

THE PORTRAYAL OF DISSENT AND THE ANGLICAN CHURCH IN VICTORIAN
LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

The reduction of the power of the Church of England during the Victorian era was inevitably reflected in the work of Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Charlotte Brontë. In this paper, I will examine one novel from each writer to explore how each responded to the decline of the Church of England and the growth of other denominations, and the way their responses converge and diverge from one another. Gaskell presents religious dissent in a sympathetic light and Dickens and Brontë respond to this topic with trepidation. Although the Victorian era brought a new religious standard, Dickens's and Brontë's fear of Gaskell's dissent novel betrays the tight grip which traditionalism still had on Victorian society. The examination of *North and South*, *Hard Times*, and *Jane Eyre* will show how the larger conversation about the cultural shift away from Anglicanism was manifesting itself on the literary page.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to Jesse, my sweet and silly brother. Your legacy for me is authenticity and I could not have done this without your voice and your memory reverberating in my heart, every painstaking step of the way. Thank you for everything. I hope you are as proud of me as I am of you.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The literature of the nineteenth-century Victorian era is marked by narratives of a newly industrialized society and the social issues that came with it. The fiction being produced during this time is often concerned with the widening gap between the rich, upper class and the proletariat, depicting stories of labor unions, strikes, and the financial disparity between classes. A lesser considered component of these Victorian era novels is the depiction of the Church of England's response to Industrialization. While industry was on the rise, the dissent from the Anglican Church of England was as well. Nonconforming denominations such as Methodism and Unitarianism became increasingly popular during this time. Walter Arnstein notes that by 1851, "just about half of England's worshippers attended the services of one of the Nonconformist denominations rather than those of the established church" (150-151). This statistic demonstrates a decline in devotion to the official Church of England, the Anglican Church, during the nineteenth century, but not a decline in religious fervor. A new type of religious fervor was building as industrialization led to a new era of social issues.

When considering the literature of the Victorian era, it is imperative to understand that the Church of England had maintained a level of authority and power over Christian expressions of faith, political office, and education and although this monopoly was in decline by the nineteenth century, this was causing its own set of issues. The diversification of belief systems and dismantling of much of the political power of the Church of England during the Victorian

era was part of what led to an emphasis on the importance of one's personal moral code in the literature of this period. Only during the nineteenth century did the Church of England's monopoly on higher education and positions in public office begin to crumble. Victorian authors began to respond to the social issues of their day, calling on society to not only see the issues but respond to them. Victorian authors Elizabeth Gaskell, Charles Dickens, and Charlotte Brontë called on Christian society to respond to humanitarian issues in different ways, but importantly, each author was concerned with the Church of England's sometimes apathetic and often oppressive treatment of the impoverished.

The reduction of the power of the Church of England was inevitably reflected in the works of Gaskell, Dickens, and Brontë. In this project I will examine one novel from each author to explore how each responded to the decline of the Church of England and the growth of other denominations. As well as analyzing a novel written by each author, I am interested in looking at the correspondence between these authors because as they navigate the criticism leveled at their respective works, their moral and religious convictions become increasingly clear. This project will focus on the differences between each author's response to Christianity of the Victorian era. I will examine Gaskell's *North and South*, Dickens's *Hard Times*, and Brontë's *Jane Eyre* beside the responses of Dickens and Brontë to Gaskell's portrayal of dissent from the Church of England in *North and South* to ascertain how each author wanted to change Victorian society for the better. This thesis project rests on the idea that Gaskell was both the main source of tension and also the connection between these three novelists. She presents religious dissent in a sympathetic light and Dickens and Brontë respond to this topic with trepidation. Gaskell's presentation of religious dissent along with the responses of Dickens and Brontë to that dissent is at the heart of this argument. While Gaskell wanted to depict a conscientious move away from

the Church of England as the exigence for the conflict in her novel *North and South*, both Dickens and Brontë expressed discomfort at this topic. Although the Victorian era brought a new religious standard, Dickens's and Brontë's fear of Gaskell's dissent novel betrays the tight grip which traditionalism still had on Victorian society. The examination of *North and South*, *Hard Times*, and *Jane Eyre* will show how the larger conversation about the cultural shift away from Anglicanism was manifesting itself on the literary page.

The similarities between these authors' responses to the Church of England is in the fact that each of these authors took on depictions of Victorian society in their works which led to sharp criticism. Gaskell writes about the power struggle between mill workers and owners, the social unrest caused by industrialization, and religious dissent in *North and South*. Dickens's allegorical novel, *Hard Times* was concerned with education reform, religious hypocrisy, and society's response to poverty. Brontë took on the hypocrisy of the Church of England's clergymen and highlighted the importance of individual conscience in her novel *Jane Eyre*. All three of these works depict dissatisfaction with the way that the Church of England wielded its institutional power and sought to demonstrate better ways to embody the Christian lifestyle.

While each author was calling for a better approach to humanitarian issues, they were each putting forth a different solution. Gaskell viewed tolerance of nonconformist denominations as the key to living in societal unity and harmony and her industrial novel shows a protagonist who achieves social unity through tolerance and understanding. Dickens was apprehensive about discussions of dissent as he viewed denominational differences as a distraction from social reform. His novel emphasizes the importance of social reform as he depicts characters who have been subjected³ to inhumane living conditions and a method of education that locks people into

an unhumanitarian perspective of society. Brontë saw the Church of England as an institution capable of and worth reforming. She sought to reveal the corruption that can easily happen when an individual's immorality goes unchecked and she advanced personal reform as the key to institutional reform.

This project is divided into four main chapters. The first chapter of this thesis will look at the lead up to the dismantling of much of the political and social power of the Church of England during the Victorian era. Considering the context in which the novels were written is paramount to understanding their author's responses to the Church of England and industrialization. While the literature of the nineteenth century is often discussed in terms of secularization, this chapter will focus on the rise of dissenting denominations which can be reframed as a rise in a new form of religious fervor during industrialization. Christian socialism is a term sometimes used in reference to the works of Gaskell, Dickens, and Brontë, so this chapter will expound on the contextual production of this literature.

The second chapter will focus on Gaskell's religious background and her publication of *North and South* in Dickens's serial magazine, *Household Words*. I will look at how Gaskell presented dissension from the Church of England and her presentation of religious tolerance. Gaskell's juxtaposition of the North and the South in her novel provides a ready comparison between all the characters and their respective experiences of society. Her characters demonstrate personal growth as they learn lessons from each other's experiences which lead to a greater unity in denominational tolerance.

The third chapter will look at Dickens's portrayal of Christian expression in *Hard Times*. Dickens's sympathetic characters are the ones who struggle within their station in society. His

antagonists are generally the religiously hypocritical people and the people who are most concerned with their own finances and social status. Dickens's impatience with denominational disputes is reflected in his reticence to publish Gaskell's chapter on dissension in *North and South* and his references to the "New Church" in *Hard Times*. He expresses a dissatisfaction with Gaskell's chapter describing Mr. Hale's painful exit from the Church of England suggesting to Gaskell that she shorten the chapter containing such a "difficult and dangerous subject" as dissension (*Letters 7*: 355-356). This chapter will introduce the idea of Dickens as a devout Christian, concerned with remaining loyal to the Church of England, but unconcerned with doctrinal discussions that might lead to dissent from the established church.

The final main chapter will analyze Brontë's, *Jane Eyre* and her response to Gaskell's portrayal of dissent from the Church of England. Brontë's concern with the Church of England lies in bigotry and hypocrisy within institutionalized religion and is laid out in her second edition preface to the novel. Her sympathetic characters are flawed but possess a strong moral conviction and individual conscience. Her antagonists, the clergymen Jane encounters, are presented as hypocritical and lacking in individual morals and consciences. Brontë's concern with the "difficult" topic of dissent in *North and South* is allayed by the fact that she perceives Gaskell to be presenting sincere doubts, not promoting divisiveness. Brontë advances a sincere, steadfast, and personal morality and faith as the answer for reform within institutionalized religion.

In this project, I have utilized the research of James Torke regarding the history of the Church of England as laid out in his article, "The English Religious Establishment" published in the *Journal of Law and Religion*. Additionally, regarding the history of the established Church,

Walter Arnstein's article, "Recent Studies in Victorian Religion," published in *Victorian Studies* in 1989 provided helpful context for understanding the institutionalization of the Church of England. Additionally, Carys Brown's article "Politeness, Hypocrisy and Protestant Dissent in England after the Toleration Act, c .1689- c .1750." provided helpful background information. Cheryl Walsh's article, "The Incarnation and the Christian Socialist Conscience in the Victorian Church of England," was helpful in my understanding of the exigence of Christian Socialism. Context for Gaskell's religious background and the history of Unitarianism came from the work of Kay Millard and her article "The Religion of Elizabeth Gaskell." I have referred to the works of biographers Michael Slater and Robert Butterworth in framing my chapter on Charles Dickens. In writing the chapter about Charlotte Brontë and *Jane Eyre*, I utilized Zoe Brennan's book, *Brontë's 'Jane Eyre' a Reader's Guide* and I also found Maria Lamonaca's article "Jane's Crown of Thorns: Feminism and Christianity in *Jane Eyre*" a helpful resource in contextualizing the criticism surrounding *Jane Eyre*. All other sources used are the letters of correspondence between these authors and the works by each author, referenced earlier in this chapter.

I hope that this project will serve to show the even greater importance of understanding the nuance of the religious climate of the Victorian era in reference to the literature being produced during the nineteenth century. Additionally, I hope to shed light on the distinctive differences between each author's response to the new social issues presented by Industrialization. Where it would be easy to regard each author's contribution to the literature of Victorian England as simply humanitarian, I hope to show the unique suggestions for social reform coming from each author's works, informed by her or his personal convictions regarding the Church of England's role in English society.

CHAPTER II

INDUSTRIALIZATION, THE RISE OF DISSENTING DENOMINATIONS, AND THE NINETEENTH CENTURY LITERARY RESPONSE

The Victorian era was a period of increasing secularization as society's diverging Christian expressions and beliefs began to be legitimized in education and politics. The works of Victorian authors such as Elizabeth Gaskell, Charles Dickens, and Charlotte Brontë reflect the growing Christian diversity in English culture as they responded to the changing society around them. Industrialization in the Victorian era ushered into society a new set of social issues. These issues and the Church of England's response to them can be evaluated through the literature of Gaskell, Dickens, and Brontë. In order to analyze the varying literary responses to the Victorian Church of England, we must first view the Anglican Church as a powerful central institution whose power was declining by the mid-19th century and consider the rise of dissenting denominations.

In the lead up to the official establishment of the Church of England in the early 1500's under the reign of Henry VIII, England had already experienced a fraught relationship with institutionalized religion. As James Torke points out, the English Church "predates not only England itself but even the sense of the English as a distinct people" (406). The idea of taking territory for a set of religious ideologies is seen in England's history as Pope Gregory I commissioned Augustine on a mission to "reclaim England for the Western Church" in 597 (406). Torke calls this the birth of the English Church. Up to 1066, the Church experienced

relative independence from any organized or Papal authority, but a struggle for civil authority between the monarchy and the pope began at this point and a blueprint for a centuries long struggle was manifested.

During the Restoration period, the 1688 Act of Toleration established that dissenters from the Church of England could worship publicly and freely, although they were still prohibited from holding public offices or attending universities. As noted by historian Carys Brown, the Act of Toleration was a “half-victory” for many dissenters, rather than a complete show of toleration for differing religious expression since the “Test and Corporation Acts, barring Dissenters from public office, remained in place, and the 1689 Act gave very little practical guidance on where Dissenting congregations and ministers might fit into the functions of the community at large” (61). With the Test and Corporations Acts still in place, the ideal of tolerance did not constitute an embrace of society’s differing denominations, but instead set a limit on the societal functions of these denominations. However, the Act “opened up space for debate about the relationship between Church, State, and dissenter” (Brown 62). This space gave writers room to reflect the unrest and to engage in the ongoing debate between Church and State. Nineteenth Century England saw the emergence of established denominations such as Methodism and Unitarianism as well as other sects of Christianity.

In the century following the passage of the Act of Toleration, England increasingly accepted the popularity of differing versions of Christian worship and faith. However, even years after the Act, a dissenter’s inability to hold public office or attend university is important to note because this gave the impression that dissent was only for the poor and uneducated. In 1828, non-members of the Church of England were admitted to Public Office (Torke 409). By then, the

power and control that the Church of England held was decreasing with every decade. Cheryl Walsh summarizes the position of the Anglican Church in the nineteenth century by pointing out:

It was the established Church of England—an arm of the state that was assigned the honor and duty of serving as the focus and guide of the nation’s spiritual life. Its position was embarrassing by the mid nineteenth century because it obviously was not fulfilling its ostensible role. The increasingly secular nature of industrial society on the one hand, and the Christian challenge of Nonconformity on the other, cost the Church membership among all classes of people. That loss significantly undermined the Anglican claim that the established Church served the religious needs of the whole nation, and it led to persistent Nonconformist cries for disestablishment. Furthermore, Christianity’s appeal to its traditional following, the poor and lowly, seemed to evaporate in the industrial environment of the Victorian city. Not only did typical urban workers not go to church (or chapel, for that matter), they were generally rather hostile to organized religion and particularly to the Anglican Church. (351)

Walsh distinguishes the Victorians’ need for a new Christian expression by explaining that the Anglican tradition in the early Victorian Church generally was not concerned with the effects of an individual’s actions on others, and was mostly concerned with how behavior, moral or immoral affected the individual. The Church did not encourage or attempt to further the “development of a social conscience—or a recognition of any kind of responsibility for the welfare of fellow human beings” (353). Therefore, the Victorian people needed a new type of Christian expression, one that would be relevant and applicable to the lives of lower-class citizens.

The industrialization of the Victorian era only exacerbated already prevalent social issues related to classism. Since the twelfth century, the universities of Oxford and Cambridge were founded and staffed entirely by English clerics and until the nineteenth century, only men who were official Church of England members were admitted. As Torke notes, this placed the “Church at the center of English learning and scholarship” (407). Not only was education largely tied up in the Anglican Church, but it was also increasingly unavailable for lower class citizens

as parents sent their children to work in factories and mills instead of to school. With little government oversight, factory and mill owners hired young children to work in poor conditions leading to illness and premature death (not to mention the abuse suffered by working class citizens at the hands of employers). The lack of education subsequently led to a lack of any real opportunities to raise one's financial and social status, perpetuating a cycle of poverty. Industrialization also made church membership and attendance all the more inaccessible for working class citizens. High Church Anglicanism with its emphasis on liturgy, education, and social status was no longer relevant for many people. As social issues tied to industrialization in Victorian England abounded, the need for a new type of Christianity arose.

This resulted in an increase in the popularity of Low Church Christianity and varying denominations. No longer was Anglicanism the only Christian expression for society. Torke writes that at this point, "decade by decade throughout the nineteenth century, membership in the established church lost its privileged status" (409). With the establishment of the University of London in 1827, the Anglican Church no longer had a monopoly on higher education (423). The establishment of a secular educational institution was an important moment in Victorian history, legitimizing differing denominational Christianity.

In *Dickens, Religion, and Society* Robert Butterworth shows that the rise of Christian Socialism in the late 1830's was inextricably linked to the rise of brand-new social issues tied to industrialization. Christian Socialism sought to respond to classist issues such as a lack of education opportunities for lower classes, extreme poverty exacerbated by poor labor conditions, and the abuse of industrial laborers. Christian Socialists saw themselves as advancing the message of Christ through the principles of charity and tolerance. Walsh posits that Christian

Socialists had in mind a model of society based on brotherhood and if all men are brothers, then it follows that each should be looking after the welfare of the other.

This tumultuous social climate led Victorian novelists to write about labor unions, social issues, poverty, unjust power structures, and religious hypocrisy. These authors began to respond to the social issues of their day, calling on society not only to see the issues but respond to them. Writing in *Victorian Studies* in 1989, Walter Arnstein, pointed out that until recently, studies of Victorian history largely overlooked the literary implications of the religious exodus from the Anglican Church after the Enlightenment period (150). Christian Socialism emphasized humanity's brotherhood and a shared social responsibility to one another, and this is reflected in much of the literature produced in Victorian England. Butterworth states that, "being one's brother's keeper involved three overriding shared concerns, about the immediate hardship and suffering of the less fortunate in their daily lives; anxiety that their humanity should not be diminished or fail to be developed; and a watchfulness about the state of their immortal souls" (37). Dickens, Gaskell, and Brontë were concerned with the idea of an individual's dignity and created characters who learned lessons about the inherent dignity of humanity. The works of Gaskell and Brontë especially express a concern for the redemption of even their more antagonizing characters. The antagonists of their novels represented the larger antagonistic qualities of Victorian society: the abusive mill and factory owners, the hypocritical religiosity of the Church of England, and the illness and death that pervaded life as a lower-class citizen. Even though these authors did not officially subscribe to the doctrine of socialism, they each expressed a desire to respond to the needs of society with charitable and Christian deeds.

The three authors whose works I focus on in this project each reflect a concern for the wellbeing of others in their works, demonstrating an individual as well as social conscience concerned with religiosity and antagonism that is institutionalized, and in these ways, their works converge. The divergence in their respective representation of social concerns seems to be the way that each author handles the Christian response to social concerns. They are each, in their own way, demonstrating a belief that the Anglican Church was not exhibiting the proper Christian response to the issues in society. Dickens and Brontë, both members of the Church of England, were reluctant to portray dissent from the official Church. Brontë, a devout Anglican, was willing to address hypocrisy within the denomination, but not to condone dissent. Dickens is also reluctant to seem as though he condones dissent from Anglicanism, but Gaskell masterfully presents dissension, differing denominations, and even agnosticism in a sympathetic light.

CHAPTER III

“IT DID THEM NO HARM”: UNITY IN DISSENT AND DIFFERENCE IN *NORTH AND SOUTH*

When Elizabeth Gaskell began to write *North and South* for serialization in Charles Dickens’s publication *Household Words*, she was concerned about the prospect of overlap between the labor union content in her novel and in Dickens’s own, *Hard Times*. Dickens reassured her in a letter that his novel would not cover a strike and that he was not concerned with their novels being too similar in their depiction of industrialization. Their difference is further reflected in the way Gaskell’s plot hinges on a minister’s dissent from the Anglican Church, and the overarching message within the novel highlights tolerance. While Dickens saw overlap as no problem, he was apprehensive about the idea of publishing Gaskell’s material about dissension from the Anglican Church and encouraged her to shorten it. The topic was important enough to her to resist Dickens’s recommendations and both the serialized story and the subsequent published novel include the long chapter on dissension. In this chapter, I explore Gaskell’s own religious background as a Unitarian, how *North and South* reflects this background by promoting tolerance and unity, and how this novel critiqued the typical Anglican outlook on poverty as an inevitable part of society rather than as a social problem that could be reformed away.

Gaskell had a unique relationship with religious expression in Victorian England. The daughter of a Unitarian minister, Gaskell spent her entire life within the Unitarian faith. Her faith

profoundly affected her ambitions both as a citizen of the world and as an author. In her article “The Religion of Elizabeth Gaskell,” Kay Millard points out that Unitarianism is less about a “set of beliefs,” and more a “way of life” and that therefore “to understand [Gaskell], we . . . need to understand her faith” (1). Significantly, because Unitarians “do not adhere to a creed;” they accept that “individual conscience is the ultimate authority” (2). One of the more controversial tenets of Unitarianism is its departure from a belief in the Trinity, a doctrine it was illegal to deny until 1813 (3). The Unitarian belief in God as a singular being is a departure from the Anglican view of the Trinity, God as three-in-one. Although denominational diversity was acceptable in England by the time Gaskell’s novel was published, disbelief in the Trinity was still heretical as far as the Church of England was concerned. Millard notes that “being a Unitarian was still, in Gaskell’s lifetime, to be on the legal and social margins” (3). Unitarianism was no longer a crime, but Gaskell and her contemporaries still felt the reverberations of society’s distrust of and distaste for their expression of Christianity. One of the profound differences between Gaskell’s faith as a Unitarian and the Victorian Anglican Church was the idea of faith guided by personal conscience that presumably would lead one to charitable action. According to Millard, Gaskell’s Unitarian faith, “placed emphasis on reading the Bible with understanding in the light of one’s God-given reason. It emphasized the love of God, rather than the anger or judgmentalism of God. . . . It said that every person should have liberty of conscience in matters of religion and should not be persecuted for his or her beliefs” (Millard 5). This is a sentiment expressed in Gaskell’s portrayal of tolerance despite denominational differences.

Aside from more theologically dense differences between Unitarianism and Anglicanism, another major difference is the Unitarian bent toward equality between the sexes. Certainly, during this time Unitarians still operated within a largely patriarchal system, but the belief that

everyone should have access to education, including women, was a principle of the Unitarian faith. Because Unitarianism was outside of the Establishment and because it focused on the individual interpretation of the Bible, it follows that one would need to have access to education in order to read and interpret the scriptures. Millard points out that “there were two main aspects to Unitarian involvement in education. One focused on education for all those who could possibly take advantage of it, and the other focused on providing higher education for ministers and laymen and laywomen” (7). This meant that Gaskell was well read and well educated. Gaskell’s education growing up was reinforced by the fact that her father was a prominent Unitarian minister, placing her in the company of other prominent theologians and Unitarian thinkers. She was taught at home by her aunt, then went to boarding school at an Anglican school (which likely later informed her writing in *North and South*). Living in a Unitarian minister’s household was “something of a cross between a finishing school and a university” and was “as near a woman could come at that time to higher education” (8). Thus, as was standard for a young Unitarian woman, she went to live with a reverend, William Turner, and his family after boarding school, forming friendships she maintained throughout her adult life.

The main principles of Gaskell’s Unitarian faith are seen in *North and South* through its portrayal of dissent from the Church of England, its representation of other Christian denominations, and its protagonist’s ultimate bent toward tolerance, intellectualism, and personal morality. In the opening lines, readers meet the novel’s protagonist, Margaret Hale, and learn that she is from an idyllic “hamlet” called Helstone, where her father is an Anglican minister. Margaret has lived with her wealthy aunt for ten years but has recently decided to move back with her parents. She dreams of “the delight of filling the important post of only daughter in Helstone parsonage” (Gaskell 8). A complication which readers are made aware of early in the

novel is that her brother Frederick, Mr. and Mrs. Hale's only son, had been involved in a mutiny on a British navy ship and is now a fugitive living in Spain. This will come up multiple times as an injustice in the Hales' lives. Margaret's loyalty to her aunt and cousin is only overshadowed by her loyalty to her parents and her love of their home in Helstone, described as "like a village in a poem – in one of Tennyson's poems" (14). The descriptions of Margaret's love of Helstone, her contentment in her parents' small country home foreshadow the devastating upheaval the impending dissension of her father will cause for the Hale family.

In the fourth chapter, entitled "Doubts and Difficulties," Gaskell emphasizes the importance of following one's personal convictions. The chapter painstakingly describes Mr. Hale's decision to leave his post as an Anglican minister, joining the dissenters in both his reduced social and financial status. Mr. Hale calls Margaret into his study to declare, "I must no longer be a minister in the Church of England...I can meet the consequences of my painful, miserable doubts; but it is an effort beyond me to speak of what has caused me so much suffering" (35). Mr. Hale reassures Margaret that her brother's fugitive status has nothing to do with his doubts, and he furthermore assures her that he has no "doubts as to religion; not the slightest injury to that" (35). Mr. Hale's explanation demonstrates key Unitarian values regarding personal conscience as the chief determiners of right and wrong. Mr. Hale explains:

You could not understand it all, if I told you – my anxiety, for years past, to know whether I had any right to hold my living – my efforts to quench my smouldering doubts by the authority of the Church. Oh! Margaret, how I love the holy Church from which I am to be shut out...I have been reading today of the two thousand who were ejected from their churches...trying to steal some of their bravery; but it is of no use – no use – I cannot help feeling it acutely (35-36).

Gaskell adds credibility to Mr. Hale's account by quoting a famous dissenter's account of his own struggle to follow his conscience. Mr. Hale shows this account of dissent to Margaret

saying, “this is the soliloquy of one who was once a clergyman in a country parish, like me; it was written by a Mr. Oldfield, minister of Carsington, in Derbyshire, a hundred and sixty years ago, or more. His trials are over. He fought the good fight” (36). Oldfield’s account reads:

When thou canst no longer continue in thy work without dishonour to God, discredit to religion, foregoing thy integrity, wounding conscience, spoiling thy peace, and hazarding the loss of thy salvation... thou must believe that God will turn thy very silence, suspension, deprivation, and laying aside to His glory and the advancement of the Gospel’s interest. (36)

This addition of Oldfield’s account underscores both Gaskell’s understanding of the topic of dissent and the value she placed on following one’s personal conscience, even into dissent.

Rather than laying out exactly what the theological or doctrinal doubts are that Mr. Hale is suffering, Gaskell highlights the pain that Mr. Hale’s decision causes Margaret and her mother. Mr. Hale entreats Margaret to “think of the early martyrs... of the thousands who have suffered” to which Margaret retorts, “the early martyrs suffered for the truth, while you —” implying her own steadfast loyalty to the Anglican faith (37). Mr. Hale retorts, “I suffer for conscience sake,” and he makes it clear that he tried, without success, to ignore his doubts about the institution of the Church of England. Even this early in the novel, Gaskell’s writing reflects her religious values. And by creating a protagonist who is a devout Anglican, she manages to characterize the struggles of dissent in a sympathetic light. This depiction of dissent takes up the entirety of a chapter and is treated with the utmost importance and sincerity by Gaskell. Margaret is made so uncomfortable by the topic and goes so far as to call her father a “heretic” (38). Margaret tries to see her father’s perspective, but when he ends the conversation with a benediction of sorts saying, “The blessing of God be upon thee, by child,” she responds, “and may He restore you to His Church” (41). Margaret is resistant to her father’s conscientious decision in the beginning, and this helps to shape the later conversation about tolerance. Gaskell

appeals to emotion in this discussion of dissent. This chapter is the exigence for the rest of the novel as it forces the move to the industrial town of Milton where the rest of the novel's action takes place.

Despite her loyalty to the Church of England demonstrated in the early chapters of *North and South*, Margaret increasingly displays tolerance toward other denominations when she interacts with characters in Milton, as she learns more about their lives and realities. As Margaret attempts to adjust to life in Milton, she meets a father and daughter, Nicholas and Bessy Higgins, who work in two of the factories in Milton. She notices that the daughter is ill as a result of long work hours in poor conditions. Margaret suggests that when Spring comes, she will feel better. Bessy responds, "I shall have a spring where I'm boun' to, and flowers, and amaranths, and shining robes besides" (74). This is the first time that readers are introduced to Bessy's faith and Margaret is shocked by Bessy's casual mention of her own death. Bessy frequently mentions wanting to die to escape her illness and this demonstrates a major difference between High Church Anglicanism and the Low Church Methodism to which Bessie belongs. Margaret is disturbed by this "for she shrank from death herself, with all the clinging to life so natural to the young and healthy" (90). At one point, Margaret admonishes Bessy: "don't be impatient with your life, whatever it is – or may have been. Remember who gave it you and made it what it is" (91). At this point, Nicholas steps in protectively saying that he does not want Bessy "preached to. She's bad enough as it is, with her dreams and her methodic fancies, and her visions of cities with goulden gates and precious stones. But if it amuses her I let it abe, but I'm none going to have more stuff poured into her" (91). Margaret's perspective is changing as she interacts with others and is confronted with realities harsher than hers, and Gaskell thus offers three different sympathetic perspectives in this passage as equally valid and born out of life experiences.

Gaskell appeals to her readers' emotions as she presents Nicholas' agnosticism as a result of his bitter life experiences, in this way drawing a connection between poverty, ill treatment of workers, and a lack of faith. Even the agnostic Nicholas Higgins is presented as a sympathetic character whose bitter life experiences justify his current spiritual state. Unlike Bessy, Nicholas Higgins is closer to agnostic than Methodist, telling Margaret that he only believes "what I see, and no more... I don't believe all I hear – no" (91). Margaret is very disturbed by the way that Bessy expresses her faith in God, and she is equally disturbed by Nicholas' unbelief. However, despite the many references to faith, God, and the Bible, Margaret does not take the opportunities to discuss her theology and doctrinal differences between her Anglican faith and Bessy's Methodism. As in her chapter on Mr. Hale's dissent, Gaskell appeals to the emotion of the reader when Bessy mentions wanting to die and she appeals to reason when Nicholas explains his own "creed" (92). Nicholas tells Margaret, "when I see the world going all wrong at this time o' day, bothering itself wi' things it knows nought about, and leaving undone all the things that lie in disorder close at its hand – why, I say, leave a' this talk about religion alone, and set to work on what yo' see and know. That's my creed. It's simple, and not far to fetch nor hard to work" (92). After this conversation, "Margaret went away very sad and thoughtful" (92). Gaskell thus suggests that, in light of the Church of England's insufficient response to poverty, it follows that some, like Nicholas, would choose to be non-religious.

This link between social concerns and religious concerns is most particularly depicted in a scene between Bessy and Margaret in which they discuss the dangers of working in the mill. The proximity between the conversation about faith and the explanation of mill work is notable because we see the ways that Gaskell correlated faith and the injustice of industrialization. Bessy explains to a I Margaret what it is like to work in the "carding-room," which is the least

dangerous part of the mill according to Bessy, but still comes with fatal dangers. Bessy explains that while working in the carding-room, “fluff got into my lungs, and poisoned me” (102). She describes fluff to Margaret as “little bits, as fly off fro’ the cotton, when they’re carding it, and fill the air till it looks all fine white dust... it winds round the lungs and tightens them up” (102). Bessy says that the only thing to really alleviate the ingestion of fluff is if the mill masters will install a “great wheel at one end o’ their carding rooms to make a draught, and carry off th’ dust” but this wheel costs a lot of money and in a devastating admission further relates that some men objected to a wheel “because they sad as how it made ‘em hungry, after they’d been long used to swallowing fluff, to go without it” (102). It is apparent in this scene that in Gaskell’s mind, social concerns are linked to religious ones.

Just as Gaskell presents the differing religious views sympathetically, the differing social concerns between Margaret and Mr. Thornton are sympathetically presented. Margaret, equipped with a greater understanding of working conditions from the perspective of working-class citizens, confronts Mr. Thornton regarding the impending strike. Mr. Thornton explains that workers are striking for higher wages and that the masters cannot afford to pay them because “we see the storm on the horizon and draw in our sails” (117). Margaret queries, “could you not explain what good reason you have for expecting a bad trade? I don’t know whether I use the right words, but you will understand what I mean” (117). She is simultaneously appealing to his logic and reasoning, while also appealing to his greater knowledge of business, allowing him to be the expert even though she clearly disagrees with his logic. Mr. Thornton replies that “we, the owners of capital, have a right to choose what we will do with it,” and Margaret calls this right “a human right” saying “there seemed no reason but religious ones, why you should not do what

you like with your own” (118). In this way, Margaret asserts the idea of a religious responsibility to care for the poor, implying that there is a connection between capitalism and religion.

At this point in Victorian society, quality of life was of less concern to the Church of England than the state of one’s soul after death, and so Margaret demonstrates a very un-Anglican view of classism by suggesting that Christians have a social responsibility to care for those less fortunate. Once again, Margaret has inserted religion into the conversation of industrialization and classism. Margaret and Mr. Thornton do not agree with each other’s assessment of the situation between masters and mill workers. Margaret states, “I see two classes dependent on each other in every possible way, yet each evidently regarding the interests of the other as opposed to their own; I never lived in a place before where there were two sets of people always running each other down” (118). Margaret comes very close to asserting a Christian socialist attitude in her statement that, “every man has had to stand in an unchristian and isolated position, apart from and jealous of his brother-man: constantly afraid of his rights being trenched upon...God has made us so that we must be mutually dependent...the most proudly independent man depends on those around him for their insensible influence on his character – his life” (122). Margaret asks Mr. Thornton to recognize his position of power and seek to relate to his mill workers and Gaskell shows both Mr. Thornton and Margaret’s viewpoints to have sympathetic elements and continues to place them in heated conversations, trying to understand each other. Margaret meets with Thornton on the planes of intellectualism, arguing morality as it pertains to everyday life and reasoning.

As the novel progresses, Margaret’s ability to understand the perspectives of others increases. When her mother falls ill, she tells Bessy “there’s no outlet but death for her out of the

prison of her great suffering,” a phrase that is surprising given her earlier discomfort with Bessy’s discussion of her own death (137). And again, when Bessy dies, Margaret notes that “the face, often so weary with pain, so restless with troublous thoughts, had now the faint soft smile of eternal rest upon it... and that was death! It looked more peaceful than life. All beautiful scriptures came into her mind” (215). Margaret is beginning to understand Bessy’s view of death and heaven and through her grief, she is seeing death as a form of peace and comfort for the sufferer. For Margaret, with experience comes empathy and this empathy makes room for tolerance of religious difference. The positive qualities of Nicholas the agnostic are shown in his taking in Boucher’s children after the death of their parents and Mr. Thornton’s own charitable qualities are consistently shown throughout the novel as he tries to make Margaret’s mother comfortable in her illness. For today’s readers, this tolerance poses no threat to faith or society, but in Victorian England, the idea that a mill owner had a Christian duty to his workers seemed a threat to both their expression of faith and their way of life. The novel tracks Margaret’s progress as a I Southern minister’s daughter, to a truly empathetic and tolerant businesswoman. The North (Thornton) and the South (Margaret) can converge only when they make space to understand each other.

Margaret is increasingly able to mediate between all the different lifestyles and belief systems she encounters in Milton and a crucial point comes after Bessy’s death in which Margaret brings Nicholas Higgins to her father’s house in hopes that Mr. Hale will provide some comfort. The “meek, kind-hearted Mr. Hale” is dismayed at the idea of a “drunk, infidel weaver” in his home, but the narrator makes a clear distinction that Higgins was “neither an habitual drunkard nor a thorough infidel. He drank to drown care... he was an infidel so far as he had never yet found any form of faith to which he could attach himself, heart and soul” (221-222).

This is an intriguing distinction for Gaskell to make, allowing that there are different forms of faith, and that one must be able to fully commit to one's expression of faith. In this chapter, Mr. Hale creates a space for tolerance in saying to Nicholas, "You consider me mistaken, and I consider you far more fatally mistaken. I don't expect to convince you in a day, – not in one conversation; but let us know each other, and speak freely to each other about these things, and the truth will prevail. I should not believe in God if I did not believe that" (223). Concluding this chapter, Higgins joins the Hales in "family prayer," wherein the narrator states, "Margaret the Churchwoman, her father the Dissenter, Higgins the Infidel, knelt down together. It did them no harm" (230).

Gaskell's depiction of dissent was met with discomfort and trepidation from contemporaries Dickens and Brontë because despite a growing tolerance for differing sects of Christianity, the Church of England was still an establishment that wielded a substantial amount of power. This power was implicit as well as explicit. The implicit nature of this power is seen in Dickens's reticence to publish the full chapter on dissent and his asking Gaskell to curtail it. By writing about dissent at length and in plain terms, Gaskell is standing up to the explicit power of the Anglican Church, demonstrating the personal good that can come from dissenting. This did prove to be a source of contention for Gaskell among her Anglican friends who reacted negatively to the dissension in her novel. Gaskell writes in a letter to her friend Eliza Fox that she was called a socialist and communist. She expresses her conflicted sense of self as she describes her 'many mes', or the 'warring members' of her own identity. The first of her 'many mes' she identifies 'is a true Christian,' only, she adds in parenthesis, 'people call her socialist and communist' (*Letters*, 108). By standing her ground and refusing to shorten her chapter on dissent, Gaskell stood up to the implicit power of the Church of England, not allowing the fear of

being considered heretical, communist, or socialist keep her from authoring her story of unity despite doctrinal differences. And finally, for a Unitarian woman to write about dissent from the Anglican Church, while positioning her protagonist as a devout Anglican, Gaskell demonstrates a positive outcome of tolerance and unity: the ability to empathize with other points of view.

CHAPTER IV

A “DIFFICULT AND DANGEROUS SUBJECT”: DICKENS AND DISSENSION FROM THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

When Dickens first set out to publish his weekly journal, *Household Words*, he expressed to Gaskell that his goal for the publication was the “raising up of those that are down, and the general improvement of our social condition” (*Letters* 6:22). In the same letter, Dickens praised her novel *Mary Barton* saying that it “profoundly affected and impressed” him. He asked her to contribute to *Household Words* saying, “there is no living English writer whose aid I would desire to enlist in preference to the authoress of ‘Mary Barton’... I should set a value on your help which your modesty can hardly imagine; and I am perfectly sure that the least result of your reflection or observation in respect of the life around you, would attract attention and do good.” The significance of this first professional correspondence between the two is not only because it reflects Dickens’s respect for Gaskell’s writing, but also because it demonstrates his understanding that Gaskell’s regard for social issues will “do good” and that her skillful writing would “attract attention.”

Dickens’s mission to bring about the “general improvement of our social condition” was reflected not only in his correspondence with Gaskell regarding her work but in his own fiction as well. This letter in early 1850 marks the beginning of their author/editor relationship, but it was not the beginning of their correspondence. Prior to enlisting her work for *Household Words*, Gaskell reached out to Dickens asking for his help in a social matter concerning a young girl

who needed safe passage to Australia, away from a life of poverty, imprisonment, and prostitution. Gaskell writes, “I can manage all except the voyage...we can pay all her expenses...pray don’t say you can’t help me for I don’t know any one else to ask, and you see the message you sent about emigration some years ago has been the mother of all this mischief” (*Letters* 61: 98). She appeals to Dickens’s work regarding social issues, demonstrating the shared social concerns between the two authors and the societal burden that linked them. This, along with Dickens’s professed admiration for *Mary Barton*, marks a distinct and unique shared social conscience. However, their shared social conscience diverged when it came to commenting on dissent from the Anglican church and resulted in Dickens’s entreaty that Gaskell curtail the section of *North and South* which deals with the Church of England. Although Dickens shared her concerns regarding social issues, he considered discussions of denominational differences pointless in the larger cause of social reform.

Like Gaskell, Dickens possessed a devout faith, seeing in the New Testament portrayal of Jesus Christ the correct remedy to the social ills facing Victorian Society and that were perpetuated by the disinterest of the Church of England. In his industrial novel, *Hard Times*, Dickens critiques a range of institutions that oppress the working and lower class citizens, one of those being the Church of England. Dickens intended to express the ills of a merely utilitarian society and by framing his novel in Biblical allusions, Dickens inextricably linked institutionalized religion with education, politics, and the downfall of society. In this way, he responds to the sterilized Victorian Anglican attitude that morality was solely individual, and poverty God-ordained to encourage piety or to punish some immorality. But unlike Gaskell, Dickens was not interested in dissent from the Church of England and only saw discussions of denominational difference as a distraction from the work of social reform. In this chapter, I posit that Dickens’s readiness to criticize the Church

of England is because he largely considered it an institution worth reforming but not dissenting from. Gaskell's writing portrays dissent in a sympathetic light, encouraging not only tolerance of different denominations but discussion of these differences. Dickens, meanwhile, wanted his fiction to promote individual conviction toward societal reform through Christian precepts without the potentially alienating distraction of discussions of denominational differences.

Dickens's own reflections on Christianity in his work are clearly stated in a letter to the Reverend David Macrae:

With a deep sense of my great responsibility always upon me when I exercise my art, one of my most constant and most earnest endeavours has been to exhibit in all my good people some faint reflections of the teachings of our great Masters, and unostentatiously to lead the reader up to those teachings as the great source of all moral goodness. All my strongest illustrations are derived from the New Testament; all my social abuses are shown as departures from its spirit; all my good people are humble, charitable, faithful, and forgiving. Over and over again, I claim them in express words as disciples of the Founder of our religion; but I must admit that to a man (or woman) they all arise and wash their faces, and do not appear unto men to fast. Furthermore, I devised a new kind of book for Christmas years ago... absolutely impossible, I think, to be separated from the exemplification of the Christian virtues and the inculcation of the Christian precepts. In every one of those books there is an express text preached on, and the text is always taken from the lips of Christ. (*Letters* 9:556)

In this letter Dickens characterizes all his fiction as his solution to “social abuses shown as departures” from the New Testament teachings. He admits to feeling a sense of responsibility to accurately portray Christlike teachings as the “source of all moral goodness.” He defends his good characters as those who are “disciples of the Founder of our religion” but excuses his readers for not correctly reading his characters as Christians by admitting that all of his characters “arise and wash their faces, and do not appear unto men to fast.” This statement is a reference to the New Testament wherein Jesus calls his disciples to not be hypocritical like some religious people who pray and fast performatively, but tells them, “Moreover when ye fast, be

not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast...when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly” (*King James Version*, Matt. 6.16-18). This shows us that his own faith in Christianity is intact even as he critiques the clergymen in his novel. It also shows us that Dickens’s concern with social issues such as poverty and classism and his dedication to charitable efforts is fundamentally opposed to the Church of England’s traditional nonresponse to these same issues. While the Victorian attitude toward poverty and disenfranchisement was apathetic at best and often oppressive, Dickens aggressively attacked this perspective through his fiction.

Dickens’s own childhood experiences with faith and the Church of England provide some insight on his later tendency to critique the Anglican Church. According to biographer Michael Slater, he received his earliest education from his mother. Later the Dickens children were sent to a school taught by a Baptist minister named William Giles (Slater 10). Slater notes that it is somewhat difficult to piece together an exact timeline of Dickens’s early life, but around the age of 12 he stopped attending school and began to work in a blacking factory, just as his father was arrested for debt in 1824 (20). Dickens’s formal education did not resume until sometime in 1825 when he began attending the Wellington House Academy, run by William Jones. Dickens describes Jones as “the most ignorant man I have ever had the pleasure to know, who was one of the worst tempered men perhaps that ever lived, whose business it was to make as much out of us and to put as little into us as possible” (25). Dickens left the school after two years, around the age of 15. His experience with Christianity in the Church of England having been through his largely negative experience at Wellington House Academy, it comes as no surprise that Dickens

would go on to critique aspects of the hold that the Church of England had on education, politics, and industry.

The hallmarks of Dickens's religious expression in adulthood are best seen through the confusion and criticism of his contemporaries. Biographer Robert Butterworth notes that Dickens was a member of the Church of England for most of his adult life, but he was often severely criticized by his contemporaries both for being too conservative and for being too radical. According to Butterworth, “a country preacher described him as a writer ‘who never ceased to sneer at and vilify religion’” (2). However, Butterworth’s position is that Dickens “does have a clear diagnosis of what is wrong with society and an established view as to how to set things right: namely, that Christianity is the solution to all of society’s problems, and a failure to follow its precepts is the cause of all that is wrong” (2). Butterworth asserts that Dickens is “alert to and well-informed about developments in religion in his time... he is primarily concerned with its moral teaching; he is impatient with theological, denominational or other disputes when they are a distraction from, or irrelevant to, the promotion of Christian moral values; he takes an interest in such debates only when he sees them as furthering the promotion of Christian morality” (5). Dickens’s contemporaries were often unhappy with his portrayal of the established Church, but Dickens was not interested in defending the Church. He was interested in promoting morality for the betterment of society.

A major difference in view on social issues arises between the Church of England’s view of charity and poverty and Dickens’s own. Butterworth asserts that Dickens was “a figure in the vanguard of a new set of religious attitudes to social problems, being one of the first to insist that Christian moral teaching had a social dimension as well as applying to the individual and

individual conduct” (44). In short, Dickens’s response to the Church of England was to challenge the Victorian Anglican opinion that the state of poverty was due to a moral failing or was simply the will of God and that charity work was an interference with God’s divine will. Social reform was not a priority for the Church of England because it would be in opposition to God’s divine order to try to intervene and change a person’s lot in life.

With the magazine’s larger mission ever in his purview, Dickens began serial publication of *Hard Times* in *Household Words* in 1854, just before the serialized release of Gaskell’s *North and South*. Discussing the two novels together is natural, not only because they were published one after the other, within the same year, but also because of the correspondence between the authors regarding the two stories. Although we do not have access to the preceding letter from Gaskell to Dickens, we can infer from his response to her in 1853, that she expressed concern over the novel’s subject material, worried that they would overlap. *North and South* depicts a labor union strike and is concerned that *Hard Times* will do the same. Dickens assures her that “I have no intention of striking” (*Letters* 7: 320). Dickens outlines his own plans for *Hard Times* in this same letter stating, “the monstrous claims at domination made by a certain class of manufacturers, and the extent to which the way is made easy for working men to slide down into discontent under such hands, are within my scheme; but I am not going to strike, so don’t be afraid of me.” Dickens intended to show the plight of working men in industrial towns, but he was convinced that his novel would not overlap in content with Gaskell’s. Dickens seemed confident that *Hard Times* would advance an entirely unique solution to the issues created and perpetuated by industrialization.

Dickens begins his novel with a satirical demonstration of extremist economical views detrimental to education and humanity. Within the first chapter of *Hard Times*, readers are met with Mr. Thomas Gradgrind, “a man of realities. A man of facts and calculations...ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature and tell you exactly what it comes to” (5). Gradgrind represents the trope of a successful businessman who believes his “method” has led to financial success and social power. At one point, Gradgrind’s writing is described by the narrator as “proving something no doubt – probably, in the main, that the Good Samaritan was a Bad Economist” (207). This is indicative of the larger concern in this novel that doing charitable deeds is not a priority because it makes one less economically savvy.

The novel’s first few lines set up the main conflict which is that pure pragmatism robs the citizens of Coketown of their innate humanity, making everyone into bodies made for service. Gradgrind has made his living as a hardware salesperson and goes on to become a member of parliament, wielding social power which represents the interests of industrialists and a purely pragmatic education. Gradgrind is also a paternal figure whose influence shows up throughout the novel, even when his character is not physically present. The first few lines of the novel introduce the main conflict upon which all other conflicts of the novel rest. The novel opens *in medias res*, with the speaker, Mr. Gradgrind, seemingly in the middle of a chapter long diatribe regarding his approach to education:

Now, what I want is Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir!”
(1)

We are first met with Gradgrind's opinion that there is no use for imagination or creativity in education because there is no use for that sort of thing in life. His method is to "plant" only facts and "root out" anything that might already be planted there (1). In the case of his own children, he has planted only facts, and in the case of Sissy Jupe, he will attempt to extricate any imagination and creativity already within her. Secondly, we see the scope of Gradgrind's perspective of humanity in that he views them as "reasoning animals," and this is significant in the later conversations surrounding industrialization and religion. And finally, Mr. Gradgrind asserts that nothing except facts, "will ever be of any service to them" (1). In this way, the entire novel's conflict is foreshadowed by contending that education should be nothing more than an assertion of facts and logic, that humans are simply reasoning animals, and that the "one thing needful" is that which can "be of service" to an individual (1).

The novel portrays facts and figures and the paramount importance of economics as almost religious. Like Gradgrind, Mr. Bounderby subscribes to the view of putting the town's economy above all else. Like Gradgrind, Mr. Bounderby is described by the narrator as "a rich man: banker, merchant, manufacturer... a big, loud man, with a stare, and a metallic laugh... a man who could never sufficiently vaunt himself a self-made man. A man who was always proclaiming, through that brassy speaking-trumpet of a voice of his, his old ignorance and his old poverty" (14). Of course, we find out later that much of his life's story is fictionalized, which is ironic in that he subscribes to Gradgrind's idealized emphasis on nothing but facts. Even Bounderby's marriage to Louisa Gradgrind is described as taking on a "manufacturing aspect... the business was Facts, from first to last" (103). When they depart for their "nuptial trip," Bounderby is certain to make it into a work occasion, planning to "take the opportunity of seeing how the Hands got on in those parts, and whether they, too, required to be fed with gold spoons"

(105). All of this works together to characterize Bounderby as a man unwilling and unable to see anything outside of his perspective as a businessman.

Dickens saw the detrimental aspects of industrialization and how it perpetuated classism, and he portrays this widening gap through the relationship between Bounderby and Stephen Blackpool. As Dickens assured Gaskell, *Hard Times* does not include a Union strike. Instead, the novel relates the slow but steady decline of Stephen Blackpool, a poor laborer in Mr. Bounderby's factory. Blackpool and Bounderby represent the employee and employer, respectively, in industrial Coketown, and Blackpool is a representation of the tragic proletariat, referred to in this novel as "the Hands" – a race who would have found more favour with some people if Providence had seen fit to make them only hands" (62). The narrator tells us that Blackpool has endured more struggles than many but "held no station among the Hands who could make speeches and carry on debates...He was a good power-loom weaver, and a man of perfect integrity" (63). When Blackpool appeals to Mr. Bounderby's knowledge of the law regarding his desire to leave his alcoholic wife, Bounderby tells him that "there is such a law... but it's not for you at all. It costs money. It costs a mint of money" (73). Blackpool responds dejectedly that "tis just a muddle a'too-gether" to which Bounderby replies, "don't you call the institutions of your country a muddle... the institutions of your country are not your piece-work, and the only thing you have got to do is to mind your piece-work" (73). Industrialization is depicted in *Hard Times*, not only as detrimental to the health of laborers, but also as an institution that further widens the gap between classes, intensifying the inaccessibility of resources to laborers.

One aspect of *Hard Times* which makes it inextricable from a conversation about Christianity, is the frequent biblical references and allusions throughout. It is structured in three parts: “Sowing, Reaping, and Garnering.” There are multiple references to the idea of sowing and reaping in the Bible, but one that stands out as the inspiration for these section titles is, “He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity,” (*King James Version*, Prov. 22.8). These section titles underscore the eventual downfalls of each character in the novel, the unhappy harvest resulting from Gradgrind’s “planting” only facts, reason, and logic and Bounderby’s loyal defense of the institutions which support him to the detriment of his employees. In the first part, “Sowing,” the narrator offers a description of Coketown’s religious establishments. The narrator notes, “You saw nothing in Coketown but what was severely workful. If the members of a religious persuasion built a chapel there – as the members of eighteen religious persuasions had done – they made it a pious warehouse” (22). The narrator observes “eighteen religious persuasions” as almost an aside, depicting an exaggerated version of Victorian England, where there was a rise in denominational division.

Importantly, the narrator mentions that a “perplexing mystery” of Coketown is the question of “who belonged to the eighteen denominations? Because whoever did, the labouring people did not” (23). The question becomes, if Coketown is an industrial town, it would largely be made up of working-class laborers and factory owners. If the laborers are not going to one of the eighteen different denominations, who is? And according to this section of the novel, one of the political issues of the day was the citizens of Coketown could be “heard of in the House of Commons every session, indignantly petitioning for Acts of Parliament that should make these people religious by main force” (23). In this novel, the loss of creativity in favor of a utilitarian way of life is detrimental to religious, educational, and working experiences. These institutions

are not serving any of the people of Coketown, and seem but a distraction from the community's issues by remaining "perplexing mystery" (23). Most importantly to Dickens, the Church institutions are specifically failing to serve the working-class citizens.

And so, coming back to the question of why dissension was such a "difficult and dangerous subject" to Dickens, the answer lies in the simple fact that no matter how many denominations of organized Christianity he saw in Victorian England, these institutions were not serving the lower-class citizens. All the denominations in Coketown, including the "New Church" representing the Nonconformists (likely Unitarians), fail to serve the people. Gradgrind's method of education has pervaded even the churches, with his method showing that "the Good Samaritan was a Bad Economist" and insinuating that economy should be prioritized over charitable deeds (207). Dickens's work does not show dissension from the Church of England in a positive or sympathetic manner, meanwhile Gaskell wrote an entire chapter depicting a sympathetic and conscientious dissenter. The apparent contradiction of Dickens's reticence to publish sympathetic dissension all the while critiquing the established church in his own work is actually no contradiction at all when we see that his desire was to write characters who "arise and wash their faces, and do not appear unto men to fast" (*Letters* 9: 556).

CHAPTER V

“DEFENCE OF THOSE WHO CONSCIENTIOUSLY DIFFER FROM HER”: BRONTE AND THE ROLE OF INDIVIDUAL CONSCIENCE IN DISSENT FROM THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

Charlotte Brontë, like Dickens, was a member of the Church of England, but unlike Dickens, she was a devout defender of the Victorian Anglican Church. Like Gaskell, Brontë demonstrates a deep devotion to the message of Christianity but unlike Gaskell, she does not promote tolerance of dissension from the Church of England even as she criticizes it in her novels. Her critique of the established church was not doctrinal but, like Dickens's, more concerned with reform regarding social issues. To her friend Elizabeth Gaskell, Brontë was comfortable stating, “The Church of England has faults – but I love her –” (*Letters*, 215... 1853). It is easy for modern readers of *Jane Eyre* to miss the Christian underpinnings of the novel in favor of the sweeping love story and coming of age tale. However, Victorian readers would have been well aware of the hypocrisy of the Church of England being portrayed. Most explicitly, the novel depicts clergymen as hypocritical and overbearing, and suggests that the antidote to the broken systems is a strong moral conscience combined with systematic reform. Despite her novel's critique of these institutions, it is important to remember that, as Maria Lamonaca suggests, “Brontë was, after all, a loyal member of the Church of England who firmly defended *Jane Eyre* against charges of immorality and anti-Christian sentiment” (1). Although she encouraged reforms, it was important to Brontë that her novel not be perceived as dissenting or

nonconformist. Viewed alongside her response to Gaskell's portrayal of dissent, and her preface to the second edition, Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, like *North and South*, demonstrates a reverence for the individual's conscience but unlike *North and South* it celebrates the devotion of faithful individuals to the Church of England even as it critiques the Church's hypocrisy.

Despite the novel's popularity, it did not go unattacked. Biographer Zoe Brennan notes that the novel "was an instant success, the first print-run selling out in only three months and an American edition quickly followed, published by Harper and Brothers on 4 January 1848. At the same time back in England, a second edition was produced to which Brontë added a preface refuting charges that her work, with its unflattering portraits of clergymen, was anti-Christian" (97). Brennan includes the criticism of Elizabeth Rigby in which she "dismissed the narrator as the 'personification of an unregenerate and undisciplined spirit' whose 'heathen mind . . . is a law unto itself. No Christian grace is perceptible upon her'" (99). Here, we see the Anglican attitude that the idea of a person's individual conscience as a moral compass was "heathen" and unchristian. The radical movements Jane makes throughout the novel in carving out her own life and her own faith, apart from the male influences in her life, make her an enormous departure from the traditional female protagonist. A conservative Anglican reader would feel their way of life threatened by the representation of Jane's personal mobility and ability to follow her own discernment.

Brontë was quick to defend *Jane Eyre* against the criticism of its portrayal of Christianity and in response to this disparagement, she addresses "another class; a small one, so far as I know... the timorous or carping few who doubt the tendency of such books as 'Jane Eyre': in whose eyes whatever is unusual is wrong; whose ears detect in each protest against

bigotry- that parent of crime- an insult to piety, that regent of God on earth” (3). Brontë acknowledges that there are elements of her novel which might be seen as unusual, but she also insists that her story contains protests against bigotry calling it the “parent of crime,” and naming piety as the “regent of God on earth” (3). Here, Brontë is both sardonic and sincere. She defends her novel’s portrayal of bigotry and emphasizes that piety does play a vital role as God’s earthly regent. At another interval, Brontë responds to a critical review of *Jane Eyre* in the High Church publication, *The Christian Remembrancer* in which the reviewer criticized the portrayal of clergymen of the Church of England within the novel. Brontë responds, “as a body, I had no ill will against them to begin with...A few individuals may be called upon to sit for their portraits some time – if their brethren in general, dislike the resemblance and abuse the artist – *tant pis!*” (*Letters*, 50... 1848-1851). In the novel, we see bigotry being protested through the characters Mr. Brocklehurst and St. John Rivers (albeit in different ways through both) and we see personal piety resulting in inner peace as the antidote for what ails Helen Burns, Jane, and Mr. Rochester.

Jane Eyre critiques bigotry in the Church of England in two main ways. The novel first demonstrates how individual bigotry has pervaded the institution of the Church of England as Christianity and the Bible is used against Jane in harmful and abusive ways. Lowood School is presented as the result of an individual’s corrupt nature pervading the institutionalized Christian expression through Brocklehurst’s hypocrisy and abusiveness. St. John Rivers’s hypocritical self-righteousness is then presented as a second form of bigotry. Brontë’s portrayal of clergymen is and has been perceived as an attack on the Church of England as an institution. However, we see in her letters and throughout the novel, that she is concerned with the pervasive nature of an individual’s hypocrisy and how that individual, if not curtailed, can inspire widespread corruption. While Brontë critiques the bigotry which leads to corruption in the institution of the

Church, she also presents it as capable of reform and redemption via improvements to the Lowood School after Helen Burns's death, Mr. Rochester's personal redemption at the end of the novel, and through Jane's final tribute to St. John.

The first few chapters of *Jane Eyre* establish a child's perception of faith as a weapon used to control and abuse her. The novel opens with depictions of Jane as an orphaned child, living with her benefactress, Aunt Reed and her cousins. The novel's first mention of religion is in chapter two, with God wielded by the servants Bessie and Miss Abbott as a threat if Jane does not refrain from immoral behavior. Miss Abbott tells the child Jane matter of factly, "God will punish her: He might strike her dead in the midst of her tantrums, and then where would she go?" She goes on to admonish Jane to "say your prayers, Miss Eyre... for if you don't repent, something bad might be permitted to come down the chimney and fetch you away" (16). Early in the novel, the idea emerges that kindness and Christian charity is reserved for a specific class of needy people and not for unattractive orphan girls such as Jane. Like Dickens's *Hard Times*, Brontë's novel attacks the Church of England's attitude toward poverty wherein poverty is understood as the result of a moral failure, a punishment for sin. Jane's childish reason is at war with her reality as she witnesses immoral behavior by her aunt and cousins who are yet never reprimanded as she is. Brontë depicts Jane as beginning to recognize the hypocrisy in the Christian teachings presented to her as she wonders why, despite the unruly behavior of her cousins, she is always the one "suffering, always browbeaten, always accused, for ever condemned" (18). She later overhears Bessie and Miss Abbott commenting that if she were only "a nice, pretty child, one might compassionate her forlornness; but one really cannot care for such a little toad as that," demonstrating the fickleness of Christian charity. Inadvertently, Bessie and Miss Abbot show Jane that in order to be worthy of kindness or charity, she should be a

specific type of charity case. This method of wielding Christianity as a threat to a young orphan girl with no advocate or autonomy foreshadows the abuse she will experience at Lowood.

To this point, Jane experiences faith only as a prod for monitoring and managing her behavior, and this will intensify at the Lowood school. Mr. Brocklehurst is introduced as the first real example of bigotry. He is an imposing figure, a “straight, narrow, sable-clad shape standing erect on the rug; the grim face at the top was like a carved mask, placed above the shaft by way of capital” (37). His presence represents a new point of religious oppression for Jane as he calls her a “naughty little girl,” and once again presents heaven as a prize for the good and hell as a punishment for the “wicked” (38). As he interviews her with questions like “do you know where the wicked go after death?” and “What is hell? Can you tell me that? ... should you like to fall into that pit, and to be burning there for ever?” (38). Jane has a “ready and orthodox” answer to all of these questions, demonstrating her knowledge of Christianity. She tells him that she sometimes reads her Bible, but she does not think the Psalms are interesting. Brocklehurst replies, “that proves you have a wicked heart; and you must pray to God to change it: to give you a new and clean one: to take away your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh” (39). Brocklehurst tells Jane’s aunt that “humility is a Christian grace...I have studied how best to mortify in them the worldly sentiment of pride” (40). Brocklehurst’s method is to wield shame as a tool for procuring humility. He goes on to express that “consistency... is the first of Christian duties, and it has been observed in every arrangement connected with the establishment of Lowood: plain fare, simple attire, unsophisticated accommodations, hardy and active habits; such is the order of the day in the house and its inhabitants” (40). Of course, these are all gentler descriptions of “the order of the day” at Lowood, which readers soon see is an abusive and harsh environment. Again, Christianity is offered to Jane as merely an alternative to hell,

demonstrating that more than anything else, she is poor because she is wicked, and she deserves to be punished with poverty.

Despite Brocklehurst's proclamations that the school promotes humility through "hardy and active habits," we soon see that the actual principles of Lowood are nonsensical and based on Brocklehurst's whims rather than on scriptural precepts. We see most clearly the hypocrisy of Mr. Brocklehurst as he scolds the school's headmistress for giving the students an edible meal, outside of the normal "plain fare," and he severely reprimands her for allowing a student's hair to be naturally curled as "we are not to conform to nature... I have again and again intimated that I desire the hair to be arranged closely, modestly, plainly" (74). He demands that the hair be cut off stating, "I have a Master to serve whose kingdom is not of this world: my mission is to mortify in these girls the lusts of flesh, to teach them to clothe themselves with shamefacedness and sobriety, not with braided hair and costly apparel." In the middle of this diatribe, however, he is interrupted by his own wife and daughters dressed "splendidly" in "velvet, silk, and furs... gray beaver hats, then in fashion, shaded with ostrich plumes, and from under the brim of this graceful head-dress fell a profusion of light tresses, elaborately curled" (75). In this way, Mr. Brocklehurst demonstrates that a stringent religion lacking in ethical principles is not only hypocritical but often has abusive and harmful oppressive results. Upon first coming to Lowood, Jane notices the inscription on one of the school's exterior walls. It reads, "Lowood Institution...Brocklehurst Hall" and contains the scripture, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven –St. Matt. V. 16" (57). At this point, Jane discovers for the first time that Lowood is a charity school for orphans. She learns that Mr. Brocklehurst is the "treasurer and manager of the establishment" positioned there simply by way of being the son of the founder of the school. Jane asks whether Mr.

Brocklehurst is a good man and is answered that “he is a clergyman” (59). This response reveals the Victorian attitude toward ministers of the Church of England in that the position itself proves a person’s goodness rather than his actual behavior. Here, there is dissonance between an external perspective of charity and the lived experience of a recipient of this charity school education.

Where Brocklehurst has no morals and is plainly hypocritical, the other Anglican cleric, St. John Rivers, has a strong moral center, and lives, for all purposes, a pure life. Nevertheless, both are lacking what the novel advances as the appropriate faith, one which is driven by ethics and personal conscience, and results in an internal peace. While Brocklehurst’s bigotry is informed by his own personal impulses and leads to harm and abuse of those around him, St. John Rivers presents a second form of bigotry, a strict religion which inflicts harsh judgment on himself and those around him. While Jane’s own faith undergoes a revival after her departure from Thornfield Hall, Brontë contrasts it with St. John’s piety. Jane notes that although St. John is “zealous in his ministerial labours, blameless in his life and habits, he yet did not appear to enjoy that mental serenity, that inward content, which should be the reward of every sincere Christian and practical philanthropist” (398). When she hears him preach at his church, she is startled by his sermon in which “there was a strange bitterness; an absence of consolatory gentleness; stern allusions to Calvinistic doctrines – election, predestination, reprobation – were frequent; and each reference to these points sounded like a sentence pronounced for doom” (399). Perhaps most strikingly, Jane states, “instead of feeling better, calmer, more enlightened by his discourse, I experienced an inexpressible sadness... I was sure St. John Rivers – pure-lived, conscientious, zealous as he was – had not yet found that peace of God which passeth all understanding” (399). Here, we see the result of extreme religious orthodoxy results in personal

unhappiness. Brontë betrays her dislike of the Calvinist doctrine in her portrayal of St. John Rivers, depicting a man more concerned with doctrine than anything else and unable to be happy because his version of faith is devoid of “mental serenity” which the novel advances as the advantage of living as a “sincere Christian and practical philanthropist.”

The disparity between unjust treatment and the teachings of Jesus are portrayed most acutely in the contrast between the unethical practices of Lowood, and Jane’s newfound friend Helen Burns. Helen is a consistent voice of steadfast faith and belief in God. Jane notices that even though Helen is mistreated by some of the teachers at Lowood, she bears it patiently and Jane notes, “I could not comprehend this doctrine of endurance; and still less could I understand or sympathise with the forbearance she expressed for her chastiser” (65). Although Jane is very well versed on Orthodoxy, she is altogether out of her depth with Helen’s faith which tells her that she should “observe what Christ says, and how He acts... love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you and despitefully use you” (67). Helen is the first to present Jane with the idea of being guided by one’s personal convictions toward religion, instead of manipulated by fear and the threat of hell. Helen is a consistent model of good and moral behavior and yet she is not upheld as such by her teachers or by Brocklehurst.

The faith of Helen Burns, abundant in inner peace, lives on in Jane and we see it in Jane’s interactions with Mr. Rochester. Mr. Rochester is as self-deprecating as he is harsh toward others; he is always seeking the inner peace that Jane possesses. He asks her, “is the wandering and sinful, but now rest-seeking and repentant, man justified in daring the world’s opinion, in order to attach to him for ever this gentle, gracious, genial stranger, thereby securing his own peace of mind and regeneration of life?” (248). To which Jane replies, “a wanderer’s repose or a

sinner's reformation should never depend on a fellow-creature...if any one you know has suffered and erred, let him look higher than his equals for strength to amend and solace to heal" (248). This parallels Helen's admonishment to Jane that she should look to God for the forbearance she sought, showing that personal reform could and should lead to institutional reform.

Mr. Rochester consistently looks to Jane as a moral center and is the first person, besides Helen, to verbalize Jane's morality and goodness to her. It is Rochester who consistently points out Jane's moral character and how it contrasts with his own. He tells her, "I envy you your peace of mind, your clean conscience, your unpolluted memory" (155). The role that Rochester plays is not only as a love interest to our protagonist, but also as the reviser of Jane's story, changing the narrative she is accustomed to hearing about the condition of her own soul. Prior to meeting Mr. Rochester, Jane has known charity and virtuous deeds that mostly apply to those who are a specific type of charity case. She asks Mr. Rochester, "do you think, because I am poor, obscure, plain, and little, I am soulless and heartless? You think wrong! —I have as much soul as you, —and full as much heart! And if God had gifted me with some beauty and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you" (287). Here, Jane verbalizes a rebuke to the Anglican attitude that maltreatment is justifiable if someone is poor. Her speech to Mr. Rochester is representative of the novel's larger conversation, implying that society's mistreatment of people who have not been divinely "gifted" with wealth and beauty is inhumane.

With every criticism of bigotry, Brontë gives an avenue for redemption. After describing the abuses at Lowood and Helen's death, Jane goes on to explain that the number of Typhoid

fever deaths “had drawn public attention on the school for “the unhealthy nature of the site; the quantity and quality of the children’s food; the brackish, fetid water used in its preparation; the pupils’ wretched clothing and accommodations” (96). After the public discovered these things, “several wealthy and benevolent individuals in the county subscribed largely for the erection of a more convenient building in a better situation; new regulations were made; improvements in diet and clothing introduced; the funds of the school were intrusted to the management of a committee” (96). The redemption of Lowood is due to the community efforts of many “enlarged and sympathizing minds...shared by those who knew how to combine reason with strictness, comfort with economy, compassion with uprightness” and therefore, “the school thus improved, became in time a truly useful and noble institution.” Importantly, Jane notes, “I bear my testimony to its value and importance” (96). This could stand in as a commentary on the Church of England with its faults, but useful and noble institution, bearing Brontë’s testimony to its value and importance.

Brontë even presents a redemptive arc for St. John Rivers, acknowledging his sacrifices for his faith as ones that will be remembered by her and rewarded by God. Jane describes St. John’s departure to India as pursuing the path he “had marked for himself” (513). She addresses his resoluteness and claims that he is an “indefatigable pioneer never wrought amidst rocks and dangers. Firm faithful, and devoted” (513). St. John’s strengths are in his firm and resolute belief in the correct path for his life. Similarly to Jane’s own resolve to follow her own convictions, St. John’s following through on his conviction is hailed as the correct thing to do. By holding to his convictions and pursuing missionary work in India, after his death he will, “fill a place in the first rank of those who are redeemed from the earth – who stand without fault before the throne of God... who are called, and chosen, and faithful” (514). This sudden redemption of St. John

has confused readers and critics, but it is because we never get to see the movement from unhappy, judgmental, and stringent clergyman to sacrificial missionary. Jane is left to fill in the blanks for the readers as she assures us of his good works, and we can either ignore this final description or believe that her account of him is as true as her account of every other narrative in this story. Brontë redeems the Anglican clergyman by showing how his resolute and firm personality has served him well as an evangelizing missionary. His personal convictions do justice to the Church of England as he spreads their institutional message.

Brontë's devotion to the Church of England is demonstrated through the redemption stories of individuals and depicting their impact on the larger institution. The positive experiences Jane had at Lowood informed her ability to become a representative of morality to Mr. Rochester and personal conviction to St. John Rivers. By the end of the novel, Jane has learned to trust her own conscience and has found peace in the knowledge that she has not compromised her morals or personal conscience. And in leaving Thornfield Hall, Jane removed the temptation of sin from Mr. Rochester, allowing him to become a more moral character. When Jane and Rochester come back together in the end, both have gone their separate ways to achieve their own inner peace. Rochester declares, "my heart swells with gratitude to the beneficent God of this earth... He sees not as man sees, but far clearer," and goes on to explain that he has experienced true "remorse, repentance, the wish for reconciliation to my Maker" (509). Mr. Rochester's final prayer is that of thanksgiving saying "I thank my Maker, that in the midst of judgment, He has remembered mercy. I humbly entreat my Redeemer to give me strength to lead henceforth a purer life than I have done hitherto" (509). Brontë shows her devotion to the Church of England by creating a redemptive story for Mr. Rochester as well as the institution of Lowood School. The novel is a response to some of the Church of England's tendency to hold so tightly

to a set of conventions and doctrines that it fails to seek the joy and peace of satisfying one's own conscience and convictions.

Brontë's preface, added to the second edition of her novel one year after the first edition was published, addresses those who were critical of her portrayal of Christianity. She states:

I would suggest to such doubters certain obvious distinctions; I would remind them of certain simple truths. Conventionality is not morality. Self-righteousness is not religion. To attack the first is not to assail the last. To pluck the mask from the face of the Pharisee, is not to lift an impious hand to the Crown of Thorns. These things and deeds are diametrically opposed: they are as distinct as is vice from virtue. Men too often confound them: they should not be confounded: appearance should not be mistaken for truth; narrow human doctrines that only tend to elate and magnify a few, should not be substituted for the redeeming creed of Christ (4).

Conventionality is represented by Mr. Brocklehurst's running of the Lowood school. No one suggested a reform of the abusive and harsh practices until after an outbreak of illness that claimed the lives of many students. That status quo maintained by Brocklehurst depicts an adherence to conventionality that goes unquestioned despite its immorality. True moral behavior is first shown through Helen Burns, and it is her faith that underpins Jane's later strong moral conscience. The error of self-righteousness is depicted through St. John Rivers who consistently assails Jane's faith telling her that she is going to hell for not acquiescing to become a Missionary's wife. Finally, Brontë states that "narrow human doctrines that only tend to elate and magnify a few, should not be substituted for the redeeming creed of Christ" (4). Brontë's novel critiques unjust systems which claim to uphold Christianity and she asserts the "certain simple truths" as the antidote for this failure in the Church of England. True morality leads to institutional reform, and this is what Brontë's novel advances.

Six years after this second edition of *Jane Eyre*, Gaskell began serially publishing *North and South*, including in it the “difficult and dangerous” subject of dissent (*Letters 7: 355-356*). If Dickens was apprehensive about including this chapter, certainly Brontë would have been as well, as a defender of the Anglican faith. In a letter to Gaskell, Charlotte Brontë expresses a wish that Gaskell had not included dissent in her novel at all saying, “the subject seems to me difficult; at first, I groaned over it” (*Letters 291-292*). Brontë goes on to justify her concern saying, “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.” Here, we see both Brontë’s loyalty to the Church of England as well as her reverence for an individual’s conscience and this is the crux of the religious aspects of her own work. She goes on to say “simple, true, and good did I think the last number – clear of artificial trammels of style and thought.” In a letter to her friend Catherine Winkworth, Brontë defended Gaskell’s chapter saying “I can’t see that Mrs. Gaskell is one whit in error. Mr. Dickens, I think, may have been somewhat too exacting – but if she found or thought her honour pledged – she does well to redeem it to the best of her ability – and she will – and I have no doubt it will be worthily done” (*Letters 280*). Brontë is careful to keep herself within the boundaries of her Anglican faith by not defending the topic of dissent, but instead defending Gaskell’s writing style and strategy.

Note that there is no substantial denominational discussion within *Jane Eyre*. Within a project that is focused largely on the presence of the topic of dissension and nonconformity to the Church of England, this novel is notably missing that topic. Brontë is willing to discuss faith and Christianity within her novel, but the idea of dissenting from the established church is not even

within question and this may be the most glaring piece of evidence supporting my argument that *Jane Eyre* was not a novel that was meant to advance any sort of nonconformity from the Anglican Church. However difficult the subject of dissent was to Brontë, her reverence for personal conviction and conscientiousness outweighed that difficulty. Dickens and Brontë each regard the subject of dissent from the Church of England with care and cautiousness, they respond to the literary implications of it differently. Dickens does not want to alienate his Anglican readers and wants to curtail the discussion, believing that discussion of denominational difference is not useful to social reform. Brontë wants to defend her Church from narrow criticisms, valuing the institution's capacity to do good work in society and wanting to present the Church of England as an institution capable of reform.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This project brought together the works of three Victorian authors whose novels are separately viewed as highlighting important social issues of the 19th-century and put them alongside their written correspondence to each other in order to ascertain how and where their social perspectives align and diverge. Looking at the authors' varying backgrounds and individual experiences sheds light on what they each advance as the primary solution to these social issues. The gap in scholarship surrounding this topic is largely in the lack of connecting the dots between these three authors. *Jane Eyre* and *Hard Times* may seem an unlikely pairing of novels, but the similarities in their respective authors' responses to Gaskell's *North and South* made them an intriguing comparison.

This project began as a study of the varying Christian expressions in the literature of the Victorian era, using *North and South*, *Hard Times*, and *Jane Eyre* as samples. But it quickly expanded as I realized that despite each author's quite different professed Christian expressions and despite the vast differences between each novel's proposed solutions to institutional issues, Gaskell, Dickens, and Brontë were each receiving the same type of criticism about their work. Gaskell related that she was called a communist and socialist for her views of tolerance and her Unitarian faith that is pervasive throughout *North and South*. Dickens was accused of mocking and disparaging religion. Brontë's work was labeled anti-Christian and immoral by such critics as Elizabeth Rigby. I perceived each novel to be diagnosing the same social problems: hypocrisy,

bigotry, and intolerance in Victorian society and institutionalized Christianity, but each advancing a different solution. So, how could each of these different solutions be communist, socialist, anti-Christian, immoral, and disparaging of religion, especially when each contains such strong Christian overtones? This led me to the conviction that it would be vital to view each author in correspondence with each other to better understand the criticism they were receiving and the climate in which they were writing.

Contemporary readers of Victorian literature have often fixated on industrialization and secularization, but not on the immense pressure on the Church of England to maintain its power during this time. Because the Victorian era was a time of increased individual religious expression and membership in the Church of England was no longer a legal issue, it follows that individual members of the established church would respond critically to any popular works that seem to advance a movement away from the establishment. I noticed that while there was criticism about these authors, individually, and even criticism that might have addressed their religious beliefs, not much literature was devoted to their connections to each other. The connection between the work of Dickens and Gaskell, to me, seems natural. Of course, Dickens acted as editor for much of Gaskell's published work and additionally, they both wrote about issues of industrialization and social reform. It was not until I began to investigate the surviving correspondences between Gaskell and her contemporaries, that I realized how clarifying it might be to look at all three of these authors together.

In *North and South*, Gaskell presents dissent in a sympathetic and positive light and a dissatisfaction with the High Church treatment of the proletariat. It is understandable that those loyal to the Church of England would take issue with her presentation of dissension. We have the

advantage of having access to several of her surviving letters, along with the correspondence between Dickens and Brontë to realize that she was trying to conscientiously depict characters of different denominations to promote tolerance among Christians, not dissent from religion. We may read in Dickens's *Hard Times*, a noble critique of hypocrisy and bigotry, and perceive, like those critics, an anti-Anglican sentiment. But, if we view that sentiment alongside his correspondence with Gaskell regarding her portrayal of dissent from the Anglican Church, we can ascertain a much more nuanced perspective of Dickens's faith and diagnosis of social issues. Similarly, we can view *Jane Eyre* as an attack against institutionalized Christianity that is often hypocritical and bigoted, but we need the 1848 preface to her second edition to contextualize her final defense of St. John Rivers by showing that she meant to critique hypocritical or bigoted clergymen, not to discredit the role of a clergyman in society.

Initially, I read Dickens's request for Gaskell to shorten her chapter on dissent as a domineering move to try and quell Gaskell's creative freedom. Dickens seemed, to me, cavalier about the content of the chapter, caring only for the formatting of his paper and worried that her chapter was too long for one week's printing. But as I read more of their correspondence and considered Dickens's own work, I became more sympathetic to his plight as an editor, reliant on a readership that was largely Anglican. I also became more convinced that Dickens cared deeply about the content of Gaskell's work, given his immense praise for her previous publications and the freedoms he had already extended to her in publication. This led me to examine other correspondence regarding the topic of dissent in *North and South*, which is when I found the letter from Brontë which detailed her position regarding the topic. This was a fascinating discovery for me as I had not previously realized that there would be such a natural connection

between Dickens and Brontë. Their shared apprehension regarding the description of nonconformity linked them together in my mind.

Each author's conscientious defense of their respective works tells us that they made intentional choices to include even the controversial elements of their novels. Gaskell's choice to include the narrative of a dissenting minister in her novel was unconventional, but not necessarily surprising. Gaskell's works often included controversial topics and she was known for her work depicting social issues, which is what drew Dickens to request her work for *Household Words*. His praise of *Mary Barton* tells us that he valued Gaskell's voice as an industrial novelist. It must be noted that for Gaskell to write about a dissenting minister, from outside of the Church of England was one thing. For a member of the established church, such as Dickens, it was quite another. His publication of such a contentious topic could have been detrimental to his magazine, and he was aware of this, even while eventually publishing the manuscript in Gaskell's preferred format. Each author risked losing some popularity by publishing what they did, critiquing the established church and advancing their own unique solutions to the issues surrounding them. But, as seen in their works, they each valued individual conscience and morality at a high enough level to be able to defend their characters and stories.

This thesis contextualizes these works within the 19th-century Christian climate, adding to readers' understanding of the nuance of the industrial social reform novel. I have argued that all three of these authors and the works they produced advanced counter-cultural solutions to the new social issues that were presented by industrialization. While the Church of England's attitude toward poverty and disenfranchisement was apathetic at best and often oppressive, Gaskell, Dickens, and Brontë each critiqued this perspective through their fiction. Each of these

stories present social issues tied to industrialization and each novel is concerned with the mainstream Church of England's approach to the new social issues linked to industrialization. But each author advances a different solution. Gaskell wanted people to value and practice tolerance, unity, and empathy. Dickens wanted to stop wasting time discussing the doctrinal or theological rightness of varying denominations and to start finding solutions to serve the lower-class citizens being left behind in industrial England, and Brontë wanted personal reform to bring about institutional change.

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VITA

Hannah L. Badger was born in Georgia to parents Melissa and Scott Badger. A love of literature and the arts was encouraged in Hannah and her siblings from a young age. Frequent trips to the Dalton-Whitfield County Public Library were a catalyst in Hannah's eventual decision to study English Literature in college. During high school, Hannah attended Georgia Northwestern Technical College for dual enrollment classes and after high school graduation, she transferred to Dalton State College where she majored in English with a minor in Latin American Studies. In May of 2019, Hannah was awarded the Jane Parks Academic Award for Excellence in Composition and the Academic Excellence Award in Spanish. After earning her Bachelor of Arts in English degree, Hannah enrolled in the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga to pursue a Master of Arts degree in English Literary Studies. During this time, she worked as a Teaching Assistant, Research Assistant, and a graduate consultant at the UTC Writing and Communication Center. Hannah will graduate with her MA in Literary Studies in May 2023.