that “If George Eliot emerges from her religious obituaries with any one identity, it is that of a controversial, influential religious leader” (5).

### **Preacher-Novelists and their works**

As much as Eliot’s work might epitomize the “wrestle between theological authority and the human imagination for supremacy in detecting or imposing patterns and meaning” (Jay “Now and in England” 5), as was noted at the beginning of the chapter, the relationship between the sermon and literature was not always competitive. Indeed, there were even a number of clergymen who also wrote novels, including such well-known figures as John Henry Newman, Frederic William Farrar, and Charles Kingsley. But perhaps the preacher-novelist who could best represent the “complementary” relationship between the sermon and literature is George MacDonald. Better known today for his fantasy fiction, and in the Victorian period for his realist novels, he was also a preacher and writer of sermons,<sup>29</sup> who might better be described as a novelist-preacher, for his works of imaginative literature (including poetry, fairy tales, and novels both realistic and fantastic for both children and adults) exceeded his sermonic and nonfiction religious output. Throughout his works, whether sermons or fiction, MacDonald displays some of the hallmarks of sermonic literature we noted above in Eliot, including the ways and forms of addressing his audience. What is more, we can also see those “humanistic”

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<sup>29</sup> MacDonald preached sermons while pastor at Trinity Congregational Chapel, Arundel, from 1850-1853, and occasionally upon invitation for various groups. He also published a three volume series, *Unspoken Sermons*.

qualities often attributed to realist novelists like Eliot, and sometimes denied—at least implicitly—to preachers by critics like Linda Gill and T. R. Wright.<sup>30</sup>

In a sermon MacDonald preached at the Unitarian chapel, Essex-street, London, in 1879, we can see a number of literary techniques on display, such as his creative use of a refrain drawn from his epigraph. MacDonald opens this sermon—simply entitled “A Sermon”—with a slight modification of the King James Version of Philippians 3:15-16: “Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by that same” (*A Dish of Orts* 170).<sup>31</sup> After discussing the relationship between “opinion” and “truth,” and arguing that truth cannot be transmitted through the imposition of opinions—which may contain truth, but is not the same as truth—MacDonald encourages his audience to walk according to the light they have, and what they lack, God shall show to them. From there, MacDonald says that “this is the condition of all growth,—that whereto we have attained, we mind that same; for such, following the manuscripts, at least the oldest, seems to me the Apostle’s meaning” (174). Here, about halfway through the sermon, MacDonald explicitly states his doctrine by

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<sup>30</sup> Gil’s work has already been cited. As far as Wright is concerned, I’m thinking of his contribution, “The Victorians,” in *The Oxford Handbook of English Literature and Theology*.

<sup>31</sup> The King James Version renders the sixteenth verse, “Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.” MacDonald explains that this ending of the verse “is pretty clearly a not otherwise marginal gloss that has crept into the text” (170). Most modern versions, including the Revised Standard, New King James, New International, and English Standard versions omit the ending or add a footnote about its exclusion in the oldest manuscripts.

paraphrasing the last verse of the epigraph.<sup>32</sup> Besides helping recall to his audience's mind the epigraph, this also sets up the repeated use of the verse as a refrain throughout the sermon.

At the end of this same paragraph, MacDonald puts the verse into the imperative as though coming from the Apostle Paul himself: "Whereto ye have attained, walk by *that*" (174 emphasis in original). At the end of the following paragraph, where MacDonald is speaking, he returns to the original wording of the verse, changing "ye" back to "we" and restoring "*let us walk by that*" (174 emphasis added). In the middle of the next paragraph, he states the verse negatively—"whereto we had, we did not, whereto we have attained, we do not walk by that" (174)—as a rebuke to the Christian Church for its divisions. As he moves into his exhortation, he repeats the verse again in the imperative, urging his audience "with all the power of my persuasion to set yourselves afresh to *walk* according to that which you have attained" (175 emphasis in original). MacDonald repeats the verse one more time in exhortation—"The thing that does matter is, that whereto we have attained, by that we should walk" (176)—and then offers another variation in the conditional, turning it into a motivating promise: "But to him who will live it [the truth],—to him, that is, who walks by that to which he has attained,—the truth will reach down a thousand true hands for his to grasp" (177). Finally, MacDonald works the verse into one final exhortation before his closing benediction, "Above all, let us be humble before the God of truth, faithfully desiring of him that truth in the inward parts

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<sup>32</sup> Interestingly enough, MacDonald borrows from the King James Version's addition to the ending of the verse—"let us mind the same thing"—which he otherwise rejects.



which alone can enable us to walk according to that which we have attained” (178). From a preacher’s perspective, the repetition of the epigraph throughout the sermon, eight times in all, would help reinforce MacDonald’s message, and was a common enough technique among even the best of preachers.

For instance, we might consider some sermons by another notable preacher, H.P. Liddon, whom the Duke of Argyll once proclaimed “the greatest living preacher in the Church of England” (Campbell 321). In an Advent sermon, “The End,” Liddon also employs repetition of his epigraph, “And He said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End” (Revelation 31:6). Throughout the sermon, Liddon repeats two phrases from this verse, “It is done” and “the End,” particularly at the end of the numbered divisions of the sermon. In each case, the repetition is nearly exact, and the use of the phrase(s) is simply to emphasize and repeat the point of the sermon, that all things come to an end, that at some point, each person, society, even the very earth will meet its end, and “the words will be heard from out the Throne, ‘It is done’” (*Advent Sermons* II.309). When seen in contrast with Liddon’s repetition of his epigraph, MacDonald’s varied wording of his epigraph for such versatile uses—as doctrine, reproof, exhortation, motivation, benediction—reveals more than just the skill of a preacher, but also the talent of a writer.

As a novelist, despite his popularity and even occasional critical praise for his style, MacDonald was often criticized for his sermonizing and didacticism. One contemporary critic went so far as to declare that his “preaching was suicidal to his art” (quoted in Ellison *The Victorian Pulpit* 112). Such criticism continued into the twentieth

century, and even one of MacDonald's most ardent admirers, Michael Phillips, author of *George MacDonald: Scotland's Beloved Storyteller* (which tends toward hagiography), concedes that "At times MacDonald's novels are, certainly, rather too long, verbose, with extended preaching or instructions that can become tedious" (271).<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, another of MacDonald's contemporaries, writing for the *London Quarterly Review*, did seem to recognize that the sermons were not merely extraneous insertions or intrusions in MacDonald's novels, but rather integral extensions of the author: "it is fair to think and write of Mr. MacDonald chiefly as a teacher [. . .]: it is the character he is most careful constantly to claim [. . .]. As verse-writer—as novelist—as fabulist—as sermon-writer, Mr. MacDonald never forgets he has doctrine to preach [. . .]. A preacher he is to the backbone" ("George MacDonald as a Teacher of Religion" 402-403). MacDonald held a similar view of himself, and in a letter written to his father after he was expelled from the pastorate of Trinity Congregational Church in Arundel, he wrote, "Do not think I intend giving up preaching—but I shall be very happy not to be dependent on it—if so it pleases God. Preaching I think is in part my mission in this world and I shall try to fulfil it" (quoted in Waddle 1). MacDonald never did hold a full-time pastorate again—though he

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<sup>33</sup> John Pennington, editor of *The North Wind*, a journal dedicated to the scholarly study of MacDonald, notes that Phillips is following the lead of C. S. Lewis—another writer whom he admires—who wrote:

If we define Literature as an art whose medium is words, then certainly MacDonald has no place in its first rank—perhaps not even in its second . . . . The texture of his writing as a whole is undistinguished, at times fumbling. Bad pulpit traditions cling to it; there is sometimes a nonconformist verbosity, sometimes an old Scotch weakness for florid ornament . . . sometimes an over-sweetness picked up from Novalis. (quoted in Pennington "Letter" 42)

Parenthetically, Pennington adds that "for the record, I disagree [with Lewis]" (43).

still occasionally preached at various pulpits—but instead “pursued a literary career, thus *fulfilling his call to preach through his fiction, essays and printed sermons*” (Waddle 1, emphasis added).

Robert Ellison laments that critics both past and present “regard MacDonald’s novels as the primary focus of their scholarship, and their study of the sermons is limited to commentary on whether MacDonald’s interpolations are an asset or a hindrance to his fiction,” whereas he argues that “MacDonald’s sermons, both those published separately and those incorporated into his novels, are worthy of study in their own right” (*The Victorian Pulpit* 112). While I agree with Ellison here, I believe he makes a similar mistake as those scholars he criticizes. That is to say, while other critics separate the sermons in MacDonald’s novels in order to focus on the novels only as fiction, Ellison likewise separates them in order to focus on the sermons only as sermons. I would suggest that what is needed is an approach that recognizes and evaluates MacDonald’s novels on their own terms, sermons, narrative, and all, woven together.

His earlier criticism notwithstanding, Michael Phillips makes a similar point, claiming that “The didactic *form* of MacDonald’s novels is not necessarily intrinsically flawed. Critics who seek to compare MacDonald’s realistic novels with other contemporary writing are judging it by standards that cannot apply to MacDonald. Quite simply, he was not writing the same kind of novel as his contemporaries” (272). I believe this is correct and was intentional. Ellison comments that “At times, MacDonald appears to be self-conscious, almost apologetic, about his tendency to use these novels as pulpits” (Ellison, *The Victorian Pulpit* 99), and there is something of the air of the-author’s-

apology-for-his-work in, for instance, the opening of *The Seaboard Parish*:

Dear Friends,—I am beginning a book like an old sermon; but, as you know, I have been so accustomed to preach all my life, that whatever I say or write will more or less take the shape of a sermon; and if you had not by this time learned at least to bear with my oddities, you would not have wanted any more of my teaching” (1).

Despite this opening, though, MacDonald rather unapologetically forges on, spending the next several pages preaching to the young about the valuable stories of the old, and to the old about the need to understand and maintain sympathy with the young, before finally getting to the set up for his story.

MacDonald’s “apology,” then, is less apology than a request for the readers’ indulgence, not merely to bear with him, but to prepare themselves to receive “a dish of good wholesome venison” (2). Indeed, MacDonald writes, “To give people what they want, would sometimes be to give them only dirt and poison,” but “To give them what you [the author/narrator] want, might be to set before them something of which they could not eat a mouthful” (2). MacDonald scholar Rolland Hein, discussing MacDonald’s novels, writes, “While MacDonald most aspired to be a poet, and took most delight in writing fantasies, he soon discovered his contemporaries had a limited interest in both. If he was to have a writing *ministry*, he had to write what the public would read” (*The Heart of George MacDonald* 230 emphasis added). Nevertheless, he still “regarded his work as a novelist as an extension of his vocation as a preacher” (Ellison, *The Victorian Pulpit* 98). When we keep these ideas in balance as MacDonald did—having to write what

people would be interested in, while wanting to fulfill his calling as a preacher—then we can read the opening of *Seaboard Parish* as MacDonald’s laying out his course for the reader: he’ll give them neither the “dirt and poison” of straight fiction they might want, nor the perhaps unpalatable fare of straight sermons he would want, but rather something in between, the two combined, which would be not only “good,” but also “wholesome” (2).

Read in such a light, MacDonald’s novels, I would argue, should be regarded not as realistic novels (or at least not primarily as such), but rather as a part of the “sermon novel” tradition,<sup>34</sup> or perhaps even better as a species of the “homiletic novel” as described by Gregory Jackson. In ““What Would Jesus Do?”: Practical Christianity, Social Gospel Realism, and the Homiletic Novel,” Jackson argues that such novels “engaged religious readers in narrative enactments aimed at merging fictive settings with readers’ everyday lives” and “aimed to facilitate private devotion, strengthen moral autonomy, and foster social engagement through particular acts of reading” (642). From a homiletic perspective, then, MacDonald’s novels would be valued for and derive “moral authority [. . .] not from the text’s conventional literary aesthetic but from its function as a moral script for spiritual performance” (643). Although MacDonald’s novels don’t necessarily lack in literary, aesthetic merit, the homiletic focus allows us to better see the

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<sup>34</sup> The term was used by the reviewer for the *London Quarterly Review* (“George MacDonald as a Teacher of Religion” 423) and is also the term Tamara Wagner uses, which was explained earlier in this chapter; the first part of her definition is particularly applicable to MacDonald: “any fictional narrative, of a certain length, that contains or centrally features sermons, their composition, delivery, or reception” and in so doing “analyzes fictional sermons” (312, 325).

sermonic element of his novels as part and parcel of them.

Perhaps a comparison with another kind of fiction that arose in the Victorian era would be illustrative. In 1851, the term “Science-Fiction” was used for the first time, in a book by William Wilson. In *A Little Earnest Book Upon a Great Old Subject*, Wilson writes:

Fiction has lately been chosen as a means of familiarizing science [. . .] with great success. We hope it will not be long before we may have other works of Science-Fiction, as we believe such works likely to fulfil a good purpose, and create an interest, where, unhappily, science alone might fail.

Campbell says that ‘Fiction in Poetry is not the reverse of truth, but her soft and enchanting resemblance.’ Now this applies especially to Science-Fiction, in which the revealed truths of Science may be given, interwoven with a pleasing story which may itself be poetical and *true*—thus circulating a knowledge of the Poetry of Science, clothed in a garb of the Poetry of Life. The influences of Science inter-penetrate the whole Earth, breathing eloquently through the framework of Creation. (137-140)

This description of the role of science fiction would, I believe, work equally well with the way MacDonald’s sermon novels work. That is, in the same way science fiction allows the “Poetry of Science” to be “clothed in a garb of the Poetry of Life,” so, too, does the sermon novel allow MacDonald to clothe the “Poetry of Religion” in the “Poetry of Life.” What is more, the influence works both ways, so that MacDonald could also clothe the Poetry of Life in the Poetry of religion, for certainly MacDonald believed that “The

influences of [Religion] inter-penetrate the whole Earth, breathing eloquently through the framework of Creation.” Indeed, Stephen Prickett notes:

This idea of two worlds co-existing in time and space, superimposed upon one another and yet, except for the occasional mysterious doorway, totally invisible to one another, is one of the most persistent themes of George MacDonald’s fantasy writing.[. . .] It was a duality that MacDonald himself was entirely conscious of. He was in his life as in his writings a man of two worlds. It was his peculiar gift as a writer to see and to make others see that to live in two juxtaposed worlds is not an accident of spiritual geography or a psychological quirk, but part of man’s normal condition of existence. (“The Two Worlds” 14-15).

While Prickett specifically speaks of MacDonald’s fantasy writing, the same principle operates in his realist fiction. Consider, for instance, the following passage from *Adela Cathcart*, Book II, Chapter II, “The Curate and His Wife”:

But in every one of [my fellowmen] is a secret chamber, to which God has access from behind by a hidden door, while they know nothing of this chamber; and the other door towards their own consciousness is hidden by darkness and wrong and ruin of all kinds. Sometimes they become dimly aware that there must be such a door. Some of us search for it, find it, turn back aghast, while God is standing behind the door waiting to be found, and ready to hold forth the arms of eternal tenderness to him who will open and look. Some of us have torn the door open and lo! there is the Father, at the heart of us, at the heart of all things. (177)

There is a dual reality at work here. On one level is the visible world of everyday life in

which Harry Armstrong, the curate, beholds his fellow men, the poor he and his wife must live among while he is trying to pay off his debts, in their wretched state. But behind this reality is another, the spiritual realm where God waits, “hidden by darkness and wrong and ruin.” While in MacDonald’s fantasy, “the occasional mysterious doorway” Prickett speaks of that separates the spiritual from the visible world is a literal doorway, in this passage the “hidden door” is figurative, but no less the real for that. There is a progression here, too, that the curate describes, a process of coming to a spiritual awakening: first is a mere dim awareness that such a door exists; then there is a seeking for the door, but a turning back upon finding it; finally comes the opening of the door and the discovery of the Father.

This new understanding of Harry’s, of “the state of my fellowmen, with all their ignorance, and hate, and revenge,” comes not from the condescension of the gentleman-preacher for the benighted masses, but rather from his own spiritual awakening (*Adela Cathcart* 177). Though initially disgusted by the coarseness of the people he lives among at the London lodging house where he rents a room, “by degrees I came to give myself to know them” (174), and in doing so:

The one thing I learned was, that they and I were one, that our hearts were the same. [. . .] Sometimes I was seized with a kind of horror, beholding my own visage in the mirror which some poor wretch's story held up to me—distorted perhaps by the flaws in the glass, but still mine: I saw myself in other circumstances and under other influences, and felt sometimes for a moment, as if I had been guilty of the very deeds —more often of the very neglects that had



brought my companion to misery. I felt in the most solemn moods of reflection, that I might have done all that, and become all that. I saw but myself, over and over again, with wondrous variations, none sufficient to destroy the identity. And I said to myself that, if I was so like them in all that was undesirable, it must be possible for them to become like me in all, whatever it was, that rendered me in any way superior to them. (175)

This “superiority” he soon realizes is nothing owing to himself, but rather to Christ the Lord, and if he, Harry, is to have any role in helping raise up the poor, he must first himself “be heaved out of the pit” (175). This leads him to contemplate the rising of Christ until he reaches the conclusion that “I must rise by partaking in my degree of his food, by doing in my degree his work” (176). He then falls on his knees in prayer, after which he proclaims, “A new life awoke in me from that hour, feeble and dim, but yet life” (176). His own spiritual awakening, then, comes after he first learns to see properly the visible world, or in this case, its inhabitants, and to recognize his spiritual kinship with them and be able to see himself in them.

The language Harry uses to describe this revelation—“beholding my own visage in the mirror,” “distorted perhaps by the flaws in the glass”—recalls the language the apostle Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 13:12, “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” This verse is commonly interpreted according to “the idea [. . .] of seeing objects by reflection from a mirror, which reflects only their imperfect forms” (Barnes). While this interpretation fits well with Harry’s figure of seeing himself in the mirror of his

neighbors' stories, though distorted by the flaws in the mirror, Albert Barnes, a nineteenth century American theologian popular on both sides of the Atlantic, notes that "this interpretation does not well accord with the apostle's idea of seeing things obscurely. The most natural idea is that of seeing objects by an imperfect medium, by looking 'through' something in contemplating them." Whether or not MacDonald had this specifically in mind, it does correlate well with MacDonald's purpose here, which is to be able to help his readers to see "through" this visible reality and to perceive, even if dimly, the hidden door to the spiritual realm, and, God permitting, to find that door to God, even as Harry did and hopes to be able to do for his fellowmen.

The context of the verse, too, is significant, coming as it does in the midst of the famous passage on "love" (or "charity" as the KJV has it). Toward the beginning of the chapter, in verse 3, Paul also writes, "And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, [ . . . ] and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." For Harry to be able to profitably work among the poor, he must first learn to see them through the eyes of love—that is, through the eyes of God, who is Love. But this alone, would likewise be insufficient. For Harry to complete his awakening, he cannot only come to an intellectual awareness; he must also obey and act. So, "I rose, and bethinking me of the words of the Son, *I went and tried to do them*" (*Adela Cathcart* 176, emphasis added). It is only after he walks according to that which he has attained—much as MacDonald admonished his audience in "A Sermon," discussed above—that he sees his neighbors correctly: "*Then I understood the state of my fellowmen*" (177).

This chapter from *Adela Cathcart* provides an interesting contrast, too, with chapter 17 of *Adam Bede*. There, too, we find a similar use of the “mirror” as metaphor, when Eliot writes that her narrator’s duty is “to give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind. The mirror is doubtless defective, the outlines will sometimes be disturbed, the reflection faint or confused; but I feel [. . .] bound to tell you as precisely as I can what that reflection is” (174). Additionally, we saw that the duty to love one’s neighbor—even those “more or less ugly, stupid, inconsistent people,” who oppose, pain, worry, gossip about, or irritate them (175)—was the chapter’s theme. But whereas Eliot saw herself as a novelist, whose job it was to reflect others by the mirror of her own mind, for Harry, it is his neighbors—even “with all their ignorance, and hate, and revenge; some misled by passion, some blinded by dulness, some turned monomaniacs from a fierce sense of injustice done them” (MacDonald, *Adela Cathcart* 177)—who are the mirrors in which he sees himself. That is, while Eliot’s narrator seems to maintain an objective distance from her neighbors in order to reflect them accurately, Harry identifies with his neighbors in order to reflect on himself.

What is more, Eliot’s narrator specifically argues that:

These fellow-mortals, every one, must be accepted as they are: you can neither straighten their noses, nor brighten their wit, nor rectify their dispositions; and it is these people—amongst whom your life is passed—that it is needful you should tolerate, pity, and love: it is these more or less ugly, stupid, inconsistent people whose movements of goodness you should be able to admire—for whom you should cherish all possible hopes, all possible patience. And I would not, even if I

had the choice, be the clever novelist who could create a world so much better than this [. . .]. (175)

Eliot's narrator explicitly rejects the notion of the Ideal, the representation of "things as they never have been and never will be" (174). Such an approach, though, MacDonald would reject insofar as it fails to perceive spiritual realities. By way of contrast, consider the following passage from another of MacDonald's novels, *David Elginbrod*, in which Robert Falconer is discussing his favorite preacher and his manner of regarding human faces:

In these human faces, others may see this or that inferior expression, may find out the mean and the small and the incomplete: he looks for and finds *the ideal; the grand, sacred, God-meant meaning*; and by that he holds as *the meaning* of the human countenances, for it is the meaning of him who made them. [. . .] he passes by moods and tempers, and beholds the main character—that on whose surface the temporal and transient floats. [. . .] in faces [. . .] he loves *the divine substance*. (409)

For Robert Falconer, it is being able to see beyond the surface—beyond Eliot's crooked noses, dim wits, and ill dispositions—to the divine substance that matters. That is not to say that the surface is unimportant, for, in a physical sense, that is all we can see.

However, in a sermon entitled, "The Voice of Job," MacDonald writes, "The show of things is that for which God cares most, for their show is the face of far deeper things than they; we see in them, in a distant way, as in a glass darkly, the face of the unseen" (*Unspoken Second* 90). Here again we have the metaphor of seeing in a glass darkly, and

it is through this dark glass of the surface, when we learn to look past the temporal and transient, that we can perceive the sacred, God-meant meaning people have.

This is not to say that one ought simply to ignore what is unpleasant in this world; MacDonald is no Pollyanna. Harry Armstrong, like Eliot's narrator, fully acknowledges the coarseness of those around him, and when he comes to his new understanding of his fellowmen, it is an understanding of them "with all their ignorance, and hate, and revenge; some misled by passion, some blinded by dulness, some turned monomaniacs from a fierce sense of injustice done them" (*Adela Cathcart* 177). But this "realistic" assessment or awareness of one's neighbors is not answered by mere tolerance or pity or love or admiration or any other feeling or emotion. For MacDonald, feeling or knowledge was never enough, might even be worse than nothing, unless it is followed by obedience to Christ manifested through action, through service or ministering to one's neighbors.

### **The Sermon, the Novel, and Sermonic Discourse**

George MacDonald was not alone in seeing service and ministry to one's neighbor as the proper outworking of Christian faith. But whereas for MacDonald this service was both evidence of and enabled by Christian faith, in the second half of the century, there was a growing literary skepticism toward Christianity, and the question arose as to what would replace it and whether this replacement could provide the motive power for love and duty toward one's neighbor. George Eliot offered various answers to that question in her works in the third quarter of the century; in the last quarter, as the question was being asked not only in literature, but in religious circles as well, another answer to that question was Mary Ward's *Robert Elsmere*.

*Robert Elsmere* is often portrayed as the representative novel of the mid- to late-Victorian “crisis of faith,” one of the few explicitly religious novels of the period worthy of serious critical attention. In his essay on the Victorians in *The Oxford Handbook of English Literature and Theology*, T. H. Wright, who dismisses many of the religious novels of the period as having “little literary or even theological merit [. . .] of interest primarily to the historian as representative and illustrative of their age” (152), argues, “Perhaps the most interesting Victorian religious novels are those categorized by [Margaret] Maison as of ‘Lost Faith’ or ‘Towards Unorthodox Faith,’” among which he includes “Ward’s *Robert Elsmere*, which can, in my view, lay claim to genuine literary and theological merit” (152-153). The novel—the story of the title character’s journey from orthodox belief to honest doubt to heterodoxy—and its challenge to traditional, orthodox Christianity is well known—the Higher Criticism that was coming from the Continent was making an unquestioning faith in the Bible untenable, the idea of miracles was discredited, the merely human Jesus was being rescued from the accretion of legend that had grown up around him, and Christianity was evolving into something less small and local. This scant summary scarcely does justice to the novel’s concerns, but these have all been well-handled in greater depth elsewhere. For our purposes, though, I would like to focus on another concern of the novel’s that has not received as much attention, and that is the question of the sermon.

To begin, there is the nature of the sermon as represented in the various scenes of the title character’s preaching. Even before leaving the Church of England, Robert’s preaching is noteworthy for including “a note of historical imagination, a power of

sketching in a background of circumstance, and of biting into the mind of the listener” (190). Shortly after the sermon about which these comments were made, we learn where that power of imagination and ability to “bit[e] into the mind of the listener” may have come from: his seemingly unrelated practice of “story-telling”: “My story-telling is the simplest thing in the world. I began it in the winter with the object of somehow or other getting at the *imagination* of these rustics. Force them for only half an hour to live someone else’s life—it is the one thing worth doing with them. That’s what I have been aiming at. I *told* my stories all the winter” (193 emphasis in original).

Significantly, though, his stories are not initially drawn from the Bible, but rather “Shakespeare, Don Quixote, Dumas—Heaven knows what!” (193). Miriam Burstein describes the purpose of Elsmere’s storytelling, to get his audience “to live someone else’s life,” as “a gateway drug of sorts to a more capacious morality [. . .] to realize the larger claims of social obligation” (9). Elsmere continues “preaching” this type of morality through empathy via stories, but it is not until he comes to understand the Bible itself as “a collection of powerful stories, characterized by ‘poetical truth’ instead of historical” that he discovers the real power of his story-telling (Burstein 9). In fact, the rhetorical peak of the novel comes in Elsmere’s Easter sermon.

Robert’s ability to combine the critical with the imaginatively sympathetic allows him to achieve a new power and forcefulness in his preaching. After the introduction to his Easter sermon, Robert “plunged into the life of Jesus. He brought to it all his trained historical power, all his story-telling faculty, all his sympathy with the needs of feeling,” and even his very points of departure from orthodoxy “did but make the whole more

poignantly real” (497). As he nears the final scenes of this dramatic, narrative re-telling of the Passion,

The dramatic force, the tender passionate insight, the fearless modernness with which the story was told, made it almost unbearable. Those listening saw the trial, the streets of Jerusalem, that desolate place outside the northern gate; they were spectators of the torture, they heard the last cry. No one present had ever so seen, so heard before [. . .]; and for the first time that night, in many a cold embittered heart, there was born that love of the Son of Man [. . .] which has in it now, as then, the promise of the future. (497)

Burstein explains “Robert’s novelistic transformation of the Gospel [. . .] make[s] narrative into an act of spiritual communion. [. . .] Here then, is the novel’s dream of a new Christianity, to be called into being by identifying fully with the founders of the old” through the audience’s vicarious experience, not of the Passion itself, but of the disciples’ witnessing of the Passion (10).

Following the success of this sermon and his benevolent work in the slums, Robert founds “The New Brotherhood of Christ,” a humanistic Christian church, where Robert continues the same sort of preaching as his Easter sermon. Robert’s friend, Hugh Flaxman, describes the first formal service of the Brotherhood, in which “Elsmere reads [a passage from the life of Christ] and expounds it, in the first place, as a lecturer might expound a passage of Tacitus, historically and critically. [. . .] But then when the critic has done, the poet and the believer begins,” and the effect is clear: “the Christ he preaches moves the human heart as much as—and in the case of the London artisan, more



than—the current orthodox presentation of him” (575). Soon after making this point, Flaxman emphasizes the “pure human pity of the story” and its effect on Robert’s audience (575). The point, according to T. H. Wright, “is that it takes ‘a poet’ to appreciate the full pathos of the story, which appeals first and foremost to the imagination” (157). Although Wright concedes that *Robert Elsmere* does not “totally escape the tendentiousness characteristic of nearly all Victorian fiction,” it still “contribute[s] something not only to literature but to theology, providing portraits of religious experience (albeit negative experience, doubt more than faith) which help readers to understand more fully what such experience involves” (157).

This is, in fact, precisely what Ward had set out to do. The genesis of the story lies in Ward’s experience listening to the introductory sermon of the Bampton lectures in 1881, preached by John Wordsworth. In the preface to the Westmoreland edition of *Robert Elsmere*,<sup>35</sup> Ward says that “it was in fact to the indignant reaction excited by that sermon [. . .] that ‘Robert Elsmere’ may ultimately be traced” (608). Ward explains:

The syllabus of the Lecture had been circulated beforehand. It contained the following: “The present unsettlement in religion.—Its relation to the movement of civilisation. [. . .] Christ, however, connects unbelief and sin.—Moral causes of unbelief, (1) Prejudice; (2) Severe claims of religion; (3) Intellectual faults, especially indolence, coldness, recklessness, pride, and avarice.” These headings were developed in the sermon itself with a good deal of vigour and rigour. (608)

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<sup>35</sup> Included as Appendix A to the Victorian Secrets edition of *Robert Elsmere*.

Imagining the “patient scholars and thinkers of the Liberal host” the preacher was attacking, Ward says:

My heart burned within me; and it sprang into my mind that the only way to show England what was in truth going on in its midst, was to try and express it concretely,—in terms of actual life and conduct. Who and what were the persons who had either provoked the present unsettlement of religion, or were suffering under its effects? What was their history? How had their thoughts and doubts come to be? and what was the effect of them on conduct? (608)

Ward’s first effort to answer these questions was a pamphlet called “Unbelief and Sin—a Protest addressed to those who attended the Bampton Lecture of Sunday, March 6,” in which she asked, “Is this all that a religious teacher at the centre of English intellectual activity, whose business it is to make a study of religious thought and of the religious life in man, can tell us about that great movement of the human mind against the traditional Christian theology [. . .]? Does he see no further, does he understand no more than this?” (609). These questions reveal not only Ward’s reaction to the particular content of this particular sermon, but perhaps, too, a reaction to the nature of the sermon itself, for throughout *Robert Elsmere*, as we have seen, Ward repeatedly emphasizes the story-telling nature of Robert’s orations, and their ability to bring new life into the minds of his audiences by enlivening their imaginations. Thus, for Ward, the best answer to a sermon was a story in which a new kind of preaching, one which emphasizes story-telling over lecturing, and imaginative sympathy over dogmatic assertion, is valued.

In her essay “The Sermon and the Victorian Novel,” Linda Gill claims that “as the Victorian period progresses, religion in the novel becomes an increasingly irrelevant and remote part of life” (605). This is due in no small part to the notion that religion, as represented by the sermon, is monologic, “invit[ing] no rebuttal,” the preacher failing to “recognize the dialectic in which he is participating” (594, 596-597). The novel, by contrast, is dialogic, and “Even in the most didactic novels,”—and Gil concedes that Victorian novels “are every bit as ideological as the sermon” (602)—“various characters, their experiences and discourses continually puncture the dominant narrative and offer alternative possibilities; even if these possibilities are subsequently rejected, they are not erased” (596). Gil concludes:

the Victorian novel [. . .] works to deconstruct the whole notion of a monologic discourse of truth which the sermon represents; the Victorian novel suggests *truths* are to be found in *fictions* which represent voices in ideological conflict. In other words, “truth” becomes something one constructs in dialogue with others rather than something one learns and then preaches to a silently submissive and obedient congregation. (607 emphasis in original)

Up to a point, Gil’s point can be taken. Interestingly, though, Gil takes no account of *Robert Elsmere*. In one sense, however, this is not a surprising omission given that one of the critiques she makes of “overtly dogmatic, doctrinal, and religious novels”—and *Robert Elsmere* certainly is such a novel—is that they “are no longer widely read. Their audience is particular and narrow; they did not and do not resonate with the general reader” (605). While it is certainly true that *Robert Elsmere* is scarcely read at all any

more, let alone widely read (a point Burstein laments in her introduction to the reprint of the novel), it most certainly *did* resonate with the general reader on both sides of the Atlantic in its time and for some decades afterwards. This was a wildly popular novel, “reviewed in all the best journals (by William Gladstone, the Prime Minister, no less), spawned fictional and nonfictional responses, and eventually wound up on stage” (Burstein 5).<sup>36</sup> Further, in view of the novel’s themes and its reconceiving of the sermon as shown above, it would seem to fit in well with Gil’s monologic/dialogic dichotomy when taken on its own. However, it is precisely at the point of this dichotomy that *Robert Elsmere* reveals the shortcomings of Gil’s argument.

First, despite the concession that Victorian novels can be as ideological as sermons, Gil asserts—as was noted earlier in our discussion of Eliot’s *Adam Bede*—that despite the intention of a sermonizer or sermon in a novel, or even the novelist behind them, “because the sermon is only one voice in the midst of others, it cannot help but be modified or even undermined by the multi-voiced context in which it appears” (596). In this way, according to Gil, even when the other voices and “alternative possibilities” are “subsequently rejected, they are not erased” (596). But even a sermon can introduce “various characters, their experiences and discourses” that “puncture the dominant” perspective (596)—and we will shortly consider a pair of sermons responding to *Robert Elsmere* that does just that. But more to the point, one of the chief critiques of Ward’s novel is not only the way it rejects alternative possibilities present in the novel, but the

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<sup>36</sup> By contrast, another novel Gil did include, *The Way of All Flesh* by Samuel Butler, although it was written in the Victorian era, was not even published until 1903.

very absence of certain alternative possibilities. William Gladstone, in his review of the novel, makes precisely that point:

It must be obvious to every reader that in the great duel between the old faith and the new, as it is fought in “Robert Elsmere,” there is a great inequality in the distribution of the arms. Reasoning is the weapon of the new scheme; emotion the sole resource of the old. Neither Catherine [Robert’s wife] nor Newcome [the orthodox Anglican priest] have a word to say beyond the expression of feeling; and it is when he has adopted the negative side that the hero himself is fully introduced to the faculty of argument. This is a singular arrangement, especially in the case of a writer who takes a generous view of the Christianity that she only desires to supplant by an improved device. The explanation may be simple. There are abundant signs in the book that the negative speculatists have been consulted if not ransacked; but there is nowhere a sign that the authoress has made herself acquainted with the Christian apologists, old or recent; or has taken measure of the relation in which the doctrines of grace have historically stood to the production of the noblest, purest, and greatest characters of the Christian ages. If such be the case, she has skipped lightly (to put it no higher) over vast mental spaces of literature and learning relevant to the case, and has given sentence in the cause *without hearing the evidence*. (623 emphasis added)<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Gladstone’s review is included as Appendix D to the Victorian Secrets edition of *Robert Elsmere*.

In the case of *Robert Elsmere*, at least, the dialogic nature of the novel is thus clipped. Even as Ward felt the perspective and experiences of liberal teachers and preachers had been unfairly attacked and silenced in Wordsworth's introductory Bampton sermon, so too does she "render [. . .] voiceless" those on the other side of the debate in the novel (Gil 597). Of course, *in the novel* is a key phrase, for outside of the novel were reviews and sermons and other works that presented those voices. However, there were reviews and novels and other works *outside of the sermon*, too, which brings us to another shortcoming of Gil's essay.

Throughout her study of the sermon *and* the Victorian novel, Gil only cites one actual sermon, from the liberal clergyman Benjamin Jowett, and it is not from the sermon proper she quotes, but rather from a reflection on Charles Dickens—whose funeral had been held five days earlier in Westminster Abbey, where the sermon was preached—which was appended to the end of the sermon. A more accurate description of the essay would have been the sermon *in* the Victorian novel. But when we broaden our scope to include actual sermons and the whole of the sermonic discourse surrounding *Robert Elsmere*, the sermon appears in a very different light than the monologic/dialogic, sermon/novel dichotomy Gil presents.

As already noted, *Robert Elsmere* was written as a direct response to an actual sermon preached in Oxford. In addition, besides the sermons included in the novel, there is a sense in which the novel itself is a sermon, in the sense that Tamara Wagner describes it in "The Victorian Sermon Novel"<sup>38</sup> and as Gil herself recognizes, in which a

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<sup>38</sup> Wagner was discussed at the beginning of the present chapter.

novel is “obviously and openly intended to teach and advise, to ‘declare and enforce common rules for the right government of life’, as the sermon was intended to do” (Gil 602).<sup>39</sup> Gil may argue that the reader of a novel “understands that the author is creating a fictional narrator who is telling a fictional story,” but in the case of a novel like *Robert Elsmere*, Victorian readers knew they were getting more than a mere story (605). Along those lines, in 1907 *The Christian Work and the Evangelist* noted:

Perhaps no book has made such a stir in the literary world during the last thirty years as did “Robert Elsmere,” when it appeared some twenty years ago. [. . .] There had been novels in which there was much propagation of theological and political doctrines. [. . .] But in “Robert Elsmere” we got the preaching novel, the story with a purpose, theology floated by fiction, religious discussion made vital by being closely united to human interest. We knew that Ms. Elsmere had set out with the deliberate purpose of putting certain great truths that seemed of vital interest to her before the people. (Lynch 571)

The “stir” mentioned, the fictional and nonfictional responses elicited by the novel, included many sermons. In the Westmoreland preface, Ward notes that “It has been much written about, and a good deal preached against” (602), and she could also have mentioned that in at least some cases, it was preached *for*, too.<sup>40</sup> For now, though, I

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<sup>39</sup> Gil summarizes Jowett’s consideration of Dickens by stating that “his novels *are* sermons” and also includes George Eliot’s *Adam Bede* as an example where “the novel itself functions as a sermon” (603).

<sup>40</sup> See, for instance, the American John W. Chadwick’s “Robert Elsmere” in *The Revelation of God and Other Sermons* (1889). I have also tracked down references to, but been unable to locate copies of, other sermons from liberal and Unitarian perspectives, such as the British Unitarian Richard A. Armstrong’s *Pulpit Studies from “Robert*

would like to focus on two particular sermons preached more or less against it by Hugh Price Hughes, “‘Robert Elsmere’ and Mr. Gladstone’s Criticism of the Book” and “The Problem for Unbelief.”

In the first of these two sermons, Hughes begins by bearing “my strong testimony to the high qualities, both literary and moral, of its gifted writer, and especially to mention [. . .] the deep insight into human character which distinguishes so many parts of the book,” which he describes as “a faithful and vivid revelation of the literary scepticism of our time” and “an explicit statement of the best attempt at religious reconstruction yet made on the sceptical side” (95-96). He also notes his admiring and affectionate acquaintance with several of the Oxford men who had inspired the novel’s main characters. And, before entering into his critique of the novel’s main teaching, he points out that the ethics of the novel, which were based on the teachings of the late Professor Thomas Hill Green, “were precisely those which, in other terms, I propound here every Friday night” (97). Clearly Hughes intends to demonstrate that this sermon will be no diatribe against the novel. And, when Hughes does enter into his point of disagreement with the novel, he does so on precisely those terms that the novel used to present its own argument, namely *testimony*. Robert Elsmere, on the basis of a (short) critical study of the history of testimony, “dismisses calmly and at once the testimony of nineteen centuries. [. . .] He appears before us as the great apostle of testimony; and he calmly ignores the testimony of the Christian consciousness” (101). Hughes makes this claim on the grounds

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*Elsmere*” (1888) which included sermons on “Catherine’s Religion,” “Newcome’s Religion,” “Elsmere’s Religion,” and an appendix on Gladstone’s critique.



that the essence of Christianity lies not in its acceptance of historical documents or the supernatural, but in “the *living personal* relation of the individual Christian to Christ,” “the living and risen Saviour, *now in the heart* of the Christian, *now in living union* with the Christian” (102, 103 emphasis in original). In explaining this point, Hughes mentions the stories of General Gordon (whom he had preached an entire sermon on previously), Thomas Chalmers, and John Wesley, among others. In this way, he offers not merely dogmatic assertion or polemics, but rather counter-testimony to answer *Elsmere’s* narrative testimony.

At the end of the sermon, in a very un-monologic move, Hughes announces that “I will resume this discussion next Sunday, and shall be glad to answer any questions or objections that may reach me through the post” (105). Then, true to his word, in the next sermon Hughes takes up one such objection that he received from a former tutor and Fellow of Oxford. He then proceeds to read the letter in its entirety, “a very clear and able statement on the other side,” which accounts for almost one-fifth of the entire length of the sermon (111). Following this reading, Hughes delineates several points of agreement between himself and his interlocutor before getting to the point of disagreement and giving his response. A little later in the sermon he quotes another critique of his previous sermon, this one from a Unitarian newspaper, *The Inquirer*, which he likewise answers. And, as he did in the previous sermon, he employs testimony—this time from two of his contemporaries, Mr. Calvert, a missionary to Fiji, and R. W. Dale, of Birmingham—to formulate his replies. Although these two sermons may be a little atypical, they do demonstrate that late-Victorian sermons could be dialogic and that it is not necessarily

true that “the preacher [. . .] does not recognize the dialectic in which he is participating” (Gil 597). In fact, quite the contrary is true.

What we see in the case of *Robert Elsmere* is a perfect example of the sermonic discourse that was so characteristic of the Victorian era. John Wordsworth preaches a Bampton sermon; Mary Ward writes a (sermonic) novel in response; William Gladstone writes a review of the novel and, incidentally, references other sermons to help make his points; Hugh Price Hughes then preaches a sermon on the novel and Gladstone’s review; a former Oxford tutor writes a letter in response to, and a newspaper publishes an extended notice on, Hughes’s sermon; and Hughes then preaches a second sermon in response to the letter and the notice. Nor was this an anomaly produced by a particularly unique novel. Sermons in the Victorian era were often responsive to other voices or events, and even in having the “bully pulpit” for an hour or two on Sundays, preachers were well aware that the periodical press may very well respond on Monday. And, in some cases, series of sermons or reviews may carry on a particular topic or debate.

Gil concludes her essay on the sermon and the Victorian novel thusly:

the Victorian novel, whether consciously or unconsciously, works to deconstruct the whole notion of a monologic discourse of truth which the sermon represents; the Victorian novel suggests *truths* are to found in *fictions* which represent voices in ideological conflict. In other words, ‘truth’ becomes something one constructs in dialogue with others rather than something one learns and then preaches to a silently submissive and obedient congregation. (607)

While I have tried to show that Gil's representation of sermons is incomplete and sometimes inaccurate, her emphasis on "truth" or "truths" emerging from voices in ideological conflict engaging in dialogue does capture something of the state of a greater Victorian sermonic discourse as the century waned. And while Gil is clearly in favor of the privileging of the novel over the sermon, it is not something she invented. Lynne Hapgood has observed that toward the end of the century, "Priests as well as writers chose fiction above the sermon [. . .] as a more pervasive, immediate and appropriate form of religious instruction. In the words of one priest/critic: 'It sometimes seems as though the man who has fresh light to throw upon the problems of theology will be compelled to write a novel to get himself listened to'" (332).

In the conclusion, we will take up the question of to what extent the novel did or did not eclipse the sermon, but for now let us return to Andrew Hass's characterization of the relationship between literature and theology discussed at the beginning of the chapter. We there noted that he described literature and theology as overlapping spheres of cultural experience which "are no longer seen as individual components of an overall aggregate, but are part of an organicism, which is open and dynamic, yet ultimately inseparable, functioning as a co-evolving, co-adapting, co-determining system" (847). Novelists with backgrounds and aims as diverse as George Eliot and George MacDonald and Mary Ward chose novels as a medium for presenting religious instruction. But their novels were heavily influenced by the sermon, not only in that they sometimes contained sermons, but their very style and structure and aims could be sermonic, too. Preachers, too, whether they were merely drawing on novels for illustrations or employing novelistic

techniques or responding to a novel could not help but be influenced by the Victorian novel.

## Chapter 2: The Sermon and Science

### **Religion, Science, and the Sermon**

Although “religion and science” (or “science and religion”) as a field of study has seen a great increase in scholarship in the last two decades, and much of that attention has focused on the Victorian era, which has been accurately termed “The Age of Darwin” and “The Age of the Sermon” (Francis “Nineteenth-Century British Sermons on Evolution” 276), only recently has systematic attention been paid to the ways the sermons of the era can shed light on that relationship.<sup>41</sup> Given the prominence of sermons in the Victorian literature, their continued study is essential for deepening our understanding of Victorian religion and science and their relationship. For one, the sermons of the period can give us some insight into what church-going Victorians would have thought—or at least heard—about science from a religious point of view. In trying to explain the gradual change in Victorian attitudes toward religion and science, Owen Chadwick in *The Victorian Church* notes that “Many educated Christians ceased long before 1860 to believe in a universal flood or Jonah’s whale or the 6,000 years of world history. But quiet men in pews knew nothing of these matters and were untroubled until they met the question in a newspaper, a pamphlet, an agitator or a friend” (II.2). Of course, that’s assuming they came across the question at all. Even as late as “a decade or two after 1896

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<sup>41</sup> See, for instance, Keith Francis, “Nineteenth-Century British Sermons on Evolution,” and “Paley to Darwin,” in *A New History of the Sermon: The Nineteenth Century* and the *Oxford Handbook to the Modern British Sermon: 1689-1901*, respectively; Diarmid Finnegan, “Exeter-Hall Science and Evangelical Rhetoric in Mid-Victorian Britain”; and Ciaran Toal, “Preaching at the British Association for the Advancement of Science: sermons, secularization and the rhetoric of conflict in the 1870s.”

some members of the Church of England, especially among the evangelicals, and nearly all official members of the Roman Catholic Church, and most of the simple worshippers among the chapels of the poor, continued to know nothing of evolution or to refuse to accept it on religious grounds” (II.23-24). But apart from their belief in a literal view of Biblical stories about nature or creation, what might “quiet men in pews” have believed about science or the natural world as it related to their religion? And after 1860, when the “controversy between ‘science’ and ‘religion’ took fire,” and the informed public began to believe that the two were opposed, how might churchgoers have grappled with it (Chadwick II.3)? A study of sermons can help us to answer these questions. Even more, a study of the sermon can also help us understand better the ways science was communicated to the public.

In this chapter, we will first examine the way many Victorians would have encountered science in sermons, namely, as a source for illustrations, divorced from its original context and without explicit consideration of the larger matter of how science and religion as a whole related to each other, before moving on to some examples where that relation between them is at least implied in sermons and in the discourse surrounding them. Then, we will consider three models of the relationship between religion and science that were employed to help Victorians understand where and how science and religion met and related. Besides exemplary statements of each model, we will also consider intermediate statements of the relationship that reveal the continuum of opinion that existed in the period. From there we’ll move on to a look at the ways the sermon as a genre was appropriated by scientists like Huxley.

## **Science as Illustration and Topic**

Before proceeding with an analysis of the ways preachers addressed the issue of science and nature in their sermons, the following caveat should be noted: such sermons were rare. Keith Francis suggests such sermons probably constitute around one percent of the total published in the nineteenth century (“Paley to Darwin” 446). Even when including “sermons on anodyne subjects such as God and nature or God and the natural world as well as lectures, addresses, and discourses which were also sermons,” Francis says the total number would certainly not be more than five percent, and still more likely closer to one percent (“Nineteenth-Century British Sermons on Evolution” 304).<sup>42</sup> Given the momentous impact of scientific discoveries during the nineteenth century, from geology to evolution, this may seem surprising. But the reason for this absence should not be surprising.

As we noted in the previous chapter, a preacher’s primary aim was the proclamation of God’s truth for the conversion and care of souls, not merely to entertain, as might be the case for a novelist, or to inform as might a scientist or professor. Thus, for example, in an early (1855) sermon of his, “The Bible,” Charles Spurgeon, the famed Baptist preacher, says this in answer to those who would urge the study of science over the study of the Bible:

Let no one turn away from the Bible because it is not a book of learning and wisdom. It is. Would ye know astronomy? It is here: it tells you of the Sun of

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<sup>42</sup> My own research and my collection of around 100 volumes of sermons from the time period bears this out, and that’s even considering the number of volumes I specifically acquired for writing this chapter.

Righteousness and the Star of Bethlehem. Would you know botany? It is here: it tells you of the plant of renown—the Lily of the Valley, and the Rose of Sharon. Would you know geology and mineralogy? You shall learn it here: for you may read of the Rock of Ages, and the White Stone with the name engraven thereon, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it. Would ye study history? Here is the most ancient of all the records of the history of the human race. Whate'er your science is, come and bend o'er this book; your science is here. [. . .] I speak to you, I plead with you, I beg of you respect your Bibles, and search them out, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and these are they which testify of Christ.

(*Sermons* I.43)

Even the more mature Spurgeon, who, as we will see shortly, urged future preachers to familiarize themselves with every field of science, opted for spiritual over scientific themes, even when the subject might seem to lend itself to the latter. In an 1875 sermon on Genesis 1, “The First Day of Creation,” Spurgeon opens thusly:

We shall, this morning, leave all discussion as to the creation of the world to those learned Divines who have paid their special attention to that subject, and to those geologists who know, or at any rate think they know, a very great deal about it. It is a very interesting subject, but this is not the time for its consideration. Our business is moral and spiritual rather than scientific.

But lest such an approach be written off as the unlearned approach of a populist Baptist minister, consider that in a sermon preached at the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1867, Charles Pritchard, a professor of astronomy at Oxford



University as well as a clergyman, “endeavoured to avoid the discussion of controverted points, whether in Physics or Theology” because “The brief hour allotted to the preacher is too sacred for such topics; and there are many simple, yet far-reaching thoughts connected with our Holy Religion and our common being, which come home alike to the Philosopher and Theologian, to the learned and to the man who is unversed in books” (qtd. in Francis “Nineteenth Century” 305). Another reason may simply be preachers’ hesitation to take on topics they did not feel fully qualified to discuss. In *Homiletical and Pastoral Lectures*, a series of addresses delivered in St. Paul’s before the Church Homiletical Society, Harvey Goodwin, Bishop of Carlisle, advises the clergy to “avoid as much as possible [. . .] questions arising out of scientific controversies and theological difficulties connected with them. There is not one clergyman in a hundred who has the qualifications necessary for dealing with such questions properly; and even if he had, there is not one hearer in a thousand who would be any the better for hearing the questions dealt with” in the pulpit (126-127).

This sort of reasoning can help us understand the way many Victorians likely would have encountered discussions of science or nature in sermons, merely as a source of illustration made for the sake of some spiritual point. Such was the approach Charles Spurgeon encouraged the future preachers at The Pastor’s College, Metropolitan Tabernacle. In his third volume of lectures on preaching, which focuses on sources and uses of illustrations and anecdotes in preaching, Spurgeon devotes one lecture to science, “The Sciences as Sources of Illustration. ASTRONOMY.” Spurgeon instructs his audience “that every student for the Christian ministry ought to know at least something of every

science” for “God has made all things that are in the world to be our teachers” (III.144). But even after saying that, Spurgeon goes on to say, “I am not going to deliver an astronomical lecture, nor to mention all the grand facts and details of that fascinating science; but I intend simply to use *astronomy as one of the many fields of illustration that the Lord has provided for us*” (III.144 emphasis in the original). What follows are a series of discussions of the telescope, the sun, the planets, and other astronomical subjects, each considered mostly anecdotally, followed by spiritual applications. For example, in discussing eclipses of the sun (which is just one of eight aspects of the sun he considers), Spurgeon draws such lessons as “When the Sun of this great world suffered eclipse, then were all men in darkness; and when any dishonour comes upon the cross of Christ, or upon Christ himself, then is each Christian himself in darkness of a horrible kind” (III.156).

Spurgeon’s sermons reveal a similar approach throughout. Besides the two sermons quoted above, in “God in Nature and in Revelation,” preached in 1866, Spurgeon does little more than mention “the vast expanse of the heavens,” “India’s coral strand,” and “Africa’s sunny fountains” and “golden sand.” In the only part of the sermon that dwells on nature at any length, Spurgeon says, “The heat of the sun finds out the little flower in the darkest glade of the forest and no doubt it exerts a mysterious influence even in the depths of the sea and at the bottom of the deepest mines! ‘There is nothing hid from the heat thereof,’ even though much is hid from the light thereof.” From there he swiftly moves to “So it is with the Gospel and with the love of Christ,” from which no one is hid though they may not see it. He similarly treats the sun’s role in

helping flowers bloom and the way flowers turn toward the light. Sermons like these, where science is not a subject or topic for study, but merely a source to be used for illustrations, are not uncommon.

If spiritual concerns were to take precedence over natural or scientific considerations, there were still those who nevertheless considered science or reflections on the natural world as topics worthy for consideration in and of themselves, even if only for a part of the sermon, or whose use of them as illustrations went deeper than did Spurgeon's. In fact, in an address to the Church Homiletical Society, Alfred Barry, Canon of Worcester Cathedral and Principal of King's College, London, suggests that doing so is sometimes a necessary precondition to addressing spiritual matters:

How can a man [. . .] speak of prayer and of God's special providence in total ignorance of what science has taught us of the reign of law? How can he call men to adore the creative wisdom, with no notion of the new views of that wisdom, which the theory (for example) of evolution suggests? How can he expound the book of Genesis, without any consideration of the light thrown upon the object and method of its teaching by what science has discovered of the visible traces of creation? (198)

Because such matters are "affecting men's whole habits of thought, touching at every point on the frontiers of metaphysics and theology," and because they "are not buried in learned treatises; they are in all men's mouths, the very air is full of them," preachers "cannot ignore them [. . .], such study cannot be foreign to the preaching of the word of

God” (198-199). For Barry and others, the “Book of Nature” was a revelation of God worthy of serious study and thoughtful exposition.

J. B. Mozley, Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford and Canon of Christ Church, gave such consideration to science and nature in his sermon “Nature” in 1871. Mozley begins with the “two great revelations” of Nature, “that of use and that of beauty” (*University Sermons* 122). The use of Nature would include its machinery, the mechanism by which it operates, its “utility and active force [. . .], its nourishing powers” which the materialist seeks to explain (124). The utilitarian view of nature, though, cannot account for nature’s beauty, which is a different and distinct revelation. The then recent and growing “passion for scenery and natural beauty [. . .] existing in the poetry and thought of the age” provides the formal occasion for the sermon (124). But even as he explores this other side of Nature, Mozley makes a number of observations about and comments upon the nature of science. For one, Mozley points out the failure of scientific analysis to reveal the truth that lies within nature, Mozley writes:

Physical science goes back and back into nature, but it is the aspect and front of nature which gives the challenge; and it is a challenge which no backward train of physical causes can meet. [. . .] The physical causes [of the arrangement of nature’s features that make it beautiful to men] are only all the separate items traced back step after step; which is no explanation of their collocation. (126)

For Mozley, the aesthetic appeal of nature provides a sort of variation on the argument from design: because beauty is “visible to reason alone, we have thus in the very structure of nature a recognition of reason, and a distinct address to reason; wholly unaccountable

unless there is a higher reason or mind to which to make it” (126-127). While science may be able to explain the “facts” of a natural scene, its “masses, projections, angles, vapour, colour, space, and extent,” it cannot “account for the poetical impression they produce” because that impression resides not in nature, but in “the mind of man” (127). Thus, nature’s beauty is not something inherent in nature itself, as its utility would be, but rather is a reflection of the “inner light or splendor” of man’s “reason upon the surface of the universal frame of things” (128), and therein lies the point. Because science tries to look past the surface, it misses the meaning of nature as revelation.

But when the beauty of Nature is contemplated, Mozley claims that nature “is an awakening sight [. . .] exciting a certain curiosity about the Deity” so that a man “becomes conscious of a veil and curtain which has the secrets of a moral existence behind it” (*University Sermons* 128, 129). In two passages from another sermon, “The Religious Enjoyment of Nature,” Mozley explains the process by which this dawning awareness of a spiritual or moral existence works in man through his contemplation of “the beauties of visible nature”:

We ought [. . .] to be able to rejoice in those parts of the creation which were designed especially to give us delight. [. . .] Who is there but must be conscious, when he admires greatly one or other of those glorious sights of nature by which we are surrounded, that he is simply doing that which he was intended to do.

(*Parochial Sermons* 153)

To be able to admire the works of God is no slight thing; it is a great privilege.

The animals do not possess it; they have not the slightest idea of the kind of world

they are in; but man does possess it. The proper delight then in visible nature sends men to the thought of themselves and their own souls. It is a delight accompanied with serious ideas and solemn impressions; it makes a man say to himself, “God has given me what He has given to no other creature—a rational soul, whereby it is that I do see His visible creation [. . .].” (155-156)

In other words, the “spiritual” or “religious” enjoyment of nature ought to “carry [people] onward to think about their own souls, the souls which God has thus framed to correspond to His own work, to be in harmony with His creation, and to be equal to the sight of the glory of it” (155).

However, if the scientific view of nature’s utility is inadequate by itself, so too is the aesthetic view. Mozley reminds his audience that the use of nature “is a sacred thought to keep in reserve, and essential even to the full poetical view of nature” (*University Sermons* 125). The proper understanding of nature, then, is one in which “the admiration of the beauty of nature strikes a sort of balance with the scientific analysis of nature” (140). In this way “no one set of ideas is allowed to domineer and monopolise ground [. . .], but, when one rises to power, another is provided to meet and check it” (140). Yet even when both revelations of nature are taken together, the “Book of Nature” is never a sufficient revelation of God. Mozley notes, “nature is partly a curtain and partly a disclosure, partly a veil and partly a revelation” (130). While Nature might be suggestive, it is neither compulsive nor definitive; people may fail to recognize the rational element in its beauty, or, recognizing it, they may fail to follow its suggestion to a consideration of their own rational soul and of the rational Creator who designed it

(*University Sermons* 125-129; *Parochial Sermons* 154-155). Thus, “though the outward face of nature is a religious communication *to those who come to it with the religious element already in them*, no man can get a religion out of” it (*University Sermons* 140 emphasis added). In each of these sermons, it still remains for the preacher to direct his congregation to spiritual considerations, and, although handled in a much more sophisticated manner than one finds in sermons by preachers like Spurgeon, the consideration of nature and science still operates as a pointer to a higher, spiritual realm.

If these two examples from Mozley represent sermons that take up considerations of and respond to science where it approaches “the frontiers of metaphysics and theology” (Barry 198), it was also possible for such sermons to invite responses from science. An illustration of one such two-way encounter between the sermon and science can be found in a sermon by H. P. Liddon and the response it elicited from T. H. Huxley. In “The End,” a sermon preached during Advent in 1886, Liddon discusses the second coming of Jesus Christ as the final “end” of all things, which other ends prefigure. Among those other “ends” are the end of one’s life, the end of human societies, and the end of the world and the course of nature. In the course of the sermon, in the third section on the end of the world, Liddon discusses the apparent “reign and perpetuity of physical law” (*Advent* II.307). Earlier in the sermon, Liddon references evolution and alludes to one of the conflicts between science and religion: “and just now, anything that can call itself evolution is as fashionable as it was of old, in the days of Lucretius. Men look out for a graduated sequence in the course of events; catastrophes, we are told, are discredited” (301). Liddon is not here criticizing evolution *per se*, nor is his aim is to

debate the merits of evolutionary theory.<sup>43</sup> Rather, as the reference to Lucretius indicates,<sup>44</sup> his point is to argue with the application of the notion of uniformitarianism, the belief that the laws of nature are as they have always been and will continue to be so. This last point is the key to his disagreement with contemporary scientific thought.

In the section discussed above, concerning the “reign and *perpetuity* of physical law,” Liddon references a passage from 2 Peter:

there shall come in the last days scoffers, [. . .] saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished.

(3:3-6)

In quoting this passage, and in the previous section of the sermon, Liddon illustrates the point of his sermon as a whole, which is to remind his congregation that all things shall come to an end, regardless of apparent physical laws, for there are “other and more

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<sup>43</sup> In fact, in another sermon, “The Creation,” he says, “It is possible, [. . .] as a distinguished naturalist of our own time has maintained, that [God] has continuously developed even new species of creatures by a natural selection out of lower species previously existing. In this, and other kindred ways, it may be that He ‘worketh hitherto’” (*Sermons on the Old Testament 2*). A footnote specifies that the “distinguished naturalist” was Charles Darwin and names *Origin of Species*.

<sup>44</sup> Lucretius was an ancient Roman poet (99-55 B.C.E.). In his poem “On the Nature of Things” he describes a sort of “evolutionary” theory in which “species were born out of the Earth, formed by the chance combination of elements. Natural selection led to the extinction of once-living “monstrous” organisms. Those organisms that survived either survived because of their strength, speed, or cunning, or because of their usefulness to people” (Waggoner).



imperative laws in His illimitable universe than those which immediately surround our puny life,” namely “moral laws” that may suspend “mere physical laws” (307). It is not that scientists necessarily get their science wrong, but that they fail to grasp this religious truth. As he puts it at the beginning of the sermon, “Why events ever began to succeed each other at all, or to what they are tending as their final goal,—*these vital questions are never raised*” (301 emphasis added). As a result, Liddon argues that

a one-sided way of looking at the facts of life is seized upon by the imagination, which thus will clog and check the equitable action of reason; will throw unwelcome facts into an arbitrary background; will envelop plain conclusions in a cloud of mystical indefiniteness, and so will create an irrational confidence that, somehow or another, things will go on for ever very much as they do. (301)

To rebut such a view, Liddon then remarks not only the fact of the perishability of individual human life, but also the temporary nature of societies (*e.g.*, the Roman Empire, the old French nobility), and the alterability of geography through catastrophic disasters (*e.g.*, various earthquakes, the eruption of Krakatoa). “These,” Liddon says, “are the elements involved in the Christian representation of the Second Coming of Christ; the end of all human probations, the final dissolution of the organized or social life of man, the destruction of man’s present home on the surface of the globe” (309). This emphasis on the Second Coming of Christ, the consideration of the end—meant both literally and teleologically—of this world, is part of the focus of Advent, and so Liddon’s employment of illustrations from the natural world, from the realm of science, of the sometimes

gradual and uniform, sometimes catastrophic end of things, follows naturally from, and serves the purpose of, the theological aim of the sermon.

Thomas Huxley, however, took issue with Liddon's use of science in the sermon when he came across it—or, rather, an account of it as recorded in the *Pall Mall Gazette*—and felt compelled to critique it in his essay “Scientific and Pseudo-Scientific Realism.” Huxley attacks Liddon's sermon primarily on two fronts. First, Huxley argues that there can be no disorder in nature, and so any apparent disruption of the uniform operation of natural law comes only from ignorance of the immediately preceding circumstances that precipitated the “catastrophe” which (naturally) gave rise to it. A failure to grasp this point, Huxley says, is a particular failure of the “Imagination [. . .] merely assuming the airs [of scientific reason], as it unfortunately too often does in the pulpit” (*Science and Christian Tradition* 71). Second, Huxley quarrels with Liddon's reification and personification of “law” as something more than a mere expression of the record of experience. On this second point, Huxley qualifies his critique, explaining that he has “not the slightest intention of finding fault with the eminent theologian and eloquent preacher [. . .] for employment of scientific language in a manner for which he could find only too many scientific precedents” (68). Huxley even concedes that he may have been guilty of “such looseness of expression” too, at some points, and that he has “no wish to bear hardly on the preacher for falling into an error for which he might find good precedents” (78). Such qualifiers and concessions notwithstanding, though, Huxley derides the “fallacious employment of the names of scientific conceptions which pervades the preacher's utterance,” and declares, “Scientifically speaking, it is the acme

of absurdity to talk of a man defying the law of gravitation when he lifts his arm” (74, 77).

As much as Huxley’s primary purpose is to correct or combat the misrepresentation of science from the pulpit, he also makes a passing attack on the theology of Liddon’s sermon. He writes:

If a sober scientific thinker is inclined to put little faith in the wild vaticinations of universal ruin which, in a less saintly person than the seer of Patmos, might seem to be dictated by the fury of a revengeful fanatic, rather than by the spirit of the teacher who bid men love their enemies, it is not on the ground that they contradict scientific principles; but because the evidence of their scientific value does not fulfil the conditions on which weight is attached to evidence. (73)

Though framed by the sober scientific thinker’s concern for the scientific value of evidence, and despite the qualifying “might seem to be” phrasing, Huxley reveals his disdain for such wild, revengeful, fanatical prophecies of apocalyptic doom and contrasts them with the loving spirit of Jesus. The problem Huxley addresses here is not essentially scientific; he makes a point of noting that it is not a matter of scientific principle. The problem is essentially moral, a preference for loving one’s enemies as opposed to predicting their catastrophic end.

After encountering Liddon’s sermon or Huxley’s response to it, what, if anything, might their respective audiences have concluded about the relationship between religion and science? Liddon’s sermon was primarily an Advent reflection on the end to come, and the need to prepare for that end; science was only a secondary matter, used for the

sake of illustrating the former. While there were some evaluative statements made about the shortcomings of certain conceptions of science, these were made in the service of establishing and furthering the primary aim of the sermon. Similarly, Huxley's response to Liddon's sermon was primarily a scientific critique of modes of thought and expression that he deemed unscientific, or, rather, pseudo-scientific; religion as such warranted only a passing judgment. In neither case was the author attempting to delineate a model for understanding the relationship between "religion" and "science." Nonetheless, a sense of their relationship can be inferred. Taken strictly at face value, each accords the other's domain some degree of autonomy: Liddon attempts to answer scientific objections (*viz.*, miraculous catastrophes would be violations of the laws of nature) on scientific grounds (*viz.*, catastrophes may follow laws of nature or be following higher laws of the universe); Huxley, when he objects to religion as such (*viz.*, his disdainful comment about wild prophecies), he does so on religious grounds (*viz.*, the loving example of Jesus). At the same time, though, neither completely compartmentalizes his own domain. Liddon does critique scientists for not taking into account questions of teleology, and Huxley's critique is as much a matter of philosophy as it is of science.

Taken thus far, religion and science as represented in these two cases might still be compatible. But given the late Victorian context and the reputations of these two men, one can't help but sense the underlying conflict between them, hinted at in Liddon, more pronounced in Huxley. This impression receives further confirmation in light of the subsequent debate that arose between Huxley and the Duke of Argyll. After Huxley's

essay appeared in *The Nineteenth Century*, George Campbell, the eighth Duke of Argyll and a fellow of the Royal Academy (among several other political positions), wrote an essay for the next month's issue, "Professor Huxley on Canon Liddon." In part, Campbell seeks to defend the general "immunity from controversy or reply" the pulpit customarily enjoys, which, in his view, Huxley's essay attacked. Describing Huxley's tactics, Campbell writes, "the Professor is on the war path, and all his frank surrenders and overflowing admissions are made with something more than a touch of scorn." In the Duke's estimate, Huxley has levelled an unwarranted and inappropriate attack on, not just Liddon, but "the pulpit," "going far beyond the matter in hand."<sup>45</sup> Science and religion, it would seem, are in conflict.

### **Religion and Science in the Victorian Period: 3 Models**

Encounters like those between Liddon, Huxley, and Campbell helped give rise to the common and persistent view of the relationship of Victorian religion and science, that of competition or conflict. In characterizing this model, we might appropriately revisit Elisabeth Jay's comments about theology and literature noted in the previous chapter, and, just paraphrasing slightly, describe it as a "wrestle between theological authority and [science] for supremacy in detecting or imposing patterns and meaning" ("Now and in England" 5). Frank M. Turner, in "The Victorian Conflict between Science and Religion: A Professional Dimension," situates the conflict in the context of the struggle of Victorian scientists to establish themselves professionally, "to project a new public image

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<sup>45</sup> As noted in the Introduction, the debate between Huxley and the Duke of Argyll continued off and on for twelve months in the pages of *The Nineteenth Century* and *Nature*.

by [among other things] penetrating existing educational institutions, and dispersing information to the general public” (175). Additionally, professionalizing scientists would need to “establish the independence of the would-be professional group [and] its right of self-definition” (175). This adds confirmation to Owen Chadwick’s claim that it was precisely “because [evolution] was sometimes denied not upon scientific grounds but upon theological” that the conflict between evolution and religion arose. Chadwick writes (II.20), “The conflict was not ultimately over the theory of evolution, or over any other scientific theory, but over the freedom of the scientist to be a scientist” independent of theological strictures (II.20). Bernard Lightman argues even further that the efforts of scientists to establish independence went beyond “just aiming to reform scientific theories and institutions” and were part of an effort “to use science as a lever to transform British culture and society” in such a way that science would be “the sole path to knowledge of the natural and social worlds, and that [scientists] alone [would have] the skill to tread that path.”

The conflict model also dovetails well with the “crisis of faith” narrative that is so often assumed to characterize the whole arc of religious history in the nineteenth century, generally, and the oft-used metaphor of the “war” between science and religion, specifically. For many observers today, Darwin’s publication of *The Origin of Species* in 1859 was at the heart of the crisis. In her essay “Reading Scripture in Crisis: The Victorian Crisis of Faith and MacDonald’s Response to Coleridge,” Gisela Kregliner claims that around mid-century, “the Victorian crisis of faith concentrated on the

seemingly irresolvable dichotomy between theology and science,” and she includes *The Origin* as one of four “significant landmarks” that drove the crisis (79, 87).<sup>46</sup>

However, in “Nineteenth-Century British Sermons on Evolution and *The Origin of Species*: The Dog That Didn’t Bark?”, Keith A. Francis writes, “Reflecting on the historiography of religion in the 19th century, the lack of sermons on science is a surprise.<sup>47</sup> The Victorian crisis of faith and the *supposed* conflict between science and religion would *seem* to be the kind of problem which would warrant extended comment in the pulpit” (304 emphasis added). Although Francis does acknowledge that the sermons of the time do reveal that there was some conflict between religion and science, he argues that characterizing that conflict as a “war” or even as a “controversy” would be inaccurate; throughout most of his essay, he uses the term “debate” instead (272). Even Kreglinger, who does employ “war” terminology, in speaking of the conflict between Genesis and geology, qualifies the point: “One should note that such a ‘war’ was between a very specific and narrow understanding of both science and natural theology that had developed during the earlier part of the nineteenth century in England” (89). Taking the argument a step further, what we find in the sermons on both sides of the debate are arguments not necessarily between science and religion *per se*, but rather between competing sciences and competing theologies (or philosophies). Owen Chadwick points

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<sup>46</sup> The other three Kreglinger mentions are George Eliot’s translation of Strauss’s *Life of Jesus*, advances in geology, and *Essays and Reviews*. I would argue that, as far as the nineteenth century was concerned, the rise of modern geology had an even greater impact on Biblical religion than Darwinism did.

<sup>47</sup> Francis estimates the percentage of sermons to be likely around 1 percent of the total number of sermons preached, and certainly not higher than 5 percent (304).

out that Thomas Huxley “liked to pretend that the opposition to Darwin was theological,” but “At first much of the opposition to Darwin’s theory came from scientists on grounds of evidence, not from theologians on grounds of Scripture” (*Victorian Church* II.12). Conversely, Chadwick shows that not all scientific opposition to religion was actually scientific. When John Tyndall attacked James Mozley’s doctrine of miracles, he did so not on the basis of “his scientific training, for they were the strong arguments of an amateur philosopher” (II.4). It is worth recognizing, too, that some of the preachers who preached on scientific topics or who addressed scientific issues in their sermons were scientists or naturalists as well as preachers, and they evaluated the science on scientific and logical, as well as theological, grounds.<sup>48</sup> Other preachers debated not the details of scientific theories so much as their theological implications. As Brooke and Cantor explain, “much of the perceived conflict was not between science and theology but between competing forms of science in which theologians might have an interest or between competing forms of theology in which appeal might be made to the authority of science” (*Reconstructing Nature* 18).

But even in light of the “serious questions [that] have been raised about emphasizing the theme of conflict in any account of the history of the relationship between science and religion, [and the] need to develop more sophisticated

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<sup>48</sup> A few examples Francis notes include Charles Pritchard, an Anglican priest as well as an Oxford professor of astronomy; William Thomson, Archbishop of York and mathematician; and Charles Kingsley, chaplain to Queen Victoria, professor of Modern History at Cambridge, and “an above-average amateur” scientist (Francis 295 n.101).



interpretations” of particular encounters between them (Lightman ),<sup>49</sup> a conflict model of the relationship between religion and science can still have its uses if the qualifications noted above are kept in mind. Even Keith Francis, despite his assertion that “the debate [about the theory of evolution] ought not to be described as a controversy and certainly not a ‘war’” due to its limited scope, later in the same essay does so anyway, writing that scientists like Huxley “did not invent a controversy: their perceptions were based on actual events. For some preachers, Darwin was wrong: it is why they believed evolutionary theory was incorrect and how they chose to express this which sheds light on the fierceness of the controversy” (“Nineteenth Century British Sermons on Evolution” 272, 288). Francis’s point about the methods preachers—and scientists, too—chose to express themselves I believe is key to understanding the persistence and, when used descriptively and not for partisan purposes, the appropriateness of a conflict model for understanding those instances in the sermonic discourse where conflict, or at least the language of conflict, does arise.

However popular or persistent the model of conflict is, it is not representative of the entire relationship between religion and science, certainly not as that relationship played out in the sermons of the period. In fact, James Fraser, Bishop of Manchester, proclaimed that the church “cannot, perhaps, be sure that the attack [from perceived enemies] will ever come, or that those who show so menacing a front are, in fact, or at

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<sup>49</sup> For challenges to the conflict model, see also David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers, *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science*; John Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives*; John Brooke and Geoffrey Cantor, *Reconstructing Nature: The Engagement of Science and Religion*; Ronald L. Numbers, *Galileo Goes to Jail: And Other Myths about Science and Religion*.

heart, enemies at all. I utterly refuse to recognize as enemies” scientists like Huxley, who, Fraser says, is “one of the most eminent of them” (47-48). Similarly, in his sermon “Science and Religion,” Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, Dean of Westminster, decried the “miserable antagonism [. . .] imagined between Religion and Science, [. . .] that unnatural civil war which in modern times has been waged under the opposing flags of Faith and Reason” and sought to reconcile traditional Christian faith with the most recent trends of modern science (*Westminster Sermons* 166). This was especially true later in the century. Often times, Victorian sermons reveal a struggle not between religion and science for supremacy or dominance, but within religion over how to integrate the two or at least to maintain their compatibility. Thus, besides the familiar conflict model, two other models also emerge: compartmentalization, which held the two to be distinct and non-overlapping spheres, and conciliation, which sought to reconcile the two. In fact, in the sermons I’ve come across, some variation of compartmentalization or conciliation, or some combination of the two, is far more common than those declaring out and out conflict.

All three of the models can be seen in Owen Chadwick’s description of “Genesis and Geology” in the first volume of his *The Victorian Church*:

Genesis and geology went to war [over the age of the earth]. Some said that as Genesis was certain and geology uncertain, geology must yield. [*Conflict*] Some said that as Genesis was intended to teach religious and spiritual truth, the science was independent of interference from Mosaic evidence. [*Compartmentalization*]

Some said, God is the author of both nature and revelation, and therefore reconciling truth exists and may be discoverable. [*Conciliation*] (I.559)

Before proceeding with our consideration of these three models, a few qualifications are in order. First, in talking about conflict, compartmentalization, and conciliation as models, it should not be understood that the preachers or scientists I discuss below necessarily thought of themselves as holding to or advancing a particular model as such, or would have thought so using the term(s) I am here using.<sup>50</sup> Rather, these are categories that are not infrequently applied to the sermonic discourse for the sake of conceptual clarity. Besides the passage by Owen Chadwick quoted above, in which all three models can be seen, Keith Francis lists three possible responses of sermons to evolution:

“evolution as natural theology, opposition to evolution, or evolution with God as its first cause or director,” which would fall under conciliation, conflict, and compartmentalization, respectively (“Nineteenth Century British Sermons on Evolution” 296). To discuss the sermons preached at the British Association for the Advancement of Science in the 1870s, Ciaran Toal also uses a similar scheme of “map[ping] three broad configurations of science-religion relations” nearly the same as the models I am using. Secondly, it should be noted that the categories I am here proposing are neither wholly original to me nor are they the only categories that have been used in describing the

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<sup>50</sup> The conflict model is perhaps the exception. By the last quarter of the century, the conceptualization of conflict as a particular model for the relationship between religion and science had been formalized. Cf. John William Draper’s *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* which was published in 1875, and A. D. White’s *The Warfare of Science* with a foreword by Tyndall and published in 1876 and expanded as *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology* in 1896, both of which are discussed in Chadwick (II.13-14).

relationship between religion and science. I have opted to use these three categories with these three terms for a couple of reasons. As far as the terms themselves are concerned, with the exception of “conflict”—which is pretty universally used (sometimes along with “war” or “warfare”)—any number of terms have been used to describe the other two: “separationist,” “independence,” “separate realms,” “NOMA,” “difference in essence,” or “difference in approach” have all been used to describe models similar to what I’m terming “compartmentalization”; “engagement,” “integrationist,” “syncretic,” or “interactive” for “conciliation.”<sup>51</sup> Each of these terms carries with it nuances and some distinctions that, while interesting, are not essential for understanding Victorian sermonic discourse on the relationship between religion and science. And so I ask for the reader’s indulgence if, given the sermonic nature of this topic of study, I employ a common preacher’s tactic of employing alliteration to describe them.

That said, I do recognize that there are some limitations that will be encountered. Though I discuss the models separately, the boundaries between them are not always so clear. A preacher or scientist, for instance, might argue that religion and science speak to non-overlapping issues, but do so in a manner so as to at least imply conflict. Similarly, proponents of conciliation may discuss the two realms as separate and distinct but within a framework that merges and unifies them. Sometimes the same preacher will espouse

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<sup>51</sup> Eugenie C. Scott’s “The ‘Science and Religion Movement,’” Stephen Jay Gould’s *Rocks of Ages*, J.P. Moreland’s chapter “Science and Christianity,” particularly the section on “Models of Integrating Science and Theology,” in his *Scaling the Secular City*, and Ciaran Toal’s “Preaching at the British Association for the Advancement of Science” are the sources I’m drawing from for these various models and terms in this and the following paragraphs.

views that fall solidly within one model in one sermon and other views that fall solidly within another model in another sermon. Francis comments on the fact that “of the sermons mentioned thus far” in his essay, “none of the preachers adopted a single position [ . . . ] and maintained it throughout their careers. More interesting, elements of all three positions are in some sermons” (“Nineteenth-Century British Sermons on Evolution” 296). The attempt to understand new scientific theories and their implications “was a problem which [many] found difficult to deal with consistently” (297).

There have, in fact, been models proposed with terms like “accommodation” and “complementary” that would fall between compartmentalization and conciliation or within parts of both, that might more precisely define the relationship that emerges in a particular sermon or a particular individual, but however finely one may try to parse the relations between religion and science, the same limitations will eventually be encountered, leading to a multiplication of terms and models without adding much in the way of conceptual clarity. Thus, for simplicity’s sake, I use the models of conflict, compartmentalization, and conciliation, with the following qualification:

These three ‘positional’ readings [ . . . ]—or indeed the labels attached—are not absolute, but reflect the relative degree of emphasis that [a given preacher or sermon] placed on the relationship between science and religion. Often these views, and the rhetoric used to frame them, are rather more fluid, contingent on time and place. But they do have value, and are useful in mapping the broad views on the configuration of science-religion relations in the literature. (Toal 13)

Understood in this way—with fluid, not absolute, boundaries between them—the three models can serve as general reference points along a continuum of relating religion and science. This way of thinking does more justice to the nature of Victorian thinking on the matter.

### **Conflict**

If the engagement between science and religion often took place on the scientific fronts of evolution and geology, one of its most active religious fronts was miracles. If we consider another of Liddon's sermons, "The Worth of the Old Testament," and Huxley's critique of it in "The Lights of the Church and the Light of Science," what we find is that it quickly turns from a battle between science and religion's pseudo-science (as Huxley sees it), to a battle over the causes, interpretations, meanings, and implications of miracles. Huxley begins by discussing the nature of historical narratives and their degrees of veracity, then takes up the Pentateuch specifically. Huxley argues, briefly, that if some of the miraculous events of the Pentateuch—like the Noachian flood or the turning of Lot's wife into salt—could be shown to be less than literally true, then the Pentateuch collapses, and with it the New Testament and all of Christianity. Then, interestingly, to bolster his position, he summons Liddon to his defense:

But these may be said to be merely the carpings of that carnal reason which the profane call common sense; I hasten, therefore, to bring up the forces of unimpeachable ecclesiastical authority in support of my position. In a sermon preached last December, in St. Paul's Cathedral, Canon Liddon declares:—

For Christians it will be enough to know that our Lord Jesus Christ set the seal of His infallible sanction on the whole of the Old Testament. He found the Hebrew Canon as we have it in our hands to-day, and He treated it as an authority which was above discussion. Nay more: He went out of His way—if we may reverently speak thus—to sanction not a few portions of it which modern skepticism rejects. [. . .] (*Science and Hebrew Tradition* 208)

Huxley continues quoting Liddon's sermon,<sup>52</sup> in which Liddon mentions Lot's wife, the flood of Noah, and Jonah and the belly of the whale. For those who would try to explain away the fact that Jesus referred to these miraculous events, Liddon counters, "The trustworthiness of the Old Testament is, in fact, inseparable from the trustworthiness of our Lord Jesus Christ; and if we believe that He is the true Light of the world, we shall close our ears against suggestions impairing the credit of those Jewish Scriptures which have received the stamp of His Divine authority" (quoted in Huxley, *Science and Hebrew Tradition* 209). Huxley then proceeds to agree with an "Anglican divine" that:

we must be prepared to choose between the trustworthiness of scientific method and the trustworthiness of that which the Church declares to be Divine authority.

For, to my mind, this declaration of war to the knife against secular science [. . .]; this rejection [. . .] of any and all evidence which conflicts with theological

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<sup>52</sup> Huxley has a footnote identifying the sermon thusly: "*The Worth of the Old Testament*, a Sermon preached in St. Paul's Cathedral on the Second Sunday in Advent, 8<sup>th</sup> Dec, 1889, by H. P. Liddon, D.D., D.C.L., Canon and Chancellor of St. Paul's. Second edition, revised and with a new preface, 1890." I have not been able to locate a copy of this sermon.

dogma—is the only position which is logically reconcilable with the axioms of orthodoxy. (229-230)

Here we do see evidence of the “war” between science and religion, the declaration of which was made by the Church against science (at least as Huxley portrays the engagement). And, as Huxley continues quoting and discussing Liddon’s sermon (as well as another sermon from one G. Rawlinson, Canon of Canterbury and Professor of Ancient History at Oxford), it is clear who the victor is: giving way to the weight of the scientific evidence, religion continually retreats through compromise and creative reinterpretations of Scripture until “No longer in contact with fact of any kind” and thus finally “inaccessible to the attacks of the infidel” (238). From Huxley’s perspective, religion’s retreats into either of the other two models—compartmentalization or conciliation—represent its defeat. Given the distance Victorian churchmen and theologians travelled over the span of Huxley’s lifetime (which was more or less coextensive with the Victorian era) in adapting doctrine and theology to accommodate new scientific theories (as we will see in some of the conciliation models below), this was not an unreasonable conclusion, from a certain point of view.

This battle between Liddon and Huxley was just one in a bigger “war” over miracles, the terms of which were perhaps most clearly set forth a little over two decades earlier when James Bowling Mozley weighed in on the issue of miracles and gave perhaps the definitive statement of the position Liddon defended above. In 1865, Mozley preached the Bampton Lectures at Oxford University, *On Miracles*. Despite the



minimizing assessments of the lectures by later generations,<sup>53</sup> they “were at once, upon their publication, recognized as an important work” (“Mozley” 250),<sup>54</sup> and a new edition was published about every three to five years until the century’s end, nine in all.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Owen Chadwick describes it as “the last statement, by a great English Protestant theologian, of a world of divinity which henceforth vanished except in the scholastic manuals” and says, “no divine of the first rank could ever again argue the case as Mozley argued” (II.31). A. M. Ramsay, the Archbishop of Canterbury from 1961-1974, in a lecture delivered before the University of London in 1963, uses Mozley’s lectures on miracles as a leaping off point for his own depiction of Christianity, the supernatural, and miracles, claiming that in 1865 Mozley’s “view of miracle was already becoming obsolescent, and its publication by J. B. Mozley seems now to have been rather a rearguard action on behalf of a view more characteristic of the eighteenth century, wherein both the great Bishop Butler and the well-known Archdeacon Paley had successively held it” (4). Joseph Altholz has a more charitable assessment of the decline of Mozley’s apologetic:

Mozley’s argument was so triumphant that it was never followed up, and he stands as ‘the last great exponent of the evidential idea of miracles’.  
[ . . . ] Since [orthodoxy] was not again attacked directly [as it had been in *Essays and Reviews*], there was nothing more for it to do. It was a position not capable of further development, so it did not develop further. An exhausted orthodoxy died of its own victory. The evidential apologetic, having survived the onslaught of the Essayists, was never again invoked and disappeared from view. The next generation knew it not. (*Anatomy* 132)

Incidentally, arguments on the evidential value and logical coherence of miracles did not die with Mozley any more than natural theology died after Darwin. Richard Swinburne, a Fellow of the British Academy and Emeritus Professor of the Philosophy of Religion at Oxford University, has been cited as a contemporary defender of miracles following in the tradition of Butler and Paley. See R. Douglas Geivett, “The Evidential Value of Miracles” in *In Defense of Miracles*, edited by Geivett and Gary R. Habermas. Speaking to Altholz’s point above, perhaps what was needed for a revival of the evidential idea of miracles was a fresh attack; the (at the time) atheist philosopher Antony Flew contributed an opening essay to *In Defense of Miracles*.

<sup>54</sup> Mozley was, according to one early-twentieth-century account of him, “one of the most princely pulpit teachers of his day,” and among the tractarians “there was no abler nor more independent, honest, or judicious thinker” than Mozley (Brastow 309, 349); the *Dictionary of National Biography* quotes Dean Church, a contemporary of Mozley’s, as saying that Mozley was “after Mr. Newman, the most forcible and impressive of the Oxford writers, [ . . . with a ] mind of great and rare power,” (“Mozley” 250); and Joseph Altholz declares that Mozley was “perhaps the finest theological mind among the tractarians” (*Anatomy* 132).

In the first lecture, “Miracles Necessary for a Revelation,” Mozley lays out what is at stake in the debate over miracles:

For if those witnesses and documents [the Scriptures] deceive us with regard to the miracles, how can we trust them with regard to the doctrines? If they are wrong upon the evidences of a revelation, how can we depend upon their being right as to the nature of that revelation? If their account of visible facts is to be received with an explanation, is not their account of doctrines liable to a like explanation? Revelation then, even if it does not need the truth of miracles for the benefit of their proof, still requires it in order not to be crushed under the weight of their falsehood. (*On Miracles* 16)

In short, it is the very survival of Christianity as a whole that Mozley seeks to defend.

Although not named directly in the lectures, Baden Powell, the Oxford professor of mathematics of *Essays and Reviews* fame (or infamy, depending on one’s perspective), was the chief antagonist. The title of the second lecture, “Order of Nature,” directly alludes to Powell’s *The Order of Nature*, which had been published in 1859 and was essentially summarized in his contribution to *Essays and Reviews*, “On the Study of the Evidences of Christianity.” Similarly, Mozley’s fifth lecture, “Testimony,” is largely a refutation of Powell.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Chadwick, presumably following the *Dictionary of National Biography*, notes only a fifth edition by 1880, but WorldCat has a sixth edition in 1883, an eighth edition in 1890, and a “New” edition in 1895. My own copy of the lectures is a seventh edition from 1886.

<sup>56</sup> In the endnotes that accompany the published version of the lectures, the identification of Powell is made explicit with numerous lengthy quotations from his works.

In “Evidences,” Powell had asserted the principle of uniformitarianism, the idea that nature has always operated according to fixed and uniform principles and must continue to do so. Consequently:

intellect and philosophy are compelled to disown the recognition of anything in the world of matter at variance with the first principle of the laws of matter—the universal order and indissoluble unity of physical causes [. . .]. The more knowledge advances, the more it has been, and will be, acknowledged that Christianity, as a real religion, must be viewed apart from connexion with physical things. (qtd. in Altholz, *Anatomy* 20-21)

Although he also asserted that faith had absolute dominion in spiritual things, this sort of radical compartmentalization made Powell’s essay the most dangerous of the *Essays* according to some critics, “voiding Christianity of its character as an historical revelation and leaving only an ineffable spirituality” (Altholz, *Anatomy* 21). Into this context Mozley launched his counterattack. Altholz provides a concise summary of Mozley’s argument: “The so-called laws of nature are not really laws; the order of nature is merely our perception of sequence and expectation of its continuance. Thus miracles are not violations of law, because there is no inherent law to prevent them” (132). Although the thoroughness of the argument is lost, the summary does capture its essence sufficient for our purposes.

To the casual observer today, the conflict could appear to be merely scholastic, an academic debate between a pair of Oxford men. The provocativeness of the passage quoted above notwithstanding, Powell’s essay was on balance calm and measured, even

if the “calmness of [Powell’s] tone gave an impression of coldness still more repellent” than his virtual denial of the miraculous (Altholz, *Anatomy* 21). Mozley’s lectures, too, were methodical and meticulously logical—for the most part. But Mozley’s tone does occasionally heat up, and he does not refrain from couching parts of his argument in terms of conflict. Toward the conclusion of the second lecture, Mozley decries those philosophers who made universalism into a law, “by which summary expedient they enclosed the world in iron, and bound the Deity in adamantine fetters” (*On Miracles* 46); against this “false certainty,” Mozley says at the end of the third lecture, it is necessary to exert “such a force as is necessary to enable reason to stand its ground, and bend back again that spring of impression against the miraculous which has illegally tightened itself into a law to the understanding” (73). Mozley goes even further in associating that spring of impression with the “vast irrational influences, the weight of custom, the power of association, the strength of passion, the *vis inertiae* of sense, the mere force of the uniformity of nature as spectacle—those influences which make up that power of the world which Scripture always speaks of as the antagonist of faith” (73). Elsewhere, Mozley speaks of miracles not “compet[ing] with nature upon its rival’s own ground” and of foes and allies (60, 63). If “Powell tried to eliminate at a stroke the conflict of science and religion by showing that ‘there was no common ground between them,’” Mozley, it seems, was having no part of it (Altholz, *Anatomy* 21). Reason, in the service of faith, would not be removed from contested ground; the illegal restriction of the understanding, the world, and the Deity himself by antagonists of the faith would be resisted and bent back.

Of course, in fairness to Mozley, it must be noted that his target was neither science nor the method of induction *per se*:

we cannot attribute to scientific men, by however penetrating and lofty faculties they may have discovered *facts*, any peculiar perception of recurrence or *law*. Language has been used as if science generated a perception of mathematical or necessary sequence in the order of nature. But science has herself proclaimed the truth that there *is no* necessary connexion in nature; nor has science to do with generalization at all, but only with discovery. [. . .]

What is the conclusion, then, to be drawn from this statement of the process of induction? It is this. The scientific part of induction being only the pursuit of a particular fact, miracles cannot in the nature of the case receive any blow from the scientific part of induction [. . .] That which *does* resist the miraculous is the *unscientific* part of induction, or the instinctive generalization upon this fact. (*On Miracles* 42-43, 44 emphasis in original)

Among scholars and educated laymen who carefully followed Mozley's lectures, such a distinction may be logical and clear enough (whether convincing or not); but this is one of the finer points of Mozley's argument, and lacks the rhetorical flourish and memorability of the conclusion of this second lecture.

Having declared that the "proper function of the inductive principle [. . .] is to operate as a practical [as opposed to logical] basis for the affairs of life and the carrying on of human society," Mozley adds:

But it is also evident what is *not* the proper function of this principle. It does not belong to this principle to lay down speculative positions, and to say what can or cannot take place in the world. It does not belong to it to control religious belief, or to determine that certain acts of God for the revelation of His will to man, reported to have taken place, have not taken place. Such decisions are totally out of its sphere; it can assert the universal as a *law*; but the universal as a law and the universal as a proposition are wholly distinct. (*On Miracles* 46)

As Mozley moves to his conclusion here, his pace quickens, and with the repetition and parallelism, he begins sounding more like a preacher and a little less like a university lecturer. Mozley continues on in this vein at some length, including the passage quoted above about enclosing the world in iron and binding the Deity in adamantine fetters—note the vivid imagery and further parallelism of the preacher—until he takes up the example of the ascension of Christ. The inductive principle (the *unscientific* part discussed earlier) “can only decide the fact [of the ascension] by the medium of a universal; the universal proposition that no man has ascended to heaven. But this is a statement which exceeds its power; it is as radically incompetent to pronounce upon it as the taste or smell is to decide on matters of sight” (47). And then, Mozley finishes with a rhetorical flourish:

Converted indeed into a universal proposition, the inductive principle is omnipotent, and totally annihilates every particular which does not come within its range. The universal statement that no man has ascended into heaven, absolutely falsifies the fact that One Man has. But thus transmuted, the inductive

principle issues out of this metamorphose, a fiction not a truth; a weapon of air, which even in the hand of a giant can inflict no blow because it is itself a shadow. The object of assault receives the unsubstantial thrust without a shock, only exposing the want of solidity in the implement of war. The battle against the supernatural has been going on long, and strong men have conducted it and are conducting it—but what they want is a weapon. The logic of unbelief wants a universal. But no real universal is forthcoming, and it only wastes its strength in wielding a fictitious one. (47-48)

Thus Mozley rhetorically disarms his foe, reducing universalism and uniformitarianism to a mere shadow of a weapon. Whatever the logical merits of Mozley's argument, however much his position on the relationship between religion and science might better be characterized as compartmental (and others of his works will be discussed as such below), it is not hard to see how someone listening to or subsequently reading Mozley's lecture could come away with the impression that science and religion were indeed engaged in combat, that religion and science were in fact opposed.

Such a sense of conflict would be reinforced by those who followed the debate which ensued between Mozley and John Tyndall. In 1867 in the *Fortnightly Review*, Tyndall wrote an essay, "Miracles and Special Providences" in which he critiques Mozley's Bampton Lectures, even going so far at one point as to refer to Mozley as a "Frankenstein" evoking a monster (*Fragments* 19). At another point he describes Mozley as "destroy[ing]" an argument "for the mere pleasure of again and again knocking the breath out of it," and he comments on the "dash of scorn in the energy with which he

tramples on it” (23, 25). Tyndall turns Mozley’s argument against him and thus, as he characterizes it, “destroys” and “effectually abolishes” Mozley’s position (24, 25).

Mozley responded in turn with “‘Of Christ Alone without Sin’: A Reply to Professor Tyndall” in the seventh volume of *The Contemporary Review* in 1868. In the introduction and conclusion of his essay, Mozley makes two comments that bear upon the perceived conflict between religion and science. First, in the introduction, Mozley remarks that Tyndall:

confined himself generally to a ground of science—a ground upon which he justly felt himself strong [. . .]: though I should be disposed to draw a broad distinction between the most intimate, subtle, and even imaginative insight into the facts of science and—what the Professor appears to claim—an exclusive right to the inferences, whether physical or metaphysical, from them. Upon one occasion, however, the Professor enters upon special theological ground [. . .]. (*Lectures* 116)

Then, in his conclusion, Mozley writes, “The whole, therefore, of this subject [miracles, the supernatural, and the moral as well as divine portraits of Christ] belongs to, and must be handed over to the jurisdiction of the department of Christian evidences” (135). As was so often the case, the conflict that arises between religion and science turns out to be a turf war, a conflict over disputed boundaries between them. While Tyndall noted but did not comment upon Mozley’s reply when he republished his original essay in *Fragments of Science*, Mozley’s assertions—objecting to scientists’ claim to “an exclusive right” to draw conclusions from the facts of nature, and asserting that the



subject of miracles “must be handed over to the jurisdiction” of religion—bear a striking resemblance to assertions Tyndall made in the conclusion of his 1874 presidential address to the British Association for the Advancement of Science. In the Belfast Address, Tyndall infamously said, “We claim, and we shall wrest from theology, the entire domain of cosmological theory. All schemes and systems which thus infringe upon the domain of science must, in so far as they do this, submit to its control, and relinquish all thought of controlling it” (210). Whether or not Tyndall had Mozley’s comments in mind when he spoke those words, looking at their previous encounter on the subject of miracles certainly sheds some light on how debates between a prominent theologian and a notable scientist over the contested territory of miracles could lead into perceptions of conflict between religion and science more generally.

If the direct conflict between Mozley and Tyndall ended with their published essays, each of them carried it on independently afterwards. Tyndall, as noted above, did so in his Belfast Address (among other works), and Mozley in the prefaces to the subsequent editions of his Bampton Lectures. Regarding the latter, though, the limits of conflict become evident. In the “Preface to Third Edition” (which appeared in 1872), Mozley writes, “It must be observed that the controversy respecting miracles tends to a stationary point, at which each side sees what its real premises are, and sees that it is separated from the other by a difference of first principles. This has perhaps been the case in the recent discussion of this question” of miracles (*On Miracles* xxiii). Even on the practical question of evidence, “we find ourselves here again, before long, coming to a

standstill in controversy, because it soon appears that the two sides have no common criterion” (xxiii). Eight pages later, Mozley’s argument reveals yet another standoff:

It is the peculiar boast of the new controversial ground—that it does not argue but only state. The fact is stated then that legendary supernatural is abandoned; and that is met by the counter fact that the Christian supernaturalism is retained. We have reasoning to offer if the law of the argument allows it; but if it is the very merit of this new argument that it settles the question by the statement of facts; that is the aggressive fact, and this is the defensive fact; and the one fact as a refutation of the Christian miracles, is directly answered by the other fact in support of them. (xxx).

By the third edition, the last that would be published with new material in his lifetime,<sup>57</sup> Mozley was publicly declaring the battle was a draw as far as the formal logical arguments were concerned. Privately, though, he admitted as much even before he preached the lectures. In a letter to R. W. Church dated 31 January, 1865, Mozley writes:

The difficulty [of putting the Bampton Lecture thoughts into some shape] is in dealing with something so informal and unexpressed and indefinite as what constitutes the real objection to miracles in doubting minds. The formal, logical answers have been given over and over again, and with great force, but the minds whom they intended to convince do not care the least about them. And yet no other answers can be given that I know of. Thus one is sometimes struck with the

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<sup>57</sup> The fourth edition was published in 1878, the year of Mozley’s death, so it’s possible it appeared before he died, but there was not an additional preface written as there had been for the first, second, and third editions.

idea of the entire superfluousness of one's task, and can only take refuge in the necessity of the case, that people will always be attacking and defending as long as the world lasts. (Anne Mozley 261-262)

That last line, "people will always be attacking and defending as long as the world lasts," stated as a "necessity," hints at a possible motivation for Mozley's use of the language of conflict in his second and third lectures,<sup>58</sup> that he may have been trying to break through the apathy of "doubting minds" and the obstinacy of the problem despite the repeated, forceful answers that had already been given. Whatever the case may have been, despite their ongoing popularity throughout the rest of the century, the lectures came to represent a "rearguard action" of an older way of viewing miracles (Ramsay 4).

There was, however, an alternative approach to miracles than the evidential and rationalist approaches of Mozley and Liddon on the one hand, or the scientific skepticism of Huxley and Tyndall, on the other hand. This was the "miracle counter-tradition" that began with Samuel Taylor Coleridge and was developed by F. D. Maurice (Gabelman *passim*). The miracle counter-tradition avoided the conflict between religion and science discussed above, and allowed preachers to move the debate from the realm of conflict and toward the realms of compartmentalization or conciliation. George MacDonald was a proponent of this counter-tradition, and he suggests that both Christian rationalists and

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<sup>58</sup> The other lectures, even the fifth which more directly attacks Powell's position than any of the others besides the second, do not employ such language, nor does the tone heat up as it does in the second. Nor does he do so in two other sermons in which he discusses religion and nature (science is discussed more indirectly), "Nature" and "The Religious Enjoyment of Nature"—both of which were discussed earlier and will be discussed again later in this chapter.

scientific sceptics alike misunderstand the nature of miracles as well as the very nature of nature, of natural facts. Speaking of sceptics, MacDonald writes, “So long as they regard only the surface of [miracles], they will, most likely, see in them only a violation of the laws of nature: when they behold the heart of them, they will recognise there at least a possible fulfilment of her deepest laws” (quoted in Gabelman 25). We might recall here the idea discussed in chapter 1 of this study, MacDonald’s notion of a “hidden doorway” separating the natural and supernatural worlds. For MacDonald, the sceptic keeps the door shut in regarding only the apparent surface of miracles—that is, their physical manifestation—and failing to see through to their heart—that is, their divine manifestation. But when seen properly, miracles become “not violations of nature but its deepest fulfilment” (Gabelman 25). From this perspective, sceptics not only fail to understand miracles, they also fail to understand nature itself properly.

In another of his “unspoken” sermons, “The Truth,” MacDonald writes about “the man of mere science” who thus fails to see the natural world rightly:

Ask a man of mere science, what is the truth of a flower: he will pull it to pieces, show you its parts, explain how they operate, how they minister each to the life of the flower; he will tell you what changes are wrought in it by scientific cultivation; where it lives originally, where it can live; the effects upon it of another climate; what part the insects bear in its varieties—and doubtless many more facts about it. Ask the poet what is the truth of the flower, and he will answer: ‘Why, the flower itself, the perfect flower, and what it cannot help saying to him who has ears to hear it.’ The truth of the flower is, not the facts about it, be

they correct as ideal science itself, but the shining, glowing, gladdening, patient thing throned on its stalk—the compeller of smile and tear from child and prophet. [. . .] here to [the child] is no mere fact; here is no law of nature; here is a truth of nature, the truth of a flower—a perfect thought from the heart of God—a truth of God!—not an intellectual truth, but a divine fact, a dim revelation, a movement of the creative soul!<sup>59</sup> (*Unspoken Third* 25-26)

However, science in and of itself—as represented here by the scientist’s examination of a flower to discover facts upon facts—is not the problem *per se*. After a similar discussion about science failing to see the real truth of nature, in “The Voice of Job” MacDonald specifically states that “I would not be supposed to depreciate the labours of science, but I say its discoveries are unspeakably less precious than the merest gifts of Nature” (*Unspoken Second* 91). Not only does MacDonald not deprecate science, he actually “was very interested in science himself, having studied physics and chemistry at Aberdeen University” (Kreglinger 93). However, “he did not believe that one would arrive at theological truth via the sciences. His concern was that the emphasis on science and especially geology would reduce reality to its material manifestations” (93). Again,

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<sup>59</sup> MacDonald’s depiction of the scientist’s “truth” vs. the poet’s or prophet’s or child’s certainly bears comparison with Dickens’s Gradgrind: “Thomas Gradgrind, sir. A man of realities. A man of fact and calculations. [. . .] With a rule and a pair of scales, and the multiplication table always in his pocket, sir, ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to. It is a mere question of figures, a case simple arithmetic” (*Hard Times* 6). Dickens also introduces an unnamed “gentleman,” who proclaims, “You are to be in all things regulated and governed, said the gentleman, 'by fact. We hope to have, before long, a board of fact, composed of commissioners of fact, who will force the people to be a people of fact, and of nothing but fact. You must discard the word Fancy altogether. You have nothing to do with it” (*Hard Times* 9).

there is not a problem with science itself so long as one recognizes its limitations: science as such is destructive—pulling apart flowers, as it were—and reductive—focusing only on material manifestations. Put in other terms, science looks at how the back of the tapestry is woven together, and in so doing misses the face of the tapestry where God’s “work culminates in revelation” (*Unspoken Second* 25).

In “The Voice of Job,” MacDonald likewise discusses the idea that science’s analysis fails to see the forest for the trees:

In what belongs to the deeper meanings of nature and her mediation between us and God, the appearances of nature are the truths of nature, far deeper than any scientific discoveries in and concerning them. [. . .] It is through their show, not through their analysis, that we enter into their deepest truths. [. . .] To know a primrose is a higher thing than to know all the botany of it. [. . .] Nature [. . .] exists primarily for her face, her look, her appeals to the heart and the imagination, her simple service to human need, and not for the secrets to be discovered in her and turned to man’s farther use. (*Unspoken Second* 90)

The paradox here, that Nature’s deepest truths are on its surface, helps us understand why, for MacDonald, the scientific analysis of nature is akin to its destruction, for in its quest to get past the surface, to pull it apart in order to anatomize it, its deeper meanings are destroyed: “by an infinite decomposition we should know nothing more of what a thing really is, for, the moment we decompose it, it ceases to be, and all its meaning is vanished” (90). In “The Truth,” MacDonald makes the point even more directly: “Analysis is well, as death is well; analysis is death, not life. It discovers a little of the

way God walks to his ends, but in so doing it forgets and leaves the end itself behind” (*Unspoken Third* 25). For all of these reasons, even though MacDonald eschews the supposed incompatibility of theology and science, “it remains important for him to emphasize that science is limited and consequently unable to give a complete account of reality [. . .] as it cannot capture the moral, aesthetic or spiritual dimension of life,” (Kreglinger 96). In other words, what we find here is a compartmentalization of science and religion, but one which relegates science to a distinctly subordinate role beneath religion. While this is perhaps a step removed from the conflict model, neither does it quite represent a fully realized version of the compartmental model, to which we will now turn.

### **Compartmentalization**

A modern-day proponent of this model, the late Harvard biologist Stephen Jay Gould, succinctly described compartmentalization using the acronym NOMA, Non-Overlapping Magisteria, and defined it thusly: “Each domain of inquiry [*e.g.*, religion or science] frames its own rules and admissible questions, and sets its own criteria for judgment and resolution. These accepted standards, and the procedures developed for debating and resolving legitimate issues, define the magisterium—or teaching authority—of any given realm” (*Rocks of Ages* 52-53). In other words, religion and science operate in different spheres, with neither able to pronounce judgment on or dictate to the other in its own sphere. As the *Pall Mall Gazette* put it on August 22, 1868, in response to Joseph Hooker’s 1868 presidential address to the British Association, “Religion is your opinion on one set of subjects, science your opinion upon another set of

subjects,” and thus there could be no conflict between them (qtd. in Chadwick II.15). For MacDonald, though, religion in fact does pronounce judgment on science even in the realm of nature, essentially arguing that because science fails to look for God, it fails to see God and therefore even fails to see nature itself rightly.

A nearer expression of compartmentalization can be seen in the sermon “God’s Revelation of Heaven,” by Frederick Robertson, a popular and influential midcentury preacher. Expositing 1 Corinthians 2: 9-10—“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit”—Robertson explains:

No scientific analysis can discover the truths of God. Science can not give a Revelation. Science proceeds upon observation. It submits every thing to the experience of the senses. Its law, expounded by its great lawgiver, is, that if you would ascertain its truth you must see, feel, taste. Experiment is the test of truth. Now, you can not, by searching, find out the Almighty to perfection, nor a single one of the blessed Truths He has to communicate. (26)

Here, Robertson is not denigrating science, nor is he proscribing avenues of inquiry to science. In fact, at the beginning of the sermon, he accepts that idea of non-overlapping magisteria in principle: “The princes of this world might judge in a matter of politics; the leaders in the world of literature were qualified to pronounce on a point of taste; the counsellors of this world to weigh an amount of evidence” (23). Although he stops his list there, it is a fair extrapolation to add “the scientists of this world are qualified to expound on the material world.” Nonetheless, Robertson does note the boundaries that science



cannot cross because of its very nature. Science cannot reveal God because of the distinction “between a kingdom which is appreciable by the senses, and another whose facts and truths are seen and heard only by the spirit” (25). More specifically, Robertson notes the futility of scientific efforts to discover anything more than the physical, material elements of life:

Men have tried to demonstrate Eternal Life from an examination of the structure of the body. One fancies he has discovered the seat of life in the pineal gland—another in the convolution of a nerve—and thence each infers the continuance of the mystic principle supposed to be discovered there. But a third comes, and sees in it all nothing really immaterial: organization, cerebration, but not Thought or Mind separable from these; nothing that must necessarily subsist after the organism has been destroyed. (26)

For Robertson, these three scientist’s conflicting views are meant to cancel each other out and thus demonstrate the futility of trying to move from science to religion. On that point, Thomas Huxley, in his lay sermon “On the Physical Basis of Life” (which will be discussed in much more detail below), would agree, and he does so by combining the roles of Robertson’s imagined scientist’s, claiming to have found the seat of life while simultaneously rejecting any religious implications.

On the one hand, Huxley proceeds much as the first two of Robertson’s imagined scientists, but suggests not a gland or a nerve, but rather “protoplasm” to be the seat of life. At the same time, though, Huxley shares a commonality with Robertson’s third scientist, arguing that in the progression from material elements, to simple compounds, to

living protoplasm, nowhere is there to be found any property—such as “vitality”—that is anything more than a result of “the nature and disposition of its molecules” (*Lay Sermons* 138, cf. 135-138). Huxley explicitly rejects and condemns the intrusion of “spiritualistic explanations” of biological life, just as Robertson dismisses the intrusion of scientists trying to explain the spiritual life in terms of human biology. Nonetheless, Huxley does not make the leap from scientific observation to “materialistic philosophy” (138-139). Although Huxley draws conclusions quite contrary to Robertson’s, he shares a due regard for the distinction between scientific inquiry and philosophical or religious belief. However much he was personally opposed to the religion of his day, “For Huxley, science was neither Christian nor anti-Christian but extra-Christian, meaning that it had a scope and autonomy independent of religious interests” (John Brooke “Modern Science” 227).

Still, although Gould speaks of this model as one of “principled and respectful separation” (4), such an attitude did not always materialize in practice. Victorian proponents of compartmentalization might very well display respectful neutrality toward each side, but they might also reveal a sometimes skeptical or dismissive, if not hostile, attitude toward one particular side, especially when discussing areas somewhere between where one magisterium ended and the other began; such was the case with Huxley. However much he maintained a distinction between science and religion and rejected philosophical materialism, Huxley was not neutral when it came to science and religion and wresting from the former domain for the latter. Take for instance the following

discussion of thought and matter in terms of either spiritualistic or materialistic terminology. Huxley argues that it makes little difference:

whether we express the phænomena of matter in terms of spirit; or the phænomena of spirit in terms of matter: matter may be regarded as a form of thought, thought may be regarded as a property of matter—each statement has a certain relative truth. But with a view to the progress of science, the materialistic terminology is in every way to be preferred. For it connects thought with the other phænomena of the universe, and suggests inquiry into the nature of those physical conditions, or concomitants of thought, which are more or less accessible to us, and a knowledge of which may, in future, help us to exercise the same kind of control over the world of thought, as we already possess in respect of the material world; whereas, the alternative, or spiritualistic, terminology is utterly barren, and leads to nothing but obscurity and confusion of ideas. (*Lay Sermons* 145-146).

After a passing disclaimer on the “relative truth” of both sides of the matter, Huxley quickly expresses his preference for materialistic terminology with regards to the “progress of science” (*viz.* what we would now call psychology or psychiatry).<sup>60</sup> And, even though the progress Huxley envisions was enlarging of the boundaries of science into what was traditionally considered the domain of religion—whose way of approaching the subject Huxley castigates as “utterly barren,” obscuring, and

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<sup>60</sup> Charles Kingsley, who was a friend of Huxley’s, expressed a similar sentiment as to the benefit of allowing science into the realm of thought, praising science for delivering “the insane—I may say by the scientific insight of one man [. . .]—I mean the great and good Pinel—from hopeless misery and torture into comparative peace and comfort, and at least the possibility of cure” (*Scientific Lectures* 255).

confusing—he does limit that expansion to the “*physical* conditions, or concomitants of thought, which are *more or less accessible*” to the scientist. Thus, despite Huxley’s frequent conflicts with the religion of his day, “On the Physical Basis of Life,” even with its implicit hostility toward religion, does illustrate a technically compartmentalized model of religion and science from the perspective of a nonreligious scientist.<sup>61</sup>

An attitude like Huxley’s, though, was not without its counterpart in religious versions of compartmentalization. In 1840, Henry Melvill—one of the most eminent preachers of the early Victorian period, whom Ruskin, Browning, and Gladstone, among others, “considered the greatest preacher of his day” (Landow 16)—preached a sermon entitled “Christianity the Guardian of Human Life” before the annual gathering of the corporation of Trinity House<sup>62</sup> and subsequently published for the general public (reaching multiple editions on both sides of the Atlantic). This sermon clearly lays out the compartmentalization of religion and science: they are separate, and each has its own knowledge and sphere of inquiry and authority with little overlap. But, as we saw in Huxley, there is a bias for one side of that relationship that emerges, too.

After lauding and giving examples of advances in medical science, astronomy, chemistry, geography, architecture, and machinery, and asserting the good science

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<sup>61</sup> Again, it’s worth reminding ourselves that the models rest on a continuum. Huxley was, no doubt, a vociferous opponent of the religion of his day; he also recognized the limits of what science as science could and could not pronounce upon. For Huxley, there was a meaningful and principled distinction between being an *agnostic*—a term he coined—and being an atheist or materialist.

<sup>62</sup> Trinity House was incorporated by Royal Charter in 1514 and charged with improving “the art and science of mariners; [and] to examine into the qualifications, and regulate the conduct of those who take upon them the charge of conducting ships” (“The history of the Corporation of Trinity House of Deptford Strond: 500 years young”).

generally has done “continually and powerfully [. . .] on the saving of human life,”

Melville then asserts the following:

without considering human wisdom as opposed to the acquisition of heavenly, what is it in itself, as to the power of giving life, when you regard man as an accountable being, and examine how we may stand at the tribunal of God? [. . .]

[. . .] It is nothing to me, ye men of science, that ye are ready to instruct me in the motions of the stars, that ye will take me with you into the laboratories of nature, and there show me the processes of her mysterious chemistry. I dread to look upon the stars; for I feel that I have made their architect mine enemy: I shrink from the wonders of nature; for I know that I have provoked the mighty being who controls them. It is nothing, that ye offer to instruct me in the relations of substances; in the connexion of cause and effect [. . .]. I am a dying creature, yet an immortal; sinful, and nevertheless accountable; and if ye cannot tell me how I may prepare for futurity, how meet death with composure, and enter eternity with hope, miserable instructors are ye all! And ye cannot tell me: I must turn to a higher teacher, and seek wisdom at a purer source. (I.276-277)

Even natural theology—perhaps a field where religion expands its borders into what would otherwise be considered science’s domain—is not of much help:

Can natural theology carry us beyond the discovery of our hopeless condition? Can it suggest a remedy? rather, is not its highest achievement, the proving us exposed to the wrath of the Almighty, the showing us that the attributes of God pledge Him to take vengeance on the sinful, and that the disorganization, too

visible throughout this creation, is evidence that the vengeance is already let loose? (I.276-277)

However much the facts of nature might hint of religious realities (at least in the hands of theologians), they cannot speak fully of the religious realm. Here, clearly articulated, are the domains of science and religion. Science operates in the physical realm, curing illness, charting the course of stars for navigation, making maps of the world, erecting lighthouses. While Melvill asserts that Christianity uniquely promotes the sciences, he does not conflate Christianity with science. In fact, later in the sermon he asserts that the Bible can impart “knowledge, if not of the stars, yet of Him who made the stars; knowledge, if not of what is perishable, of that which is imperishable” (I.277). The Bible, for Melvill, is no science text,<sup>63</sup> At the same time, though, neither does science provide any sort of moral instruction or guidance, how to live, face death, or enter eternity, and with his twice-repeated “it is nothing” and his declaration “miserable instructors are ye all,” Melvill’s dismissive attitude toward science comes through.

What is more, just before he proclaims that human wisdom is not opposed to the acquisition of heavenly wisdom, Melvill declares that “they who have been most successful in scientific inquiry, have not only been often destitute of acquaintance with God, but deprived of it through the very knowledge for which they have labored, and of which they have been proud. There is a tendency in earthly science, to the encouraging that haughtiness of spirit which is directly opposed to religion” (I.276). Given the

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<sup>63</sup> This should not be taken in the sense of implying that Melvill would accept the views of Higher Criticism of the Bible that would allow for its containing errors of fact in regard to science.

occasion of this sermon and its audience, such a declaration might seem surprising. This was, after all, the annual gathering of the members of Trinity House, a significant secular and scientific organization, for its election of their Master and his deputy, and Trinity was known to have employed or worked with a number of scientists and engineers of note, including Michael Faraday (one of the most prominent scientists of the day and a devout Christian) and James Walker (the eminent Scottish civil engineer). But it was perhaps exactly the principle of compartmentalization that allowed Melvill to do so: he was not there to dictate to them their practical and scientific work, but to fulfill his calling as a preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to exhort them to mind a higher calling. And, at least Trinity House did not mind, for it was not the first time he had similarly reproved them, and he was invited back to preach at their annual gathering at least three more times.<sup>64</sup>

### **Conciliation**

Striking a more conciliatory note, and perhaps bridging the gap between our models of compartmentalization and conciliation, is Charles Kingsley's 1866 sermon preached to Trinity House, "Prayer and Science." Kingsley opens the sermon with the pronouncement, "These are days in which there is much dispute about religion and science—how far they agree with each other; whether they contradict or interfere with

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<sup>64</sup> The two volumes of Melvill's *Sermons*, "comprising all the discourses published by consent of the author," includes in the section "Sermons Preached on Public Occasions" five sermons preached before Trinity House, on Trinity Sunday for the years 1838, 1840, 1842, 1844, and 1846. In his 1838 address to them, "The Greatness of Being Useful," he noted England's failure to fulfill its "duty of making commerce subservient to Christianity" and using its dominion over the seas for spreading the Gospel (I.272).

each other. Especially, there is dispute about Providence” (*Discipline* 23). If, more and more, science discovers regular laws ordering the visible world, then, some argue, there is less and less room for God’s action in the world. While Kingsley—who was, among other things, both a clergyman and an amateur naturalist—might not see any problem in allowing simultaneously the “fixed and regular laws” of nature and “God’s special providence,” others certainly did. And so Kingsley does not appeal to his own authority but rather to that of his audience, seafaring men who “are the most likely to solve this great puzzle about the limits of science and of religion, of law and providence; for, of all callings, theirs needs at once most science and most religion; [. . .] and that they do show, by their daily conduct, that a man may be at once thoroughly scientific and thoroughly religious” (25).

After noting the number of ways and situations in which mariners must scientifically study nature, its laws and operations, in order to secure their safety, Kingsley also notes those situations that defy their knowledge and reason, thus leaving room for religion and prayer. As he continues on to take up the practical question about “where science ends and where religion begins”—a typical notion of compartmentalization—Kingsley considers two dangers, storms and disease, seamen might face that require both “science and reason, and so much, at the same time, [. . .] Providence and God’s merciful will” (*Discipline* 29-30). On the one hand, a seaman cannot pray that a storm will not come, for it either will, according to the laws of nature, or it will not. Instead, it is incumbent upon seamen (or anyone) “to guard ourselves against [known dangers] by science” lest they tempt God (34). On the other hand, for



those dangers which are not or cannot be known, seamen can only pray for deliverance and trust in God's mercy. But, of course, it is apparent "that God would not always deliver poor mariners, even though they cried to him in their distress" (35). Thus, the more proper prayer for deliverance would be:

to pray to him to deliver us from [dangers] in the best way, the surest way, the most lasting way, the way in which we may not only preserve ourselves, but our fellow-men and generations yet unborn; namely, by giving us wisdom and understanding to discover the dangers, to comprehend them, and to conquer them, by reason and science.

[. . .] God will not always help poor mariners: but he will always teach them to deliver themselves. (34-35, 35-36)

What emerges, then, is a model of conciliation which moves beyond a compartmentalized, "science is for what we know, religion for what we don't know" approach, to one that begins to move toward viewing religion as a motivating force and a source for science: Kingsley talks about "the reason *which God has given us*" (34 emphasis added); God is "the root and ground of this matter," "the source of all law and order" (36); the Holy Ghost "inspires man with the spirit of *wisdom and understanding*, and gives him a *right judgment* in all things" (36 emphasis added); and God will "prosper his children in as far as they used that reason *which he himself had bestowed upon them*" (37 emphasis added). In this way, Kingsley declares that Trinity House "stands here as a token to all generations of Britons, that science and religion are not contrary to each other, but twin sisters, meant to aid each other and mankind in the battle with the brute

forces of this universe” (37-38). But even though science and religion may be twins, they are not conjoined twins, and this sermon still retains elements of compartmentalization even while moving toward conciliation. In other of Kingsley’s works, though, we can see the model of conciliation emerge more fully.

In 1867, Kingsley delivered a pair of addresses to the Royal Institution , “Superstition” and “Science.”<sup>65</sup> In the latter, after listing a number of the practical benefits science has wrought in combatting superstition, advancing medicine, and improving public health and education, among others, Kingsley proclaims that “science has as yet done nothing but good. [. . .] When any one will show me a single result of science, of the knowledge of and use of physical facts, which has not tended directly to the benefit of mankind, *moral and spiritual*, as well as physical and economic,” then, he says, he would be tempted to disbelieve Solomon’s assertion that Wisdom was the one thing above all else to be sought (*Scientific Lectures* 257 emphasis added). Given that in the first of these two addresses to the Royal Institution Kingsley declares that “Theology—that is, the knowledge of God; and Religion—that is, the knowledge of Duty” are “two subjects rightly excluded from this Institution,” which is, again, a rather compartmentalized notion, his declaration that science produces direct moral and spiritual

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<sup>65</sup> Although these are scientific lectures, not sermons, Kingsley’s status as a clergyman—which he makes a point of highlighting, interestingly enough, as particularly qualifying him to address his audience on a scientific level, for a clergyman, he claims, should know “what is Theology, and what is Religion,” and therefore “he should best know what is not Theology, and what is not Religion” (*Scientific Lectures* 201)—as well as his standing as a respected amateur naturalist, and the additional light they shed on views Kingsley does state within his sermons, make them relevant for our consideration.

benefits is all the more noteworthy, but perhaps not so surprising or inconsistent as it might appear at first (*Scientific Lectures* 201).

In *Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet*, Kingsley's "Condition of England" novel, published in 1850, there are two chapters, "Cultivated Women" and "Miracles and Science,"<sup>66</sup> in which Kingsley takes up the nature of the relationship between religion and science. The novel as a whole has been described as "a dramatized Christian sermon," with its concluding three chapters, which includes "Miracles and Science," having been "written with the suasive rhetoric of an evangelistic preacher" similar to Kingsley's sermons in "rhythm, [. . .] emotional fervor, and [. . .] tone" (Muller 9). In each chapter, Alton Locke engages in a conversation about science with Dean Winnstay, who, like Kingsley himself, is a clergyman and amateur naturalist. In the first of these two chapters, the Dean tells Locke:

I am in no wise anxious to weaken the antithesis between natural and revealed religion. Science may help the former, but it has absolutely nothing to do with the latter. She stands on her own ground, has her own laws, and is her own reward. Christianity is a matter of faith and of the teaching of the Church. It must not go out of its way for science, and science must not go out of her way for it[.] (169)

Thus far, this is a classic statement of compartmentalization. Later, the Dean would go on to describe his thinking about religion and science "as parallel, and impossible to unite"

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<sup>66</sup> I will return shortly to the specific arguments about miracles Kingsley makes in this latter chapter, but for now I want to note only the evolution of the Dean's (and Kingsley's?) thinking on the religion and science relationship.

(371). However, the Dean goes on to argue that “where they seem to differ, it is our duty to believe that they are reconcilable by fuller knowledge” (169-170). At this point, Eleanor Staunton, the Dean’s daughter—who, according to Muller, “serves as Kingsley’s mouthpiece” (9)—suggests that “the God of Nature is the God of man,” and, what is more, argues that “unless the truths of Christianity contrive soon to get themselves justified by the laws of science, the higher orders will believe in them as little as Mr Locke informs us that the working classes do” (170). This is, in fact, precisely what the Dean ends up doing and explaining in “Miracles and Science,” when he posits “Nature’s deepest laws, her only true laws, are her invisible ones,” and the “True causes” of even natural phenomena are “ever tending towards some great primal law [. . .] manifesting itself, according to circumstances, in countless diverse and unexpected forms” so that even miracles might be “the orderly result of some such deep, orderly, and yet most spiritual law” (372). The Dean attributes this new, conciliatory position to his initial conversation with Locke about religion and science quoted above, which “first awoke in me the sense of a hitherto unconscious inconsistency—a desire to reconcile two lines of thought—which I had hitherto considered as parallel” (371). Thus the Dean starts from a model of compartmentalization, then gradually moves to a position of conciliation, which provides a more consistent model for him and allows him to both find the God of Man in the God of Nature—that is, to find religion in science—as well as to justify the truths of Christianity (*viz.* miracles) by the laws of science—that is, to find science in religion.

We can see just how far Kingsley takes this conciliation if we consider his argument on miracles from *Alton Locke*—part of the miracle counter-tradition seen in

MacDonald, above—in more detail. In “Miracles and Science,” Kingsley tackles head on the skeptical scientific critique of miracles that had been popularized in England by David Strauss’s *Leben Jesu*, published in Germany in 1835 and translated and published in English by George Eliot in 1846. At the beginning of the chapter, *Alton Locke*’s titular protagonist confesses, “The question of miracles had been ever since I had read Strauss my greatest stumbling-block” (370). The nature of those doubts were given expression earlier in the novel, when Locke explains that the working classes “cannot identify the God of the Bible with the God of the world around them; and one of their greatest complaints against Christianity is, that it demands assent to mysteries which are independent of, and even contradictory to, the laws of Nature” (170). This far, the argument is typical of the conflict model. But Locke elaborates on his complaint in “Miracles and Science,” arguing that “miracles seem to me impossible, just because they break the laws of Nature. [. . .] there seems something blasphemous in supposing that God can mar his own order: His power I do not call in question, but the very thought of His so doing is abhorrent to me” (371). The nature of the critique of miracles here expressed sets the stage for the Dean’s conciliatory response, for it is now not an inherent contradiction between religion and science that is at issue, but rather the need for a way to accept miracles that does justice to—or, at least, does not do violence to—either religion or science.

Locke’s doubts and difficulties are answered by Dean Winnstay. The Dean makes two points in responding to Locke. First, he points out the question-begging of Locke’s critique: “Who told you, my dear young friend, that to break the customs of Nature is to

break her laws?” (371). Rather than seeing miracles as a violation of natural law, they are merely exceptions to the ordinary course of nature. “The difficulty,” the Dean argues, “lies only in the rationalist’s [. . .] ambiguous, slip-slop trick of using the word natural to mean, in one sentence, ‘material’, and in the next, as I use it, only ‘normal and orderly’” (374). This equivocation leads to the confusion about the nature of Nature and science. On the one hand, rationalistic science’s “shallow and sensuous view of Nature” blinds it to its own limitations (374):

All analyses [. . .] whether of appearances, of causes, or of elements, only lead us down to fresh appearances—we cannot see a law, let the power of our lense be ever so immense. The true causes remain just as impalpable, as unfathomable as ever, eluding equally our microscope and our induction [. . .] till all that the philosopher as well as the divine can say, is—the Spirit of Life, impalpable, transcendental, direct from God, is the only real cause. “It bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth.” What, if miracles should be the orderly result of some such deep, most orderly, and yet most spiritual law? (372).

Nature, the Dean explains, is describable by its appearance only; its causes can be seen by their effects, but cannot ultimately be discerned themselves, much like the wind’s effects—“the sound thereof”—can be described, but its origins cannot. However deeply into the natural world science looks, it must *look*, that is, it must rely on what can be

observed, and that is only its appearance.<sup>67</sup> Science is impotent to penetrate Nature's appearances to discover its "true causes," the "great primal law" behind it (372).

Furthermore, the rationalist has failed to rightly consider miracles. Dean Winnstay notes that the miracles of Christ recorded in the Gospels "were almost exclusively miracles of healing—*restorations* of that order of health which disease was breaking" (372 emphasis added). In other words, Christ's "miracles" were merely bringing Nature back into order, back into conformity with its own laws. Even the converting of water into wine at Cana is a mere compression of the ordinary process by which the grape vine takes water and produces the grapes which produce wine (373). When Locke counters that seen this way, and in the light of "modern discoveries in medicine [. . .] Christ's miracles may be attributed to natural causes," the Dean unexpectedly concedes the point and goes even further in attributing "miraculous" healing gifts to modern medicines (374):

The surgeons of St George's make the boy walk who has been lame from his mother's womb. But [have they] given life to a single bone or muscle of his limbs? They have only put them into that position—those circumstances in which the God-given life in them can have its free and normal play, and produce the cure which they only assist. I claim that miracle of science, as I do all future ones, as the inspiration of Him who made the lame to walk in Judea. (375)

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<sup>67</sup> Many definitions of science include the fact that science must confine itself only to what is discernible by the senses, that is, to work by induction.

Implicitly, Kingsley is raising a key point of the miracle counter-tradition, that miracles are not supernatural violations of natural law which serve as evidence of Christianity, but rather they are revelations of the Divine working within Nature to restore and vindicate its laws and “fulfil [them] to hitherto unattained perfection,” even as the physician’s “gifts of healing are all inspired and revealed by Him who is the Great Physician, the Life, the Lord of that vital energy by whom all cures are wrought” (374, 375).<sup>68</sup>

What was a “counter-tradition” for the Established Church when Kingsley published *Alton Locke* in 1850 was on its way to becoming its orthodoxy in the 1870s. In “The Evidential Value of Miracles,” a sermon preached at St. Mary’s, Oxford, in January of 1872, James Fraser, Bishop of Manchester, asserted that it would be “utterly out of keeping with the whole train of scientific processes and scientific thought” to consider miracles either violations or even suspensions of natural law; rather they ought to be regarded as “the manifestation of a higher and as yet undiscovered law” (69). While Fraser does favorably quote from Mozley’s Bampton Lectures on miracles (73), he also distinguishes his position from Mozley’s, arguing against the necessity of miracles for a divine revelation, a direct allusion to the title of the first of Mozley’s lectures (69). Even more surprisingly, in light of the Mozley-Tyndall conflict discussed above, later in the

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<sup>68</sup> It might be noted that Kingsley is addressing only the miracles of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels and not the miracles of the Old Testament that were the basis of the dispute between opponents like Huxley and Liddon. This is at least in part because Strauss’s work was specifically on the life of Christ, and thus that was the charge to be answered. Also, the popular critiques of the Old Testament miracles, as seen in Huxley or works like John William Colenso’s *The Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua Critically Examined*, were yet to be published. Although MacDonald, whose work on miracles was discussed earlier, was writing late enough to take account of such critiques, his work, too, focused on the miracles of Christ or with nature more generally.



sermon Fraser quotes favorably from Tyndall's "brilliant essay on the scientific uses of the imagination" (79).

By the 1880s, the conciliatory view of miracles was firmly within the mainstream of Anglican thought. In the Bampton Lectures for 1884, Frederick Temple, then Bishop of Exeter and future Archbishop of Canterbury, preached what are often considered the definitive statements of conciliation between mainstream Victorian religion and science. Four of the eight lectures are about aspects of "Apparent Conflict" or "Apparent Collision" between them. One of those, "Apparent Collision of Science with the Claim to Supernatural Power," takes up the issue of miracles. Echoing Fraser, Temple claims that "It is further possible, and Revelation has no interest in denying it, that the intervention which has apparently disturbed the sequence of phenomena is, after all, that of a higher physical law as yet unknown" (195). As a specific example, Temple says of the healing miracles of Jesus that they "may be but an instance of the power of mind over body, a power which is undeniably not yet brought within the range of Science, and which nevertheless may be really within its domain" (195). While Temple is more circumspect in wording the claim than Fraser—"it is further *possible*," "it *may* be" explainable—the underlying idea is the same. But Temple then takes the argument a step further, asserting that:

Revelation is not bound by the scientific definition of a miracle, and that if all the miraculous events recorded in the Bible happened exactly as they are told, and if Science were some day able to show that they could be accounted for by natural causes working at the time in each case, this would not in any way affect their

character, as regards the Revelation which they were worked to prove or of which they form a part. (195-196)

For Temple, the resolution of the apparent conflict Mozley was so concerned to defend against is to regard miracles not as supernatural evidence to compel belief in the present, but in their own time. If they served their purpose in their time, then any present natural explanation would have “no bearing at all on the Revelation to which they belong. The miracle would in that case consist in the precise coincidence in time with the purpose which they served, or in the manner and degree in which they marked out the Man who wrought them from all other men, or in the foreshadowing of events which are in the distant future” (196). In the second of these three characteristics, Temple advances an argument similar to MacDonald’s noted above, namely that the purpose of miracles is not to prove the character of Jesus Christ, but rather to manifest and demonstrate of that character. But in all three of the points taken together, Temple’s argument bears some interesting similarities to arguments Mozley makes in the preface to his Bampton Lectures.

First, it is worth noting that Temple is *not* explaining away the supernatural character of the New Testament miracles. He is merely making the point that *if* a natural explanation could be found for miracles (and, granted, he does spend some time speculating on how that might happen even for a miracle as grand as the resurrection), they could still be considered miracles of Revelation if not of science. As miracles of Revelation, they would still have their “precise coincidence in time with the purpose which they served” and their “foreshadowing” or prophetic character. In the “Preface to

Second Edition” of his Bampton Lectures, Mozley takes up the question of naturalizing rationales of miracles in a scientific sense. “Should the question *e.g.* ever be raised, whether the miracle of our Lord’s Resurrection was a fact ultimately referrible [*sic*] to natural law”—as Temple conjectures—“the fact about which the question would lie [. . .] would be, not the simple resurrection of a man from the dead, but that resurrection as *coinciding* with the whole nature, mission and office of Christ, his whole *character*, life and ministry, as well as with the *previous announcements* of the event” (xvi emphasis added). In other words, even if the physical occurrence of the resurrection could be explained naturally, the event would still be a miracle of Revelation in precisely the same ways laid out by Temple. While the arguments about miracles certainly evolved after Mozley’s lectures, ancestral traces of them can still be found in the more “progressive” sermons on miracles like Fraser’s and Temple’s.

Perhaps, too, we ought to note that despite the examples of conflict from Mozley on miracles discussed above, he, too, offered a model of conciliation of sorts. In “Miracles Necessary for a Revelation,” Mozley explains how the doctrine of miracles could coexist with a world of order:

upon the supposition of the Divine design of a revelation, a miracle is not an anomaly or irregularity, but part of the system of the universe; because, though an irregularity and an anomaly in relation to either part, it has a complete adaptation to the whole. There being two worlds, a visible and invisible, and a communication between the two being wanted, a miracle is the instrument of that communication. An exception to each order of things separately, it is in perfect

keeping with both taken together, as being the link or medium between them. [. . .] Take any tool or implement of art, handicraft, or husbandry, and look at it by itself; what an eccentric and unmeaning thing it is, wholly out of order and place; but it is in exact order and place as the medium between the workman and the material. And a miracle is in perfect order and place as the medium between two worlds, though it is an anomaly with respect to one of them alone. (18)

Mozley here is not denying the order of the natural world nor, as noted earlier, the practical necessity of accepting a principle of uniformity. He is insisting, though, on the reality of two worlds, a spiritual as well as a physical, which *together* constitute an integral whole. In this respect, Mozley's thinking is in perfect keeping with every other Christian preacher of the time, including Temple. In his lecture on miracles, Temple also notes the practical necessity of postulating the uniformity of nature and then adds, "if the student of Science is to admit a breach, it can only be by stepping outside of his science for the time and conceiving the possibility that there is some other truth beside scientific truth, and some other kind of evidence beside scientific evidence" ("Apparent Collision of Science with the Claim to Supernatural Power" 217).

In practical terms, though conciliation was not always so easy to explain. How would a scientist take into account non-scientific evidence? How precisely ought a theologian or preacher incorporate scientific thought? Keith Francis, talking about Charles Kingsley and William Thomson (the Archbishop of York), both of whom he notes for their progressive attitudes toward science, says "neither man had explained how exactly a Christian should integrate a belief in the existence of God with the science of

evolution” (“Paley to Darwin” 459). There is, perhaps, some truth to this claim, not just concerning evolution, but science generally. As seen in our discussions above, Kingsley’s conciliatory stance is more theoretical; when he gets into practical considerations, as in his sermon “Prayer and Science,” his position starts looking much more compartmental. On the other hand, at least part of the essence of conciliation lies in the attitude of the preacher or scientist toward religion and science. In the funeral sermon for Charles Lyell, “The Religious Aspect of Geology,” preached in Westminster Abbey, Dean Stanley proclaimed that “To invest the pursuit of Truth with the sanctity of a religious duty, to make Truth and Goodness meet together in one holy fellowship, is the high reconciliation of Religion and Science for which all scientific and all religious men should alike labor and pray” (241).

Kingsley gives a concrete example of what this might look like in a brief passage from his sermon “The Glory of the Trinity,” which he preached twice, once in Eversley in 1868, and again at St. Mary’s Chester in 1871. Given the highly theological nature of its subject and occasion (the Trinity; both times it was preached on Trinity Sunday) and its epitaph (Psalm 104: 31, 33, “The glory of the Lord shall endure forever: The Lord shall rejoice in his works. I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being”), its conciliatory stance toward science, the very fact that the contemplation and study of nature provides most of its subject matter, is striking. In the middle of this sermon, Kingsley speaks of Faraday, “the saintly philosopher,” saying, “Such a man’s whole life is one act of reverence to that God in whose inner presence he finds himself illuminated and strengthened; and if there be revelation of divine things on

earth, it is when the hidden secrets of nature are disclosed to the sincere and self-denying seeker after truth” (146). Here, nature itself is indeed infused “with a knowable factuality of godliness,” (Gould 4),<sup>69</sup> but only to one who has eyes to see, like Faraday; and for such a one, his very science is consecrated as an act of worship. This is in keeping with his address at the Royal Institute, in which he defends science from “those who think that the scientific habit of mind tends to irreverence,” saying, “Doubtless this accusation will always be brought against science by those who confound reverence with fear. For from blind fear of the unknown, science does certainly deliver man.” (Kingsley *Scientific Lectures* 249-250). Consistently, whether before church congregations, seamen at Trinity House, the Royal Institution, or the novel-reading public, Kingsley preaches a conciliation in which science and religion are genuinely treated as “twin sisters.”

Before concluding our discussion of conciliation, it is worth mentioning that not all efforts to bring religion and science together did so equitably. This is the basis of Stephen Jay Gould’s complaint about conciliation (which he refers to as syncretism). Gould writes that “Older and classical forms of syncretism [. . .] required that the principles and findings of science yield religious results known in advance to be true,” but contemporary versions require “the conclusions of science must be accepted a priori, and religious interpretations must be finessed and adjusted to match” them (*Rocks of*

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<sup>69</sup> In fairness to Gould, it should be noted that he is extremely critical of the conciliation model—what he calls the “*syncretic school*”—“where the facts of science reinforce and validate the precepts of religion, and where God shows his hand (and mind) in the workings of nature” (212). Nonetheless, despite his “difficulty keeping a straight face or a peaceful pen,” he does at least provide a fair definition (213). I will be citing him again later, and this same qualification should be kept in mind.

*Ages* 213). But even in the 1870s, both of these modes of conciliation were already being noted and condemned. In 1875 in the “Religious Aspect of Geology,” Stanley denounces such ways of attempting conciliation: “There were, there are perhaps still, two modes of reconciliation of Scripture and science, which have been each in their day attempted, and have each totally and deservedly failed. One is the endeavor to wrest the words of the Bible from their natural meaning, and force them to speak the language of science,” and the other is “the equal error of falsifying science to meet the supposed requirements of the Bible” (234, 235). Four years earlier, in 1871 in “Science and Religion,” his funeral sermon for Sir John Herschel, Stanley called out these same two problems, stating “it is as unjust to the Bible as it is vexatious to Science, to endeavor to reduce scientific systems into conformity with the Biblical accounts, or to require the Bible to give us scientific systems” (163). Undoubtedly, there were those who attempted each of these, as, for instance, the interpretation of the “days” of creation in Genesis were reinterpreted to be “ages” to accommodate discoveries in geology. Or, to take an example in regards to evolution, R. W. Dale, a popular Congregationalist minister, says “This new scientific conception of the order of Nature will compel Christendom to revise some of its theological conceptions of the life of God,—conceptions which have been largely derived neither from the Jewish nor the Christian scriptures, but from a cold metaphysical philosophy” (“Faith and Physical Science” 185). If evolution is true, then “It will be something if science enables us to recover a firmer hold of the ancient faith, and enables us to see for ourselves the present activity of God” (186).

While views like Dale's on evolution, or Temple's on miracles, demonstrate Victorian religion's changing attitude toward science and religion in the last quarter of the century, they were not entirely new. Charles Kingsley, for example, had long embraced this sort of conciliation of religion and science. On the other hand, it should not be assumed that such views had become universal by the century's end. Mozley's Bampton Lectures on miracles had reached a seventh edition by 1886, two years after Temple's lectures. In fact, all three models herein discussed, and many gradations in between them, can be found throughout the Victorian era (and even still today).<sup>70</sup> But to consider the relations between religion and science in this way, in terms of models (however finely nuanced), misses another, crucial element of their relationship, which we will now examine.

### **The Sermon's Influence on Science**

Undoubtedly, nineteenth-century science had an impact on at least some ministers and their sermons, at least on those that took up questions at the interface between religion and science such as miracles or the "Book of Nature," whether directly or indirectly. But in his essay on sermons and evolution, Keith Francis also raises—but does

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<sup>70</sup> The common narrative of science's gradual triumph over religion, of slow but inexorable secularization, fails to do justice to the range of the Victorian religious experience. While I would not discount that notion altogether, Victorian religion was still thriving at the century's end. Even church attendance, while failing to keep up with population growth, held steady. Also, it's worth keeping in mind that secularization had many causes, of which science might be only one part, and perhaps not a very significant part at that. Even the more modest claim, that natural theology and the argument by design fell out of favor with the rise of Darwin does not hold up to scrutiny. Cf. Myth 18, "That Darwin Destroyed Natural Theology" by Jon H. Roberts and Myth 25, "That Modern Science Has Secularized Western Culture" by John Hedley Brooke in *Galileo Goes to Jail and Other Myths about Science and Religion*, ed. Ronald L. Numbers.



not directly address—the question of “Whether [. . .] descriptions by scientists of the theory of evolution were influenced by what was preached in church” (“Nineteenth-Century” 276). If we broaden his question to include not only evolution, but also other fields of science or science as a topic itself, the answer is certainly yes. One way this influence can be seen is by examining the scientific literature (whether essays or lectures) of those scientists who were also ordained clergymen and comparing it to their published sermons. Charles Kingsley would be one such candidate, and in the discussion of him above, two of his scientific lectures were considered. Another way this influence can be seen is by examining the way scientists directly responded to published sermons in some of their essays; Huxley and Tyndall have been considered in this regard above. But the influence of the sermon, or at least the sermon as a public expression of religion, can be seen in more general terms, too.

In their introduction to their *Treasury of Scientific Prose: A Nineteenth-Century Anthology*, Howard Mumford Jones and I. Bernard Cohen, professors of English and the history of science, respectively, at Harvard University, argued that the less technical nature of scientific writing for an educated lay-public in the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century more or less required “the scientist, like the divine, the poet, and the metaphysician, [to see] life steadily and [to see] it whole,” and thus to be “concerned with the general shape of things in the universe and not merely with statements of technical problems” (6). What is more, they argue, “The scientific writer” in this time period “was more often than not under a kind of public commitment to general truth. He had to show, if not God, then Order, or Law, or Organization, or Meaning. The terms in which he

wrote were, so to speak, terms of respect for these cosmological notions. He had, in short, to be both a philosopher and a professional workman in science" (7). Bernard Lightman notes similar strictures on scientists: "If they wanted to be considered as members of the intellectual elite, the scientific naturalists had no choice but construct their model of professional scientific authority in line with their opponents' standards of respectability" ("On Tyndall's Belfast Address").

We can see this sort of deference at work in the scientific prose of the period. For example, in the second edition of *On the Origin of Species*, Darwin sought to defend his work against religious criticism, stating, "I see no good reason why the views given in this volume should shock the religious feelings of anyone," and then he quotes a letter from Charles Kingsley, whom Darwin describes as "a celebrated author and divine," in which Kingsley defends the compatibility of evolution and divine creation (quoted in Francis "Nineteenth-Century" 278).

But I believe an even more direct influence of the sermon specifically, and not just religion generally, on science is in the style and structure of public lectures and "lay sermons" that we see in men like Tyndall and Huxley. The structure and development of Tyndall's Belfast Address, for example, bears some similarities with that of a sermon. He opens with an epitaph<sup>71</sup> which serves as a text which the rest of the address expositis.<sup>72</sup> The first section of the address, an historical survey of scientific progress from its birth in

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<sup>71</sup> The epitaph is a passage from Xenophanes of Colophon's *Supernatural Religion*.

<sup>72</sup> In the Belfast Address, Tyndall uses some form of the word "exposit" six times. In five of those instances, he uses it in terms of "scientific exposition" or in reference to Huxley as an expositor of Darwin's theory of evolution.

ancient Greece, through the fallowness of the Middle Ages, to its rebirth in the Renaissance, and finally to the recent achievements of Darwin, provides the context for the theme of his epitaph, the ongoing advance of science through religious obstacles. In the second section of the address, Tyndall establishes a doctrine<sup>73</sup> of “reasonable materialism,” which he carefully differentiates from more vulgar forms of materialism. In the final section of the address, which includes the infamous claim quoted earlier about wresting control of cosmology from the domain of theology and requiring the submission of all “schemes and systems” that would enter science’s domain, Tyndall closes with the application of his doctrine, the assertion of science’s “unrestricted right of search” into all physical aspects of life and its rightful possession of “the region of objective *knowledge*,” which included everything except “the region of *poetry* and *emotion*,” to which religion was relegated (213, 209).

But perhaps the best example of the sermon’s influence on science can be seen in the person of Thomas Huxley. Despite a reputation that has earned him nicknames like the “Devil’s Disciple,” “Darwin’s Bulldog,” and “Evolution’s High Priest,”<sup>74</sup> Huxley was, like many (most?) Victorians of his day, quite conversant in the Bible and the sermon, and their influence can be seen in his self-presentation, use of authoritative texts (both Biblical and scientific), Biblical diction and allusions, and the structure of his

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<sup>73</sup> I am not here imposing religious terminology on Tyndall’s speech. He himself refers to various scientific doctrines, including the doctrine of the Conservation of Energy and the doctrine of Evolution (192, 206; the capitalization is his). Tyndall’s critics, too, charged him with adhering to a “doctrine of ‘Material Atheism’” (*Scientific Fragments* “Apology for the Belfast Address” 217).

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Adrian J. Desmond’s *Huxley: From Devil's Disciple to Evolution's High Priest*.

discourses. It has been noted that “Huxley cultivated the style and the dress of a cleric,<sup>75</sup> canvassing for ‘scientific Sunday Schools’” (Alexander 213), for which it could be said he was an evangelist for “the agnostic faith, which if a man keep whole and undefiled, he shall not be ashamed” (Huxley, *Science and Christian Tradition* 246).<sup>76</sup> In the second volume of *Religion in Victorian Britain*, Huxley is described as “that preacher of ‘lay sermons’ and self-consecrated ‘bishop’ of the ‘Church scientific’” (Moore 231). Along those same lines, Huxley draws a parallel between “the priest who stands up before a congregation, as the minister and interpreter of Divinity” and “the layman who comes before his audience, as the minister and interpreter of nature” (*Science and Christian Tradition* 93). Huxley also proclaimed a sort of faith in science that is akin to religious faith. In one of his lay sermons, he says that “we live in the hope and in the faith that, by the advance of [science], we shall by and by be able to see our way” clearly enough to explain that which is currently unexplained (*Lay Sermons* 137).

Besides such specifically termed “lay sermons,” which also include “On the Advisableness of Improving Natural Knowledge” and “On the Physical Basis of Life,” Huxley also claimed, according to his son and biographer Leonard Huxley, that his Romanes Lecture “On Evolution and Ethics” was “a very orthodox discourse on the text, ‘Satan, the Prince of this world’” (*Life and Letters* vol. III, 299; cf. John 12:31).

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<sup>75</sup> Owen Chadwick, in the first part of his monumental work, *The Victorian Church*, notes that even as a child Huxley played the game of arranging his nursery into a miniature church with an imaginary pulpit and congregation and pretended to be a preacher (351).

<sup>76</sup> The reference to keeping the faith “whole and undefiled” is an allusion to the Athanasian Creed: “Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.”

Moreover, Huxley also wrote some of his essays in response to sermons: “Scientific and Pseudo-Scientific Realism,” “Science and Pseudo-Science” and “The Lights of the Church and the Light of Science,” for example, were responses to sermons by H. P. Liddon, and “An Episcopal Trilogy” was written in response to sermons by the Bishops of Carlisle, Bedford, and Manchester preached before the British Association for the Advancement of Science. Let us turn, then, to a closer examination of these works to see how the sermon’s influence on science operated in the works of a prominent scientist like Huxley.

“On the Physical Basis of Life” was a “lay sermon” Huxley originally delivered in Edinburgh on a Sunday evening, November 8 to be exact, in 1868, and was to be “the first of a series of Sunday evening addresses upon nontheological topics, instituted by the Rev. J[ames] Cranbrook” (*Lay Sermons* 121). Significantly, Cranbrook was a former Congregational minister who left his church over charges of unorthodoxy and then rented out a building to continue a sort of “free-thought” ministry. This “congregation,” composed of many former members of Cranbrook’s Congregational church who had followed him out, was the audience for Huxley’s lay sermon (Statham viii). Despite the disclaimer of the “nontheological” nature of the address, the context of the address and his own labelling of it as a “lay sermon” justify treating it as such.<sup>77</sup> He opens this sermon

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<sup>77</sup> I would not, though, want to make too hard and fast of a distinction between addresses labeled “sermons” or “lectures” or “discourses” or “addresses.” Even orthodox preachers’ collections could be labeled by anyone of those terms. Thus, Charles M. Davies, a contemporary chronicler of religious life in London, in describing—perhaps only a little facetiously—a Sunday when he “resolved to make Professor Huxley [his] preacher for the day,” notes that it can be “very difficult to say where the practical sermon merges into the lecture” and that, at least in the case of the sermons of a particular Unitarian minister

by explaining that the title is a translation of “‘Protoplasm,’ which is the scientific name of the substance of which I am about to speak,” his goal being, he says, to “make the title of this discourse generally intelligible” (120). In this we can imagine Huxley like a preacher, seeking to “translate” a particularly technical theological term, or perhaps a Hebrew or Greek term that will be germane to the rest of his sermon. But Huxley’s title does more than merely translate his key term. Commenting on this “translation,” the editors of the *British and Foreign Evangelical Review* critically point out:

We have not merely now a linguistic symbol [. . .]. We have a linguistic vehicle of *theory*. The phrase is an abbreviated or muffled *proposition*. So the lecturer admits, when he immediately follows up his first utterance of it with the sentence: “I suppose that to many the idea that *there is a physical basis of life* may be novel.” [. . .] “Protoplasm” involves no immediate proposition; and, therefore, the way is open for description. But when Mr. Huxley substitutes his new phrase, he shuffles in a proposition, and mere physiological description cannot be his aim now. He is committing himself to the establishment of his proposition . . .” (“As Regards Protoplasm” 88 emphasis in original)

In fact, Huxley goes on to suggest that “even those who are aware that matter and life are inseparably connected”—as perhaps his “free-thought” audience would be—“may not be prepared for the conclusion plainly suggested by the phrase, ‘*the physical basis of life*’” (120 emphasis in original). Pressing the point, Huxley goes on to add that “In fact, when

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he mentions, there can be “but an ill-defined frontier line between [the sermon] and a lecture by Professor Huxley” (*Unorthodox London* 50, 56).

first apprehended, such a *doctrine* as this appears almost shocking to common sense” (120-121 emphasis added). Timothy Larsen cites Huxley’s use of the term “doctrine” in regards to evolution throughout his professional and private writings as an example of his tendency “to appropriate the power of a biblical word or category rather than to attempt to replace or debunk it” (*One Book* 204). In other words, his use of the term should not be taken ironically but rather at face value.

Having set forth the doctrine for his sermon, Huxley follows with a series of leading questions: “what community of form, or structure, is there,” “what hidden bond can connect,” “what is there in common between” the immense varieties of life (*Lay Sermons* 121-122)? In answer to these “objections,” Huxley “propose[s] to demonstrate to you that, notwithstanding these apparent difficulties, a threefold unity—namely, a unity of power or faculty, a unity of form, and a unity of substantial composition—does pervade the whole living world” (122). Such an announcement of the threefold division of the topic, each of which he takes up in turn, is a common sermonic technique, as is the promise to reveal “hidden” knowledge through a careful study of his text, *viz* the natural world.<sup>78</sup> After a lengthy description of the “wonderful energies” moving within the hair of the nettle, Huxley expounds, “If such be the case [that even plant life is alive with

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<sup>78</sup> It was not uncommon for preachers and theologians to refer to two or even three “books” of God: “There are three books—the Book of Nature, the Book of Humanity, the Book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Remember that in one and all [. . .] we read the Word of God” (Barry 196). Though in a different context, Laura Otis makes a similar point in the introduction to her *Literature and Science in the Nineteenth Century*: “At the most fundamental level, scientific explanation of the world is akin to the process of reading and writing. Whether studying skull structures, geological layers, or bird populations, scientists were deciphering sign systems and interpreting texts” (xxi).

activity], the wonderful noonday silence of a tropical forest is, after all, due only to the dulness of our hearing; and could our ears catch the murmur of these tiny Maelstroms, as they whirl in the innumerable myriads of living cells which constitute each tree, we should be stunned, as with the roar of a great city" (125). This illustration moves beyond mere ornamentation or description, but rather serves to illuminate his point. Charles Spurgeon, in one of his lectures to his pastoral college students previously quoted, explains, "You may build up laborious definitions and explanations and yet leave your hearers in the dark as to your meaning [, . . .] a thoroughly suitable metaphor will wonderfully clear the sense" (*Lectures* 3.1). Huxley has in fact been carefully building up a laborious explanation—nearly three pages of text—that all life, whether animal or vegetable, shares a common power of movement. But here, as he is concluding his first point, he offers a concise, vivid metaphor that sums up the application of his point: that if we would just have ears to hear, a whole world would open up to us.

What is more, while the reference to "the dulness of our hearing," is meant in a literal sense, it also echoes Biblical references to dullness: "their ears are dull of hearing" (Matthew 13:15, Acts 28:27); "Of [Christ] we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing" (Hebrews 5:11). Given that Huxley "habitually used biblical language and imagery in order to express his ideas," such an allusion should not be taken as merely incidental (Timothy Larsen, *One Book* 201).<sup>79</sup> In this case, I would

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<sup>79</sup> Elsewhere in this sermon, Huxley alludes to the common imagery of the Potter and the clay, writing, "It [protoplasm] is the clay of the potter" (129); cf. Isaiah 64:8 "we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand." Jeremiah 18:6 and Romans 9:21 also employ this image. There are two other references in this sermon which, if not directly allusive, at least contain echoes of biblical texts: Huxley writes, "we



argue that the statement “we should be stunned” could be read as not only a conditional statement of what *would* be our reaction if we had ears to hear, but also as a statement of what our reaction *ought* to be. Thus, the illustration not only sheds light on the topic at hand, but also helps to clear their senses, so to speak, and guide the audience’s interpretation and understanding.

Another significant element of this lay sermon is the motif of death and resurrection. As he moves to the conclusion, Huxley proposes to address “the ultimate fate, and [. . .] the origin, of the matter of life” (*Lay Sermons* 131). To do so, Huxley quotes Horace’s *Ars Poetica*: “Debemur morti nos nostraque”—which can be translated “We must die, we and ours,” or “We owe ourselves and what we have to death”—“with a profounder meaning than the Roman poet attached to that melancholy line” (131). Huxley then goes on to explain that “living protoplasm not only ultimately dies and is resolved into its mineral and lifeless constituents, but is always dying, and, strange as the paradox may sound, could not live unless it died” (132). Again, the allusion—“that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die” (1 Corinthians 15:36)—is significant.

This verse comes in the middle of the longest explanation of the doctrine of the resurrection in the Bible, in which Paul explains the resurrection of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the order of the resurrection, and the nature of the resurrection

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live in the hope and in the faith that [. . .] we shall by and by be able to see our way [. . .] clearly” (136); cf. Hebrews 11:1, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” The reference to being able to see “by and by” echoes a common Christian trope that faith will give way to sight. Two other direct allusions will be discussed shortly: the slaying of Agag (140; cf. 1 Samuel 15:33) and Jacob’s Ladder (138; cf. Genesis 28).

body. In this discussion, Paul specifically, though, declares that “All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds” (verse 39). Such a notion seems to contradict Huxley’s point throughout his lay sermon, and Huxley perhaps intended this notion to come to mind in order to refute it, for he follows this reference with a very strange discussion in which he proposes a sort of naturalistic doctrine of transubstantiation and resurrection of his own.

Huxley explains that “Every word uttered by a speaker costs him some physical loss; and, in the strictest sense, he burns that others may have light” (*Lay Sermons* 132); or, if I might paraphrase the Bible myself, he dies (or, at least a part of him does), that others might live. But Huxley’s loss in speaking to his audience is not permanent, for his loss can be restored through eating mutton. And, though the lamb’s protoplasm died, the process of digestion “will convert the dead protoplasm into living protoplasm, and *transubstantiate* sheep into man” (133 emphasis added). The same thing could occur whether he ate lobster or bread, and in fact would happen in reverse if the lobster ate him. He summarizes the point thusly:

Hence it appears to be a matter of no great moment what animal, or what plant, I lay under contribution for protoplasm, and the fact speaks volumes for the general identity of that substance in all living beings. *I share this catholicity of assimilation with other animals*, all of which, so far as we know, could thrive equally well on the protoplasm of any of their fellows, or of any plant[. . .]. Thus, the animal can [. . .] raise the complex substance of dead protoplasm to the higher power, as one may say, of living protoplasm. (133, 134 emphasis added)

Huxley's references here to transubstantiation and to the "catholicity of assimilation" which he shares with other animals also call to mind the idea of Christian communion and only reinforce the connection between his thoughts and the Christian scheme of communion-death-resurrection. In the Gospel of John, Jesus says, "I am the bread of life [. . .]: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh [. . .]. He that eateth my flesh [. . .] dwelleth in me, and I in him. (6:35, 51, 56). Then, at the Last Supper before his crucifixion, Jesus instituted the sacrament of communion (with which the doctrine of transubstantiation is associated): "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body" (Matthew 26:26). In alluding to communion and the passage on resurrection from 1 Corinthians, Huxley does not so much refute them as appropriate the imagery and connotations, however much he turns them on their head, in order to explicate his own doctrine—"the physical basis of [all] life"—and to extend it to ultimate matters, the communion of all living creatures (similar to the idea of the "communion of the saints") and the "resurrection" of the natural body, which depends on the death of other natural bodies that it and they might live.

After drawing out its materialistic (lower-case *m*) implications, Huxley's sermon then turns to exhortation and encouragement, as he cautions his audience of the consequences of accepting this doctrine. He writes, "But I bid you beware that, in accepting these conclusions, you are placing your feet on the first rung of a ladder which, in most people's estimation, is the reverse of Jacob's, and leads to the antipodes of heaven" (*Lay Sermons* 138). Condemnation "by many zealous persons, and perhaps by

some few of the wise and thoughtful” is almost certain to follow (138). “Nevertheless,” he continues, “I hold the statements to be substantially true” (139). And so, consequences notwithstanding, he speaks. And at this point, his lecture takes a decidedly polemical turn in which he seeks to clear up at least one potential misinterpretation of his message as being synonymous with philosophical materialism or positivism.

First, Huxley makes a distinction between the scientific method and positivism, despite their conflation by the Archbishop of York. Of positivism and Auguste Comte, Huxley, alluding to 1 Samuel 15:33, says that “so far as I am concerned, the most reverend prelate might dialectically hew M. Comte in pieces, as a modern Agag, and I should not attempt to stay his hand” (*Lay Sermons* 140). But if Huxley is happy to allow the Archbishop to “dialectically hew” Auguste Comte, he—that is, Huxley—will call upon another authority to dispense with the Archbishop, not only for his misattribution of the principles of the “New Philosophy” of modern science to Comte, but for his “reprobation” of those principles, which are David Hume’s. Huxley first exclaims that Hume would “turn in his grave” to have his “doctrines” attributed to Comte, who lacked Hume’s “vigour of thought” and “exquisite clearness of style” (141). Then after proclaiming Hume “the most acute thinker of the eighteenth century” and “one of the greatest men [Scotland] has ever produced,” he moves to commend the “adoption and strict working-out of the very principles” of Hume’s that the Archbishop has disparaged. After a rather lengthy exposition of these principles, Huxley concedes that *if* the “New Philosophy” was what its critics said it was, then it would “be worthy of the reprobation with which it is visited,” and he would “confess their fears seem [. . .] to be well

founded” (143). However, “could David Hume be consulted,” Huxley continues, “I think he would smile at their perplexities, and chide them for doing even as the heathen, and falling down in terror before the hideous idols their own hands have raised” (143).<sup>80</sup> Summoning Hume, Huxley has him castigate his opponents as heathen idolaters. Their caricaturization of science and the so-called laws of nature he declares to be nothing more than “gratuitously invented bugbears” or “an empty shadow of my own mind’s throwing,” and “For my part, I utterly repudiate and *anathematize* the intruder” (143, 144 emphasis added). Then, invoking “David Hume’s great service to humanity,” his “irrefragable demonstration” of the limits of philosophical inquiry, and invoking “Hume’s strong and subtle intellect” (144), Huxley quotes Hume at length,<sup>81</sup> and then entreats his audience to “Permit [him] to enforce this most wise advice” (145).

The purpose here is not merely to reveal Huxley’s admiration for Hume, but rather to demonstrate that throughout this section of his lay sermon, Huxley is very much playing the role of the scientist-cum-preacher, expositing the authoritative work Hume. In fact, Huxley’s admiration for Hume, I would suggest, borders on reverence, with all the religious connotations of the term intended. It is Hume’s “doctrine” he explains, opponents are “heathen” guilty of raising “idols,” and false doctrine is not merely

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<sup>80</sup> Timothy Larsen discusses at some length Huxley’s appropriation of the category of idolatry, and also notes “his persistent tendency to recast his opponents as the enemies of God [or, specifically in this case, as heathen idolaters] as presented in the Scriptures. This is particularly ironic as his opponents were often Bible believers who saw themselves as members of God’s chosen people,” as the Archbishop of York certainly would have (*One Book* 206-208, 203).

<sup>81</sup> “Hume’s Essay ‘Of the Academical or Sceptical Philosophy,’ in the ‘Inquiry concerning the Human Understanding’” (Huxley *Lay Sermons* 145 n.1)

condemned but “anathematized.” The close of his address is like the final exhortation of a sermon, in which he “enforces” Hume’s “most wise advice” and then cautions them to steer clear of the Scylla of “spiritualistic” (i.e., theological) terminology which “leads to nothing but obscurity and confusion of ideas,” while reminding them not to forget “the limits of philosophical inquiry” laid down by Hume lest they crash into the Charybdis of “systematic materialism” which “may paralyse the energies and destroy the beauty of a life” (*Lay Sermons* 146). Nor is this the only text in which Huxley cites and preaches from authoritative texts.

“On the Advisableness of Improving Natural Knowledge” is a lay sermon Huxley preached in London in January of 1866. He takes as the occasion of his sermon the “time two hundred years ago—in the beginning of January, 1666—[ . . . ] between the shocks of two fearful calamities,” the great plague that had nearly passed, and the great fire that was soon to come (*Lectures* 41). In contrast to the explanations that were offered by the religious and political institutions of the day for these disasters, Huxley invites his audience to imagine what a third institution, the recently founded Royal Society for the Improvement of Natural Knowledge, could have given. “If the return of such misfortunes were ever rendered impossible,” Huxley says, then “the one thing needful for compassing this end was, that the people of England should second the efforts of [as seen at the time] an insignificant corporation,” whose ends “cannot be stated more clearly than in the words of one of the founders of the organization” (42). He then goes on to quote from this founder at some length: “Our business was (precluding matters of theology and state affairs) to discourse and consider of philosophical enquiries, and such as related

thereunto:—as Physick, Anatomy, [etc.]; with the state of these studies and their cultivation at home and abroad. [. . .]” (42-43). The phrase “the one thing needful” is an allusion to Luke 10:42, where Jesus tells Martha, “But one thing is needful: and Mary [Martha’s sister] hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.” The “good part” that Mary chose was “to sit at Jesus’ feet and hear his word,” as Charles Spurgeon explains in an 1871 sermon itself entitled “The One Thing Needful.” To preface the words of a founder of the Royal Society with this allusion, then, is to establish those words as a sort of scientific gospel, to be heeded by the British public even as Mary heeded the words of Jesus.

Furthermore, despite the fact that “Huxley frequently condemned the orthodox view of Scripture as bibliolatry and its holders as bibliolaters,” he nonetheless held the Bible in high regard:

Take the Bible as a whole; make the severest deductions which fair criticism can dictate for shortcomings and positive errors; eliminate, as a sensible lay-teacher would do, if left to himself, all that is not desirable for children to occupy themselves with; and there still remains in this old literature a vast residuum of moral beauty and grandeur. And then consider the great historical fact that, for three centuries, this book has been woven into the life of all that is best and noblest in English history, that it has become the national epic of Britain, and is as familiar to noble and simple, from John-o’-Groat’s house to Land’s End . . .

(quoted in Larsen *One Book* 210)

His many scriptural allusions, then, are not just conventional or convenient sources for illustrating a point here or there. They are not, that is, mere decoration or ornament.<sup>82</sup> Instead, Huxley's allusions demonstrate the Bible's prominence not just in Victorian culture generally, but in Huxley's thinking. To cite the Bible was to draw on its familiarity as "the national epic of Britain" *and* its authority as a source of "moral beauty and grandeur." Each of these cases—Hume, the words of a Royal Society founder, the Bible—reveal Huxley the "preacher," proclaiming not his own authority (though, to be certain, drawing on his expertise and his reputation), but that of the authoritative and "sacred" texts of the "church scientific."

In all of these ways, Huxley exhibits how the sermon could influence the public communication of science. For the new generation of scientists, represented by the likes of Huxley and Tyndall, who were seeking to establish themselves not only professionally, but culturally, it would make sense in the "Age of the Sermon" to appropriate at least some of its elements which would have had a certain resonance for so much of the population.

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<sup>82</sup> This point was discussed in the previous chapter in regards to Charles Spurgeon's and R. W. Dale's homiletical lectures. Cf. page 21-22 of this work.



### Chapter 3: The Sermon and the City

It is not wholly inaccurate to claim that Victorian Christianity often presented “Christian doctrine and morality as a means of supporting and justifying the existing social order and controlling the lower social classes” (Parsons “Social Control” 40-41). However, this was less true at the end of Victoria’s reign than at the beginning. While the early nineteenth-century churches often saw the disparity between the rich and the poor as simply part of the God-given order of society, their social attitudes evolved over the last three quarters of the century to include more socially conscious and engaged efforts to evangelize the poor and improve their condition, especially with respect to the urban poor and the city, which was emerging as the particular focus of the problem. Gerald Parsons lays out the trajectory of these changing attitudes thusly:

In the second quarter of the nineteenth century the churches had become increasingly aware of the ‘spiritual destitution’ of the urban poor and working classes and had begun the Victorian urban mission. In the third quarter of the century, their fears and efforts reinforced by the 1851 Census of Religion, they had redoubled their missionary ‘aggression’ and commitment. In the final quarter, faced with the findings of the local censuses of 1881 and their own awareness of the continued absence of the majority of the working classes from their parishes, chapels and missions, they became less sure that simple evangelical aggression would prevail. They therefore also became yet more evangelistically inventive and innovative, yet more socially conscious, and yet more ‘market-conscious’ in their bid to convert working-class souls via sanctified working-class leisure. (74)

Tristram Hunt, in *Building Jerusalem: The Rise and Fall of the Victorian City*, adopts a generally similar schema—but focused on the city itself—dividing his book into three parts that neatly capture the spirit of each quarter: “Confronting the City,” “Transforming the City,” and “Fleeing the City.” In confronting the city in the second quarter of the century, Victorian reformers of all stripes—medical, political, and spiritual—began identifying the problem in a way that set the terms that would be in effect throughout the rest of the century. In the third quarter, reformers on multiple fronts met with some success in transforming the city, and a spirit of optimism emerged. But beneath the optimism were undercurrents of despair that the moral and spiritual problems of the city were not being solved, and, while they did not literally flee the city, in the final quarter of the century the approach of the Victorian churches became more diversified, opening space for more unorthodox and more radical methods.

This chapter will follow this trajectory along several intersecting trains of thought. The first will be the changing attitudes and approaches toward the urban poor and working classes, from an emphasis on quietism to Christian socialism and social reform. Concurrent with this change was a growing awareness that it was not only the inhabitants of the city that needed reform; their habitation, the city itself, was in need of transformation. Connecting both of these movements is a focus on sanitary reform, particularly (though not exclusively) as it concerned responses to the cholera epidemics that struck between 1832 and 1866. Pamela K. Gilbert notes that cholera:

became a foundational issue itself. It contributed to the targeting of public health in what came to be called the Condition of England question, in the struggle of the

lower classes for inclusion in the national body [. . .]. For the remainder of the period, charitable, housing, and labor reform would focus on health, above all other issues, [. . .] as that which bound the ‘two nations’ into a single body through a communicative medium of disease. (“Sinful” 32)

Given their importance for helping to frame the discourse about cholera and public health, sermons related to either or both of these issues will also be part of this chapter’s focus.

Andrew Lees observes that besides medical doctors and clergy who focused public attention on the physical and moral health of the cities, “there were the well known ‘sages’, whose works of fiction [. . .] expressed views of the city that incorporated both moral considerations and a sense of growing unease that was largely aesthetic” (17). Thus, as in prior chapters, sermonic novelists, including Charles Kingsley and Charles Dickens, and their influence on Victorian attitudes toward the urban poor and the city will be examined. Dickens’s *Hard Times* and *Dombey and Son* are of particular note, the former for its prophetic and parabolic nature and overall style, and the latter for a brief but revealing mini-sermon on the connection between the material and the moral/spiritual environment of the city tucked into chapter 47, “The Thunderbolt.”

### **Early-Victorian Sermons: Attitudes toward Rich and Poor**

Describing the state of the Church of England in the first quarter of the century, Stewart J. Brown notes the growing concerns over “sectarian division, confusion, political unrest, increasing crime and a general breakdown of social order. Where people had once shared a sense of social belonging and mutual responsibility, and been united

under an overarching national faith, now they pursued their selfish interests and followed diverse religious teachings, and society was losing all cohesion” (Brown 43). Brown goes on to quote from an 1815 pamphlet written by Richard Yates, chaplain of Chelsea Hospital and rector of Ashen, which lamented “the crowded assemblages which the extension of Manufactures and Commerce necessarily brings together” and which “bred, like a pestilence, ‘the vicious and delusive principles of profligate infidelity and rash insubordination’” in industrial towns and cities (43). Thomas Chalmers, the popular and influential Scottish preacher, in an 1817 sermon foresaw that “If something be not done to bring this enormous physical strength [of the industrial working class] under the control of the Christian and humanized principle, the day may yet come, when it may lift against the authorities of this land its brawny vigour, and discharge upon them all, the turbulence of its rude and volcanic energy” (qtd. in Brown 44). For clergyman like Yates and Chalmers, the answer to this problem was to strengthen and expand the parish system of the national churches, and in the decade to follow, there was considerable effort to this end.

However, the mere expansion of the established church did not alter the social order that alienated so many of the working classes. In the first quarter of the century, “In their sermons and pastoral visiting, the parish clergy generally gave emphasis to the Pauline virtues of passive obedience and non-resistance to the powers that be, deference to social superiors, and acceptance of the existing social order as part of the providential plan” (Brown 13). The same could still be said of their sermons in the second quarter of the century. Although there were exceptions, early Victorian clergy largely believed in

and preached a strict social conservatism. Gerald Parsons describes the features of this outlook:

Poverty was morally tolerable because it was the inevitable product of immutable economic laws which were themselves the product of a divinely ordained and designed world. Hence whilst charity might alleviate poverty, it would be impious, as well as fruitless to contemplate the transformation of the social structure itself by human reform. Poverty, besides, performed a necessary social function, offering the better off opportunities for the practice of Christian charity and the poor the opportunity for patience, humility and gratitude. Even the practice of charity, moreover, was to be directed towards the deserving poor, whose poverty was identifiably not the result of their own improvidence, intemperance or indolence. Much poverty, it was confidently claimed, was in fact the result of precisely such personal failing and hence a recompense for sin.

(“Social Control” 43)

Such attitudes toward poverty were outgrowths of Malthusian Christian political economy. Rationalizing the persistence of poverty, Christian political economy—of which Thomas Chalmers was a leading exponent—argued that “Because population growth always pressed against the limits of the food supply, the large majority of humankind were destined to live close to the margins of subsistence—confirming Christ’s words in Scripture that the poor would always be with us” (Brown 50). Further, famine and epidemic disease were “natural checks” to population growth, and “The only

way for a society to avoid these cataclysmic natural checks was for individuals to exercise ‘moral restraint’” (50).

A most characteristic example of such an outlook is William Gresley’s 1836 collection *Sermons, on Some of the Social and Political Duties of a Christian*. The frontispiece of the work includes the following epigraph: “Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to *every* good work, to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men.—*St Paul to Titus*, iii. 1, 2.” Gresley elaborates on this in the Preface, calling out those who might “consider *passive resistance* to be equivalent to ‘obedience;’—*insurrection* to be a *sacred right*; [. . .]—and ‘brawling’ and ‘speaking evil of dignities,’ and libeling their rulers, to be a fair liberty of speech” (xvii). To such as those, Gresley asserts that it is the minister’s duty not only to “put them in mind” of their duties, “It is time for [the minister] to explain the principles and details of society and civil government, and to apply the economy of the Gospel to the habits of the age in which we live” (xvii). The minister’s explanation then commences through sermons such as “On the Different Ranks of Society,” “On the Necessity and Advantages of Labour,” “On the Origin of Property, and a Christian’s Duty with Regard to It,” and “The Money-Changers in the Temple, or the Efficacy of the Gospel to Sanctify the Commercial Habits of the Day,” among others, each of which more or less counsels an acceptance of and submission to the current, unequal state of society. One might easily imagine the general tenor and position of the sermons even before reading them.

The first sermon of the collection, “On the Different Ranks of Society” on Proverbs 22:2 (“The rich and poor meet together: the Lord is the maker of them all”), sets the tone for the rest that follow. “In this sacred place,” Gresley begins, “it seems as if we stood for awhile [*sic*] aloof from the busy world, and were able [. . .] to view its pursuits and pleasures, its toils and troubles, its hopes and disappointments, with a more comprehensive and discriminating eye, than when we are actually engaged in them” (1). From the outset, Gresley prepares his middle- to working-class congregation of St. Chad’s, Lichfield, to set aside their perception of their experiences outside of the church, and to accept the “purer and holier atmosphere [. . .] apart from the mist of worldly vanities, [where] we may take a juster view of those various duties and relations in which we shall so soon again be busied” so that “the sacred truths which we here receive [will] be so grafted in our hearts, that when we return to our homes, they [. . .] may sanctify every thought, word and deed [. . .] in whatsoever rank or station it may have pleased the providence of God to place us” (2). Not to accept the teaching that follows, then, would be to reject “the light from heaven [which] shines more directly on our souls” in the church, “God’s holy mountain,” than in the world (2). Although Gresley encourages his congregation “to look with fixed purpose to that spiritual world, in which human ranks and stations are as nothing,” his present aim for the congregation is that they each “learn how to conduct himself rightly, according to his spiritual station in this world” (3-4).

To begin, Gresley considers his congregation’s equality, which is dispensed with in two short paragraphs affirming their equality as sinners and their common responsibility. From there, he proceeds to their differences. He readily acknowledges the

obvious existence of social inequalities and attributes them “in the first place, from the dispensation of God himself” (5); Providence has placed each man in his station in life. However, “the inequalities which God hath given us by nature, are greatly increased by man himself, —according to the use or misuse which he makes of his advantages” (6). What follows is a typical Victorian ascription of wealth and poverty to the respective virtues and vices of individuals:

One man will improve his mind by diligent study, while another will waste his days in vain pursuits. One will live honestly and prudently, and leave behind him a good name, and an ample fortune; while another will squander his means in intemperance, ruin his character, and leave his children beggars. The next generation will probably widen the difference; for the children of the honest and industrious man are likely to follow their father’s righteous steps; and the children of the profligate, too often abide by the evil example of their parents. The first become richer, and the last poorer. (6-7)

More than just an observation of the way things are, of an outworking of mere cause and effect, Gresley declares such a state to be proper, politic, and just (7). In fact, the persistence of poverty “as one of the ingredients of the social state,” Gresley adds, “is a blessing rather than a curse” insofar as fear of it is a stimulus for exertion and industry (7, 8). After describing each of the different ranks of society—the nobility, gentry, middle class, and working class<sup>83</sup>—Gresley draws a distinction between *rank* and *caste*, arguing

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<sup>83</sup> Gresley does not use the terms “middle class” or “working class.” He designates the middle class as *respectable*, by which he means “not one who is respected merely for his money’s sake, but one who is deservedly respected for his character and conduct” (17).



that “in this country the poorest man may, by his talent and industry, arrive at the most distinguished posts” (21). From Gresley’s perspective, no more than “industry and frugality” are necessary to lift the poor from their condition; by implication, then, those who do not rise must not because of their own lack of effort.

Gresley then closes his sermon by dismissing the significance of class distinctions. “But what, after all, are the ranks of life, and human distinctions, but mere places in which God makes trial of the spirits of men? What are earthly honours, what is nobility and respectability with Him who weighs the hearts of men, and in whose balance all of us must be found wanting. They are but the different garbs in which we play our part” (22). Then, as he did at the beginning of the sermon, Gresley admonishes his congregation to “always have in view that final state of things, when the ranks and dignities of life will be levelled with the dust, and rich and poor alike will ‘meet together’ in strict equality, before the judgment seat of Him who made them” (22).

One thing lacking in Gresley’s sermon is any real consideration of the actual condition of the poor, which is never described in any more detail than in one brief passage where he notes their “circumstances of great difficulty and temptation, sometimes scarcely removed from want” (18). This omission is even more glaring in the third sermon in the collection, “On the Necessity and Advantages of Labour.” This sermon is on the whole an exhortation to the laboring classes to work hard and honestly

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Gresley says of the working class, “The last class consists of those whom the proud would call ‘the common people,’ the political economist would describe as ‘the operative classes,’ but to whom, looking to the best side of their moral character, [. . .] I would assign the name of *honest*” (18).

and not to neglect religion. Having explained the origins and extolling the virtues of physical labor, Gresley does anticipate the objection, though, that “in the present age there is a large portion of the community which is able to live in affluence without such [manual] labour, some indeed without any labour at all” (50). Gresley dismisses the objection by explaining the origins of the present state of society which requires intellectual labor, which in return requires a certain degree of leisure for study. Then, in a remarkable turn, Gresley proceeds to describe to the manual laborer the burdens of the upper classes:

let not the labourer or mechanic whose hands are callous from toil, or whose “shoulder is peeled” by the burden, let him not think that his lot is peculiarly hard. Little does he know of the painful anxiety and midnight labours of many who are toiling in those mental occupations which their condition in life demands of them. Little does he mark the dimmed eye, and pallid cheek, and waning health, of the young aspirant after usefulness and distinction. Nay, even those who by birth or well-directed talent have reached the highest pinnacle of earthly greatness, even statesmen and kings, though in outward show so great and enviable, live not less laborious days than the poorest workman, and often pass the weary night in anxious sleeplessness, while the labourer, in his humble cottage, slumbers in security and peace. (55-56)

Such a passage betrays an inability to imagine the real extent of the “great difficulty and temptation” of the poor or just what it meant to be “scarcely removed from want,” and it romanticizes the laborers slumbering securely and peacefully in their “humble” cottages.

Such views as Gresley's were common. Henry Melvill—considered by many prominent Victorians such as Ruskin, Browning, and Gladstone to be one of the greatest preachers of the day (Landow 16)—preached a similar theology, even elevating Deuteronomy 15: 11, “the poor shall never cease out of the land,” to the status of prophecy. In “The Provision Made by God for the Poor,” likely preached during the late-1830s,<sup>84</sup> Melvill flatly states, “We hold it to be clear to every student of Scripture, that God hath ordained successive ranks in human society, and that uniformity of earthly allotment was never contemplated by his providence. And, therefore, do we likewise hold, that attempts at equalization would be tantamount to rebellion against the appointments of heaven” (1.83). Throughout the sermon there are similarly disparaging remarks about those who would make or promote any such “attempts at equalization,” referring to them as demagogues plying their audiences with “stormy and factious declamation[s],” “popular harangues on equality of rights [that] are nothing less than contradictions to the assertions, ‘the rich and poor meet together, the Lord is the maker of them all.’ Proverbs, 22: 2” (1.83). In the face of those who might voice such opposition, Melvill reasserts “the fact, that poverty is an appointment of God. We assume this fact as one not to be questioned by a christian congregation” (1.84).

Nonetheless, admonitions to accept poverty as ordained by God, should not be misread as a complete lack of concern for the poor. Melvill entitled his sermon “The Provision Made by God for the Poor,” and he took for his text Psalm 68:10, “Thou, O

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<sup>84</sup> The sermon is not dated, but is included in Volume I of *Melvill's Sermons*, the preface to which is dated 1843. Some passages within the sermon seem to allude to the Chartist movement.

God, hast prepared of thy goodness for the poor.” As a corollary to the belief that it is “God’s will that the poor should not cease,” Melvill preaches, “it must also be his arrangement that the poor should be cared for” (1.84). Without minimizing the providential nature of class distinctions, Melvill also asserts:

it would be altogether wrong that we should judge any appointment of God, without reference being had to the distortions which man has himself introduced. [ . . . ] we are to the full as clear upon another point, namely, that if in any case there be *positive destitution*, it is not to be referred to the established ordinance of God, but only to some forgetfulness, or violation, of that mutual dependence which this ordinance would encourage. (1.84, emphasis added)

In defending the sufficiency of God’s provision for the poor, Melvill makes a distinction between God’s supplying of that provision and its “human management” or the potential for the “mal-administration of his bounties” which could leave the poor “wholly unprovided for” (1.84, 85). Such concessions—that there is a difference between mere poverty and “positive destitution,” and that the latter is at best a forgetfulness if not an outright violation of God’s ordering of society and the result of human mal-administration—at least implicitly calls for some changes in social relations to alleviate such destitution.

But implicit calls for better management and administration of resources, especially when accompanied by denunciations of those who sought more direct changes, were not—could not be—enough to quiet the voices of discontent, such as those of the Chartists. In the late summer and early fall of 1839, a number of Chartists descended

upon a handful of churches across England. The event illustrates that “odd air of religion which accompanied so much antichurch and antichapel feeling” Chadwick describes (I.334): “Some of them never knew whether they were attacking Christianity or were defending Christianity by attacking the churches which betrayed Christianity. Most of them thought the second” (I.335). Thus they conducted what essentially amounted to sit-ins, “march[ing] to church before the doors were open, [and trying] to cram every seat before the regular congregation could appear” (I.335). They did not seek to shut down the service of the church, but rather “sent the vicar a request that he should preach on certain texts, usually ‘Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you’ or ‘Hear this, O ye that would swallow up the needy, and cause the poor of the land to fail’, or ‘If any will not work, neither shall he eat’” (I.335). And then, having sent their request, in nearly each case, they sat through the sermon and the rest of the service in “orderly displays of good temper” (I.335). This is all the more remarkable given the disparity between their requests for sermon texts and topics and what they actually received.

The Reverend F. Close, curate at the parish church of Cheltenham, was one of those clergymen who found his church occupied by the Chartists on two successive Sundays in August of 1839. On the first Sunday, he chose as his text Samuel 12:23-24: “Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way: Only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart; for consider how great things he hath done for you.” There is no mistaking Close’s intent, for he begins by providing the historical context of these words

of Samuel to the people of Israel, when they chose a king to rule over them instead of judges. Far from being a condemnation of monarchy, though, Close informs his audience that “The sin of Israel would have been just the same had they chosen a republic instead of a King. They chose a man to reign over them, when God himself was their king; *this* was their sin [. . .]. Their sin was rebellion against the established government; against the order of things; against the sway of God, and preferring the rule of man: that was their sin” (*The Chartists’ Visit* 4). In publishing the sermon, this message is reinforced by the verse chosen for the title page, Proverbs 24: 21-22: “My son, fear thou the Lord and the King: and meddle not with them that are given to change: for their calamity shall rise suddenly; and who knoweth the ruin of them both?”

In dealing with his sermon text, Close delineates duties, both his own as a clergyman and his congregation’s, and motives. As for his own duties, Close explains that it is to pray for and teach them. As for their duties, what it means for them to “fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart,” Close is plain:

We know that the man who fears God has the grand principle of moral duty in him: we know that he will be a good servant, a good master, a faithful friend; we know that he will be *a peaceable and contented subject*; that the man who fears God will *fear “the powers that be;”* that he will *submit himself cheerfully to them*, considering whence those powers proceed. (*The Chartists’ Visit* 8, emphasis added)

The motive Close assigns to this quietistic stance is consideration for “how great things [God] hath done for you” (10). What then follows is essentially an admonition for the

congregation to count their blessings, those they have received individually—such as life, recovery from illness, food and raiment—and nationally—noting especially how much better the poor of Britain fare compared to the poor in other parts of the world. The conclusion of Close’s sermon is a rebuke of their actions in “pollut[ing] the sanctuary of the Lord of Hosts, and convert[ing] the church of God into a political engine, [. . .] for God has said, ‘My house shall be called the house of prayer!’” (18-19); the conclusion of the verse<sup>85</sup> would likely have been known by at least some of the audience: “but ye have made it a den of thieves.”<sup>86</sup> Close presses the point even further, proclaiming to them that “SOCIALISM is *rebellion against God*, and CHARTISM is *rebellion against man*” (22, emphasis in original). He then urges them not to set aside the Bible, which he describes as “the universal charter of God to man!” (24).<sup>87</sup>

Perhaps Close’s biggest complaint against the Cheltenham Chartists (as distinct from his critiques of Chartism as a movement more generally) is the disruption their actions caused. Though Close “commend[s] them for their orderly conduct” (17), he hastens to add:

It is impossible that a body of two or three hundred men can attempt to come to a Church in this unusual manner without causing confusion, and therefore it is idle to talk about coming in a decent and proper manner. We may well be suspicious

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<sup>85</sup> Matthew 21:13

<sup>86</sup> Chadwick notes that in one of the other churches visited by the Chartists, when the clergyman gave this same verse in full as his text, they left en masse (I.335).

<sup>87</sup> Close’s second sermon, preached to the female Chartists the following Sunday, treads much of the same ground, though tailored specifically to women and including their peculiar duties as women.

of the motives which have brought you here to-day [. . .]. We cannot put a hundred or even fifty additional persons into this church upon the Sabbath day without inconvenience and disorder. (*The Chartists' Visit* 18)

Certainly the Chartists—in Cheltenham and elsewhere—knew this, and Close was not far off the mark in suggesting that they had “not come to worship God [. . .] in a humble spirit of prayer, to seek His blessing” (18). Nevertheless, the Chartists’ actions demonstrate an acknowledgement of the importance sermons in shaping social attitudes. Although they were likely disappointed—but could hardly have been surprised—in the particular sermons they heard, they did succeed in getting direct and explicit sermonic attention paid to their movement, not only in the sermons themselves, but in the subsequent printing of some of those sermons and in the reporting on the sermons in the periodical press.<sup>88</sup>

To be fair to Close, it should be kept in mind that he was preaching against the backdrop of Continental unrest, and more than once he makes reference to the bloody uprisings in France. Nor were the outbreaks of violence in the early 1830s so far removed as to be forgotten. Fear of such violence and a desire to avoid it was one of the motivating factors in the conservative reaction against Chartism, and Close’s condemnation of the politics of the Chartists was not a condemnation of helping alleviate poverty and its effects. Much as Melvill argued that the presence of poverty created a

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<sup>88</sup> Chadwick references six different articles from the *Christian Observer* and the *Times*, and notes that besides Close’s sermons, Dr. Whitaker’s sermon at Blackburn was printed (I.336.n2). The frontispiece to the first of Close’s sermons notes that it was a “Second Issue, Fifteen Thousand,” which is not an insubstantial number.



positive duty to care for the poor, Close takes pains to emphasize the numerous provisions for the poor in Cheltenham, including “our charitable societies in this place, our Hospital, our Orphan Asylum, our District Visiting Societies, our Schools, and various benevolent Institutions” (19). And in his second sermon, to the female Chartists, he makes clear that it is the *means* of the Chartists he objects to, pledging:

myself, though only a private individual in the nation, that if the Chartists will lay aside the posture of rebellion, disarm themselves, and retire to the bosoms of their families; if they will cease to profane the Sabbath day by political meetings; if they become again peaceable, kind, and gentle to their fellow-men and fellow-subjects,—I for one, would do all in my power to promote the removal of their grievances. (*The Female Chartists' Visit* 23)

Just how far Close would have gone “to promote the removal of their grievances” is a matter of conjecture, but likely it would not have extended much beyond his regular parish visitations and the promotion of those charitable organizations he mentions, while the existing social order would remain essentially unchallenged: in exchange for the efforts of “a private individual” to remove grievances, rebellion and political agitation would have to cease, the Chartists retreating to the domestic domain and submitting, as peaceable subjects, to the social order.

In each of the above cases, we can see the early Victorian tendency toward social control through the sermons’ construction of their audiences. In “The Second Persona,” Edwin Black describes the way an audience can be shaped by a speaker:

Actual auditors look to the discourse they are attending for cues that tell them how they are to view the world, even beyond the expressed concerns, the overt propositional sense, of the discourse. Let the rhetor, for example, who is talking about [a particular issue] use [a particular term], and the auditor is confronted with more than a decision about [the issue]. He is confronted with a plexus of attitudes that may not at all be discussed in the discourse or even implied in any way other than the use of the single term. The discourse will exert on him the pull of an ideology. It will move, unless he rejects it, to structure his experience on many subjects besides [that issue]. (334)

For a preacher, the choice of particular texts can be used as an implicit signal of an ideology that is intended to move his congregation to accept (or, perhaps, at least not challenge) a particular social stance or attitude. Gresley, for instance, cites a number of texts that seem to support the existing social order, and we can find many of those texts in the sermons by Melvil, Close, and others. Even the structure of Close's address to the Chartists is significant in this light. Despite the more than usual chastisement of the audience, his address still follows the form of a traditional sermon—Scriptural epigraph followed by exposition and application—and thus casts the Chartists in the role of a traditional (if perhaps unusual) congregation. And, the Chartists in Cheltenham and elsewhere behaved themselves as such, with “only occasional irreverence” (Chadwick I.335).

This understanding of how rhetors construe and thus seek to shape their audiences—or preachers their congregations—can help us understand the controversy

surrounding Kingsley's famous (or infamous, depending on which side of the question one stood) 1851 sermon preached at St. John's Church, "The Message of the Church to Labouring Men," which demonstrates how much the awareness of working class poverty had grown over the course of the second quarter of the century. The sermon takes as its text an account from the fourth chapter of Luke's gospel wherein Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind; to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (vs. 18-19). The sermon text contains within it the seeds of Kingsley's message, with its singling out of the poor, and its emphasis on deliverance and liberty. These Kingsley sums up in the three words liberty, equality, and brotherhood, which he repeats (with some variation<sup>89</sup>) throughout the sermon. The selection of these particular words to sum up his text, with their associations with the French Revolution, coupled with the reference to "priestcraft and kingcraft" in the opening line of his sermon (5), could not make his import more clear: Kingsley is firmly on the side of the "people," the "masses," his "working friends," the "degraded masses" (*passim*). Those of the Church, both clergy and laity, who have failed to preach liberty, equality, and brotherhood, Kingsley declares "traitors" (6), "tyrannical, luxurious, bigoted, ignorant, [and] careless" (12). In addition to his choice of words,

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<sup>89</sup> Kingsley sometimes uses "freedom" in place of "equality," and "fraternity" in place of "brotherhood"; once he refers to "free, equal, brothers" (13). In the middle of the sermon he also devotes a paragraph each to discussing true and false forms of each term (10-12).

Kingsley also employs a prophetic style against them, proclaiming six times “Woe unto you . . .” (9) and another six times “How dare you . . .” (16-17).

The language and style Kingsley uses signals the sort of “plexus of attitudes” and ideology Black refers to, and would certainly have resonated with the many working class visitors that were drawn to this special Sunday evening sermon. Neither would those attitudes and ideology have been lost on the regular attendees of St. John’s or its incumbent, G. S. Drew, whose “church was too near for comfort to the celebrated John Street Literary Institution, palace of London socialistic atheism” (Chadwick I.358). This ought not to have surprised anyone familiar with Kingsley at this time. He had been sympathetic toward the Chartists in April of 1848, and along with F. D. Maurice and John Malcolm Ludlow, started a penny journal, *Politics for the People*, that same year. Kingsley’s writings in that journal “paraded the biblical texts which, nine years before, the Chartists sent up to the pulpits of harassed clergyman; ‘He that will not work, neither shall he eat’; ‘Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl’. ‘You cry, and I cry, “A fair day’s wages for a fair day’s work”. And is not this the doctrine of the whole Bible . . .?’” (Chadwick I.353). And, in a series of meetings with working men, Kingsley had said “‘I am a Church of England parson’—long pause—‘and a Chartist’” (Chadwick I.354). F. D. Maurice, in a letter quoted in the “Advertisement” that preceded the second edition of Kingsley’s sermon, says as much, noting that it was not only in full knowledge of Kingsley’s previous works but even because of those works that he had been invited to preach at St. John’s.

Nevertheless, at the close of Kingsley's sermon, Drew rose and declared, "Some things which the preacher has said may be very useful; much that he has said I think very imprudent; and much I consider to be very untrue. I must also say that I think the subject which he was to have brought before you has been utterly forgotten" (qtd. in Chadwick I.359). Though Kingsley and Maurice believed that last point to imply there had been some agreement about the subject arranged beforehand that Kingsley had broken,<sup>90</sup> Chadwick asserts that clearly "this was not Drew's intention," though he fails to clarify what his intention was (359 n.1). Perhaps, then, Drew had assumed that the message of the church to laboring men<sup>91</sup> would have been something more akin to the sort of emphasis on social control to be found in Gresley's or Close's sermons.

To be sure, there were some such elements in Kingsley's sermon. Kingsley makes distinctions between true and false versions of liberty, equality, and fraternity. For instance, he rejects any such liberty "where man is free to do what he likes" in favor of that "where a man is free to do what he ought—[ . . . ] free from all degrading passions" (*The Message of the Church* 10). Or, again, he rejects any sort of equality "which reduces all intellects and all characters to a dead level, and gives the same power to the bad as to the good," and promotes "the true equality, wherein each man has equal powers to educate and to use whatsoever faculties or talents God has given him, *be they less or more*; and there are equal opportunities for *unequal* characters" (11 emphasis added). Granted, Kingsley was no progressive in today's sense of the term, but, as Chadwick

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<sup>90</sup> Cf. the "Advertisement" that precedes the published sermon.

<sup>91</sup> Kingsley's sermon was one of six scheduled for Sunday evenings at St. John's that summer, each focusing on "The Message of the Church." Cf. Chadwick I.358.

says, “The cry [for equality, liberty, and fraternity] was qualified. But neither the manner nor the matter caused his hearers to mark what was reserved” (I.359). Whatever the case may have been, Drew’s denunciation of Kingsley had the effect of granting the sermon a good deal of publicity.

“The Message of the Church to Labouring Men” was a success for Kingsley and the Christian Socialists. The sermon and the subsequent controversy bestowed on the emerging Christian Socialist movement a degree of credibility and influence with the working classes that was “astonishing in so small a group” (Chadwick I.360). Though Kingsley would begin distancing himself from Christian Socialism by the middle of the 1850s, his sermon marks a shift away from the social control of earlier Victorian sermons to the social consciousness of the third quarter of the century.

### **Sermonic Social Novels: Dickens and Kingsley**

Before continuing on to the third quarter of the century, it’s important to recognize the role of the sermonic novel in helping to raise awareness of the growing problems of industrialization and urban working class poverty. As noted in an earlier chapter, Victorian novels sometimes borrowed elements of the sermon. While sometimes that led to a perception of the novel as a competitor to the sermon, in other cases the novel could be used as an ally of the sermon, an opportunity to amplify a sermon and carry on where the sermon left off:

By providing an imaginative context for the presentation of problems that contemporaries were beginning to assign to separate domains, novels provided the possibility that the gaps between domains could be healed—in the domain of the

aesthetic. As topics or episodes in a novel, in other words, issues that seemed to belong to the social *or* the economic *or* the political domain could be represented as belonging to a single whole. (Poovey 139 emphasis in original)

Preachers, of course, sought to accomplish a similar unifying of domains in the theological or religious domain, but even some preachers, like Charles Kingsley, recognized and sought to appropriate the aesthetic power of the novel, even as some novelists, like Charles Dickens, could recognize and incorporate the didactic power of the sermon and thus bring the social, economic, political, *and* theological domains into a single whole.

Dickens's *Dombey and Son* and *Hard Times*, and Kingsley's *Alton Locke* could each be fruitfully considered at this point in respect to their bearing on the concerns for the working poor and the city and as helpful markers of the transitional period between the early- and mid-Victorian eras. Louis Cazamian, in his seminal study of the early-Victorian social novel, highlights the "outstanding importance" of Dickens's and Kingsley's writings in the "philanthropic reform of English social life," which he credits with, among other things, "the overturn of those theories by which social quietism had been justified" (3) in the early-Victorian period. Cazamian fixes the end of this period between 1846 and 1855, with 1850 as a symbolic boundary point (2). These three novels fit neatly within this period, with *Dombey and Son* having been published in 1848 (though it was serialized from 1846-1848), *Alton Locke* in 1850, and *Hard Times* in

1854.<sup>92</sup> For our purposes, though, only *Dombey and Son*, specifically chapter 47, “The Thunderbolt,” will be discussed at length as illustrative of the work that the sermonic novel could do; *Hard Times* will be briefly considered, and *Alton Locke* even more briefly, Kingsley and his sermons being discussed more fully in the section to follow.

Before delving into his works, perhaps we should take a moment to consider Dickens more generally and his inclusion in this study of the Victorian sermon. A novelist like Charles Kingsley seems a natural choice because he was also a preacher.<sup>93</sup> Nevertheless, I believe there is justification for including Dickens here, not merely for the thematic reason that his novels so often dealt with the city and class, nor only for the sermonic qualities of some of his works, which will be demonstrated below, but for the way he was seen by his contemporaries and the way he has come to be regarded since. In his funeral sermon preached the Sunday after Dickens was laid to rest in Westminster Abbey, Arthur Stanley described Dickens as a man “who had for years delighted and instructed the generation to which he belonged,” “one in whom this generation seemed to see the most vivid exemplification of this heaven-sent power of fiction” (*Westminster*

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<sup>92</sup> Despite the relatively “late” date of *Hard Times*, Cazamian considers it an early-Victorian novel, explaining that “if intellectual pacification was far from instant in society in 1848, it took still longer to come in the novel. This is a normal phenomenon: literature more often than not comes in the wake of events. [. . .] Dicken’s *Hard Times* [. . .] prolonged for several years the artistic response to social agitation which had been stilled” (5).

<sup>93</sup> William Gresley, discussed earlier in this chapter, was also a novelist. George MacDonald, who is discussed in chapters 1 and 2, was also a preacher for a time. George Eliot was also discussed at length in chapter 1, but there the focus was specifically on the novel, so no other particular justification was needed. Nonetheless, her status as a “sage,” the sermonic qualities of her work, and her rivalry with (some) preachers and preaching were all qualifiers.



*Sermons* 150, 152). For Stanley, however, these were no generic statements of praise. After noting Jesus's own sanction for the use of "invented story," Stanley goes on to proclaim, "If we were to ask for the most perfect exposition of the most perfect truth respecting God and man, which the world contains, it will be found not in a Discourse, or a Creed, or a Hymn, or even a Prayer, but in a Parable, a story—[. . .] the Parable of the Prodigal Son" (151). The "exposition of the [. . .] truth respecting God and man" sounds like it could be a description of preaching a sermon or discourse, but Stanley asserts that it is a story that most perfectly expounds this truth. Moreover, storytelling, Stanley says, is a Jesus- and Bible-sanctioned "mode of instruction which has been, in a special sense, God's gift to our own age" on a par with "the burning eloquence of speaker or preacher, the grave address of moralist or divine" (151). Stanley notes that in Dickens "there was a profoundly serious—nay, may we not say, a profoundly Christian and Evangelical truth, of which we all need to be reminded, and of which he was, in his own way, the special teacher" (155). Janet Larson, professor at Rutgers University, says that "Dean Stanley's sermon is typical, for as George Ford notes, Dickens' 'social criticism had acquired a New Testament aura of considerable importance to its status' by the time of his death" (4).

This perception of Dickens as a teacher of divine truth has continued since his death, as well. In the early twentieth-century, G. K. Chesterton described Dickens as a "prophet" and noted the "prophetic" nature of his work (*Appreciations* xiv, 14, 69, 94, 217). More recently, Robert Green, in his 1970 article "*Hard Times*: The Style of a Sermon," asserts that "certainly in discussing *Hard Times*, it seems fruitful to think of

Dickens as the preacher, and of the reader as his congregation,” and again calls him a “preacher, [. . .] England’s St. Paul” (1390, 1391). Chris Vanden Bossche, in a 1982 article, “Preaching and Performance: The Rhetoric of Fictional High Seriousness in Carlyle and Dickens,” likewise describes Dickens as a preacher who is also a performer, a writer who preaches as he performs his fiction (45, 50). Janet Larson, in her 1985 study, *Dickens and the Broken Scripture*, claims that in *Dombey and Son*, Dickens “speaks now as the Victorian sage [. . .], as one who would awaken the Christian conscience of his readers by conducting them through an experience toward what Newman called real assent. As sage Dickens does this by redefining and revivifying religious and other common terms (such as ‘unnatural’) that have masked the facts, while making readers physically and morally see what they had been blind to before” (97).<sup>94</sup>

Both Green and Vanden Bossche comment on parts of Dickens’s language in *Hard Times* and *Bleak House*, respectively, Green calling it “sermonese” (1394), and Vanden Bossche referring to it as “the language of the pulpit” (49). Interestingly, Green also notes that some of the similarities of Dickens’s language in *Hard Times* with oral language may have been influenced by his practice of reading his works aloud in public settings (1394 n.49). While it would be an interesting study in its own right to consider

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<sup>94</sup> Larson does qualify the characterization of Dickens as an “apocalyptic prophet or a ‘New Testament Christian,’” however, noting that from *Dombey* on, “Dickens’ biblical framework [. . .] remains impotent to dispel the unease these forces [*i.e.*, the influx of new worlds] have provoked,” and that “the efficacy of the Bible and Prayer Book standards Dickens also calls upon to judge the irreligious times is being gradually and ineluctably undermined” (99). These qualification, however, do not strike at the heart of my point, which is not so much focused on the efficacy of Dickens’s message as the style and form that message takes.

the relationship between Dickens's reading performances and his experiences with the sermon,<sup>95</sup> For now, let it suffice to note that Dickens himself saw a connection between the didactic purpose of his fiction and the effect the public reading of it could have on hearers. Louis Cazamian quotes from two of Dickens's letters that illustrate the point. Of his didactic purpose in *The Chimes*, Dickens wrote, "I like more and more my notion of making, in this little book, a great blow for the poor. Something powerful, I think I can do, but I want to be tender too, and cheerful," and of the impact it had on its hearers, he wrote, "Anybody who has heard it has been moved in the most extraordinary manner. . . . If you [his wife] had seen Macready last night undisguisedly sobbing and crying on the sofa as I read, you would have felt, as I did, what a thing it is to have power" (quoted in Cazamian 126). For these reasons, I believe we may consider Dickens not merely as a writer of sermonic novels, but, as Stanley said, "in his own way, [a] special teacher," and, we may add, preacher. With that consideration, let us now turn our attention to his works.

Writing from a social ecocritical perspective,<sup>96</sup> John Parham describes how Dickens used literature to advance what has been described as the "civic gospel":

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<sup>95</sup> The more obvious comparison would be between Dickens's performances and his experience with the theater, but even that could then be turned to account when comparisons between traditional theatrical performances and preaching are considered, as Herbert Sennett does in his 2003 article "Preaching as Performance: (A Preliminary Analytical Model)" or Jana Childers does in her 2005 article "Making Connections: Preaching as Theatre," both of which were published in *The Journal of Religion and Theatre*.

<sup>96</sup> Parham draws a distinction between "deep" ecology and "social" ecology, the former focusing more on a Romantic, Nature-centered ecology, while the latter is more post-Romantic, encompassing the human and social elements as well as the natural and environmental elements of an ecosystem. Cf. pp. 3-4.

Dickens acknowledged that his most positive contribution to this movement was in bringing alive, in his novels, the experience of living under an ‘urban health penalty’. Seeking ‘to turn Fiction to the good account of showing the preventable [sic] wretchedness and misery in which the mass of people dwell’, what Dickens’s writing ultimately illustrates is the role imaginative literature can play in inculcating concern about and action around environmental injustice. (14)

Parham illustrates this through an examination of four of Dickens’s novels, including *Dombey and Son*’s forty-seventh chapter, “The Thunderbolt.” Parham’s consideration of this chapter—specifically the passage on the environmental conditions of the city—concentrates on its environmental description “informed by the language and concepts of science,” but he also notes Dickens’s recognition “that environmental hazards – most notably, air pollution and sanitation – pervaded the entire (human and nonhuman) environment” and posed a risk to human health (11). Parham goes on to argue that “This awareness [that environmental injustice might engender dire social consequences] led both to the perception, as he writes in *Dombey and Son*, that we are ‘creatures of one common origin [...] tending to one common end’ and an insistence on the need to find political solutions” which “translated into a socially reconstructive dimension that appeared in his work” (16, 15 ellipsis in original).

Besides his reference to the “civic gospel” (of which more will be said later), Parham also quotes from one of Dickens’s speeches in which Dickens disputed the notion “that this age is a material age, and that a material age is not a religious age” (Parham 19). Although Parham understandably focuses on the environmental and social

implications of Dickens's work—and, it should be noted, “social” encompasses or is linked to “moral” throughout Parham's article—it is important that the religious element of Dickens ought not to be glossed over too quickly. In fact, I would argue that this passage from *Dombey and Son* is essentially a religious text, replete with sermonic elements.

Before working through the details, it is worth revisiting the definition of the sermonic mode detailed in the first chapter of this work. There, I noted Dawn Coleman identifies the sermonic mode “by a cluster of stylistic features”:

a tone of conviction and certainty; Biblical and theological diction; stylistic structures characteristic of, but not limited to, oratory, such as parallelism, anaphora, and antithesis; and an apparent attempt to persuade an audience to correct thought or action. [. . .] It may be spoken by either a narrator or a character [. . .] and anguishes over a variety of philosophical and social problems [. . .]. It tackles vital human problems with heightened emotional intensity and emphasizes their human or divine solutions; it operates in the spirit of hope or faith. [. . .] The sermonic mode is preaching idealized and concentrated—passionate, eloquent, commanding, and brief. (*Novel* 4-5)

The presence of each of these features in the “The Thunderbolt” passage clearly marks it as sermonic. Moreover, when its overall structure is taken into consideration, I would argue that the passage can profitably be read as a mini-sermon.

For one, “The Thunderbolt” passage demonstrates the inextricable, and socially problematic, link between the material and the immaterial, the environmental and the

moral, and this latter term includes more than just a social morality but also a spiritual morality specifically informed by religious faith. In the paragraph where he brings the insights of “Those who study the physical sciences [. . .] to bear upon the health of Man,” Dickens explicitly says that “the moral pestilence” of the city “is inseparable from” “the noxious particles that rise from vitiated air” (684). But Dickens does more than simply assert the fact of this connection; rather, he interweaves the physical and the spiritual throughout the entirety of this section. In the preceding paragraph Dickens notes the “outcasts of society” who are “unnatural in losing and confounding all distinctions between good and evil; unnatural in [. . .] vice,” but then follows that by noting “the polluted air, foul with every impurity that is poisonous to health and life” (684). He later remarks “how the same poisoned fountains that flow into our hospitals [. . .] inundate the jails, and make the convict-ships swim deep” and that “where we generate disease to strike our children down [. . .], there also we breed, by the same certain process, infancy that knows no innocence, youth without modesty or shame” (684-685). Toward the end of the passage, Dickens observes “the thick and sullen air where Vice and Fever propagate together,” again making explicit the inextricable link between the material and the moral that runs throughout the passage (685).

In “The Gospel According to Dickens,” Ben Faber discusses this same passage from *Dombey and Son*, further noting Dickens’s juxtaposition of:

biblical imagery of the Destroying Angel in Exodus with scientific speculation about the spread of cholera in poor neighbourhoods to suggest a social-environmentalist notion of evil. This fantastic vision ends not with a materialist,

utilitarian, or political solution but with hope in a common humanity: “Men . . . would then apply themselves, like creatures of one common origin, owing one duty to the Father of one family, and tending to one common end, to make the world a better place!”

Although Faber’s reference to “a social-environmentalist notion of evil” fits well with Parham’s social ecocritical perspective discussed above, Faber approaches the passage from a theological perspective, and in quoting this line from *Dombey and Son*, Faber does not elide the reference to “one duty to the Father of one family” as Parham does. This is significant, because this part of the line and the repetition of “one” four times would surely call to the Victorian reader’s mind the passage from Ephesians 4, where Paul writes “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all” (vs. 4-6). It is worth noting, too, that the “one Spirit” mentioned here in Ephesians is surely parallel with the “good spirit” Dickens opens his paragraph with, when he calls for “a good spirit who would [. . .] show a Christian people” the misery surrounding them and bring them to fulfill their duty (or calling) to the (One God and) Father of the one Family (or body) (685). Faber’s take on this line, though, seems to be nearly opposite that of Parham. Whereas Parham sees Dickens’s efforts leading to “an insistence on the need to find political solutions” (16), Faber sees this passage ending “not with a materialist, utilitarian, or political solution but with hope in a common humanity.” These two positions, however, are not as contradictory as they may at first appear.

Faber's characterization of Dickens's position might seem rather vague and nebulous. If "hope" is all Dickens leaves the reader with, then he would indeed be subject to the criticism "of calling for action but failing to tell us how to act" (Vanden Bossche 53). But Chris Vanden Bossche (writing of both Carlyle and Dickens) argues that "Their action was in their works, in altering the way the world of which they spoke was perceived. [. . .] The function of [their work] is not to urge us to [. . .] support urban renewal, but rather to break through the insensitivity bred by the modern city" (53). In his funeral sermon for Dickens, Arthur Stanley makes a similar point about the effect of Dickens's work:

By him that veil was rent asunder which parts the various classes of society. Through his genius, the rich man, faring sumptuously every day, was made to see and feel the presence of the Lazarus at his gate. The unhappy inmates of the workhouse, the neglected children in the dens and caves of our great cities [. . .], far from the observation of men, felt that a new ray of sunshine was poured on their dark existence, a new interest awakened in their forlorn and desolate lot. [. . .] It was because, as by a magician's wand, those gaunt figures and strange faces had been [. . .] made to stand and speak before those who hardly dreamed of their existence. (157-158)

By breaking through the "insensitivity bred by the modern city" and making imaginatively palpable to the reader "the presence of the Lazarus at his gate" at the outset of the sermon, Dickens's work can provide an impetus to action, and what Faber



characterizes as a mere “hope in a common humanity” could find its expression in social and political action.<sup>97</sup>

One way Dickens accomplishes this can be seen in the second paragraph of this section of “The Thunderbolt,” in a series of imperatives that sets up then breaks down the distance between the reader and the “Lazarus” at their gate. First, Dickens asks the reader to “Hear the magistrate or judge admonish the unnatural outcasts of society,” and then he enumerates their unnaturalness: “unnatural in brutal habits, unnatural in want of decency, unnatural in losing and confounding all distinctions between good and evil; unnatural in ignorance, in vice, in recklessness, in contumacy, in mind, in looks, in everything” (684). The repetition of the sentence gathers momentum as it gains weight, moving from “unnatural in” to just “in,” until the end of the sentence when “everything” about the outcast is declared unnatural. “But,” Dickens continues, “follow the good clergyman or doctor, who [. . .] goes down into their dens,” inviting the reader to close the distance between them even as he calls out the willful separation of those who pass by the poor “lying within the echoes of our carriage wheels” and of “dainty delicacy living in the next street, [who] stops her ears, and lisps ‘I don’t believe it!’” (684). Taking the reader farther in, Dickens next has the reader “Breathe the polluted air [. . .]; and have every sense [. . .] offended, sickened, and disgusted, and made a channel by which misery and death alone can enter” (684). Having pulled aside “that veil [. . .] which parts the various classes of society” (Stanley 157), Dickens then poses a challenge to the reader:

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<sup>97</sup> Such action, as will be discussed in the section to follow, found its expression in part in the civic or municipal gospel movement, and was explicitly addressed and advocated from the pulpit as well.

Vainly attempt to think of any simple plant, or flower, or wholesome weed, that, set in this foetid bed, could have its natural growth [. . .] as GOD designed it. And then, calling up some ghastly child, with stunted form and wicked face, hold forth on its unnatural sinfulness, and lament its being, so early, far away from Heaven—but think a little of its having been conceived, and born, and bred, in Hell! (684).

Of course, by now, such thought of holding forth on the “unnatural sinfulness” of the social outcast in the manner of the magistrate or judge, without the imaginative sympathy of considering its polluted and foetid environment, ought to be literally unthinkable.

Like a good preacher, though, Dickens presses the point. After briefly summoning “Those who study the physical sciences” to provide an illustration of physical pollution, he then draws an analogy between that and moral pollution, declaring that “if the moral pestilence [. . .] could be made discernible too, how terrible the revelation!” (684). The biblical implications of “revelation” are surely intended, and what follows is a fierce jeremiad, worthy of any pulpit:

*Then should we see* depravity, impiety, drunkenness, theft, murder, and a long train of nameless sins against the natural affections [. . .] creeping on, to blight the innocent and spread contagion among the pure. *Then should we see* how the same poisoned fountains that flow into our hospitals [. . .] inundate the jails, *and* make convict-ships swim deep, *and* roll across the seas, *and* overrun vast continents with crime. *Then should we stand* appalled to know, that where we generate disease to strike our children down and entail itself on unborn generations, there

also we breed, by the same certain process, *infancy* that knows no innocence, *youth* without modesty or shame, *maturity* that is mature in nothing but in suffering and guilt, blasted *old age* that is a scandal on the form we bear. (684-685 emphasis added)

The list of sins in the first sentence quoted here is reminiscent of similar lists Paul describes in Romans and Ephesians, which include, among many other named sins, fornication, adultery, and lasciviousness, murder, drunkenness, and, significantly for the context of Dickens's list, "without natural affection."<sup>98</sup> Further, this list taken together with the anaphora of the three sentences, the polysyndeton in the second, and the parallelism of the third (all italicized) serve to create a cumulative force that builds to Dickens's indignant exclamation: "Unnatural humanity!" (685). Still, though, Dickens does not relent, and he concludes this part of the sermon with one last anaphoristic repetition: "When we shall gather grapes from thorns, and figs from thistles; when fields of grain shall spring up from the offal in the by-ways of our wicked cities, and roses bloom in the fat churchyards they cherish; then we may look for natural humanity, and find it growing from such seed" (685). As Vanden Bossche said of a passage from *Bleak House*, "This is the language of the pulpit" (49). The use of "shall," "offal," and "by-

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<sup>98</sup> The lists in full are these: "Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful" (Romans 1:29-31); and "Now the works of the flesh are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like" (Ephesians 5:19-21).

ways,” sounds like the diction of the King James Bible. The imagery of gathering grapes from thorns and figs from thistles caustically borrows from Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus asks rhetorically, “Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?” (Matthew 7:16); in both cases, the implication is that it shall not come to pass.

In addition to these sermonic elements, the overall structure of the passage is that of a sermon as well. We have already examined much of what would be the body of the sermon, with its “exposition” and illustration of its “doctrine.” Although there is not an explicit text that headlines the passage,<sup>99</sup> the introduction of the topic, natural versus unnatural, in the first paragraph reads very much like a sermon opening: “It might be worth while to inquire what Nature is, and how men work to change her, and whether, in the enforced distortions so produced, it is not natural to be unnatural” (683). Pointing out the worthiness of the subject, and laying out a three-part division of the subject are common features of Victorian sermons. The opening also introduces the key terms on which the rest of the sermon will focus—“Nature,” “natural,” and “unnatural”—that will be repeated another sixteen times throughout. Implicit in this opening is also the theme of this mini-sermon: if in some cases it becomes “natural to be unnatural,” then one must not be too hasty in pronouncing judgment on the “unnatural.” These features, too, bear the marks of a sermon, for “It was understood in the Victorian period that sermons were to begin with a text around which the preacher carefully focused his thoughts. [. . .] This

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<sup>99</sup> Unless, perhaps, we consider the opening question of this first paragraph of the section—“Was Mr. Dombey’s master-vice, that ruled him so inexorably, an unnatural characteristic?” (683)—as the text, or perhaps as a sort of contextualizing of the sermon topic by making Mr. Dombey himself a “text” of sorts.

text and reflections were intended to empower the parishioners to live as better Christians” (Stolpa 229).<sup>100</sup> Concerning this latter point, Dickens’s intention to motivate his readers to “live as better Christians” is made clear in the closing application and exhortations of the mini-sermon.

In the final two paragraphs of this passage, Dickens calls for a potent and benignant spirit to enlighten “a Christian people” by showing them “the pale phantoms rising from the scenes of our too-long neglect,” the result of which would then be men who “would then apply themselves, like creatures of one common origin, owning one duty to the Father of one family, and tending to one common end, to make the world a better place!” (685). In addition to this social, communal exhortation and application that we explored in some detail above, Dickens adds one last paragraph with a more individual, personal application, expressing the desire that the spirit’s enlightenment would also rouse “some who never have looked out upon the world of human life around them, to a knowledge of their own relation to it, and for making them acquainted with a perversion of nature in their own contracted sympathies and estimates” (685). Faber says that Dickens depicts sin “in social or psychological terms as an offense against another human being or against oneself,” and so “salvation from evil is seen as the conversion to selfless acts of kindness.” This conversion that would enable readers to “live as better Christians,” though, requires a prior shift in perception: the ability to see oneself rightly in relation to others, recognizing one’s own flaws as well.

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<sup>100</sup> In the elided portion of this quotation, Stolpa cites, but does not quote, Brian Heaney’s *A Different Kind of Gentleman: Parish Clergy as Professional Men in Early and Mid-Victorian England* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1976), page 43.

This point is reinforced by Dickens's choice of diction in the penultimate sentence of the conclusion. Dickens writes, "Bright and blest the morning that should rise on such a night: for men, delayed no more by stumbling-blocks of their own making, which are but *specks of dust* upon the path between them and eternity, would then apply themselves, like creatures of one common origin, owing one duty to the Father of one family [. . .], to make the world a better place!" (685 emphasis added). Given the message of the sermon—learning to see oneself and one's brother (and all are one's brothers, part of "one family") clearly, and reserving judgment on the "unnatural outcasts of society"—Dickens's choice of "specks of dust" seems suggestive, if indirectly so, of the "mote" Jesus refers to in the Sermon on the Mount:<sup>101</sup>

Judge not, that ye be not judged. [. . .] why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.

(Matthew 7:1, 3-6)

Only after one has removed the beam from one's own eye, that is, learned to see oneself and one's own flaws clearly, is one in any position to look at his brother's flaws.

Moreover, the goal is not to judge one's brother's flaws, but to help remove those flaws and, in the context of Dickens's mini-sermon, the conditions that so naturally create

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<sup>101</sup> Janet Larson refers to this part of the line as "a somewhat confused echo of the motes and beams parable of the Sermon [on the Mount]" which "turn[s] into a *Pilgrim's Progress* emblem" (96).

them. Dickens thus concludes his mini-sermon with the hope that in coming to judge themselves rightly, his readers would then be able to see clearly their kinship with the outcasts and begin applying themselves to making the world a better place.

*Hard Times* and *Alton Locke* share many of the same sermonic elements as the mini-sermon in *Dombey and Son*. Besides comparing some of the syntactical elements of *Hard Times* with similar elements in passages from sermons by John Henry Newman, Robert Green also notes its “fierce moral indignation,” its castigation of sinners through “forceful, strident and assertive” language, and its echoing “the language of the pulpit” in “that final exhortation” of the novel’s last paragraph, which he calls “the climax of the sermon” (1390-1391). Similarly, Owen Chadwick, speaking of *Alton Locke*, says that Kingsley “couched his moral vehemence in language of graphic power and range. [. . .] Every chapter is a denunciation. Kingsley released his pulpit reproof against [a wide variety of Victorian targets]; and behind everything the contemporary society which allowed the brutality and squalor and poverty of the slum” (I.358). Both of these novels, like *Dombey and Son*’s “The Thunderbolt,” helped not only to raise awareness of the wretched conditions of the urban poor themselves, but also to expose the wretchedness of the industrial city itself.

Perhaps the best example of this kind of exposé of the city in Charles Kingsley’s *Alton Locke* is the description of Bermondsey’s ditch-water:

The light of the policeman’s lantern glared over the ghastly scene—along the double row of miserable house-backs, which lined the sides of the open tidal ditch—over strange rambling jetties, and balconies, and sleeping-sheds, which

hung on rotting piles over the black waters, with phosphorescent scraps of rotten fish gleaming and twinkling out of the dark hollows, like devilish grave-lights—over bubbles of poisonous gas, and bloated carcasses of dogs, and lumps of offal, floating on the stagnant olive-green hell-broth—over the slow sullen rows of oily ripple which were dying away into the darkness far beyond, sending up, as they stirred, hot breaths of miasma—the only sign that a spark of humanity, after years of foul life, had quenched itself in that foul death. (336)

It is no mere conjecture to say that Kingsley used the language of the pulpit in *Alton Locke*, for we find the same language in his own sermons on similar subjects. Consider, for instance, this passage from his “First Sermon on the Cholera,” preached in 1849:

Did they [Englishmen] repent of and confess the covetousness, the tyranny, the carelessness, which in most great towns, and in too many villages also, forces the poor to lodge in undrained stifling hovels, unfit for hogs, amid vapours and smells which send forth on every breath the seeds of rickets and consumption, typhus and scarlet fever, and worse and last of all, the cholera? [. . .] Did they repent of the carelessness and laziness and covetousness which sends meat and fish up to all our large towns in a half-putrid state; which fills every corner of London and the great cities with slaughter-houses, over-crowded graveyards, undrained sewers? Not they. So the filth of our great cities was left to ferment in poisonous cesspools, foul ditches and marshes and muds [. . .]. (*National Subjects* 135, 136)



These are remarkable illustrations, ones that accumulate detail upon graphic detail to pull back the veil of willful denial from the public's eyes and confront them with the wretchedness of the city.

It was not, however, merely the literal filth of the city that was problematic. In the description of Coketown that opens chapter five of *Hard Times*, "The Key-Note," Dickens employs a linking of the material and immaterial similar to that which we saw in *Dombey and Son*:

You saw nothing in Coketown but what was severely workful. If the members of a religious persuasion built a chapel there—as the members of eighteen religious persuasions had done—they made it a pious warehouse of red brick. [. . .] The jail might have been the infirmary, the infirmary might have been the jail, the town-hall might have been either, or both, or anything else, for anything that appeared to the contrary in the graces of their construction. Fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the material aspect of the town; fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the immaterial. The M'Choakumchild school was all fact, and the school of design was all fact, and everything was fact between the lying-in hospital and the cemetery, and what you couldn't state in figures, or show to be purchaseable in the cheapest market and saleable in the dearest, was not, and never should be, world without end, Amen. (21)

Green remarks on the "Christian rhythm and imagery serving to demonstrate the satanic, black-magic quality in the followers of the Coketown religion" in this passage (1385).

Jennifer Gribble, in "Why the Good Samaritan Was a Bad Economist: Dickens' Parable

for *Hard Times*,” similarly notes that “The Lord’s Prayer and the Church of England Book of Common Prayer lend their cadences” to the passage, which, “From its Christian sources, [. . .] borrows as well, liturgical repetitions of the talismanic word” (430). However, in linking the material and immaterial by that talismanic word “fact,”—which, Gribble says, is an “empty signifier,”—the “temporal [material] world [is] no longer co-terminous with the eternal [immaterial] world of the life everlasting” (430). As we saw in *Dombey and Son*, the material and immaterial worlds are linked in such a way that to degrade one is to degrade the other.

If in *Dombey and Son* we see the degraded physical environment of the city effect the spiritual condition of its inhabitants, here in *Hard Times* we can conversely see the degraded spiritual condition of Coketown’s inhabitants effect the physical environment of Coketown:

It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but, as matters stood it was a town of *unnatural* red and black, like the painted face of a *savage*. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable *serpents* of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled. It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of building full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long, and where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down, like the head of an elephant in a state of *melancholy madness*. (20-21 emphasis added)

In this description the city itself is afflicted. It exists in an “unnatural” condition, likened to a “savage,” in a “state of melancholy madness.” Even its church bells are “barbarous,” “driving the sick and nervous mad” (21). If the early-Victorian period witnessed an awakening to the physical and spiritual needs of the laboring classes, with that awakening came an awareness that the city itself was also in need of saving, a task to which the mid-Victorians turned their attention.

### **The Social Body/Body of Christ, Cholera, and Public Sanitation**

James Shergold Boone, curate of Paddington, brings together both aspects of the problem in “The Need of Christianity to Cities: A Sermon” (1844), where he says:

The very extent of edifices, and the very collection of vast masses of human beings into one spot, humanity remaining what it is, must be fraught with moral infection. . . . Cities are the centres and theatres of human ambition, human cupidity, and human pleasure. On the one side, the appetites, the passions, the carnal corruptions of man are forced, as in a hot-bed, into a rank and foul luxuriance; and countless evils which would have elsewhere a feeble and difficult existence, are struck out into activity and warmth by their mere contact with each other. On the other side, many restraints and safeguards are weakened, or even withdrawn. . . . In cities, there is a complication of evils: external forces cooperate with internal desires, in tainting, defiling, poisoning the character [. . .].

(quoted in Lees 30)

This eloquent jeremiad illustrates some of the important features of the early-Victorian response to the city. For one, with their vast “extent of edifices” and “masses of human

beings” concentrated into one location, it is the very nature of cities as cities that is problematic, their size and concentration inflaming “the carnal corruptions.” Given “the centrality and the influence of the big city in modern society, it was all the more vital” the city be Christianized (Lees 30). Boone’s solution was to focus on the infrastructure of the city itself as a way to get at the moral problems of its inhabitants. That is, he believed the Church’s pressing need was to build more churches: “In a word, churches will create church-goers; and church-goers will create churches” (quoted in Lees 30). The Church of England did in fact embark on a vigorous church-building program, but the problem was not merely a lack of churches. Even in the densest populated cities where there was an insufficient number of churches for the number of residents, many pews still remained empty.

Noteworthy, too, is the way in which Boone figures the moral corruption of the city’s inhabitants in terms of disease. Life in the city is “fraught with moral *infection*,” and man’s carnal nature is forced into “*rank and foul luxuriance*,” “tainting, defiling, *poisoning* the character.” Such language is no accident. After the first cholera epidemic of 1832, the language of disease was often used to describe moral and social concerns. Mary Poovey’s analysis of James Phillip Kay’s use of similar language in his 1832 pamphlet *The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes . . . in Manchester* captures the way such language worked:

Rhetorically [. . .], cholera provides the metaphor that draws all of society’s problems into a single conceptual cluster which Kay designates *ills* or *maladies*. This metaphorical use of cholera enables Kay to convince his middle- and upper-

class readers that the fate of the poor has implications for the wealthy too—or, in other words, that everyone belongs to one “social body.” (58)

But at the same time that “social body” implies an organic unity, the term:

was used in two quite different ways [in the early-nineteenth century]: it referred either to the poor in isolation from the rest of the population or to British (or English) society as an organic whole. The ambiguity [. . .] allowed social analysts to treat one segment of the population as a special problem at the same time that they could gesture toward the mutual interests that (theoretically) united all parts of the social whole. The phrase *social body* therefore promised full membership in a whole (and held out the image *of* that whole) to a part identified as needing both discipline and care. (5-6)

This concept of the *social body*, which could encompass society as a unified whole while simultaneously singling out the poor as a problem, has its parallels in several Biblical passages that describe the Church as one unified body that is made up of separate and distinct parts. A familiarity with the Biblical figure of the Church as the body of Christ is important for understanding the religious overtones of the metaphor.

The most prominent and most often referred to Biblical text on the Church as the body of Christ is 1 Corinthians 12, where Paul writes, “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body [. . .]. For the body is not one member, but many. [. . .] But now are they many members, yet but one body. [. . .] Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular” (1 Corinthians 12: 12-14, 20,

27). Within this same passage, Paul also emphasizes the distinctiveness of “those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble,” and their need for special consideration and care: “And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness” (12:22-23). While 1 Corinthians 12 refers to the *church* as a body, preachers (among others) implicitly and explicitly apply its imagery to society as a whole.

William Gresley, whom we considered earlier, provides an exemplary use of the figure in just this way in a sermon entitled “On Mutual Dependence and Need of Co-Operation.” Taking 1 Corinthians 12:12 as his text, Gresley tells his congregation “the well-being of the social body depends on the continuance of each member to perform the functions assigned to him” (34). Sickness to the point of death would befall:

the body politic<sup>102</sup>—that is the collective nation, if any of its numerous members refused to perform their functions. If the laboring part of the people refused to work, if the educated part refused to think, and if the ministers and religious part of the community, (which we may well call the heart,) no longer propelled the life-blood of religious truth into the veins of the social system, soon would the whole system itself become stagnant and corrupted, and every member, in common with the body itself, would hasten to dissolution. (34-35)

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<sup>102</sup> Poovey discusses the history of and distinction between the terms “social body,” “body politic,” and “the great body of the people,” with “social body” encompassing both of the latter (5). Gresley shows no particular precision in his use of the terms.

There is more at stake, though, than the profit or loss that comes from fulfilling or not fulfilling one's individual duties. Gresley also notes:

if one member suffer, all the others suffer with it [a close paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 12:26]. The disease of the extremities shoots its pains upward to the head and heart [. . .]. So, if the humblest class of society be aggrieved; if their morals become corrupted, their natural wants unsupplied, and if no sympathetic feeling be shewn, and no means of relief be devised, by those to whom they have a right to cry for succor, the body becomes a diseased body, and contracts a morbid habit which will surely one day terminate in its dissolution. (27-28)

Gresley spends slightly more than half of the sermon on this consideration of "the prosperity of the body politic, and its members in particular," which he intends to use "as illustrative and explanatory of the far more important" religious part of the subject that takes up the second half of the sermon.

Gresley's sermon illustrates well the reciprocal nature of the discourse on the city and its problems. In Gresley, the Biblical text is the foundation which informs his discussion of the social body/body politic, which in turn informs his discussion of Christian duty within the Church. Other sermons, though, might take medical reports or outbreaks of disease as the grounds for discussing moral and spiritual issues, which are then related back to physical and social concerns.

The sermonic response to the first cholera focused almost exclusively on the disease as the judgment of God for national sins, which were often generalized as the accumulation of the individual sins of its members. For instance, discussing the lesson to

be learned following the end of the cholera outbreak, Charles Girdlestone, Vicar of Sedgley, Staffordshire, warns his congregation not about the importance of improving sanitation, but against the danger of relapsing into sin, noting “the flagrant enormities of sabbath breaking, swearing, drunkenness, and impurity, [. . .] lying and slandering, [. . .] rebellion and strife” (59). Such rhetoric was common, and it was picked up by the medical and sanitary reports that came out for some time afterwards. Even as notable a figure as Dr. Henry Letheby, the analytical chemist and medical health officer, writing to the City Commissioners of Sewers for London in 1857, still placed medical and moral concerns side by side:

In many of my former reports [. . .] your attention has been drawn to the pestilential source of disease, and to the consequence of heaping human beings into such contracted localities; and I again revert to it because of its great importance, not merely that it perpetuates fever and the allied disorders, but because there stalks side by side with this pestilence a yet deadlier presence, blighting the moral existence of a rising population, rendering their hearts hopeless, their acts ruffianly and incestuous, and scattering, while society averts her eye, the retributive seeds of increase for crime, turbulence, and pauperism.

(quoted in Guthrie 194)

In light of the national fasts proclaimed and the accompanying sermons preached in response to cholera outbreaks, it is not surprising that moral rhetoric would find its way into medical reports. And then, sermons could draw upon those same reports as confirmation of their moral messages, thus perpetuating the cycle.



The result of the discourse that grew up around the first outbreak was that “the rhetoric a new generation of clergy [. . .] inherited from the first epidemic [. . .] positions them against the medical profession [. . .]. The sense of the specificity of sins for which the nation is chargeable—and for which parishioners are likely to feel a collective responsibility—is even less defined” (Gilbert “Sinful” 34-35). However, with subsequent outbreaks, sermons that employed such rhetoric—indeed, even the very fact that a *religious* service was declared in response to a *medical* crisis—began to provoke sometimes hostile responses from the more medically-minded. One such respondent, writing under the pseudonym “Sensus Communis” attacked the Fast Day proclamation and liturgy that had been assigned for 1849, arguing that “in the public employment of this prayer, millions of devout men have been led to imply their positive belief in two very remarkable propositions [that cholera is sent by God as punishment, and Two, that ‘humiliation and repentance’ shall avert it].” Communis continues, “Does it not in effect tell them [the poor] that what the doctors tell them . . . about the danger of want of cleanliness, and the deadly effects of vice and intemperance, is sheer nonsense? . . . that it is the hand of GOD, and not their filthy condition” (quoted in Gilbert “Sinful” 36 brackets, ellipses, emphasis in original).

Certainly there were sermons that at least implicitly took such anti-medical stances. Gilbert cites one such by the Reverend Davies given on the occasion of the 1854 outbreak of cholera. In it, Davies asserts, “Of the general fact there can be no question that when a kingdom, a nation, or a smaller community has sunk to a certain point of moral degradation . . . they are frequently visited in this capacity,” and while he does not

“intend for a moment to deny the existence of general and fixed laws, nor the spontaneous action of physical and secondary causes,” which are “the creatures of an omnipotent will,” trying to fix upon the particular “forms of impiety and ungodliness, which have called forth these outpourings of divine anger” is pointless (quoted in Gilbert “Sinful” 40). While Davies seems begrudgingly to admit of “physical and secondary causes”—but only as instruments of “omnipotent will”—other preachers were more willing to accept both sanitary and Divine knowledge and to ascribe moral culpability to a failure to heed either.

Henry Venn Elliott, also preaching on the occasion of the 1854 outbreak, points out “Cleanliness . . . and an early application of medicine and medical skill . . . were supposed to be specifics against the contagion. And to a certain extent there is some truth in these views; and it is thus that God enforces on us, by his great and invariable laws of health, the necessity of attention to these sanitary measures. But pushing that truth too far” led to a selfish complacency that left “the poor in their disease or in their danger to pay the penalty of their localities” (quoted in Gilbert “Sinful” 39 emphasis added). That complacency cost them, though, as the cholera “passed from the squalid abodes of poverty into the houses which were rejoicing in their comforts, and the streets which were high and clean” (ibid). The cholera, then was seen as both a judgment of God *and* the result of natural laws. But even here we see some hesitation and qualification: proper sanitation was “supposed to be” a protection, but only “to a certain extent,” and it was not to be pushed “too far.”

A more nuanced expression of the position seen in Elliott can be found in “Thanksgiving Day after Cholera,” a sermon preached after the previous outbreak of 1849, by the popular preacher F. W. Robertson of Brighton. In this sermon, Robertson draws a distinction between God’s punishment as “penalty” and God’s punishment as “chastisement” (754). A penalty, Robertson explains, is merely the consequence of breaking a law of God, whether physical or political or moral; it is simply a matter of cause and effect, and no particular responsibility or sin may be implied. A chastisement, on the other hand, involves moral transgression and culpability. Thus, penalties could fall in the absence of sin or as a consequence of sin—Robertson mentions, for example “those sins which are connected with the flesh, sensuality [and] drunkenness,” which make the body more susceptible to certain penalties (759)—but there is not a necessary cause and effect relationship between sin (or its absence) and punishment of either sort. Further, Robertson says:

transgressions against the natural laws of God may, in the end, become trespasses against His moral law, and then the penalty becomes chastisement. [. . .] want of cleanliness in some Alpine regions may result from ignorance of the laws of nature; but when, in more crowded populations, it is ascertained that it is productive of disease, and injurious to those around them, then the infraction of the natural law is stigmatized as a higher degree of turpitude. [. . .] And in this there is something that tells us not merely of ignorance, but of selfishness; for when commissioners went through the length and breadth of the country to examine into the statistics of the disease, we were met by the startling fact that

medical science, that careful nursing, could do nothing while our crowded graveyards, our teeming and airless habitations, our worn-out and unhealthy population, received and propagated the miasma [. . .]. (756, 758)

Failure to heed natural laws related to sanitation rise to the level of selfishness, a sin, and not only of a general, national sort. Robertson anticipates the parishioner who would declare his or her own personal innocence:

The men who join in a crowd, aiding and abetting the death of any individual, by the law of every country are held guilty [. . .]. I may fearlessly ask you all, Christian brethren, does not your conscience tell you how little the welfare and the comfort of others has been in your thoughts? As far as we have taken part in the world's selfishness; as far as we have lived for self and not for our neighbors; as far as we have forgotten the poor sufferers lying in the porches of Bethesda<sup>103</sup>—not directly, but indirectly, all that has fallen upon this land may have been sent as a chastisement to us. (760)

In this way, the sins of selfishness and neglect of the poor are reckoned as *social*, existing in that space between the private individual and the nation. Crucial to this understanding of sin for Robertson is also the recognition of kinship between the classes.

In between the two passages quoted in the previous paragraph, Robertson illustrates this kinship:

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<sup>103</sup> Robertson is referencing the context on which the text of the sermon is based, John 5:1-15, in which the sick and suffering gathered on the porches of Bethesda in the hope of being healed in the waters of the pool there.

every time that a man in the higher classes perished, it was as if the poor neglected man had spoken from the grave; or, as if God himself had been heard to speak through him. He seems to say, "I can prove to you *now* my relationship. You can receive evil from me, if nothing else has ever passed between us; the same constitution, the same flesh and blood, the same frame were once ours; and if I can do it in no other way, I can prove, by infecting you, that I am your brother still. (758-759)

Kinship is here figured in bodily terms of flesh and blood and proved by the passing of contagion, the poor infecting the rich. (Recall, too, Henry Venn Elliott's reference to cholera passing from the "abodes of poverty" to the houses of comfort.) The significance of this for the Victorian religious understanding of the urban poor, their relationship with the upper classes, and, more generally, the city can be seen more clearly by considering Charles Kingsley's 1849 sermons on cholera.

In his "Second Sermon on Cholera," Kingsley relates a story of a poor Irish widow in Liverpool who proves her kinship to those who would not help her in the same way as Robertson's "poor neglected man" above: by infecting and killing seventeen of them (*National Subjects* 151). "We are every one of us our brother's keeper," Kingsley says, and the Irish widow "was the same flesh and blood as they. The fever that killed her killed them" (150-151). In his "Third Sermon on Cholera," Kingsley returns to and expands upon the notion of kinship as necessary for civilization and citizenship. He declares:

The law of man's life [. . .] is *this*—to depend upon his fellow-men, to be their brothers, in flesh and in spirit; for we are brothers to each other. God made of one blood all nations [. . .]. The same food will feed us all alike. The same cholera will kill us all alike. And we can give the cholera to each other; we can give each other the infection, not merely by our touch and breath, [. . .] but by housing our families and our tenants badly, feeding them badly, draining the land around them badly. [. . .] in pestilences, and famines, and disorders, which are handed down from father to child, [. . .] we are all of the same blood. (157)

Thus far, Kingsley seems to be explaining kinship in straightforwardly physiological and social terms, with an emphasis on flesh and blood, and passing on of disease by breath, touch, improper attention to sanitation, and heredity. But then Kingsley's thoughts take a theological turn:

This is the reason why Adam's sin infected our whole race. Adam died, and through him all his children have received a certain property of sinfulness and of dying [. . .]. For by sinning and cutting himself off from God Adam gave way to the lower part of him, his flesh, his animal nature, and therefore he died as other animals do. And we his children, who all of us give way to our flesh, to our animal nature [. . .] we die too. (157)

Sin, too, is an infection, and like biological infections, it is passed on through a contagion of blood. But if we are hereditarily infected by sharing in the blood of Adam, we who "are brothers, made in the same image of God" can be "redeemed by the same blood of Christ" who is the new Adam (160; cf. Romans 5:12, 18-19 and 1 Corinthians 13:22,

45<sup>104</sup>). From there, Kingsley shifts metaphors: “Yes, my friends, it is [. . .] good for us to suffer anything that will teach us this great truth, that we are all one family, and that where one of the members suffers, all the other members suffer with it; and that if one of the members has cause to rejoice, all the others will have cause to rejoice with it” (160). The notion of kinship, that “we are all one family” biologically and spiritually, gets linked to the figure of the body, of which we are each members, and this linking reinforces the social implications of sanitation reform: “we are all brothers in Him [and] in proportion as we believe *that*, I say, shall we act upon this very matter of public cleanliness. [. . .] And I say again [. . .] that this is a spiritual question, a Gospel sermon; for by your conduct in this matter will your faith in the Gospel be proved” (*National Subjects* 144-145, 152). In Kingsley, the cholera epidemic provides an illustration of and basis for his theological reflection, and that theological reflection is then used in turn as the basis for social action.

Another thing that we see in Kingsley’s cholera sermons, and which was rare for sermons on the 1849 cholera epidemic, is just how focused on the lack of sanitation reform and public action Kingsley is. In his “First Sermon on the Cholera,” Kingsley specifically takes to task those preachers who, during the outbreak of 1832, “proclaimed

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<sup>104</sup> Romans 5:12, 18-19 reads, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned [. . .]. Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.” 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, 45 reads, “For since by man came death, but man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. [. . .] And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.”

a Fast and confessed their sins and promised repentance in a general way,” but who failed to repent of the specific sins that had actually been responsible for the cholera: “the covetousness, the tyranny, the carelessness, which in most great towns” created the conditions for the disease to strike, namely “bad food, bad air, crowded bedrooms, bad drainage and filth” that were “left to ferment in poisonous cesspools, foul ditches and marshes and muds” (*National Subjects* 136). Toward the end of the sermon, Kingsley is not only calling the causes of these conditions sins, but the conditions themselves—the “filth [. . .], foul air, foul food, foul drains, foul bedrooms”—are labelled sins (141). The repentance that is required, the lesson that must be learned, is for “the rich [to] amend their idleness and neglect, and the poor [. . .] their dirt and stupid ignorance,” and “rich and poor, to make the workman’s home what it ought to be” (142). Nonetheless, Kingsley’s cholera sermons notwithstanding, the 1854 cholera outbreak produced yet more preaching that made unspecific references to sin or which, when they did mention sanitation, paid it only lip service (Gilbert “Sinful” 39-40).

However, by the final cholera outbreak of 1866 there had been an almost complete reversal of sermonic rhetoric, the views Kingsley presaged in 1849 having become orthodox as medical opinion had become almost universally accepted. Even Charles Spurgeon, whose sermon “The Voice of Cholera” pronounces the cholera a judgment of God for the usual litany of “national sins”—drunkenness, prostitution, neglect of the Sabbath—and urges private, individual repentance and action, prefaces his sermon with the acknowledgement “that if all men would take scrupulous care as to cleanliness, and if better dwellings were provided for the poor, and if overcrowding were



effectually prevented, and if the water supply could be larger, and other sanitary improvements could be carried out, the disease, most probably, would not occur,” and after expressing gratitude for the “many men of intelligence and scientific information who can speak well upon this point,” says he hopes “they will never cease to speak until all men learn that the laws of cleanliness and health are as binding upon us as those of morality.” But that being said, Spurgeon then adds, “It is not my business this morning to describe the sanitary aspect of the subject; this is not the day nor the place, but I shall claim a full liberty to enter into the theological view of it [. . .]. We believe [. . .] that it is our business as ministers of God to call the people’s attention to God in the disease, and teach them the lesson which God would have them learn.” On the other hand, other preachers *did* see it as their business to enter into the sanitary aspect of the subject, much as Charles Kingsley had in 1849.

For example, Stopford Brooke in his 1866 sermon on the cholera, “The Lessons of the Cholera” begins by asserting that it is:

the duty of the pastors of the Church of England to endeavor, from their pulpits, to divest the mind of the religious public of certain superstitious views which notoriously hinder the labours of men of science to get rid of the plague. For there is no doubt that in all ages there has been as much evil done, and as much good prevented during epidemics, by certain theological theories on what are rightly called God’s judgments [. . .]. a superstitious idea leads astray all the souls of a nation [. . .] and retards the salutary work of science.

It is very hard on scientific men that their conscientious obstructors in every age have been those religious men who, from want of faith in a God of order and truth, and from blind cleaving to blind opinions, have opposed instead of assisting those whose objects were the welfare of the race through the discovery of truth. (27-28)

Brooke then goes on to compare those clergy who continue to hold onto such “blind opinions” with “the inquisitors who condemned Galileo,” and he declares again the duty “incumbent on every clergyman now to free himself from this party of retrogression, and to endeavor to free his flock from its superstition” (28).

Though not addressing this sermon specifically, Gilbert’s assessment of the position of the clergy in relation to medical knowledge seems particularly apropos:

By this time, religion—the vicar, the missionaries—is put into the service of conveying truth to the public, and that truth is determined not only by Church interpretations of doctrine, but by medical interpretations of scientific study. Clergy become the secular go-between of the oracular scientist and the public—and science becomes the expression and servant of Divine Will. (“Sinful” 41)

The reciprocity of discourses which we saw in both Gresley’s and Kingsley’s sermons, is yet again seen here in Brooke’s sermon. But there is a shift in emphasis that we see in Brooke that distinguishes him even from Kingsley. Throughout all of Gresley’s sermon, there is an emphasis on the theological, even when he discusses the social. In Kingsley’s sermons, Kingsley does discuss the social as its own distinct domain, but when all four of his 1849 cholera sermons are taken together, we can see that the social is always

anchored to the theological. But in Brooke, the social is much more loosely tethered to the theological. If Kingsley's sermons could be characterized as theological reflections with social implications, Brooke's sermon might be characterized as a social reflection with theological implications. In thus constructing his sermon, Brooke, and others like him, seem to position the Church, as Gilbert explains it, to "retain its centrality as a national symbol" as it "appropriate[s] to itself an interest in those knowledges [of political economy and public health] and claim a space within their practice. By the end of the period the domains of the body and soul are, at least in this respect, rendered both fully disaggregated and seamlessly complementary" ("Sinful" 43). This seamless complementarity of the domains of the body and the soul, the social and the theological, can be seen once more in play a little farther into Brooke's sermon.

Having declared that any prayer that asks God to remove the consequences of actions whose ill effects are well-known is an insult to God, he further says "it would be a positive evil [for God to answer such prayer]; for then we should be freed from that judgment which points out the diseased spots in our social organization, as pain points out the spot in our body where disease is settling" (Stopford Brooke 39-40). The social body is diseased, and the pain of cholera is needed, indeed, the pain of cholera ought to be welcomed:

if it produces action against our wrongdoing [. . .] For what is it which has roused us to do what we have done, little as it is? What is it that has been the cause of our efforts to improve the condition of the poor? Why, God's judgments—cholera, typhus, diphtheria, which are not quite content with feeding on the wretched, but

come and knock at our fine houses, and wake us with death's cry to our duty. By the lessons which every visitation of cholera has taught us, the death rate has been permanently diminished [. . .]. I do trust not a year will pass by without some effort on the part of Government to call the nation to the only repentance worth having—a united effort to remedy the condition of the poor” (40-41).

In the middle of the third quarter of the century, such calls were being made, and many within the Victorian churches were answering with not a little optimism that the city and its inhabitants could be saved.

### **Reaching the Poor, Improving the City: Revival and The Civic Gospel**

Essential to heeding the call to saving the city and its inhabitants was a belief that the city was worth saving, and that the ideal of national life did not lay exclusively in the countryside or the small village. Even among those who harshly condemned the conditions of city life, Andrew Lees observes, did so “for the purpose of encouraging [people] to seek urban remedies [. . .] precisely because they fervently believed that these places could indeed be made more livable. They sought not to escape the town but to improve it” (39). And among those who would defend cities, there was no denial “that the urban landscape was marred by serious social problems” such as poor sanitary conditions” (47). But while “These conditions made it clear that much work had to be undertaken to make the town as favorable to life and virtue as it ought to be, [reformers] were not at all disheartened, believing that the problems were manageable and that the job could and would be done” (47). The Scottish preacher Thomas Guthrie and Charles

Kingsley capture these perspective—the criticism of the city in the hopes of improving it along with a sense of optimism—in discourses given in 1857.

Despite the title *The City: Its Sins and Sorrows*, a collection of four sermons, Thomas Guthrie does not excoriate the city. Although he intends “to lay bare before you [his congregation] the evils of our city,” he does so in order to “rouse you to arrest and amend them,” to “labor to leave [. . .] the city of their habitation, somewhat better than they found them” (12, 13). Indeed, he even proclaims, “having [. . .] no sympathy with those who, regarding them as the excrescences of a tree or the tumors of disease, would raze our cities to the ground, I bless God for cities” (16). To that end, he begins by looking at the favorable aspects of cities. Among the benefits of the city, he notes that it is there that the highest humanity, piety, and happiness are developed in cities. Guthrie develops the first two of these qualities in terms that seem almost an explicit answer to Dickens’s challenge in *Dombey and Son*’s forty-seventh chapter. Whereas Dickens writes, “Vainly attempt to think of any simple plant, or flower, or wholesome weed, that, set in this foetid bed, could have its natural growth, or put its little leaves forth to the sun as GOD designed it. And then, [call] up some ghastly child, with stunted form [. . .]” (*Dombey* 684), Guthrie claims “The finest flowers of genius have grown in an atmosphere where those of nature are prone to droop, and difficult to bring to maturity,” and this despite “the searching smoke and foul vapors of city air” (16-17). Alternatively, Guthrie says “Christians are like trees—they grow the tallest where they stand together; running no small chance, like a solitary tree, of becoming dwarfed, stunted, gnarled, and bark-bound, if they grow alone” (18). All of this follows, too, not in spite of, but even

because of the evils of the city, for “just as in those countries where tropical suns and the same skies ripen the sweetest fruits and deadliest poisons, you find in the city the most daring and active wickedness, you find there also—boldly confronting it—the most active, diligent, zealous, warm-hearted, self-denying, and devoted Christians” (17-18). While Guthrie would not be one of those self-righteous judges of the poor Dickens castigates—he specifically says that even as he “protest[s] against the wrongs of a class that are to the full as unfortunate as they are guilty,” the poor “deserve succor rather than censure. They are more to be pitied than punished” (112-113)—he cannot join in Dickens’s extreme censure of the city.

That is not to say that Guthrie would turn away from the city’s evils or fail to reveal them to his readers. Even as Dickens called “for a good spirit who would take the house-tops off [ . . . ] and show a Christian people what dark shapes issue from amidst their homes” (685), so does Guthrie remark “Under a fair and beautiful exterior, there is an extent of corruption, vile corruption, loathsome corruption, which has only to be laid bare to astonish all, and, I believe, to sicken many,” and were it not for the restraining hand of propriety which “forbids details,” Guthrie says “I could raise a curtain, I could reveal that which would make your hair stand on end” (31-32). Despite the withholding of some details, though, Guthrie reveals much. Where Dickens challenged his readers to “follow the good clergyman” into the city and “Look round upon the world of odious sights” (*Dombey* 684), Guthrie invites his congregation, “let us behold this city,” and four times he introduces scenes with “I had seen” (24). In the third sermon of the collection (which focuses on one of the commonly-attributed besetting sins of the city—

drunkenness), he invites them “come along with me, while I again travel over some bygone scenes” and then commands them four times “Look” (98, 100, 101, 102), each time painting a pathos-filled scene of novelistic detail, of which one example shall suffice to convey the impression:

The bed beside which you have at other visits conversed and prayed with one who, in the very bloom and flower of youth, was withering away under a slow decline—is empty. The living need it; and so its long, and spent, and weary tenant lies now, stretched out in death, on the top of two rude chests beside the window. And as you stand by the body—contemplating it—in that pallid face lighted up by a passing sun-gleam you see, along with lingering traces of no common beauty, the calmness and peace which were her latter end. But in this hot, sultry, summer weather, why lies she there uncoffined? Drink has left us to do that last office for the dead. Her father—how unworthy the name of father—when his daughter pled with him for his soul, pled with him for her mother, pled with him for her little sister, had stood by her dying pillow to damn her—fiercely damning her to her face. He has left his poor, dead child to the care of others. With the wages he retains for drink, he refuses to buy that lifeless form a coffin and a grave! (100-101)

In including such illustrations, Guthrie allows his readers to vicariously witness the depths of city life, something that preachers and commentators of all sorts sought to achieve. But as we noted above, Guthrie’s purpose was not merely to excite the emotions of his congregation or readers—the sort of “preaching to the nerves” we saw condemned

in chapter one. Lest he be guilty of that sort of sensationalistic preaching that inflames the passions but provides no corresponding outlet of righteous conduct, Guthrie says he “would not seek to stem [the flood of passion and indignation], but to direct it—directing it not against the victims, but against the vice,” and, “for pity’s sake, for God’s sake, for Christ’s sake, for humanity’s sake” to “rouse yourselves to the question, What can be done?” (104). And to be sure, Guthrie is clear that something can be done. However “rude and uncultivated, ignorant and vicious” the “lapsed classes” of the city are, and “whatever length of time may be required to evangelize our city masses,” Britain’s cities are not as Jerusalem in the time of Jesus, “doomed beyond redemption,” and “We have not to mourn as those who have no hope” (87, 88).

This note of optimism, of hope, even in the face of the darkest corruptions of the city, can be seen, too, in Kingsley’s “Great Cities and Their Influence for Good and Evil,” a lecture he delivered in Bristol in October of 1857.<sup>105</sup> Looking back at “scheme on scheme of improvement [that] has been not only proposed but carried out” since 1843’s *Perils of the Nation*, Kingsley says that England “has put herself into a permanent state of

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<sup>105</sup> Although this is a lecture and not a sermon, Kingsley makes much of the fact that even out of the pulpit, he is a priest:

because I am a priest, and glory in the name of a priest, I have tried to fulfil somewhat of that which seems to me the true office of a priest—namely, to proclaim to man the Divine element which exists in all [. . .]; to make men understand that God is indeed about their path and about their bed, spying out all their ways; that they are indeed fearfully and wonderfully made, and that God’s hand lies for ever on them [. . .]. To say this is a priest’s duty; and then to preach the good news that the remedy is patent, easy, close at hand; [. . .] to awaken men to the importance of the visible world, that they may judge from thence the higher importance of that invisible world whereof this is but the garment and the type [. . .] (*Sanitary* 221-222)

I can scarcely imagine a sermon proper doing anything more.



confession of sin, repentance, and amendment, which I verily trust will be accepted by Almighty God; and will [. . .] save alive both the soul and the body of this ancient people” (*Sanitary* 191, 192). And, just like Guthrie said he would not curse cities, Kingsley declares “I will not [. . .] go as far as some who say that ‘A great city is a great evil.’ We cannot say that Bristol was in 1830, or is now, a great evil,” and he then notes its achievements of wealth, employment, commerce, foreign knowledge, and science (193). Also like Guthrie, Kingsley says that “the crowded city life can bring out human nobleness as well as human baseness,” and that it is the very evils of the city that “forced at least the loftier and tender souls to know their fellow-men, and therefore to care for them, to love them, to die for them” and to remember what is so often forgotten in the isolation of country life, “that man is his brother’s keeper” (196).

Kingsley’s positive reckoning of the city in this way may seem to give credence to the notion that after 1850 Kingsley was distancing himself from his days of *Alton Locke* and “The Message of the Church to Labouring Men.” Chadwick reports that in 1856, Kingsley told Tom Hughes (the author of *Tom Brown’s School Days*) “that he was becoming an optimist and that the world would go right in its own way,” which Chadwick characterizes as his coming near to recanting (I.363). On the other hand, Cazamian, while acknowledging that Kingsley’s ideas after 1850 were “modified” and “his expression of them toned down,” shows how Kingsley continued in one way or another with many of the same causes and concerns as before (288).<sup>106</sup> Indeed,

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<sup>106</sup> It is perhaps worth observing that the radicalism of Kingsley’s early days was somewhat tempered. Chadwick himself does point out that Kingsley’s radicalism was qualified even in the St. John’s sermon (I.359), and Joseph Childers notes a similar

throughout the third quarter of the century he continued to display a zeal for and preach sermons on sanitary and social reform, the titles of which—“The Massacre of Innocents” (1859), “Civilized Barbarism” (1866), “Human Soot” (1870), to name a few<sup>107</sup>—show he was still fully aware of the ills of the city. But again, as with Guthrie and others in this period, there was a sense that “many of the worst evils which afflict humanity may be exterminated by simple common sense, and the justice and mercy which does to others as it would be done by” (*Sanitary* 222). To the Ladies’ Sanitary Association, for example, he suggests that their efforts can help relieve “disease and death” that “no sanitary legislation whatsoever could touch” in the absence of such efforts, and at the end of the sermon he four times states that it is in their power to save the lives of the urban poor and prevent, if not all, at least “three-fourths” of the “preventable suffering” in England (*Sanitary* 261, 266-267).

The question remained, though, what was the work to be done? In the face of the city’s many evils—unsanitariness, drunkenness, ignorance, irreligion, each of which is mentioned by Guthrie, or Kingsley, or both, among others—what was the solution? For some, evangelism was the answer, a belief that “The grand and only sovereign remedy for the evils of this world is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Guthrie 106). Charles Spurgeon was one such preacher whose focus “was essentially the old gospel message of sin, eternal punishment, redemption through the blood of Christ, and the perseverance of

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paradoxical conservatism in the midst of the Chartism Kingsley preached in *Alton Locke* (154).

<sup>107</sup> These sermons can be found in *Sanitary and Social Lectures and Essays; The Water of Life and Other Sermons*; and *All Saints’ Day and Other Sermons*, respectively.

the redeemed through the travails of the world” (Brown 224). When Spurgeon ventured among the costermongers, a visit recorded in the April 1867 issue of his Metropolitan Tabernacle’s *The Sword and the Trowel*, Spurgeon prayed and then preached a gospel sermon on Jesus as the “living water.” Following this sermon, he remained for over an hour praying with some two-hundred attendants who had stayed afterward (E. L. “Mr. Spurgeon among the Costermongers”). And, in his sermon on the cholera outbreak in 1866 considered earlier, Spurgeon says, “It is not my business” to enter into such considerations as sanitary reforms from the pulpit (“The Voice of Cholera”). At the same time, though, Spurgeon was not opposed to more practical measures.<sup>108</sup> While he may have seen his business as preaching the gospel, not sanitation, he was also quick to note that “The Gospel has no quarrel with ventilation, and the Doctrines of Grace have no dispute with chloride of lime. We preach repentance and faith, but we do not denounce whitewash; and as much as we advocate holiness, we always have a good word for cleanliness and sobriety” (“The Voice of Cholera”).

To be sure, no preachers were denying the need to preach the gospel to the poor, but there was a sense that preaching as the only and exclusive solution was insufficient. Guthrie, who was quoted above claiming that the “remedy for the evils of this world is the gospel,” qualified that statement, saying the gospel was the “only *sovereign* remedy,” that is, the only ultimate or eternal remedy (106 emphasis added). And, just after

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<sup>108</sup> Nor, it might be added, was Spurgeon opposed to carrying out such practical work through the Metropolitan Tabernacle and its associated endeavors, such as *The Sword and the Trowel*, through which he solicited financial support for any number of philanthropic organizations and ministries, and various mission halls and an orphanage.

affirming his belief in preaching the gospel, he also adds, “But he rather hinders than helps the cause of religion who shuts his eyes to the fact, that, in curing souls, as in curing bodies, many things may be important as auxiliaries to the remedy, which cannot properly be considered as remedies” (106-107).

For Kingsley, there was sometimes little distinction made between preaching sanitary reform and preaching the gospel. In his second sermon on the 1849 cholera outbreak, Kingsley proclaims that the issue of the practical measures needed to prevent cholera “is a spiritual question,” and he explicitly declares that his preaching on it is “a Gospel sermon; for by your conduct in this matter will your faith in the Gospel be proved” (*National Subjects* 152). And in “Great Cities and Their Influence for Good and Evil,” he observes, “That the social state of a city depends directly on its moral state, and [ . . . ] that the moral state of a city depends [ . . . ] on the physical state of that city; on the food, water, air, and lodging of its inhabitants” (*Sanitary* 190-191). These excerpts demonstrate well that “For Kingsley there was no division between the secular and the religious. Sanitary reform, and social emancipation, would come through spiritual or religious emancipation, or ‘under the influence of those creeds which tell men that the Son of God has redeemed all mankind, body, soul, and spirit . . .’” (Muller 18).

To take one last example of this concern about preaching as a stand-alone method of saving the city and its inhabitants, let us consider Robert Gregory, Canon of St. Paul’s and Vicar of St. Mary the Less, Lambeth. In his 1869 collection, *Sermons on the Poorer Classes of London*, Gregory laments those efforts to reach the poor that “have consisted in *addressing* the people rather than in mixing with them, in *preaching* rather than in

personal intercourse,” for their “influence has been of a most transient and unsatisfactory kind” (15 emphasis added). Gregory describes the consequences of this kind of overemphasis on preaching:

They [the poor] have been taught to consider instruction, *the hearing of sermons*, and the being profited thereby, as the great end for which they are to go to church. They have soon satisfied themselves that this end can be as effectually gained by studying their Bible at home: that they can profit as much by their own reading or thoughts, as by listening to the preaching of another: and then little hindrances and other occupations have banished this substitute; and so they have been left in the habitual disregard of every ordinance of religion. (27 emphasis added)

He further argues that “It is not enough for us to build churches [. . .] and to multiply opportunities for proclaiming the Gospel to the masses” (39). Sermons alone, preaching that doesn’t involve “mixing with the people” or “personal intercourse,” will not produce lasting improvement; indeed, it scarcely counts as preaching at all, for “The great preaching is when men of power and of learning give their lives to the work” (39).

On this last point, all of these preachers were agreed: there had to be a personal, individual effort and direct personal involvement in the lives of the poor. Spurgeon preaches it as a duty in his 1857 sermon “Love Thy Neighbor,” telling his largely working class and lower-middle class London congregation to “See where thy neighbors are in need; do not wait to be told of it, but find it out thyself, and give them some help” (*Sermons* 4.435). Guthrie, in the fourth sermon of his collection, challenges “Every church-going family” in Edinburgh to “charge itself with the care of one single [poor, un-

evangelized] family, with seeing that the children [. . .] were got to school, and its members were brought out on the Lord's day to the church of the district or their own place of worship, with visiting them in their sickness, and helping them over their difficulties, and by all Christian kindness promoting both their temporal and eternal interests" (157-158). In this way, those who are preached to could become preachers themselves and multiply the efforts of the clergy and accomplish the work (158-159). Kingsley, too, believed it was not "shillings" or "preaching" or "scolding," but "simple human kindness," expressed by "sight and speech" through "personal intercourse" that would best reach the poor (*All Saints' Day* 405).

On the matter of politics, though, these preachers were divided, each occupying a different point on the spectrum of political advocacy. Though not without personal opinions about politics, Spurgeon avoided politics in the pulpit. Guthrie specifically advocates for legislative restrictions on the sale of alcohol (107ff). Kingsley, on the other hand, expresses some skepticism about it. In "The Massacre of Innocents" preached to the Ladies' Sanitary Association in 1859, he comments on "the difficulties of sanitary legislation" which "One looks [on] at times almost with despair," but he does not rule it out completely (*Sanitary* 259). Gregory specifically rejects political solutions: "It is not the stone of political reform we require, but the bread of social and personal improvement" (18). But such diversity of thought notwithstanding, the third quarter of the century witnessed a decisive shift in Christian attitudes toward political involvement,

which gave birth to came to a movement, the civic gospel,<sup>109</sup> that explicitly and articulately preached the sacredness of government and the duty of direct, personal involvement in politics and government.

Gerald Parsons explains, “In practical terms the civic gospel meant the conviction that local government that was efficient, public-spirited and directed to the well-being of the community as a whole could bring immense benefit to municipal life” including action on sewage, public health, slum clearance, education, and cultural facilities among others (“Social Control” 46, 47). Or, to put it in the words of one of its own proponents, “Medicine, and not the gospel only, is necessary to cure the sick. Municipal action, and not the gospel only, is necessary to improve the homes of the poor” (Dale *Laws of Christ* 199-200). While it is not difficult to see the “civic” side of the movement in the above, the “gospel” part seems lacking. Descriptions like Parsons’s taken alone, even with the qualifier “in practical terms,” or statements like Dale’s read out of context, can conceal the degree to which the civic gospel was a genuinely religious movement. In *Building Jerusalem*, Tristram Hunt acknowledges its Christian origins:

A cohesive case for improving Birmingham [where the civic gospel started] was first voiced not by newspaper editors, businessmen or politicians but *from the pulpit of the Church*. One of the curiosities surrounding the philosophy of

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<sup>109</sup> Tristram Hunt, in *Building Jerusalem*, acknowledges the use of the term “civic gospel,” but states his preference for “municipal gospel” as being “a more apposite term as a way of denoting a distinct shift from the mid-Victorian voluntarist model of city life” (519 n.19). Both terms refer to the same idea, so when quoting from sources I will leave whichever of the two terms is used as is. In my own writing, I will use “civic gospel,” which seems to be the more common of the two.

municipal socialism [which succeeded the civic gospel] is that its origins are located in Christian doctrine—the very belief system which socialism had originally attempted to subsume. More specifically, it was the work of three Nonconformist ministers—George Dawson, Robert Dale and Henry Crosskey—who commandeered late Victorian Birmingham with all the civic fury of nineteenth-century Savonarolas. (325 emphasis added)

To better understand this significant movement of the third quarter of the century and its Christian underpinnings, let us consider the sermons of two of these preachers, Dawson and Dale.

In much the same way that Kingsley regarded a sermon on sanitary reform and improving the physical state of a city as a “Gospel sermon” insofar as it proved how much one truly believed that he was his brother’s keeper and had a more than individual concern in the gospel, so too did George Dawson, the influential Birmingham preacher, believe that not to preach political sermons was to deprive the Gospel of Christ “of its greater meaning and its broader intent,” for “the Gospel of Christ deals with great questions of human polity in the broadest and most catholic spirit” (*Daily Life* 120-121). Dawson contends that complaining about politics from the pulpit is, at best, a result of a heart “so sad, and so egotistical in its sorrow, as to be able to take interest only in its own concerns, and is careless of all other things than salvation of its own small soul” (120). At its worse, such complaints are evidence that “we have narrowed and degraded [the Gospel of Christ] into a miserable egotism of personal good and a pitiful attention to our own soul’s salvation” (120). He then presses the point, claiming, “The impatience of



people against the deep principles of the polity of the world being proclaimed from the pulpit, is but part of the indolence of men who are filled with a foolish notion that they are superior to these things, and can afford to let the world go on without meddling in its affairs” (121). By contrast, he claims, “the Kingdom of God is spread abroad by that great company of its subjects, the good men who are striving, and have striven, to bring this disorderly world to order, this indolent world to action, this warring world to peace” (122). In light of such statements, it is perhaps not surprising that this sermon is entitled “The Religion of Politics.” But these were not commonly held views for early Victorians, who often saw politics as too worldly.

R. W. Dale, pastor of the prominent Carr’s Lane Chapel in Birmingham, and a colleague of Dawson, describes the shift that took place in the third quarter of the century. Prior to mid-century, he says, many Evangelical Nonconformists believed the sphere of political activity to lie outside of the Christian life, and “The State, with all its affairs, was regarded [. . .] as belonging in an evil sense to this world, and to be political was to be worldly. They went to the polling booth, many of them, no doubt; but they went, as many Christian people now go to the theatre, feeling that they were hardly in their right place” (*Fellowship* 201). But thanks largely to F. D. Maurice (who had a decisive influence over Charles Kingsley, among others), many began to inquire whether “the State is a Divine institution—like the Family, like the Church” (201); becoming convinced that it was, many began teaching that “it is the duty of Christian men to use the franchise and to use their political influence so as to secure that rulers, who are the ministers of God, shall discharge their trust according to the will of God” (203).

As a resident of mid-century Birmingham, Dale recognized that the sheer magnitude of the problems of the city “could only be effectively dealt with by utilizing far greater resources than could be provided by voluntary efforts alone” (Kenyon 205), and those resources were not to be found in Parliament, but in local government:

I sometimes think municipalities can do more for the people than Parliament. [. . . Municipalities] can greatly diminish the amount of sickness in the community, and can prolong human life. They can prevent—they have prevented—tens of thousands of wives from becoming widows, tens of thousands of children from becoming orphans. They can do very much to improve those miserable homes which are fatal not only to health, but to decency and morality. They can give to the poor the enjoyment of pleasant parks and gardens, and the intellectual cultivation and refinement of public libraries and galleries of art. They can redress in many ways the inequalities of human conditions. (*Laws of Christ* 198-199)

In advocating the role of municipalities, Dale is not denigrating individual efforts to relieve the sufferings of the poor. Dale did preach on the need for individual action. In “The Perils and Uses of Rich Men,” he pointed out to his congregation “In the streets along which some of you go every day to your business, in the courts which surround your shops and warehouses and manufactories, there are sufferings which the public provision for the poor cannot remove. [. . .] it is for you to give effectual relief” (*Week-Day Sermons* 180). At the same time, though, this kind of voluntary, individual effort would leave untouched other sufferings which the public provision for the poor could remove. The solution, then, had to consist of both individual effort *and* municipal action,

and this is where the civic gospel becomes distinctive, for it made personal, individual involvement in municipal government a *Christian* duty.

Insofar as civil authority is a Divine institution—and Dale cites a number of scriptures supporting this contention—then “The man who holds municipal or political office is a ‘minister of God.’ One man may, therefore, have just as real a Divine vocation to become a town councilor or a Member of Parliament as another to become a missionary to the heathen” (*Laws of Christ* 197-198). Dale further justifies the point by citing Christ’s words “Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these My brethren, even these least, ye did it unto Me” (Matthew 25:40), which “will be addressed not only to those who with their own hands fed the hungry, and clothed the naked, and cared for the sick, but to those who supported a municipal policy which lessened the miseries of the wretched, and added brightness to the lives of the desolate” (199). Seen in this light, public service becomes service to Christ; conversely, a failure to serve publically becomes a failure to serve Christ. Dale says, “the terrible rebuke, ‘Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of these least, ye did it not unto Me,’ will condemn the selfishness of those who refused to make municipal government the instrument of a policy of justice and humanity” (199). Apart from the threat of eternal damnation implied in this rebuke,<sup>110</sup> Dale elsewhere covers the more practical consequences of good Christians failing to accept the duty of public service. If they do not, then “your streets will be neither well drained nor well swept, and the health of the people will suffer; your police will be

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<sup>110</sup> The verse Dale quotes is Matthew 25:45. The forty-sixth verse reads, “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal.” The whole passage covers verses 31-46.

inefficiently organised, and will fail to repress crime; your public servants will be appointed by corrupt influence; your finances will be plundered” (*Nine Lectures* 259). To refuse to serve, then, is a “dereliction of Christian duty” (259).

Dale and Dawson also provide a more general and thorough basis for justifying their civic gospel, which can be summed up in the title of two of Dale’s sermons: “Every-Day Business a Divine Calling” and “The Universal Sovereignty of Christ,” both of which appear in his collection *Laws of Christ for Common Life*. In the first of these sermons, Dale acknowledges the convenience of the distinction between “secular” and “religious,” but, he adds, “the distinction must not be understood to imply that in religious work we are doing God’s will, and that in secular work we are not doing it” (3-4). Instead, Dale insists that Christians must come to see *all* of their doings, secular and religious, as an opportunity to do God’s will; it is the spirit in which the work is done, not what the work is, that makes the difference. When this is understood and acted on, “It would be the fulfilment of the prayer, ‘Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven’” (15). Dale appealed to this same scripture when explaining the necessity of preaching on public duty:

It is our constant prayer that God’s will may ‘be done on earth, even as it is done in heaven;’ our preaching should be definitely directed to securing the fulfilment of this prayer. We fail if we merely induce men to accept a right creed. We fail if we do nothing more than create religious sentiment and stimulate religious emotion. We also fail if the authority of Christ is excluded from *any province* of human life. [. . .] we have been wanting either in wisdom or the courage to insist

that human life in all its length and breadth and height and depth belongs to Christ, and that no part of it can be withdrawn from His control without guilt. If we have asserted this in general terms, we have shrunk from illustrating in detail the relations of the law of Christ to the actual pursuits of men. (260, 261 emphasis added)

The realization of the kingdom of God on earth is a recurring motivation for the civic gospel. At the conclusion of Dale's sermon on "Political and Municipal Duty," he says that carrying "into municipal and political activity the law and the spirit of Christ" will "fulfil the purpose for which He ordained them [governments], and the Divine will be done by civil rulers on earth as it is done by angels and the spirits of the just in heaven" (*Laws of Christ* 204). But it was not only politics that the civic gospel encompassed. Politics was *one* area encompassed by it, but "God intends that Commerce, Science, Art, Literature, Politics, shall all be subjected to His law" (*Nine Lectures* 262).

In "The Universal Sovereignty of Christ," Dale expresses it this way:  
all occupations of human life are His. He is King of all the world, and therefore King of our homes, King of our trade, King of our literature, King of every province of the life of man. [. . .] He rules not only within these walls [of the church], but within the walls of our own homes, rules in the schoolroom, rules in the workshop, rules in the merchant's office, rules wherever Christian men can go, and over whatever Christian men can do. (*Laws of Christ* 261)

This notion of Christ's sovereignty over all of life can help us understand Dawson's approach in his sermons. Dale had this to say of Dawson in the pulpit:

Quickly descending from generalities to the particular, he would talk to his congregation about Avery's scales, and about yard measures, about tea and sugar, about adulterated mustard and about butter half of which was fat, about stock-taking and long credit . . . about all the details of the doings of a scoundrel who had been tried a day or two before for his transactions in connection with a fraudulent joint-stock company; about dress and jewellery; about dinners and evening parties; about all the follies and sins and vanities of the day. This made his sermons effective. Men of business knew what he meant when he talked about honest trading. Women knew what he meant when he talked about simplicity of living. Masters and servants, parents and children all had their turn, and could hardly miss the intentions of his lessons. (qtd. in Hunt 326-327)

This is what it meant to proclaim the sovereignty of Christ over all of life. But Dawson would not stop there at the level of personal, individual conduct. "Prompt at the warehouse, admirable at the shop, nice in your own concerns and careful of your own comforts, what is the world the better for you? or what has the growth and increase of the Kingdom of God in this world to thank you for?" Dawson asked his congregation (*Daily Life* 121-122). Essential to the civic gospel was the belief shared by Dawson and Dale alike, that the city "was a society, established by the divine will, as the family, the State, and the Church are established, for common life and common purpose and common action" (A. W. W. Dale 100).

Dawson himself, in an address delivered at the opening of Birmingham's Reference Library, said "a great town exists to discharge towards the people of that town

the duties that a great nation exists to discharge towards the people of that nation; that a town exists here by the grace of God; that a great town is a solemn organism through which should flow, and in which should be shaped, all the highest, loftiest, and truest ends of man's intellectual and moral nature" (100-101). Derek Benjamin Heater, in his work on the history of British citizenship, notes, "The key word here is 'organism'.

Dawson envisaged the municipality as a close-knit community drawn together by an altruistic ideal. But the message was an explicitly religious commitment" (130). That "altruistic ideal" and "religious commitment" are well-illustrated in a sermon Dawson delivered toward the end of his life, "The Communism of Christianity." The sermon takes as its text Acts 2:44-45: "And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need." Dawson reminds his congregation of the historical context of this event, the birth of the Church during Pentecost, and goes on to describe it as belonging "to the first blush, the first bloom of the spring-time of the Church, from which, alas! we have fallen" (*Authentic Gospel* 115). Despite this falling away, though, there is hope, for God "has so ordered it, that the tree shall bear more blossom than it can bear fruit. Some must fall, and but few be left; but those few are a prophecy of what shall be" (117). In other words, the early communism of the Church, as Dawson characterizes his text, was a bloom that could not last, but it nevertheless prophesied of "the holy communism for which some of us do long," and it "*will* come, though it be late. The Day of God *will* come; it *is* coming; slowly, it may be, but surely" (123).

The evidence of its coming that Dawson provides is the work that has been accomplished in Birmingham. His congregation, along with all the residents of Birmingham,

can now have a library full of the souls of the ancients [ . . . ] There are the thoughts of the fathers, the words of the wise, the songs of the poets, the gathered honey of all nations. And over all this is written, “FREE LIBRARY.” O holy words! words that the Holy Ghost Himself might have inspired! Here, any man can go in [ . . . ]. And though there are no people there to preach, or to distribute tracts; nevertheless, there comes back again the old river of God: “And all that believed were together, and had all things common.” This great river is becoming more and more widely spread. By-and-by we shall have free education for all [ . . . ], and education shall be like the Gospel—free to all [ . . . ]. So shall the Pentecostal spirit come back again: “And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.” (124-125)

Dawson continues cataloguing the victories they had achieved in Birmingham—“hours of leisure, and places of recreation; free libraries of divine wisdom, free roads, free churches, free speech, cheap books” (126). This last item Dawson singles out for special notice, for “when books are cheap, the inspiring things of God belong to all. High price of books means heaven closed, and Pentecost impossible; but when there are cheap books for everyone, *all* men may become prophets, and priests, and kings unto God” (127).



What is apparent in this sermon is the manner in which Dawson so closely links the things of the Church with the things of the City. “FREE LIBRARY” is akin to Holy Ghost-inspired scripture and education is akin to the Gospel, places of recreation and free roads are put side-by-side with free churches, and access to cheap books is access to heaven and the priesthood of all believers. But in his address at the opening of the free library in Birmingham in 1866, Dawson had gone even further in remarkably declaring, “This [the community of town and nation] was the new corporation, the new Church, in which they might meet until they came into union again—a church in which there was no bond, nor text, nor articles—a large Church, one of the greatest institutions yet established” (quoted in Hennock 75-76). This went well beyond linking Church and City; it conflated them. And it is at this point that Dawson’s and Dale’s views separated. While Dale “shared the sense of [the] religious obligation” of public service and municipal improvement, “he rejected [Dawson’s] doctrine” of the Church (Hennock 159). Nevertheless, he was able to take Dawson’s ideas and re-interpret them “in terms that were acceptable to Evangelical Dissent,” and “When the Evangelical Dissenters did take up municipal service they did not talk as Dawson” did about the Church (Hennock 99, 167). In any case, there was a sense that the work of reforming the city was the work of God, and that work could, and would, be done.

Such optimism about the city, specifically Birmingham, was not entirely without foundation. First and foremost, it was grounded in Dawson’s faith in God and that “‘the holy city, the new Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,’ [. . .] will one day be received—into the earth” (*Authentic Gospel* 119). And, in more earthly terms, significant

progress had been made and was being made in Birmingham, which was on its way to being proclaimed by *Harper's Monthly Magazine* "The Best-Governed City in the World" (Heater 130). Dawson, even if he was particularly ardent in expressing it, was not alone in his optimism. Nevertheless, it was far from universal. Even while great progress was being made, others saw the great problems that remained and that, more and more, were looking intractable.

Charles Kingsley, once again, proves instructive. Concern for the poor and sanitary reform in the city remained a consistent focus of his throughout his life, but there is a gradual shift in tone in his sermons on these subjects over the course of time. In "Great Cities and Their Influence for Good and Evil" and, despite its title, "The Massacre of the Innocents," both preached in 1859, there is a decided optimism that though the problems be great, they can be met. Even in "Civilized Barbarism," Kingsley's sermon on reconciling the rich and the poor through a revival of the parochial system—a conservative Anglican counterpart, of sorts, to the civic gospel of Nonconformity—preached in 1866, Kingsley expresses a fair amount of optimism that with the right efforts the problems of poverty could be alleviated. But within two months of that sermon, cholera struck yet again, and in "Cholera, 1866" a harsher note begins to appear in his sermons on social and sanitary reform. In this cholera sermon, Kingsley laments, "This outbreak of cholera in London, considering what we now know about it, *and have known for twenty years past*, is a national shame, scandal, and sin, which, if man cannot and will not punish, God can and will" (*Water of Life* 191, emphasis added). Whereas in earlier sermons on cholera he rejected the notion that disease came as a result of sins like

infidelity and not from poor sanitation, in this sermon he asserts that “It cannot be that God means us to learn the physical cause of cholera, for that we *have known these twenty years*. [. . .] Perhaps the Lord wills that we should [. . .] learn what is the moral and spiritual cause of our own miserable weakness, negligence, hardness of heart [. . .]. But I have little hope that that will happen, till we get rid of our secret atheism” (200, emphasis added). In “Useless Sacrifice,” a sermon in 1871 on behalf of the Mission of the Good Shepherd in Portsea, he acknowledges his lack of familiarity with the customs of the town, and so says that he “shall treat this case of Portsea, as what it is, alas! *one among a hundred similar ones*, and say to you simply what *I have said for twenty-five years*, wherever and whenever I can get a hearing,” and he forewarns them that he may “speak sharply and sternly” to them (*All Saints’ Day* 337). There is an exasperation that comes through these sermons, a frustration that increased knowledge has not led to increased action, or at least not enough that he might not have to preach such sermons any longer.

Kingsley’s descriptions of the problem, too, though always having been vivid if not graphic, also take on a darker shade. In “Human Soot,” preached in Liverpool in 1870, Kingsley might have been talking of Coketown when he made the following comparison:

Our processes [of political economy] are hasty, imperfect, *barbaric*—and their result is vast and rapid production: but also waste, refuse, in the shape of a dangerous class. We know well how, in some manufactures, a certain amount of waste is profitable—that it pays better to let certain substances run to refuse, than to use every product of the manufacture; as in a steam mill, where it pays better

not to consume the whole fuel, to let the soot escape, though every atom of soot is so much wasted fuel. So it is now in our present social system. It pays better, capital is accumulated more rapidly, by wasting a certain amount of human life, human health, human intellect, human morals, by producing and throwing away a regular percentage of human soot—of that thinking, acting, dirt, which lies about, and alas! breeds and perpetuates itself in foul alleys and low public houses, and all dens and dark places of the earth. [ . . . ] that human soot, these human poison gases, infect the whole society which has allowed them to fester under its feet.

*(All Saints' Day 306)*

Or there is this rebuke from “Useless Sacrifice”:

of how many and how heavy stripes, think you, will the inhabitant of that palace [England] be counted worthy, who has been taught by Christianity for the last fifteen hundred years, and by physical science and political economy for the last fifty years, and yet persists, *in defiance of knowledge*, in leaving his used-up servants, and their children and grand-children after them, to rot, body, mind, and soul, in the very precincts of the palace, having no other excuse to offer for this than that it is too much trouble to treat them better, and that, on the whole, he can make money more rapidly by thus throwing away that human dirt, and leaving it to decay where it can, regardless what it pollutes and poisons; just as the manufacturer can make money more rapidly by not consuming his own smoke, but letting it stream out of the chimney to poison with blackness and desolation

the green fields where God meant little children to gather flowers? (*All Saints' Day 341*)

Though in “Human Soot” he does suggest that there is “a gleam of light on the horizon”—advances in chemical science to reduce physical pollution, and advances in political economy to reduce human pollution—he observes, “But as things are, one has only to go into the streets of this, or any great city, to see how we, with all our boasted civilisation, are as yet, but one step removed from barbarism” (308-309).

In “The Rich and the Poor,” preached on behalf of the Parochial Mission Women’s Fund in 1871, Kingsley sounds almost defeated. As he builds to the close of his sermon, Kingsley employs a not atypical use of anaphora and parallelism, asking “Are we selfish? We shall call out selfishness in others. Do we neglect our duty? Then others will neglect their duty to us” (*All Saints' Day 409*). Twice more Kingsley poses a question and answers it. But the fifth time he breaks the pattern: “Do we?—but *what use to go on reminding men of truths which no one believes*, because they are too painful and searching to be believed in comfort? *What use to tell men what they never will confess to be true*—that by every crime, folly, even neglect of theirs, they drive a thorn into their own flesh, which will trouble them for years to come, it may be to their dying day. And yet so it is” (410, emphasis added). Kingsley then finishes with a reference to “that last great day” of judgment, when all will be forced to discover that the Lord is the maker of rich and poor alike. Kingsley often played the role of the prophet, denouncing the woes of his day, but there is a pessimism that sometimes shows through in these later sermons that had not been present before.

The advances of sanitary reform that had been made and the success of the civic gospel through the 1870s notwithstanding, poverty and suffering stubbornly persisted, and “many observers of the urban scene began to voice a heightened awareness of poverty in the midst of plenty. In their view, material deprivation among the poorer classes in the cities had not simply failed to disappear in accord with the earlier expectations of urban optimists; it had also in many cases become much worse and certainly more noticeable” (Lees 106). A series of recessions in the late-1870s and the first half of the 1880s only exacerbated the problems. Beholding the national scene in 1881, Charles William Stubb, at the time Vicar of Granborough and Select Preacher at Cambridge, said “the co-existence in the same country of enormous wealth and frightful poverty” could not help but raise certain “awkward questions”:

Why do the rich ever seem to be growing richer and richer, and the poor, at least relatively, poorer and poorer? Is the gulf between Dives and Lazarus to grow ever wider and wider; and the struggle for existence to become daily more and more intense? Why is it that all this marvellous increase of productive power which has marked the present century has no tendency to extirpate or to lighten the burdens of those who are condemned to toil? Can we indeed congratulate ourselves upon a growth of wealth, in which the workhouse and the prison are as surely the mark of material progress, as costly dwellings, rich warehouses, and magnificent churches? . . . (25-26)

These and other questions about poverty and the urban poor, coupled with the growing realization that traditional methods of reaching the working classes were ineffective led

to a variety of responses, two of which will be the primary focus of the remainder of this chapter: the revival of Christian Socialism and the Salvation Army.

### **Christian Socialism**

Much like R. W. Dale had credited F. D. Maurice with shifting Christian thinking on politics and involvement with the things of this world which made possible the civic gospel movement, so did the Christian Socialist revival of the late 1870s and early 1880s trace its roots back to Maurice, particularly his emphasis on the Incarnation. Given that Christ's humanity bridged the divide between sacred and secular, the heavenly and the worldly, and that his resurrection redeemed humanity, "his resurrection heralded the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth, in which all were brothers and sisters in him and members of his Body" (Walsh 356, emphasis in original). Accordingly, Maurice believed "the social problems of the nineteenth century were caused by the fact that people [. . .] insisted on seeing themselves as individuals and not as members of the Body of Christ" (Walsh 357). Over the latter half of the century, Maurice's thought was developed, and gradually there was a shift from an Atonement-centered theology, focusing on the next world and personal sin and individual salvation, to an Incarnation-centered theology, focusing on this world and a present Kingdom and social salvation.

The beginning of the "Christian Socialist Revival" is often associated with the creation of the Guild of St. Matthew in 1877, of which Thomas Hancock was an influential member. Two of his sermons capture the way in which Christian Socialism emanated from the pulpit, "The Hymn of the Universal Social Revolution" and "The Banner of Christ in the Hands of the 'Socialists.'" In the former, Hancock takes a portion

of the Magnificat from the Gospel of Luke as his text: “He hath shewed strength with His arm; He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts; He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and meek. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away” (Luke 1:51-53). Hancock declares that these words are “a fair statement [. . .] of the hopes and the objects of the Guild of St. Matthew” (*The Pulpit and the Press* 22). The Magnificat reveals, Hancock says, that “God is always and everywhere at war against these three classes [‘the proud,’ ‘the mighty,’ and ‘the rich’]—as the Church declares with joy every afternoon in this hymn—on behalf of the humble, the meek, and the hungry” (25). This “Social Revolution,” however, will not be brought about “by copying the inhuman methods of ‘the proud,’ ‘the mighty,’ and ‘the rich,’” (28). Instead, it will require an awakening of the Church to the “plain meaning” of the hymn and to recognize that “the Son of God was made the Son of Man, the Champion and Rescuer of Humanity, in Mary’s womb,” and that He is “revealing Himself in the history of the world [. . .] as the real Head of Humanity, as the only possible Saviour not only of individual souls, but of peoples” (26, 28-29). Those last words are instructive. Over and against the evangelical emphasis on personal salvation, Christian Socialism emphasized the social and communal aspects of salvation, and that social emphasis had practical implications for Christian living.

In an earlier sermon, “Jesus Christ the Irresistible Attractor of the People” preached in 1869, Hancock addresses “respectable persons” who ask for “*practical sermons*” (*Christ and the People* 4, emphasis in original). He asks “Do they mean sermons for themselves—private, not catholic? Do they mean personal application of the



Gospel to the making comfortable the individual, not the great wide Gospel for the whole Humankind?” (4-5) Hancock clearly rejects such a notion of “practical” and replies, “Jesus preached something so wide and so full that it drew to Him ‘all the publicans and sinners.’ The New Adam is the most practical of all Teachers because He is the most universal” (5). The practical implication for living, then, must involve a recognition of one’s duty towards one’s neighbor,<sup>111</sup> and that duty must be seen in terms of “such things as we are fond of calling temporal and worldly” (*The Pulpit and the Press* 30). Hancock is clear to distinguish those things like “gaining a great fortune, or a high social position” that are actually “temporal or worldly in the unchristian sense” from those that are simply needed for this life on earth as our “daily bread” (30). Understood this way, “the *Magnificat* is a *Secularist* hymn; and its rich spiritual contents can only be fully disclosed in an age like our own to those who are caring, praying, and working for its secular fulfilment” (30, emphasis in original). To those who would try to spiritualize the *Magnificat*, who would suggest that “the hungry” Mary refers to are those who “hunger and thirst for righteousness,” Hancock imagines Mary’s reply “There is no ‘righteousness’ so long as there is any soul in a nation without a certainty of daily bread,” and “There is no ‘hunger for righteousness’ where it is not the supreme care of the commune and the state that all may eat and be satisfied” (30). Working to satisfy the physical, not just the spiritual, hunger of *all* of society becomes a Christian’s duty as a

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<sup>111</sup> In a later sermon, “My Duty Towards My Neighbor,” Hancock asks, “can anything be more peculiarly ‘civic’ or ‘municipal’ than to ask the future citizen what is due from him to his neighbor?” and then rejects “such foreign and platform words as ‘civic’ and ‘municipal’” and suggests replacing them with a true English word, “neighbor” (*The Pulpit and the Press* 287, 289).

result of his or her membership in the Church, the Body of Christ, of which his or her neighbor is also a member.

Also important in those lines last quoted is the notion that one cannot claim any personal righteousness or even a hunger for righteousness in the presence of poverty or absence of “supreme care *of the commune and the state*” to relieve that poverty. Cheryl Walsh notes, “The Guild maintained that [. . .] everyone that professed to be a member of the Body of Christ [. . .] must necessarily have a social conscience, that is, a conscience that engendered a sense of Christian responsibility to others and, furthermore, a responsibility *for society*” (369, emphasis in original). On this much, all Christian Socialists were agreed, but as to how exactly that responsibility was to be carried out, how the commune and the state were to play a role, there was no unanimity.

Nor was there unanimity when it came to the problem of the absence of the working classes from the churches. In 1869, Hancock described the problem thusly:

You, my brethren, cannot be expected to enter into the shame and misery which often overflow the heart of the priest of Jesus Christ as he goes into the pulpit and glances at the faces and the habits of those seated before him. A well-dressed, respectable, decent crowd fills the nave of every full church from the east to the west. I see that the class of persons whom Jesus Christ drew, draws, and ever will draw perforce to Himself [*viz* publicans and sinners]—whenever and wherever He is known to be speaking—are not here; and I do not believe that, as a class, they are in any church in England.

They are not absent because they are uninvited. Everything has been tried to bring them. At no time since the beginning of Christendom have been seen such efforts, such earnestness, such a yearning anxiety to draw the masses of people to Jesus Christ in His Church as may be seen in our day. (*Christ and the People* 2)

The situation had not improved when he preached “The Banner of Christ” in 1887, observing, “For fifty years the National Bishops and the patron-made clergy [. . .] have been at their wits’ end how to persuade the crowds of the disinherited and oppressed to become, or own themselves to be, members incorporated of Christ’s Church. They have spent millions of pounds [and] held thousands upon thousands of anxious discussions,” but to no avail (*The Pulpit and the Press* 34). In Hancock’s view, the problem is with the formulation of the problem itself, “that they are beginning at the wrong end,” which is to say the problem was not how the clergy could “get” the masses, but rather how “the so-called masses should ‘get’ the clergy” (34). However, Hancock—and many other clergy, Church of England or otherwise—could likewise be subject to the accusation that “they are beginning at the wrong end” by focusing on conventional church-going and filling the naves of churches with the poor. But around the last quarter of the century, there arose an *unconventional* answer to the problem—the Salvation Army.

### **The Salvation Army**

The Salvation Army, founded by both William and Catherine Booth, developed out of their East London Christian Mission, which from its beginning in 1865 targeted the poor and working classes, but they found their revivalist preaching had little effect. They realized, then, that to be effective, they would have to employ more unorthodox tactics,

for which they received so much criticism. In one of her West London sermons, in response to the common criticism of the “noise and *éclat*” connected with the Army’s methods, Catherine Booth argues that “these are indispensable, because we seek those who cannot be reached without. I deplore their condition as much as you do, but *there it is*, and if you are to reach them, you must adapt your modes of thought, expression, and action to them” (*The Salvation Army and the State* 25). As she continues, she describes the problem that frustrated so many late-Victorian churches, simply stating “It is demonstrated by sad and awful experience that they will have nothing to do with your quiet and genteel methods. Bishops, clergy, ministers, philanthropists, are forced to confess themselves powerless to reach them” (25). In order to respond to this failure of conventional church-going to attract the masses, “common sense and Christian charity alike say, Send them such instrumentalities as they *will and can* appreciate. Stoop as low as you lawfully can to pick them up rather than let them wax worse and worse while you are standing on your dignity” (25, emphasis in original).

Among those instrumentalities the working classes would and could appreciate were the Army’s drum and brass bands and Hallelujah Lasses, and its appropriation of popular tunes and advertising techniques. What is more, these methods were not contained within the walls of a chapel or church, but were out in the open, in the streets and in the neighborhoods of the working classes. In her sermon “Aggressive Christianity” on Mark 16:15—“Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature”—Catherine Booth asks, “Would it ever occur to you that the language meant, ‘Go and build chapels and churches and invite the people to come in, and if they will not, let them

alone?’ ‘GO YE’ [. . .] Where am I to get at them? WHERE THEY ARE” (*Aggressive Christianity* 10). In view of the fact that “three parts of the population utterly ignore our invitations and take no notice whatever of our buildings and of our services,” Booth says we must follow the lead of Jesus and “Go after them!” (12).

But the Army’s critique of conventional Victorian churches did not stop at efforts, or lack thereof, to bring the masses into the churches, or, as the case may require, bring the church to the masses. What happened once they were in church services was also a target of criticism. George Scott Railton, who was an influential Salvationist and advisor to the Booths, described the problem of “The system that is generally prevalent in the world, whereby service after service is taken up by one man, and the vast majority of God’s people are trained to sit and listen,” and declared it to be “a system utterly opposed to the very idea of spiritual religion, and which can only minister to idleness and disgrace to the hearers.” (qtd. in Walker 102). The Salvation Army, on the other hand, expected members to participate in their services, including preaching, which meant much more than the mere exposition of the Bible designed to promote an intellectual belief in the Scriptures. In a sermon preached in West London, Catherine Booth explained that “it pleased God to save [those who believe] by the foolishness of preaching—by the living testimony of living men—by those who embody the word in their experience and lives, and then go and speak it in the power of the Spirit to others. This is the sort of preaching God has commanded” (*Popular Christianity* 37). Besides the “preaching” of a good example of a changed life, members were expected to share their experiences with others.

In *Heathen England*, an early account of the Salvation Army's work, Railton describes what this kind of participatory "preaching" looked like in the open-air portion of their meetings. The service would commence with singing, then prayer, then more singing, after which there would be "a series of addresses, none of them exceeding five minutes in length, and with a verse or two of a hymn sung between each" (40). He then gives examples of these addresses:

No. 1—"You all know what I once was when I kept my shop open on Sundays — how I delighted in sin ; but now I am happy in Jesus, and if you want to know more about the change which has taken place, just come down to my place"— giving name and address—"and ask my wife an' family." (40)

No. 5—"Thank God! He saved me when I was a potman standing behind the bar of a public-house! I was a drunkard, too, for I knew how to get into the cellar and have a 'skinful' of drink. I have been 'in college,' too—not in Oxford or Cambridge, but in gaol. And my soul was in prison, too; but now I am free, body and soul, I have got something to shout about. Many a time in the dark night I have crept about among the trees poaching; but now I love Jesus, and I can sing his praises." (41)

Railton adds that these addresses are abridged, having omitted "the earnest exhortation addressed by each to the people to give up the sins which were their curse, and to seek the Lord without delay," but that they capture the essence of each (43). These "preachers" were not speaking to their "congregations" from a distance. They came from among

them, the poor and “dangerous” classes, and in some cases were known by them personally as evidenced by the appeal “You all know what I once was.”

The style of the preaching, too, was suited to engage and arrest the attention of the working classes. Pamela Walker cites an 1879 *Daily Telegraph* account of one particularly vigorous sermon:

He [the preacher] lost not a moment in shilly-shally, but seized Satan by the horns at once, and commenced abusing him in a tone and at a rate which must have convinced the Evil One that he was in the hands of a person who not only had no dread of him, but was hot and eager to rouse him to a fury, and then give him battle to the death. [. . .] His gestures were prodigiously energetic, and the consequence was, that before he had preached ten minutes he had worked his wrists well through the coat cuffs [. . .]. (121)

Such tactics subjected the Salvation Army to a variety of critiques, that it was uneducated and undignified. However, as Railton put it when describing a sermon by William Booth, “it is a rough-and-ready style of preaching, but then the preacher has to do with rough-and-ready minds, upon which the subtleties of a refined discourse would be lost” (68).

Although individual salvation from sin and Hell were the focus of Salvation Army sermons and evangelism, the Army was not unmindful of the social significance of its work. In fact, Catherine Booth preached an entire sermon on the benefits to society accrued by the Salvation Army’s efforts. Among these, she included “respect for law,” an appreciation for “the universal brotherhood of man,” “improved morality,” an “increase in good and reliable labour,” and a reduction in the public costs associated with

“workhouse and prison accommodation” (*Salvation Army and the State* passim). And, there were any number of social services the Salvation Army provided and causes it supported, including providing meals and shelter, arranging job opportunities, and rescuing women from prostitution. In a short address making an appeal for funds for the Army’s social work, William Booth describes various unfortunates—a large family in a single chamber, a drunkard and his victimized family, the unemployed, criminals, prostitutes, delinquent children—and then asks, “But what shall we do? Content ourselves by singing a hymn? Offering a prayer? Or giving a little good advice? No! Ten thousand times no! We will pity them, feed them, reclaim them, employ them” (“Don’t Forget”). Yet, as much as this address is in keeping with the style and work of the Salvation Army in late-Victorian England, it was given in 1907. For all its successes with the working classes, the Salvation Army, too, had to accept that those successes would always be partial relative to the need.

This chapter has sought to demonstrate some of the complexity and diversity of Victorian Christian social thought even as it has tried to reveal the broad shifts in the sermonic discourse of the period along what might be considered generally progressive lines. But that shift, that progress, was not along a single, continuous trajectory. Parsons goes on to point out that characteristics of each side of the spectrum, from social control to Christian socialism and the social gospel, could be found throughout the Victorian period (“Social Control” 55). That being said, Parsons adds that “By the end of the century, however, the recognition of the significance and limitations of ‘the environmental factor’ was more widespread and more profound, calls for social reform



were more frequent and more extensive in range, and political commitment on social issues was more readily perceived as a concomitant of Christian belief” (55). However, it is not only social attitudes that have changed by the end of the century. At the close of Victoria’s reign, something has happened to the sermon. What that something is will be the subject of the conclusion.

## Conclusion

As we noted in the introduction, the Victorian age has been dubbed “The Age of the Sermon” (Francis “Nineteenth-Century British Sermons on Evolution” 276) and “The Golden Age of Preaching” (Henry). And yet, in the late-Victorian period, one need not look far to find works like J. P. Mahaffy’s 1882 *The Decay of Modern Preaching*, and in 1895, H. R. Haweis declared the “MODERN [Victorian] PULPIT” a “Transition Pulpit,” living “on the dried pippins of the past” with “nothing distinctive” about it and called for a “New Pulpit,” one “in touch with the life of the period. A pulpit up to date; interested in what is interesting; capable of refocusing religion; quick to note when a phrase is outworn; resolved to find why clever men won’t listen to sermons; convinced that every pursuit, occupation, discovery, and faculty of man should have a moral thrust and prepared to give it” (172, 173). So what was happening to the sermon as the century came to a close? I would suggest several contributing factors to the decline of the sermon: the death of the great Victorian preachers, increasing competition from a variety of sources, the rise of modernism, and the diffusion of Christian faith and practice.

### **The Passing of the “Greats”**

First, at a very basic level, the pulpit was losing its great preachers. One contemporary scholar of homiletics notes that at the time “There was an enormous interest in heroic preachers. [. . .] The virtuosity of individual preachers was cherished [. . .]. In this respect preaching was a popular art. London was the center of this art, and a visit to London always meant an opportunity to hear the foremost preachers of the day” (Old 348). According to the readers of *Contemporary Pulpit* in 1884, these “foremost”

preachers included such notable, “heroic” preachers we’ve discussed as H. P. Liddon, C. H. Spurgeon, Joseph Parker, and R. W. Dale, among others.<sup>112</sup> The sermons of these preachers (and many more lesser lights) were consumed not only in churches and chapels on Sunday mornings or weekday evenings, but also in print.

But of the *Contemporary Pulpit*’s list of the ten “greatest living [. . .] preachers” in 1884, four were dead by the end of Victoria’s reign—H. P. Liddon (d. 1890), William Magee (d. 1891), C. H. Spurgeon (d. 1892), and R. W. Dale (d. 1895); another two survived her by only a year or two—Joseph Parker (d. 1902) and F. W. Farrar (d. 1903). We might add to this list John Henry Newman, the most famous of the Tractarians who (in)famously converted to Roman Catholicism, who died in 1890. None of the other great Tractarians or Anglo-Catholics had survived to the end of the century either, John Keble having died in 1866, James Bowling Mozley in 1878, E. B. Pusey in 1882. Other preachers who helped define the Victorian pulpit also died in the last thirty years of Victoria’s reign: Henry Melvill (d. 1871), F. D. Maurice (d. 1872), Samuel Wilberforce (d. 1873), Thomas Guthrie (d. 1873), Charles Kingsley (d. 1875), Walter Farquhar Hook (d. 1875), George Dawson (d. 1876), John Cumming (d. 1881), Arthur Penrhyn Stanley (d. 1881), Catherine Booth (1890), J. C. Ryle (d. 1900), Frederick Temple (d. 1902). Of the other preachers discussed in this study, William Gresley died in 1876, George

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<sup>112</sup> The list was a compilation of the “greatest living English-speaking Protestant preachers” as voted on by readers. The other British preachers included (Henry Ward Beecher, the only American, was also on the list) were Alexander Maclaren (Union Chapel, Manchester), Frederic William Farrar (St. Margaret’s Church, London), William Magee (Bishop of Peterborough), William J. Knox-Little (Liddon’s successor at St. Paul’s), and William Boyd Carpenter (Canon of Windsor, later Bishop of Ripon). See Ellison, “Well-Known Victorian Preachers.”

Rawlinson in 1902, and George MacDonald in 1905. Of the “greats,” only Alexander Maclaren (d. 1910), William Booth (d. 1912), William J. Knox-Little (d. 1918), and William Boyd Carpenter (d. 1918) survived significantly beyond the Victorian era.

To the extent, then, that the popularity of sermons was driven by the popularity of “celebrity” preachers, the sermon’s popularity suffered with the passing of these preachers. R. W. Dale “was the dominant intellectual of evangelical Nonconformity until his death, standing head and shoulders above all [. . .]. He provided the intellectual underpinning and the personal example in Birmingham affairs that enabled the movement to break out of its self-imposed isolation and take a more active role in the larger society” (Schlossberg 120). While he was worthily succeeded by John Henry Jowett, who was highly regarded in his own right, Jowett wouldn’t attain the stature that Dale enjoyed. Similarly, Spurgeon’s successor at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Archibald G. Brown, despite being a successful preacher in the East End of London before taking over for Spurgeon, simply did not command the national attention that Spurgeon had. Focusing on the Anglican sermon, E. D. Mackerness notes one late-Victorian lament after the passing of Dean Church, “One after another, the great men of our Church disappear, and their places are not filled” (*The Heeded Voice* 109). Mackerness then adds, “As preachers, certainly, men like Liddon, Pusey, and Magee had few very obvious successors. Such figures were, indeed, declining in significance as the twentieth century approached” (109). Still, the question remains, why the successors of the great preachers were unable to attain a comparable level of greatness.

### **Competition**

Another fairly basic explanation for the decline of the sermon's prominence was the increase in various forms of competition to the pulpit. On the one hand, there was a rise of alternative belief systems that challenged orthodox Christianity and vied for the attention and allegiance of Victorians. E. D. Mackerness notes the rise of Agnosticism, Positivism, and Secularism as rival philosophies (104-109). While these movements sometimes adopted the sermon form as a way to disseminate their own ideas, they were also able to draw upon the increasing accessibility and popularity of the periodical press, another source of direct competition to the printed sermon. In 1882, John Morley, upon retiring as editor of *The Fortnightly*, claimed that "the clergy no longer (had) the pulpit to themselves, for the new Reviews (had become) more powerful pulpits, in which heretics were at least as welcome as the orthodox" (quoted in Mackerness 124).

Editors and contributors to the periodical press were only one challenge to the authority of the pulpit. While chapter two considered the challenges science could pose to religion and the various ways preachers responded to these challenges, the credence of scientists as professionals and their authority relative to preachers was on the rise in throughout the nineteenth century. Frank Turner, in his essay on the professional dimension of the "disagreements between *religious and scientific spokesmen*" (173 emphasis added)—as opposed to any inherent conflict between religion and science *per se*—notes the need for the mid-Victorian scientific community to "establish [its] independence [. . .], its right of self-definition, and its self-generating role in the social order" (175). This increasing professionalization resulted in "a transfer of authority from religious to naturalistic belief," so that "a great part of the reverence once given to priests

and to their stories of an unseen universe has been transferred to the astronomer, the geologist, the physician, and the engineer” (174). With “this shift from one part of the intellectual nation to another,” preachers lost a degree of the attention they once commanded. As Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart comment in their work on secularization, ““Priests [and] ministers [. . .] appealing to divine authority became only one source of knowledge in modern societies, and not necessarily the most important or trusted one in many dimensions of life, when competing with the specialized expertise, certified training, and practical skills of professional economists, physicists, physicians, or engineers” (*Sacred and Secular* 8). That said, we must avoid anachronistically reading too much into the impact of the rise of science on religion and the sermon. As was noted in chapter two of this study, the average Victorian churchgoer would likely not have been much aware of rising scientific challenges to the Bible (Chadwick *The Victorian Church* II.2), nor did preachers often take up scientific matters in the pulpit. Further, the rise of science was not universally seen as a threat to the authority of the Bible or of the pulpit, as there were many efforts at conciliation between science and religion. Nevertheless, as the century progressed, it is possible to see that others were coming to the conclusion that science and religion either were in direct competition, or that the sphere of religion’s influence, at least, was shrinking, about which more will be said shortly.

The theater and the novel, too, were sources of competition for the sermon, both as entertainment and as a source of moral wisdom and authority. In 1886, Edwin Paxton Hood, speaking of the theater, claimed that “many of our great comedies are great social

sermons. . . . Thus it has happened that the pulpit has lost where the stage has gained” (quoted in Mackerness 122). Mackerness elaborates on this idea:

The ‘social problem’ drama, which became so great a feature of the *fin de siècle* literary world, is able to arouse susceptibilities which even the most brilliant homily does not engage [. . .]. And so the ‘Renaissance of the English Theatre’ had a tendency to make the preacher’s offering look a little tame. [. . .] And though sophisticated clergymen occasionally borrowed histrionic gestures for use in the pulpit, these were not sufficient to make up for what the preacher knew to be lacking in conventional methods of address. (122)

Keith Francis notes that “if venues such as the theatre had not surpassed the pulpit by 1901, the signs were apparent that this would soon be the case” (“Sermon Studies” 626). In much the same way, the novel was an increasing source of competition for the reading of sermons. Novels had a way of engaging readers that sermons lacked, and it was precisely this appeal that led many clergymen to caution their congregations about them if not renounce them altogether. But it wasn’t just spurious or sensational novels that competed with sermons for the attention of the Victorian middle classes. Norman Vance argues that “from the 1870s and 1880s [the novel] finally achieved the kind of cultural and indeed moral authority dreamed of by Jane Austen. By 1890 [. . .] the life or death of God and issues of messianic destiny were engaging novel readers as well as theologians. The best fictional narratives could now share or even usurp the respect once accorded exclusively to biblical narrative,” and, we might add, to the sermons based on that biblical narrative (*Bible and Novel* 27).

Finally, some forms of competition arose from the work of the churches themselves, notably the various efforts at social reform. From the mid-century Christian Socialism of Maruice and Kingsley to Dawson's and Dale's civic gospel to the Christian Socialist revival of the final two decades, at least one recent critic argues that the Victorian churches "thought too much [about social policies], allowing the scale and complexity of the social problem to cloud the simplicity of their Gospel" (Erdozain 87). The Salvation Army suffered this sort of shift in focus when in 1890 "it launched a social services wing that would divide the organization in two and soon dominate the public perception" of it (Walker 235). As the attention of the churches and chapels of the late-Victorian era shifted toward more earth-bound issues and temporal solutions, attention was diverted away from the kind of simple Gospel focus that had fueled the sermon and helped make groups like the Salvation Army so successful initially. Of course, the Salvation Army was never overly-focused on the pulpit to begin with. But even more preaching-centered efforts, like the municipal or civic gospel movement in Birmingham, could see their preaching become ironically less and less relevant the more successful it became. Tristram Hunt suggests as much when he points out that "the municipal gospel of [George] Dawson [. . .] would ultimately become an irrelevance in a self-governing system [. . .]. The gospel was a victim of its own success: if all accepted its precepts then the need for the enforcing authority was redundant" (379).

Alternative belief systems, the periodical press, the professionalization of science, the rise of the novel, the shift in emphasis toward social concerns—none of these



heralded an end of preaching or the irrelevance of the sermon, but taken together, they heralded the oncoming of modernity.

### **The Rise of Modernism**

The rise of modernism was perhaps a more significant contributing factor to the decline of the pulpit. Linda Gil sums up what she sees as the cumulative effect of modernism on the sermon, stating that “belief in any sort of grand narrative—even a religious one—was proving to be uncomfortably tentative if not outright fictional,” and “even Victorian churchgoers could hardly be unaware” (594). Furthermore, she adds that the Victorian novel so deconstructed “the whole notion of a monologic discourse of truth which the sermon represents” that “The sermon can no longer be a valid discourse because it is a monologue, predicated on an infallible truth,” and she then concludes that by the early twentieth-century “Carlyle's assertion that religion is but empty clothing, a signifier pointing to nothing, has come to be accepted by the dominant culture as a norm” (606-607). While this is perhaps overstated (as we will consider shortly), it nevertheless captures the essence of what many twentieth-century critics have perceived to be the impact of modernism on religion generally, and thus, by extension, on the sermon.

Hughes Oliphant Old notes that “Generally speaking, the leading expositors of the day [. . .] considered such questions [about evolution or higher criticism] introduction rather than exposition and simply left them aside” (349). Consequently, he says, “The Victorian pulpit remained by and large ‘precritical.’ The failure of Victorian preachers to address the problems that were coming to light is certainly one of the chief reasons for the decline of serious expository preaching” (350). Granting Gil’s assertion that “even

Victorian churchgoers could hardly be unaware” of the implications of these various issues, then one might reasonably argue that the “decline of serious expository preaching” toward the century’s end would have been accompanied by a decline in the attention paid to what preaching did remain.

### **Secularization, “Diffusive Christianity,” and the Sermon**

Undoubtedly, the various facets of modernity had an impact on “the old ways of understanding Christianity” (Francis “Major Issues” 614). Keith Francis makes the obvious point that “How to believe was not the same in 1901 as it was in 1837” (614). And, Francis admits that “the term [secularization] seems helpful” in describing these changes (614). At the same time, though, Francis adds “The ubiquity of the sermon may be a source of scholarly complaint in that it makes the study of the sermon difficult, but surely something so universal is evidence that the idea of secularization is inadequate,” and the sheer volume of sermons “being preached up and down the country, with no fanfare, from Sunday to Sunday [. . .] render it difficult to think of Christianity declining in the nineteenth century [. . .]. The sermon is pervasive. And if the sermon is a universal phenomenon in the nineteenth, and earlier, centuries, then it seems logical to argue that Christianity was everywhere too” (614-615).

And yet, the impact of modernity cannot be ignored, either, as Francis has noted. Thus:

There remains an unresolved dilemma, which is, ‘How does one intellectually deal with decline and vitality when they exist side by side?’ We know that modernity did not herald any Feuerbachian moment of disillusionment; that the

industrial cities were not religious wastelands; we also know that the religious juggernaut did not roll on without complications in the twentieth century.

(Erdozain 65)

One of the answers to this dilemma that has been proposed is the notion of “diffusive Christianity,” a term used in 1903 by the Bishop of Rochester, E. S. Talbot, and originally used to describe the religion of the working classes (Parsons “A Question of Meaning” 77). Diffusive Christianity was “a widespread working-class *version* of Christianity, at variance with the official versions on offer from the churches, and it is characterized by a lack of focus on doctrine or dogma and an emphasis on “practical Christianity, the morality of the Bible, the ethical discipline of the Ten Commandments, and the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount and the parable of the Good Samaritan” (77, 78 emphasis in original). Part of the variance with “official” Christianity, and pertinent to the study of the sermon, was a lack of emphasis on church-going. In her work on the Salvation Army, Pamela Walker explains that:

Far too often, religion is relegated to what happens in church [. . .], and thus the diverse and contested nature of working-class religion [. . .] is diminished. Church attendance has too often been the measure of religiosity, and the Victorian middle class has been seen as the possessors of whatever religious life can be discerned. But, as Thomas Wright wrote in 1873, workers’ “common sense tells them that to make church-going the be-all and end-all, as a text of religion, is to confound religion with one of its most mechanical sides.” (234)

This notion of diffusive Christianity is significant not only for understanding Victorian working-class religiosity, but it can also shed light on the question with which this conclusion began about what was happening to the sermon as the Victorian era came to a close.

In “Reassessing the ‘Crisis of Faith’ in the Victorian Age,” David Nash says that the “concept of ‘believing without belonging’”—a concept very much like diffusive Christianity—“signals that an apparent decline in religious belief, evidenced by falling Church attendance and association with religious institutions, might indicate estrangement merely from the institutions themselves” (66). Such religious belief “could exist, and perhaps even thrive, away from the conventional religious outlets that had previously claimed it as their own” even as it “continued to disappoint those authorities who presided over conventional religion or still thought of it solely through forms of institutional legitimacy” (66).

The sermon is unquestionably one of those facets of “what happens in church,” a significant element of “conventional religion,” that helped define so much of Victorian Christianity. Even as late as 1882, in the midst of his lament about the decay of modern preaching, Mahaffy could still claim that “Most people, whether really religious or not, are conservative enough to go regularly to their church on Sunday, and would feel that they had been defrauded of part of their due exercise if the sermon were omitted” (2). But if more and more religiosity, even Christian religiosity, was moving outside of the churches, then the sermon would be largely left out of the Christian experience for those whose Christianity was becoming more diffusive. Thus, even while sermons continued to

be preached unabated, their reach gradually declined. This is not to say, however, that the sermon does not remain an important subject for continued study. As Erdozain has said more generally, recent scholarship has made it possible for Victorian religion to “be studied without that feeling that it is good and necessary to know about things that have been lost forever; Victorian history is not a quaint anteroom to a secular present” (61-62). Indeed, even though the sermon has declined, it has not disappeared, and there is still much that can be learned from the study of the sermon, past and present.

### Appendix: Brief Biographical Sketches of Select Preachers

The following sketches are meant as a quick reference guide for this study, intended to provide an overview of the timeframe, affiliation, and influence of those preachers whose sermons come in for more than passing mention.

**Booth, Catherine (1829-1890)** Catherine Booth was born and raised in a Methodist home, and was herself a devout child, reportedly having read the Bible cover to cover eight times by the age of twelve. Her participation in Methodist class meetings developed her public speaking, and Methodism provided her examples of public female ministry. In her early twenties she left the Wesleyan Methodists for a more democratic and zealous reform movement of Methodists. She met Charles Booth in London, and the two were soon engaged in 1852. After some time serving with Charles in various Methodist congregations, Catherine and Charles left the Methodists to found the Salvation Army together. Throughout the early years of their marriage, Catherine argued for a greater role for women in public ministry, and she was instrumental in paving the way for women to have the right to preach in the Salvation Army; she would become an ardent and frequent preacher herself. Over time, Catherine would become known as the “Army Mother.” Her death in 1890 is regarded as a turning point in the history of the Salvation Army, when its social work began to assume a more prominent—and soon dominant—role in the organization.

**Booth, Charles (1829-1912)** Charles Booth was born to a working class family within the Church of England. He joined a Wesleyan Methodist chapel and by age fifteen was “saved,” and he started preaching soon after. He moved to London in 1849, and after

joining a Wesleyan chapel there, he was soon preaching full time. In London he met Catherine, and the two were married in 1855. They participated in ministry together, and in 1865 they struck out on their own to found the group that would come to be known as the Salvation Army. The Salvation Army's ministry focused on the poor and working classes that lacked the "respectability" of more conventional churches. In the 1880s, the Salvation Army had spread to the United States which was just the beginning of its international growth.

**Close, Francis (1797-1882)** Francis Close was a Low Church evangelical preacher. In Cheltenham, where he preached his two sermons to the Chartists who occupied his church for two Sundays, he was a "perpetual curate," but he established himself as a forceful presence and was known for his charitable and educational work. In 1847, he established the Cheltenham Training College, which is now the University of Gloucestershire. He was nominated Dean of Carlisle in 1856, a position which he held until 1881, when poor health forced him to resign. In Carlisle, many of his efforts were devoted to helping the poorer classes.

**Dale, Robert William (1829-1895)** Dale was a Congregationalist, a dissenting denomination, educated at London University, where he took his M.A., and Springhill College in Birmingham. In Birmingham, he came under the tutelage of John Angell James (an important Victorian preacher in his own right) as an assistant pastor at Carr's Lane Church. Upon James's death in 1858, Dale assumed the role of sole pastor of Carr's Lane, which held until his death in 1895. Dale has been credited with the birth of the civic gospel, which held that political involvement was a Christian duty. Although he was

actively involved in Birmingham Liberalism and had an influential voice in the Liberal party, he was first and foremost a preacher and respected as such on both sides of the Atlantic.

**Dawson, George (1821-1876)** Dawson was born in London, the son of a Baptist. He was educated at the University of Glasgow, and in 1843 accepted his first pastorate at a Baptist church in Rickmansworth. He moved to Birmingham in 1845, but soon found his views out of keeping with Baptist theology, and so he began his career as an independent preacher at the Church of the Saviour, which was built for him, and which would come to count Joseph Chamberlain as one of its more prominent members. At the Church of the Saviour, he began preaching and articulating the ideas that would lay the foundation for the civic gospel, of which he and R. W. Dale were the chief proponents. He was an influential and popular preacher, not only in Birmingham but also nationally, and Charles Kingsley once described him as “the greatest talker in England.”

**Fraser, James (1818-1885)** Educated at Oxford, Fraser was ordained as a priest in the Church of England in 1847. He was involved in educational matters and appointed to the Royal Commission on education in 1858. His continuing work on education helped him gain the appointment as the second Bishop of Manchester in 1870. As Bishop, he worked tirelessly as a preacher and in all manner of civic involvement, from education to labor. He was well-respected throughout Manchester among all varieties of Christian and even non-Christian religious groups, and he was known as the bishop of all denominations.



**Gregory, Robert (1819-1911)** Oxford educated, and ordained in 1843, Gregory served as the vicar of St Mary the Less in Lambeth for twenty years from 1853-1873. While there, he made improvements to the church and was also involved in educational matters. In 1867 he was nominated as one of the Select Preacher at Oxford. He was appointed as Canon St. Paul's Cathedral in 1868, and then as Dean from 1891 until his death in 1911. During his tenure at St. Paul's, he was an energetic and tireless reformer who worked to reinvigorate the worship and solemnity of the Cathedral's services.

**Gresley, William (1801-1876)** Gresley was a High Churchman whose career was spent primarily in Lichfield, Brighton, and Boyne Hill, where he served in a number of roles including curate, lecturer, and assistant priest. He was a devoted supporter and defender of the Tractarians and prolific writer; besides several volumes of sermons, he authored a treatise on preaching, many works on polemical subjects advocating High Church views, and a number of novels.

**Guthrie, Thomas (1803-1873)** Guthrie trained for ministry at the University of Edinburgh. He was not immediately ordained, and so he went abroad to study medicine in Paris, then returned to Scotland where he worked for a time in business. He was ordained in the Church of Scotland in 1830, but he became one of the leading figures in the Disruption that led to the creation of the Free Church of Scotland in 1843. Throughout his long career, he was one of the most popular preachers in Scotland, known for his application of Christianity to alleviating the plight of the poor and for his philanthropic work.

**Hancock, Thomas (?)** Hancock was a curate at St. Stephen's, Lewisham, and at St. Nicholas, Cole Abbey in London. He was one of the second generation of Victorian Christian Socialists. He belonged to the Guild of St. Matthew, which was founded by Stewart Headlam. Hancock was part of the more radical expression of Christian socialism, and his preaching, which included such sermons as "The Hymn of the Universal Social Revolution" (based on the Magnificat of Mary) and "The Banner of Christ in the Hands of the Socialists," helped increase church attendance.

**Hughes, Hugh Price (1847-1902)** Hughes was a Welsh Methodist educated at Wesleyan Theological College at Richmond and University College London. He was a prominent leader in Methodism in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, founding the *Methodist Times* and serving as Superintendent of the West London Methodist Mission, and he helped found and served as the first president of the National Council of Evangelical Free Churches. With his wife, he also founded a Methodist sisterhood dedicated to social work. Believing that the nonconformist denominations focused too narrowly on individual salvation, he worked to broaden their role to take on more of the functions of Churches and to develop a *social* Christianity.

**Kingsley, Charles (1819-1875)** Kingsley was a clergyman and novelist, historian and amateur naturalist. Educated at Cambridge, then ordained in 1842. In the mid-1840s he became involved with F. D. Maurice and Christian Socialism, authoring a number of tracts, publishing the novel *Alton Locke*, and preaching his famed sermon "The Message of the Church to the Labouring Man." Though he distanced himself from some of these associations in the mid-1850s, he never gave up his social concerns. He took an interest

in sanitation which can be seen in his sermons on cholera, his *Sanitary and Social Lectures and Essays*, and his novels *Alton Locke* and *Water Babies*. In 1864 Kingsley engaged in a dispute with John Henry Newman, which led to the latter's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. He was rector of Eversley from 1844; throughout his career he also enjoyed appointments as chaplain to the queen in 1859, tutor to the Prince of Wales in 1861, professor of history at Cambridge from 1860-1869, canon of Chester from 1869-1873, and canon of Westminster from 1873-1875. He died in Eversley in 1875.

**Liddon, Henry Parry (1829-1890)** Liddon entered Oxford in 1846, after the heyday of the Oxford Movement, but he nevertheless embraced its principles and began his lifelong relationship with E. B. Pusey while there. After a brief stint as a curate, in 1854 he accepted the first of his academic appointments at a theological college in Cuddesdon where he distinguished himself as a lecturer and theologian. In 1859 he returned to Oxford, accepting the vice-principalship of St. Edmund's Hall. He was a four times a Select Preacher at Oxford, where he also delivered the Bampton Lectures in 1866, and he was two times a Select Preacher at Cambridge. In 1870 he became Canon of St. Paul's Cathedral, a position which he held until his death in 1890. He was a Tractarian, theologically conservative, and widely popular, drawing crowds of 3,000 to 4,000 on Sundays.

**Melville, Henry (1798-1871)** Melville was a Low Church, evangelical priest in the Church of England. He held a number of positions over the course of his career, including incumbent of Camden Chapel, Camberwell, London; chaplain to Queen Victoria and to the Tower of London; Canon Residentiary of St. Paul's Cathedral; and

rector of Barnes, Surrey. He was considered one of the greatest preachers in England and counted John Ruskin, Robert Browning, and William Gladstone among his admirers. He was an able rhetorician with a literary style, owing to his practice of writing and revising his sermons several times before reading them from the pulpit, and his legacy was contained in the volumes of published sermons he left behind.

**Mozley, James Bowling (1813-1878)** Oxford educated, Mozley was an active participant in the Oxford Movement. Although he served in a couple priestly positions during his career, he was better known as a theologian than as a preacher; he was elected as a fellow at Magdalen College, Oxford, in 1840, and appointed Regius Professor of Divinity in 1871. His sermons were more widely known through the press than the pulpit. He was considered by contemporaries as perhaps the finest mind among the tractarians, on a par with Newman, and his Bampton Lectures on miracles in 1865 were highly regarded.

**Parker, Joseph (1830-1902)** After a series of appointments at other Congregational chapels, in Banbury and in Manchester, Parker settled in London in 1869 and soon began work on his City Temple chapel, which opened in 1874 and where he remained until his death in 1902. During his tenure in London, he served two times each as the chairman of the London Congregational Board and the Congregational Union of England and Wales. He was a leading force in English nonconformity, and alongside Charles Spurgeon and H. P. Liddon, he was one of the greatest preachers in London.

**Robertson, Frederick William (1816-1853)** Despite an early death and short preaching career spanning just thirteen years, F. W. Robertson's reputation as a preacher

grew in the second half of the nineteenth century, establishing him as one of the most influential preachers of the century. Educated at Oxford, his ministry began first in Winchester and then moved to Cheltenham before settling in Brighton for the last six years of his life, and he was often referred to as “Robertson of Brighton.” Though sympathetic to and influenced by elements of the High, Low, and Broad Church parties of the Anglican Church, he allied himself with none. He was considered an original preacher and was well-thought of among the more intellectual classes of Victorian society.

**Spurgeon, Charles Haddon (1834-1892)** For as many famed and remarkable preachers as there were in the Victorian era, none can claim the fame and popularity of the London Baptist Charles Spurgeon. Spurgeon was converted in 18, began preaching almost immediately thereafter at the age of sixteen. In 1851, at the age of eighteen, he became pastor of Waterbeach Baptist Chapel. Two years later he was invited to preach at the New Park Street Chapel in London, and a year later became pastor there. His congregation soon outgrew the chapel’s capacity, and he took to renting out Exeter Hall and Surrey Gardens Music Hall until construction of his vast Metropolitan Tabernacle could be completed. In 1861, the 6,000 seat Tabernacle opened, and he regularly preached to full congregations three times a week. In 1857 he preached a fast day sermon in response to the Indian Mutiny to a crowd of almost 24,000 at the Crystal Palace in London. Hearing him preach was something of a tourist attraction, and even George Eliot felt obliged to go hear him preach. His preaching output was prodigious. He delivered more than 3,000 sermons, and millions of copies were sold; they are still in print today.

In 1867 he started *The Sword and the Trowel*, a periodical which reached a circulation of 12,000. In 1857 he founded a pastor's college, and in 1867 an orphanage. Upon his death, over 100,000 people filed through to see his body in state. He preached a strict but not uncharitable Calvinistic, evangelical doctrine to which he remained faithful—even stubbornly so—to the end of his life.

**Stanley, Arthur Penrhyn (1815-1881)** Stanley was educated first at Rugby under Arnold, and then at Oxford. His early career was spent at Oxford where he took an active role in university politics. While there, he advocated for a principled broad church theology, and he allied himself with none of the parties that were in conflict there at the time. He left Oxford briefly when he accepted the canonry at Canterbury in 1851, but returned in 1858 as professor of ecclesiastical history and Canon of Christ Church. At the end of 1863 he was appointed Dean of Westminster Abbey. Besides his preaching there—which included notable funeral sermons for Lord Palmerston, Thomas Carlyle, Charles Dickens, Charles Lyell, and Charles Kingsley, among others—he was known for his work to preserve the historic treasures of the Abbey. Stanley was the leading liberal, Broad Church theologian of the Victorian era.

**Temple, Frederick (1821-1902)** Frederick Temple, a Broad Church theologian and eventual Archbishop of Canterbury, was educated at Oxford and spent his early career there in a number of educational positions. In 1857 he was appointed Headmaster of Rugby and instituted a number of reforms while there, including the enlargement of the curriculum to include art and science. He was caught up in the controversy surrounding *Essays and Reviews*, having contributed one of the essays; though his essay

on education was unexceptional, there was a sense of guilt by association, and his appointment as Bishop of Exeter in 1869 was (unsuccessfully) opposed as a result. As Bishop, he dedicated himself to social and educational reform, seeing education as the solution to the social ills of poverty. He preached the Bampton Lectures of 1884 on the relationship between religion and science. He was appointed as Bishop of London in 1885 and then as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1897, a position which he held until his death in 1902.

**Wordsworth, John (1843-1911)** Wordsworth (nephew of the poet William Wordsworth) was a priest in the Church of England. He was twice a Select Preacher at Oxford in 1876 and 1888, and the Bampton Lecturer in 1881. From 1883-1885 he was a professor of biblical interpretation at Oxford and Canon of Rochester, and Bishop of Salisbury from 1885-1911. The first of his Bampton lectures on *The One Religion : Truth, Holiness, and Peace Desired by the Nations and Revealed in Jesus Christ* was the impetus for what would become Mary Ward's *Robert Elsmere*.

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