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CHALLENGES TO RELIGIOUS
AUTHORITY.

CRITICISM OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND AS
EXPRESSED IN THREE VICTORIAN NOVELS.

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ABSTRACT

The opening chapter of this thesis describes the Church of England as it existed in the first half of the nineteenth-century. The close liason between the Established Church and the State is emphasised as is the involvement of the Church in many areas of Victorian life. Because, to a large extent, the Church is the Clergy the lives of many clerical representatives of the Church are discussed - and are found, on the whole, to be lacking in dedication. The three novels continue the method of examining the Church through depiction of its clergymen. Each novel presents a different challenge to the Established Church. *Shirley* by Charlotte Brontë, is critical of the Church because it misuses its Authority in its subjugation of women and finds false justification for this in scripture. Elizabeth Gaskell, in a covert way critices the Church by comparing it unfavourably with Unitarianism. George Eliot, in *Middlemarch* is deeply sceptical of the supernatural grounds for the Authority of the Church. She finds Authority in religious humanism. At the time the Church considered that its many problems were found either within itself due to its polarisation into Low and High Church, or else from without as the Dissenters and Roman Catholics increased in numbers. These three novels, however, consider problems which, although hardly of concern at the time, have since become major issues for the Church and its Authority.

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CHAPTER 1

In the late eighteenth century the relationship between Church and State was, on the whole, the same as it had been when the Established Church came into being under King Henry VIII. Peter Virgin comments on this situation. "The church, according to classic eighteenth - century theory, was a pillar of the constitution; and as such it was part and parcel of the system of law, as well as being the partner - some said the ally - of the state" (p. 15).

Virgin continues by describing the church as being under the protection of the great and powerful and maintained in its social place by a complex legal apparatus, which extended into financial, sacramental and educational areas. Every householder in England, irrespective of his religious affiliation, had to pay the church rate for the upkeep of the parish; baptism and marriage, if desired by any member of the population, had to be in Anglican churches, burial in the parish churchyard only by Anglican clergy using an Anglican order of service. The church had exclusive educational rights in that Roman Catholics and Dissenters were excluded from degrees at Cambridge and even from matriculating at Oxford (pp.15 - 16). These customs caused considerable resentment against the Established Church - a resentment which grew as the number of Dissenters increased. This reached explosive levels in the early 1830's.

Parliament wielded wide-reaching authority in the affairs of the church. Such matters as Orders of Service, the creation of new bishoprics, the laws governing pluralism, the number of cathedral posts and matters of church discipline were all the concern of Parliament. This did not mean that the church was the servant of the State. The eighteenth-century view was that there was interdependence, an "alliance" between the two. In the 1790's, however, the State was represented by the upper classes and, fearful of an English form of the French Revolution, they needed the church as a moral bastion, a force for social control. Paradoxically social control was achieved to a considerable degree not through the Established Church but through the Methodist revival. According to Elie Halevy "we shall explain by this movement (Methodism) the extraordinary stability which English

society was destined to enjoy throughout a period of revolution and crisis" (p. 387).

The success of the Methodist Church under Wesley and Whitefield raises the question as to why the Established Church failed to bring religion to the people and was "upstaged" by Dissent. The Evangelical movement, of course, was to some extent an exception, as showing an impulse towards reform within the Church of England, and we shall consider it presently.

There were many deficiencies in the late eighteenth - century and the early nineteenth-century church. Charges of pervasive slackness and abuses were levelled. Gerald Parsons has suggested that these were due not to pervasive failure but failure to reform energetically. Parsons describes the Church then as being "an essentially practical, rational, moderate church, with a low regard for mystery and emotion, a dislike of extremes, and an avoidance of organized churchmanship" (p. 19). E. E. Kellett has a similar opinion, suggesting that there was in the first thirty years of the nineteenth century a legacy from the eighteenth and that "such Christianity was hardly to be distinguished from a reasonable respectability" (p.25).

Such a church was in no condition to be an effective opposition to Dissent. Although Wesley remained an Anglican himself many Methodists, rejected by the Established Church, formed their new church and in so doing influenced other Dissenting denominations. They too gained in strength. The result was a loss to the Anglican church.

A further weakness in the Church of England was caused by the doubling of the population in England in the fifty years from 1800. There was an associated movement of people from rural areas to the new industrial towns. Both the State and the Church failed to adjust to these changes. Gerald Parsons comments that,

The Church of England of 1832 paralleled the unreformed Parliament in the mismatch between the geographical location of its human, financial and physical resources, and the growing centres of population in early nineteenth-century Britain. The diocesan and parochial systems had remained virtually unchanged for over 500 years. (p. 18).

Bradford, for example, expanded from 6393 in 1800 to 34,560 in 1841 but was still a single parish.

Just as Parliamentary reform included the need for greater representation so did the internal government of the church. At the time of the first Parliamentary Reform Bill in 1832 the Convocation of Canterbury and York had not met since 1717.

The lethargic state of the church was reflected in its buildings. Churches and parsonages had become dilapidated and neglected. Hart and Carpenter describe a typical situation.

The altar, wrote Dean Hole of the church of his childhood, was represented by a small rickety deal table, with a scanty covering and faded and patched green baize, on which were placed the overcoat, hat and riding whip of the officiating minister. . . . The font was filled with coffin ropes, tinder boxes and brimstone matches, candle ends, etc. It was never used for baptism. Sparrows twittered and bats floated beneath the rotten timbers (p. 4).

Not only were buildings in this lamentable state but there was a grave shortage of churches in the towns and in the new manufacturing centres. There were, for example, 1,220,000 people in the diocese of London with church-room for only 336,500. St. Matthew's, Bethnal Green could accommodate only 4% of the population.

The wealth or poverty of a diocese bore no relation to its size and population. There were incredible inequalities. The classic case was Chester, where one of the largest yet poorest districts included within its boundaries Liverpool and Manchester. At the diocesan level Episcopal incomes varied considerably. The ten wealthiest sees had an average annual income of £11,634 and the wealthiest of all an income of £22,305; but the average income of the remaining sixteen sees was less than £3000. They varied no less strikingly at the parochial level: whilst the richest of livings was worth over £1000 a year there were, in the 1830's, over 3,500 livings worth less than £150. Curates received even less. The consequences of such anomalies for the quality of pastoral care ranged from the disturbing to the appalling" (Parsons 18 - 19).

Every benefice in the Church of England had a patron. Some benefices were the gift of the Crown, others those of church dignitaries, colleges and public institutions, trustees, London companies and guilds and an enormous range of private citizens. Alan Haig's research concludes that in the period 1821 to 1901 the number of benefices grew by some 3500 to over 14000. Throughout, benefices in the gifts of private individuals or of trusts made up between 48 and 53 percent of the whole (p. 249). The private benefices were predominantly in rural areas. Private livings were usually obtained by purchase or given away from interested motives - that is, given to a son or relative.

The financial position of incumbents varied considerably. Francis Knight quotes the case, in 1848, of two Lincolnshire incumbents who were so destitute that they could have died of starvation. Knight suggests that these cases, although extreme, were perhaps not isolated examples. Incumbents in poverty, particularly the elderly and frail, were often supported without fuss or publicity by neighbouring clergy (p. 130). 16% of the total English benefices were valued at £100 and under. By contrast 4% of the total were worth between £1000 and £2000. An average of 54% of the total were in the low-income range of values of £300 or less. This was the situation in 1830. Haig suggests that £300 marked the boundary between keeping up a respectable middle class appearance and having to struggle (p. 304). Bishop Kay considered that £200 was the absolute minimum.

Knight points out that the clergy were expected also to relieve the poor and to pay any curate if one was employed. For an incumbent with a family and no private income a stipend of £500 was hardly sufficient (p. 132). Haig considers that "What kept the clergy - and hence the parochial system as a whole afloat - financially, was the amount of their private means. The fact was generally acknowledged in the mid-century years" (p. 307).

Absenteeism and pluralism were other legacies of the pre-reform church. In 1827, of 10,544 benefices the incumbents of only 4413 were resident. Most of them, holding more than one living, resided in one of the benefices and hardly ever saw their other one or two livings which were served by curates. A few absentee clergymen, like Trollope's Dr. Stanhope, lived overseas. The lot of a pluralist was not, however, always easy. In 1857 D. S. Wayland held three livings

but after paying his curates a total of £225 had very little remaining and described himself as a poor man.

As part of the general reforms in the church the Pluralities Acts of 1838 and 1850 placed a gradual reduction on the holdings of plural livings. As more incumbents started to reside in their livings the number of sole-charge curacies was reduced and curates became assistants to the incumbents. But such reforms were still in the future, so far as our novels are concerned.

The lot of curates was unenviable. Because incumbencies could not be held before ordination as a priest there was some period, always at least a year, as a curate. In the mid-century this became a serious problem as the necessary period between ordination and incumbency was increasing and some clergy seemed to have less chance of obtaining a living within say fifteen years. Many waited much longer. For a large majority curacies were the sole employment before their first benefice. A less important role lay in the area of chaplaincies. Most men who pursued this option did so for only a short period between curacies and livings. Full-time chaplains seem to have numbered no more than three to four hundred. Most were paid comparably to curates, some as low as £65 p.a. and as high as £250. The posts seem to have been either restful berths for men who had no need for concern at their small incomes, or modest jobs akin to curacies but with a certain degree of stability, taken by men of few means or connections. The latter fact seems confirmed by the predominance of non-Oxbridge men among those who held chaplaincies for significant periods (Haig p. 217).

As noted above, the term "curate" had changed its meaning from a sole-charge position to that of being an assistant to a resident incumbent. Efforts were made through such agencies as the Curates Augmentation Fund to raise the stipend but little was achieved. On the whole the lot of the curates was lamentable. There was a tendency for an incumbent to hand over all the work to the curates who toiled mightily with little financial recompense.

While much emphasis is directed at the financial plight of both incumbents and curates who lacked private means there was also a stratum of "gentlemen clergy" who had no financial problems. This

group seems to have enjoyed sport and numerous other pursuits. Hart and Carpenter consider that,

possibly the eighteenth-century saw more parsons indulging in the pastimes of hunting, shooting, drinking, cock fighting, dicing and card playing than at any other time before or since. Many scandals were caused, but few clergymen were indicted (p. xxvi).

A good example, quoted by Hart and Carpenter, is James Woodeforde who was a gentleman and a scholar with an income of £400 per year.

The famous diary he kept is mainly concerned with six matters: detailed descriptions of the large meals he ate; his visits to neighbouring gentry and clergy, where besides the food consumed the chief occupation was card-playing, or sometimes in the summer bowling, for money; frequent expeditions to Norwich; long holidays with relations in the West country; personal affairs; and Church duties; in that order of importance (p. xxvii).

Woodeforde was at home with the gentry and his bishop, but was also described as being the Good Samaritan.

Hart and Carpenter refer also to the nineteenth-century Squarson: the Black Squire of the countryside "who was of good birth, possessed ample private means beyond what his rich benefice brought him and ruled his parish like a benevolent autocrat" (p.xxix).

Another term for such clergymen is "High and Dry." Robert Lee Wolff, writing about the early 1830's comments that while the church needed reform in such areas as nepotism, absenteeism and neglect of parish duties,

many of the clergy remained unmoved, "high and dry", living the lives of country gentlemen and comfortably indifferent to the needs of their poorer parishioners, administering communion four times a year (though gingerly moving in some advanced regions towards monthly celebrations), clinging to psalms rather than adopting the hymns of Evangelical worship, allowing the fabric of many village churches to decay, and acting like minor

officials of the state - which, in a way they were - rather than spiritual leaders (p. 19).

R. W. Church writes of them:

Its better members were highly cultivated, benevolent men whose lives were governed by an unostentatious but solid and unfaltering piety, ready to burst forth on occasion into fervid devotion. Its worse members were jobbers and hunters after preferment, pluralists who built fortunes and endowed families out of the Church, or country gentlemen in orders, who rode to hounds and shot and danced and farmed and often did worse things (pp. 14-15).

Many of these clergymen conformed in most respects to the traditional stereotype of the huntin' and fishin' school. Hart reports the Bishop of Exeter, Phillpotts, saying to one of his clergy that he didn't complain that he hunted but that he didn't do anything else (p. 25). Hart's research has also found a remarkable little book entitled *Wilke's Essays on the Signs of Conversion or Non-Conversion of Ministers of the Church of England*, one sentence of which ran as follows:

The conscientious clergyman will neither devote his morning to the chase nor his evenings to the card table; he will not be the steward of the racecourse, nor the litigious guardian of the Game Laws; he will not be the frivolous companion of female amusement nor the boisterous associate of Bacchanalian carousal (p. 47).

Hart states that as late as the eighteen-thirties ordinands for the Salisbury diocese were required to read it.

It is obvious that the clergyman who acts in the reprehensible manner described in Wilke's essay has insufficient regard for the Authority of the Church. Hart provides several examples of this. The rector of Perivale, near Ealing, then a little village, would have his butler stand at the church door of a Sunday morning to ask those who came whether they would prefer Mattins in church or a glass of ale at the rectory. Another, the Rev. John Bythesea, a rector of Bagendon in Gloucestershire from 1800 - 1845, was averse to taking too many

services; "for he sent his Clerk to the church of a Sunday afternoon with a bag of sixpences, and instructions to turn away any would-be worshippers. This practice, apparently was not uncommon in Lincolnshire as well as Gloucestershire" (Hart p.46). Some incumbents were even worse and Hart relates accounts of smuggling clergymen who hid the brandy casks in the church. In Devon and Cornwall a ship aground on the rocks was regarded as a gift from God and both parson and people were more concerned with salvaging its stores than saving the lives of its crew and passengers (Hart pp. 55-6).

Although the church reformed itself in the last sixty years of the nineteenth century the "reformed" parson remained a country gentleman. The younger sons of upper class, moneyed, families were happy to become parsons and establish themselves in pleasant rural parsonages. As the century moved on, however, there was, in keeping with the Victorian ethic, a greater seriousness and far more dedication to the needs of the parish.

The changed attitude was reflected also in the courts of law. At the beginning of the century many clergymen were magistrates. From the 1850's onwards the number of clerical magistrates slowly declined with the realization that the two roles were fundamentally incompatible from a Christian point of view.

When considering the nineteenth-century clergyman the question arises as to what extent the ministry was a profession or a calling. There seems little doubt that until 1832 it was mainly regarded as one profession among the others - medicine, law and the armed forces. There was not always a spiritual reason or motivation to become a clergyman. Haig quotes *The Parent's handbook*, by J. C. Hudson, which appeared in 1842. The first chapter was on the Church and motivation or dedication never mentioned; all was to do with money.

There should be no difficulty whatever in purchasing through the medium of any of the clerical agents the next presentation of a living, and one of £300 with an incumbent aged over 60 years might be had for less than £1000. (p. 9).

A further reason for taking orders was social, in that a wealthy man who had prospered in "trade" and was not considered a gentleman, by sending his son to Oxbridge and purchasing a good living, would ensure

that his son could be elevated to the gentry. In 1827 ninety-one per cent of graduates from Oxbridge became ordinands. One wonders whether this was because more men wished to become clergymen, or whether an improving general economy allowed more to attend university, who then found no opening other than the Church.

Whether lack of occupational opportunity was the reason for taking orders, or not, it is noteworthy that many clergymen continued to pursue knowledge in a variety of different disciplines. Peter Virgin describes the clergy's contribution to learning across a wide range of subjects as being formidable.

Butler and Berkeley in philosophy; Sterne in literature; Malthus and Whateley in political economy; Crabbe in poetry; Stephen Hales in chemistry; William Buckland in geology and mineralogy; Thoman Arnold in ancient history; Gilbert White in natural history and Burn in law. These were among the most original and gifted, but there was also plenty of talent lower down the intellectual ladder; after all, one in six of the parish clergy had been at some time a don (p. 256).

Despite the emphasis on University education for clergymen, it is paradoxical that specific training for them in their future roles was non-existent at the universities before the 1830's. Halevy comments that,

England was probably the sole country in Christendom where no proof of theological knowledge was exacted before ordination. At Oxford theology was reduced to one single question asked of all candidates for examination. At Cambridge no theology whatsoever entered into any of the examinations for a degree (p. 391).

Haig refers to the "simple inflexibility of the universities at the crucial time, 1840 to 1860: while the Church was maintaining a rapid growth of clergy, the universities, static or only growing slowly in number, perforce provided a lesser proportion of the new clergy" (p. 117). It was the development of other training institutions, which helped to make up the shortfall. Such colleges as St. Bees and St. Aidans and King's College in London became available to train non-graduate clergy. From the 1860's, about one-quarter of ordained ministers had been trained in these institutions.

The Church, in the early nineteenth century, would seem to have discounted these non-university institutions. Haig suggests "their existence was regarded as cause for shame or regret rather than for pride. The Church's "official" reaction, when it came, was reluctant and inept" (p. 116).

The reason for this attitude was undoubtedly social. Halevy, commenting on the situation in 1815, wrote

Above all things clergymen must be gentlemen; and to secure this it was of the first importance that they should receive the education, which all English gentlemen received. The Anglican clergy was, and was anxious to remain, a branch of the aristocracy (p. 393).

To emphasize this point Halevy proceeds to record that the choice of archbishops and bishops was political and as the Tories had enjoyed almost uninterrupted power, these men were all Tories as well as being of noble birth. The appointment of the lower clergy was in the hands of the bishops, who were careful to distribute their patronages among their clients and relatives (pp. 393-4). Halevy concludes "Thus did the ecclesiastical constitution of the country harmonize with the political. The landed gentry were masters equally of the ecclesiastical as of the civil administration (p. 394). Halevy's comments apply to England in 1815 when the Church was truly established and in great need of reform. Reform of the Church did occur after 1830 and one of the reasons for this was the growth of the Evangelical movement within the Church itself.

The faith of the Evangelicals is not a particularly intellectual one. It is necessary for man to experience God through "conversion". He must listen to God's word: he must spread that word to others. Because God speaks through the conscience this means following the "inner light". Evangelicals may be Calvinists, meaning that they are predestined to either salvation or damnation, there is nothing they can do themselves to earn or to merit justifying faith. Other Evangelicals may embrace a gentler doctrine, that of Arminianism, which accepts the possibility of universal salvation. All Evangelicals believe that salvation is obtained through faith and the atonement and that

Authority is to be found in the Bible which is inerrant. Evangelicals are known as Low Church.

Although involved in the reform of the Church, its Evangelical wing had existed as a small minority at the end of the eighteenth century. From very small beginnings under Wilberforce and the Clapham sect, it went on in the years after 1785 to become a huge organization achieving great social reforms. Despite its deep dissatisfaction with the ecclesiastical status quo it remained within the established church. Among its many achievements were the abolition of slavery and the formation of the Church Missionary Society.

Evangelicalism was a reaction to eighteenth-century Latitudinarianism. This school was represented by the Cambridge Platonists who disregarded authority and tradition in matters of faith and asserted the supremacy of reason. Influenced by Platonic thought they attempted to wed philosophy and religion with the aim of constructing a philosophical Christianity on the basis of reason. Latitudinarians reasoned that the questioning mind should not be disregarded when considering matters of faith, but that the two aspects should blend together to provide a more acceptable religion. Hart comments,

Such men had been brought up on Archbishop Tillotson's sermons and Locke's *Reasonableness of Religion* and were of the latitudinarian school of thought, deprecating the marvellous and miraculous in religion, laying stress on reason, morality and practical Christianity, and championing the alliance between science and theology. . . . They were kind gentlemanly clerics who abhorred anything in the nature of "enthusiasm" and so vigorously opposed John Wesley and all his works (pp. xxvi - xxvii).

The rise of Evangelicalism, with its rejection of reason, caused the influence of Latitudinarianism to diminish considerably. Nevertheless we are able to discern Latitudinarian ideas expressed by some of the characters in the novels we are about to consider.

After 1830, as we have seen, the Church did commence to reform itself. The strengths of the non-conformist churches, in both numbers and in dedication, meant, according to Peter Virgin, that,

The virtual hegemony enjoyed by the Anglican establishment over many areas of eighteenth-century English life was now almost a thing of the past, a distant memory, and a more religiously varied, but also fragmented society was emerging. Of the reality of this kind of society there came gradually, to be little room for doubt, and its existence was tacitly admitted when in 1828, Parliament repeated the Test and Corporation Acts (pp. 18-19).

These measures enabled Dissenters to sit in Parliament as of right. Within a year similar rights were extended to Roman Catholics. The government came to realise that it was impossible to have political equality when large numbers of the populace were excluded politically through religious affiliations.

Disestablishment - for that is what it amounted to - was followed by Church growth in both quality and numbers. The Victorian bishops worked harder and more closely with their clergy. Chadwick considers it beyond doubt that the clergy of 1860 were more zealous than the clergy of 1830 in all areas of parish life (p. 127).

This thirty-year period, however, was not without discord between the Evangelical and the traditional High Church wings of Anglicanism.

Occupying the opposite pole to the evangelicals was the High Church, the "highest" of which was the Oxford Movement under Newman, Keble, Pusey and others. This represented the Catholic faction and was deeply critical of any interference by the State in Church affairs. The Oxford Movement wished to return the Church to its early pre-Reformation origins as expressed by the Fathers of the Church. As such it tended to introduce various Catholic practices such as confession and it placed greater emphasis on the sacraments. Because of the number of tracts which the leaders of the Oxford Movement wrote and distributed its followers were also known as Tractarians. These High Church Anglicans found their authority in the apostolicity of the Church itself.

The novels considered in the following chapters are concerned with Low and High Church clergymen and with the beliefs and doctrines which they hold. Each novel, however, concentrates on a particular problem - one which, at the time, was not considered to be a threat to the

Established Church - but which has subsequently grown until today it is a major issue for Anglicanism.

Chapter 2

"It was a joyous scene, and a scene to do good: it was a day of happiness for rich and poor; the work, first, of God, and then of the clergy. Let England's priests have their due: they are a faulty set in some respects, being only of common flesh and blood, like us all; but the land would be badly off without them: Britain would miss her church, if that church fell. God save it! God also reform it! (p. 337 - 8).

These words, by the narrator in *Shirley* summarise several themes which occur throughout the novel. On the one hand we see the love for God and the Established Church expressed, yet on the other hand there is fear that the Church may fall. The clergy perform an important role yet they are found wanting. Reform of both Church and clergy is called for. Throughout the book we learn of this need for reform, not only in the Church but in other areas of Victorian life.

We read, in Shirley Keeldar's remarks to Mr. Yorke, Charlotte Brontë's most trenchant criticism of the Church.

"When I hear Messrs. Malone and Donne chatter about the authority of the Church, the dignity and claims of the priesthood, the deference due to them as clergymen; when I hear the outbreaks of their small spite against Dissenters; when I witness their silly narrow jealousies and assumptions; when their palaver about forms, and traditions, and superstitions, is sounding in my ear; when I behold their insolent carriage to the poor, their often base servility to the rich, I think the Establishment is indeed in a poor way, and both she and her sons appear in the utmost need of reformation" (p. 416).

It is thus obvious that Charlotte Brontë loves the Church but is critical of it and calls for its reform. The novel, although published in 1849, was set in 1812, a time when the Church of England came under widespread attack and was found to be lacking in many areas, particularly in its care for the under-privileged. This was the period also of the Napoleonic wars and the Luddite riots. We read of severe unemployment, destitute families, hard-pressed manufacturers trying to survive and draconian measures taken by the Establishment to maintain

social control. If ever there is a time for the Church and its clergy to act with Christian love and concern for those in need it is the present but Brontë shows us clergymen who not only ignore the needy but take an active part in persecuting them.

We read of Mr. Helstone, a clergyman who provides military support to the industrialists against the rioters whose women and children are virtually starving. There is no doubt that clergymen with similar views to Helstone did exist. Tom Winnifrith writes, "Mr. Helstone, as an old-fashioned Church and State Tory, is a rather out-of-date figure though as late as the Reform Bill there were probably many clergymen like him" (p. 171).

The intense patriotism demonstrated by Helstone was probably fuelled by the rise of dissent. We see Helstone in another confrontation here - in the march when the Dissenters were routed. William Gibson comments on this.

What worried the Government, and the Church in particular, was the attempt by some to argue that religion was in essence revolutionary. Samuel Taylor Coleridge in Bristol, in 1795, emphasized the revolutionary nature of Christianity, speaking ominously of Christ as a reformer, and of the poverty of the apostles. Such views were rare among the Anglican clergy but were perceived as widespread in Dissent (p. 50).

Helstone obviously considers the Dissenters to be revolutionary and is thus a true representative of the alliance between Church and State. Already in the previous chapter we have noted Virgin's description of the Church and the way in which it was involved in many secular areas such as finance, education and the professions. Here Helstone not only acts as a militiaman in defending the mill, but he also hunts down the perpetrators so that they can be brought to trial. We see the Church-State alliance here also because in 1834 one fifth of the magistrates were Anglican clergymen.

Gibson quotes another example of the close association of Church and State in the case of Bishop Horsley, who, in 1798, even asked the clergy to mobilise into an armed militia for the final defence of the nation against any armed invasion from France. Horsley also denounced the Methodist schools and sought to destroy them where he could. He

saw Methodist opposition to Pitt's anti- sedition legislation as proof of their treason (p. 51).

In *Shirley* it is significant that the author positions the account of the march and the confrontation in the same chapter as the attack on the mill. The intolerance of the Church to both Dissenters and rioters is thus emphasized. The Established Church is seen to support the government, which is oppressing the poor, and Brontë shows this association between Church and State.

The historian W. R. Ward has argued that the town represented materialism, dissent and change whereas the Church was essentially rural, paternalistic and conservative. It was therefore no surprise to Ward that the bishops in the House of Lords did not support factory and mining reform (Gibson pp. 89-90). In other words, an opportunity to alleviate the plight of women and children was rejected by the leaders of the Church. Charlotte Brontë is certainly critical of the clergy in *Shirley* and we have noted her remarks regarding Helstone and the curates Malone and Dunne. In fact the only clergyman who wins her approval is Mr. Hall, who cares for the under-privileged and the disadvantaged. He shows true Christian love for others. The author, however, takes pains to emphasise that Church of England laymen also are culpable in that they fail to be worthy representatives of the Church to which they belong.

An example is Robert Moore, who attends church but fails to be an upholder of the Christian life. He is intensely materialistic. To save his mill is everything even if it costs lives or necessitates making an uneasy peace with France. Lack of money causes him to propose marriage to Shirley. His criticism of the unmarried spinsters shows a lack of Christian charity and a mean spirit.

Mr. Sympson, another Anglican layman, is criticized severely. He represents those churchmen who, while enjoying a comfortable life-style, dominate others. Through maintaining those trivial and narrow-minded customs of the Church, which are unimportant, they consider themselves to be good members of it. The author uses *Shirley* to express her disapproval of such hypocrites. She says to Mr. Sympson,

"Your thoughts are not my thoughts, your aims are not my aims, your gods are not my gods. We do not view things in the same

light; we do not measure them by the same standard; we hardly speak in the same tongue. Let us part. . . . As to your small maxims, your narrow rules, your little prejudices, aversions, dogmas, bundle them off: Mr. Sympson - go, offer them a sacrifice to the deity you worship; I'll none of them: I wash my hands of the lot. I walk by another creed, light, faith, and hope than you."

"Another creed! I believe she is an infidel."

"An infidel to your religion; an atheist to your god." "An - atheist!!! " "Your god, sir, is the World. In my eyes, you too, if not an infidel, are an idolater" (p. 633).

In this exchange Shirley criticizes not only the way the Church is represented but also the alliance of Church and State when she tells Sympson that his god is the world.

Throughout this novel we find the Church and its members, whether clergy or lay, to be censured. The Church itself, however, perceived its problems to be due to the burgeoning of Dissent and Tractarianism. Ignoring this, Charlotte Brontë reserves her most trenchant criticism for the way in which the Church treated women and the oppressed. History has subsequently proved that the objections in *Shirley* to male chauvinism, which existed as a policy, almost a doctrine, of the Church were to become as great an issue within the Church as doctrinal threats from outside it. Because Brontë placed so much emphasis on this particular criticism of the Church we must consider feminist themes in *Shirley* and the author's perception of the ways in which the Church fostered patriarchy.

Brontë shows the Church as the prime mover behind almost all the ways in which women are subjected to the will of men. This domination is apparent in the representatives of the Church whom we meet in the opening pages of the novel. These men, the curates and Mr. Helstone have already been discussed and criticised for their lack of concern for others and for many other failings but Brontë reserves her deepest censure for the way in which they treat women. The first direct speech we read is that of Malone to Mrs. Gale when he cries "More bread!" When she arrives with the loaf he orders "Cut it, woman" (p. 11). This brief example of high-handedness towards women is indicative of Malone's attitude throughout.

Malone and his fellow curates appear to be typical of many curates living at that time. Malone is said to be modelled on Mr. Brontë's curate, Mr. Smith. Another of Mr. Brontë's curates, Mr. Collins, drank. Valerie Myer reports a letter from Charlotte to Ellen Nussey written on 18 June 1845.

I have no desire at all to see your medical- clerical curate - I think he must be like all the other curates I have seen - and they seem to me a self-seeking, vain, empty race. At this blessed moment we have no less than three of them in Haworth Parish - and God knows there is not one to mend another (p. 76).

It was not only the curates who held this cavalier attitude to women; it was apparent in Anglican laymen and in other ranks of clergy. Helstone, for example "Made no pretence of comprehending women, or comparing them with men: they were a different, probably a very inferior order of existence; a wife could not be her husband's companion, much less his confidant, much less his stay" (p. 61). We are not surprised to read later what Helstone privately thought of women,

At heart he could not abide sense in women: he liked to see them as silly, as light-headed, as vain, as open to ridicule as possible; because they were then in reality what he held them to be, and wished them to be, - inferior: toys to play with, to amuse a vacant hour and to be thrown away (p. 130).

With such an attitude to women as this - and we may safely assume that other Victorian men as well as Helstone held it - it is not surprising that the Victorian marriage was decidedly patriarchal. Walter Houghton writes,

Of the three conceptions of woman current in the Victorian period, the best known is that of the submissive wife whose whole excuse for being was to love, honour, obey - and amuse - her lord and master, and to manage his household and bring up his children. In that role her character and her life were completely distinct from his (p. 348).

We see this attitude to marriage expressed not only by representatives of the Church but by other men such as Robert Moore who, as we have

seen, proposes to Shirley Keeldar purely to save his mills from bankruptcy. The author describes other marriages in which women are portrayed as little else than a commodity to be purchased for a variety of reasons, none of which are the right ones. We read of Mr. Wynne proposing marriage in form for his son, Samuel Fawthorp Wynne.

"Decidedly suitable! Most proper!" pronounced Mr. Sympson. "A fine unencumbered estate; real substance; good connections. It *must be done!*" He sent for his niece to the oak-parlour; he shut himself up there with her alone; he communicated the offer; he gave his opinion; he claimed her consent. It was withheld. "I ask why? I must have a reason. In all respects he is more than worthy of you." . . . "He has twice your money, - twice your common sense; - equal connections, - equal responsibility" (pp. 531-2).

On the next page Shirley gives her reason. "Before I marry, I am resolved to esteem, to admire, to love." Her uncle replies. "Preposterous stuff! - indecorous! - unwomanly!" Not only does this domineering uncle attempt to force his niece into marriage for financial and social reasons, he considers that it is unwomanly to love. Furthermore the proposal is not made from the suitor to the woman but from the man's father to the woman's uncle. This is not a marriage proposal, it is a transaction. Nothing could be more chauvinistic. What is particularly reprehensible about it is that Shirley's fate is being decided by Anglican laymen. We know this because Mr. Sympson considers himself to be a devout member of the Established Church and would not consider a proposal from Mr. Wynn unless he were Anglican also.

Barbara Gates comments,

All the men in the novel, no matter what their political views, agree with the view of marriage expressed by Peter Malone. 'If there is one notion I hate more than another, it is that of marriage . . . in the vulgar weak sense, as a mere matter of sentiment; two beggarly fools agreeing to unite their indigence by some fantastic tie of feeling . . . But an advantageous connexion, such as can be formed in consonance with dignity of views, and permanency of solid interests, is not so bad.' In

this novel men and women seem to have nothing in common" (p. 225).

Malone, a man of the cloth, has designs on Caroline because he mistakenly believes she is an heiress.

What is particularly deplorable about the attitudes to marriage expressed by both clergy and laymen is that in their church, the Church of England, marriage is a sacrament. It is not a business contract. When we read "the Form of Solemnization of Marriage" in the prayer book, however, we realise the extent to which the Church endorses patriarchy. The causes for which matrimony was ordained, the procreation of children, the avoidance of fornication and the mutual society, help, and comfort that one ought to have of the other tend to favour the husband and the vows are even more male dominant: the couple promise to love, to honour, to keep each other in sickness and in health but only the woman promises to obey and serve her husband. One cannot help wondering whether the "help" from the woman to the man refers to her dowry or marriage settlement. There is considerable emphasis on marriage in this novel. Perhaps one reason for this, among others, is that it is the one occasion in a woman's life when she gives formal assent to the patriarchal situation which has dominated her life and will continue to do so.

In Caroline and Shirley we have two different responses to this patriarchal attitude to marriage. Caroline, because she loves Robert Moore, is more than prepared to accept the status quo. She is willing to "obey" Robert. There is a practical side to this also because, other than marriage, what can she do? This is another great issue, which faced Victorian woman, and it is due entirely to male chauvinism. Caroline asks herself.

"What was I created for I wonder? Where is my place in the world?" She mused again. "Ah! I see," she pursued presently, "that is the question which most old maids are puzzled to solve: other people solve it for them by saying, "Your place is to do good to others, to be helpful whenever help is wanted." That is right in some measure and a very convenient doctrine for the people who hold it; but I perceive that certain sets of human beings are very apt to maintain that other sets should give up their lives to them and their service, and then they requite

them by praise: they call them devoted and virtuous. Is this enough? Is it to live? . . . Does virtue lie in abnegation of self? I do not believe it" (p. 194).

Caroline asks the question - "What was I created for?" This is a religious question because creation is one of God's activities. So here the blame is on those who represent God for not providing fulfillment for half of his creatures. In other words, the Church errs in its male chauvinist teaching which denies women entrance to the professions or to any worthwhile work.

The frustration of Victorian women concerning their situation is expressed frankly by Caroline and Shirley.

"Caroline," demanded Miss Keeldar, abruptly, "don't you wish you had a profession - a trade?" "I wish it fifty times a day. As it is, I often wonder what I came into the world for. I long to have something absorbing and compulsory to fill my head and hands, and to occupy my thoughts." "Can labour alone make a human being happy?" "No; but it can give varieties of pain, and prevent us from breaking our hearts with a single tyrant master-torture. Besides, successful labour has its recompense: a vacant, weary, lonely, hopeless life has none" (p. 257).

Not only did male chauvinism exclude women from satisfying work it also ensured that university education was denied them. There is no doubt that the Church was responsible for this as the colleges at both universities were foundations of the Church. This situation was to continue for many years. Even eighty years after the publishing of Shirley Virginia Woolf, writing in *A Room of One's Own*, relates how she was refused admittance to a university library because ladies were only admitted if accompanied by a fellow of the College or furnished with a letter of introduction (p. 17).

In order to appreciate the effect which the attitude of the Church had on women and others who were oppressed, it is helpful to return briefly to the curates because their attitude and their conduct to the under-privileged reveals deficiencies in the Church. Throughout the book we see the curates eating. For example, at the mill with Robert Moore, Malone has still more to eat even though he has just had a large dinner at Dunne's lodgings. The consumption of food is

emphasised throughout the novel but this first description of the curates eating hugely is followed immediately by a description of an attempt by famished workers to prevent the delivery of new machinery to the mill. So the hearty food of the curates, who represent the Church, is contrasted with the hunger of those without work. In the novel there are many instances of this contrast between hungry people and clergy who abuse the authority of the Church.

In *Shirley* food represents love. The curates are not reported as giving food to the needy, they retain it all for themselves. Similarly they give no love to anyone. Their concern as churchmen is for petty niceties of dogma rather than "the feeding of their lambs". Like food, love is nourishing and we see this, or its deprivation, most markedly in the case of Caroline. Love is nourishing and Caroline has received no love from Mr. Helstone, she has, as far as she is aware, no mother and Robert Moore ignores her. She is unable to break out of her situation in the world. Judith Mitchell writes of this. "Nevertheless love is portrayed in *Shirley* as necessary for life itself. This is made clear not only in the events of the novel, which portray Caroline being literally rescued from death by love, but also in the recurring metaphor of love as food' (p. 64).

The association of food and love forms the theme of the first chapter in Volume 3 - *The Valley of the Shadow of Death*. Throughout this chapter Caroline is unable to eat. She wonders why herself. "I look well; why can I not eat? (p. 474). The narrator leaves us in no doubt that this is due to her love for Robert Moore, a love which she thinks is not returned. Not only this but she feels unloved by everyone. She says, "Sometimes I wish somebody in the world loved me" (p. 422). She literally starves for love, almost to the point of death. Attempts to persuade Caroline to eat all fail.

"Have you eaten anything to-day Caroline?"

"I cannot eat." And later Caroline asks Mrs. Pryor, "Do you think I shall not get better? I do not feel very ill - only weak."

"But your mind, Caroline: your mind is crushed; your heart is almost broken: you have been so neglected, so repulsed, left so desolate" (p. 485).

Gilbert and Gubar write of Caroline,

Consumed by sorrow, she cannot eat, reminding us again of the prominence of anorexia nervosa as a female dis-ease and as a theme in women's literature; Caroline has received stones instead of bread, so she denies herself the traditional symbol of love. But of course, like so many other girls suffering from this disease (all of whose case histories reveal a paralyzing feeling of ineffectiveness), Caroline has good reason to believe that the only control she can exert is over her own body, since she is completely ineffectual at altering her intolerable lot in the world (p. 390).

Gilbert and Gubar, no doubt, include the lack of a fulfilling role as a contributing factor in Caroline's illness as well as the deprivation of love.

Gilbert and Gubar see Caroline's self-starvation not only as a denial of food as being the symbol of love but also as a kind of protest - a rejection of what patriarchal society has defined as nourishing but which obviously she does not. They suggest that because eating maintains the self, in a discredited world it is a compromise implying acquiescence. "Women will starve in silence, Brontë seems to imply, until new stories are created that confer upon them the power of naming themselves and controlling their world" (p. 391).

Gilbert and Gubar consider that Caroline's self-starvation has a deeper and more complex meaning than that which is usually associated with anorexics.

Earlier in the novel, as we have seen, Brontë carefully associated food with the voracious curates, the Sunday school feast, Mr. Helstone's tea table and Shirley's supplies for the mill owners. In some ways, then, Caroline's rejection of food is a response not only to these characters but also to their definitions of communion and redemption (p. 391).

Gilbert and Gubar proceed to suggest that the myth of origins in Genesis, in which a woman is condemned for eating, reflects male

hatred of the female, and fear of her sustaining or strengthening herself. "Caroline has internalized the injunction not to eat, not to speak, and not to be first . . . In other words, Caroline's silent slow suicide implies all the ways in which she has been victimized by male myths" (p. 391).

We may find it difficult to agree with Gilbert and Gubar in their hypothesis that the Genesis myth "reflects male hatred of the female and fear of her sustaining or strengthening herself". The connection between Caroline's rejection of food and the various characters' definitions of communion and redemption, appear also to be tenuous. The question of the male myths, however, has been raised and should now be considered. It is through these myths that Charlotte Brontë explains the origin and the persistent power of male patriarchy.

The myth which has been largely responsible for the subjugation of women is found in the book of Genesis. There are several places in the account which appear to justify this. We read such verses as "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (Gen 3:16) and "The Lord God said, it is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (Gen 2:18). Here a "helper" is a subordinate position. God created Adam from the dust but he made Eve from Adam almost as if Eve is another "member" of Adam's body. God berates Adam for listening to his wife. The whole story casts Eve in a lower position than Adam. Gerstenberger comments,

The woman lures the man into disobeying the deity and is therefore more seriously punished than the equally sinful Adam. As a result the social hierarchy is set in patriarchal terms. . . . It is a way to legitimate patriarchal claims to leadership that have been operative as far back as human beings can remember (p. 21).

But it is surely the Genesis story of creation which has had the greatest effect in the subjugation of women and which has made God the author of that subjugation. When we consider the myth, for myth it is, we are naturally drawn to Milton's view of creation as he has written it in *Paradise Lost*. Milton's view is patriarchal. Virginia Woolf puts this quite plainly when she suggested that literate women "must look past Milton's bogey, for no human being should shut out the view" (p. 117). While commenting that no one is exactly sure what Milton's bogey

is, Gilbert and Gubar consider that "other Woolfian allusions to Milton reinforce the idea that for her, as for most other woman writers, both he and the creatures of his imagination constitute the misogynistic essence of what Gertrude Stein called 'patriarchal poetry'" (p. 188).

Charlotte Brontë is certainly numbered among the writers who saw Milton in this light. Shirley Keeldar's questions go to the heart of the matter.

"Milton was great: but was he good? His brain was right: how was his heart? He saw Heaven: he looked down on Hell. He saw Satan, and Sin his daughter, and Death their horrible offspring. Milton tried to see the first woman; but, Cary, he saw her not."

"You are bold to say so Shirley"

"Not more bold than faithful. It was his cook that he saw; or it was Mrs. Gill, as I have seen her, making custards, in the heat of summer, in the cool dairy, with rose-trees and nasturtiums about the latticed window, preparing a cold collation for the Rectors, - preserves, and 'dulcet creams - puzzled 'what choice to choose for delicacy best; what order so contrived as not to mix tastes, not well-joined, inelegant, but bring taste after taste, upheld with kindest change'" (p. 359).

These lines, which Shirley quotes from Book V of *Paradise Lost* confirm her view of Milton's Eve. In the poem Eve "ministers" to Adam and Raphael. She has no part, it seems, in the discussions. She does appear to be in the same role as Mrs. Gill. There are many other references in *Paradise Lost* to the inferior status of Eve.

Not equal, as their sex not equal seemed;
For contemplation he and valour formed,
For softness she and sweet attractive grace,
He for God only, she for God in him:
His fair large front and eye sublime declared
Absolute rule (IV 296 - 301).

And the following lines are incredibly denigrating of women and must have had the effect of creating even more self-aggrandizement in men. Adam says of Eve,

For well I understand in the prime end
of nature her th'inferior, in the mind
And inward faculties, which most excel,
In outward also her resembling less
His image who made both, and less expressing
The character of that dominion giv'n
O'er other creatures (VIII 540 - 546).

We are able to understand why such writers as Virginia Woolf and Charlotte Brontë take exception to Milton when he suggests that women are "inferior in the mind". The real problem for women faced with this patriarchal mind-set is that it apparently comes from God. If one believes the Genesis myth to be true, and Milton's elaboration of it to be history, not myth, then women are in an almost defenceless position. As the curates, Mr. Helstone, Mr. Sympson, Joe Scott and others all belong to the Church of England, which believes in the Bible, they appear to have Authority on their side. Patriarchy is endorsed in the Scriptures and appears to be the will of God.

There is a solution to this "Judgement by myth" and it is found, says Shirley Keeldar, in the discovery of an earlier myth which pre-dates the story of the creation. Shirley says that she would like to remind Milton "that the first men of the earth were Titans and that Eve was their mother: from her sprang Saturn, Hyperion, Oceanus; she bore Prometheus" (p. 359).

Shirley's earlier myth, is discussed by Gilbert and Gubar. They write:

the alternative that Brontë and Shirley propose to Milton's Eve-as-little-woman is more serious and implies an even severer criticism of *Paradise Lost's* visionary misogyny. The first woman, Shirley hypothesizes, was not Eve, "half doll, half angel" and always potential fiend. Rather, she was a Titan, and a distinctly Promethean one at that (p. 194).

The Titans in Greek myth were, according to Howatson, the older gods of the generation before the Olympian gods, children of Uranus (Heaven) and Gaia (Earth). The story of the marriage of Heaven and Earth and the birth of gods from the marriage is very widespread in myth from all parts of the world (p. 545).

Shirley's Eve is certainly completely different from Milton's.

The first woman's breast that heaved with life on this world yielded the daring which could contend with Omnipotence: the strength which could bear a thousand years of bondage, - the vitality which could feed that vulture death through uncounted ages, - the unexhausted life and uncorrupted excellence, sisters to immortality, which after millenniums of crimes, struggles and woes, could conceive and bring forth a Messiah. The first woman was heaven-born: vast was the heart whence gushed the well-spring of the blood of nations; and grand the undegenerate head where rested the consort- crown of creation (p. 360).

This is no Eve who is prepared to stay in the kitchen and wait at table while a husband discusses cosmic matters with a visitor from outer-space.

Earlier, Shirley had explained to Caroline that she did not want to attend the church service. "And how hot it will be in the church!" responded Shirley, "and what a dreary long speech Dr. Boulthby will make! and how the curates will hammer over their prepared orations! For my part, I would rather not enter" (p. 358). She wishes to remain outside where "Nature is now at her evening prayers: she is kneeling before those red hills. I see her prostrate on the great steps of the altar . . . Caroline, I see her" (pp. 358-9).

Now she explains to Caroline that the kneeling figure is Eve, Jehovah's daughter as Adam was his son.

She is a woman-Titan: her robe of blue air spreads to the outskirts of the heath . . . Her forehead has the expanse of a cloud, and is paler than the early moon, risen long before dark gathers: she reclines her bosom on the ridge of Stilbro' Moor; her mighty hands are joined beneath it. So kneeling, face to face she speaks with God. I will stay out here with my mother Eve, in these days called Nature. I love her - undying, mighty being!" (p. 361).

Here is Shirley's answer to the creation myth in Genesis. Eve is no secondary figure, born later than Adam and made from him. Primogeniture does not apply. Eve is heaven-born and she is Nature.

Gerstenberger finds some early mention of this rival myth in scripture.

There are indications, though minimal ones, that the birth of the world and humanity from a primal uterus was an idea known also in Israel. Psalm 90:2 states "Before the hills were yet born and earth and the dry land were lying in pains of birth." Psalm 139:15 also presupposes the birth of the (first?) human being in the primeval mother earth: "when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth." Stories of the primeval mother were, therefore, present in Israel in one mythological form or another, but they were overlaid and repressed by purely male experiences of forming, making and commanding (p. 127).

It is possible that Charlotte Brontë, with her knowledge of the scriptures, may well have been aware of this alternative myth.

We have seen above that Shirley, more so than Caroline, wishes to remain outside the church and in the open air. The contrast between the Church and the natural world is thus made clear. Inside the church all is hot, unnatural and unbearable, outside Nature is at her evening prayers, So the world of nature is divine - it has after all been made by God - whereas the Church is, in reality, a male construct which is in conflict with Nature. The contrast is heightened further when, through the beautiful natural trees, come the soldiers on their way to give support to the Church, represented by Helstone.

So here the author is deeply critical of the Church. Later in the novel we see this expressed in a call for a more natural religion.

The still parlour, the clean hearth, the window opening on the twilight sky, and showing its sweet regent new throned and glorious, suffice to make earth a poem, for Shirley. A still, deep, inborn delight glows in her young veins; unmingled - untroubled; not to be reached or ravished by human agency, because by no human agency bestowed: the pure gift of God to his creature, the free dower of Nature to her child (p. 437).

The criticism of human agency in this quotation must surely apply to the way in which the authority of the church is expressed by its

patriarchal male clergy. This seems to be a call for a more natural religion in which the "pure gift of God to his creatures" is available to all regardless of gender.

Shirley presents her account of an alternative myth in Chapter VII. This chapter concludes, however, with a re-statement of the conventional chauvinistic point of view presented by Joe Scott. Joe is Robert Moore's foreman and the selection of him to quote scriptural texts which denigrate women indicates that the patriarchal teaching of the Church is widely accepted by all men. Joe Scott, to support his argument, quotes the words of St. Paul. In answer to Shirley's question, "Joe, do you seriously think all the wisdom in the world is lodged in male skulls?" He replies, "Let the woman learn in silence, with all subjection. I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man: but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve." Joe continues by asserting that although he allows the right of private judgement he does so only for men. "Nay: women is to take their husband's opinion, both in politics and religion: it's wholesomest for them." Shirley replies to this: "You might as well say, men are to take the opinions of their priests without examination. Of what value would a religion so adopted be? It would be mere blind, besotted superstition."

The connection here between the Church and patriarchy is made obvious, not only in matters of religion but in all areas of life. All of this chapter is typical of the book as a whole in that it constantly reconsiders "the woman question" and lays the blame on the Church and its non-questioning adherence to the story of creation. It would be only ten years after the publishing of Shirley that Darwin's *Origin of Species* would bring the logic of science to bear upon the myth.

We have already referred to the chauvinist view within the Church, that women are inferior intellectually to men, an opinion which comes from scripture. The author is determined to debunk this and does so in the chapter entitled "The First Blue-Stocking" in which we see Shirley providing once more an alternative myth. In this instance Brontë builds on Genesis 6. 1:4 in which "the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any one of them they chose."

Eve is chosen by Genius who is a son of God. They marry and her husband, the Seraph, protects her from Satan.

Who shall record the long strife between Serpent and Seraph? How still the Father of Lies insinuated evil into good - pride into wisdom - grossness into glory - pain into bliss - poison into passion? How the 'dreadless Angel' defied, resisted, and repelled . . . How by his patience, by his strength, by that unutterable excellence he held from God - his Origin - this faithful Seraph fought for Humanity a good fight through Time; and, when Time's course closed, and Death was encountered at the end, barring with fleshless arm the portals of Eternity, how Genius still held close his dying bride, sustained her through the agony of passage, bore her triumphant into his own home - Heaven; restored her, redeemed, to Jehovah - her Maker; and at last, before Angel and Archangel, crowned her with the crown of Immortality (p. 553).

There appear to be several strands of thought in this story. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* Genius is,

The tutelary god or attendant spirit allotted to every person at his birth to govern his fortunes and determine his character and finally to conduct him out of the world.

Thus Eva has no particular need of marriage to a human for she has her own Spirit, which is within her, her Genius. This Spirit sustains her and takes her through the pitfalls of life and presents her to God at life's close. The story is presenting again the independence of woman but from a different aspect. Brontë is claiming that woman is no secondary "appendage" to man for she exists completely independently and most satisfactorily free from male patriarchy. She is her own person.

The *Oxford Dictionary* provides another significant meaning for the word Genius. It means,

Native intellectual power of an exalted type, such as is attributed to those who are esteemed greatest in any department of art, speculation, or practice; instinctive and extraordinary

capacity for imaginative creation, original thought, invention, or discovery. Often contrasted with talent.

Because this story is found in the chapter entitled "The First Blue-Stocking" we know that it refers to women as being intellectual, learned beings and we see how this second definition of Genius applies also. The Genius who "marries" Eva is a son of God and thus it is God's will that women have independence of thought and are not inferior intellectually. This Eve is not tainted with Original Sin as was the Eve in Genesis who became, unjustly, the victim of male domination. Her children can go forth, not as "second class citizens" but equal with men. This Eve is the complete opposite of Milton's Eve.

We note also that in Eva's story the Church is never mentioned. All communication is between this Son of God and Eva, or later between Eva and God Himself. The Church, as an intermediary, has been by-passed. This appears to reinforce the idea that the Church is indeed a human agency and that its doctrines and attitudes lack some relevance to the lives of human beings. The author has made this plain in her portrayal of the Church's attitude to women and to others.

As we have already seen, *Shirley* is set in a time of widespread tension and distress. Reform in many areas of English life was urgently needed and no institution required it more than the Church of England. Charlotte Brontë, in this novel, calls for reform of the Church in its attitude to women. No doubt the author intends her criticism of the Church, in this regard, to apply to her own time as well as 1812. She claims that the problems which women had to face in Victorian England were due, in no small measure, to the retention of a belief in an account of the creation of humanity which is not true history but mythic story. The Church errs in its acceptance of this theology which denigrates women. In the century and a half following the publication of *Shirley* the Church would learn that the "woman question" would slowly become more pressing until ultimately it would be one of the major problems which it had to face.

The novel ends with the marriages of Caroline and Shirley. Brontë shows us the sacrifices which women make when they agree to obey their husbands as required by the Church sacrament of marriage. Brontë clearly points out that it is Robert who will be making all the decisions. Caroline will still be the Sunday-school teacher, her

beloved copse will be rooted up and a black sooty road made instead of the rough pebbled track. Her wishes are secondary to his financial ambitions.

Charlotte Brontë's final criticism of Victorian marriage is portrayed in Shirley's marriage to Louis, who is Robert Moore's school-teacher brother. Here the author describes a situation in which, in order to conform to the only acceptable pattern of marriage, that which is authorized by the Church, Shirley has to teach Louis to be controlling. She thus abdicates from a role in which she showed talent and success but one which apparently no Victorian wife should retain. Thus, in the final assessment, the power of patriarchy being what it was, Brontë has both women "obeying" their husbands as prescribed in the Church's wedding sacrament.

In so doing, she shows us that she does accept the Authority of the church but at the same time she challenges the church to apply that Authority in a more enlightened and equitable way.

CHAPTER THREE

In *North and South* Mrs. Gaskell has written a novel which is concerned with industrial relations in the north of England during the middle years of the nineteenth century. The author examines the relationship between masters and "hands" and advocates greater understanding between them. This, the major theme of the novel, is to some extent resolved in the developing relationship between Margaret and Thornton. But there are other themes running through the work, one of which is the importance of religion. It is with this particular aspect of the book that this chapter is concerned.

It is obvious from such matters as the resignation of Mr. Hale, the prayers of Bessy and many other instances that religion, and religious values, play a part in the unfolding of the story. I would like to suggest that in addition to this unmistakable concern with religion there is a theme beneath the surface which is not so obvious and which is of considerable importance to the author. This is Mrs. Gaskell's faith - her Unitarianism. Throughout the novel she quietly, almost covertly, shows the "marks" of Unitarianism. To appraise this aspect of her writing it is helpful to consider the origins of this movement and its subsequent history.

Unitarianism has links back to the very early Christian Church. From the middle of the second century, when early Christianity encountered Greek philosophy - the Logos - the questions concerning the divinity of Christ and His relationship with God became urgent. A cultivated Alexandrian priest called Arius maintained that the Son was not equal to the Father, but created by Him. An opposing view was advanced by Athanasius, the Bishop of Alexandria. He affirmed that Father and Son were equal and of the same substance but were distinct persons. So much controversy resulted that the Emperor Constantine called the Council of Nicaea which drew up the Nicene Creed in support of Athanasius and the view of Arius was deemed heretical. The Athanasian Creed, in support of the Trinity, followed and both Creeds are still in use in the Anglican Prayer Book. The Prayer book directs that the Athanasian Creed is to be said on certain Church Feast-days. It is not a long step from the Arian "heresy" that Christ was not equal to the

Father, to the thought that Christ was entirely human - a view held, as we shall see by the Unitarians and by liberal theologians of today.

Earl Wilbur in his *A History of Unitarianism* writes of it,

Whatever names it has borne, it has usually been regarded, alike by its adherents and its opponents from the standpoint of doctrinal theology, as a movement or a sect characterized primarily by certain beliefs about the being of God and the person of Christ. It is true that it has from the beginning generally had such doctrinal associations. It has from first to last been anti-trinitarian, or at least un-trinitarian, if the Nicene and Athanasian doctrine of the Trinity be taken as standard (p. 4).

It was not until the Reformation and the discovery of printing, which enabled independent study of the Bible, that the doctrine of the Trinity again came under attack. Laelius Socinus and his nephew Faustus Socinus, natives of Siena, through their questioning of the doctrine, had considerable influence throughout Europe during the sixteenth century. From 1535 Dutch people who were Socinians started coming to England, feeling no doubt safer under Henry VIII, for in many areas of Europe they were undergoing persecution. The Socinians were really the fore-runners of the Unitarians. They taught that the Doctrine of the Trinity was contrary to Scripture and to reason; that the Old Testament was only of historical value; that predestination was abhorrent and communion a symbolic act. They considered that in this they were returning theology to its pre-Nicene pre-Logos state.

As can be imagined the new spirit of appealing to reason in interpretation of Scripture instead of trying to find support in the Bible for established dogmas caused criticism within the English Established Church. There were, however, many Anglicans who had doubts regarding the Trinity. In 1662 Parliament passed the Act of Uniformity which required that every clergyman declare his unfeigned assent to everything in the Book of Common Prayer and it forbade anyone who had not been ordained by the Bishop to conduct public worship. No fewer than 2,257 of the clergy refused to deny their convictions and so were ejected from their livings. Wilbur comments on this,

Suffice it to say that it is of the direct descendants of these Protestant Nonconformists, as the Puritans were henceforth to be known, who could not be forced to avow beliefs that they held to be untrue, and to worship God under forms they abominated as wrong, that those congregations were largely made up which a century later began to cohere into a group of congregations known as Unitarian (p. 210).

The doctrinal path which many of the ejected divines followed towards Unitarianism was by way of an Arian position.

In the 18th. century a number of Church of England clergymen became Unitarians. Perhaps the most famous of them was Theophilus Lindsey, who was born in 1723. Although a most able and caring vicar, early in his career religious doubts concerning the Trinity began to worry him. He had not read any Socinian literature but had apparently seen some Unitarian tracts. Finally, unable with honour to modify the liturgy to meet his own ideas regarding the doctrine of the Trinity, he resigned from the Church in 1769.

Although offered some excellent "pulpits" he pressed on with his aim to gather out of the Church a congregation of those that desired a pure Unitarian form of worship and he decided to make this experiment in London, a move undertaken despite severe financial hardship to himself and his family. The scheme was highly successful in Lindsey's lifetime although he was disappointed that only a few Church of England clergymen followed his lead.

Lindsey, in rejecting the Trinity as expressed in the liturgy, initially subscribed to the Arian "heresy" but he finally came to believe in the humanity of Christ.

He at length became convinced that Christ was in respects a fully human being, that the stories of his birth were not historically true, that the miracle stories were more or less legendary, and that in his nature and teachings he was not exempt from the frailties and errors of other men (Wilbur (p. 289).

Lindsey even raised the question whether prayers to Christ were not practical idolatry. "The Unitarian doctrine," he declared, "is this:

that religious worship is to be addressed only to the One True God, the Father."

It is men such as Lindsey and his colleagues who were the forebears of Elizabeth Gaskell. Jane Spencer comments,

The importance of the future writer's religious background can hardly be overstated. Unitarians had been one of the Dissenting groups in the eighteenth century; they were subject to civil disabilities and even, in theory, to imprisonment because they denied the divinity of Christ, and the existence of the Trinity. After the Trinity Bill of 1813 repealed old statutes that told against it, the sect expanded in a climate of greater toleration, and became a powerful social group, with members in the professions, in Parliament, and in the movements for social reform; and Elizabeth Gaskell was to number many prominent Unitarian families among her friends (p. 7).

The friends included the Darwins, the Wedgwoods and the Nightingales, to name only a few.

Having very briefly reviewed the historical background to Unitarianism it is time to consider the beliefs of its adherents in the period after 1813, that is, the years 1854-5, when *North and South* was written.

All commentators agree that Unitarians found religious truth in reason rather than in Scriptural authority. Because of this emphasis on reason, together with their strict regard for truth there have been, over the years, divisions among them concerning various theological positions. Despite this, according to Wilbur,

the movement is fundamentally characterized by its steadfast and increasing devotion to three leading principles; first, complete mental freedom in religion rather than bondage to creeds or confessions; second, the unrestricted use of reason in religion, rather than the reliance upon external authority or past tradition; third, generous tolerance of differing religious views and usages rather than insistence upon uniformity in doctrine, worship or polity. Freedom, reason and tolerance: it

is these conditions above all others that this movement has from the beginning increasingly sought to promote (p. 5).

The Rev R. B. Drummond writes that "the two great affirmations of the Unitarian faith are the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of man to which, however, must be added the leadership of Jesus Christ as our great teacher and exemplar. . . . Unitarians are agreed in rejecting the entire orthodox scheme - including the doctrines of the Trinity, the vicarious atonement, the deity of Christ, original sin and everlasting punishment as both unscriptural and irrational" (p. 313).

Coral Lansbury also refers to the differences of opinion that Unitarians hold among themselves but emphasises that they are all "within the family." She claims that Unitarians,

had all the strengths and failings of a large family, argumentative, noisy, loyal in times of need, and, despite differences, enjoying a sense of intellectual kinship that could be traced back to John Milton and Isaac Newton. . . . Always drawn to public issues, they could be found whenever there was a demand for social reform. Unitarians tended to marry within their own community because they were shunned by the Church of England and other Christian groups. In the opinion of most, Unitarians were heretics plain and simple (pp. 4-5).

Unitarian intellectualism extended to women in an enlightened way which was un-Victorian. To quote Lansbury again,

Unitarian women were generally given educations comparable with those given men. Women had always been denied university educations, so Barbara Bodichon helped endow Girton College for women at Cambridge. It was unusual for a Unitarian woman not to be proficient in languages, to appreciate politics, and to understand the principles of science. Harriet Martineau and Florence Nightingale were both brought up as Unitarians - and both of these remarkable women and many others were friends or acquaintances of Elizabeth Gaskell (p. 4).

Another distinguishing trait of Unitarianism is the concern shown by its adherents for the needy, the poor and the disadvantaged. Ruth Jenkins goes so far as to state, "the powerful philanthropic tradition

placed it in firm contradiction to the patriarchal hierarchy of the Established Church; and just as importantly, it stood in contrast to the prevalent Hebraic and authoritarian element of Victorian religion by embracing and practicing a New Testament ethic" (p. 96). Jenkins continues to emphasise the differences between what she sees as the ethic of justice represented by the Church of England and the ethic of Christian charity practiced by the Unitarian faith. To quote her again:

Gaskell believed that the powerful Church of England, with its hierarchical structure and strict dogma, reproduced her culture's ideology: both the sacred and secular spheres separated men and women in God's name (p. 94).

If we turn to the life of Elizabeth Gaskell her Unitarian heritage is obvious. She was the daughter of a Unitarian minister who left the ministry because he considered that he should not be paid to preach God's word. In addition to an enlightened and cultured upbringing Elizabeth Gaskell married a learned and cultured man, a Unitarian minister, William Gaskell. In the opinion of Valentine Cunningham, Gaskell's father, William Stevenson, together with William Turner and William Gaskell, "represent the cultured Dissent that helped to define Unitarianism as the antithesis, on the whole, of nineteenth-century Methodism" (p.129). Turner and Gaskell were both educated at Warrington Dissenting Academy and Glasgow University. William Gaskell was Professor of English History and Literature at Manchester's New College (1846-53), lecturer in English Literature at the Working Men's College (founded 1858) and later also at Owen's College. He was a frequent speaker at Mechanics' Institutes, and a private tutor. We read Carol Lansbury's comments on the marriage:

the young couple shared a common interest in social reform: like all radical Unitarians they were determined to change the world. Elizabeth Gaskell conducted ragged schools in her home, visited prisons and factories, and not in the dutiful manner of minister's wives, but sharing her life with those she was helping (p.5).

As part of the religious tolerance which Unitarians profess Elizabeth Gaskell's writing is devoid of questions of doctrine or dogma. Instead, her work is imbued with Christian principles and concern for

others. She does not approve of religious fanaticism, being well aware of its dangers, and it is only through her letters to friends and families that she reveals her concerns regarding those forms of Dissent which were inclined to induce hysteria. In a letter written to Eliza Fox on April 26, 1850 she describes a visit to Bishop Lee's house where

As luck would have it it was a visitation or a something-ation, and upwards of 20 clergymen were there. Such fun! We were tumbled into the drawing room to them; arch-deacons and all. . . . Mr. Stowell was there and all the cursing Evangelicals. Luckily we knew Canon Clifton and one or two of the better sort, so we talked pretty well till the Bishop came in. I thought I would watch him and see how he took the affair; if he skirted Unitarianism as a subject, as he generally talks about it to William, but no! he pounced on the subject at once and it was funny to watch the clergymen of the Evangelical set, who looked as if a bombshell was going off amongst them (*Letters* p. 112).

This letter describes the not-surprising opinion held by Evangelicals that Unitarians were heretics.

An important Unitarian principle is truthfulness. Jenny Uglow refers to a letter of Mrs. Gaskell to Charles Bosanquet in which she expresses her concern with those who told wonderful, entertaining stories which were not true as alleged. "Just lately I have found that this temptation to excite his (Mr. Thomas Wright) hearers strongly, has led to pure invention" (p. 240). Emile Montegut, writing on *North and South* and the decision of Mr. Hale, makes the comment that

At bottom, the conduct of the clergyman strictly conforms to the rule of the Decalogue and in particular to the Commandment that says: Thou shalt not bear false witness. And besides, the great point is to obey the truth, which is always invisible, and not the outward forms of truth, which are always imperfect. Armed with this principle, which is the chief of those of the Unitarians . . . Mrs. Gaskell looks with a benevolent eye at all the various forms that the Christian idea has assumed" (p. 358).

Unitarian concern for the truth is apparent in the lives of many notable Unitarians. One thinks of Priestley, who discovered Oxygen,

and who was a devout Unitarian minister. He searched diligently for the truth in both religion and science.

As has been mentioned above, this novel, in an unobtrusive way, is imbued with Unitarian ideas and principles. These are not often obvious to the reader, because they run as a sort of sub-text beneath the surface. Nevertheless from the very beginning of the narrative we can discern the author's Unitarian approach to life emerging.

We become aware of Unitarian points of view in the author's description of Mrs. Shaw's house. "The familiar acquaintances of the house; neighbours whom Mrs. Shaw called friends, because she happened to dine with them more frequently than with other people" (p. 6), suggests something lacking in relationships and that the friendships have little real depth. We read that Mrs. Shaw did not marry her late husband for love, but for his character and establishments meaning, no doubt, his household and staff. Her sister, Mrs. Hale, we discover later, did marry her husband for love but was ill prepared to accept their reduced financial circumstances with equanimity. Both women appear to have been selfish and materialistic. Mrs. Hale seems to have considered it more important to be well dressed than to attend the wedding of her only sister's child. Edith's main worry is about keeping a piano in tune in Corfu (a difficulty which Edith seemed to consider as one of the most formidable that could befall her in her married life) Edith "would certainly have preferred a good house in Belgravia, to all the picturesqueness of the life which Captain Lennox described at Corfu" (p.7). Edith's view is in direct contrast to that of Elizabeth Gaskell who, on moving into a new house, expresses qualms of conscience in a letter to Eliza Fox.

You must come and see us in it, dearest Tottie, and try to make me see "the wrong the better cause," and that it is right to spend so much on ourselves on so purely selfish a thing as a house is while so many are wanting - that's the haunting thought to me (letter 69).

The picture of the whole London scene is one of shallowness although, with typical Unitarian toleration, Mrs. Shaw and Edith are not censured. It is rather significant that later in the book we learn that Sir John Beresford, father of Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Shaw, used to give the toast "Church and King and down with the Rump" (p. 45). This

referred to the Parliament of 1649- 53 and was thus an Establishment toast. It positions his daughters and Edith firmly in the Church of England.

The description of the London scene serves also to heighten the contrast with Milton and to describe Margaret's life style before she commences what amounts to being a journey into Unitarianism.

Mr. Hale takes the step into Unitarianism when he resigns from the Church of England. His doubts are considered at such length that the resignation is not a mere device to have the family move to the North. There is a possibility that the author intended to develop this aspect of the novel further but had second thoughts after being advised by Charles Dickens to "make the scene between Margaret and her father relative to his leaving the church. . . as short as you can find it in your heart to make it" (letter to Mrs. Gaskell 20/8/54). Charlotte Brontë also wrote to Mrs. Gaskell.

What has appeared I like well, and better and better each fresh number; best of all the last (today's). The subject seems to me difficult; at first, I groaned over it. If you had any narrowness of views or bitterness of feeling towards the Church or her Clergy, I should groan over it still; but I think I see the ground you are about to take so far as the Church is concerned; not that of attack on her, but of defence of those who conscientiously differ from her, and feel it a duty to leave her fold (Easson p. 31).

Possibly these communications may have influenced her to not proceed with a narrative concerning Mr. Hale. But it does seem possible that, rather than offending Dickens or Charlotte Brontë, together with other Anglicans throughout England, she conceived another way of showing tolerance to them while not shirking her Unitarian beliefs or principles.

The word "Unitarian" appears nowhere in the novel but Mr. Hale certainly becomes one. The author likens Mr. Hale to the 2,257 clergy, who in 1662, refused to deny their convictions. "I have been reading today of the two thousand who were ejected from their churches" he says (p. 34). He also quotes from Mr. Oldfield's soliloquy. Mr. Oldfield was a deeply religious man, a committed Christian who vacated

his living for reasons of conscience. Angus Easson points out that Mrs. Gaskell used as her source for the soliloquy *The Apology of Theophilus Lindsey M.A. on Resigning the Vicarage of Catterick, Yorkshire* (p. 35). Mr. Hale is following in Lindsey's footsteps and faces the same crisis of faith. Mr. Hale has been offered a new, and better, living but this would mean making a fresh declaration of conformity to the Liturgy at his institution. He would be required to acknowledge and subscribe "all and every the Articles as agreeable to the Word of God" and before entering upon a living he must promise, "I do declare that I will conform to the Liturgy of the Church of England as it is now established." The Liturgy contains both the Nicene and the Athanasian creeds and the doctrine of the Trinity. It seems clear that Mr. Hale's doubts are concerned with the Trinity and that in fact he becomes a Unitarian. Angus Easson considers that "If Mr. Hale's conversion to Unitarianism (for such it is, even if nowhere explicitly stated) was intended by Mrs. Gaskell as one theme central to the novel, I think it clear that she changed her mind or failed fully to achieve her purpose without ever revising the earlier section" p.39). Easson sees Mr. Hale's role as one of "mediation" between Margaret and Thornton and also master and men.

One wonders whether Mrs. Gaskell, in her aim to write a covert Unitarian novel, decided first to portray a kind devoted, pastoral Anglican vicar, who through reasons of doctrine, converts to Unitarianism although "he loves the Holy Church from which he is to be shut out." She then transfers the "Unitarian theme" to a young woman who, in her progress through the novel, develops all the characteristics and strengths of Unitarianism. At no stage in the novel will dogma or doctrine be discussed. The author has selected a woman to display the virtues of this religion because Unitarians believe in equality of gender and it is appropriate that she should assume the position of leader and decision maker in the family and elsewhere. By portraying Margaret in this role a love story can develop between herself and Thornton, which will have several results. These include greater cooperation between masters and men, a portrayal of Unitarian concern for the needy and greater rapport between north and south. All should help to promote the Unitarian idea of Brotherhood.

Because it is necessary to portray Margaret losing her Anglican ways she must first be described, in the early chapters, as a member of the

Established Church. She loves Helstone and her role as the Vicar's daughter but Lennox is partly correct when he says "it really sounded like a village in a tale rather than in real life." Her view of it is romantic and it is only later, when she returns with Mr. Bell, that she sees it realistically. Even the choice of the name "Helstone" with its similarity to "Hell's stone" is hardly idyllic.

We are shown the hierarchical nature of the Church operating in Helstone. While not minimising Margaret's undoubted kindness there is a degree of patronage in her visits to the villagers. She learns in Milton that this must change. Higgins finds her offer to visit Bessy an impertinence. "I'm none so fond of having strange folk in my house. . . . yo may come if yo like." Margaret was half-amused, half-nettled at this answer. She was not sure if she would go where permission was given so like a favour conferred" (p. 74). At Helstone the villagers were not invited into the drawing-room but restricted to the kitchen. In Helstone we learn of Margaret's snobbish attitude to those in "trade". There is a haughtiness about her, even a sort of feudal attitude. At her first meeting with Thornton we read "Mr. Thornton was in habits of authority himself, but she seemed to assume some kind of rule over him at once" (p. 62).

Slowly, as Margaret adjusts to Milton, she assumes more and more Unitarian characteristics and loses her intolerance of the lower classes. In the end she and her father become genuine friends of Higgins and his family. Higgins acts as a sort of catalyst - an agent for change in both Thornton and Margaret. Thornton comes to see that justice may be tempered with kindness and Margaret to see that caring requires warmth and understanding if it is to be genuine.

In her visits to Bessy and Higgins the author portrays Margaret in Unitarian terms. We have seen one of the main traits of Unitarianism is the caring for others in need and Margaret upholds that principle. In her religious discussions with Bessy other important Unitarian ideas become evident. At no stage does Margaret discuss doctrine and dogma with the dying girl but she does emphasise an important Unitarian principle, the Fatherhood of God. "Bessy - we have a Father in heaven" (p. 101).

There is another important characteristic of Unitarianism which emerges in these discussions, the importance of reason. She attempts

to dissuade Bessy from reading the apocalyptic visions in the book of Revelation. Higgins is also disturbed by his daughter's religious fanaticism and, mistakenly thinking Margaret is encouraging this, he says;

Now, I'll not have my wench preached to. She's bad enough as it is, with her dreams and her methodee fancies, and her visions of cities with golden gates and precious stones. But if it amuses her I let her be, but I'm none going to have more stuff poured into her (p. 90-91).

Bessy is Calvinistic also.

Some's pre-elected to sumptuous feasts and purple and fine linen, - may be yo're one on 'em. Others toil and moil all their lives long - and the very dogs are not pitiful in our days, as they were in the days of Lazarus. But if yo' ask me to cool yo're tongue wi' th'tip of my finger, I'll come across the great gulf to yo' just for th' thought o' what yo've been to me here (p. 150).

Margaret attempts, through reason, to banish these thoughts. "Bessy! you're very feverish! I can tell it in the touch of your hand, as well as what you are saying" (p. 150). We have already noted in Elizabeth Gaskell's letter to Eliza Fox her feeling regarding Evangelicals and here we see this antipathy is extended to include Calvinists. In a letter to Marianne (No 405) she states that she can feel communion with anyone who seeks in the Bible for their religion and finds it there, all but the Calvinists. The inclusion of Bessy's "methodee" and Calvinistic ideas and their subsequent rejection by Margaret is in accord with the author's Unitarianism

Although Gaskell rejects these evangelical persuasions she does appreciate aspects of Anglicanism as her letter to Marianne Gaskell in May 1854 illustrates. She writes that she feels more devotional in Church (Anglican) than in Chapel (Unitarian).

But I always do feel as if the Litany - the beginning of it I mean, - and one or two other parts did so completely go against my belief that it would be wrong to deaden my sense of its serious error by hearing it too often. It seems to me so

distinctly to go against some of the clearest of our Saviour's words in which he so expressly tells us to pray to God alone. My own wish would be that you should go to Chapel in the morning, and to Church in the evening, when there is nothing except the doxology to offend one's sense of truth. . . . Then the one thing I am clear and sure about is that Jesus Christ was not equal to His father; that, however divine a being he was not God; and that worship as God addressed to Him is therefore wrong in me (Letter 198a).

This is the main tenet of Unitarianism. We see this attitude to the Church of England in *North and South* when Margaret, after the death of her mother, comforts herself by reciting the whole of Chapter 14 of St. John's gospel. This seems to confirm Margaret as an Anglican, for this chapter is frequently quoted at Anglican funeral services. However, it contains Christ's words "If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I" - a Unitarian position in accord with Gaskell's attitude as expressed in the letter above. It also places Margaret within Unitarianism.

Reference has been made above to Coral Lansbury's remarks regarding the intellectual interests of Unitarian women. We see examples of this in the attention shown by Margaret to industrial relations. This is particularly highlighted at the Thornton's dinner-party at which she listens intelligently to the conversation of the men. "She could listen to something larger and grander than the petty interests which the ladies had been talking about" (p.163). And in all the conversations with Thornton she confidently advances her own views in a way which appears to be not typical of Victorian women. Walter Houghton writes, "Of the three conceptions of woman current in the Victorian period, the best known is that of the submissive wife whose whole excuse for being was to love, honour, obey - and amuse - her lord and master, and to manage his household and bring up his children. In that role her character and her life were completely distinct from his" (p.348). Because Margaret is not married this quotation does not apply completely to her but it does emphasise the submissiveness of the Victorian woman. But Margaret is certainly not submissive. One feels that most other women of her time would never have directly discussed industrial matters with Mr. Thornton. An "Anglican" Margaret, one feels, would have discussed such issues with Mr. Hale who, later perhaps, would mention them to Thornton if he so

wished. Here, once again, the author seems to have placed Margaret as a covert Unitarian. Unitarians, with their strong belief in social justice, together with their sense of gender-equality, would have found it difficult to remain silent and Margaret demonstrates this. Her attitude reaches its highest point at the riot when she intervenes for the sake of both parties. Her action here is in accord with Mrs. Gaskell's words as reported by Edith Duthie. "I don't call the use of words action unless there is some definite, distinct, practical course of action logically proposed by those words" (p. 155). Once more we see Margaret acting in a Unitarian way. One of the hallmarks of Unitarianism as enunciated by Wilbur is that of Freedom. Here she feels no restraint in acting as she did. We read "She did it because it was right, and simple, and true to save where she could save; even to try to save" (p. 198). She was free to do so.

Underpinning all of Margaret's actions is her religion. The ultimate aim of the author, as presented in the character of Margaret, is surely the establishment of the Brotherhood of Man. This is, as we have seen above, one of the two main principles of Unitarianism and in this novel religion and brotherhood are closely associated. This is apparent in such remarks from Margaret as "God has made us so that we must be mutually dependent" (p. 122). and in reply to Thornton's remark, "We, the owners of capital, have a right to choose what we will do with it", she replies, "I said you had a human right. I meant that there seemed no reason but religious ones, why you should not do what you like with your own" (p. 117-8).

Mr. Hale expresses the idea of Unitarian Brotherhood. "Oh! said Mr. Hale, sighing, "your Union in itself would be beautiful, glorious, - it would be Christianity itself - if it were but for an end which affected the good of all, instead of that of merely one class as opposed to another" (p. 233).

Elizabeth Gaskell realizes that Brotherhood occurs through individuals becoming "brothers" in a non-gender sense. Brotherhood is not a mass movement of people. Margaret, with the social concern of the Unitarian woman, meets the rioters and protects Thornton because she could see that he was in danger. But, as she says to Thornton later, "Why there was not a man - not a poor desperate man in all that crowd - for whom I had not more sympathy - for whom I should not have done what little I could more heartily" (p. 195).

In her action at the strike Margaret is, in effect, calling for Brotherhood. She is protecting the adversaries from each other. She realizes the necessity of accord between people. Thornton, on the other hand, cannot understand the beginnings of Brotherhood and can take only one meaning from her action at the riot.

It is only when Thornton comes to know Higgins and to realise what he is doing to help Boucher's children that the friendship starts between the two individuals. In both Margaret and Thornton it is the Unitarian principle of caring for others which motivates them first to befriend others and to begin the way towards Brotherhood.

The views of Ruth Jenkins regarding the domination of the social order by the Church of England have already been referred to above. Jenkins moves on to describe what can only be Elizabeth Gaskell's idea of brotherhood.

Central to Gaskell's conflict with her culture is the appropriation of sacred symbols for a human enterprise, an appropriation that, she would argue, misconstrues God's word for patriarchal ends. The alternative agenda that she posits would seek to replace her culture's ethical and secular hierarchy with a social vision that recognizes the integral interdependence of humanity - whether worker or master, woman or man. Significantly, by claiming such authority Gaskell reappropriates sacred imagery to empower and validate those her culture marginalizes (p. 94).

We see the Unitarian attitude to the dominant culture and its shortcomings throughout the novel. The author, from a position of concern for the underprivileged, together with the strict regard for the truth, which we have noted is a Unitarian characteristic, questions the impartiality of justice and the application of authority.

We see these questions asked particularly in the case of Frederick. We realise that the sub-plot involving him is more than a device to cause Margaret to tell the lie and be demeaned in Thornton's eyes. There are several issues here. The first one is to do with justice and raises the question as to how "just" is man's idea of justice. Frederick is

appalled at the cruelty of his Captain to the sailors and so ultimately he is involved in mutiny. "Months after, this letter came, and you see what provocation Frederick had. It was not for himself, or his own injuries, he rebelled; but he would speak his mind to Captain Reid, and so it went from bad to worse; and you see most of the sailors stuck by Frederick" (p. 108). Later, Frederick explains the hopelessness of getting a fair trial.

In the next place, allow me to tell you, you don't know what a court-martial is, and consider it as an assembly where justice is administered, instead of what it really is - a court where authority weighs nine-tenths in the balance, and evidence forms only the other tenth. In such cases, evidence itself can hardly escape being influenced by the prestige of authority (p. 259).

So here authority overrides justice in both the mutiny and the court-martial. The authority of Captain Reid allows no justice for the sailors and the authority of the navy overrides justice at the trial. Margaret's opinion is, "Loyalty and obedience to wisdom and justice are fine; but it is still finer to defy arbitrary power, unjustly and cruelly used - not on behalf of ourselves, but on behalf of others more helpless" (p. 109). Because the Royal Navy is part of the Establishment, as is the Church of England, Frederick's actions are in opposition to the dominant culture. In more ways than one his physical removal to a different country, culture and religion show him leaving the culture of his birth. Despite Elizabeth Gaskell's Unitarian toleration of the Church of England and the culture of the Establishment, one must agree with the remarks of Ruth Jenkins that there is conflict expressed in the novel. Margaret's comments on Frederick's action, quoted above, are in complete accord with the Unitarian principles which she demonstrated at the riot.

There is, however, a price to pay. Margaret tells the lie. But although she does so we can see that she is adhering to the Unitarian principle with her concern to be truthful. We know this because she is so upset at having to tell the lie. There is a suggestion of appropriateness in the quotation above in that the truth regarding Margaret and Frederick is "invisible" and the visible truth is "imperfect".

As mentioned above, the mutiny and the riot show similar instances of rebellion against authority, in the form of the Establishment. The mill owners are akin to Captain Reid although of course not nearly as draconian. It is not by chance, however, that we see an affinity between Frederick's naval scene, the action of Thornton calling in the army and Higgins describing his position as resembling a soldier who fights on behalf of those for whom he cares. We see the battle-lines drawn up in the name of justice. But the justice system is far from perfect, it is heavily weighted on the side of the Establishment and is endorsed by the Established Church.

Thornton is a just man and in the first chapters of the book he tells us so. He compares the condition of the mills with that of fifty years ago when the manufacturers had unlimited power.

Because a man was successful in his venture, there was no reason that in all other things his mind should be well balanced. On the contrary, his sense of justice, and his simplicity, were often entirely smothered under the glut of wealth that came down upon him . . . there can be no doubt, too, of the tyranny they exercised over their work-people (p. 83). "But by-and-by," Thornton continued, "The power of masters and men became more evenly balanced; and now the battle is pretty fairly waged between us" (p. 83).

Thornton believes in justice and considers that he administers it, but the novel suggests how arbitrary justice can be.

Thornton has authority on his side. Margaret challenges this authority. In doing so she acts in a Unitarian manner because Unitarians are used to challenging authority. They do so regarding the Bible and the Established Church. Margaret describes Thornton to her father:

He must know of the growing anger and hardly smothered hatred of his workpeople, who all look upon him as what the Bible calls a "hard man", not so much unjust as unfeeling; clear in judgement, standing upon his "rights" as no human being ought to stand, considering what we and all our petty rights are in the sight of the Almighty (p. 166).

This Unitarian stance stresses the necessity of God's approval in all things.

Higgins also believes in justice and considers that it is not being shown to the workers by the manufacturers. He says the workers have to stand up and fight hard, - "not for ourselves alone, but for them round about us - for justice and fair play" (p. 135). Margaret's answer to this is religious. "Oh, Bessy, God is just, and our lots are well portioned out by Him, although none but He knows the bitterness of our souls" (p. 137).

Throughout the book we come across the problems of justice, as it is perceived by different people. Ruth Jenkins writes that the sermons of William Gaskell, the author's husband, show the contrast between the beliefs that the Unitarians held and those they ascribed to the Church of England. These sermons reveal the important differences between justice and charity and the fundamental importance of God's mercy, not vengeance for all. Most significantly his sermons illustrate the conflict between Gaskell's Unitarian values and the Church of England (p. 97).

If we consider Thornton in the light of Gaskell's sermons we note that he maintains his strict regard for justice but as the novel progresses he tempers this with kindness and understanding. From his deep conversations with Mr. Hale, after the death of Mrs. Hale, we read -

Man of action as he was, busy in the world's great battle, there was a deeper religion binding him to God in his heart, in spite of his strong wilfulness, through all his mistakes, than Mr. Hale had ever dreamed. They never spoke of such things again, as it happened; but this one conversation made them peculiar people to each other; knit them together, in a way which no loose indiscriminate talking about sacred things can ever accomplish. When all are admitted, how can there be a Holy of Holies? (p. 276).

Here Unitarian thought is expressed in two ways. On the one hand the idea of Christian brotherhood is advanced and on the other, in the remark "when all are admitted", we discern a rejection of the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. The quotation reveals also the depths of religion in Thornton.

We see Thornton's "epiphany" as it were when he decides to go to Higgins and offer him a job.

But if he dreaded exposure of his tenderness, he was equally desirous that all men should recognise his justice; and he felt that he had been unjust, in giving so scornful a hearing to any one who had waited, with humble patience, for five hours, to speak to him. . . . And then the conviction went in, as if by some spell, and touched the latent tenderness of his heart; the patience of the man, the simple generosity of the motive (for he had learnt about the quarrel between Boucher and Higgins), made him forget entirely the mere reasonings of justice and overleap them by a diviner instinct (p. 324-25).

From this point on a new relationship develops between Thornton and the men. We have noted above the comment of Ruth Jenkins regarding the differences between what she sees as the ethic of justice represented by the Church of England and the ethic of Christian charity practiced by the Unitarian faith. Here we see that contrast and the way it is overturned.

Margaret, too, has something of an "epiphany" when, full of remorse for the lie, she unconsciously opens her father's book and reads the words of St. Francis de Sales. "The way of humility. Ah", thought Margaret, "that is what I have missed! But courage, little heart. We will turn back, and by God's help we may find the lost path" (p. 345). Although in Margaret we have seen Unitarianism in action she had still retained a degree of pride in her opinion of Thornton. After she rejected him he says "You are unfair and unjust" (p. 196). She now starts to realise that this was so. Thus in both Thornton and Margaret as well as Higgins and Frederick justice is examined and proved to be unreliable. Gaskell reminds us that it is a human construct which must be measured against the standards of Christian love and truth.

As mentioned above Truth is of major importance to Unitarians and it is the necessity of receiving forgiveness for her lie that places Margaret without doubt within Unitarianism. Unable to receive forgiveness from her father as a priest she decides, "No; she would keep her secret, and bear the burden alone. Alone she would go before God, and cry for His absolution" (p. 287). Her rejection of this

Church of England sacrament is in accord with the fact that at no stage in the novel does the author portray Margaret attending an Anglican service.

In *North and South* Elizabeth Gaskell does not achieve the Brotherhood of Man but without even mentioning the word Unitarianism she conveys to us, through the thoughts, words and actions of her characters, the principles of the movement. To do so was to demonstrate that a novelist could contest the authority of the Established Church by using the values and language of another branch of Victorian Christianity. In so doing she has been able to avoid direct criticism of the Church of England, but to show its need for reform through comparison with Unitarianism.

CHAPTER 4

George Eliot's novel *Middlemarch* was published in 1871 but was set forty years earlier - just before the passing of the First Reform Act of 1832. The author thus set her novel at a pivotal time in English history when both State and Church, in sore need of reform, were about to commence processes of change. She gives the weaknesses of the Established Church particular attention. Because George Eliot understood life in religious terms *Middlemarch* is concerned with religion as portrayed in the individual and in the individual's relationships with others.

In the novel we find clergymen representing the two main parties in the Church of England at that time - the Evangelicals and the High Churchmen. Messrs Cadwallader, Casaubon and Farebrother may all be called High Church, although Farebrother could also be described as Orthodox, a somewhat less "high" position. All three, however, dislike Evangelicalism. Apart from this common antipathy they show considerable variations in their circumstances, their conduct and the attitudes they have to their profession. It is possible to see these three as representing, in a microcosm, the way in which the right wing section of the Church of England as a whole tends to have divisions within its members.

Mr. Cadwallader is more aptly described as "High and Dry." In the opening chapter we have already read Robert Lee Wolff's portrayal of these early Victorian parsons and aspects of Cadwallader's character are in accord with these broad descriptions. He lives the life of a country gentleman. The narrator describes him as "one of the high gentry living four miles away from Lowick and was thus exalted to an equal sky with the sheriff of the county and other dignitaries vaguely regarded as necessary to the system of things" (p. 325).

Cadwallader, in fact, seems to be more than equal with the gentry because he is deferred to by all the other characters, including his good friend the Squire. It is his opinion regarding both of Dorothea's marriages which overrides the objections advanced by Sir. James: and, unlike Bishop Proudie, he is not swayed by the arguments of his

outspoken wife. Mrs. Cadwallader, however, is partly responsible for the exalted social position which the Cadwalladers enjoy. "She is a lady of immeasurably high birth, descended, as it were, from unknown earls" (p. 53). Cadwallader has married well.

Perhaps the best illustration of social status in *Middlemarch* is the description of Featherstone's funeral which the gentry overlook from the upper windows of Casaubon's house. The lower classes are diminished in size and Mr. Cadwallader is described as "towering above them in his white surplice" (p. 327). Significantly Dorothea, whose social conscience is stirring, "was not at ease in the perspective and chilliness of that height" (p. 326).

Confirmation of the Cadwalladers' social position is evident in a revealing remark Mrs. Cadwallader makes to her husband and the consequent statement from Lady Chettam. "Does anyone suppose that I would have taken such a monster as you by any other name?" "And a clergyman too," observed Lady Chettam with approbation. "Elinor cannot be said to have descended below her rank" (p. 819).

Cadwallader, in many respects, is an example of the early nineteenth-century huntin' and fishin' parson. There is no doubt he has a passion for fishing and his study is filled with rods and reels and other angling equipment thus signifying what the priorities are in his life. He enjoys the sport so much that one wonders whether having the use of Casaubon's trout stream caused his reluctance to interfere in Dorothea's first marriage. It also placed him at a disadvantage with Featherstone because he had had to ask a favour of him concerning the same stream as it ran through Featherstone land (p.325). Mrs. Cadwallader says of her husband. "As long as the fish rise to his bait, everybody is what he ought to be. Bless you, Casaubon has got a trout stream, and does not care about fishing in it himself: could there be a better fellow?" (p. 70).

Mr. Cadwallader's conscience is large and easy like the rest of him: it does only what it could do without any trouble. He is aware that he neglects his parish. "I confess that's what I should be afraid of, if we parsons had to stand at the hustings for preferment. I should be afraid of them reckoning up all my fishing days" (p. 384). Cadwalladers's sporting lifestyle was common among his fellow clergymen.

Cadwallader typifies many 1830's High Church clergymen in his support of the Tories. Not only is he an ardent Tory but he is contemptuous of the Whigs. "Don't take the throwing out of the Bill so much to heart, Brooke; you've got all the riff-raff of the country on your side" (p. 814).

He is also basically selfish in money matters. In discussing the possibility of Brooke improving the lot of his tenants he remarks, "I know I should be glad. I should hear less grumbling when my tithe is paid. I don't know what I should do if there were not a modus in Tipton" (p. 381). The modus here refers to money being paid in lieu instead of the customary tithe which was paid in produce. Cadwallader here seems more concerned about his own income than that of the poor tenants who were living in atrocious conditions. It does not appear to cross his mind that there could be a connection between the grumbling farmers and his lax ways. If he were a more caring clergyman they might have grumbled less. Even his wife describes him as having "weak charitableness."

Cadwallader is not a "bad" man however; indeed his laid-back attitude seems to be beneficial and full of common sense. Despite this he represents the Authority of the Church and he does so inadequately. It appears that regardless of his high calling to be a worthy ambassador and apologist, his priorities lie elsewhere. When one considers that there were many other clergymen with similar attitudes to Cadwallader's it is no wonder that the Authority of the Church was so weakened that reform had become urgent.

If we turn our attention to Mr. Farebrother we find that here also is a clergyman who has insufficient regard for the authority of the church. Mr. Farebrother is not a sporting parson like Mr. Cadwallader but he spends too much time pursuing his interest in natural history. In this Farebrother represents many other clergymen who pursued similar interests.

Another interesting and somewhat disturbing side to Farebrother is that he plays cards and billiards for money. In this he may be excused to some extent because he supports his mother, his sister, his aunt and himself on a very meagre income which he receives from the living at St. Botolphs.

There are considerable differences between Messrs Farebrother and Cadwallader. Mr. Farebrother does not appear to be interested in social position, his interest in people is more concerned with their moral worth, or perhaps one should say their moral potential, than their position on the social ladder. He has considerable regard for the Garth family and we, as readers, through the description of the Garths, can deduce the admiration and approval which the author has for such worthy characters, for whom honesty, love for neighbour and pride in workmanship, constitute paramount virtues. We see Farebrother's concern for others in his "rescue" of Fred and in the way he sacrifices his own love for Mary Garth. Also it is revealed that he had been carrying out his duties at the hospital without any remuneration for some time before the chaplaincy was advertised, purely, it would appear, to help the patients.

Middlemarch is remarkable in that it contains few details about the services at which the various clergymen officiate. Of Casaubon and Cadwallader in church we learn nothing, but it is significant that the novel has some comments on Farebrother and Tyke. Farebrother's preaching was "ingenious and pithy, like the preaching of the English Church in its robust age" (p. 178). Dr. Sprague comments "He's a good fellow is Farebrother, with as little of the parson about him as will serve to carry orders" (p. 183). Mr. Hawley, speaking of Mr. Tyke, says "Sick people can't bear so much praying and preaching. And that methodistical sort of religion is bad for the spirits" (pp. 184-5). Mr. Powderell, in supporting Mr. Tyke says, "He is a real Gospel preacher, is Mr. Tyke. I should vote against my conscience if I voted against Mr. Tyke - I should indeed" (p. 183). Nobody had anything to say against Mr. Tyke, except that they could not bear him and suspected him of cant" (p. 179).

So here are two Anglican clergymen opposed to one another. Both need the salary provided with the chaplaincy. As we have seen, Mr. Farebrother's living is small and he has dependents, but Mr. Tyke's financial position is possibly worse because the ministers at chapels-of-ease received the basic stipend of a curate. The real opposition, however, is in theology. Mr. Tyke is most certainly an evangelical; for him the Bible is without error and he believes in Justification by Faith along with other evangelical doctrine. Farebrother would appear to have doctrinal roots going back to the latitudinarian clergy of the late eighteenth-century. He has possibly been influenced by his

mother, who holds these views. She states "There was no need to go back on what you couldn't see", which precipitates the rejoinder, "My mother is like old George the Third," said the Vicar, "she objects to metaphysics" (p. 169). And Farebrother himself appears to object to metaphysics. When Lydgate asks him, "What reason does Bulstrode give for superseding you?" Farebrother replies "That I don't teach his opinions - which he calls spiritual religion; and that I have no time to spare. Both statements are true" (p. 176). Halevy comments,

Throughout the (eighteenth) century the sermons of Anglican preachers, whatever their party, though most markedly among the Whigs, kept the miraculous character of Christianity as far as possible in the background. Their religion was a liberal and rationalistic Christianity, a system of humanitarian ethics in which the supernatural was left out of sight. The goal of this direction of Anglican opinion was the book published by Paley in 1785, in which he identified Christian with utilitarian ethics, and presented Jesus Christ as the first teacher of the greatest happiness principle (p. 392).

Something of this attitude to religion seems to be present in Farebrother and it emerges when Lydgate and Dorothea discuss the choice of a new incumbent for the late Casaubon's living. Once more the only two candidates are Farebrother and Tyke. "My uncle says that Mr. Tyke is spoken of as an apostolic man," said Dorothea meditatively. "I don't pretend to say that Farebrother is apostolic," said Lydgate. "His position is not quite like that of the Apostles: he is only a parson among parishioners whose lives he has to try and make better. Practically I find that what is called being apostolic now, is an impatience of everything in which the parson doesn't cut the principal figure. I see something of that in Mr. Tyke at the Hospital: a good deal of his doctrine is a sort of pinching hard to make people uncomfortably aware of him." Dorothea comments,

I have been looking into a volume of sermons by Mr. Tyke: such sermons would be of no use at Lowick - I mean about imputed righteousness and the prophecies in the Apocalypse. I have always been thinking of the different ways in which Christianity is taught, and whenever I find one way that makes it a wider blessing than any other, I cling to that as the truest - I mean that which takes in the most good of all kinds, and brings in

the most people as sharers in it, It is surely better to pardon too much than to condemn too much. But I should like to see Mr. Farebrother and hear him preach (p. 495).

It is not surprising, having heard these religious opinions of Dorothea, that Farebrother is appointed.

The Farebrother versus Tyke situation in *Middlemarch* mirrors the actual position in England in the early 1830's: Farebrother describes himself as being a party man (p. 175). When Lydgate asks him what the truth is about Tyke he replies "Oh, nothing bad at all. . . He is a zealous fellow: not very learned, and not very wise, I think - because I don't agree with him" (p. 171). There was, at the time, a widely held opinion among non- evangelical Anglicans that Evangelicals believed piety was necessarily found in inverse ratio to learning. Elisabeth Jay comments that Shaftesbury's simple dichotomy, "Satan reigns in the intellect, God in the heart of man," was the result of teaching which presented Evangelicalism as exclusively the religion of the heart, easily to be comprehended by the simplest of mortals on the individual basis, rather than through the accumulated wisdom of tradition" (p. 40).

Mr. Tyke's unpopularity appears to be the unfortunate situation many evangelical parsons had to accept. Owen Chadwick writes of them,

They distributed tracts. Evangelicals disapproved of fox-hunting parsons, shooting parsons, cricketing parsons, ballroom parsons. They did not disapprove of wine. They did good work, sometimes great work in the parishes. But they were unpopular. No more unpopular than the Puseyites and usually less unpopular, they collected nearly as bad a reputation. The British public feared Puseyites and despised evangelicals (p. 446).

The narrator in *Middlemarch* describes the Vincy's house as exceptional in most country towns at that time when "Evangelicalism had cast a certain suspicion as of a plague-infection over the few amusements which survived in the provinces" (p. 161). Their unpopularity was the odium of the godly and the puritan. As late as 1837 they were still known as Church Methodists (Chadwick p. 447).

Many Evangelicals, following ordination, found difficulty in obtaining livings or curacies, when few bishops were sympathetic to the cause and many livings were held by wealthy latitudinarian clerics (Jay p. 40). Tyke would appear to be in this situation. His curacy at a chapel-of-ease is certainly a bottom rung of the ladder and his particular theology has lost him Dorothea's living. The difficulties Evangelicals encountered over employment opportunities would have made the position of chaplain more desirable and Tyke was probably one of a number of Evangelicals who sought such positions. Alan Haig, although not commenting on the theological position of chaplains, confirms the predominance of non-Oxford men among those who held chaplaincies for significant periods. This appears to suggest that chaplains were more inclined to be evangelical than high church (p. 217). Mr. Thesiger, in promoting Tyke for the post of chaplain, stated,

It was desirable that chaplaincies of this kind should be entered with a fervent intention: they were peculiar opportunities for spiritual influence, and while it was good that a salary should be allotted, there was more need for scrupulous watching lest the office should be perverted into a mere question of salary (p. 185).

From these remarks it would seem to be evangelical policy to have evangelical clergymen installed as hospital chaplains.

As has been indicated in the Introduction Evangelicals may be either Calvinists or Arminians. Tyke signifies that he is a Calvinist because his sermons are about "imputed righteousness and the prophecies in the Apocalypse". The term "imputed" here means that God has "imputed" or given salvation to the individual. Only God's elect can be saved. Man cannot earn salvation. This is predestination and it places Tyke on the left wing of the Evangelical party. This is a major difference from Farebrother's latitudinarianism, which places no limits on salvation.

Another Calvinist, although he insists on the Lutheran doctrine of justification, is Bulstrode. We are aware that he is a Calvinist through the reply that he makes to his wife when she says of Rosamond, "I am sure we are bound to pray for that thoughtless girl." His reply is certainly Calvinistic, "Truly, my dear," said Mr. Bulstrode assertingly, "those who are not of this world can do little else to

arrest the errors of the obstinately worldly" (pp. 347-8). Thus it is apparent that in Tyke and Bulstrode the author has portrayed two Calvinists who represent the extreme puritan or left wing of the Evangelical party.

Apart from this doctrine, which they share, there are vast differences between Tyke and Bulstrode. Tyke, despite his faults and his unpopularity, is a genuine person. He works hard and is sincere in his religion. Bulstrode is far more unpopular than Tyke. In him we see self-congratulation, smugness and puritanism. Bulstrode *thinks* he is sincere and by a process of mental gymnastics succeeds in convincing himself that whatever he does is approved by God. It is through this process of self-justification that we see Bulstrode as a casuist.

Casuistry is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as

that part of ethics which resolves cases of conscience, applying the general rules of religion and morality to particular instances in which circumstances alter cases or in which there appears to be a conflict of duties.

This definition has more application to the original meaning of the term, when casuistry was a respected method of dealing with problems of conscience.

In *Middlemarch* however, Bulstrode employs casuistry to justify his selfish and infamous ends. There are two other citations in the OED which describe Bulstrode's use of casuistry more accurately.

Casuistry destroys by distinctions and exceptions all morality, and effaces the essential differences between right and wrong.

The art of quibbling with God.

Although now an Anglican, Bulstrode has retained the beliefs which he held, years ago, as a Calvinist when attending the chapel at Highbury. The particular theology of Puritans and Calvinists stresses the power of sin, the moral law and relationship with God. For Bulstrode "The spiritual kind of rescue was a genuine need with him" (p. 619).

But Bulstrode has a problem in that his worldly desires for money, power and domination over others constantly lead him into iniquity. The people of the town are aware of this contradiction. Mr. Vincy tells him, "this tyrannical spirit wanting to play bishop and banker everywhere - it's this sort of thing makes a man's name stink" (p. 130).

Bulstrode uses casuistry to reconcile these two irreconcilables. His casuistry is not used to find a genuine solution but only to justify his own reprehensible desires and actions. By means of ingenious argument between himself and his conscience and the use of devious excuses he is able to satisfy himself that whatever evil thing he does is in accord with the will of God.

It was a principle with Mr. Bulstrode to gain as much power as possible that he might use it for the glory of God. He went through a great deal of spiritual conflict and inward argument in order to adjust his motives and make clear to himself what God's glory required (p. 130).

Here is Bulstrode's form of casuistry in action. Similarly we read, "His religious activity could not be incompatible with his business as long as he had argued himself into not feeling it incompatible" (p. 617). Bulstrode's accommodation of conscience, after years of deception, dishonesty and theft, reaches its nadir in Raffles' death. We read some of Bulstrode's thoughts as Raffles lies ill.

He could not but see the death of Raffles and see in it his own deliverance. What was the removal of this wretched creature? He was impenitent - but were not public criminals impenitent? - yet the law decided on their fate. Should Providence in this case award death, there was no sin in contemplating death as the desirable issue - if he kept his hands from hastening it - if he scrupulously did what was prescribed. Even here there might be a mistake; human prescriptions were fallible things (p. 704).

Here is the start of Bulstrode's casuistic argument. As it develops further it will lead to the murder of Raffles. We read that while Raffles was still alive Mr. Bulstrode rose about six and spent some time in prayer,

As he sat there and beheld the enemy of his peace going irrevocably into silence, he felt more at rest than he had done for many months. His conscience was soothed by the enfolding wing of secrecy, which seemed just then like an angel sent down for his relief (p. 711).

Elisabeth Jay suggests,

It is not by chance that Bulstrode is depicted as a Calvinist rather than an Arminian Evangelical. George Eliot never makes the crude mistake of affirming that Calvinism is directly responsible for Bulstrode's perverted moral perceptions but she draws attention to tendencies inherent in a doctrine which she believes to be peculiarly dangerous (p. 237).

By these tendencies she undoubtedly means the possibility of slipping into Antinomianism. Throughout the novel Bulstrode never quite moves into this although he is very close to it at the end. He never reaches the stage of thinking that his particular form of Christianity places him above and beyond the obligations of natural law and morality. Jay recounts the trial of an impecunious solicitor who was a forger and yet even after sentencing the criminal retained his conviction in his freedom from the moral law and "made the final statement that at that very moment he was conscious of his Lord's presence at his side whispering to him 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant'" (p. 66). This illustrates the danger to which the "inner light" of evangelicalism may lead.

As we read *Middlemarch* we are reminded of that earlier account of casuistry in Defoe's *Moll Flanders*. Although written one hundred and fifty years before there are similarities in the ways in which Moll and Bulstrode employ various arguments to "talk themselves" into evil acts. Both characters are able to gratify their various desires and also satisfy their beliefs.

In Bulstrode George Eliot seems to have combined the less admirable traits of many evangelical Victorians. According to Noel Annan,

Pusey noted that belief in the regenerated will lead some Evangelicals to speak of their past sins as if they had been committed by another. 'Every man,' said Keble, 'was his own

absolver,' and pharisaically those 'born again' looked down on anyone who did not use Evangelical jargon. The doctrine that good works were evidential - or in other words an excellent indication that one was of the Elect enjoying perpetual sanctification through the Holy Spirit - exaggerated the importance of worldly success in the eyes of the petty-minded. The close connection between cash and religion, Pharisaism and cant, was the legacy of an emotional religion when it was professed by the ruck of those classes in society who were learning the value - and it was a real value - of Respectability (p. 119).

Annan quotes Gladstone's statement that "The Redemption of Man was treated as a joint stock transaction between God and man with Christ as the broker. One acquired 'a saving interest in the Blood of Jesus'" (Annan p. 120).

In the character of Bulstrode, George Eliot seems to be warning us as readers that it is possible to deceive ourselves through the agency of religion.

It has already been noted, above, that Farebrother is very interested in Natural History but in *Middlemarch* there is another parson who pursues knowledge and that is Casaubon. His great thesis, his *Key to All Mythologies*, is filling many notebooks and is occupying many hours. There is, however, a considerable difference in the attitudes of these two scholars. Farebrother appears to be studying Natural History simply because he enjoys doing so and he wishes to increase his knowledge. There is no suggestion that he is studying in order to gain prestige or position or to earn the admiration of others.

Casaubon, however, is studying for very different reasons. His interest is focused entirely on his great project. Although Brooke is convinced that it is possible that Casaubon could be made a bishop this is not what Casaubon wants. He does not seek the authority of a bishopric but he does seek, indeed long for, a different authority, an intellectual one through writing the *Key to All Mythologies*. We learn, however, that this resolve is not the laudable one of providing valuable information for future students but the base desire of impressing, and defeating, Mr. Carp and other academics at Brasenose

College in Oxford. He has already sent some pamphlets - or Parerga as he called them - to test reaction.

"He suspected the Archdeacon of not having read them, he was in painful doubt as to what was really thought of them by the leading minds of Brasenose, and bitterly convinced that his old acquaintance Carp had been the writer of that depreciatory recension which was locked in a small drawer of Mr. Casaubon's desk, and also in a dark closet of his verbal memory. . . even his religious faith wavered with his wavering trust in his own authorship, and the consolations of the Christian hope in immortality seemed to lean on the immortality of the still unwritten *Key to All Mythologies* (p. 281).

Not only is there intense contestation with Carp over the work but it also becomes apparent that despite the long hours Casaubon spends over his great project he is not a good scholar. Instead of seeking the truth in his research he has made an initial assumption and then attempted to make his research conform to it. Already he has been beaten by German scholars although he is unaware of it. As Bernard Paris comments,

Casaubon's scholarly labours were divorced from life both in subject matter and in method. To confound his enemies, real and imaginary, by writing an immortal book became the sole purpose of his life (pp. 182-3).

Casaubon would appear to be a poor representative of the Church. He hardly expresses its Authority. Brooke says of him, "He doesn't care much about the philanthropic side of things, punishments, and that kind of thing. He only cares about Church questions" (p. 53). We note that it is Church *questions* which interest him, not the Church itself. Casaubon is fortunate financially and employs a curate who does all the work for him except for one service on Sundays. Apart from that service he is almost an absentee clergyman. He knows nothing about his parishioners. It is the curate, Mr. Tucker, who is able to answer Dorothea's questions about the villagers and the other parishioners.

Here again the author has portrayed a character who represents some of the clergymen at that time. Other clergymen attempted to write huge works. Hart refers to Mandell Chrichton at Embleton, J. H. Overton at

Epworth and R. W. Dixon of Warkworth and many more. The pathetic case of John Skinner, who hoped that his *History of Roman Remains* would give him that place among the immortals, denied by his country seclusion, suggests Casaubon. Another similar case is that of Thomas Teasdale, curate of Luckington in Wiltshire, who laboured for more than ten years on a Greek dictionary only to be anticipated at the last moment by Liddell and Scott (Hart p. 43).

The country isolation must have made research difficult for these men. Peter Virgin in discussing Oxford and Cambridge colleges states that for each fellowship, they wanted at least one living. "In this way, stagnation could be avoided. There would be vacancies in college livings for Fellows wanting to marry, or seeking a move into rural clerical life, while the college could ease out into the countryside any don who was considered unsuitable" (p. 182). It seems possible that Casaubon might have been a student or don at Brasenose and perhaps he was "eased" into the countryside. Certainly Carp, Pike and Tench are not impressed with his scholarship.

We can only conclude that George Eliot's portrait of Casaubon appears to be a reasonably accurate one. Affluent incumbents did only preach one sermon a week, they did leave everything to their curates and they did pursue various academic goals although their motives for these may not have been as reprehensible as that of Casaubon. When one considers this rather indulgent lifestyle it seems that these men placed the Authority of the Church as secondary to other matters.

The issue of upholding the Authority of the Church and being true to its principles is made plain in the love of Fred Vincy for Mary Garth. The author is using Fred to comment on the common practice of men in "trade" to elevate their sons into the gentry by sending them to Oxbridge and then finding them a living. But Fred does not want to be a clergyman and Mary will not have him if he is. He would be a hypocrite, she declares. Here we see the author emphasising the differences between a profession and a calling. Fred's father sees the Church as one profession among the others - law, medicine and the armed services - but Mary sees it to be much more than that. She says, "His being a clergyman would be only for gentility's sake, and I think there is nothing more contemptible than such imbecile gentility." She develops this idea further: "he has plenty of sense, but I think he would not show it as a clergyman. He would be a piece of professional

affectation" (p. 516). In the relationship between these two young people George Eliot confronts a major problem in the Church, the lack of dedication in many of the clergy. She uses the moral strength of Mary Garth to do so.

Throughout the pages of *Middlemarch* there is a constant concern with religion and with moral conduct. Even in those parts of the book where such matters are not obvious they are there as an undercurrent. As we have seen, several clergymen of the Church of England are major characters in the novel but as moral mentors they are disappointing. George Eliot, as has been suggested in the preceding pages, has been critical of all of these clergymen. As has been pointed out, the collective failings of the English clergy in the early 1830's are all to be found in these characters. But of the clergy at the time who were devoted servants of Christ and who upheld, in the best possible way, the Authority of the Anglican Church we search the pages of the novel in vain. The reason for this lack must surely be that for the author anyone who worships a supernatural God, or holds a metaphysical philosophy, is deluded. She is best able to expound her Religion of Humanity by way of contrast with the characters she has drawn, rather than the more exemplary ones she has not.

George Eliot was an ardent evangelical until her middle twenties when she came under the influence of Charles Hennell, who, by careful study, had satisfied himself of the validity of the Unitarian position. In 1838 he published *An Inquiry into the Origins of Christianity* in which he conceded that "the true account of the life of Jesus Christ and of the spread of His religion, would be found to contain no deviation from the known laws of nature" (Haight p. 38). According to Kerry McSweeney, the *Inquiry* "offered a historical, psychological and literary explanation of the supposed supernatural and miraculous events recounted in scripture" (p. 24).

This had a profound effect on George Eliot as did Strauss's *Life of Jesus*, which she translated for the British edition. Although she rejected Christianity she did not repudiate Theism and from various sources, including Wordsworth and Spinoza, she derived a pantheism which Bernard Paris suggests "permitted her to retain many of her old values despite her rejection of the Bible" (p. 11).

But her interest in science was to cause a break with Pantheism for, under the influence of Comte, Mill, Spencer and Feuerbach, she became a Positivist. This was a more basic shift than that of Christianity to Pantheism because Positivism rejected any form of a supernatural deity. There was, however, a difficulty because while Comte's work satisfied the empirical side of her mind it hardly compensated for the ethics and values of her abandoned Christianity. Relief for her was provided by Feuerbach's book *The Essence of Christianity* in which the author denied the traditional antithesis of the divine and human, maintaining that divinity is man's projection of his own human nature. Love and morality, the basis of human relations, are the essence of religion. The need which all humans have to be loved is projected onto an objective, supernatural, but according to Feuerbach, non-existent deity. Man projects on to God that which he wishes to receive.

This was of great significance for George Eliot because it meant that the traditional morals and ethics of Christianity could be retained once it was understood that what *appeared* to be outside oneself or "objective" was really "subjective". True objectivity is no egoistic projection of one's desires onto a mythical deity but is expressed in a love and fellow-feeling for others. From this realization she arrived at her "Religion of Humanity" which essentially combines this selfless concept of objectivity with a positivistic sense of the universe. Humans possess the traits of egoism and objectivity and moral improvement consists in the movement from the former to the latter. Paris comments, "She believed that man is born a subjective creature and that objectivity is developed only through the painful education of experience" (p. 20). The narrator in *Middlemarch* says, "We are all of us born in moral stupidity taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves" (p. 211). This remark seems to be the humanistic equivalent of original sin.

There is no doubt that in the novel all the characters show degrees of egoism and objectivity. Such characters as Rosamond, Casaubon and Featherstone, who are self-centered and show little or no love or concern for their fellow humans, are egoistical and quite the opposite of Farebrother and Caleb Garth who are objective and concerned for others. Throughout the book, in all the different plots, the characters are used by George Eliot in some way to illustrate her Religion of Humanity. This religion is not dependent on any supernatural entity. Throughout the novel we discern a gentle implied

criticism of those doctrines of the Church which are to do with supernaturalism as contrasted with the ethics and morals of Christianity. It is interesting that Farebrother, who we feel has the approval of the author, has a background of latitudinarianism, which we have already noted "deprecated the marvellous and miraculous in religion". But it is not for this that Farebrother wins her, and our, approval. Farebrother is not subjective, he is not an egoist: he takes an objective view of his fellow human beings. We have already noted his act of self-sacrifice in promoting the love of Fred and Mary and also his concern for those dependent on him. "I want you," he told Fred, "to make the happiness of her life and your own" (p. 676).

Fred Vincy is the only complete egoist who finally attains an objective view of life. Bernard Paris comments that

Farebrother was here the true agent of God; through him the divine quality of human love was made manifest to Fred. Fred's values were no longer self-created: through Farebrother, and through the Garths too, Fred came to recognize something higher than himself and began to participate in the life of the species (p. 170).

Fred provides us with an example of moral development from egoism to objectivity and the way it occurs in three stages. Fred, at his egoistical stage, relies on Featherstone's will to provide for him. "Fred fancied that he saw to the bottom of his uncle Featherstone's soul, though in reality half of what he saw there was no more than a reflex of his own inclination" (p. 119). There is a similarity here with Dorothea who, in her initial stage, sees in Casaubon a reflection of her own wishes. The second stage for Fred, which begins at the reading of the will, is one of disillusionment and humiliation. His egoism, manifest in his virtual sponging from others for his own existence, is shattered. Mary speaks the truth to him. "Be brave Fred. I do believe you are better without the money. What was the good of it to Mr. Featherstone" (p. 340)? As Bernard Paris comments,

In the course of moral evolution, experience of suffering (the second stage) leads us to vision and vision intensifies sympathy. In the third stage of moral development, George

Eliot's characters arrive at some version of Feuerbach's religion of humanity (p. 128).

Fred, through suffering in the second stage, ultimately reaches this third stage with the help of Farebrother, as outlined above.

As well as these three stages of moral development those characters in the novel who attain objectivity follow Comte's Law of the Three Stages. Comte contended that each of our leading conceptions - each branch of our knowledge - passes through three different theoretical conditions: the Theological or fictitious; the Metaphysical, or abstract; and the Scientific or positive. Dorothea, in her journey to objectivity, passes through these stages and at the same time we see that she is experiencing the three stages of moral development.

At the beginning of the book she is an egoist. She does wish to do worthwhile work in the world for others but her motives are questionable. "Her mind was theoretic, and yearned by its nature after some lofty conception of the world which might frankly include the parish of Tipton and her own rule of conduct there" (p. 8). Here is egoism, in fact romance, the basis of which is self. She is at the Theological or fictitious stage of Comte's law. With her marriage to Casaubon she commences her journey of tribulation. As mentioned above she projects onto Casaubon that which she wishes to see and he does the same of her. She now finds a new Authority to live by. Whereas her Authority before was God it is now Knowledge;

since the time was gone by for guiding visions and spiritual directors, since prayer heightened yearning but not instruction, what lamp was there but knowledge? Surely learned men kept the only oil, and who more learned than Mr. Casaubon (pp. 86-7).

She is now at Comte's second stage, the Metaphysical. Or abstract. But also she is close to a time of suffering - the second stage of moral evolution. After this period of anguish she undergoes something like religious conversion. She wakes after a night of trauma.

She opened her curtains, and looked out towards the bit of road that lay in view with fields beyond, outside the entrance-gates. On the road there was a man with a bundle on his back and a woman carrying her baby; in the fields she could see figures

moving - perhaps the shepherd with his dog. Far off in the bending sky was the pearly light: and she felt the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance. She was part of that involuntary, palpitating life, and she could neither look out on it from the luxurious shelter as a mere spectator, nor hide her eyes in selfish complaining (p. 788).

The contrast with the Dorothea who looked down with detachment on Featherstone's funeral "watching everything with the interest of a monk on his holiday tour" and the new Dorothea with her deep involvement in humanity is here apparent.

This is Dorothea's epiphany. She has passed through suffering into a truly objective view of life. She is no longer the egoist. Now in the third stage of Comte's Law she sees God as an idealised projection of mankind and that to act with love and sympathy is to do so according to the Religion of Humanity. Authority for Dorothea is now not God, not Knowledge but a moral Authority based on an objective love and concern for one's fellow humans.

In Casaubon, by contrast, we have an example of egoism which worsens as the novel proceeds. Dorothea, despite her initial egoism, and Casaubon's selfishness, was able to see her husband with some degree of sympathy and to look at him with the beginnings of objectivity. Casaubon not only fails completely to see Dorothea's point of view, he becomes even more egoistical to the extent that he attempts to have power and control over her even after his death. There is a similar situation to this in Featherstone's will which attempts also to control the living.

The egoism-objectivity principle applies to all the other characters in the novel. Lydgate and Rosamond are so egoistical that it is impossible for each of them to be objective enough to communicate adequately. Rosamond, however, does perform one selfless act, an act which has enormous consequences, when she tells Dorothea that Will loves her. This is a confession which is quite outside Rosamond's moral character. She says of Will, "He has never had any love for me - I know he has not - he has always thought slightly of me. He said yesterday that no other woman existed for him beside you" (p. 798). In

this the author seems to be suggesting that even one objective act can be of great value.

We are now able to see why George Eliot has described her clerical characters in the way she has. To quote Paris again,

The truth, the virtue of Christianity lies in the fact that the divine nature is human nature made objective to itself: the untruth, the evil of Christianity lies in the illusion that the divine nature is different from human nature and that God is a personal being who exists independently of mankind. "When this projected image of human nature is made an object of reflection, of theology," writes Feuerbach, "it becomes an inexhaustible mine of falsehoods, illusions, contradictions, and sophisms." The illusions of religion are by no means harmless; the doctrines and attitudes to which they give rise are, to use George Eliot's description . . . "subversive of true moral development and therefore positively noxious" (p. 107).

Feuerbach points out that one of the most injurious of Christianity's teachings is that the source, end and arbiter of moral action is God and "what is done is done not because it is good and right, but because it is commanded by God. . . . whatever God commands is right" (Paris p. 107). This is indeed dangerous doctrine. God in past centuries, and unfortunately in our own twentieth century as we have seen to our dismay, has commanded man to do horrific acts.

So, not only is George Eliot, in her religion of Humanity, discarding supernaturalism in religion, she is also saying, with Feuerbach, that to hold a belief in a God "out there" as an objective reality hampers rather than promotes objectivity among humans and may even be hazardous. In her clerical characters in *Middlemarch* we can discern this.

We see this in Tyke; Feuerbach would describe Tyke's faith in the documents and dogmas of religion as "superstition and sophistry". Feuerbach lays down the rule that, in general "wherever religion places itself in contradiction with reason, it places itself also in contradiction with the moral sense" (Hart p. 189). Both Cadwallader and Casaubon neglect their parishes because, it is implied, it is necessary to serve God, not one's fellows. We see this in Bulstrode

who, although not a clergyman, justifies his lust for money and power by believing that what he wants to do is actually what God wants him to do. Feuerbach's "falsehoods, illusions, contradictions and sophisms" are to be seen in the very existence of "parties" and shades of opinion in the church. According to Feuerbach these are inevitable when God is a projection of man's own subjectivity.

Throughout *Middlemarch* we see the operation of Eliot's Religion of Humanity. As it is a post-Christian religion it does not require a church or an external God to function. Its moral Authority operates in all walks of life, although many, such as Bulstrode, fail through not following it.

We see it in Dorothea who, by visiting Rosamond, rescues four people - Rosamond, Lydgate, Will and herself. At the end of the book she and Will are continuing to think and act objectively. Will is elected to Parliament. "Dorothea could have liked nothing better, since wrongs existed, than that her husband should be in the thick of a struggle against them, and that she should give him wifely help" (p. 836).

We see it in Mrs. Bulstrode who remains loyal to her husband. "A movement of new compassion and old tenderness went through her like a great wave . . . They could not yet speak to each other of the shame which she was bearing with him, or of the acts which had brought it down on them" (p. 750).

We commenced this chapter with reference to the need, in the early 1830's, for reform of the Church of England. At no stage does George Eliot express outright criticism of the Church itself. She does so in an indirect manner, however, through her criticisms of those who represent the Church, both clergy and lay members. These characters, regardless of whether they are Evangelicals or High-church, are found to be wanting. At the time it was considered that these parties within the Church of England, together with pressure from Roman Catholics and Dissenters outside it, were the major problems for the Church. In *Middlemarch* George Eliot suggests that the Church of England, is in danger from a different source - one which has little to do with dogma and doctrine. Authority, for her is not a revealed system of beliefs as upheld by the Established Church but is found in the recognition that although humans live in a positivistic world there is indeed a moral authority achieved through the objective sympathy and love

expressed one to the other. In *Middlemarch* George Eliot examines the Authority of the Church of England and finds it lacking.

CHAPTER 5

It is immediately apparent that the three novels we have considered have several aspects which are common to them all. They are written by woman authors, the main character in each is a woman, and they are all set in the first half of the nineteenth century.

From the point of view of this thesis the most important shared concern is in the area of religion as evident in the Church of England because, as we have seen, each novelist provides a challenge to the Established Church. Not only is this criticism levelled at the Church itself but it extends into other areas of English life because the Church was part of the Establishment and a close ally of the State.

One such area, for example, is that of justice. There is no doubt that the Established Church in Victorian England was deeply involved here. The whole issue of justice is very important in these novels because it is bound up with Authority. In *North and South* both the mutiny and the riot show rebellion against Authority. Frederick Hale points out that he would not have a just court-martial because it would be overruled by Authority. Likewise in *Shirley* justice for the oppressed workers is overridden by Authority, which, in this case, is actively supported by the English Church in the person of Mr. Helstone. Again, in *Shirley* Shirley questions the Authority of the Church in two powerful scenes with Mr. Yorke and with Mr. Sympson. In *Middlemarch* we see the Authority of the Church poorly represented by Cadwallader and Casaubon, who treat their parishioners in what amounts to an unjust manner. On the personal level Mr. Brooke, who belongs to the Establishment, deals with his tenant, Dagley, most unjustly.

There is, however, a different attitude to justice expressed in *North and South*. In this novel Margaret Hale, although raised as an Anglican, is a Unitarian in spirit. As such she has a different outlook on life from that expressed by Caroline Helstone in Charlotte Brontë's novel. Unitarians find religious truth in reason rather than in Scriptural authority, creeds, or confessions. Hence they challenge the Church of England and do so particularly in the issue of justice. The ethic of justice in the Established Church is contrasted with the

ethic of charity practised by Unitarians. We note that Helstone's justice has little mercy about it - he goes to great lengths to track down the perpetrators of the riot to hand them over to the magistrates who will have them transported. As we have seen in the Introduction, the magistrates are probably clergymen. This is contrasted with Margaret Hale, a Unitarian, who seeks out the under-privileged to help them.

This difference is emphasised when we consider the riots which occur in *North and South* and in *Shirley*. In the former Margaret Hale rushes out to protect Thornton, not for personal reasons, but from a sense of concern for all those present, master and men. Not so Caroline, who would go to protect Robert for purely personal reasons.

The issue comes down to the question of Authority. Each novel appears to describe the Authority which its writer finds of utmost importance in her life. This Authority, as Bishop John Robinson puts it, is "the depth at the centre of life" (p. 3).

In *Middlemarch* we learn that Authority for Dorothea is found not in God, nor in the Church, but in an objective love and concern for her fellow human beings. This is the basis of George Eliot's Religion of Humanity which, as we have seen, was essentially humanistic but retained the values of Christianity. This religion rejects any form of supernaturalism. In *Middlemarch* this is expressed through showing love and concern for one's fellows in an objective way. Thus, in this novel, religion is all important, even though it is a new religion. The Church of England is rejected and is replaced by what amounts to atheism. Yet Eliot's religion appears to be more concerned with the needs of human beings than that of the Established Church. An unspoken criticism of Anglicanism runs throughout the book. Authority is located with those who try to live with maximal objectivity

The Authority for Unitarians is God. For them, as stated above, Authority is not found in creeds or liturgies and every Unitarian is free to apply reason to scripture. Although the word Unitarian does not ever appear in *North and South* the novel presents Unitarian ideas and practice in a covert way. We encounter, in the story of Mr. Hale's defection from the Church of England, Unitarian criticism of the Established Church because he is unable to subscribe the Articles. These would require him to assent to the divinity of Christ. In *North*

and *South* although never stated, we can discern the three main principles of Unitarianism. These are the fatherhood of God, the example of Jesus Christ and the Brotherhood of Man.

The Authority evident in *Shirley* is the Church of England. This is plainly stated by the narrator in her remark. "Britain would miss her church, if that church fell. God save it! God also reform it!" The author thus acknowledges the faults in the Church and the novel is concerned with presenting these, particularly those which pertain to the patriarchal treatment of women. Brontë, we have seen, uses two different characters to express her criticisms. Caroline is a far more passive character than the vocal and active Shirley. Caroline shows the dangers of succumbing to the status quo, and Shirley the possibility of victory in opposing it. But in *Shirley* unlike the other two novels, the Authority of the Church is not rejected. It is still accepted but a more enlightened view of its application is called for.

The difference in Authority expressed in these three novels is highlighted when one considers the attitudes to charitable work. In *Middlemarch* and in *North and South*, Dorothea and Margaret Hale are both free to do whatever charitable work they consider helpful. There is no requirement to consult any church about it. In *Shirley*, however, Shirley Keeldar finds it politic to do her good works through the Church. She cleverly arranges for Mr. Helstone to chair the meeting and for all clergymen to be present with the exception of the curates, who are considered by everyone to be useless.

All three novels challenge the hierarchical, patriarchal Authority of the Established Church. It is Shirley Keeldar, however, who voices the most outspoken criticism of male chauvinism and the effects it has on women. The patriarchal attitude, Shirley alleges, is based on the Genesis story in which Eve was created from Adam and was, in every way, secondary to him. Shirley, in order to emphasise that this story is a myth, provides a contrary myth. In effect she is saying, "This story is not true, it is myth. I will give you another myth which counters the Biblical one in the hope that it is now easier to discern that both stories are not literally true." Turning to *Middlemarch* we find myths also. Casaubon attempts to assemble myths which support Christian doctrine. This is in complete contrast to Shirley who is challenging orthodoxy. In considering the Genesis story as myth, Shirley is bringing reason to bear upon scripture. In this she steps

outside her Anglicanism and acts, in this instance, as a Unitarian. Margaret's Unitarian approach to Scripture is evident in her efforts to dissuade Bessy from reading the apocalyptic books in the Bible. Because Unitarians bring reason to bear and because they have gender equality there is no male chauvinism in *North and South*. Hence we see Margaret discussing industrial matters with the manufacturers in Milton. One cannot imagine a similar occurrence in *Shirley*.

The freedom which Unitarian women have is due also, in no small measure, to the education which they receive. This is commensurate with that provided for men. Conversely, female lack of education is lamented by Dorothea in *Middlemarch* and is a main reason for her disastrous marriage to Casaubon. Here again, the Established Church, with its control of both English universities, is responsible for the restrictions placed on tertiary education against women and all non-Anglicans. We note that William Gaskell graduated from Glasgow University. As a Unitarian he would have been denied entrance to Oxford or graduation from Cambridge.

Bound up with education is the question of the availability of suitable, fulfilling work for women. As we have read, for Caroline and *Shirley* there is an urgent desire to be able to work - to find some worthy role in the world. Margaret Hale does not have this difficulty. She assumes the leadership of the family and also she befriends the under-privileged. Later, on returning to London, she finds the social life empty of purpose and turns again to helping those in need. We see again the contrast between the socially-concerned Unitarian and the frivolous life-style of the Establishment, of which the Church of England is part.

Marriage is an important theme in all three books. Once again there are considerably different attitudes. Unitarians tend to marry other Unitarians but in *North and South* it is their freedom, their education and their equality with men which is the ultimate reason for the marriage of Margaret and Thornton. Although the somewhat contrived ending of the novel has Margaret rescuing Thornton financially, the author conveys to us the important truth that each of them has reached an understanding of the other's mind and that this is no semi-arranged marriage for reasons of finance or prestige. In *Middlemarch* Dorothea has learned that the most important way to live is to do so with an objective concern and sympathy for one's fellows. This she has learned

through her marriage to Casaubon in which both spouses saw in the other only what they wished to see - a reflection of their own desires. The Church of England has no involvement in the marriages of Dorothea and Ladislav and Margaret and Thornton but it has much to answer for in the various marriages proposed in *Shirley*.

Here the author describes marriage proposals such as that of Robert Moore to Shirley in which the resultant money would save his mill. We read of Mr. Sympson attempting to force his niece into marriage with the local aristocrat. Marriages are more like business transactions. Mr. Sympson cannot understand that Shirley would only marry for love. With such conduct as this we have difficulty reminding ourselves that these men are members of the Church of England. We have noted the chain of events, the trail of patriarchy which is responsible for the marriage situation in the Establishment and how the Genesis myth supposedly justified the domination of women. Charlotte finds this myth responsible for male chauvinism, not only in marriage but in all areas of Victorian life. The patriarchal attitude of the Established Church has far reaching effects - as complained of by Caroline and Shirley. Shirley's story "The First Blue-Stocking" is a plea for the intellectual ability of women to be recognized by Victorian society. Indirectly it states that there is an alternative to marriage for women.

In all three novels we see expressed the idea that love is restoring and nourishing. This is allied with the concept of freedom - one must be free to love or to be loved. In *Shirley* this is very strongly stated and we see food used as a metaphor for love. Caroline, because of the patriarchal restrictions of the Church, is, in effect, cut off from those whom she does love. As the passive churchwoman Caroline is unable to express her love, she can only receive it. In the absence of it she becomes anorexic. Ultimately, in the receipt of love from her mother she is restored to physical health. There is a considerable difference regarding the restoring power of love in both *North and South* and *Middlemarch*. In these two books Margaret and Dorothea have both undergone periods of disillusionment and humiliation but in both cases they find fulfillment in an outgoing love for others. Dorothea, after her epiphany, has passed through suffering into a truly objective view of life. Margaret, with the freedom of Unitarianism, has no religious restrictions and is able to sublimate her disappointments into helping the underprivileged in both Milton and

London. They, like Caroline, are nourished by love, although, unlike her, they extend love objectively to others.

Although these three novels are concerned with religion we note that there is very little written about religious practices. The aspect of religion with which all three books are concerned is the influence that religion has on human beings. We read of no sermons, prayer or dogma. In *Shirley* for example, apart from the patriarchal texts of St. Paul and a discussion about Milton's view of Genesis, we read little of the actual worship services of the English Church. This is because it is the attitude of the Church regarding "the woman question" which most concerns the author. Similarly, *North and South* although an advocate for Unitarianism, is really concerned with the benefits which it is able to confer on the needy rather than any theology, dogma, or scriptural exegesis. In *Middlemarch* also, little actual dogma of the Church is considered.

The overall impression we have of the Church in reading all three books is one of criticism. Each novel emphasises the point that because of the close liason between the State and the Church the ills and injustices of the former are condoned by the latter. In fact we gain the impression that it is because the Church is largely uncaring that the State is also. Many of the clergy, as we have seen, are unworthy representatives. Cadwallader and the curates are lazy and pleasure seeking. Helstone should be an army officer. No one can stand Tyke. Mr. Hale's replacement in Helstone is a dogmatic busybody. And so it goes on. Only three clergy in a total of three novels receive approval from their authors. Messrs Farebrother, Hall and Hale are favoured, not for their beliefs but for their kindness to others.

When *Middlemarch* and *Shirley* were written there was great agitation for reform in England. And although *North and South* was published in 1855 the movement towards reform was still progressing. Many areas of Victorian life were undergoing reform and these included the Church. At the time the great problems which the Church of England faced were those which concerned the divisions within itself. As discussed in the Introduction the Church, at the period described in these three novels, consisted of High and Low Church. It saw the increase in numbers and power of the dissenters and the relaxing of constraints on Roman Catholics as threats. The short but dramatic rise of the Tractarians with the consequent defection to Rome of Newman and others

was another problem. What is significant, however, is that none of these three novels is concerned with these problems. Instead, they deal with other issues which, although unrecognized by the Church at the time, became important in later years.

Middlemarch is prophetic because today we see many theologians and lay people assenting to a humanist religion. In our own country Lloyd Geering, and overseas such prominent scholars as Paul Tillich and Don Cupitt, have spoken the unspoken thoughts, no doubt, of many. George Eliot has, in some sense, given us a blueprint of how to live in a world in which God is, to use Tillich's phrase, "the ground of our being" rather than the God "out there." This book is important because it presents the start of what was to become a far greater challenge to the Church of England than were many internal problems at the time. *Middlemarch* has raised the question for the Church of how it must relate to an increasingly humanist world.

Unitarianism, as presented in *North and South* is prophetic also as more and more scientific research is undertaken concerning the historical Jesus. Groups of scholars, such as the "Jesus Seminar", are uncovering new knowledge in this direction so that it appears that the tenet of Unitarianism, the humanity of Jesus, may be confirmed. If evidence for this is forthcoming it will present a major theological problem for the Church, which would cease to be Trinitarian.

In keeping with the other two novels, *Shirley* is also prophetic. The yearning for gender equality expressed by Caroline and Shirley has largely been met. This has not been without problems for the Church which still contains within itself an entrenched lobby for an entirely male priesthood. This does not apply everywhere and Charlotte would, one feels, have been delighted if she could have known that the Anglican bishop in Dunedin was a woman. Such an appointment in 1849 was unthinkable.

Running as a thread through these three novels, despite their differences, is an aversion to structures and organisations which are man-made. We see this in Shirley Keeldar's preference for the idyllic world of nature rather than being inside the Church which is a male construct. Dorothea loathes the works of man in her visit to Rome but finds peace when she looks out her window at the beautiful pastoral scene. The village of Helstone for Margaret is ruined when, on her

return, she finds that a meddling dictatorial clergyman has somehow sullied the natural charm it once held for her. This love and respect for nature in all three books, through contrast, reveals the shortcomings of the Church and the Establishment.

As we have seen, these three novels all throw out challenges to the Church. In two of them, *Middlemarch* and *North and South* the Authority of the Church is rejected. In *Shirley* its Authority is accepted, but questions are asked of it. Associated with these differences in Authority we discern a progression regarding supernatural religion. In *Shirley* no doubts are expressed concerning the existence of God or the Trinity. In *North and South* the Unitarian view that Christ was not divine underpins the novel. In *Middlemarch* however, George Eliot's humanism replaces traditional supernatural Christian religion.

All three question the Establishment of which the Church is part. Hence we see concern expressed in such areas as justice, education for women, patriarchy, reform of Church and State and the care of the under-privileged. Since these novels were written many of the reforms which they advocate have been introduced. The Unitarian ideal of Brotherhood, which is an unstated aim in all these novels, still eludes us. Perhaps it always will.

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